



Thames Valley  
School

Welcome to my  
school. Welcome  
to **MyProgress**<sup>®</sup>



The National  
Autistic Society

Academies  
Trust



Thames Valley  
School



Understanding  
my autism  
is part of  
**MyProgress®**



**Mr Gary Simm, Principal**



**Dr Jacqui Ashton Smith,  
Executive Director of Education**

# Welcome to Thames Valley School

Each child at Thames Valley School is treated as an individual. We take enormous care to give your child the support they need to learn well and to develop their confidence and independence. Small classes, committed and experienced specialist teachers, and a wonderful learning environment all make our school an exceptional place to be.

We have the highest expectations for every child in our school and believe that they are able to achieve above and beyond what may have been anticipated for them before. We are encouraging and supportive, and always celebrate your child's achievements. We also ask them to work hard, and help them to enjoy the success that this brings.

Your child will receive an outstanding, highly-personalised education at Thames Valley School. We are specialists in autism, and our aim is for your child to lead a successful, fulfilling life in society.

We will work closely with you: we know that parents and carers are experts in what their child needs, and you will be an important member of our team. Our doors are open to all our families and we want you to feel as much a part of our school community as your child.

Please do get in touch with us to discuss what our school could offer your child. We look forward to talking to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Simm".

**Mr Gary Simm**  
Principal

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jacqui Ashton Smith".

**Dr Jacqui Ashton Smith**  
Executive Director of Education

# We're autism specialists



## We are dedicated to autism education

Our staff are committed practitioners, trained to deliver a curriculum that is designed specifically for children with autism. Through our curriculum, your child will engage with their learning and enjoy it. We will help them to overcome barriers to learning caused by their autism.

We believe that every child in our school can do well. We use our knowledge and expertise to make sure that they are successful learners, building skills and tools to help them handle the challenges their autism brings, and developing their strengths.

## We are ambitious

We know that your child can be a successful learner.

At Thames Valley School, we expect every child to make progress at least as fast as their peers in mainstream schools, if not faster.

We monitor and assess your child and plan their learning individually to make sure that this happens. Our results so far confirm that we are right to be confident in our children's ability and hard work.

## We are friendly

We are a small school, with small classes, and children feel at home here. They are among friends who work hard to understand the way they see and experience the world.

We work closely with our families too. You know more about your child than anyone, and we want you to be part of our team. You can visit or talk to us at any time, and we will be here if you need extra support.

## Key facts about Thames Valley School:

- specialists in teaching children with autism
- primary and secondary
- ages 5 to 16
- girls and boys
- 50 day places
- support from an educational psychologist, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist
- full National Curriculum and Adventure Learning
- high staff to student ratio
- new purpose-built school, opened September 2013
- breakfast club daily, from 8.30am
- regular off-site activities, experiences, local and residential trips.

“The staff do help you a lot. They understand us more because they specialise in kids like us. If we have a meltdown, there are places we can go.”

Student



Enjoying my  
school is part of  
**MyProgress<sup>®</sup>**



## How we help your child

### Our approach to assessment, recording and reporting

**MyProgress®** is The National Autistic Society's overall strategy for working with your child. With **MyProgress®**, your child will have the best start in life because every aspect of their care and education is tailor-made for them. **MyProgress®** guarantees that your child will use approaches that The National Autistic Society has tried and tested over many years: we know that they make a difference.

### A positive school for children with autism

When your child comes to Thames Valley School, they will be surrounded by children and adults who understand autism, and who celebrate them for who they are. They will be taught and supported by knowledgeable, committed and experienced people who believe fully in their potential.

### Our vision

We want a world where all people living with autism get to lead the life they choose.

### Our mission

We will transform understanding of autism, and make sure everyone living with autism gets the support they need.

Our high quality, specialist provision will give every child at Thames Valley School access to an effective and suitable education.

We will help students to develop a solid foundation of skills so that they can play their part in society and prepare for further study, university and employment.

We seek to excite our students about school and learning by delivering a broad, flexible and challenging curriculum with inspiring learning opportunities.

Your child will gain the skills they need to learn well, understand their own challenges, and develop toolkits to help them through life, especially in times of change.

Your child's learning will be truly personalised. It will build on their strengths and remove the barriers that prevent them from learning.

