



Ambitious about Autism

Executive Head

Recruitment Pack 2026

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Welcome from the Director of Education

Thank you for your interest in the role of Executive Head at Ambitious about Autism. I hope that you will find our mission and this opportunity exciting and compelling and will consider joining our team. If you are ambitious and forward thinking this is a role for you. It offers a unique opportunity to join a thoroughly values driven organisation.

Ambitious about Autism has achieved and developed so much since it was founded in 1997. Our education services continue to grow and develop to support the increasing and changing needs of autistic children and young people. Our outstanding TreeHouse School continues to be innovative in meeting the needs of autistic children and young people with learning disabilities. The Rise School opened in 2014 as the first special free school in our multi-academy trust. It is co-located with Springwest Academy. Ambitious College opened in the same year and was London's first autism-specific registered day college serving autistic young people with learning disabilities, aged 16 to 25 years. It now has two permanent campuses co-located and developed in partnership with mainstream further education colleges and a Supported Internship programme with the Whittington Trust. Both new services achieved a 'Good' Ofsted rating in 2017. Through these services we educate and support over 300 autistic children and young people and thousands more through our national policy and practice influencing work. In September 2023 we opened Spring School in Kingston, as part of our Trust, and are actively exploring other partnership opportunities.

We are at an exciting point in our history. The scale of our ambition, set out in our three-year strategy, *Time for Ambition*, requires a highly successful Executive Head to join our education leadership team and bring established strategic leadership experience, credibility and expertise in education, and to work with the Education Leadership team, Executive Leadership Team and Governors to maintain the pace of innovation, development and success in our schools and college. The post will work across our education settings for Ambitious about Autism and Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust, so will lead the development of all education provision, including our new school in Kingston.

Above all, we are looking for someone who will share an absolute commitment to our mission and values. We are searching for an honest, approachable, adaptable, resilient, patient, motivated, knowledgeable and excellent communicator who can demonstrate that they work with integrity and respect for all.

This challenge is both exciting and significant and I hope very much that you will consider this opportunity to contribute to our future and the lives of autistic children and young people.

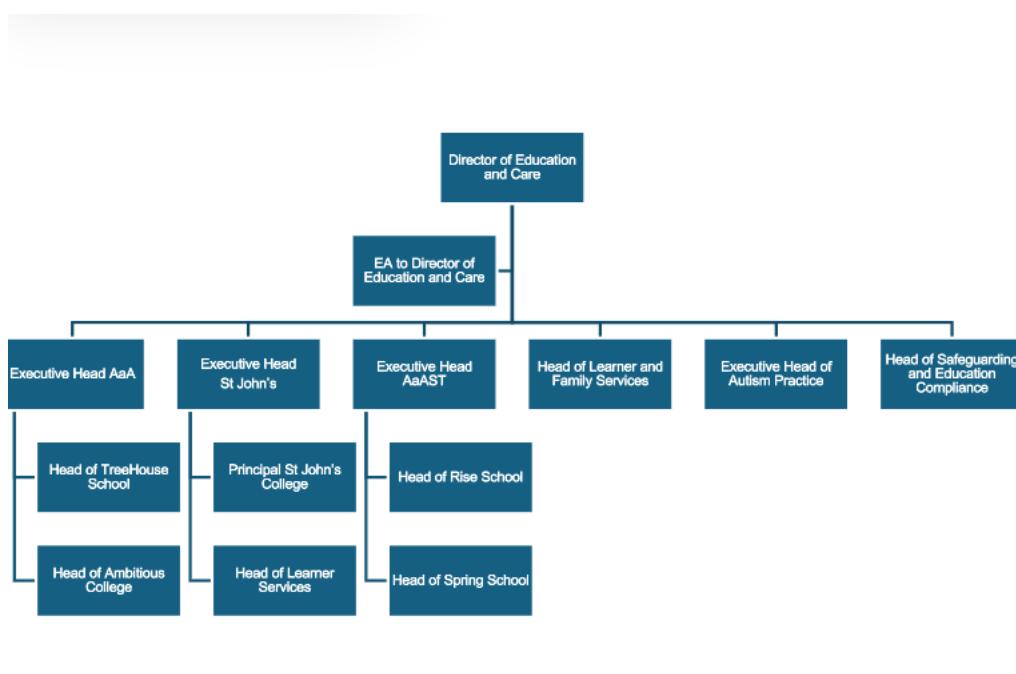
Sam Newton, Director of Education

Education Directorate

The Education Executive Management Team (EEMT) consists of the Heads of school/college, Integrated Services and Learner and Family Support. The team works together to lead our education services.

