

# The National Autistic Society **Cullum Centres**



The National  
Autistic Society

Cullum  
Centre





**Peter Cullum CBE**

Peter Cullum is a businessman and philanthropist. He founded the Cullum Family Trust and in 2013 was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for his services to business and charity.

## Expanding opportunities for children with autism

**When Peter Cullum CBE met Mark Lever, Chief Executive of The National Autistic Society (NAS), he had one question: why do so many capable children and young people with autism struggle to thrive in mainstream schools?**

They talked about the huge potential these young people have. They explored the support that children with autism need to do well in school. And they made a plan.

The NAS Cullum Centres are the result of that conversation, of many months of research and preparation, and of collaboration between the Cullum Family Trust, The National Autistic Society, Surrey County Council and four schools in Surrey.

The NAS Cullum Centres take a new approach to autism education and support as they are fully integrated into mainstream schools. The drive behind the Centres is that many children with autism can learn better and benefit from greater opportunities when they are students in mainstream schools with high-quality support.

Each NAS Cullum Centre will provide specialist support to students with autism, minimising their separation from their peers because students using the Centres will spend most of their time in mainstream lessons. The Centres' role is to give each student specialist and individual support to help them become a full member of their school community – learning, socialising and taking responsibility alongside all the other students.

**“We are absolutely delighted to be part of this innovative project that we believe will make a huge difference to many school children with autism. Once this initiative is a proven success we genuinely hope it is adopted more widely.”**

Peter Cullum CBE

## The NAS Cullum Centres

Salesian School  
Chertsey, Surrey

Rodborough  
Milford, Surrey

Hinchley Wood School  
Esher, Surrey

Howard of Effingham School  
Effingham, Surrey

# The NAS Cullum Centre partnership

**The first two NAS Cullum Centres opened in 2015 at Salesian School in Chertsey, and Rodborough in Milford. Two more Centres will follow, each within a mainstream secondary school (Hinchley Wood School and Howard of Effingham School). All the Centres are at schools in Surrey.**

We chose these first schools carefully. They have a key role to play in leading the way with us in this approach to educating children with autism. We looked for schools where all students are valued and included, new approaches are welcome, and where every student is expected to do well.

This is a truly collaborative project. The Cullum Family Trust is funding the building and kitting out of each NAS Cullum Centre. Placements for all four schools are funded by Surrey County Council. Each school is responsible and accountable for running their Centre and will work in collaboration with Surrey County Council and The National Autistic Society.

The National Autistic Society is supporting the Centres, bringing over 50 years of experience in educating children and young people with autism to the partnership. Specifically, we will ensure that each student with autism gets the best possible support through our **MyProgress**<sup>®</sup> approach to education, by providing training for all staff, and by supporting the Centres in their development and progress through the Autism Accreditation programme.

We will be monitoring, assessing and analysing the success of each NAS Cullum Centre from the start. While we will use tried and tested approaches for supporting children with autism – we already support many children with autism across the UK as well as in our specialist schools and services – this is the first time we have been able to support fully-integrated, specialist resources within mainstream schools.

Everyone involved in the project is extremely excited. We strongly believe that the NAS Cullum Centres can transform the experience of mainstream education for young people with autism, and look forward to encouraging and supporting others to develop similar centres.

**“We want to ensure that all Surrey children get the best education possible... This partnership will give superb support in mainstream schools to pupils with autism.”**

Linda Kemeny, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

**“The NAS is delighted to be working in partnership with Surrey County Council and four local schools on this exciting project, which has been made possible thanks to the generous financial support of the Cullum Family Trust.”**

Mark Lever, Chief Executive of The National Autistic Society



# Fully including students with autism

**The NAS Cullum Centres are substantially and distinctively different from our existing provision for young people with autism in the UK.**

The Centres are embedded in mainstream schools and are dedicated to fully including students with autism in every aspect of the school's life.

Students will spend as little time as possible in their Centre. They will use it for specialist support – for example to develop their social or learning skills or to unwind during breaks – but will mostly attend mainstream classes and activities every day.

The greatest measure of success for a student using an NAS Cullum Centre will be when they no longer need their Centre's support to fully participate in school.

These are true inclusion centres: NAS Cullum Centres are not places to send students to keep them separate from their peers, but specialist resources that students with autism can use to help them thrive in mainstream classes.

Surrey County Council will carefully assess potential students to be sure that they will benefit fully from joining a school with an NAS Cullum Centre. They will look to see that the young person with autism will be able to access a mainstream classroom most of the time with the right support, and is likely to be able to achieve at least five GCSEs (A to C).

We are confident that NAS Cullum Centre students will exceed their own expectations. By working with the specialist staff in the Centre they will understand their autism and develop their strengths. As they succeed more and more in school, their confidence will grow, and they will begin to look ahead to a future in which they can achieve their goals and play an active part in society.

