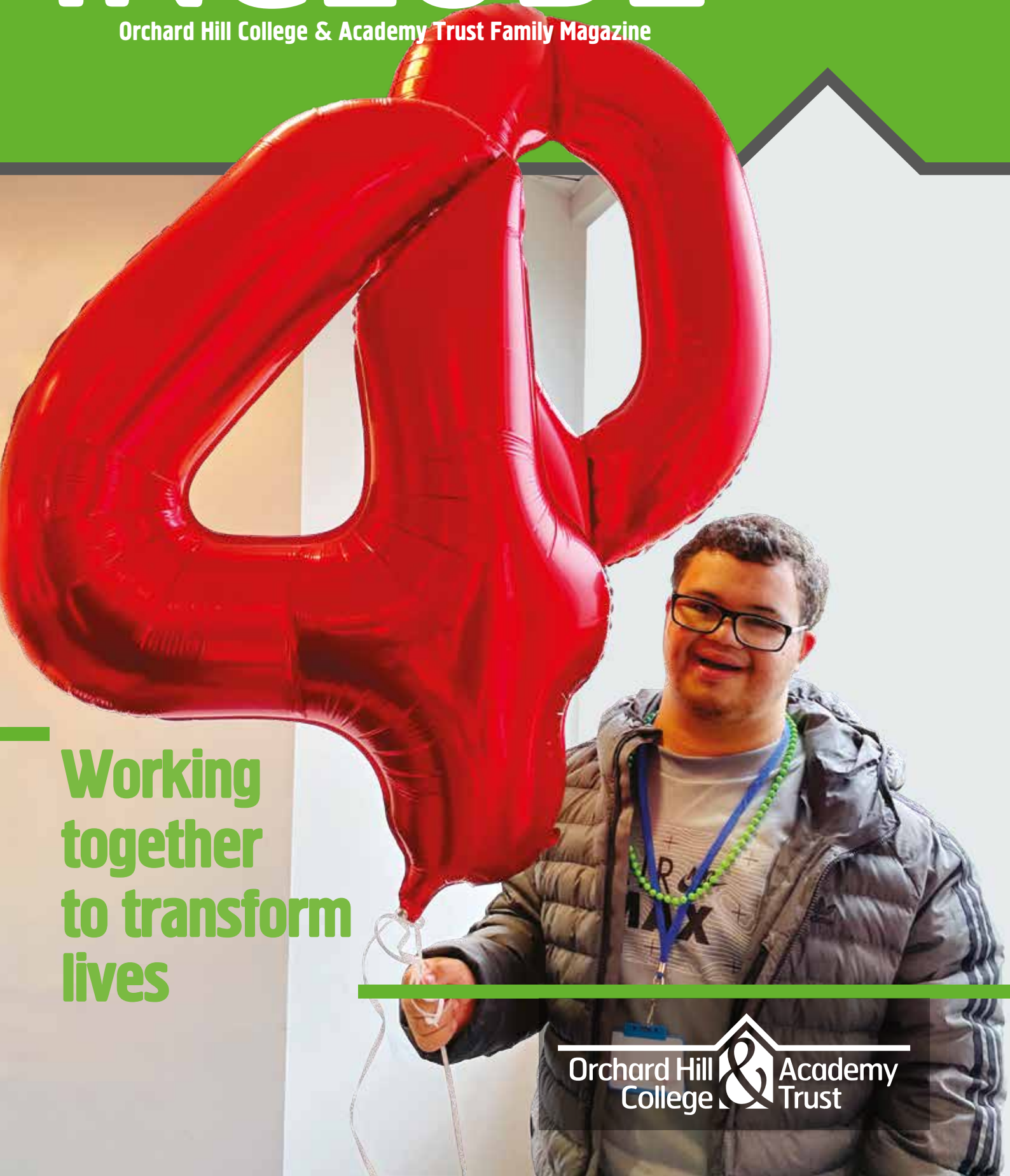


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Anniversary Edition
Issue 7 Autumn 2023

Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust Family Magazine



**Working
together
to transform
lives**

Orchard Hill  Academy
College & Trust

Welcome

The past year marks two standout occasions in the timeline of Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust, and it has been incredibly uplifting to see everyone come together to celebrate our double milestones including the 40th anniversary of Orchard Hill College, and the 10th anniversary of our Trust.

We are extremely proud of our long and varied history in the education sector, and it is the collective strength and commitment from our teams, combined with the unwavering support of students, families, and our wider community connections, which have helped build OHC&AT into the success that it is today.

Thank you to everyone for making 2023 such a memorable year.

In this issue, we reflect on the accomplishments and the incredible news and events across our network of schools, academies, and college centres.

Fantastic at 40!

Celebrating a combined five decades of teaching and learning, we take a nostalgic look back to the 80s – at Orchard Hill College, where the story began. We have a fascinating history and over the past 40 years have grown our team from 15 to more than 270 professionals, while also extending our provision to reach more than 2,000 young people with SEND. Discover more about the evolution of our journey on page 24.

A dynamic decade

In just one decade, OHC&AT has created meaningful impact in the SEND education space, transforming provision and leading change

through new and innovative approaches. Indeed, we are credited as one of the largest providers of quality, specialist provision in the country. An impressive 86% of our schools are rated by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding,' a status which exceeds the UK national averages for SEND schools (See page 31).

Snapshot views and in-depth insight

As well as short snapshot views into the key happenings in each setting, from MP visits to world book day wonders, make sure to read our more in-depth insights too. Here we take a deeper look into some of the larger projects such as the implementation of a state-of-the-art professional boxing ring (p 43), animals in every classroom (p 48), reading beyond books (p 35), and much more.

There are exciting times ahead as we continue to grow, develop and shape future SEND provision, supporting our young people to become independent, resilient and fulfilled and ultimately releasing their potential and transforming their lives.

John Prior
CEO OHC&AT



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The OHC&AT Family

Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust (OHC&AT) is a family of specialist education providers from pre-school through to further education across London, Surrey, Sussex and Berkshire and fully represents all designations of special education needs and disabilities (SEND).

North West London and Slough

South West London

Sutton and Croydon

Surrey and Sussex

North West London and Slough
The PRIDE Academy
The Skills Hub
Arbour Vale School
Orchard Hill College - Park View Centre

South West London
Nightingale Community Academy
Dysart School
Bedelsford School
St Philip's School
Orchard Hill College - Vocational Centre
Orchard Hill College - Lomond House
Orchard Hill College - Camberwell Road
Orchard Hill College - Beaconsfield

Sutton and Croydon
Carew Academy
The Link School
Addington Valley Academy (AVA)
Orchard Hill College - VPC
Orchard Hill College - Robin Hood Centre
Orchard Hill College - Garratt House

Surrey and Sussex
Unified Academy
Brantridge School
Grafham Grange School
St Dominic's School

Working together to transform lives

Across the whole organisation we have experts and practitioners who advocate for children and young people with SEND to ensure they receive the best possible opportunities to achieve their full potential.

Since the College was established in 1983 it has grown from a small hospital provision into

an outstanding college that operates from nine college centres and provides post-16 education for students with moderate, complex and profound learning needs. In 2013, the College established the Trust to share its expertise and provide services and support to specialist schools. The Trust is now home to 14 special schools.

Orchard Hill College

Orchard Hill College is an outstanding specialist college offering life-changing learning opportunities to students aged 16 and over with a wide range of needs in nine centres:



VPC
Carshalton

Beaconsfield
New Malden

Robin Hood Centre
Sutton

Park View Centre
Uxbridge

Vocational Centre
Wandsworth

Camberwell Road
Camberwell

Lomond House
Camberwell

Old Town Hall
Wallington

Garratt House
Sutton





Building Futures
changing
lives

Opening a New Centre - Old Town Hall

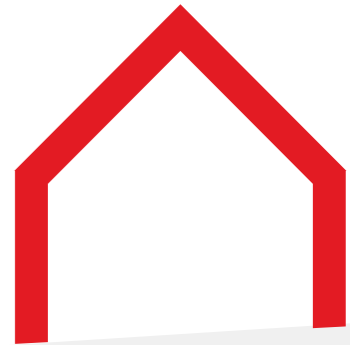
In September we opened the doors at our new college centre, Old Town Hall, in Wallington. Our students have settled in and have been exploring the local community. It is wonderful to be back in Wallington and build new partnerships. For example, students are linking with Wallington Library to attend a weekly sensory story session. We are also delighted to have hosted, in partnership with the community, a Christmas shopping event during Wallington Festival.

