

ISSUE 38 • MARCH 2026

Summerhill Newsletter

www.summerhillschool.co.uk



A.S. Neill SUMMERHILL SCHOOL



Dear All,

Hello and Welcome to the latest Summerhill Newsletter.

Lovely to see that Spring is on its way – lots of bird song and many children outside playing on bikes, trampoline, skateboards and roller blades to name but a few. As soon as the sun shines they tumble out.....

Of course, for the bigger ones it is a busy time working on exam subjects ready for next term when the GCSEs will be in motion. Obviously there is a certain amount of stress involved but we all try to keep a measured attitude towards exams. They are important, they are serious – but they are not life-threatening and there is always the possibility of resits or other alternatives.

Let us not forget the author and MP, Geoffrey Archer whose mother took her GCSEs at the age of ninety!

Having so many day pupils in the school at the present time has given the community a lot to think about. There is no doubt that it changes a lot of things and the feel of the place too, though it is lovely to see how well everybody integrates and also shows how very adaptable the school is.

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Here are some day-to-day practicalities....

If you get a 24 hour screen ban (quite a popular fine, particularly for screening out of hours) and you are not a boarder, how does this work out? Whatever happens with screening at home is not the school's direct business, but does that mean that if you have a 24 hour screen ban as a boarder then it is a harsher fine than if you are a day-kid and how do we deal with it?

Answers on a post-card please!

The full Summerhill experience is still a live-in experience. Not leaving your parents behind, but joining a community and being a free spirit with only responsibility for yourself and the community you live in. Day kids can never quite feel the full experience of working within the school - such as Beddies Officers, Ombudsmen, or just being a 'Big Kid', loved and respected by all. An old pupil doing her PhD on Summerhill called it "Big Kidness" which I think describes it wonderfully.

I am trying to be a bit restrained writing this welcome. There is so much going on in the world and in education and child-rearing that makes me rant. My family have talked of a time in the future where I might retire and have my own podcast, website or blog called "Zoë unleashed"! But I wouldn't want my rants to reflect negatively upon the school which has constantly had to fight so hard to maintain its respected position in the world. Maybe just leave it a year or two and then watch this space!

We are pushing ahead with our plans for the new archive. At the moment looking at various options for buildings. Very exciting. The plan so far is to put it on the tennis court so that it is on the edge of the school for outside visits without being too intrusive to the community – but we are aware that it eats away at the property and the tennis court (though nobody plays tennis anymore) is a good gaming area for muddy weather. I'm sure we will work something out.

Stephen is doing such a wonderful job preserving and organising - he also has a group of Carriage and Shack kids showing interest. We celebrated National Archive day looking at old photographs and artefacts and talking about Neill, Ena, Mrs Lins, Germany, Austria and the move to Lyme Regis. Wonderful stuff!

Thanks for reading our newsletter. It seems fitting that friends of Summerhill, with its great social community should all get together like this. Please send comments or thoughts for publication to Montse to office@summerhillschool.co.uk

Have a good, safe summer and don't forget to laugh a lot....

Love from me, my family and Summerhill xx



Zoë



Work opportunities!

Join our wonderful community

We are delighted with the strong interest shown in these two posts and look forward to meeting our candidates at interviews in May. In the meantime, there is still time to submit an application.

2 vacancies starting in
September 2026

Apply by 24th April 2026



Primary Teacher

Apply Now

Apply Now



English Teacher

- What if a school was built on trust?
- What if children were free to be themselves, to choose, to belong and to flourish?

We can offer

- Freedom to use your preferred teaching methods.
- A safe and comfortable living environment.
- A friendly and welcoming school community.
- Freedom to manage your classroom alongside experienced and supportive staff.



Contact us by:
office@summerhillschool.co.uk

Chairing a Summerhill Meeting

In Summerhill we currently have two Meetings a week. They used to be divided into Tribunal and General cases but now are all one. A Special Meeting can be called at any time if required but are seldom used at the moment.

The Summerhill Chairmen run for two Meetings before a change is voted in. There is normally quite a small pool of people who want, or feel able, to do it.

Chairing the Meeting is a very difficult job involving a lot of skills – not least being strong and able to control a room full of 30 – 50 -people of all ages. You have to be quick, organised and impartial but interested in the cases. The secretary is there to help and support you by taking the minutes and helping with proposals and votes. It can take a bit of practice to become a skilled Chair but listening to advice and perseverance will make the task quicker.

