

DARJEELING CHILDREN'S TRUST SPONSORSHIP POLICY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Why sponsor a child through the Darjeeling Children's Trust?

Sponsoring a child means giving a gifted child the chance to reach their full potential, and lift themselves, their families and their communities out of poverty. We send children from municipal schools to good quality, often English-medium schools, where they receive a high standard of education to prepare them for professional careers.

Our UK-based Trustees regularly visit Darjeeling, and our Trustee is based there permanently oversees a paid assistant to perform supporting duties. We understand the situation on the ground and manage our sponsorships accordingly, taking into account local sensitivities. Sponsoring a child through the Trust gives you the reassurance that not only is all your money being used to improve the lives and prospects of a disadvantaged child, but also that the child is protected and their best interests catered for in accordance with our official policy.

Our criteria for sponsorship.

Much as we would like to, we cannot sponsor all the children in Darjeeling who need help. As a Trust, we have therefore agreed a number of criteria to ensure our help goes to those who would benefit from it most:

- Our aim is to improve the future of whole families and communities; we will consider this as a key factor in any decision.
- In order to benefit most from an English-medium education, and therefore have the best chance at future employment, we will give priority to sponsoring children aged 7 or under. Unless there are good reasons for doing so, such as prior English ability, we will not accept older children for sponsorship;
- Wherever possible we will seek recommendations from teachers to identify children with potential; therefore we will try to accommodate requests from sponsors for children of a particular age or gender, but sponsoring children with potential will be our first priority.
- To avoid disruption to schools and children we will generally only set up new sponsorships in the autumn and winter and send children to new schools in March. Sponsorship offers received throughout the year will be held on a reserve list until a child becomes available, and voluntary payments may be made towards ongoing work at orphanages in the meantime.
- We require the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the children to be based in Darjeeling and sign up to support the continued education of the child.

Involving families in sponsorship.

We recognise that the support of a child's parents or guardian is essential to ensuring they continue to attend school until they gain appropriate qualifications, and we take a partnership approach to involve families in their child's education. We insist on at least one Trustee meeting the parent or guardian of any child being considered for sponsorship, to secure written consent and to ensure they understand the reciprocal commitment involved.

We also ask that the family is based in Darjeeling, to avoid families calling their children away from the town to work for part of the year or at short notice.

Which schools do the children attend?

We currently send children from municipal schools in Darjeeling to English-medium schools such as Alpine or Camellia, or to high quality Nepali-medium schools such as the Nepali Girls High School. Our Trustees regularly visit all the schools to monitor the progress of sponsored children, and we enjoy a strong, mutually beneficial relationship with teaching staff.

How much does sponsorship cost?

Sponsorship currently costs £20 a month, or £240 a year. This equates to just 65p a day, or less than £5 a week. Payment can either be made by standing order on a monthly basis, or in an annual lump sum.

How is payment made to Darjeeling?

We pay for school fees, uniforms and stationery on an annual basis directly to the schools through well-established International Money Transfer services. No money is sent through the children or their families.

When does sponsorship start?

The school year in Darjeeling runs from March to November. To avoid disruption and ensure that sponsored children have the best possible start in their new schools, we seek new children and sponsors in the autumn and winter in advance of the new school year. However, opportunities arise throughout the year to take over from sponsors whose circumstances change, or to cover the fees of children already at good schools whose families can no longer afford to pay fees.

What happens if a sponsorship fails?

Sponsorship is a commitment to support a child until they achieve their educational goals, but if your personal circumstances change at any time, simply advise us and your child will continue to be looked after from our reserve funds until another sponsor can be found. We guarantee the long-term education of a sponsored child for as long as is needed. The children themselves are never disadvantaged if a sponsorship fails, for whatever reason.

What do sponsors receive?

Child sponsorship is a rewarding and satisfying way to give, and allows you to see your money making a direct and real difference to the life and prospects of a child and their family.

When we match a sponsor with a child, we will send the sponsor an initial introduction sheet and 'case history', including a photograph. At least once a year, you will receive a letter, drawing or school report from your child. Sponsorship fees cover the cost of a small present to be given to your sponsored child and any siblings they may have whenever Trustees from the UK visit Darjeeling (usually twice a year).

Keeping children safe.

The safety and best interests of the sponsored children is our first priority. We insist on meeting parents and guardians before any sponsorship commences, to secure their permission and ensure they understand what is involved. If a sponsor wishes to visit their child, we will facilitate this and will ensure a member of the Trust is present at all times. All communication between children and their sponsors is sent through the Trust and the children's schools. Our sponsorship officer, Katherine Carr, can be contacted at any time for further information.