Prince's Trust

The Prince's Trust is a great way for young people to gain skills to fulfil their potential, and our students, are pleased to be participating in the Prince's Trust Achiever Award. Students are completing modules around emotional wellbeing and teamwork, gaining new skills and strategies to support mental wellbeing and increase their confidence.

Welcoming Visitors through our Doors

Many visitors have been welcomed through our doors in the last year. Sir Ed Davey, MP for Kingston & Surbiton, visited our college centre in New Malden. Students and staff were pleased to meet Sir Ed Davey and show him around. Sir Ed Davey commented, "I was so impressed by the students, how happy and confident they are. From cooking and canine therapy to community connections and extra-curricular activities, Orchard Hill College is doing a great job with these amazing young people."



Students from VPC Carshalton were joined by Sarah Innes from the Commissioning Unit at the Department for Education. Sarah was greeted by students, Annie and Jeanet who led a tour of the site, along with Kelly Phillips, the Principal. Sarah caught a glimpse of some exciting and engaging lessons and saw the College in action.

Sarah and Kelly were also joined by John Prior, CEO of Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust, to meet and discuss future partnership working around commissioning.

New Monthly Club House Launched



Orchard Hill College has launched a monthly inclusive and accessible club night in Sutton; incorporating a live DJ set and glitter bar. Open to young people both in the College and the local community, Club House is an exciting new venture. Expect great music, dancing, fun and plenty of socialising!

Club House runs monthly at Sutton United Football Club. Get your diary ready - dates and ticket details are on our website: orchardhill.ac.uk/event/sutton-clubhouse/



Grease Lightning

Students from Southwark took to the stage and performed Grease at Southwark Playhouse. Alex and Kayisha delivered an outstanding performance in the lead roles as Danny and Sandy. Students en masse wowed everyone with branded set designs, seamless choreography, and on cue script. Staff, families and carers all enjoyed the show and were singing along.



“I am so proud of the students for their hard work and dedication to put on such a brilliant show.”

Kirsty Cottrell, Deputy Principal





Addington Valley Academy is a special Free School in Croydon for children and young people with autism and learning difficulties. The school opened in 2020 and provides 150 places for children and young people who have autism and social communication, cognitive, sensory and social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

Crystal Palace Football Club Partnership

Addington Valley Academy's partnership with Palace for Life Foundation means a great deal to everyone involved. Staff from the disability team run sessions in the playground to motivate students to get involved in sport. Principal, John Reilly explained "The sessions allow our students to have equal access to sports which can enhance their gross motor skills, social and communicating abilities, as well as improve their overall health and well-being." The Academy's relationship with the club reaches beyond sport. They recently named a new classroom Palace and Michael, from the Foundation officially opened the space. As he cut the ribbon and declared the class open he said "We're thrilled to have a classroom named after us and can't wait to see what the students achieve in their new space."



Sixth Form DIY Session

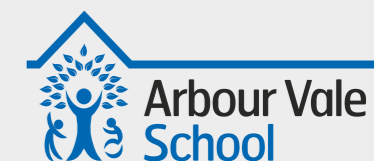
Sixth Form students enjoyed a plumbing and DIY skill session with Construction and Engineering Opportunities. They used their soldering, pipe bending and connecting skills to make their initials out of copper piping.



Best School Building

What an accolade! Addington Valley Academy was awarded 'Best School Building' at this year's National Education Business Awards. The awards recognise excellence in the education sector and were presented at a gala dinner in London's Royal Garden Hotel. This achievement is testament to an excellent collaboration between the Academy, Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust, Croydon Council and Kier Construction to design and build an outstanding learning environment with excellent facilities and resources for local children to thrive.

Addington Valley Academy also features in our article about Reading on page 35



Arbour Vale School, located in Slough is for pupils aged 2 to 19 with a range of educational needs including severe learning difficulties with profound and multiple needs.



Department for Education Visit

Arbour Vale School was delighted to welcome a delegation from the Department for Education including the Regional Director for the South East, Dame Kate Dethridge. Dame Kate met with staff and pupils. She spoke with members of the school council, dropped in on the ICT club and watched a lunchtime basketball session run with the help of sports leaders from the secondary school next door.



Music Mark Awards

The school was delighted to be nominated by Slough Council to become a Music Mark School, an award which celebrates the music curriculum.



Pepper wins Mental Health Award

Well done to Pepper, the Canine Assisted Learning therapy dog, who has won the CAL Mental Health poster competition.

Pepper's top tips for positive mental health:

- 🐾 A balanced diet
- 🐾 Exercise
- 🐾 Rest and relaxation
- 🐾 Time with family and friends
- 🐾 Talking and listening
- 🐾 Problem solving
- 🐾 Regular check ups
- 🐾 Self care
- 🐾 Treats

Excellent Exam Outcomes

There was a bumper crop of exam successes this year with more than 20 students achieving Computer Science awards, 15 Maths and 11 English awards. A special congratulations to Katie

who achieved a Distinction* in the BTEC First Award in Public Services and didn't drop a mark!



Bedelsford School, located in Kingston, supports pupils aged 2-19 with a wide range of physical disabilities, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, multi-sensory impairment and complex health needs.



MOVE Centre of Excellence

It's quadruple success here! Firstly, the school scooped the MOVE Pursue Excellence Award at the MOVE annual conference, in recognition of its use of communication and MOVE to enable the pupils to gain independence.

While earlier in the year, Bedelsford received the MOVE Centre of Excellence quality mark. This was closely followed by three members of staff qualifying as MOVE trainers which enables them to share best practice with colleagues at the school and elsewhere.

Finally, the school was awarded the MOVE Gold quality mark in recognition of the work undertaken to embed the programme for all pupils.



Leading Parent Partnership Award

In the summer, Bedelsford School achieved the Leading Parent Partnership Award. This award recognises the work the school fulfils in partnership with parents and carers. The final report stated, "There is a real sense of community at Bedelsford and parents feel a full part of this, and as a community they celebrate every success and achievement of each pupil and face challenges together."



Best Practice with TA's Award

The school was also delighted to receive the Best Practice with Teaching Assistants' Award. The final verification report highlighted the expertise of the TAs, "Bedelsford School is a school where TAs feel valued and supported and part of a cohesive team where the talents, expertise and experience they have is used effectively and where they feel listened to both as individuals and collectively."

Brantridge School, West Sussex supports boys aged 6-12 with social, emotional and mental health needs, autistic spectrum conditions, including those with Asperger's syndrome, and those with a diagnosis of ADHD and associated learning difficulties.

Eco World Book Week

World Book Day celebrations had an environmental theme with every class reading 'Mother Earth is weeping' by Claire Donald and using it to create art, writing and drama.

The boys loved reading the book and engaged with the topics it raises including global warming, plastic pollution, deforestation and the refugee crisis. In keeping with the theme, pupils wore costumes that were either homemade, re-used or recycled. The highlight of the week was a whole school protest in which pupils used their design skills to make environmental messages stand out on placards. Some focussed on saving our planet and global warming, while others chose messages against deforestation in line with their curriculum topics.



Artsmark Silver Award

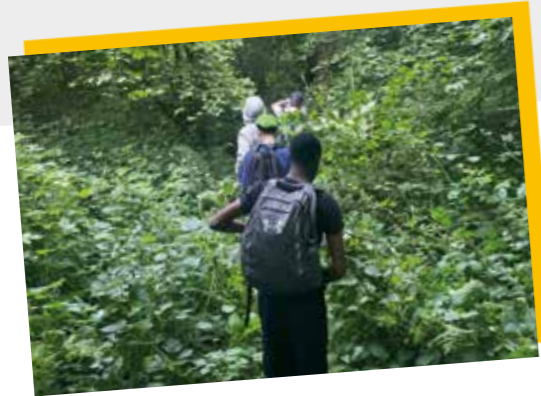
Staff and pupils celebrated achieving the Artsmark Silver Award. To achieve this award, the school had to develop its arts and culture provision and embed it into the curriculum.