During the next week or so we shall be having a Chairman's workshop. We have these about once a term and it gives new Chairs a chance to gain confidence and to learn a few good tips. Obviously, they are not compulsory but you cannot Chair meetings if you have not attended a workshop at some point. You have to be Shack (an age group, roughly 12 - 13) or over and been here for two years to be Chair.

We tend to refer to the Chair as the "Chairman" just because of tradition and also because Summerhill girls do not normally have any worries about their status as the weaker sex! But it is fine for people to use whatever title they wish to refer to.

The format is to go through the 'tips' with comments from working Chairs and others. After that we have some practice cases (which can get a bit riotous is not kept firmly under control as we all love to play Meetings and misbehave....I usually get brought up for something really stupid!).

There is no certificate or anything but generally after this people begin to run for Chair or to ask the present Chair if they can take a few practice cases.



Chairman Tips

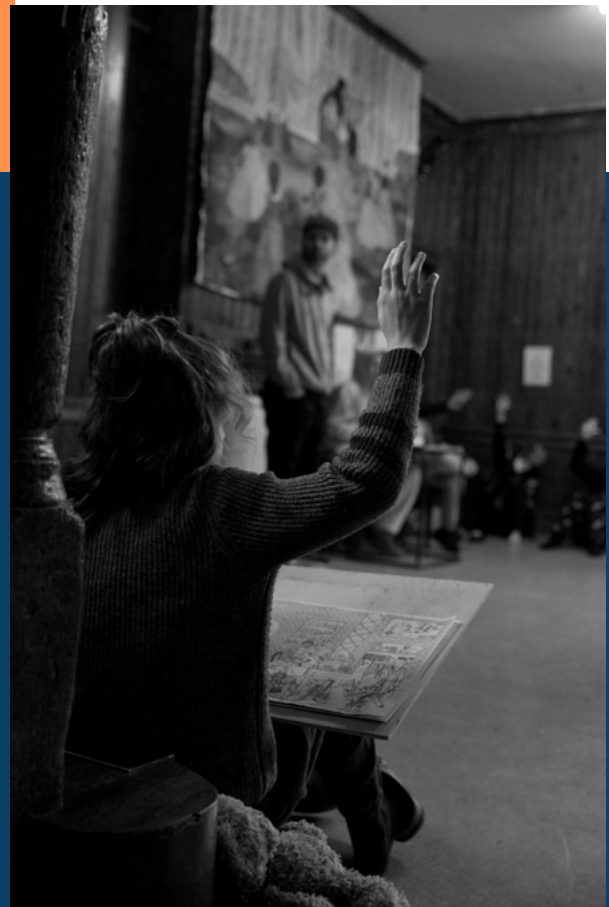
Control.

- Always stand up.
- Try to encompass whole meeting instead of interacting with individuals.
- ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU HAVE ULTIMATE POWER!
- You need to remember to remain impartial but that YOU control the meeting, whether it's a good or bad meeting is up to you.

Procedure.

- Always speak loudly and clearly and address the whole room rather than individuals.
- Always read (or ask your secretary to read) ALL proposals before voting commences
- It is not always necessary to count all the votes if the proposal is obviously carried, but if it's likely to be hot subject than make sure you count every vote and make sure the secretary takes note of it.
- The Chair needs to be sensitive and aware about cases that need to be discussed as opposed to standard simple cases, which need to be kept short.
- Make sure you take everybody's hands – keep a list in your head of when people put their hands up (not easy)
- If someone puts their hand up who is new, small or who generally doesn't speak, take their hand as soon as possible, even if they've taken their hand down again. Ask: "Did you want to say something?"
- If the Meeting is troublesome and all else fails you can just close it!
- Strong Warning's need to be given seriously and with direct eye contact and said in a way that non-English speakers or young children can understand.
- Meetings are often too long – keep them short and sharp! You will not be voted on again if your meetings are long and out of control and bad decisions will be made as people get bored and angry.

Created by Big Carman, Camilla and Zoë, Thursday, 01 November 2001, for the Chairman's workshop



A Summerhill Internship

Hello, my name is Eric Berschneider and I had the wonderful opportunity to visit Summerhill School for four weeks in the beginning of 2026. I want to share a bit about my time and instead of writing a general report I've decided to write little chapters about certain experiences I've made.

I have a professional background in working with younger and older children, mostly in day care, kindergarten or through assisting in different projects. I'm also very concerned with the question how to raise and educate children, with an interest on alternative schools. I came to Summerhill because I was very interested in the concept, which promotes personal responsibility and independence, while at the same time offering eye-level contact and a great deal of freedom. I really wanted to see how the concept works in the everyday life of the school and how it effects the students.



