



HEAD TEACHER

Recruitment pack 2026





About Chatten Free School

Chatten Free School is a local authority–funded special needs free school in Witham, Essex, specialising in the education of pupils with severe autism and associated learning needs. Many of our pupils are pre-verbal and may display complex behaviours, and we are proud to offer a highly individualised, evidence-based approach that meets their unique profiles.

As part of the Hope Learning Community Trust, we work within a strong network of SEND schools committed to excellence. Chatten is an **Outstanding** multidisciplinary setting where ABA, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and specialist teaching combine to create personalised programmes for every child. With 75 pupils and an SLD+ profile, our school is designed for those whose needs cannot be met elsewhere locally.

Our core values—Happiness, Independence and Respect—shape every aspect of school life. We strive to ensure that all pupils leave us with meaningful communication, functional life skills and the greatest possible independence. Chatten is a warm, joyful, and ambitious school, and we are incredibly proud of the life-changing work that takes place here each day.

Please take a look on our website to find out more information about the school

- [Head welcome](#)
- [Aims and Values](#)
- [Some informational videos](#)
- [Curriculum](#)
- [News Article: Chatten Free School transforms futures for autistic children with complex needs](#)



HEADTEACHER – JOB DESCRIPTION

Chatten Free School, Rivenhall, Witham (CM8)

A special school for pupils with severe autism and complex learning needs (SLD+), 75 pupils

Main Purpose of the Role

The Headteacher will provide exceptional leadership to ensure the highest standards of education, safeguarding, care, and personal development for every pupil at Chatten Free School. Rooted in the school's core values of **Happiness, Independence and Respect**, the Headteacher will:

- Lead, manage and inspire the whole school community, ensuring excellent provision for pupils with severe autism and associated complex needs.
- Maintain and further develop the school's **Outstanding**, fully individualised model, ensuring every child receives a bespoke programme of learning.
- Work in partnership with the Strategic Headteacher (whilst in post) and the Trust to shape and deliver a clear, ambitious vision for the school's future; inspiring and empowering staff, pupils, and families.
- Ensure the consistent implementation of Chatten's unique multidisciplinary approach, incorporating ABA, Speech & Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and specialist teaching.
- Champion excellence through effective systems, policies, and processes that ensure high-quality teaching, personalised interventions, and strong safeguarding practice.

Qualities

The Headteacher will:

- Uphold the highest standards of ethics, behaviour, and professional conduct, maintaining public trust in school leadership.
- Demonstrate unwavering commitment to the rights, dignity and potential of pupils with severe autism and complex needs.
- Build respectful, positive relationships across the school community and wider professional networks.
- Lead by example with integrity, emotional intelligence, resilience, and a relentless drive for improvement.
- Show empathy, patience, flexibility and a willingness to be hands-on with pupils.
- Model a growth mindset, promoting innovation, evidence-based practice, and lifelong learning.





Key Duties and Responsibilities

1. School Culture, Values and Behaviour

The Headteacher will:

- Create a positive, enriching school culture where every pupil experiences joy, safety and belonging.
- Embed the school's values—**Happiness, Independence, Respect**—in all aspects of school life.
- Ensure high expectations for all pupils, using trauma-informed, compassionate and individualised behaviour support approaches.
- Promote professionalism, collaboration, and wellbeing across the staff team.
- Ensure staff understand and respond appropriately to behaviours as communication, reflecting a deep understanding of each child.

2. Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment

The Headteacher will:

- Ensure a fully individualised curriculum that removes barriers to learning through creative, evidence-based approaches.
- Sustain high-quality teaching across all subjects and phases, underpinned by specialist knowledge.
- Oversee curriculum leadership, ensuring subject leaders are supported and connected to professional networks.
- Ensure that formative and summative assessment methods are valid, reliable, proportionate and used effectively to inform decisions.
- Promote evidence-informed approaches to communication, reading, independence, life skills and functional learning.



3. Inclusion, SEND and Complex Needs

The Headteacher will:

- Promote a culture where every pupil can access the curriculum and achieve ambitious outcomes.
- Ensure strong collaboration with families and professionals to support pupils with significant autism, communication needs and behaviours that challenge.
- Ensure statutory responsibilities under the **SEND Code of Practice** are met.
- Safeguard and enhance the expertise of the multidisciplinary team (ABA, SALT, OT).

4. Leadership of Staff

The Headteacher will:

- Lead, inspire and support a dedicated, skilled staff team including tutors, teachers, specialists and support staff.
- Ensure robust systems for coaching, supervision, performance management and professional growth.
- Manage staff workload, wellbeing and development, ensuring opportunities for professional learning and innovation.
- Promote a culture of accountability, constructive challenge and continuous improvement.