The schools we are working with are looking forward to seeing the benefits of this new, fully-inclusive approach to teaching students with autism. Not only will it enable them to include these individual students in every element of school life, but it will also help them to develop and broaden skills and experience throughout the school, to the benefit of every student and teacher.

**“Many young people with autism can find it difficult to cope in a mainstream school. The NAS Cullum Centres will make this possible by providing autism support, tailored to each student, along with the opportunity to participate in mainstream school life and lessons.”**

Mark Lever, Chief Executive of The National Autistic Society





# A day in the life of a Cullum Centre

**The students who use NAS Cullum Centres follow a mainstream timetable like the other students in their school. They study the full academic curriculum, though they may replace some subjects with sessions in the Centre.**

In the NAS Cullum Centre, students can build up their understanding of how autism affects them. They will learn strategies to help them overcome any barriers their autism creates in the classroom and beyond, and they will explore and strengthen their social skills and independence.

The Centre's therapy teams will give each student specific support, for example, with communication or sensory processing.

The staff in the Centre will always be there to offer support and understanding to their students, and the Centre will provide a calm and safe place to take a break.

## Designed for autism

We've gone to great lengths to make sure each Centre is a relaxing and comfortable environment for anyone with autism.

Our four Centres are all very different in design, reflecting the nature of the schools of which they are part of. However, we have brought our years of experience around how physical environments affect people with autism to each one. We know, for example, that it's important to use natural light and ventilation as much as possible.

We've made sure each Centre is quiet, and has alcoves, quiet areas, and outside spaces where students can unwind when they need to.

Our classrooms are bright and airy, creating calm but stimulating atmospheres for learning. They have clear areas for specific activities such as ICT, group work and independent work.

## Specialist staff

On average there will be one member of Centre staff for every two students, and specialist speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists will work closely with the students and the Centre staff.

All staff working in the NAS Cullum Centres are trained to work with young people with autism and will receive support and continuing training from the NAS to build on and update their skills.

A key part of staff training will be in the NAS's **MyProgress**<sup>®</sup> methodology. This ensures a consistent approach across the Centres and guarantees that every student receives individual, effective support for their autism.

# MyProgress®

**Every Cullum Centre will follow The National Autistic Society's methodology, called MyProgress®**

At the NAS we recognise that each student is an individual person, with their own likes and dislikes, their own challenges and strengths, and their own way of being in the world. This means there is no single approach to working successfully with students with autism.

**MyProgress®** is The National Autistic Society's overall strategy for working with children and young people with autism. It gives them the best start in life because every aspect of their care and education is tailor-made for them. With **MyProgress®**, children and young people use approaches that we have developed over many years.

**MyProgress®** involves NAS Cullum Centre staff finding out all about each student by spending time with them and their family. They ask how life has been so far, and what their hopes are for the future.

Staff create an individual plan with each student. This helps them to build on their strengths and thrive at school. Every element of the plan will be specific to them. It won't be like their classmates' plans, because staff will choose approaches and strategies that match each student's particular needs.

**MyProgress®** means that staff will work with each student as an individual from the moment they join the school to the moment they leave.

**MyProgress®** encompasses the way staff assess each student, plan the support they give them, work with students day-to-day and in the long term, and the way that staff make sure that they are giving students the best possible opportunities to thrive and progress.

NAS Cullum Centre staff assess students regularly, plan the approaches and strategies that will work best for them, deliver those plans and monitor their progress. They are systematic and thorough, and above all, they work with parents, carers and students to create the best education for the young person as an individual.

**“At school I don't feel I have to be something I'm not. I used to find it scary sometimes. Now I can relax enough to be myself and that's a great feeling.”**

Christopher, student with autism at one of The National Autistic Society's specialist schools



## What **MyProgress**<sup>®</sup> means for students

Every term the NAS Cullum Centre's specialist speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists assess all areas of a student's development. They use this information to design a programme to help the student progress. The following tools are part of this ongoing assessment process:

**My ability profile:** identifying the student's strengths and the support they need

**MyProgress<sup>®</sup> meeting:** how the school and family can help the student approach things they find hard, and build their strengths and interests

**MyProgress<sup>®</sup> plans:** the student's academic, social and independence targets, and how the curriculum and timetable will be tailored to help the student meet them

**MyProgress<sup>®</sup> curriculum:** this focuses on social communication skills and community-based learning

**MyProgress<sup>®</sup> file:** evidence of the student's learning (academic, social, emotional and independence)

**MyProgress<sup>®</sup> report:** this measures the student's progress against their targets, rating it red, amber or green; achievements in green are celebrated and teachers develop an action plan to address areas rated red.

