

The Rowans AP  
Outreach Team

# THE DEN PROJECT

*Developing Engagement through Nature*

[www.therowansap-that.org.uk](http://www.therowansap-that.org.uk)

# DEVELOPING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH NATURE

## *Our purpose: Why the DEN exists*

The DEN Project exists to provide a safe, structured and nurturing environment for children who are struggling to access mainstream education due to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Our core purpose is to support regulation, build trust, and re-engage pupils with learning by meeting their unmet needs first. We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication and that children require connection, consistency and understanding before they are able to succeed academically.



# RECONNECTION THROUGH NATURE AND NURTURE

## *Our Vision: What we aim to achieve*

Our vision is to enable every pupil to feel safe, valued and understood, equipping them with the emotional literacy, resilience and self-regulation skills required to successfully re-engage with education. At the heart of The DEN is our belief in the restorative power of nature. We work outdoors in an all-natural environment, in all weather conditions, using the predictability and calm of the natural world to support regulation and wellbeing.

We recognise that many of our pupils feel overwhelmed within traditional classroom settings, and the outdoor environment provides a less restrictive, more therapeutic space where they can begin to feel settled and safe. Through this approach, children are supported to recognise, manage and communicate their emotions, stresses and challenges.

Our sessions are highly relational and discussion-based, creating opportunities for pupils to talk openly, without judgement, about their experiences. This includes exploring topics such as challenges within school, barriers to learning, and what they would like to change or improve. Through nurturing group work, reflective conversation and consistent adult support, pupils begin to build trust, develop self-awareness and feel empowered to make positive changes.

The DEN seeks long-term outcomes including improved emotional wellbeing, increased readiness to learn, stronger relationships with adults and peers, and successful transition back into education, whether within mainstream settings or onward specialist provision where appropriate.

# THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE US

## *Our Ethos*

The DEN Project is underpinned by a trauma-informed and attachment-aware approach. We prioritise relationships, consistency, and emotional safety. Key principles include:

- Behaviour is communication
- Regulation before expectation
- Connection before correction
- Consistency and predictability
- High support alongside clear boundaries

Our approach reflects a deep understanding of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), neurodiversity, and the importance of co-regulation.



# WHO WE SUPPORT

## *Understanding the need*

The DEN Project supports pupils presenting with SEMH needs, including trauma-related behaviours, attachment difficulties, anxiety, dysregulation, and neurodiverse profiles such as ADHD or ASC. Many pupils have struggled to maintain placement in mainstream classrooms and require a higher level of adult support, structure, and emotional containment in order to feel safe and able to engage.



# WHAT WE DO

## *Our core offer*

The DEN Project provides a structured six-week programme focused on emotional regulation, social skills development and readiness for learning. We run groups for KS1, KS2 and KS3, ensuring provision is developmentally appropriate and tailored to the needs of each age group. Sessions include nurturing group work, targeted interventions, sensory regulation activities and opportunities for structured social interaction. The focus is on developing key life skills, communication and emotional understanding rather than academic attainment.

## *What we do not provide:*

## *Defining our boundaries*

The DEN Project is not an academic provision and does not replace classroom teaching. We do not deliver formal curriculum-based learning or act as an alternative education setting. We also do not operate as a Forest School provision. Our role is to complement school-based learning by addressing the underlying barriers that prevent pupils from accessing education.



# OUR ENVIRONMENT

## *Facilities and resources*

The DEN Project provides a calm, safe and fully nature-based environment, designed to reduce anxiety and support emotional regulation. All DEN sessions take place outdoors, in all seasons, allowing pupils to benefit from the grounding and regulating impact of the natural environment. The provision is well equipped to support this approach, with access to an outdoor toilet, clean running water, and a dedicated DEN outdoor kitchen, including washing-up facilities. All cooking activities are carried out on the campfire, which is also used to heat water for hot chocolate, supporting purposeful, shared experiences around warmth and routine.

The site includes a bell tent for use when weather conditions change, alongside a permanent shelter that is used daily to provide structure and consistency. For younger pupils, particularly within the KS1 cohort, there is access to a mud kitchen, as well as designated DEN building areas that encourage creativity, collaboration and problem-solving. The environment also includes hammocks, swings and climbing nets, offering natural opportunities for sensory regulation and movement.

Pupils are supported to safely access a range of non-electric, hand-powered tools, including whittling knives, fire-starting equipment, saws, hammers and hand drills. These activities are carefully supervised and risk-assessed, promoting confidence, responsibility and engagement through meaningful, hands-on learning.

Resources across The DEN are intentionally selected to support sensory regulation, emotional wellbeing and structured play, with access to quiet spaces, clearly defined activity areas and safe breakout zones. This carefully considered environment enables pupils to engage with the provision in a way that meets their sensory, emotional and developmental needs, while fostering independence, regulation and a strong sense of safety.

# OUR ENVIRONMENT



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# EXPECTATIONS AND SAFETY

## *Our Non-Negotiables*

While The DEN Project provides a nurturing and supportive environment, clear and consistent boundaries are central to our practice. Expectations are firmly rooted in safety, respect and readiness to engage, ensuring pupils understand what is expected of them while feeling supported and secure. Staff use predictable routines and consistent, calm responses to behaviour, enabling pupils to develop trust and a clear understanding of boundaries. Safety education is also an essential part of pupil induction. All children attending The DEN Project are required, during their first session, to complete a safety questionnaire, receive fire safety training, and sign a behaviour agreement. This ensures that pupils understand expectations around safety, tool use, boundaries and respect for others from the outset. Safety is always prioritised, particularly during periods of dysregulation. Staff are trained to manage emotional and behavioural challenges using calm, therapeutic and trauma-informed approaches, supporting pupils to regulate while maintaining clear and consistent limits. This balance of nurture and structure ensures that The DEN Project remains a safe, supportive and predictable environment for all children.