Art is used to support topic work and the use of Drama in English has led to improved writing outcomes. The Arts are utilised to provide a WOW start to topics and to showcase pupils' understanding. The school also celebrated Access all Arts week with several workshops and activities.

Dr Darren Henley OBE, Chief Executive of the Arts Council, said: "Becoming an Artsmark school demonstrates that through offering a broad, balanced and creative curriculum, young people have the opportunity to develop character and resilience, increasing their knowledge, curiosity and skills that will remain with them through to adult life."



Carew Academy, an outstanding special school situated at the edge of Beddington Park in Wallington. It has 230 students aged 7-18 with a wide range of ability levels and additional learning needs, including complex needs.



Duke of Edinburgh Award Expeditions

Students have been busy completing the physical, skill and volunteering sections of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and in May and June embarked on their Bronze and Silver expeditions.

Students illustrated the school values throughout, showing ambition, independence, caring and resilience. Thanks to strong teamwork, they completed all tasks and challenges that were thrown their way, despite hiking during some of the hottest days of the year. Having successfully completed their awards students have also received certificates.

Sutton's Student Voice Panel

Carew Academy proudly hosted Sutton's Student Voice Panel. The panel consisted of 10 schools and representatives from the local police force with the theme of personal safety.

As hosts, Carew students showcased their work and delivered their views and knowledge - making some excellent points regarding online safety and staying safe in the community.



Students showed impeccable courage standing up and presenting in front of peers and visitors, with one student from Carew who delivered a short speech, receiving a standing ovation.



Royal Navy STEM Morning

The Royal Navy STEM Engagement Team received a warm welcome from upper school students who participated in a practical session in STEM applications.

They built electrical circuits that transferred electrical energy into movement energy to make a propeller fly. They also learnt about how pneumatic devices work by connecting hoses to direct pressurised air through a variety of components to work a piston.

Coding skills were also developed with students using block coding to control a 'Sphero' robotic ball allowing the navigation of its speed, direction, light and sound effects. Students and staff thoroughly enjoyed all activities, and meeting and talking with the Royal Navy Team. One student declared "This is the best day ever!".

Sharing Best Practise

Dysart School is pleased to offer training and support to colleagues in mainstream schools to promote wider inclusion. It has hosted several workshops throughout the year, including one called 'Same Destinations, Different Paths' which highlighted the need to think creatively about ways to deliver the national curriculum to students with additional needs.

All Aboard the Learning Bus

Every class thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to climb aboard the Learning Bus that visited. The bus was joined by a police car, which pupils were able to sit in and talk to the friendly police officers. The highlight of the day was having an opportunity to toot the horn on the bus and turn on the police car's siren which made for a noisy day! The visits helped familiarise pupils and alleviate concerns about travelling by bus or asking a police officer for help.



There is a further article on Page 38 about Careers Education at Dysart School.

Dysart School, Surbiton, provides for pupils aged 4-19 with a range of severe and complex learning needs. In addition to the main site, it runs two satellite sites.



Fundraising for New Playground Equipment

Working with the CiaO Foundation, students helped to host a charity lunch for 50 local people at Langley's restaurant in Surbiton. Students helped lay tables and greet guests. They also helped with fundraising by making and selling gingerbread biscuits and painted canvases. The money raised went towards new playground equipment, which was installed at one of the satellite sites in the Summer term.



It was also wonderful to refurbish the Oasis, sensory garden and outdoor gym thanks to generous donations from the Saxton Family, the Rotary Club, and Dysart Champions (the School's PTA). All three additions to its outdoor learning spaces are being enjoyed by pupils on all sites.



Grafham Grange School is a special school for 70 students aged 10 to 16 with social, emotional and mental health needs. It is situated in 42 acres of beautiful Surrey countryside in Bramley offering significant opportunities for outdoor learning.



Meet Clemmie

Clemmie is a 7-month-old Cockapoo puppy who joined the School in June at 10 weeks old. In that time, she has been getting to know staff and students and has enjoyed many cuddles!

Since returning after the Summer holidays, Clemmie has been attending therapy sessions with students and has completed puppy training and a junior course at the Haslemere & District Dog Training Club. She will soon complete her bronze, silver and gold good citizen dog training awards. Clemmie has also been enrolled on the Dog Mentor Course enabling her to help students in class early next year.

Inspirational Nature at RHS

Year 7 students recently visited RHS Wisley to experience the gardens and participate in an 'Inspirational Nature' workshop. The different shapes and textures of plants were explored and students created their own clay models.

They also planted seedlings and didn't let the wet weather stop them from taking a run around the lake!



We are the Champions

At the start of the season, years 7-9 students entered the Inclusive Football League at Fulham Football Club.

They competed in tournaments every half term against other special schools. Points were awarded based on performance and also on respect.

After playing an extremely competitive set of fixtures, Grafham Grange was crowned overall winner of the championship and were presented with the Performance Cup at the final. Yet the team was most proud to receive the Respect Cup.

Nightingale Community Academy, Wandsworth, is a school for boys aged 5-19 who have social emotional and mental health needs.

Thank You for the Music

Music at Nightingale Community Academy has received a big boost from several generous donations which has enabled the purchase of new instruments, music tuition and drumming workshops. Many pupils are interested in music technology and in response, funds have also purchased electronic equipment to enable pupils to compose and play their own compositions.

Primary pupils have been working with Wandsworth Music Service and boys in Years 5 and 6 sang at the Wandsworth Brighter Sounds concert in the Royal Albert Hall in March. A group of Year 7 and 8 pupils also had an amazing opportunity to work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and students from other special schools, to compose and perform their own composition, The World is Ours.

It has been fantastic to see music embedded across the school thanks to an injection of funding and the student's enthusiastic participation in these opportunities. Future plans include launching a school radio station!

Inclusive Football with Fulham FC



The school's footballers have been really enjoying termly trips to the Fulham FC training ground for the Inclusive Schools League fixtures. They are one of 13 local schools and 280 young footballers with disabilities or special educational needs who have the opportunity to play competitive football at a world class facility. The teams are split in Key Stage 3 and 4 age groups and compete for two trophies - the Standard League Title, as well as a Respect League Title.



St Dominic's School, a special school in Godalming, Surrey, stands in 56 acres of wooded grounds with ample space for outdoor learning activities. The school provides for 150 pupils between the ages of 7 – 19, who have a range of academic abilities and complex needs and a primary diagnosis of speech language and communication needs and/or autistic spectrum conditions.

World Mental Health Day

The whole school came together to mark World Mental Health Day and show its support for young people's mental health. It is estimated that 70-80% of children and adults with autism have experienced poor mental health in their lifetime. Throughout the day they looked at how to break down barriers and misconceptions, working towards an understanding that experiencing poor mental health can happen to anyone and the importance of communicating feelings.



The school achieved the 'Excelling' Accreditation from Innovating Minds. This is an outstanding recognition of a whole school approach to mental health. The team is proud of how well students are supported during experiences of poor mental health through counselling, ELSA, drawing and talking, PAT dogs, healing together and other interventions.

World Book Day Wonders

Pupils had fun dressing up as characters from their favourite books, from Spiderman to Mary Poppins, they had it all!

World Book Day activities took place all day, including a treasure hunt around the school grounds. Pupils also listened to stories read by friends or family members. Meanwhile, there were many bargains to be had at the Friends of St Dominic's epic book sale, with books priced at just 20p,

students enjoyed rummaging through the incredible number of donations, as there was something for everyone. They also enjoyed wonderful workshops on 'The Tempest' and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by the Shakespeare company 'Finding the Will'.