Whilst each setting has its own discrete identity and infrastructure, the group works together to develop shared plans, approaches, frameworks and policies to achieve greater impact, consistency and efficiencies. Team members work together in meetings and outside to shape strategic and operational developments, share best practice and support each other.

Whilst the EEMT is chaired by the Director of Education, the incoming Executive Head will have a key role to play in developing the agenda and team moving forward.



"An example of how a specialist school should cater for children with autism and their families. Very compassionate, high[ly] skilled, determined, friendly."

Parent of TreeHouse School pupil

Ambitious about Autism

Our history

Our journey started in 1997 when a group of parents set up TreeHouse School. At a time when autistic children faced little or no chance of receiving a full and rewarding education, these parents were determined to change this for their children.

This pioneering approach has evolved over time as we have adapted and grown as an organisation. What started with four pupils has grown to become a charity that has supported thousands of autistic children and young people. Today we run schools and a college that focus on improving the quality of life of pupils and learners to enable them to learn, thrive and achieve.

We are Ambitious about Autism

Every autistic child and young person has the right to be themselves and realise their ambitions.

We stand with autistic children, young people and their families to champion rights, campaign for change and create opportunities.

We started as one school and have become a movement for change. Our services include providing information and practical support and delivering specialist education and employment programmes.

Our vision

Our vision is a future where every autistic child and young person can be themselves and realise their ambitions.

Our mission

We stand with autistic children and young people, champion their rights and create opportunities.

Autistic children and young people are at the heart of everything that we do.



Autism statistics



One in 100
people in the UK are autistic.¹

79%  
of autistic people say they are socially isolated because of a lack of understanding

Failing to support autistic people costs the UK economy at least **£32bn a year.** 
This is greater than the combined cost of supporting cancer, heart disease and strokes.

Just **21.7%** 
of autistic people are in full or part-time employment, the lowest rate of employment of all disabled groups.

56% 
of autistic children in England have been sent home from school illegally or denied a full education.



There isn't anywhere else where my son would be so well looked after with such determination and energy for improvement... along with a keen eye to the lives of parents and how they can also be improved.

Parent of Ambitious College learner
PARENT

Our Ambitious Approach

Ambitious about Autism's mission is to stand with autistic children and young people, champion their rights and create opportunities. We believe all autistic children and young people have a right to the best education that meet their needs and enables them to learn, thrive and achieve. In addition to our direct work in schools and colleges, we work to transform policy and practice in autism education nationally.

We have high aspirations for our pupils and learners. Our goal for all our pupils and learners is that when they leave our settings they will have the opportunity to access employment, further education or training and to live as part of the communities of their choice.

The Ambitious Approach is the educational approach we have developed and adopted to put quality of life at the centre of all we do. It is based upon a learner's indisputable rights to be:

- treated with dignity and compassion
- valued
- listened to
- supported to have the best quality of life possible
- empowered to make choices and decide on how they want to live their life.

The Ambitious Approach has 3 areas of focus:

- **The curriculum:** The curriculum in our settings focuses on equipping learners with the knowledge and skills they need for quality of life. Learning is tailored to support autistic children and young people to live the life they want to lead.
- **Curriculum delivery:** We recruit and train staff in our settings to provide high-quality teaching. This includes having a deep knowledge of the subjects they teach, specialist knowledge of how autistic children and young people learn best and creating environments that support and nurture physical and psychological needs.
- **Collaboration:** To afford dignity, respect and compassion, young people and are placed at the core of a setting so their voices are heard and so we can support them with what is important to them. Staff in the settings work closely together, sharing their expertise, to address barriers to learning and support the best possible outcomes.

Learning and Development

We have an Ambitious Approach competency framework that details the skills and knowledge that staff need to have or acquire. We have a comprehensive learning and development programme to support them with this. There is a standard level of competence that all staff need to pass their probation period when joining the settings.

The Ambitious Approach evaluation cycle involves collecting data at the start and end of each academic year. This data is used at an individual level, to celebrate positive changes for children and young people and to identify areas for development. The data is also used at a setting-wide level to celebrate progress and development in our education offer and to identify where and how to improve. Each setting has an Ambitious Approach Implementation Team who use this data for their action planning.

