



**HEADTEACHER
Candidate brochure**





Welcome letter from Proprietors

Dear Applicant,

Our sincere thanks for your interest in the position of Headteacher at Blue Skies School.

We are a small, compassionate school for children and young people with intellectually high functioning autism aged 11-25. We currently have capacity for 27 students each with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Blue Skies is a unique school that was founded by Frances Higgins, a passionate and inspiring person, who believed she could make a difference in the lives of young people with autism. The school now continues in the family, with myself and my brother, Jo, as Proprietors. With the departure of our current Headteacher who is moving on to a new role, we find ourselves in the exciting position of welcoming a new Headteacher from September 2024.

In our time as Proprietors, we have learnt and developed an incredible amount, seeing it through multiple Ofsted inspections and developing the school to build upon its strong foundations culminating in its current 'Good' outcome. Over the past few years the school has developed new systems for tracking and supporting students development and appointed an Advisory Board to support us our Proprietors; all with the aim of strengthening the outcomes for our young people.

The majority of students we welcome have experienced failed educational placements in mainstream settings and have often built up barriers that prevent them from learning or engaging within that school. We have had great success in breaking down these barriers, nurturing them and teaching in the way that they learn to enable them to achieve nationally recognised qualifications such as BTEC's and GCSE's. We have an excellent success rate in transitioning students into further education and some past students have subsequently made the move to higher education, which is testament to the love of learning that our team gives them.

We have a dedicated and hardworking team and the school is often described as a family; we think this a powerful statement considering the often complex social and emotional needs of our students. Our students are all individual and, being so small, we are in a position to be able to spend time with each and every student to gain an understanding of their needs and develop the curriculum to support these specific needs. This chance to be able to support vulnerable students in such a hands-on way is something that we feel both fortunate and proud to be able to do. We work hard to provide our students with great role models and help them to develop into confident, happy and engaged learners with bright futures.

We received a 'Good' rating by Ofsted in September 2023 and believe we have the potential to move to 'Outstanding'. We are looking for an inspiring leader who shares our vision and has the ability to motivate and support both staff and students and has the experience, passion and drive to help us reach that goal.

I hope that you will find our school both intriguing and refreshing in the current educational climate and I hope that after looking through this pack you will want to join us on our journey.

Best wishes,

Lauren Higgins
Proprietor

Key Information

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Type of school | Independent Day Special Educational Needs school |
| Denomination | Non-Denominational |
| Age range | 11-25 |
| Specialism | Autism |
| Year school established | 2008 |
| Co-education or single sex | Co-educational |
| Number of students | 17 |
| Average class size | 6 |
| Number of teaching staff | 3 |
| Number of newly qualified teachers | - |
| % English as an additional language | 0% |
| Ofsted Judgement | Good 2023 |





About us

Blue Skies is an independent special school, based in Medway, which offers a unique service to children and young adults aged 11-25 on the autism spectrum. It is an extremely caring school with a holistic approach towards education, catering for students in Medway, Kent and the surrounding areas.

We believe it is important for students to achieve their full potential, to ensure this we offer a rich and stimulating curriculum, individually tailored to our student's needs, supported by strong pastoral care, social and emotional support and various therapies. We reflect good practice in an environment that supports our student's learning.



Our history

Blue Skies School was founded in April 2008 by Fran Higgins. Fran had extensive experience in special needs within the maintained sector and was instrumental in the inception and running of a nationally recognised centre for autism. Within the independent sector, Fran saw the opportunity to create a school which held the students and their needs at the forefront and gave them the best opportunity to succeed in life.

Blue Skies is a family run business, now owned by Fran's children Lauren and Jo. They are very happy to continue the school in the vision in which it was created and are passionate about providing the best possible provision for the students of Blue Skies and their futures. Due to the nature of the business and its small size, past staff and students have described the school and its stakeholders as a 'family'.

Our future

Currently there are 17 children on roll at Blue Skies, however, this can be increased. In addition, Blue Skies has begun exploring options for their 19-25 provision, which is very much in its infancy and provides an exciting opportunity for the school and local community.

In the future, Blue Skies would like to acquire an additional site to further develop this provision and extend the schools current offering.

Forward thinking leadership will be critical to growing our school to make the very best use of resources and allow us to make a difference in as many young people's lives as possible.

About the school site

Blue Skies School is located in Chatham with good links to local transport. The school is spread over four floors, with small classrooms designed for focused learning for the students. With an average class size of 6 children, the classes have the capacity to be arranged not only by age, but also through ability, offering the children a chance to engage and learn with peers across different age groups, encouraging peer to peer learning and relationship building.

On the lower ground floor of Blue Skies there is an open plan kitchen where the children experience cooking lessons and prepare a meal to enjoy together on a Friday, offering them the chance to develop teamwork skills, alongside important life skills.

The rear of the school has a terraced area for the students to socialise, and at the bottom of the outdoor area there is a small garden which is maintained by staff and students. In addition to the garden, we also hold a local allotment which our sixth formers have been transforming.

Blue Skies have arrangements with local leisure centres and schools to make use of their sports facilities, which enable the students regular PE sessions. Our 'Park Club' at lunchtime is very popular, when weather allows, and makes use of nearby outdoor space.

Blue Skies makes use of excellent relationships with local schools and colleges, enabling access to science laboratories and taster courses.



