Swinging into Action

Hope Wood Academy is swinging into action to help fund the refurbishment of a new state of the art therapy room.
Staff and students at Hope Wood Academy, Easington, part of the Ascent Academies Trust, are aiming to raise thousands of pounds to adapt a former photocopier room into a state of the art specialist occupational therapy suite.

The academy, a specialist school which supports learning for students aged from two to 19 with severe and complex needs, has already begun the conversion with the addition of a reinforced weight bearing beam and wooden swing used to help with students’ sensory integration.

Paediatric occupational therapist Lynn Mitchell, of Future Steps Consultancy, Darlington, who has been employed by The Ascent Academies Trust to work with students across four of its five academies, said: “When I came to Hope Wood Academy last year there was no specific designated therapy room in place to help support the students.

“The former photocopier room was assigned to us and we basically begged, borrowed and stole equipment from other rooms in the school to try and equip it as best we could.

“Over the summer the academy used its sensory budget to install the swing but there is so much more that we would like to do to make the room fully functional.”

The wish list for the new therapy room includes a specialist floor and wall coverings, sensory lighting, security door, sound proofing, new ball pit, two new swings, a climbing wall, monkey bars, mini trampoline and new therapy balls.

“The room will be used for sensory integration to help
children who find it difficult to concentrate in lessons develop their central nervous system to be able to process information better,” said Lynn.

“Children with autism can experience sensory overload and become de-regulated, the therapy sessions, such as bouncing on a ball, swinging, or exercising in a ball pit, can help to calm and re-regulate them so they get to a position where learning, in a sometimes busy and noisy educational environment, is not such a challenge.”

The academy will now consult with The Ascent Academies Trust and its own student council to come up with fundraising ideas to help refurbish and equip the new room.

Maryan Wales, mother of six-year-old Hope Wood Academy student Tia, is supporting the school in its fundraising efforts.

“Tia has autism with noise and sleeping disorders and is especially affected by loud noise and high pitched voices,” she said.

“On a morning she can become quite distressed with all the noise at school but after using the therapy room it really calms her down.

“It’s great that the academy now has a designated room but it really does need a major refurbishment to continue to help to support Tia and other students at the school.”

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