Just playing lego:

One of my first true encounters with the concept of Summerhill was, when I was asked to substitute one of the class one teachers for a Wednesday morning. I was keen on doing that, because I wanted to experience how it is to work as a teacher (I might become one in the future). The lesson was creative writing and I prepared material for writing little stories, practicing calligraphy and - mathematics, because one of the students told me before, that he preferred to do that instead of writing.

I was excited and at the beginning of class, three of eight students showed up. Quickly it became quite clear that two of them just wanted to play with Lego for the whole time, while the third one actually wanted to do mathematics. I stayed with him, supported him and after 40 minutes he left. So I stayed there for another 90 minutes with the other two students, who where deeply occupied by their Lego and different thoughts and feelings started to creep into my consciousness. I felt uncomfortable, like failing at my task and certainly it didn't feel alright, that I wasn't teaching and for the moment doing nothing at all, when I'm supposed to do a lesson! Not to mention, that five students didn't show up at all...I knew that those children had a choice, which in that moment was playing Lego, while I was sitting there, feeling left on my own with the things I prepared. It was a valuable experience to me, because it showed me how (unconscious) beliefs, thoughts and fears can interfere with something (in this case the concept of Summerhill) that I fully support.

Respect:

It was very helpful for me that many people, students and staff, were very nice and open towards me from the first day. Also in general, it felt like there was much more respect and interaction on the same level between students and students and staff members compared to what I experienced in my school time and to what I hear today, sadly, from different children at „normal“ schools. Staff members/teachers didn't act like they were untouchable, standing above anyone else (interns included) and they weren't seen like that. That and the fact that students could decide about their own lessons and participation in the school's matters seemed to lead to an atmosphere of respect, trust and less stress. Of course students were teasing each other and being silly, but more than often, a „no“ was accepted and if there was issue it was brought up to an "ombudsman" and/or in the meeting. I also perceived everyone very open and helpful towards each other.

Being on their own:

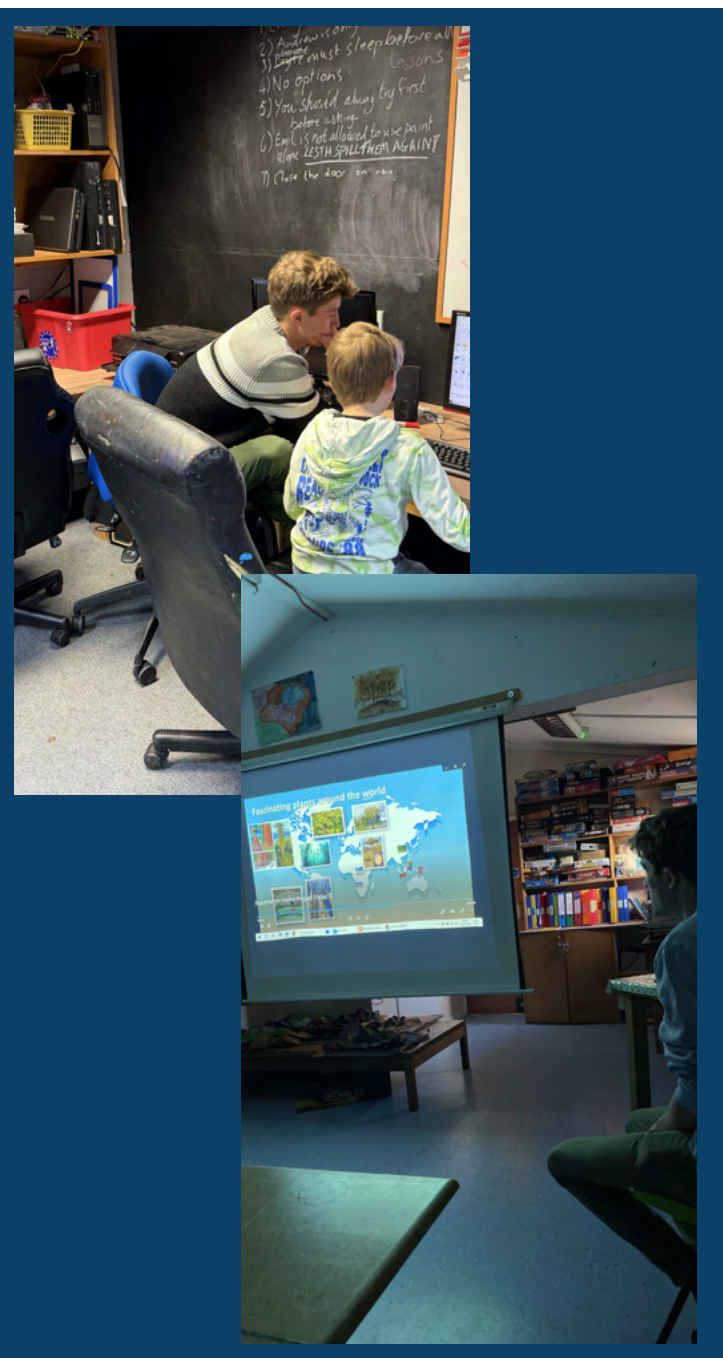
Pretty often I was in class two observing and supporting in various lessons, like mathematics, reading, newspaper or playing pickleball (or tennis). I particularly enjoyed supporting students with their 'island-project', where they were creating their own island with a map, a 3D-Model, with their own fauna, flora and the circumstances in which people would live on this island. But not every student in class two found those things as interesting as I did, so there were a few chatting, reading, drawing or playing board games in the library next to the classroom all the time. I was astonished how well they were getting along with each other or being on their own for many hours without any input in the form of animation or regulation from an adult. I think that's an important skill if you want to become an independent adult and a lot of children are struggling with that, at least as far as I know.

