

General Information

"All crimes, all hatreds, all wars can be reduced to unhappiness," wrote A.S. Neill, founder of Summerhill School.

Today, all over the world, education is moving towards more and more testing, more examinations, and more qualifications. It seems to be a modern trend that assessment and qualifications define education.

If society were to treat any other group of people the way it treats its children, it would be considered a violation of human rights. But for most of the world's children this is the normal expectation from parents, schools and the society we live in.

Today many educationalists and families are becoming uneasy with this restrictive environment. They are beginning to look for alternative answers to mainstream schooling.

One of these answers is democratic or "free" schooling. There are many models of democratic schools in all corners of the globe, from Israel to Japan, from New Zealand and Thailand to the United States.

The oldest and most famous of these schools is Summerhill, on the east coast of England.

Summerhill School was founded in 1921 at a time when the rights of individuals were less respected than they are today. Children were beaten in most homes at some time or another and discipline was the key word in child rearing. Through its self-government and freedom it has struggled for more than eighty years against pressures to conform, in order to give children the right to decide for themselves. The school is now a thriving democratic community, showing that children learn to be self-confident, tolerant and considerate when they are given space to be themselves.

Summerhill School is one of the most famous schools in the world, and has influenced educational practice in many schools and universities. The

democratic schools movement is now blossoming internationally, with many schools far and wide being based upon the philosophy of A.S. Neill or inspired by reading his books.

Summerhill is a community of over a hundred people. About 95 of these are children aged between 5 and 18. The rest are teachers, house parents and other staff. It is situated in a large, much loved, Victorian house and grounds, two miles from the east coast of Suffolk.

Most of the children board during term time, though there are day pupils as well. Usually as the younger ones grow older, they prefer to sleep at school!

Summerhill is coeducational and enjoys the diversity of pupils from throughout the world.

There is a wide choice of subjects, up to and above GCSE level. A new timetable is created each term when the older children have "signed-up" for classes, though there is no compulsion to attend.

As well as the structured timetable, there is free access to art, woodwork and computers. There are also open areas where kids not in classes can hang out, amuse themselves, socialise, play games, be creative etc. Adults are not there to create things for the children to do – they need to create things for themselves. So sports, games and other amusements are all generated by the pupils and adults, according to need.

The staff meet daily to discuss any problems or concerns. A Special Attention List monitors new children, and those who may have problems with lessons. Staff will consider various actions that will assist the child in learning. For example, if a child is nervous of the classroom, one-to-one lessons can be offered. This is the case for fast or slow learners. Pupils can take exams early if they wish and most pupils take some GCSE's before they leave, but of course, some prefer not to take any at all.

The most important freedom at Summerhill is the right to play. All lessons are optional. There is no pressure to conform to adult ideas of growing up, though



the community itself has expectations of reasonable conduct from individuals. Bullying, vandalism or other anti-social behaviour is dealt with by specially elected ombudsmen, or by the whole community in its daily meetings.

The school is set in twelve acres of garden and woodland with plenty of space for cycling, hut building, tree climbing, bonfires, camping, imaginative games. There is a swimming pool for use in the summer time, a tennis court, playing field, basketball area as well as table tennis indoors.

During the winter and spring there is a Social Committee elected by the community to organise games and activities in the afternoons and evenings. These include capture and word games, board games, spontaneous acting, story telling, cinema trips, etc.

Summerhill is a happy and caring community that recognises the importance of expressing emotions and learning through feelings. There is a general openness and honesty among the community members. Staff do not use adult authority to impose values and solve problems; these are solved by the individual with the help of friends or ombudsmen, or by the community in meetings.

The school has an outreach programme with its own external affairs person and an elected committee of pupils who regularly take part in conferences, children's rights programmes, workshops in schools and colleges, etc. As well as this the school endeavours to allow as many people as possible to visit and see the unique system in action.

There are further plans for sharing Summerhill's long and unique experience of freedom, with other schools throughout the world. The Principal and daughter of A.S.Neill, Zoë Readhead, and her husband Tony are regularly invited to lecture abroad. The enthusiastic response reflects increasing recognition of the school as a beacon of enlightened, pupil-centred education. Recent visits have included, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Italy, Portugal, Germany, Spain and Greece.

A.S Neill Summerhill Trust

(registered charity 1089804)

During Summerhill's recent battle against the British Government that threatened to destroy Neill's philosophy and close the school, the support received emphasised Summerhill's international and historical importance.

Summerhill has always wanted to have a wider intake of pupils and not be dependent upon financial constraints. Whilst the school is a successful business, it becomes increasingly difficult to offer financial assistance to families, as has been done, unofficially, in the past. Rising demands and costs require more financial commitment from year to year.

As a unique source of experiences that are inspiring children, teachers and parents throughout the world, we feel that we must ensure Summerhill's future as a living part of educational history.

If you have an interest in democracy, freedom or children's rights perhaps you would like to support us.

Donations can be given to specific projects that include funding a child, assisting the outreach programme, creating teacher training courses, developing teaching materials and promoting children's rights.

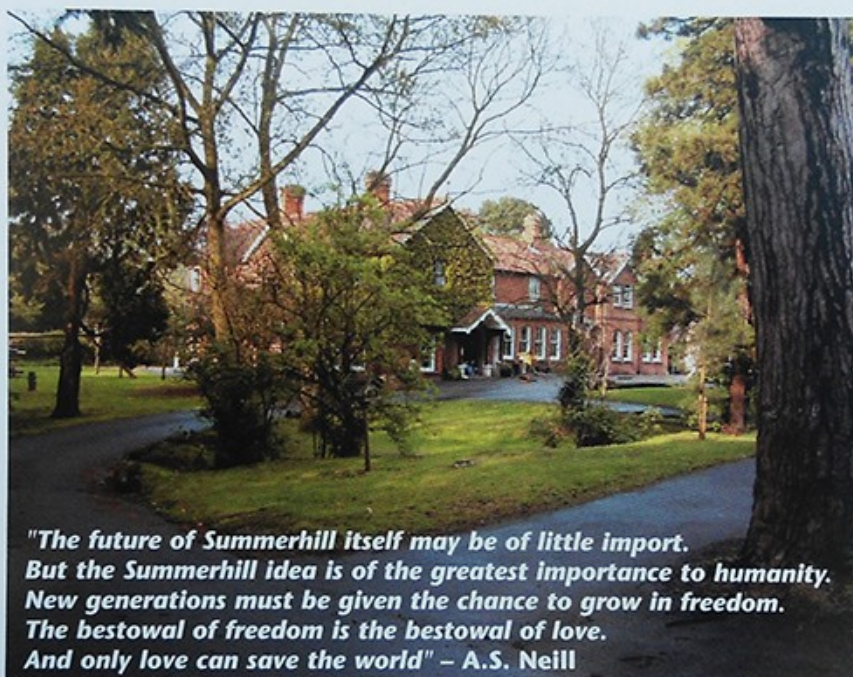
The A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust patrons include Tim Brighouse, Geoffrey Robertson QC and Mark Stephens.

Further information is available from:

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***"The future of Summerhill itself may be of little import.
But the Summerhill idea is of the greatest importance to humanity.
New generations must be given the chance to grow in freedom.
The bestowal of freedom is the bestowal of love.
And only love can save the world" – A.S. Neill***