### We look to the future

An important outcome of **MyProgress®** is ensuring that your child is ready to move on to the next stage in their life. We work closely with you, your child and our transition co-ordinator to create a **My Transitions Passport**. This document describes your child's skills, interests, aspirations and other key information to provide a clear plan for his or her future and lifelong learning.

"I love it here because we can personalise the learning to the students."

Mrs Miners, Teacher

### MyProgress®

My teacher works with speech therapists, psychologists and, of course, my parents to assess all areas of my development. This helps everyone understand my strengths and needs.



## Every term

**My ability profile** demonstrates the unique way autism impacts on me and my learning style.

**MyProgress® meeting** identifies what my school and my family can do to build on my strengths and interests and support me in the things I find difficult.

**MyProgress® plans** set out my academic, social and independence targets and says how the curriculum and timetable are going to be tailored to meet my needs.

**MyProgress® curriculum** puts significant emphasis on social communication skills, community-based learning and enterprise. The curriculum is delivered using the NAS SPELL philosophy that includes a blend of autism-specific interventions.

**MyProgress® file** provides evidence of my achievements across academic (eg literacy), social (eg turn-taking), emotional (eg managing my emotions), and independence (eg caring for myself) aspects of learning.

**MyProgress® report** measures how I am doing against my targets by rating progress red, amber or green. My achievements in green are celebrated and my teacher develops an action plan to help me improve in those areas rated red.

# Working together for your child



## A committed and experienced team

Our staff are knowledgeable, experienced and committed to providing the best quality education for your child. Everyone who works at Thames Valley School is trained in working with children with autism.

We are a small, close-knit team, and we work together every day, sharing our expertise and observations to make sure that your child is happy, thriving and learning well.

Every child in our school has a learning mentor. Their mentor supports them in their daily lessons and helps them to carry out their programme so they get to know your child well. The mentor also talks regularly to you, involving you in your child's progress and keeping you up to date.

## Our therapy support

Our teaching staff work with a number of qualified therapists to make sure that your child is helped to learn effectively. They help children with areas such as behaviour, social and independence skills, as well as learning strategies and tools.

We draw on the considerable expertise of an educational psychologist, who assesses our students, works with parents, and helps us to build individual programmes. We also bring in speech and language therapists and occupational therapists when a child needs this specialist support.

## The Centre for Autism

In addition to our own staff's expertise, we draw on the specialist knowledge of The National Autistic Society's Centre for Autism. The Centre gathers and shares research evidence about autism and is an extremely valuable resource as we develop our programmes and extend our work.

“We know pretty well what will trigger each child's challenging behaviour so we can remove the triggers and the behaviour isn't in the way of learning.”