Tennis and improv-theater:

For the time of my stay I offered improv-theatre and tennis to the students. It wasn't quite the right season for tennis but some students picked up on it and enjoyed it a lot! With some, I did lessons, practicing groundstrokes and ball control, while others wanted to play in doubles or singles all the time. Tennis isn't easy to pick up and in the beginning it needs a lot of practice, as well as coordination just to hit the ball and play it back and forth a few times. It was nice to see, how persistently they tried and that they made progress towards the last weeks, when we started to have rallies in our games. Two times a week I offered improv theatre after school. My goal was, that students enjoy playing and play without inhibitions. I incorporated different games and exercises to loosen up, for being focused and spontaneous, as well as different ways/settings of playing improv. One of the favourites was definitely playing the „door-game“, where two people would start a scene with one person coming to another one's door. Some very interesting, funny and exciting scenes were created this way. Overall everyone involved liked it and we often left inspired and energized after we finished.

The meeting

You can't speak about Summerhill without speaking about the meeting. It's one of the most essential parts of Summerhill School, where students, teachers and staff members decide democratically on almost everything regarding life in school. I have read about it before and it was amazing to see it in person. I could see that the meeting was well respected by staff and students, because no one disturbed and everyone was very attentive and silent, even when the meeting went on for 80 minutes. Usually, the meeting was used to make announcements, rarely to propose a law change or, pretty often, to find a solution for a conflict between students. It was also used to bring someone up, who broke the law and I really liked the fact that, especially the older students, took responsibility for their actions, instead of denying everything. I also admired the fact that a student was leading the meeting every time. It takes a certain amount of clarity, energy and focus to hold everything together and to keep everything on track. It is a great opportunity to practice leadership skills.



Generally, I'm very thankful for the possibility of doing this internship. I really enjoyed my time here, which has definitely passed too quickly. I'm grateful that almost every teacher had an open door for me and that I was able to observe their lessons, to ask questions and to see how they prepare and structure their teachings. I'm grateful that the students showed me the things they were working on. I saw beautiful and diverse art portfolio's, wall paintings and I was presented with stories about historical figures and fantasy worlds, which were very sophisticated and well-thought of, to name a few. I also want to thank Stephen, the Class 3 and History teacher for giving me a presentation about Summerhill's history and showing me the archive and Andrew for making sure, that everything was organized while I was here.

Kind regards,
Eric

What is “Bar”?

by Giles

The smooth running of Summerhill relies on a wide ranging group of committees - all elected on a regular basis by the school community and each with specific responsibilities. Adults and kids alike can volunteer to “run” for a position on a particular committee, and a volunteer chosen in the school meeting then “takes the book around” to offer everyone the opportunity to cast a number of votes, equal to the number of spaces available on the committee, to decide who “gets on”.

One such, often very active, committee is what we call “Bar”. Bar committee is elected twice every term, and has the responsibility of raising money to pay for “free bar” - a special food treat, served at midnight at our twice-termly, late night parties - which we have half way through every term, and to celebrate the end of term.

