

The Journey & Evolution of Church Lawton School

TEN **10** YEARS



A Beacon for Autism Education



DR Nicola Crossley
CEO at Liberty
Academy Trust



Dear families, staff, and friends,
Can you believe it? Church Lawton School is turning 10! A whole decade of learning, growing, and making a real difference in the lives of children and young people.

As we celebrate this milestone, I want to say what an absolute joy it's been to have Church Lawton as part of the Liberty Academy Trust family since December 2022. From day one, it was clear that this is no ordinary school - it's a place filled with heart, ambition, and a deep commitment to ensuring every child who walks through its doors has the opportunity to thrive.

Church Lawton represents the very best of what education should be. It's a school where students are not just supported, but truly seen. Where individuality is celebrated. Where staff go above and beyond, every single day.

There's something truly special about Church Lawton. It's something you feel the minute you walk through the door.

It's in the calm, welcoming atmosphere, the laughter in the corridors, the dedication of staff, and above all, the pride and potential shining in every student.

Church Lawton embodies everything Liberty stands for. From humble beginnings in temporary premises to the thriving, specialist setting it is today, the journey has been nothing short of remarkable. There is so much to celebrate today, and I couldn't be prouder to have Church Lawton as part of the Liberty family.

To the staff, past and present, thank you. The impact you've made over the last decade cannot be overstated. To the families, thank you for your partnership and support. And to the students, whether you're just starting your journey or have been part of the school for years, you are what this is all about. You inspire us every day.

Here's to ten years of impact, inclusion, and innovation - and to many more to come.

With warm wishes,
Dr Nic Crossley

Paul Scales

Church Lawton School

Principal



Church Lawton School, situated in Church Lawton near Alsager, has emerged as a cornerstone in the education of autistic children. From its inception, the school has expanded and evolved significantly, constantly adapting to fit the demands of the evolving world of its pupils.

Established 2015

Church Lawton School commenced operations by officially opening its doors as a free school specifically set up and designed to deliver education services to autistic children, offering a complete education for students within the age range of 4 to 19 years.



The mission of the school was clearly specific and targeted: to provide a specially crafted educational environment where autistic students can excel academically and socially to achieve their full potential. Commencing operations with a handful of students, the school laid a strong emphasis on the implementation of individualised learning plans, conducting small-sized classes, and creating a friendly and nurturing environment conducive to enhancement and growth.

Year after year, the school experiences immense growth and expansion, with increasing students, teachers, and learning mentors, each one thoroughly dedicated to the mission of establishing an inclusive and compassionate learning environment. This commitment led to various enhancements and developments in the overall learning environment.





In 2016, Church Lawton School was lucky to be awarded a generous grant from the National Lottery Fund. This funding enabled the provision of a range of playground equipment that has been carefully chosen to cater to and provide for the sensory as well as the physical requirements of its inclusive population of students.

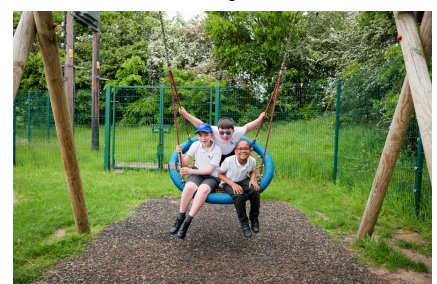
The newly installed playground, long awaited and highly anticipated by both students and staff, was officially opened by the honourable Mayor of Alsager, an occasion that marks a milestone in the school's ongoing commitment to the provision of holistic educational experiences in response to the diverse needs of its students. During this memorable event, a time capsule was ceremoniously buried on the school grounds, not just representing hope but also progress for generations of students to come who will benefit from the provision of education that this playground will support. This momentous ceremony was undertaken with thoughtful consideration by Mark Lever, the former CEO of the National Autistic Society and honoured member of the community, and Principal Paul Scales, whose guidance motivates and steers the school towards success.

It was in the year 2018 that the school witnessed further tremendous progress when it successfully acquired much-needed funding from the prestigious Denise Coates Foundation, which was specifically targeted at creating a sensory field. The carefully planned outdoor area was meant to give the students a calming and enriching atmosphere, one that would, in turn, enhance sensory stimulation as well as the general well-being of the students. It was none other than the founder of the foundation herself, Denise Coates, who had the privilege of opening the sensory field in a special opening ceremony that served to accentuate and bring to the forefront the strong support of the community for the diverse initiatives being carried out by the school.



Demonstrating Resilience

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 ushered in a set of unprecedented challenges that had a profound impact on educational institutions worldwide. During this challenging moment, Church Lawton School demonstrated exemplary resilience and strength, rapidly transforming its processes and strategies to provide ongoing support for students and their families. The school responded swiftly by instituting effective remote learning measures, ensuring that proper resources for home learning were easily accessible, and keeping regular and open channels of communication with families to provide for any emerging needs that cropped up during this crisis. This unshakeable resolve for students and their families helped keep them engaged and supported throughout the numerous disruptions and uncertainties unleashed by the pandemic, enabling them to weather this challenging moment more successfully.