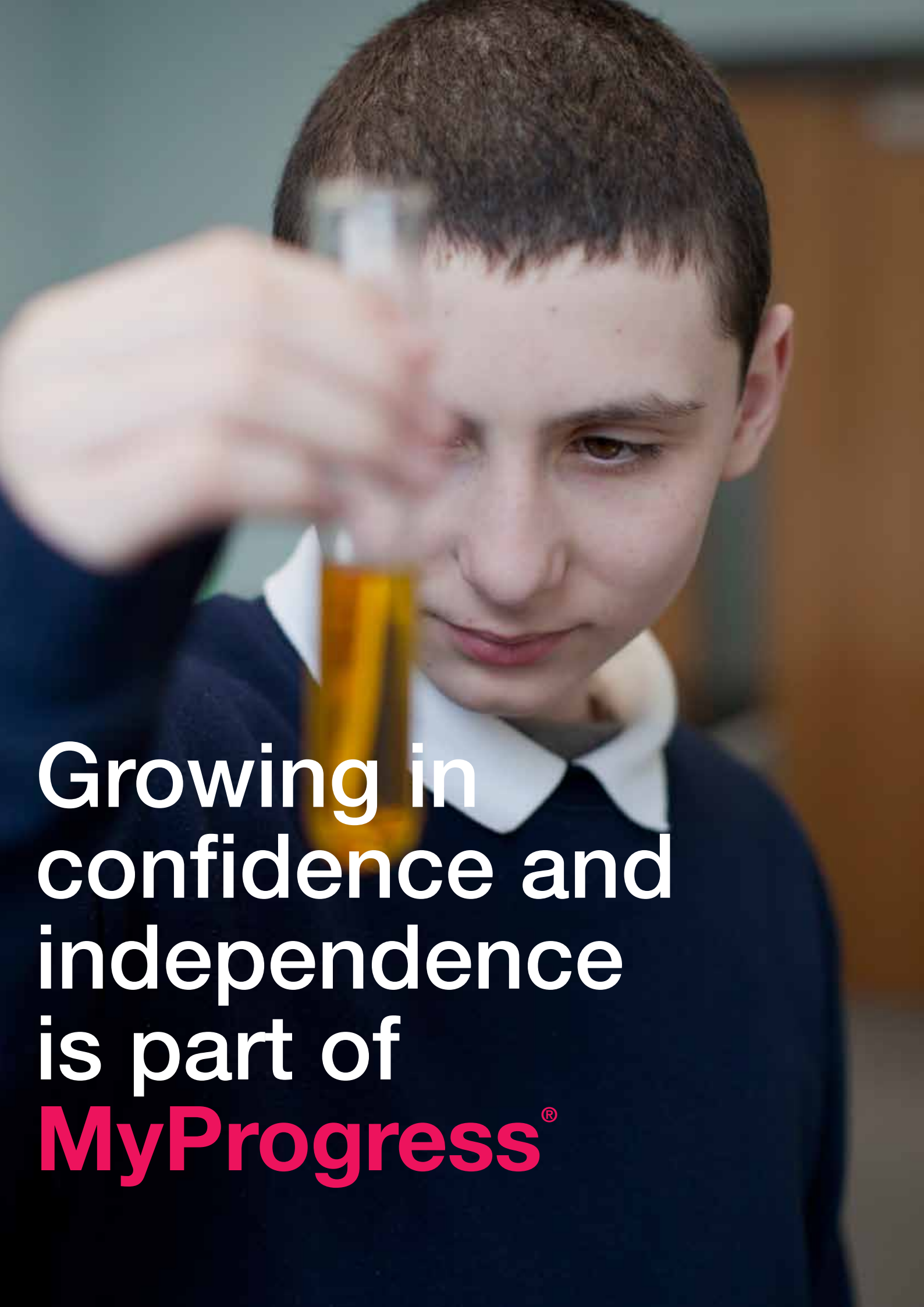
Miss Chaston, Assistant Head Teacher

“He likes the fact that teachers get him, and he doesn't get shouted at for stuff to do with autism.”

Parent



Building trusting,  
long-term  
relationships is part  
of **MyProgress**<sup>®</sup>



Growing in  
confidence and  
independence  
is part of  
**MyProgress<sup>®</sup>**

# A full and rounded education



**“It’s good here because they don’t force you to do things you find hard. They help you.”**

Student

## We believe in your child’s ability

At Thames Valley School we offer a full and rounded education to children with autism from ages 5 to 16. We have high expectations, ask our children to work hard, and encourage them to always do their best.

Our students say that, unlike in other schools they have attended, they are never ‘forced’ to work. Instead, we like our children to enjoy their studies, and to learn how they learn best. By giving them more control over the way that they do their work, and always making it clear that we believe that they can do it, and expect them to complete their tasks, we find that our students make exceptional progress.

We deliver the National Curriculum at all key stages, and expect most of our students to attain at least the same levels as children in mainstream schools. By age 16, our students will take national qualifications, aiming to gain GCSEs, or equivalent BTEC qualifications or ASDAN life and work skill qualifications.

## Our classes

The class sizes at Thames Valley School are small: on average a class of six children will learn with one teacher and two learning mentors, and some children are supported individually.

## Our curriculum

At Thames Valley School, we personalise the curriculum to each individual student’s needs, combining the National Curriculum subjects alongside Adventure Learning.

We place a strong emphasis on English and Maths as they are core to success in every other subject. As pupils move into our secondary provision, we increasingly focus on Science and ICT too.

Subjects we deliver include History, Geography, RE, Food Technology, Design Technology, and Art and Design. PE is a very important part of our curriculum as is Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE). In everything we do, we emphasise social, moral, citizenship and life skills, encouraging your child to do well and to make a positive contribution to their community.

Through Adventure Learning, students build on their confidence by facing new challenges and pushing their boundaries in a structured programme with qualified instructors.