5. School Improvement and Quality Assurance

The Headteacher will:

- Lead rigorous self-evaluation and implement strategic school improvement planning.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and interventions to ensure consistent excellence.
- Use data to set challenging but realistic goals and track progress toward school aims.
- Identify barriers to effectiveness and develop timely, context-appropriate solutions.



6. Safeguarding and Pupil Wellbeing

The Headteacher will:

- Ensure effective safeguarding systems, working closely with and supporting the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Ensure staff are fully trained and confident in child protection responsibilities in line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education*.
- Promote a culture of vigilance and safe practice across the school.

7. Governance, Accountability and Partnerships

The Headteacher will:

- Work constructively with governors and understand their strategic role in holding the school to account.
- Provide accurate, timely reports on school performance, safeguarding, finance and improvement priorities.
- Build strong relationships with local authorities, professional agencies, community organisations and national stakeholders.
- Collaborate with Hope Learning Community, sharing expertise and contributing to trust-wide improvement.

8. Managing Resources and Operations

The Headteacher will:

- Ensure effective financial planning and resource allocation, securing best value and long-term sustainability.
- Oversee the strategic use of technology and resources to enhance provision.
- Maintain safe, compliant and well-managed school operations, including safeguarding, health & safety and risk management.

This job description reflects the core expectations of the role but is not exhaustive. It will be reviewed annually and may be amended following consultation to reflect the evolving needs of the school, pupils and Hope Learning Community





Safeguarding Statement

Hope Learning Community is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The Headteacher will be responsible for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of all children for whom they are responsible, or with whom they come into contact, in accordance with the Trust's Safeguarding Policy. The successful candidate will be required to complete a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) application, medical checks and references.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Hope Learning Community committed to creating a diverse workforce. We will consider all qualified applicants for employment without regard to sex, race, religion, belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, age, disability, marriage or civil partnership, ensuring compliance with the Equalities Act 2010.



Person Specification

If you are selected for interview, the recruitment and selection procedure will collect evidence from any of the following activities:

Must have	Good to have
Qualifications and training	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or equivalent such as BCBA or UKSBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of relevant continued professional development Qualification in SEND, behaviour or Autism BCBA or UKSBA
Experience of...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with young people with complex needs including complex behaviour that challenges. As an assistant or deputy leader (ideally in a SEND setting) Leading and developing teams Working with external and internal stake holders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> And/or qualification in working with pupils with autism Working in a special school or alternative provision is desirable
Skills and knowledge	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills Ability to inspire, motivate, and support staff and pupils Ability to build positive relationships with all stakeholders Commitment to personalised, pupil-centred approaches Sound knowledge of safeguarding requirements and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep understanding of SEND legislation, guidance, and best practice Strong knowledge of strategies for supporting pupils with autism and complex needs
Personal qualities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passionate about making a difference to the lives of children and young people High expectations for all pupils and belief in their potential Commitment to the school's values of Happiness, Independence, and Respect Reflective, resilient, and adaptable Ability to work collaboratively and build trust Committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion Patience, empathy, kindness Flexible and ready to learn new things A sense of humour Hands on – you must be ready to be present with pupils 	





Application Process

Required: September 2026

Visits: By appointment.

Closing date: 19th April 2026

Interview: 28th & 29th April 2026 or 5th & 6th May 2026

Salary and benefits: Group 5 Leadership Range L18-L30

Application process Applicants should complete the Hope Learning Community Application Form and submit it to the return address no later than the closing date above. All applicants are strongly advised to read the job description and person specification for the post prior to submitting their application.

Selection process Applications are ranked against the person specification for the role and those shortlisted will be subject to a face-to-face interview with the selection panel. There may also be a skills test/observation or practical assessment. Details regarding selection panel members and assessments will be made available to shortlisted candidates.

Shortlisted candidates Applicants shortlisted for the post will be notified as soon as reasonably practical upon completion of the shortlisting process.

Referees The referees for all shortlisted candidates will be contacted prior to the interview date.

On-Line Searches In line with statutory requirements, Hope Learning Community Trust carries out online searches (including social media) as part of its due diligence on all shortlisted candidates. This helps identify any incidents or issues that have happened, and are publicly available online, which the Trust might want to explore with the applicant at interview.

Probation All teaching and support staff new to employment with the Hope Learning Community will be required to complete a satisfactorily probationary period.

Interview expenses Please note: Hope Learning Community does not reimburse candidates for interview expenses.

Further information Applicants who require further information should contact the Trust HR team hr@hopelearningcommunity.org.uk