Hazelwood is a purpose built school for children with sensory and dual sensory impairment. It fosters life skills in children with severe learning difficulties, to help them lead independent lives. The children, who age between 2 and 18, are blind and deaf or have a variety of sight problems. Others have cognitive impairment and physical disability.

The customised design of the school was the product of a high degree of collaboration amongst parents, staff, associated agencies and the architects, Murray Dunlop.

The interior of the school is aimed at maximising independence and providing the optimum learning environment. This ensures a secure and highly stimulating educational experience for all the pupils. The physical location provides a natural and easily accessible range of outdoor activities. The architects have developed innovative sensory clues throughout their design to help the children orient themselves within the school environment and find their own way to their classrooms.

We visited Hazelwood to learn more about its design and to see how good design can enhance independence.

The key features that stood out were:

- Lots of light
- Integration into surrounding gardens and green areas
- Use of natural materials such as wood and slate
- Lack of clutter to make independent travel easier for visually impaired students and those that use wheelchairs
- Trail walls - a small design feature that had a big impact for students who could use them to move more confidently along the corridors and between rooms
- Ease of access to outdoor areas - for play and for learning
- Lots of storage space
Wide corridors with trail walls assist children to move around safely without help.

Textures, colours, light, finishes and floor features all provide sensory clues to help children get their bearings and move around the building.
The buildings are set in gardens, play areas and green space which can be accessed from every class room. This gives teachers plenty of opportunities to take advantage of sunny days and provides additional teaching space.