Activities range from on-site adventure play equipment, a six-week timetable of activities, which can include skiing, rock climbing, go-karting, ice skating, horse riding and kayaking, to a residential overnight trip.

Our curriculum encourages your child to overcome the barriers to their learning, to develop coping strategies, and to learn to manage their own behaviour.

Every child has their own individual education plan. Through this plan we build on your child’s strengths and capitalise on their interests, so they have a reason to learn, and believe in the importance of what they achieve.

**“Everything is personalised. In one lesson, four children will be doing four different activities.”**

Miss Chaston, Assistant Head Teacher

# Our learning environment

## Purpose-built for autism

Our school was purpose-built for us in 2013, so we were able to design it to be the ideal place for children with autism. Our spaces were created specifically to help everyone to feel calm and to work well together.

Our primary classes are all on the ground floor of the school, and our secondary classes are on the first floor, so everyone is part of the school community. Each classroom has an individual room attached for when a child needs some time apart in order to learn successfully.

Throughout the school we have calming pods. The children like to come to these small semi-enclosed areas to relax or read.

Our soft play area provides a safe environment for robust play and is complemented by our outdoor adventure playground.

In our dining area, your child can choose to eat in a pod, secure inside a curved wall, or they can eat sitting along our shared bench.

We use our main hall for all sorts of activities, including basketball, yoga and PE.

Outside we have several play areas where your child will do PE, sports and other outdoor play activities at lunchtime, or simply relax or let off steam.

Our new specialist provision for design and technology includes commercial machinery and tools. These allow students to test their practical skills as well as develop new ones.

We also use the leisure centre next door for swimming, trampolining and other sports.

## Key facts about our facilities:

- 11 classrooms
- individual room attached to each class
- primary and secondary classes are on separate floors
- calming pods allow children to unwind
- dining hall with enclosed pods
- specialist art and design classroom
- science laboratory
- technology workshop
- teaching kitchen
- common room for older students
- Fujitsu Innovation Centre with state-of-the-art technology, opened in 2014.



**“It’s a calmer environment. He has his own space and feels in control. The staff are really friendly and encourage him to do well.”**

Parent



Learning,  
socialising, and  
communicating  
at school is part of  
**MyProgress<sup>®</sup>**



Striving to  
make every day  
positive is part  
of **MyProgress<sup>®</sup>**

# A rich mix of resources



“He’s learned programme writing in ICT – he’s always wanted to do that.”

Parent

## From laptops to hamsters

Our school is extremely well equipped, both with traditional learning materials and modern technology. From the design technology machinery and inspirational classroom displays to our innovation centre and interactive Clevertouch screens, all our resources are carefully chosen to help your child to learn well and with enjoyment.

Technology can offer a great deal to children with autism, and we’ve embraced it. We use iPads, laptops and our Clevertouch screens to bring the outside world into our classrooms, to make it easy for us to share our learning, and to learn in different ways in one class. The Clevertouch screens are interactive, allowing us to show films, film ourselves, draw, write, explore new environments, and even to play air hockey, because the screens can lie flat and are virtually indestructible! Our children are also teaching us to love the game of Minecraft, and we’re finding exciting ways to use it not only as a reward for working well, but also in lessons.

Our training studio flat allows students to develop their life skills in preparation for adult life. Just like any standard flat, they can do laundry, make the bed, wash up or iron.

## Learning and sharing with our community

Our children are learning to be well-rounded, confident members of society, which is why we make the most of the resources in our community. We are building strong connections with local schools, colleges, employers and communities both to generate greater awareness of autism, and to create inclusion opportunities for our children. These include vocational courses such as first aid certification.

We build into our lessons visits from art galleries, museums, places of worship, farms and historical monuments, to kayaking and trips to Legoland: anywhere that will engage our students in their learning. The children enjoy the way this lets them explore subjects in greater depth and breadth. We use the sports centre next door regularly for swimming and other activities.

We invite people into our school to provide exciting learning experiences. Recently we have had visits from an animal workshop, our community police officers and the Urban Play Rangers.

# Support for you and your child



## Moving to Thames Valley School

Coming to Thames Valley School may be the best thing for your child, but it's still a major change for them and for you. We take it very seriously and support you every step of the way.