Community Engagement & Events

One of the most characteristic and distinguishing aspects of Church Lawton School is, without a doubt, its close and firm connection with the surrounding community within which it exists. The school makes a concerted effort to contribute to this connection through hosting a range of events on a regular basis, including the ever-popular Macmillan Coffee Mornings, as well as Christmas and Summer Fairs.

Such events are excellent opportunities that help to bring students, their families, and other members of the community together in support of a whole range of valuable causes and initiatives. Not only do these events actively help to create a sense of community spirit and unity, but they also offer students the crucial chance to gain important social skills. In addition, these events enable students to become involved in valuable interactions that reach out beyond the confines of the conventional classroom setting, enhancing the overall learning process.



Global Cooperation & Cultural Interaction

In 2019 Church Lawton School embarked on a fulfilling international student exchange program under Erasmus with Rodengymnasiet, a school in the town of Norrtälje in northern Sweden.

The program allowed autistic students from both schools to experience another country's educational system and culture, broadening their horizons and developing a global sense of belonging.

The exchange presented both similarities and unique practices in teaching autistic students in other countries and provided rich learning for the educators and the students.

Dedicated Staff & Leadership

The school's remarkable resilience owes much to the unwavering loyalty and commitment of its staff. Most staff members have been dedicated to the school for almost ten years, taking an active part in establishing a steady and dependable learning environment that plays a crucial role in the lives of the students.

Principal Mr. Scales, Deputy Principal Mrs. Woodall, and School Business Manager Mrs. Burton have been collaborating since 2015, and they have been central and key to the ongoing creation and shaping of the overall vision and development pathway of the school.

Members of staff like Mr. Lawley, Miss Sercombe, and Miss Arthurs have been key and essential to the ongoing development of the school throughout the same period of time. The constant presence of these dedicated members of staff has been of absolute importance in terms of making sure there is still a friendly and recognisable atmosphere for pupils, something which plays a great part in their overall learning experience.





Looking to the Future

Looking towards the future, Church Lawton School is in a good position for even further growth and significant innovation. Active plans are underway to construct additional classrooms, along with creating a specialised centre focused on life skills and Quality of Life. The primary intent of these new structures is to continue enhancing the school's ability to deliver individualised education and comprehensive support services, thereby ensuring that each and every student is supported with the appropriate resources and opportunities to truly succeed and flourish. Moreover, the school's very strong dedication to continuous improvement clearly demonstrates its strong passion for not only meeting but also adapting to the ever-evolving needs of its students, along with meeting the needs of the broader community that it serves.

In conclusion, the history of Church Lawton School from its inception until the present day is a remarkable record of the school's steadfast and unwavering commitment to the delivery of an exceptional level of education and pastoral care specifically tailored to autistic students. Through its continuous development and advancement over the decades, coupled with progressive community engagement and a firm commitment to differentiated learning approaches, the school has indeed emerged as a beacon of excellence in the arena of autism education. As it looks forward into the future with optimism and direction, Church Lawton School remains deeply committed to caring and developing a culture of inclusion. This is an environment where all students, irrespective of background or circumstances, have the right to flourish and develop their true potential in all that they do in their schooling life.



Staff Memories



Sarah Burton
School Business Manager

Reflecting on my journey as the longest-serving member of staff at Church Lawton School brings back so many memories. I started as the School Business Manager in October 2014, before the school officially opened in 2015. Those early days were a whirlwind of activity and challenges. I was thrown in at the deep end, working on a Blackberry mobile phone for three weeks before an old laptop arrived! I did wonder at first what I had taken on! My days were spent travelling to the National Autistic Society Nottingham Office, collaborating with the project team, and visiting the Church Lawton School building site to attend meetings with contractors. Originally, the school was due to open at the Church Lawton site in January 2015, but delays in building works meant we had to find alternative premises. We hired two rooms at the back of Pikemere School, using one as a classroom and the other as a shared office. Against all odds, we opened in January 2015 with just four members of staff: myself, the Principal at the time, and two teachers. We had four pupils on roll who were excited to start their Church Lawton journey.

I was juggling a myriad of tasks including recruitment, budgets and health and safety, whilst ensuring we had the necessary resources for teaching and learning, and making sure the new building was on track for opening in April 2015. One of my main tasks was equipping the whole school from classrooms to offices with all its furniture and fittings and ICT equipment. It was an incredibly busy, 'slightly' stressful, but exciting time. Looking back, I marvel at how we managed to achieve what we did. It was no mean feat, but through tenacity, perseverance, and a great deal of passion, we succeeded. I am immensely proud of what we accomplished then and what we have continued to achieve. From those humble beginnings, we have grown to a thriving school with 84 children and 60 staff. We have never stopped developing the school to make it a great place for students to learn and excel in all that they do. Over the ten years we have been open, in my key role as School Business Manager, I have worked on numerous projects to continuously develop and improve the school. Our first major project was the Lottery Funded playground, followed by the Sensory Room, our wonderful Sensory Field and MUGA, and the Science Classroom. I am incredibly proud to be part of Church Lawton School and look forward to our next expansion project, which is currently in the planning phases. We have an incredibly committed and dedicated team of staff who strive to give students the very best education and learning experiences possible, and I look forward to the next ten years and the continued growth and success of the school.