# Specialist autism support from the NAS

## Approaches that make a difference

We use a range of approaches to support students with autism. This gives us great flexibility to choose ways of working that suit each individual student. As the student develops, we adapt the approaches we use so that the student continues to make progress and achieve new goals.

### The approaches we use include:

#### **NAS SPELL philosophy**

**Structure** (to reduce anxiety)

**Positivity** (to recognise autistic intelligence)

**Empathy** (recognising the student's perspective)

**Low arousal** (reducing anxiety from sensory differences)

**Links** (to other approaches and the wider community)

#### **TEACCH**

Increasing independence and reducing anxiety by ensuring young people know what is expected of them

#### **SCERTS**

Developing functional social communication skills; emotional regulation and coping strategies; using transactional supports

#### **Positive Behaviour Support**

A five-step process to understanding behaviour when the usual strategies have not helped

We have developed these approaches over many years, and our research shows clearly how effective they are in helping young people with autism.

You can find out more about all of our approaches on our website: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk).

## Support for schools and teachers

All young people who use the Cullum Centres are assessed as able to do well in mainstream education – they just need some specialist support and the awareness of all staff and pupils of how autism may affect them.

While Centre staff will always be on hand to offer advice, the NAS will offer training about autism and the main approaches we use to every member of school staff.

We also support a complete training programme for all Centre staff. This is thorough and ongoing training and covers all the approaches and interventions we use.

An NAS Education Consultant works with each Cullum Centre, sharing NAS expertise and advising on training, inclusion, approaches, multi-agency work, quality monitoring, Centre improvement, autism accreditation and research. The Consultant also supports recruitment to the Centre, and works with specific students at risk of exclusion.

There is an enormous range of support for teachers and other staff from the NAS, including our social network for professionals, Network Autism; our MyWorld teachers' campaign and resources; and our training and conferences.



# Admission to a school with an NAS Cullum Centre

Each NAS Cullum Centre is operated by their school and the admissions process is run by Surrey County Council through the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Area Team.

## Who do Cullum Centres cater for?

NAS Cullum Centres have been developed to enable young people on the autism spectrum to access mainstream secondary schools in a way that wouldn't otherwise have been possible.

The Centres are designed to cater for students with a diagnosis and primary need of autism identified on their statement or education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Students in the Centres are expected to access mainstream lessons with appropriate support for a majority of the time, and are likely to be able to go on to achieve at least five GCSEs (A-C).

NAS Cullum Centres have a staffing ratio tailored to the needs of their students and they support the students' integration into mainstream. The Centres are not appropriate for young people with a level of social anxiety that is likely to prevent them from being able to access a mainstream classroom.

The Centres typically provide for four students per year group and 20 students in total. Referrals are typically for students starting in Year 7.

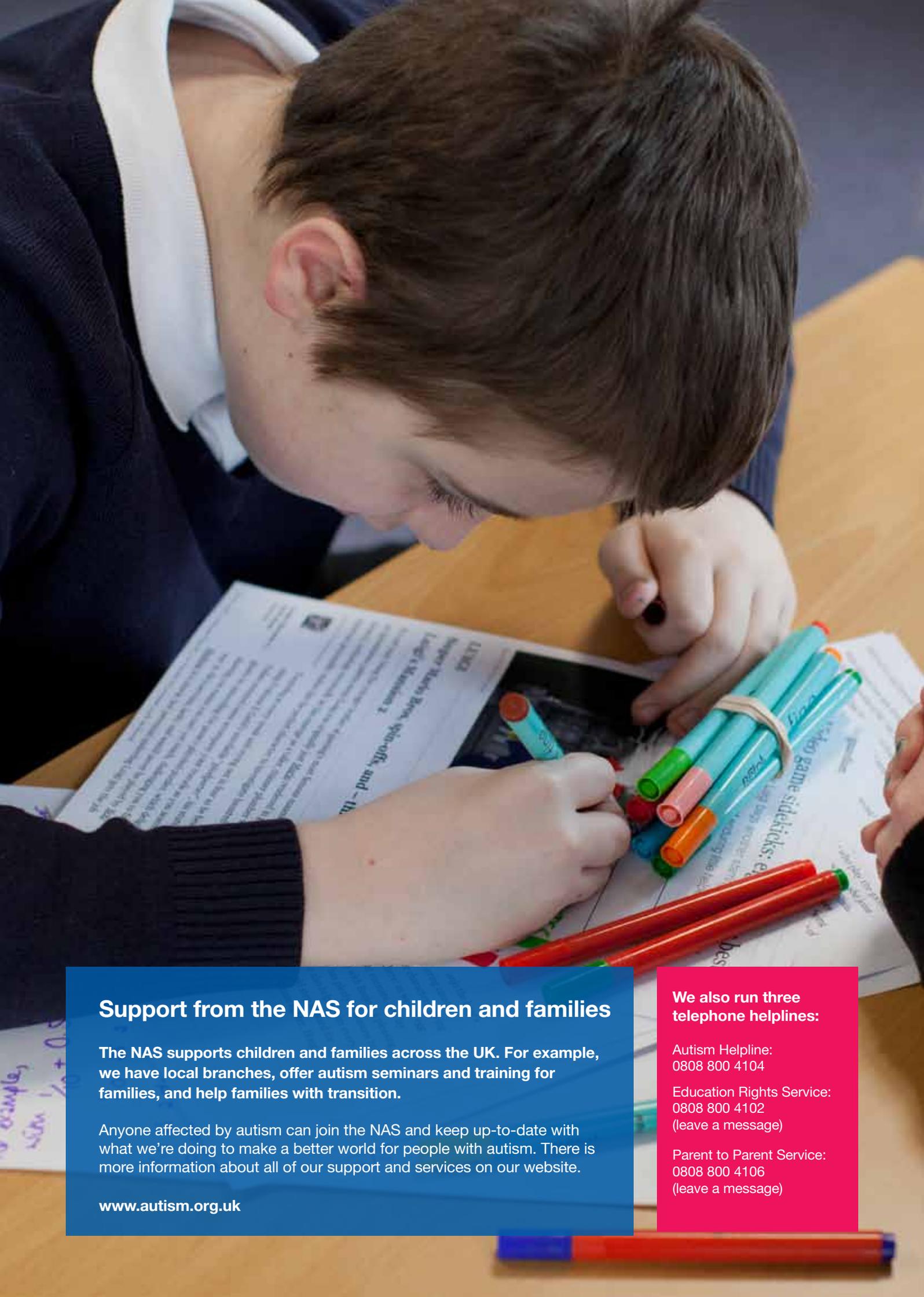
All referrals are managed centrally by the SEN admissions team at Surrey County Council (SCC), consulting with any school involved in the process.