We take plenty of time to get to know you and your child, and in this way you can be sure that every member of staff who'll be working with your child has all the information they need to help them learn. Our transition coordinator will visit your child in their current school to begin to form that all-important first relationship and to get to know them. Your child will be given photos and information about Thames Valley so that when they begin to visit they are prepared.

You and your child will visit the school at different times of the day and for varying lengths of time. When they start they may come for part days at first, though we will always be guided by what will suit your child best.

## You are part of our team

Our students' families are as much a part of our community as the children. You are always welcome to visit or ring us, and we are here to support you.

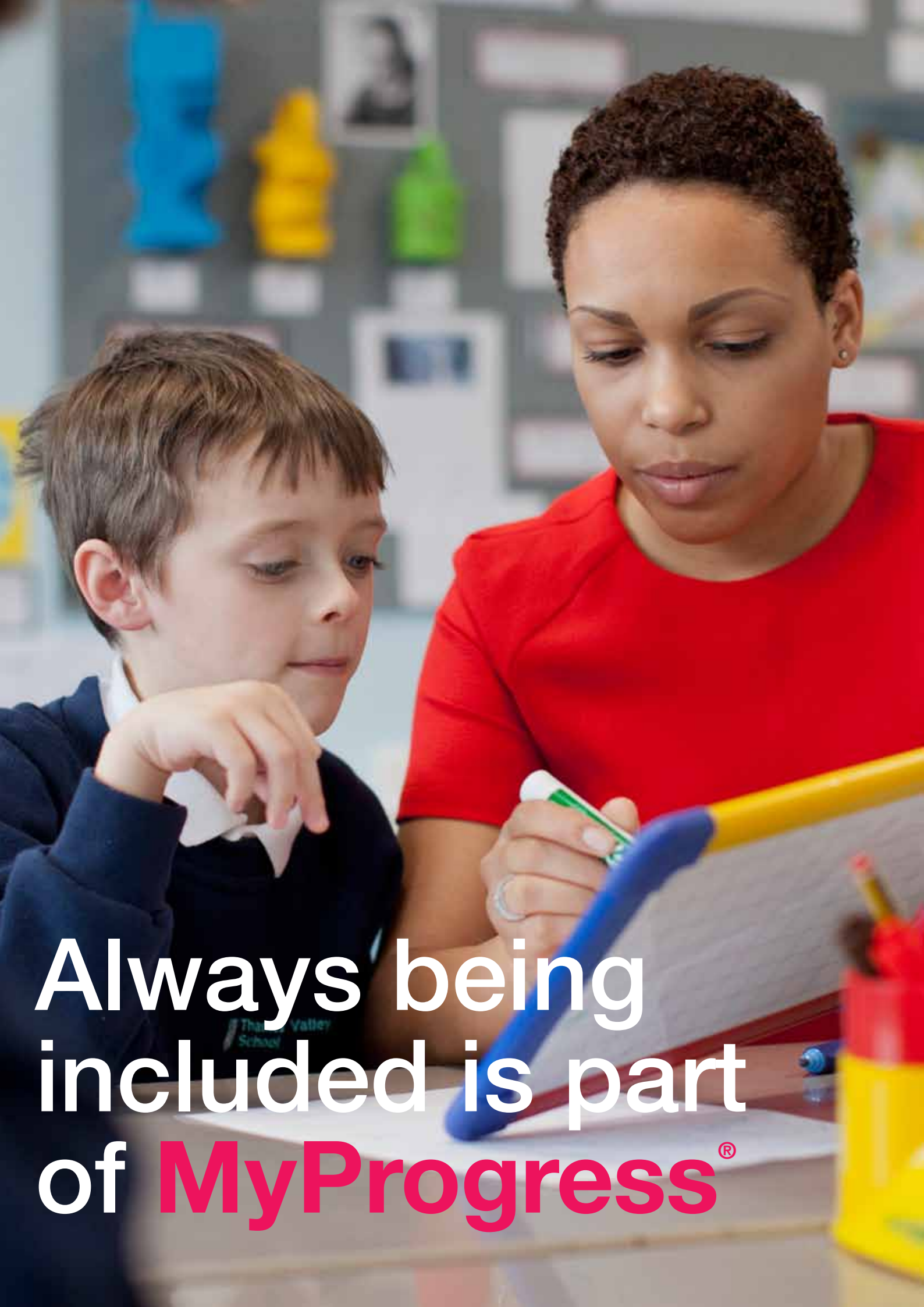
Your child's teacher and learning mentor will communicate regularly with you about what your child is doing at school, the targets we have set, and the progress they are making. We explain how we are helping them to tackle the challenges they face, and celebrate their successes with you.

