# Hopefields School seeks permission to expand with farm-based educational therapy for vulnerable pupils



Hopefields School in Middlesbrough has submitted a planning application seeking permission to expand its educational facilities by incorporating "educational therapy" involving farm animals. The proposal centres on a site at Cross Farm off Wynyard Road in Wolviston, where the school aims to develop the land for educational, agricultural, and horticultural uses to support vulnerable young people with complex learning needs.

The school, catering to 40 pupils aged 11 to 18 with social, emotional, or mental health challenges, is noted for its "100% success" rate in reintegrating students into further education, employment, or training. It currently has more than 200 children on its waiting list. Many of these young people have experienced disrupted education, with some having been excluded from mainstream schooling. Most pupils attend under an education, health and care plan and have suffered adverse childhood experiences.

Hopefields intends to use the farmstead, which already accommodates ponies, sheep, chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs, and includes a dedicated chicken run and all-weather pony working surface, as part of a specialised educational and therapeutic environment regulated by Ofsted. The proposed development includes converting a barn into a classroom and breakroom and constructing shelters for the farm animals. Pupils will be transported to and from the farm by minibus during term time, with daily staff visits to attend to animal welfare.

A planning statement submitted by consultants Stovell & Millwater outlines the educational use of equine, small animal, and horticultural activities as integral to the school's approach. The school aims to equip students with life skills necessary to transition back into mainstream education settings such as schools or colleges. The statement also highlights a rising demand for such educational provision in the Tees Valley region, given the number of young people facing disrupted or excluded educational experiences.

Reflecting on the benefits, pupils have described hands-on experiences with the animals as bringing their learning to life. They reported improvements in emotional regulation, reduced stress and anxiety, enhanced responsibility, teamwork capabilities, social skills, confidence, and a sense of safety. One grandparent remarked to Teesside Live that the school had helped his grandson "rediscover himself."

Since adopting this curriculum, Hopefields claims that the programme has become perpetually full and continues to face pressure to accept more students referred by local education authorities. The school’s Ofsted rating remains "good," with behaviour and attitudes assessed as "excellent" in 2023.

The planning application argues that the development would not alter the character or appearance of the countryside site, nor would it increase local traffic levels. There are plans to extend an orchard, re-wild parts of the land, and improve site security at the entrance.

Concluding the planning statement, the school expresses the hope that the local planning authority will recognise the educational and social merits of the initiative. It states, "We consider that this is a use that is demonstrably needed, providing a special educational facility that meets the requirements of an increasing number of disadvantaged pupils. We would hope the local planning authority would support this initiative as a positive contribution to the education of some marginalised children from the locality."

The Teesside Live is reporting on this proposed development which reflects an innovative approach to supporting young people with complex educational needs through farm-based therapeutic activities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://hopefields.org.uk> - This URL provides information about Hopefields School, including its mission to offer bespoke education for young people who are hard to reach and hard to place, aligning with the educational goals described in the article.
2. <https://www.investmiddlesbrough.co.uk/hopefields-education-expands-to-middlesbrough/> - This URL supports the expansion of Hopefields Education into Middlesbrough, which is relevant to the context of the school's growth and educational initiatives.
3. <https://moderngov.middlesbrough.gov.uk/Data/Planning%20and%20Development%20Committee/200908141330/Agenda/$att3846.doc.pdf> - Although this document doesn't specifically mention Hopefields, it illustrates Middlesbrough Council's handling of educational facility planning applications, which is relevant to the planning context of the article.
4. <https://www.discoveryspecialacademy.org.uk/discovery-special-academy-new-build-unanimously-approved-by-middlesbrough-council/> - This URL highlights Middlesbrough Council's approach to approving educational projects, demonstrating the council's openness to innovative educational initiatives.
5. <https://ofsted.gov.uk> - This URL provides general information about Ofsted, the regulatory body mentioned in the article as overseeing the educational and therapeutic environment at Hopefields School.
6. <https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-applications> - This URL links to Middlesbrough's planning application page, providing context for how schools like Hopefields might engage with the local planning authority for educational development projects.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMingFBVV95cUxPazE0RkdyUUJDSjdpY0RPdlN3VlRGN3JGNUlxNkhBelpCaTNPRTB3UWl0YXMwZEpBVmhwSXNkazhPQmVXeUdOMTA5cUZld1JwdWZaZ3Z0VWJXOEpLVHI3Q2ZFOExoREdlTFhvOWg5d0g2Vk1NUEtSdjc5UU9RZE0zQVZsbV81T0NwZ1doaFFtZEFwTEZrOGc4cE11S1lVUdIBowFBVV95cUxQU0hjcjRUQ1dsbDNXcmNHeXlzcmlzTnU3eTNlMzBuRXZoMXM4NTRwV3ZmQm1OdlNLQTRpNWxWSy1KRkpZQ1JKLXFFWXlqOElxS3l3bXBCN2tSeFFYTGgzNzdWMmtYQnhlaDBNeVpEOC0zd29kdDNRUjQybXdoVllScUIweUNWblhnSVhxWEhXc0JzMnVPU05VbXZYeEY2NjJyZ3hr?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data