Passing the assessment for the Leading Parent Partnership Award

A highlight of the report is the following extract taken from parental feedback:

"Parental satisfaction with the school is very high, with parents happy that their children are learning in a safe and stimulating environment. They feel that staff are accessible and supportive, with a sound knowledge of every child, 'They are accepted for who they are' and, 'They look at their potential'. During the verification, parents met, shared their own stories and their appreciation of school, 'School has been unbelievably supportive.'"

St Philip's School, Chessington for pupils aged 9 -19 with a wide range of ability levels and additional learning needs, including complex autism.



Attachment Aware Award

St Philip's School achieved the Attachment Aware School's Bronze Award and is now considered an AfC Virtual School Attachment and Trauma Aware School, following an extensive staff training programme.



Sir Ed Davey Visit

Sir Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrat party and local MP visited the school to discuss the careers programme and possible future collaborations to broaden the opportunities available for students.

Cricket Award

The school was delighted to be awarded the Don Rowan Cricket Award for the fourth time at the Cricket Society Awards. Cricket is very much part of the PE curriculum and Surrey coaches work closely with the teaching team to offer a weekly after school club.

St Philip's School also features in our article about Animal Therapies on Page 48



Building Careers

As part of the careers programme, students have enjoyed special interest careers trips ranging from visiting building sites to radio stations. The idea behind these visits is to provide students with experience of real-life working environments, in sectors that have captured their imagination.



Eva riding to success

Well done to Eva who was named Most Improved Rider by the coaches at the Riding for Disabled Charity.

She was presented with a rosette by the Duchess of Edinburgh, in the charity's annual Fancy Dress Parade in Windsor Great Park.

The Link School specialises in meeting the needs of 148 students from 4-18 with speech, language and communication difficulties including autistic spectrum conditions and Pathological Demand Avoidance. In addition to the primary and secondary sites, it also has a satellite provision which provides a safe and nurturing environment for autistic young people who show demand avoidant profiles.



MP Visit

Elliott Colburn, MP for Wallington and Carshalton recently visited the 3 Link School sites. He was keen to see the speech, language and communication strategies in practice at the Primary and Secondary. He said of his visit "The school and its staff are doing brilliant work for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties."

Mr Colburn also visited the satellite site to learn more about Pathological Demand Avoidance, and said "The site provides nurturing, inclusive environment for young people displaying demand avoidant profiles. It really is one of a kind, and it's a privilege to say we have such a provision within the constituency." He was so impressed with both the students and their learning environment, Mr Colburn intends to table this as a discussion for Ministers in the Department for Education and the Houses of Parliament.



Residential Trip to High Ashurst Camp

Key Stage 4 and 5 students attended a residential trip at the High Ashurst camp. It is set in 56 acres of woodland on Box Hill, near Dorking, in the tranquil Surrey Hills. The camp helps develop the students' personal, social, physical and emotional health outcomes through the many adventurous activities on offer. Over five days, students participated in low ropes, high ropes, climbing, woodland skills, archery, mountain biking, fire lighting, orienteering and team challenges. They also enjoyed two campfires for which they collected wood, and prepared and lit the bonfire themselves using flint stones. Once the fire was roaring, they ate marshmallows, participated in sing-a-longs and listened to campfire stories.



Chick Hatching Project

Each year pupils and students excitedly await the arrival of a special incubator containing a bundle of eggs which they will watch hatch and welcome to the world. They nurture the little hatchlings through their first few weeks whilst learning about their life cycle and development. Some children enjoy handling the chicks and find them 'cute and calming'.

The PRIDE Academy, Hillingdon supports pupils aged 11-19 with social, emotional and mental health needs.



End of Term Awards

At the end of every term, student progress is celebrated by inviting parents and carers to a Big Breakfast and Award Ceremony. Highlights of the year include the number of 100% attendance awards presented to students gaining Functional Skills awards.



Enterprising Endeavours

Each term staff organise an Enterprise Day where students are split into groups to plan and pitch a business idea. In the Summer term, students were tasked with creating a new paintballing company and in the Autumn, they were challenged to create a new soft drinks company. A local business kindly donated to fund a prize trip for each winning team so it is always hotly contested!

Tea and Talk

A 'Tea and Talk' event held for World Mental Health Day invited students and their families to come and enjoy tea and biscuits and communicate their feelings in a safe space. It was a very positive day, in which parents and students were able to unwind and express any concerns or worries.



Urban Flyers

For STEM week, a company called Urban Flyers brought robots and drones into the Academy. Students had the chance to customise the robots using Scratch programming. They programmed the robots to navigate an obstacle course and race against each other!

Kidzania Trip

Students had plenty of fun exploring Kidzania, in West London and trying out various jobs including car mechanics and floristry. They also produced some eye-catching newspaper front pages and took turns as interviewers and interviewees in the radio studio. It was a hands-on way for students to think about work experience.



The Skills Hub in Hillingdon offers an alternative provision to mainstream education for pupils aged 5-19 to prepare them for adult life and employment.

New Home

The Skills Hub moved into its brand-new purpose-built school at the beginning of 2023. Students and staff soon settled into their new environment and have been enjoying the specialist teaching and sports facilities.

Class of 2023

The class of 2023 graduated in style and celebrated the achievements of this year's leavers. In a speech thanking staff on behalf of all students, Bobbi said, "My old school looked at my past, The Skills Hub gave me a future. You have given us the tools to go on and be great."



House of Parliament Visit

Citizenship and history students visited the Houses of Parliament, to learn about the Government and how laws are passed in this country.



Summer Fair

To celebrate the move, a Summer Fair and STEM Careers event was held. This attracted the Mayor of Hillingdon and several local firms and apprenticeship providers to come together and talk to the students about opportunities after they leave school. There were also fun activities to take part in including fair ground games, controlling robots and the pit stop challenge with the car mechanics team.

Silver DofE Award

This year for the first time ever at The Skills Hub, students completed their Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award. As part of their expedition in the Lake District, they completed an ascent up the Old Man of Coniston a mountain with a height of 802 metres!



Councillor Clare Curran Visits

Councillor Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education was recently welcomed on a visit to the Academy. Clare lives locally, and Special Education Needs is one of her key areas of responsibility.

Year 7 students created a series of welcome posters and were excited to present them to the Cabinet Member.

Principal, Annabelle Thomas and Laurie Cornwell, Deputy CEO of Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust showed Clare around the site introducing her to students and staff. Clare was impressed by the range of facilities including a state-of-the-art boxing gym, sensory room and reading hub. She loved meeting the therapy dog and was keen to understand how students are supported to be successful after school.

Gone Fishing

Students had the opportunity to go fishing at Henfold lake which is nestled in the beautiful Surrey countryside. It was a glorious day and the boys favoured being outside and learning a new skill. Two fish were caught and released safely. There were some excellent displays of teamwork with the more experienced fishermen helping those who had never fished before.

You can read about how Unified Academy use boxing to build emotional strength on page 43

Unified Academy located in Dorking is a special school for up to 120 boys aged 9 to 16 who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some students also have moderate learning and attachment difficulties.



Car Mechanics at GASP Motor Project

Year 10 and 11 students attend the GASP Motor Project one day per week where they work towards a vocational AQA accredited course in basic motor mechanics and practical engineering skills. They receive specialist, practical, hands-on learning within a focused, personalised and disciplined framework at a fully equipped custom-built workshop in Albury.

It is a real highlight for students who enjoy a practical approach to learning. One student said they would love to pursue mechanics fulltime as he has learnt how to strip down an engine and now understands how a brake system works. His tutor said: "Not only is the course preparing students for work it also contributes to their positive personal development and wellbeing".





Orchard Hill College is thrilled to mark a significant milestone - our 40-year anniversary! The College's journey began in 1983 as a small hospital provision. Initially, the College occupied a modest unit on the Queen Mary's Hospital premises, providing essential support to residents living on-site. Back then, our dedicated team consisted of just 15 staff members. Fast forward to the present day, and we've grown to an impressive team of more than 270 professionals.

Originally established as part of the NHS, the College received support from the London Borough of Sutton and Carshalton College to secure funding.

When the Learning and Skills Act came into

effect, we became an Independent Specialist Provider (ISP). Our overarching goal was to embed ourselves within the heart of the community, expanding our reach to engage more young people and continue to support hospital residents by offering them increased opportunities within the community.

