



# Classroom Pods

Investing in the organisation

## Running Deer School

In 2016, following changes to the rules around the provision of intervention services for children struggling in main stream education, the Directors of Running Deer C.I.C agreed that in order to continue to provide this service we needed to register with the Department for Education as an Independent School for children with special educational needs.

Our very first Ofsted registration inspection took place in a tent. A year later, in autumn 2017, we had a full 3 day Ofsted inspection which was pretty depressing.

So we had to decide what to do next. Do we shut our intervention service and new school down, or do we take the plunge, make essential changes and meet the requirements to become a good school?

We decided to fight.

After the tent came a 22ft trailer so we could provide a warm dry space for lessons, with a diesel generator to provide heating and lighting. 3G dongles provided internet. It did the job, And a surprise Ofsted inspection in June 2018 announced we had met the standards for independent schools.

Our hard work was starting to pay off.

We decided, however, that we couldn't go through another winter with a temperamental generator so we made a huge investment in the school and had electricity installed on the site at Butterdon Wood.

Following the surprise inspection, and meeting the standards as laid out in t the school started to grow until we needed a second 16ft trailer for additional lessons. But we realised that a couple of tin boxes on wheels, as useful as they are, were not the best solution and we needed something more appropriate for our school.

## **Feasibility Study 2018**

We initially thought that a single school building would be the way forward for Running Deer School and commissioned a local architect to produce a feasibility study to consider our options, with the aim of submitting this to the National Park in a pre-app enquiry.

The architect considered two designs, one located where our main camp is now, the other located where our tool store was.

Our 3 year strategy (Objective 5) clearly states “to ensure that students are fully involved from the start of the project so that they are able to contribute their ideas and learn about the process”. In doing so we are creating a sense of ownership and inclusion for our students, and staff.

## **Feedback from Feasibility Study**

When we showed the feasibility study and drawings to our students, and staff, it was overwhelmingly rejected.

Our students, and staff, made it absolutely clear that a school building was not going to work. Many of our students left mainstream education due to their high sensory needs which includes the material fabric of traditional school buildings and classrooms.

We started to research alternative facilities that would meet the needs of our school, the growth that we have already experienced, and anticipate moving forward. We are very aware that the buildings need to be in keeping with our environment, be low impact, and meet the sensory needs of our students. We started to research prefabricated wooden pods, mounted on a steel chassis, as a solution.

During our research we found that Brimpts Farm on Dartmoor have wooden camping pods and many other similar facilities have been established on Dartmoor, and further afield. Whilst we appreciate that this come under a separate policy, these pods are still within the DNPA and attract similar issues to our proposal, including impact on the landscape and travel.

## **Planning applications**

So started the long process of putting a planning application together for 5 classroom pods.

21 months after starting the process, and two planning applications later, our application was referred to committee for a decision. Initially Dartmoor National Park were only prepared to offer a 3 year licence. We argued for full and unconditional planning permission. We were granted a 5 year licence. We had our planning permission.

## **Covid 19**

However 3 weeks later Covid-19 hit and the whole country was shut down.

With schools shut down, staff shielding, staff providing lessons and welfare call via Zoom and phone calls, Butterdon Wood was quiet for a few weeks so we decided it was the best time to do some maths and see if we could purchase at least a couple of pods and have them installed before the autumn term began..

## **Classroom Pods**

2 pods became 5, to cut down on truly eye watering transport costs and also because build timescales were tight and difficult to secure. It made sense to invest in all 5 classroom pods and install them before winter. And because the pods were paid for in agreed timeframe instalments it made it easier to budget and plan ahead.

The groundworks started as soon as we were able to get back to work, with the installation of the car park and reinstatement of our verge on the road to grass and wild flowers. Services were laid, footpaths created, level pads for the pods built and all the metal trailers removed as per the planning conditions.

The first pod arrived on 8th September. The last pods arrived in a storm on 2nd October. The staff and students had somewhere warm and dry for winter.

The final works such as landscaping and installing fencing was completed soon after. This was a massive investment in our school but it has made a huge difference to our staff, and our student. The pods all have names which include Podzilla, Harry Podder, The Podfather, R2-POD-2 and Gastropod - chosen by our students.





