Carol Arthurs
HLTA



I remember when we only had four students on roll, and look at us now, currently on 84 and still growing. There has always been a family feel to the school, starting off with 'Wagon Wheel' Wednesdays and now we have a dedicated Well-being team! A fond memory of mine is burying the Time Capsule, and I thought Mr Scales might fall in when he was filling the hole back in! But here we are, 10 years later, thriving and I am very proud to have been a part of it from the very beginning.

Staff Memories



Simon Lawley
Teacher

When I started, there were just as many empty classrooms as full ones. You didn't have to book the cookery room, it was nearly always free. That didn't make me a better cook though! I thought the nice bottle next to the sink was the hand-sanitizer, until a student pointed out I'd just washed my hands with the cooking oil! There were, are and always will be some amazing staff at Church Lawton School, some of whom I've had the pleasure of working with. Carol Arthurs was actually the first learning mentor in my first class. She looked at a student's artwork once and reminded him to "draw on some eyebrows". Which he did-literally.



Emma Castle
HLTA

I started in 2015 at Easter when we first moved into the building. It was a very quiet place back then. Just 3 classes, Churchill, Nightingale and Branson.

I worked in Nightingale with Carol and our very first students. I also helped out in the secondary class from September. I remember heading out on my first school outing with Nightingale to the canal. I also remember an exhausting trip to Cheshire show. It was baking hot and the students were overwhelmed with the amount of people but coped amazingly. Wagon wheel Wednesday! On a Wednesday-the acting principal at the time would bring in wagon wheels for the staff. It was a lovely idea and very much appreciated.

The things I remember the most are the wonderful students, the little quirks and interests that still make me smile. Detailed conversations about Disney characters, Pepper Pig and parker pens. I remember recording and creating our first Christmas song with secondary students.

However, most of all, I think of the amazing children I've had in my classes in the past 10 years. There is a misconception that autistic people don't get jokes or don't have a sense of humour. My classes have made me laugh and smile every day. They have also taught me to think differently and that is why many go onto to be our scientists, engineers, computer programmers of the future. A student was grouping prime and non-prime numbers in a venn diagram. She placed 12 in the overlap. I told her that a number, any number, couldn't be both prime and non-prime at the same time. She replied, "but that depends on how you're looking at the number Mr Lawley. If you see a 12 it's not prime, but if you see the digits 1 and 2 then they are both prime". I'm not going to end with some inspiring quote about neurodiversity. I am proud to be me. I hope my students are proud to be them and beyond that labels don't matter.

I remember Miss Norris and I being miss led for about 3 months that a certain student had a guinea pig as a pet, we then realised that it was from a TV series and not hers.

I remember having great fun in Franklin class being the other Teaching half of Liz Wood when I became HLTA whilst she did her SENCo role. We had great teamwork and although all the children had different needs and abilities, we worked well to provide a differentiated curriculum. I had great fun planning science and ICT lessons that were as interactive and hands on as the food tech and Art lessons I also taught. Having an impromptu debate about whether the pizza toppings should go on before or after the cheese was fun.

Over all my memories of working here have been lovely. Most of my favourite memories involve interactions with the students, both highs and working through the lows and coming out the other side.

Staff Memories



Jo Galloway
Director of Education

As Director of Education, I am immensely proud of the remarkable journey and evolution of Church Lawton School. From its opening in 2015 the staff team have consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to nurturing the potential of every student. The dedication of the staff, and wider community has created a truly inclusive environment where autistic pupils are not only supported but celebrated. Their work supports the realisation of our Trusts vision to deliver an education for our children that meets their needs, aspirations and interests, and prepares them well for adulthood. What sets Church Lawton School apart is its heart—the passion, resilience, and creativity of its team, who go above and beyond to ensure every child feels seen, valued, and empowered.

The school's ability to adapt, grow, and thrive, even in the face of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, is a testament to the strength of its community and the clarity of its vision. I am inspired by the stories of success that emerge from this school, and I am confident that Church Lawton will continue to lead the way in shaping a future where all young people, regardless of their neurodiversity, can flourish and succeed.

Having the pleasure of accompanying trustees on a school visit today (13th May) reaffirmed how exceptional a school this is. We witnessed the calm, purposeful atmosphere which underlines the power of tailored education in transforming lives. Every space is thoughtfully designed to meet the unique needs of autistic pupils. We heard from pupils directly who described how they feel safe, supported and able to succeed. What stood out most was the warmth and dedication of the staff, whose deep understanding, respect and care was evident in every interaction. It's clear that this is more than a school—it's a community where young people are empowered to thrive, grow, and be unapologetically themselves.



Student Memories

Memories Shared by our First Student.

'I remember, before the Sensory field, there was no play equipment, only wooden stairs!'



'I remember, the annual Christmas videos and songs we did for the school, particularly, Feed the World and one with Mr Lawley in it!'



'I think, me and Mrs Arthurs should have a statue dedicated to us as we have been here so long!'