Our first venture into the community was in 2004 when we relocated to the historic Old Town Hall



in Wallington. From there, we've maintained a steadfast commitment to situating our centres in areas where our students live. We've since established a presence in Southwark, Uxbridge, and Kingston.

In the early years, the College primarily catered to students with profound multiple learning disabilities. Over the years, we expanded to include students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) and various other complex needs. We've also become a hub for staff members pursuing their teacher training courses.

In 2013, the College took a significant step by establishing Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust (OHC&AT) in response to a request from Sutton Council and the Department for Education (DfE) to assist a struggling school in need of improvement. Today, the Trust is home to 14 SEND schools spanning London, Surrey, Sussex, and Berkshire.

The College's journey has been nothing short of remarkable. With nine centres dispersed across London and Surrey, we currently provide support to over 400 students, collaborating with 27 local authorities. Our commitment remains unwavering – to support and empower each student to achieve their aspirations and goals, whilst developing skills to become more independent in their community.

The ethos and core values of the College have remained at the heart of our 40-year journey, while we continually seek innovative ways to improve and guarantee the best possible outcomes for our students. We look forward to the next 40 years with the same unwavering passion and commitment to providing outstanding educational opportunities.



40th Anniversary Celebrations

The various celebrations at the College marking its tremendous 40-year milestone have been truly remarkable, such as, the annual Outstanding Achievement Awards which included a ceremonial cake cutting and celebrations with the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Councillor Rob Geleit.



Students and staff, from all our college centres, came together to take part in our 80's themed '40 miles for 40 Years' sponsored walk. Despite the very wet and windy weather, we collectively achieved more than 550 miles, a reflection of the resilience and unity within the College community.



The conclusion of the day was an 80's themed party, adding a joyful and memorable touch to the celebrations.



Supported Internships open the doors to real jobs



Supported internship programmes play a crucial role in helping young people move from education to the world of work. These programmes are designed to provide additional support and guidance to individuals who may face challenges in securing employment independently.

Gaining invaluable real-life experience in the workplace, combined with extra support, supported internships are just one of the ways that Orchard Hill College helps students who are thinking about their next steps after education.

A journey that transforms lives

What are supported internships?

Structured work-based study programmes for 17-24 year olds with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and want to move into employment.

The programme includes:

- ✓ Work rotations
- ✓ Support of an expert coach
- ✓ Personalised study programme

Supported internships create a pathway to sustained paid-for employment, and place students into jobs that they really enjoy as Melissa Shepherd, Head of College Work-based Learning, explains, “Our one-year programme gives students an opportunity to shine - they gain transferable skills valued by employers. At the end of the programme many receive job offers to do a job they love!”

These programmes are a collaborative approach, between the College as the education provider, a host business and a supported employment agency (job coaching). “Our unique collaborative approach allows students to develop academic, work and life skills – and this is what sets it aside from other employability programmes, and makes it a success,” continues Melissa.

Since the programme started three years ago, students have worked in many organisations including The London Borough of Hillingdon, The London Borough of Sutton, Achieving for Children, The Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Where do students work?

The College partners with host organisations including local authorities, charities and hospitals.



Becoming work ready!

Following an induction period, students swiftly move into getting a taste of the working world. Attending their chosen place of work five days a week between 9am and 3.30pm, up to 80% of a student's day is designated to gaining hands-on experience.

“I really like the structure of the course and it is well organised. I have got to meet lots of new people and feel a sense of belonging being a part of the supported internship,” says current student Jordan.

For the remainder of the time, students find themselves in the on-site base room at the start of the day. Here, college staff deliver a range of tutorials on areas such as health and safety at work or online safety. At the end of each day students reconvene

once again for a final debrief.

Part of the collaboration sees students receive support from a job coach. Melissa explains, “Students are integrated as employees into real work environments.

They are important team members and attend meetings, and complete tasks independently (with support from an expert job coach initially). The students also have a mentor in every department in which they work.”



“On the supported internship, I have learnt so many things, including patience, organisation, increased confidence and how to work successfully with higher management.”

Yousef, student

To provide a wide breadth of insight, and the opportunity to try out different roles and work with a broad range of people, there are three rotations in different departments. In a local authority for instance this could be in administration, the leisure centre or parks and gardens.

Uplifting experience

Positive impact

- ✓ Enables financial independence
- ✓ Builds confidence and self-esteem
- ✓ Develops social life and friendships
- ✓ Improves wellbeing
- ✓ Enables valuable insight into a working environment
- ✓ Develops transferrable skills

Those who have completed the programme have built many strong transferrable skills, a key outcome of the programme. “An important distinction is that this is not work experience. The students are doing real jobs and learn skills and behaviours that employers really value,” states Melissa.

For many, it’s more than just a job, it’s about independence, being part of a community and building connections with others.

The programme also ensures preparation for adulthood including health and wellbeing, friendships and relationships, independent living and employment – equipping students further to move into full-time employment.

Equipping young people for future careers

The College’s growing programme has delivered significant impact, with 81% of students gaining permanent paid employment. For those who do not receive a job offer, job coaches help them apply and find roles elsewhere, providing ongoing support for up to nine months.

Melissa concludes, “With a big push from the Department for Education encouraging local authorities to double the number of internships in the next three years, we’re hoping to extend our scope. We would also like to welcome more host organisations from other industries, such as hospitality and retail to give students a variety of experience.”

Currently, a very talented and enthusiastic group of 34 interns are making a valuable contribution to their host organisations, and it is working very well for them. Moving forward, the College would

like the message to reach more young people, parents and carers; supported internships empower young people, who don’t want to be in a classroom environment all of the time, to discover the exciting world of work and build their confidence to become valuable employees.



Orchard Hill College Academy Trust celebrates its 10th Anniversary!

The Trust was established in 2013 by Orchard Hill College so the College could share its expertise and support specialist schools. Carew Academy, then known as Carew Manor, was the first school to join the Trust and over the next few years a further 14 schools joined as well as a new free school, Addington Valley Academy. As the Trust celebrates its 10th anniversary, it is now one of the largest providers of specialist provision in the country supporting more than 2000 students.



Celebrating 10 years of OHC&AT

The Trust has not stood still these past 10 years and in addition to the number of schools that have joined, there has been significant development and change across all the academies to ensure we meet the needs of current and future pupils and learners. Some key developments include:

The PRIDE Academy (formerly Young People's Academy), and The Skills Hub the Trust's only alternative provision, are both in brand new buildings and have been able to increase their intake as a result of additional space. The PRIDE Academy has welcomed its first intake of Sixth Form students and The Skills Hub is now able to offer places to primary and post-16 students.

Dysart School has opened two satellite sites to meet the need for high quality SEND places and The Link School has opened a specialist provision for students displaying Pathological Demand Avoidance profiles.



The Trust has also sought to improve the quality of provision: pre-conversion 37% of the schools were judged by Ofsted to be Inadequate and 21% Requires Improvement. By working with Ofsted and using in-house expertise, 86% are now judged to be Good or Outstanding. This is in line with national averages and well above the statistics for SEND schools.

The Trust believes everyone's voice is bigger within OHC&AT and together it uses the power of advocacy to champion the young people it serves. OHC&AT's ambition is to continue to build and strengthen its expertise, and to continue in its mission of working together to transform lives. We look forward to the next 10 years!



Innovative Approaches to Reading

Capturing the magic of reading beyond books

Fostering a love of reading can increase a child's confidence and improve their abilities emotionally and academically, and OHC&AT takes the reading experience for its students beyond just books. This enables pupils and students to discover new and exciting ways to engage with reading, sparking curiosity whilst also building other key skills.

Here's a glimpse into the bespoke mix of multisensory methods which are encouraging students to play and explore the magic of reading in a more interactive, appealing and accessible way.

Addington Valley Academy: accessible reading

Addington Valley Academy is igniting its students' love of stories by helping them connect with reading via tailored pathways. Vice Principal for Primary, Anna Huzzey explains, "There isn't a one size fits all approach to reading for our students. It's not just about books, it's about communication, discovery, expression and integration. We create an accessible, personalised plan to motivate and engage students and to help open up their world."

