

Hope courted in new Surrey school for extra needs

13 March 2026



The official opening of Hopescourt School in Walton-on-Thames marks a new chapter for children with additional needs in Surrey. The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey joined pupils, staff, Bourne Education Trust, project partners and the Leader of Surrey County Council to celebrate the opening of a school designed to give children the support, stability and opportunities they need to thrive.

Hopescourt School will ultimately provide 200 specialist places for autistic pupils and children with communication and interaction needs by 2029. For many families, the new school means shorter journeys and stronger connections to their local community, ensuring children can learn and grow in an environment that feels safe, familiar and supportive.

With the first cohort of pupils already settling into their new learning environment, the school will continue to expand over the coming years, strengthening Surrey's local specialist education offer. It forms a key part of Surrey County Council's commitment to increasing high quality specialist provision close to home, helping more children access the right support without needing to travel long distances.

The opening event brought together students, families, Surrey County Council, Bourne Education Trust, construction partners Willmott Dixon and many others whose expertise and dedication have helped bring this new school to life.

The Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux, said: "I was so pleased to be present to celebrate the opening of Hopescourt School. Never having visited the new building, I was immediately taken with its design. For members of the teaching team, it was obvious that they were very enthusiastic about their new school. The pupils, it should be said, were equally enthusiastic about their new place of learning. It is a facility that is certainly needed in Surrey, and I send my congratulations to all concerned for the building of this most impressive centre of education."

Surrey County Council's investment of nearly £30 million to build the school reflects its long-term ambition to give children and young people with additional needs the best possible start. The expansion of specialist provision is a core aim of Surrey's Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023-2026, ensuring children receive the right support where and when they need it.

Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, highlighted the life-changing impact this new school will have on children and young people and their families: "Hopescourt School is a symbol of what can be achieved when partners work together with a shared vision, creating a school that is inclusive, sustainable, and truly life-changing for Surrey children and their families."

Hopescourt is also Surrey's first Net Zero Carbon in operation specialist free school, combining sustainability with child-centred design. Specially designed spaces support the school's ethos of 'pause, breathe, think and flourish', ensuring a calm and nurturing environment for pupils aged 4 to 19.

Richard Poulter, Managing Director at Willmott Dixon, highlighted the lasting impact of the project: "Delivering Surrey's first Net Zero in Operation school reflects our joint commitment to sustainability and community impact. This school will provide much needed specialist places and support generations of young people."

The project is the result of close collaboration between Willmott Dixon, Surrey County Council, the school, Bourne Education Trust, Freemantles School, AtkinsRealis and many other partners. In particular, the dedication and expertise of the council's Land & Property Capital Projects team and construction partners Willmott Dixon ensured the successful delivery of a school built around the needs of children.

Andy Field, Chair of Bourne Education Trust, reflected on the collective achievement: "Hopescourt stands as a powerful example of partnership in action. This school demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations come together with a shared purpose: to create exceptional, inclusive opportunities for young people. With these fabulous new facilities and excellent staff serving our children, we now have the opportunity to build a thriving school at the heart of the community with the aim of becoming one of the best special schools in the country."

Acting Headteacher, Nicky Meston, paid tribute to the dedication of the Hopescourt staff and the excitement of the school community: "I am incredibly proud of our team and the way they champion our pupils every single day. Today isn't just about opening a building, it's about opening doors to opportunity, belonging, and the very best start in life."

Hopescourt School embodies the council's vision for inclusive, high-quality and community-anchored provision, delivering sustainable support and improving outcomes for children and families across Surrey.

Surrey County Council