Bar committee members, who at the moment can be House (10-13) kids and older, can choose to raise these funds from the community in any creative way they can think of, but generally there are two main ways they do this...



Primarily, Bar will run what is effectively a school tuck shop for a few weeks before each party night. They have to take on the whole process of running a small shop - including choosing what to sell, buying stock from local supermarkets that they think other kids would want to buy, deciding what price they can sell items for to allow a small profit and making sure someone is available to sell stock throughout the day (other kids will often stop a Bar committee member in their tracks and ask "Can I buy?"). They have to handle the money, make change and even offer and manage a small line of credit to other kids (Bar is allowed to sell "on poc" - meaning kids can spend from their following weeks pocket money, which Bar committee then have to collect the debts on the next time kids are given their "poc").

In addition, Bar committee will often run evening events for the community to boost their funds. This might be a Movie night in the cafe, where Bar would make and sell popcorn and snacks; it might be a board games night with cheese toasties for sale; it might be a retro games night where old games consoles are dug out and connected to a projector or it might be a classic Summerhill game like "Socks", where Bar will set up a table and sell drinks and chocolate bars. Last Summer term, Bar organised badminton competitions and other sports events, with a small entry fee and prizes for winners. These events not only raise funds for "free bar", but they are also important social events for the Summerhill community.





Finally, Bar committee has to organise “Free Bar” itself. There is a tradition of exactly what the midnight feast will consist of being kept a secret right up until the dining room doors are opened - and the committee can decide between themselves what they’d like to offer every time. Nevertheless, they have to plan something that they can prepare in good time, can do in enough volume to ensure everyone gets something to eat (many of our older kids help in the school kitchens and hold a valid Food Health and Hygiene certificate and can lend these skills to Bar) and that they think will go down well with the community. They also have to work within the bounds of whatever profit they’ve managed to raise during the previous few weeks. For the half term just gone, Free Bar was nachos and milkshakes! The committee members have to make this happen themselves, which means making shopping lists and budgets, buying ingredients and then leaving the party for several hours to prepare the food. They then have to serve (and keep a sometimes raucous, excited queue in order) and then, finally, clean up, mop the floors and do the washing up afterwards as well.



Adults will occasionally run for Bar committee and help out, but generally this committee is the domain of the kids - showcasing their organisational, business, creative and culinary skills in a regular operation that forms just another part of their Summerhill experience outside of the classroom.

School Fundraising

Hi everyone, we're raising funds to complete the floor for our new pickleball court, and to paint the mural with a new cool design.

We need your help!

Instead of asking for a plain donation, we're offering something useful (and a little fun):

- Tea Towels with a drawings from everyone in the community
- Tote Bags with the beautiful totoem pole

They're practical and reusable.

Every towel and every tote bag you carry helps us:

- Finish the court floor
- Create a space for sport and fun
- Paint a the new mural

So if you need a new tea towel or tote bag anyway, why not get one that helps Summerhill School at the same time?



Thank you for supporting our school!



Barefoot in November

Parenting the Summerhill way.

Now available on



audible
an **amazon** company

'Summerhill is a happy place to live... If we can look closely at what Summerhill does and how it does it, then perhaps we can transfer some of what it offers into our homes, into our parenting.'

— Zoë Neill Readhead.



Throughout the book, Zoë is unequivocal about her support for parents and parenting: 'I love parents. I love seeing them out with their children at supermarkets, in the park, at the zoo. I have such respect for the fact that these people are ready to change their whole lives for that little scrap of a person who arrives with such a flourish of trumpets and proceeds to take over everything!'

QUESTIONS WE ARE BEING ASKED:

A note from the A.S. Neill Summerhill CIC

The A.S. Neill Summerhill CIC exists for a simple reason: to protect and share the values that underpin Summerhill's approach to childhood.

We support conversations, training, and reflection around autonomy, trust, and the role of the adult. Often, our work is less about introducing new ideas and more about helping adults unlearn old habits.

As more educators and parents around the world grow curious about alternative approaches to education and child-rearing, we notice certain questions returning again and again.

Here are a few reflections on those questions, only glimpses, really. We usually explore these conversations in far greater depth through our CPD courses, where there is time for study, reflection, and dialogue.

No short response can fully hold the complexity of these ideas, but perhaps they can open a space for thought.

When freedom is real, how does responsibility grow?

Freedom without reciprocal relationship can drift toward chaos. But freedom within a respectful community grows into responsibility.

