



About Park School

Park School has been established since 1986 and is one of the longest running alternative schools in the UK.

Set in the historic and spacious grounds on the 1,200-acre Dartington Hall Estate in South Devon, the children have the opportunity to play and to explore. They experience and learn to care for, and to respect, the natural environment.

Park School is a Human Scale School where relationships are very important. It is the quality of relationships within the school which most often strikes visitors and newcomers. The individuality of each child is valued and children learn to respect themselves and others and to become constructive members of the school community. Children are encouraged to be responsible for their own behaviour, to understand its effects, and to gain insight into themselves and others.

Small classes mean that there is time for personal attention as well as the space and freedom for individual expression. Our curriculum and approach to learning develops children's creativity, enquiry and understanding of themselves and the world around them. We want to inspire a love of learning, an appreciation and respect for the natural environment and the ability to be active, global citizens.



Children are the heart of the school; Park School is built around providing an exciting, enjoyable and nurturing environment for children to learn. Teaching is at the child's own pace and structured in a way which helps them to reach high standards. Children have a voice in the school and options and choices are available from the start. We look to seek their views, ideas and thoughts on how they learn, how the school is organised and any other matter that might concern them.

Welcoming children of all cultural backgrounds, beliefs and abilities, the school provides an alternative, holistic learning environment nurturing the whole child and developing their sense of wellbeing, their social and emotional resilience along with their physical, intellectual and spiritual self, helping them to realise their unique potential.

Teaching is enhanced, wherever possible, by providing opportunities for the children to engage with people and places beyond the school environment. Parents also share their skills with children, offering contributions as varied as singing workshops and computer skills or reading with children.

Community

The community of parents and staff working together for the benefit of the children is a vital part of the strength of Park School.

Parents play an active role in the life of the school. As well being involved in helping out directly in class, parents organise the programme of social and fundraising events and help to maintain the school by taking part in the Parent Community Group.

We view this collaboration between parents and teachers, providing an active and living community, as an important element in the education that the children experience when they come to Park School.

Working at Park School

We are a small team of educationalist, committed to working with children in ways that value and respect their unique individuality. As a small school, we work closely together as a team and regardless of roles, we all step in to help each other when needed to make sure that the children are safe, well cared for and most importantly, enjoy learning.

When you work at Park School you are not just doing another job, you are becoming a part of a great team and a vibrant community of children, parents and educationalists.



What is Human Scale Education?

Human-Scale is an approach to understanding our world that uses the human as a unit of scale. How many humans make the ideal community, a functioning country or an ideal school?

In terms of use for institutions or design, it deals with the belief that there is a proper scale that defines its limits by the well-being of both the person and the planet and the ability of the person to seek wholeness. It can be seen today in the call for architecture, economics, politics and schools that are created as if people matter.

It is an organisational principle that understands there is a balanced relationship between the needs and wants of the personal and the communal.

Human-scale asserts that community institutions should be created with the person at their centre in a way that enables real and authentic relationships and connections between people.

The Three Principles of Our Community

At Park School, we have three fundamental questions that we ask of the children; 'are you looking after yourself, are you looking after others and are you looking after your environment?'

If they are doing these things, then we often don't need too many other rules.

At Park School, we have the privilege to investigate the potential of truly small schools and attempt to keep our numbers at a human-scale across the three-to-eleven age range.

The school is large enough for healthy social groups but small enough to ensure every child's talents can be developed and ensure that all adults and children can be heard and contribute to the functioning of the school.

What Does Human-Scale Look Like in Practice?



How will you see the human scale manifested in the day to day life of Park School?

Children learn to communicate well; they learn to argue and resolve their disputes with kindness. They show compassion for each other and learn to have empathy for the world around them. They talk about the way they want things to be, talk to adults as friends and talk to all ages as if they are equals.

They talk a lot!

Adults are able to teach to each child's strength and help them face the challenge of their weaknesses without comparison to others. Classrooms are

relaxed and informal and you are likely to see children playing together or exploring an idea, you will definitely see children enjoying their learning.

Children play a lot; they run around barefooted: they get muddy, they learn to take risks, they laugh and smile often. And guess what? They learn a lot and complain that it is the end of the day!

Human Scale can mean small, but more than anything it means respect. Respect for children as humans with needs as important as an adult's, and the right that their school environment and experience should be tailored to them and not them tailored to an educational outcome. Teachers are also respected in this process. Their creativity allowed free rein and their needs as professionals understood.

The Dartington Hall Estate

The historic Dartington Estate, where the school is located, estate which dates back to the 12th Century is rich in history as well as being a diverse, natural resource which underpins much of the learning and curriculum at Park School.

Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst purchased the Dartington estate in 1925. They were pioneers, inspired by many innovative thinkers of the time and poured their resources into the “Dartington Experiment” – restoring the estate buildings and setting up a host of farming, forestry and educational projects. This experiment was formalised in 1932 with the creation of The Dartington Hall Trust, which oversaw Dorothy and Leonard's charitable work.

Inspired by a long association with Rabindranath Tagore who had worked with a neighbourhood in West India where Tagore was trying to introduce progressive education and rural reconstruction into a tribal community, they set out on a similar goal for the depressed agricultural economy in rural England.



Early initiatives included Dartington Hall School, Dartington Tweed Mill and later Dartington Glass. Dartington also rapidly became a magnet for artists, architects, writers, philosophers and musicians from around the world, creating an exceptional centre of creative activity.

The Elmhirsts understood that the world and its people are complex. There are many sides to every story and to every human being. They believed that we need environments that encourage our whole being to flourish in connection with nature and each other.

The roll-call of outstanding people involved in the Dartington experiment includes Rabindranath Tagore, Jacqueline du Pré, Daniel Barenboim, Arthur Rubinstein, Igor Stravinsky, Imogen Holst, Benjamin Britten, Peter Maxwell Davies, Ravi Shankar, T. E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia'), Bernard Leach, Paul Robeson, William Lescaze, Walter Gropius, Moholy Nagy, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, H.G. Wells, Yehudi Menuhin, Simon Rattle, Ben Nicholson, Aldous Huxley, James Lovelock, Rupert Sheldrake, Hazel Henderson, Amory Lovins, Jonathan Porritt, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Paul Hawken and Vandana Shiva.

The list of landmark events associated with Dartington is equally remarkable. It was at Dartington that the post-war Labour manifesto was penned by Herbert Morrison; it was here that the Arts Council was conceived and the first arts school with practising and performing artists was established. The International Summer School moved to Dartington in 1953 and has become renowned for offering amateurs a unique opportunity to play with the world's leading musicians – and for professionals to experiment and explore new collaborations.

In 1968, the Social Research Unit moved to Dartington from Cambridge to work on issues of social justice. Research in Practice (RiP) was launched in 1996 and in 2005 Research in Practice for Adults (RiPfA) was established. RiP and RiPfA are now recognised as distinctive centres, owned and directed by their network of agencies working with children, young people, families and adults who need support.

More recently, Dartington has continued to push boundaries - In 1991, long before climate change was a major concern, Schumacher College was established, becoming a leading international centre for sustainable education.

Social enterprise was central to the Elmhirsts' original vision and continues to play a key part in supporting Dartington's charitable activities. In 1977, the Cider Press Centre (subsequently The Shops at Dartington) opened as a high quality retail centre selling local crafts and other products. In 1991, the White Hart and the Dartington Conference Centre opened – all play a part in generating revenue and providing hospitality for the many people who come to Dartington.

While much has changed since the Elmhirsts' time, the ethos established by those two remarkable people is as alive today as when they first created the Dartington Hall Trust.