To empower students to communicate and express their preferences, a Picture Exchange Communication (PECs) system is utilised to great effect. This enables students to recognise single pictures or symbols which they may see in everyday life, such as a bus stop sign or whether a shop is open or closed, and exchange the pictures for actions or items.



Spotlight: Sight Reader Pathway

(for students who read words 'on sight' without decoding them)

Harry, aged 7, was so fascinated by the story 'We're going on a bear hunt,' that he repeated sections of it on a loop. To capture the adventurous, fun side of this classic tale, the story was initially acted out in the classroom, then taken to the playground enabling him to march around recounting the words.

An outdoor sensory PE session was also created, inviting Harry to go on his own bear hunt. He walked through different textures, played in the mud, and felt the crisp fresh air on his skin. Luke, PE teacher said, "We focused on the narrative and the sensory experiences of the story. Sensory play helps students improve their fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination and body and spatial awareness, all of which are essential for growth." Although Harry loved looking at books, he was unable to connect the words with the pictures.

Through using the PECs system, alongside repetition work with symbols, a multisensory approach was gradually introduced using basic phonics. Harry is already beginning to access words around the school. He will see a word, point to the letters and try to read it.

He also has fun recounting The Three Little Pigs to his friends through using story trays, which encourage tactile engagement using stimulating objects to bring stories to life.



Spotlight: Functional Pathway

(for complex and vulnerable, or non-verbal students)

Casper joined the school from Reception as a bubbly child with vocalisation but no words. There was no waving, no greetings, and even eye contact was a struggle. His challenging behaviour was from sheer frustration that he couldn't vocalise his wants, needs or feelings.

Using the PECs system, Casper quickly realised that through giving a picture, he could receive what he wanted. His behaviour improved, and he soon progressed onto sentence strips, adding in attributes such as big or small. At this point, his verbal language began to develop, and he started to come up to the teachers and say what he wanted.

Teacher Ashton said, "In a short space of time Casper went from preverbal and not being able to tell us what he wanted or needed, to speaking in sentences using attributes to communicate."



Nightingale Community Academy: nurturing reading



Every week the Literacy Nurture Group meets, and pupils are paired with volunteers. Working on a one-to-one basis, the volunteers have built a strong rapport with the pupils and incredibly, in some instances their reading age has improved by more than two years in just six months.

Madeleine Merrifield, coordinator said, "We are very grateful to our wonderful volunteers who are so generous with their time and are making such a difference to our boys."

Bedelsford School: support stories

All classrooms have been transformed with a comfy and welcoming reading corner, which includes personalised books to help with students' learning. These are 'support stories' written by the speech and language therapy team to help pupils in their everyday life, which is having meaningful impact.

One pupil who became distressed by hospital visits, had a story created to explain what would happen at their next visit. School and home joined forces to read this story to the pupil every day, and as the pupil enjoyed role play, the school also provided doctors and nurses dressing up uniforms, bandages, a toy stethoscope and mask.

"Just before the pupil was due to go into hospital, they mimed putting on the mask and going to sleep as had been explained in the story. It was a big step in expressing understanding and the family has since reported that hospital visits are much less traumatic," said Assistant Principal Jessica Webb.



Carew Academy: story book corner

In each classroom, the inviting and relaxing atmosphere of Story Book Corner inspires and encourages students to look at books or read by themselves, share books with others or listen to storytelling.

A through-school poster campaign has also been designed to engage reluctant and budding readers, and encourage them to relax in a story book corner where they can lose themselves in story after story. At Carew they are committed to increasing their "reading miles" by embedding a school culture that values and supports reading for pleasure. Tutor times have been extended to 45 minutes to include

designated reading time every day. Most students are read to, with teachers choosing a variety of high-quality texts to engage their students, breathing life into the stories by reading them aloud. Research tells us that daily story time is a powerful driver for improving pupils' reading and all-round education, as well as having a positive impact on their social and emotional wellbeing. It can also be a time of genuine enjoyment for the whole class, a shared experience sparking reflection and discussion. In addition, a lunchtime reading club for students takes place twice a week and a Staff Book Club meets once per half term. At Carew Academy, they are all readers!

Careers Education at Dysart School



“The [careers] creativity and innovation shown by leaders at Dysart is inspirational.”

The Careers Enterprise Company
(the national body for careers education in England)

Conquering the careers challenge at Dysart School

Dysart School is no stranger to pushing the boundaries to ensure the best outcomes for its students. With two satellite schools under its wing, and an Outstanding Ofsted rating spanning more than 10 years, the team has now taken on its next challenge.

Across the country, the careers provision accessible to young people with severe and complex learning disabilities, rarely meets their needs - a situation

which staff want to transform, and with more than 160 students and demand growing, change is paramount.

However, the term ‘career’ at Dysart does not necessarily mean paid employment, but instead a purposeful destination on leaving school; effectively equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed for the next stage in their life.



Initiating careers change

In the UK, schools are required to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks, a framework for high quality careers provision. However, principal Leigh Edser said, “The Gatsby Benchmarks are more tailored to mainstream education and do not always apply to our learners. To improve our careers offering, we had to get creative with linking our programme to the framework.”

The school has since demonstrated how its provision strongly aligns with the Gatsby Benchmarks in some very unique ways - a move which has also provided an opportunity to highlight how the benchmark could ensure it's more applicable to SEND schools. Leigh continues, “We want to encourage better understanding and ensure real inclusivity. We hope that our insight and approach will help shape future change.”



Students staff the popular **Snack and Sell** shop which runs on a Monday lunch time

Encountering the world of work

Many exciting and innovative strands to the careers provision are mapped out across key stages and pathways, and aligned with the Gatsby framework in a way that has not previously been achieved.

For instance, to strengthen the careers pathway and maximise students' encounters with employers in the surrounding areas, high quality relationships have been formed with businesses including Langley's restaurant in Surbiton. Steph Cruse, vice principal, explains, "Getting businesses on-board that can meet the needs of our learners who have the potential to access work, is a huge challenge. However, some local businesses have the right provision in place."

In collaboration with The CiaO Foundation, Langley's hosted a charity evening to raise funds for the school, which jointly provided a careers opportunity. Students helped market the event, designed menus, and helped with the setup, including laying tables and meeting and greeting guests. Students showed their enterprising side further via a market stall selling handmade items, with profits going towards a class trip.



Students sold hand decorated biscuits to raise funds for a class trip at the Langley's lunch.

On-site occupations

Even the school itself has become a valuable source of careers opportunities through an internal job fair in which students applied for on-site roles. "The job fair was a huge hit! We received a selection of CVs - either written, images or video. Staff interviewed shortlisted students, with some receiving job offers for roles in hospitality and catering right through to admin and site maintenance," explains Steph.

Other students assisted with open events, welcoming prospective parents, and students, with one visiting parent exclaiming, "We loved joining the tour. We love how calm the school is and how many children are out in the community, and the opportunities (even within the open day) for children to take on responsibilities and grow in confidence. You are a fantastic school and your leadership shines through."

Meanwhile, another enterprising group of students have recently opened a café in a local church. The aptly named 'Dysart Delights' provides first-hand experience of running a small business in

the local community and is a space for the public to retreat to for a morning coffee and homemade cake. This opportunity, supported by Christ Church, has given Dysart students the chance to practice their customer service and practical skills such as displaying products and taking payment, to ordering stock, and marketing. There is even the possibility of offering an external delivery service, a Dysart Deliveroo!

Collectively, these amazing developments help develop students' confidence and social communication skills in a workplace environment; raising the quality of careers provision for young people with complex needs.