This is the approach taken in Surrey according to their admission process however any future NAS Cullum Centres based in other areas may operate differently.

## Admissions process

1. Parents are welcome to visit the school and Centre, whether during an open day or by appointment, and to request information. However, parents can only proceed to the admissions stage with SCC support, so we encourage parents to talk to the SCC SEN team.
2. SCC should provide parents with a list of suitable providers to meet their child's special educational needs.
3. Parents may express a preference for a place at an NAS Cullum Centre, usually through their SCC SEN caseworker.
4. SCC SEN team will send relevant paperwork to the NAS Cullum Centre so they can advise them if the Centre would be able to meet the child's needs. In making its decision about whether to name the school, SCC will consider parental preference, advice from the NAS Cullum Centre and:
  - whether the school can meet the individual needs of the child as stated in their statement of special educational needs or EHC plan
  - whether the placement is compatible with both the efficient education of the children already placed in the school and the existing environment
  - whether the placement is an efficient use of SCC's resources.
5. Detailed information and guidance on special education needs and disability (SEND) admissions is available in School admissions for children with special educational needs. Download it at [www.surreycc.gov.uk/send](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/send).

For more information about the Surrey admissions process, go to [www.surreycc.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/admissions).



## Support from the NAS for children and families

The NAS supports children and families across the UK. For example, we have local branches, offer autism seminars and training for families, and help families with transition.

Anyone affected by autism can join the NAS and keep up-to-date with what we're doing to make a better world for people with autism. There is more information about all of our support and services on our website.

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

We also run three telephone helplines:

Autism Helpline:  
0808 800 4104

Education Rights Service:  
0808 800 4102  
(leave a message)

Parent to Parent Service:  
0808 800 4106  
(leave a message)

## Find out more

Find out more about the Cullum Centres on  
The National Autistic Society website:  
[www.autism.org.uk/cullumcentre](http://www.autism.org.uk/cullumcentre)

If you are interested in making your school more  
inclusive by working with the NAS, please contact us  
at: [cullumcentre@nas.org.uk](mailto:cullumcentre@nas.org.uk)

## The National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity  
for people affected by autism.

We were founded in 1962 by a group of parents who  
were passionate about ensuring a better future for their  
children. Today, our UK-wide network of specialist  
schools and education services gives hundreds of  
children and young people the opportunity to grow and  
learn in a reassuring environment, with teachers and  
support staff who understand their needs.

For over 50 years, we've built our success on the  
principle that every child that passes through our  
doors is unique. Each student has their own support  
programme based around their needs and ambitions.  
Together with them and their families, we're building  
the better future that our founders hoped for.

The National Autistic Society  
393 City Road  
London EC1V 1NG  
T: 020 7833 2299  
E: [nas@nas.org.uk](mailto:nas@nas.org.uk)  
W: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)



The National  
Autistic Society

Cullum  
Centre