# OUR EXPERTISE

## *Training and professional knowledge*

Staff within The DEN Project bring a wide range of specialist training and experience, including SEMH strategies, trauma-informed practice, behaviour support, safeguarding, and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Staff are skilled in de-escalation, emotional coaching and relational approaches, and regularly engage in continued professional development to ensure practice remains reflective, evidence-based and responsive to pupil need. In addition, all DEN Project staff are fully trained in First Aid, fire safety and food hygiene, ensuring that safety is embedded into every aspect of provision. All higher-risk activities are fully risk-assessed and are carefully planned, delivered and supervised by our skilled DEN Coordinators, who are experienced in managing risk in a therapeutic, calm and developmentally appropriate way.



# WORKING TOGETHER

## *Partnership with schools and families*

The DEN Project works closely with schools, parents, and other professionals to ensure a joined-up approach. Regular communication, reviews, and collaborative planning ensure that strategies used within The DEN are consistent and transferable to the wider school environment and home.



# VOICES THAT MATTER

## Pupil and parent feedback

Pupil and parent voice are central to The DEN Project. Feedback highlights increased feelings of safety, improved confidence, and greater engagement with school. Parents often report positive changes at home, including improved communication and emotional regulation. Pupil voice reflects enjoyment of the provision, strong relationships with staff, and a sense of belonging.

**"I know how hard you all work to help and support my child especially when he is really struggling. Thank you for your patience with us and him. We are very grateful for the opportunities that the DEN Project has provided for him and pleased with the impact that this has had on him."**

**"I just wanted to say thank you for all the hard work you have done with T. He has had an amazing time with you and grown lots."**

**"We would like to say a huge thank you for all the hard work and support you give him at the DEN. J really enjoys attending the sessions and has made so much progress. We've noticed such positive changes at home, and we feel incredibly lucky that he has had the opportunity to be part of such a fantastic provision."**

**"I love coming to the DEN, I've made friends, get to do some really cool things and I feel better about being in school knowing I have this to look forward to every week. My favourite part of the DEN is the hot chocolate and smores around the campfire and the chats we all have."**

**"I love the DEN! Charley and Jenny are brilliant and they really help me do difficult things and make me feel better about myself"**

**"The best part about the DEN is the friends I've made."**

# OUR APPROACH TO LEARNING

## *The DEN curriculum*

The DEN Project follows a bespoke SEMH-focused curriculum centred around emotional literacy, regulation, communication, and social interaction. This includes areas such as:

- Understanding emotions
- Building positive relationships
- Developing communication skills
- Problem-solving and resilience
- Self-regulation strategies

Activities are adapted to meet individual needs and delivered through flexible, engaging, and therapeutic approaches.



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## *Understanding emotions*

Children are supported to recognise, name and understand their own emotions and the emotions of others.

Activities:

- Emotion check-ins using visuals or natural objects (e.g. picking a stone or leaf to represent how they feel)
- Group discussions about “what does this feeling look like/sound like?”
- Emotion walk-and-talks outdoors (linking feelings to experiences)
- Drawing or creating “emotion maps” in natural materials



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## *Building positive relationships*

Focus on trust, cooperation, empathy and safe interactions with others.

Activities:

- Team challenges (e.g. building shelters, group problem-solving tasks)
- Paired activities with guided conversation prompts
- Role-play and scenario discussions (“What could you do if...?”)
- Group reflection circles where children can share and listen to each other



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## *Developing communication skills*

Supporting children to express themselves, listen to others and engage in meaningful interaction.

Activities:

- Talking circles where each child has a turn to speak without interruption
- “Question of the day” discussions (e.g. What would you like to change about school?)
- Barrier games (giving and following instructions)
- Storytelling using objects found in nature



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## Problem-Solving and Resilience

Helping children navigate challenges, manage setbacks and develop coping strategies.

Activities:

- Outdoor challenges that require perseverance (e.g. building something that stays standing)
- Reflective discussions after mistakes (“What worked? What could we do differently?”)
- Scenario-based problem-solving (“What would you do if you felt angry in class?”)
- Small achievable tasks to build success and confidence



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## *Self-Regulation and Emotional Control*

Developing strategies for managing strong emotions and maintaining calm.

Activities:

- Sensory circuits or movement breaks (climbing, balancing, carrying)
- Breathing techniques practiced outdoors
- Safe “time away” spaces to regulate
- Identifying personal calming strategies (e.g. walking, sitting quietly, talking to an adult)



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## *Connection Through Nature*

Using the outdoor environment to support calmness, reflection and wellbeing.

Activities:

- Nature walks focused on slowing down and observing surroundings
- Grounding activities (e.g. noticing sounds, textures, smells)
- Gardening or caring for natural spaces
- Quiet reflection time sitting in nature



# THE DEN CURRICULUM

## Reflection and Personal Growth

Encouraging children to think about themselves, their behaviours and their goals.

Activities:

- End-of-session reflection circles (“What went well today?”)
- “What’s holding me back?” discussions
- Personal goal setting (small, achievable steps)
- Journaling or drawing (where appropriate)



# GET INVOLVED

## Contact us

If you would like to visit our provision or would like further information, please feel free to get in touch.

**We are now accepting pupils for Term 6 and the 2026/27 academic year.**

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