We are always happy to talk and to share ideas, so if you're worried about your child, or wondering how best to support them at home, please ask us.

We are also committed to helping you to get all the support you need from health and social care services and agencies – we know how hard it can be, and we will be by your side.

“I can talk to them about anything: they're lovely. They give you lots of support. You're like a family there.”

Parent



Always being  
included is part  
of **MyProgress**®

# Applying to Thames Valley School



“I think it’s absolutely brilliant. It makes me feel happy knowing he’s there: in mainstream I was always on edge.”

Parent

## Find out more about us

We offer education to young people aged 5 to 16 with a diagnosis of autism who have been referred by their local authority.

If you think our school might be the right place for your child to learn, we suggest you contact us to find out more about what we provide, or to arrange to visit us to see what we do.

## Making an application

If you decide you would like to apply, you need to discuss your child’s needs with your local authority, and make a joint application. Once you have made your application, we will assess your child.

There are several steps to the application process. We can explain them to you and there is a chart showing the process on our website – [www.thamesvalleyschool.org.uk](http://www.thamesvalleyschool.org.uk).

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism.

We were founded in 1962 by a group of parents who were passionate about ensuring a better future for their children. Since we started providing autism-specific education in 1965, we have developed our education offer into a diverse network of independent and free schools, and programmes that are relied on by hundreds of people across the UK.

Free schools are state-funded schools, established in response to local need and run by sponsoring voluntary organisations with relevant knowledge and experience. We sponsor our network of free schools and academies through the NAS Academies Trust.

We believe that young people with autism have the right to an appropriate education.

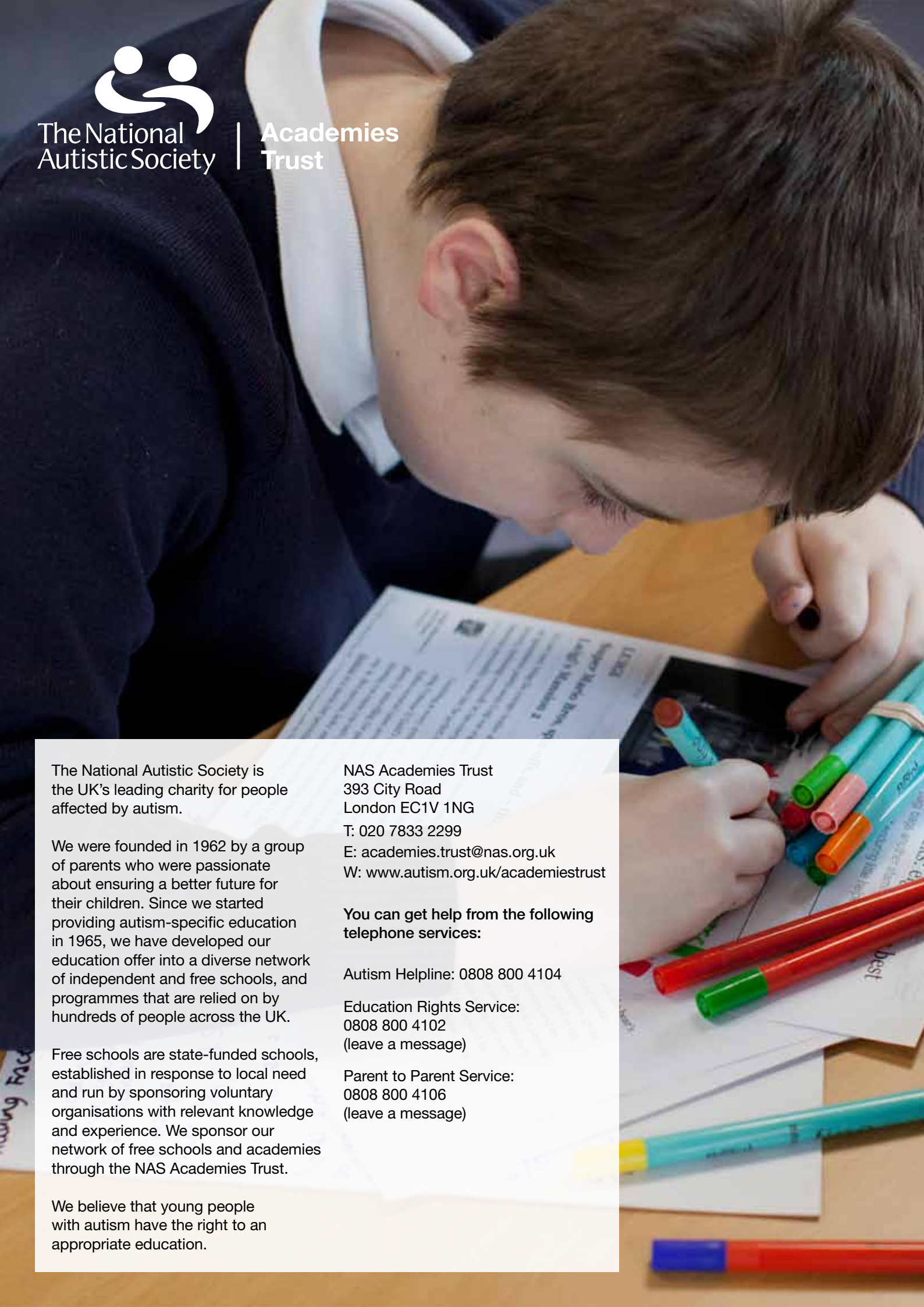
NAS Academies Trust  
393 City Road  
London EC1V 1NG  
T: 020 7833 2299  
E: [academies.trust@nas.org.uk](mailto:academies.trust@nas.org.uk)  
W: [www.autism.org.uk/academiestrust](http://www.autism.org.uk/academiestrust)