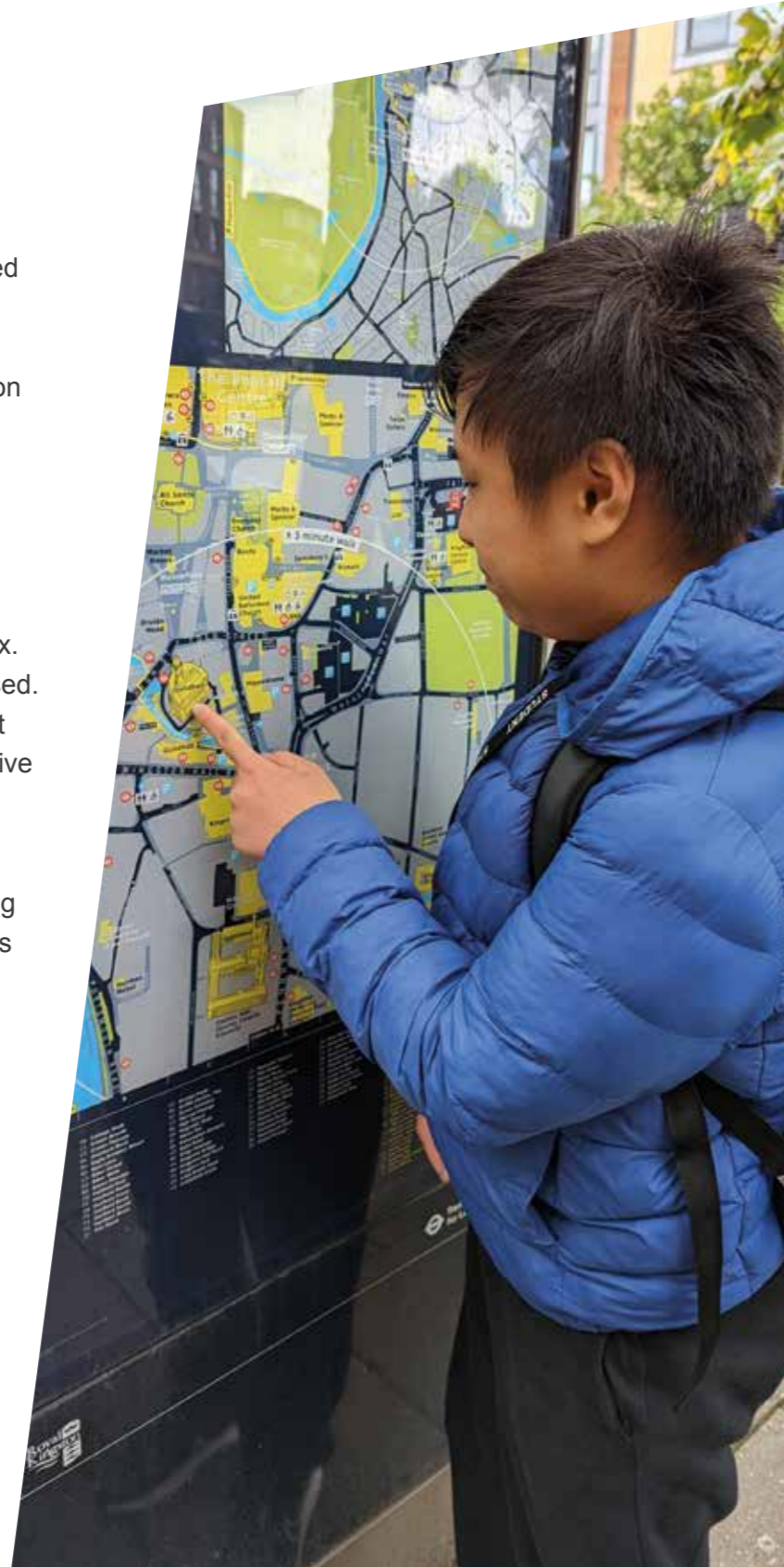
Students help with everyday tasks around the school and are encouraged to take on additional roles for example baking cakes to raise funds.

Best practice careers provision

Recently an independent careers impact review, undertaken by the national body for careers education in England, has paid tribute to the School's efforts. The compelling report recognised the extraordinary achievements, stating, 'The creativity and innovation shown by leaders at Dysart is inspirational. Through a tenacious vision to enable meaningful lifelong social inclusion, the school are creating student careers learning journeys that include relevant encounters and experience that meets students' needs.'

"We've successfully demonstrated how to meet the Gatsby framework by thinking outside the box. We're thrilled that our efforts have been recognised. Our children have a voice, a place and an impact on society. It's about making careers truly inclusive and empowering students to live their dreams," concludes Leigh.

There is an ambition to enable meaningful lifelong social inclusion for students, and Dysart's careers approach is synonymous with this intent. It is successfully shaping what careers provision can look like in a complex education setting, and its learnings will enable progress for other schools, and ultimately drive change nationally.



Boxing Ring at Unified Academy



Building emotional strength in the boxing ring at the Unified Academy

The discipline of boxing demands a high level of skill, commitment, and strength, both physically and mentally - and whilst some may dismiss the sport as too aggressive, Unified Academy has proven that it instils discipline, resilience, and respect in young people with complex behavioural needs.

Aligned with the school's values of showing one another respect and compassion, boxing has been introduced over the past few years to more than 160 students aged 9–16 with social, emotional, and mental health needs. "Boxing is embedded into our culture, it's part of what we do. The pride that the students display through boxing, for both themselves and the school, is striking. We're certainly breaking stereotypes," explains Mrs Thomas, Principal.

Maximising morale

Assistant Principal, Mr Nicholls introduced low-level boxing in the PE curriculum several years ago, and it has since become a key part of the school. In fact, Unified Academy's unique journey has taken an exciting turn and most recently has been gifted a state-of-the-art professional boxing ring.

In the early stages there wasn't a specialist facility or resources on-site. Instead, any available space was utilised, be it the sports hall or on occasions, even classrooms.

"There are so many brilliant moments that happen around boxing at Unified Academy."

Mrs Thomas, Principal

The sport rapidly gained momentum and following the introduction of boxing as part of the GCSE PE qualification, many students chose the discipline as their assessment activity. As interest grew, two additional ABA (Amateur Boxing Alliance) qualified coaches from a grassroots amateur boxing club were recruited to provide one-to-one, two-to-one and small group sessions.

In tandem, Friday enrichment sessions enabled students to not only benefit from the coaching of a boxing instructor for the training side, but also for personal development such as teamwork and leadership skills. "Attendance on a Friday soared because the students wanted to take part. By responding to their feedback and getting a boxing instructor on-board, our students feel listened to, they feel valued," enthuses Mrs Thomas.



An invaluable facility – the professional boxing ring

Unified Academy has strong connections with The Unit Gym in Harlington which has always supported other schools within the Trust, with many students using its facilities. Now, with thanks to its incredibly generous donation, the professional boxing ring takes pride of place in the fitness studio at Unified Academy along with a selection of other equipment previously donated.

The team at Unit Gym said "The boxing ring is making a real difference to the lives of young people. For many boys, it's the first time that they've stepped into a boxing ring and it has boosted their confidence, self-discipline and respect for others. We have built a well-established alliance with OCH&AT, and it's a privilege to help give young people who face challenges and adversities a chance to thrive,"

Whilst the framework for the ring was constructed over the Summer, the students gained a real sense of ownership and responsibility by setting up the ropes and padding to ensure it was on track to use at the start of the Autumn term.

Today, the fitness studio houses a professional boxing ring plus a range of equipment including freestanding punch bags, hanging boxing bags, speed balls, battle ropes, medicine balls, skipping ropes, and even a sparring BOB (a training bag dummy); equipment and accessories usually found in a professional boxing gym.



Creating a sense of community

Teamwork and camaraderie between the students has improved, and students often complete press ups together or practice their boxing combinations and speed with one another using pads.

Utilised daily, the boxing ring encourages students to step out of their comfort zone and has paved the way for new opportunities, enabling the students to connect more with visitors to the school and the local community. Mrs Thomas explains, “Many students would never have interacted with external visitors before, but now they feel more comfortable and safer in their surroundings and are proud to show staff, parents and visitors a challenging 20 set combination – it’s their chance to shine.”

This passion for boxing extends beyond the school walls too, with one student travelling from Surrey to the club in Uxbridge to train. “Our strong connection with The Unit Gym provides students with an opportunity to join the local community, which for some is challenging and quite daunting. The Unit Gym is however very accommodating for our students, it’s a safe, respectful environment,” continues Mr Nicholls.