Personal development, behaviour and safety

The safety, wellbeing and positive behaviour of pupils and learners is paramount. We have child and adult safeguarding policies and procedures in place, which are implemented holistically and rigorously and reviewed at least annually to ensure they reflect latest requirements and best practice. We focus on creating a whole organisational approach to safeguarding, which includes checks, training, information and briefings for all trustees, governors, staff and volunteers. Pupils and learners are also supported to understand these issues via the curriculum. For further information, see the relevant Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedure and the Adult at Risk Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. These are available on the settings' and Ambitious About Autism/Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust's websites.

Progress and attainment

Children and young people in our education settings have Education, Health and Care Plans, which outline their aspirations, outcomes, needs and support. Our trans-disciplinary teams work collaboratively with the young people and their parents/carers to input into and develop these plans and ensure they are implemented. Progress is regularly and comprehensively monitored, evaluated and reported. We tailor how we teach to match the individual child or young person, and we also measure whether the approach is working. This helps to ensure that pupils and learners make the best progress they can. Pupils and learners have access to a range of qualifications, as well as non-accredited learning, depending on their interests, desired outcomes and abilities. For more information, please see the individual settings' Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy.

Accountability

Each setting has a Governing Body comprising a range of people with the knowledge, skills and experience needed to support and challenge our services, including parents/carers. The Governing Bodies meet regularly and visit the settings to review and monitor their performance. Information on progress and outcomes is made available at annual reviews, to parents/carers and Local Authorities, and reported termly to the Governing Bodies. We also have a board-level Education Committee that oversees performance across all of our services. We welcome visitors to our services and regularly hold open days for parents/carers and professionals.

Our services are subject to Ofsted inspections, which are published online, both on our website and by Ofsted.



At college, the more I've progressed, the happier I've felt. The college has helped me to develop more strategies in general, testing my social skills and gaining more knowledge before I move on.

Ben
LEARNER

Job description

Job title	Executive Head	Team	Education Directorate
Salary	Circa £100K	Reporting to	Director of Education
Hours	37.5 hours	Line manages	Head of TreeHouse School Head of Ambitious College Business and Contracts Manager Governance and Compliance Officer

Approved by: Director of Education

Date: January 2026

Role purpose

To be responsible and accountable for the operational direction, quality and outcomes of Ambitious about Autism/Schools Trust education settings and act as an ambassador for education services with internal and external stakeholders.

Duties and key responsibilities

Leadership and management

- Recruit, manage, coach and motivate the Head of each setting to develop high performing and sustainable leadership teams, capacity and skills.
- Ensure the Heads develop and implement robust and consistent plans and self-assessments to support the development and delivery of high-quality education provision and support and challenge leaders to achieve their objectives.
- Lead the development of the schools/college educational model and support the leadership to translate and implement the model in the context of their setting.
- Support the Director of Education with the development of new provision, including free schools and other provision.
- Support the understanding of and research into best practice in autism education and promote our Ambitious Approach internally and externally with key influencers.
- Contribute to the development of the organisation's overall strategy and operational plan, as a member of the EEMT.

Quality Assurance

- Develop the overall quality framework and cycle and ensure that it is understood and implemented consistently across all settings. This includes working with academic bodies to evidence long-term outcomes and impact of schools/college.
- Support the Heads to ensure there is a fit for purpose curriculum in place that focuses on long term positive outcomes for autistic children and young people.
- Attend and proactively contribute to each setting's Quality Committee.
- Produce the termly information dashboards and Education Report for the Education Committee

Governance

- Be the overall safeguarding lead for the organization, leading on development of policies, procedures and developments in this area to ensure that children's and young people's safety and welfare is always paramount and the organisation exercises best practice in this area.
- Support the Governing Bodies to fulfil their role, ensuring they receive high quality, timely agendas, reports and engagement.
- Chair the Safeguarding Committee and report to Education Committee on safeguarding activity, including producing the annual safeguarding report.
- Support the development of the Governing Bodies and act as Governor on each of the Governing Bodies.
- Develop policies and processes relating to schools/college.
- Ensure the settings are managed in line with organisational policy, statutory requirements and best practice guidance.
- Produce papers for Education Committee.

Finance

- Work with the Heads and Finance Team to manage income and expenditure budgets, ensuring that plans and budgets are affordable and sustainable.

Develop and manage a personal work programme

- Actively participate in the organisation's performance management processes including the appraisal and competency review process and the induction.
- Proactively maintain the knowledge, skills and networks needed to deliver this role.
- Work effectively with the Director of Education, the Executive Leadership Team, the Executive Education Management Team and Governors to fulfil this role and support the work of the organisation.
- Support the charity's core values and carry out all responsibilities with due regard to Safeguarding Children/Adults, Health and Safety, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies and procedures.
- This job description is not an exhaustive list. The postholder may be required to undertake other duties as directed by the Director of Education.