Our vision

Our students will leave Blue Skies with the skills and opportunities to live a happy and independent life.



Our mission

We believe it is important for students to achieve their full potential and progress to a future of their choice, to ensure this we offer a rich and stimulating curriculum, individually tailored to our student's needs, supported by strong pastoral care, social and emotional support and various therapies. Our small adapted environment allows us to break down any barriers to learning and support individuals needs. We will ensure they are provided with the skills and qualifications necessary to achieve their goals and be celebrated along the way. We will reflect good practice in an environment that supports our student's learning.



Our values

Our core values are central to all of our decision making and they run through our curriculum, policies, recruitment and all of our interactions with students and local community. We expect all of our staff to exhibit them at all times and we encourage all of our students and their families to work within these values.

These core values are:

- ★ Compassion
- ★ Inclusion
- ★ Respect
- ★ Aspiration
- ★ Collaboration



The curriculum

The curriculum at Blue Skies School gives students the opportunity to learn and develop in a supportive and creative environment in which there is a focus on supporting progression and recognising achievement ensuring students feel safe and are happy. The curriculum is individualised, creative, innovative and flexible allowing for the needs of each student to be met. It aims to promote the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of the students as well as their intellectual and physical development.

The school is committed to providing a broad and balanced curriculum, based on the National Curriculum for those students of

compulsory school age. This is blended with opportunities for students to develop functional skills, independence skills and skills for working life. Some subjects are taught discretely whilst others are covered via a creative curriculum approach.



We endeavour to provide opportunities for students who are identified as having a gift or talent to develop their skills and abilities in that area.

The curriculum is planned to provide continuity and progression. It enables students to make connections, transfer skills, think creatively and solve problems. It also develops students' capacity to work independently and collaboratively.

Our students have complex needs. In addition to the academic curriculum, their individualised timetables provide opportunities for students to withdraw from some lessons to participate in therapy sessions with our school counsellor, mental health specialist, Speech and Language and Occupational therapists.

We know that students on the autistic spectrum are happiest and achieve most when routine is clear and when their learning opportunities build on their particular skills and talents. To this end, we tailor the curriculum to help students make progress in a way that best suits them.

The curriculum aims:

- That students make great progress against personal targets
- That students acknowledge their achievements and have a sense of pride
- That students have opportunities to participate in a range of enrichment activities within and beyond the curriculum via working with professionals within the community for example: sports coaches, musicians, gardeners etc. and by visiting places of interest
- That students develop skills for independence and employment
- That students develop a greater awareness of their local community and make a positive contribution
- That students learn a range of skills for life beyond the school



Curriculum basis

A range of subjects are offered at Blue Skies to ensure that students have the opportunities and skills necessary to progress in life. All students have access to National Curriculum programmes of study at relevant key stages, which are adapted accordingly in ways appropriate to their abilities.

We teach the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science, alongside other academic and vocational subjects such as ICT, Food Technology, PE, PSHE, Functional Skills, Life and Living Skills. Students may also be separately timetabled for social, life and communication sessions, work experience,

college taster sessions and specific subjects of interest.

Materials may be selected from earlier or later key stages, where necessary, to enable children to progress and demonstrate achievement.

Sixth Form

Within Blue Skies sixth form, students are offered the full range of opportunities and subjects that are offered throughout the school. In addition to these subjects, students have the opportunity to choose different subjects such as vocational qualifications and A Levels. Materials may be selected from earlier or later key stages, where necessary, to enable children to progress and demonstrate achievement.

In addition to the qualifications offered, Blue Skies has a comprehensive offering of functional skills, independence skills and skills for working life to support our aim of enabling our students to live happy and fruitful lives. There is a community inclusion focus in the timetable, which gives students the opportunity to be supported in the community to learn skills such as shopping and how to travel on public transport.

Through our close partnership with Mid Kent College, students also have the opportunity to access a carousel of taster sessions.

To best support them for the future, students are provided with ongoing careers advice and make numerous visits to various local colleges, universities and careers fairs throughout the year.

In the sixth form, students are offered the opportunity to complete supported work experience placements in a number of different local businesses, including supermarkets, accountants, stables, offices, retail outlets, schools and cafes.



Our location

Blue Skies School is located in Chatham, a large suburb in the Medway Towns. Bordering Rochester and Gillingham, Chatham is a fascinating maritime destination that holds an abundance of history.

Chatham's history extends back more than 400 years. The Historic Chatham Dockyard is one of Britain's leading maritime heritage locations including a fantastic array of attractions and known as the world's most complete dockyard from the Age of Sail.

The town offers excellent transport links with Chatham train station, being just a 10-minute walk away. The station provides high speed links into London. Both Rochester and Gillingham train stations are also within proximity as well as a local bus station, with bus stops immediately outside of the school which service the local area. Additionally, the A2 main road and M2 motorway are easily accessible.

Medway is where Charles Dickens' spent a large portion of his life; and the place where Dickens found inspiration for some of his work's greatest characters and settings with many of its local places popping up in his books with characterful streets, shops and ancient buildings.

Both the Central Theatres and The Brook sit at the heart of Chatham and offer a wide array of national touring shows and amateur productions. The Brook Theatre is home to a thriving arts centre that offers a professional theatre experience, along with community led productions and performances.