**You can get help from the following telephone services:**

Autism Helpline: 0808 800 4104

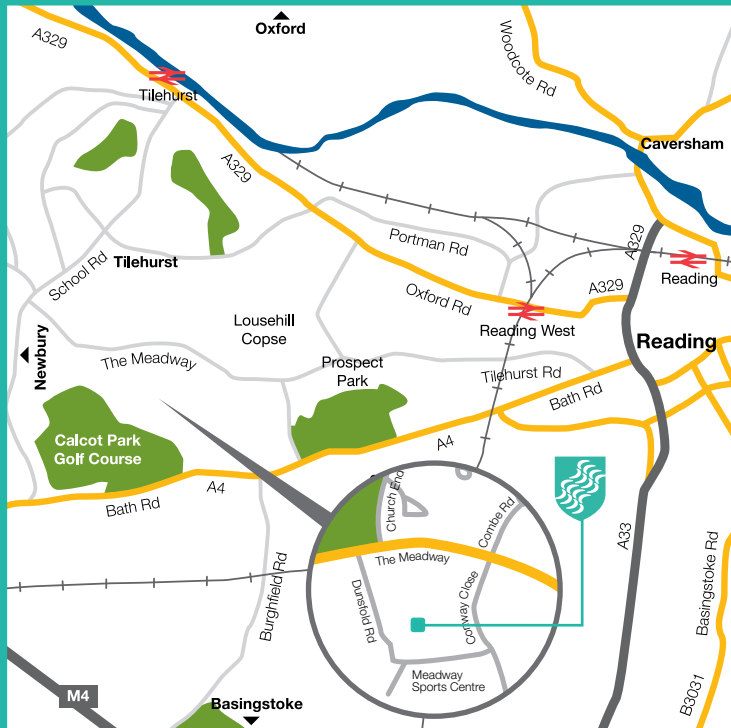
Education Rights Service:  
0808 800 4102  
(leave a message)

Parent to Parent Service:  
0808 800 4106  
(leave a message)





# Thames Valley School



If you have any questions or want to find out more about our school, please feel free to contact us.

**Principal: Mr Gary Simm BEd (Hons), MA, NPQH**

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For more information about all our schools please get in touch:

T: 0117 974 8430  
E: [schools@nas.org.uk](mailto:schools@nas.org.uk)  
W: [www.autism.org.uk/schools](http://www.autism.org.uk/schools)



**Academies Trust**