Additional duties

- Demonstrate a continual commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
- To uphold Ambitious about Autism policies to protect and safeguard pupils to secure their health, safety and wellbeing.
- Demonstrate a continual commitment to the promotion of diversity initiatives and the sharing of best practice in line with Ambitious about Autism's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and procedures.
- Ensure the highest degree of confidentiality and data protection of all materials.

Person specification

Role and band competencies, all requirements are listed below

Specific knowledge, experience and technical skills

1. Educated to degree level, or equivalent written and analytical skills.
2. Qualified teaching status and NPQH (National Professional Qualifications for Headship) or NPQEH
3. Working knowledge of:
 - The policy, practice and regulatory issues affecting the education of autistic children and young people and their families
 - Commissioning and service delivery for these children and their families
 - Supporting children and young people with SEND, including autism, in education
4. Knowledge of third sector
5. Sound understanding of safeguarding practices and processes for children and adults
6. Proven experience as a Headteacher/Principal of a specialist education setting provision for children and young people with SEND, including autism
7. Proven record of accomplishment developing leadership teams, staff capacity and capability
8. Experienced in leading on developing and working to quality frameworks e.g., Ofsted
9. Proven record of accomplishment of working as part of a Governing Body
10. Proven record of accomplishment of strategic planning and reporting against operational plans and KPIs (key performance indicators)
11. Proven experience of developing and managing an income and expenditure budget of £5m+
12. Proven record of accomplishment of developing strategic partnerships with commissioners, agencies and providers
13. Proven record of accomplishment of working with SEND children and young people and their parents and carers to co-produce services and resources
14. Proven experience of leading and managing complex projects

Personal attributes

15. Strong commercial acumen and financially literate
16. Entrepreneurial with a flair for innovation
17. Strong leadership skills and ability to inspire people
18. Interpersonal skills and the ability to lead and build effective partnerships with individuals and organisations
19. Ability to plan, manage and deliver work to agreed deadlines

20. Excellent communication and presentation skills
21. Highly resilient and able to work on your own initiative and as part of a team
22. Computer literate with working knowledge of all Word, Excel and PowerPoint
23. Ability to frequently travel across all Ambitious about Autism/Schools Trust sites and to meetings externally
24. Good appreciation of health and safety in the workplace, data protection principles and equal opportunities
25. Ambitious about Autism is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment
26. Ensure the highest degree of confidentiality and data protection of all materials

How to apply

To apply for the role please go to our careers page below where you will find the position and the 'apply now' button. You will be able to upload your CV when you have registered, please note we have a limit in the supporting statement section so please register and go through the steps prior to writing this. Please note we would not contact your referees at any point without your written permission.

<https://jobs.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/jobs/vacancy/find/results/>

Visits

Individual visits may be permitted to our settings please contact Ben Lowe blowe@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk if you wish to visit one of our settings.

Contact

If you would like to find out more about this exciting opportunity, need any further information or wish to have an informal discussion, please contact Ben Lowe at blowe@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk.

The stages of the recruitment process are outlined below:

Stage	Timescale
Position advertised	Friday 13 February 2026
Closing date for applications	Friday 6 March 2026
Shortlisting	Monday 9 March 2026
Stage 1 Stakeholder engagement day	Thursday 12 March 2026
Stage 2 Interview and assessment (In person at Pears National Centre)	Monday 16 March 2026

Equal opportunities

Ambitious about Autism is fully committed to equality of opportunity and diversity and we warmly welcome applications from all suitably qualified candidates. We welcome applications regardless of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, disability, or age. All applications will be considered solely on merit.

Ambitious about Autism is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and successful candidates will be subject to an Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.

The Safeguarding responsibilities of the post as per the job description and personal specification.

Whether the post is exempt from the rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the amendment to the Exceptions Order 1975, 2013 and 2021. This means that when applying for certain jobs and activities certain spent convictions and cautions are 'protected', so they do not need to be disclosed to employers, and if they are disclosed, employers cannot take them into account. Further information about filtering offences can be found in the DBS Filter Guidance.

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Contact us

The Pears National Centre for Autism Education
Woodside Avenue, London N10 3JA

📞 020 8815 5444

✉️ info@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

🌐 ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

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