Inspiring self-confidence & trust

The staff at Unified Academy credit boxing with a multitude of benefits and there is clear respect and understanding for each other, as well as a recognition of adversity in others.

“There are so many brilliant moments that happen around boxing at the Academy, which I’m keen to harness and make a big part of what we do. I’m a huge believer in sports and its benefits - it’s good for students to have an outlet that they love. I’ll never forget a student showing me a 20 boxing combination with absolute pride, and students cheering each other on – boxing is an invaluable avenue for our students to show their true worth,” concludes Mrs Thomas.

“Boxing is an effective way for students to emotionally regulate. For instance, if a student needs a quick outlet, they come out of the classroom for 15 minutes, do some exercise and boxing in the ring and return to class in a more settled state, for more sustained periods of time.”

Mr Nicholls, Assistant Principal

Finding inner strength to overcome obstacles

Boxing has been a completely new experience for many, and staff have recognised just how meaningful it is for students’ mental health, engaging with young people in a way that other sports can’t.

Mr Nicholls explains, “When the students are boxing you can see their enjoyment. These are complex young men, yet there’s laughter, care, and compassion in the boxing ring. It helps develop a sense of worth, confidence and self-esteem, and has instilled a profound sense of discipline and respect.”

Unified Academy has also ensured cross curricula links. For instance, food tech classes draw on the health and nutrition aspect of boxing, with students acquiring a better understanding of the best foods to fuel the body and preserve energy levels. Similarly, some students use boxing towards their Duke of Edinburgh award.

On occasions, the students even bring other schoolwork into the boxing ring, and the coach has even been known to teach boxing combinations whilst also helping the students master the Pythagoras theorem!

The academic outcomes speak for themselves and this year, of the 15 students who entered the GCSE PE exam, 100% passed. “Having taught GCSE PE and recognising the challenges that students face around literacy and retention, being able to say to

them that boxing accounts for 40% of the grade, and that they can walk into the exam having already achieved that is a real boost. It makes them want to keep on trying, it creates a can-do attitude.”

Vocationally, several students who have moved into further education have selected to study sports or personal training, while one student’s ambitions are set on becoming a professional boxer.

Boxing at Unified Academy:

- Strengthens emotional wellbeing
- Raises concentration levels
- Increases self-confidence & self-belief
- Reduces feelings of loneliness
- Reduces anxiety & stress
- Enables social development
- Boosts physical fitness
- Builds understanding around nutrition & healthy eating
- Instils respect

Animal Therapy at St Philip's School

At St Philip's School there's an animal in every classroom!

Some might think that animals and schools don't mix. Yet walk through the doors at St Philip's School in Chessington and it's a prime example of exactly why it works so well.

Animals are everywhere, inside, and outside.

There are many advantages of having so many animals in the school. As positive relationships form between students and animals, improvements are evident in attention, motivation, mood, empathy, wellbeing, and more.

With animals in every classroom there is an extraordinary menagerie which greatly benefits students' emotions towards learning. Mr Walsh, principal, explains, "We are huge animal-lovers at St Philip's School, and see first-hand the powerful impact of having animals on-site."

There are many wonderful examples of positive change. If a student is showing challenging behaviour, having an animal in the room creates a calming and soothing effect. Learners also adhere to instructions better in the presence of an animal and there are improvements in classroom behaviour. Mr Walsh continues, "One of my first encounters upon joining the school was with a student with challenging behaviour, who had been excluded from another school. There were difficulties building connections, but one day he



Introducing the gang!

- African helmeted turtle
- Bearded dragon
- Chickens
- Crested geckos
- Dogs
- Fish
- Guinea pigs
- Leopard gecko
- Madagascar day gecko
- Milk snake
- Rabbits
- Tortoise

had an opportunity to hold a python across his shoulders and there was an instant change in behaviour. He was calm and able to articulate his feelings, while also showing kindness and empathy towards the snake. Today, several years on, this student has had no behavioural incidents, it has been a complete transformation."

At St Philip's School, the animals are seen as a friend or ally by students. Strong bonds are formed which creates a safe atmosphere for sharing feelings. It also encourages students to be more socially interactive, supporting relationship building.



Therapy dogs

Whilst there are animals with permanent residency, some staff bring their pets into school. Mr Henn works in the student support team and is joined every day by Bobby, his pet dog. "The presence of a therapy dog has positive emotional effects on learners and builds trust between staff and students. Our students often find it easier to discuss challenges or issues with Bobby around and talk to Bobby about their concerns while we indirectly listen. We notice positive improvements in many areas, such as communication; it directly influences mood, expressions and attitudes completely change," explains Mr Henn.



Joker is a rescue greyhound who is based in the Deputy Head's office

Meet Bobby, a therapy dog



Bobby is an 8-year-old lurcher, based in the student support centre with owner, and student support worker, Sean Henn.

Bobby likes lots of walks, interaction, and the hustle and bustle of the student support centre.

Animal interaction

There is plenty of animal-time to tap into throughout the school day, with opportunities to interact with the animals for certain educational activities and play with them during break times.

Indeed, all the animals are brought into the curriculum in interesting and unique ways. For instance, the presence of a dog when reading aloud, helps students develop an enthusiasm for reading.

In maths, students complete a range of functional maths skills through simple tasks such as counting the number of guinea pigs in the hutch or weighing

and measuring the right quantity of chicken feed. Over in science, learning has focused on temperature by reading the thermometers in the reptile vivariums and understanding how animals adapt to their environment by exploring the various species onsite. While in English, students write animal-based fables for the myths and legends module, using a school animal as their main character and sensory adjectives to create interesting sentences.



Animal Therapy at St Philip's

On other occasions, animals are taken to local primary schools. A 'Road Show' style event enables students to explain to the primary school children about how they care for the animals; an effective way to develop students' communication skills and overcome the anxiety of public speaking.

Learning extends beyond the curriculum into other areas too. "When animals die, there is learning about the circle of life and the grieving process. In recent years with the impact of Covid, some students sadly experienced bereavement, and we have worked through things with them by using analogies with the animals," confirms Mr Walsh.

A course in animal care is a popular choice for students in Key Stage 4, providing an opportunity to explore animal care industries and jobs working with animals. They also learn how to safely care for different animals and the type of hazards that could arise.

The inclusion of animals in educational settings has become increasingly popular in recent years due to the benefits for students and staff. At St Philip's School, animals are here to stay, they are part of the fabric of school life; enhancing the learning and wellbeing environment.



Horses for courses



Students in Year 10 and 11 with an interest in equestrian, have the option to enrol on a Horse Care course at the family-run Silvermere Equestrian Centre.

In a safe and calm environment, students learn how to look after horses, master basic skills such as grooming, and much more including learning about the different colours and markings on horses!

What happens to animals in the holiday

There is a whole-school approach to the welfare and wellbeing of animals at St Philip's.

When it comes to holidays and weekends, students and staff step in to look after some of the resident animals in their own homes. Other animals remain on-site and are either cared for by our caretakers or by teachers who pop-in!

Future Projects



Carew Academy will move into a purpose-designed new building in Sutton with capacity for 246 children aged 5-19.



Wings Academy will be a special school with 90 places, located in Hounslow, for children and young people aged 11- 19 with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Join the OHC&AT family and make a difference to the lives of young people

- Comprehensive training and development
- In-service teacher training delivered in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University
- Opportunities to engage with internal professional networks
- Access to counselling advice and support via Health Assured (our employee assistance programme)
- Commitment to wellbeing supported by our occupational health service and mental-health first aiders
- Scope for career progression across nine college centres, 14 academy schools and central support team
- Generous annual leave and flexible working schemes in addition to bank and public holidays and a Christmas closure period
- As part of your contract of employment you will be enrolled into a pension scheme, the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) or Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS) both of which have life cover and financial protection for your family
- Electric car lease scheme
- Enhanced parental leave schemes
- Cycle to work scheme
- Season ticket loans
- Employee referral scheme
- Discounted gym membership subscription including digital fitness
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Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust Family Magazine

In the Media

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