Imposed responsibility may bring compliance. Internally developed responsibility tends to last. It grows when children see their voice matters, in meetings, in decisions, and in daily life. Through this, they begin to understand their place in the community.

At Summerhill, freedom has never meant no structure. It exists alongside shared agreements and conversation. The difference is that the structure is shaped with children, not simply placed upon them.

Responsibility is not rooted in fear of consequence, but in belonging and participation.

Are we educating for happiness or for survival?

At Summerhill, happiness is never seen as shallow pleasure or constant comfort. Neill spoke of happiness as inner wellbeing, a child feeling secure, understood, and free to be themselves.

From that foundation, resilience grows naturally. A young person who knows themselves and feels emotionally secure meets the wider world with more steadiness than one shaped only by pressure or fear of failure.

Happiness must never be sacrificed for resilience, for resilience cannot take root in unhappiness but only in fulfilment and emotional freedom.



If children are truly free, what is the adult's role?

This is a question that is not often spoken aloud at all, but it sits beneath many conversations in our Role of the Adult courses.

It brings us back to the idea of community and individual responsibility. A community only works because people bring different strengths, capacities, and ways of being. Children and adults are part of the same community, but their roles are not identical.

At Summerhill, an adult's role is not to control a child's path, but neither is it to disappear. The adult is present. They model boundaries, honesty, and humanity. They help create the conditions where relationships can grow naturally and with mutual respect.

Often the work is quiet: listening, noticing, being consistent. Real growth stems from relationship, not position. And children, perhaps more than anyone, recognise the difference.

How do you know when to step in and when to step back?

This is a tricky one, especially when you are new to trusting children in this way.

Stepping in too early can send an unintentional message to a child that they cannot be trusted, that they need adult intervention to manage their world. Stepping back too far, on the other hand, can feel like absence.

This sensitivity is something that develops over time and through reflection, it cannot be reduced to a checklist. In our courses, we often find it grows through experience, conversation, and noticing oneself in relation to children.

It is less about applying methods as fixed rules and more about developing a felt sense. A kind of quiet inner judgement rooted in relationship. Trusting your instinct, being sincere, and allowing relationships to develop organically.

Often, the real question is not "What is the correct technique?" but "What does this child need from me in this moment?" – a need that is always changing.

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT
IN FACILITATING A HAPPY
AND FULFILLED CHILDHOOD

**APRIL
TO
JUNE
2026**



www.asneillsummerhillcic.co.uk

THE A.S. NEILL SUMMERHILL TRUST

The A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust is a registered charity whose purposes are:

- To promote the educational philosophy, ideas, life and writings of A.S.Neill
- To promote the re-publication and translation of existing books, new books. To support overseas visits by school staff to give talks, as well as Summerhill pupils visiting other schools to run workshops on Summerhill values.
- To provide bursaries or other forms of financial assistance to school pupils. Parents should contact the school office for information on how to apply for a bursary from the A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust.

A very big thank you to all our donors who have so generously supported the spirit of Summerhill. Your donations help kids remain at the School who would otherwise have to leave, and provide extracurricular activities that would be beyond the School's ability to provide.

If you'd like to make a difference to a child's life, you too can make a donation to the Trust. Whether it is a one off or regular donation, we will spend it wisely.

- £25 could help a child can join their friends on a school trip
- £50 will pay for two extra-curricular lessons.
- £100 will pay for travel costs incurred by the External Affairs Committee
- £1,000 will provide assistance over two terms for parents who are struggling to pay their child's school fees.

A regular donation made by standing order will become an important part of our 'bread and butter'. To make a gift or regular donation, or for more information about the A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust, please contact the School office on 01728 830540 or email: office@summerhillschool.co.uk.

You can also write to The A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust, c/o Summerhill School, Westward Ho, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY.

Summerhill School Zoë Readhead (Principal)

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through



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through easy
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look up Summerhill School at
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HOW IT WORKS

Easy fundraising turns your daily shopping into every day magic! easyfundraising partners with over 8,000 brands who will donate part of what you spend to a cause of your choice. It won't cost you any extra.

The cost is covered by the brand.

Brands pay easyfundraising a commission because when you start your shop from the easyfundraising website or app, they can see we sent you to them. If you make a purchase, a commission is generated, and we turn that into a donation - magic!

Love from Summerhill

As always, we send our
love and best wishes to all
friends of Summerhill.

Thank you so much for all
your support.



A.S. Neill **SUMMERHILL SCHOOL**