



Wargrave House 'The Autism Specialists'



Wargrave House A Brief History

*On a journey together,
learning about life.*

**'Wargrave
House School
continues to be
an outstanding
school'**

OFSTED 2019

**'Students love
coming to school'**

OFSTED 2014

*"Wargrave House is a service
that enables some very
vulnerable young people to
develop a sense of
belonging, ownership and
community that enhances
their wellbeing and self-
esteem which results in very
positive outcomes for
students and their families."*

NAS Accreditation 2018



Bessie Berman

Bessie Berman was a Quaker, founder and first Principal of Wargrave House School. She gained her teacher's certificate from London University and went on to work as a teacher for over 22 years with children of all ages. In 1957 she entered the field of Special Education by joining the staff of the Children's Convalescent Hospital School in Southport and was quickly appointed Deputy Headmistress.



In 1964 Bessie achieved a Diploma in the Education of Handicapped Children at Manchester University and after being awarded a Platt prize and the Withers Memorial research scholarship she resigned her position in Southport to undertake a years full time research on children with autism. Bessie contacted the Organiser for Special Education for Lancashire to find children with autism for her research and through this contact she went on to assist Lancashire in setting up the Eccles Autistic Unit which opened in June 1966 with Bessie as the teacher-in-charge.

In 1967 Bessie was awarded a Degree of Master in Education at Manchester University, for her thesis on 'Cognitive and Perceptual Function in Children with Autistic Symptoms', she was accepted as a graduate member of the British Psychological Society.

Bessie's interest in special education, in particular autism and the lack of residential schools led her to present her ideas for setting up such a school specifically for children with Autism to the General Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in February 1969. After several meetings Bessie's plans were finally approved and in October 1969 a committee was formed. The Barrow and Geraldine Cadbury Trust provided a very considerable sum to start the school with further donations from the Society for Autistic Children which went on to become the National Autistic Society (NAS).



Photograph from 1972 (approx.)

Wargrave House

Wargrave House was built around 1835 and became a residence for successive partners/directors/managers of the Vulcan Foundry for over a century. In 1956 it was in part used as offices, and from 1960 – 1969 as a hostel for apprentices and students with up to 24 being accommodated at any one time.

Wargrave House was purchased from General Electric & English Electric Company in December 1970 for approximately £9,000, but it wasn't until the following September 1971 that Wargrave House School officially opened its doors as the first residential weekly-boarding school for children with autism in the North West.

Original school aims:

We plan to:

- ◆ Create a warm family feeling which will give a sense of security to the children
- ◆ Provide an environment giving opportunities for extending their experiences, which will when necessary be structured, so that the world in which they live may become meaningful to them. Gradually they will be integrated into the world at large.
- ◆ To build up an understanding of speech and language and make every effort to obtain meaningful speech.
- ◆ Starting from nursery school activities to introduce such normal school skills as are within the capabilities of the children
- ◆ To obtain a proficiency in 'self help' and to build up a pride in independence and a desire to help other people
- ◆ To guide the parents in their dealings with the children to the benefit of all concerned.

In December 1971, as the school closed for Christmas after it's first term, the school had 10 pupils with 5 more due to start after the holidays, the fees were a fixed £1,500 per child per year. In January 1972 the school was briefly inspected by a H.M. Inspector for the very first time followed by a full two day inspection in July 1973.



Enquiries

If you are interested in finding more out about our school and our services, would like to arrange a visit or require any post diagnosis support, advice or information about autism please ring

Claire Byrne our **Family Liaison Officer** at the school on

01925 224899

or check out our website

www.wargravehouse.com

or email:

clairebyrne@wargravehouse.com

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