



Grange Drive



Birch Wood  
Vale School



Birch Wood  
Ashton House

## End of Term Whole School Newsletter 2023

It is hard to believe that this will be the end of my 7<sup>th</sup> year as Headteacher and latterly Executive Head at Birch Wood. It is amazing to think of all that we've achieved in that time and exciting to know that Birch Wood is and will continue to be a place in which our students experience the

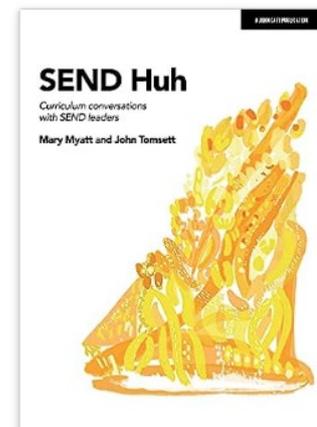


ENABLES ethos and culture. At different times in the year, I reflect on what each statement or word from our vision means and at different times one statement will stand out from the other. At the centre of ENABLES- is the word **'belonging'** and this year the importance of that word has resonated in so many ways. It has become more and more evident to me how important it is that children and young people develop the sense that they belong to a community- a place where they are known, accepted and understood. We hope that the community aspect of our school means that staff and families also get that sense of belonging at Birch Wood too.

So much of our work is about preparing students for their adult lives and this has also sharpened our focus as a school on how society responds to the wonderful diversity in our student population. Increasingly through our work we have come to

understand the challenges our students and their families may face post Birch Wood. We have started to showcase the voices of our parents and their lived experience of having a child with a disability through our new 'Ask the Expert- a Parents View' Podcasts. In November 2022 we also launched our SEND and Inclusion Hub in partnership with the Leicestershire and Rutland Teaching School Hub. Through this we have been able to use our specialist knowledge to work with schools and professionals beyond Birch Wood to improve SEND provision in other settings.

The Birch Wood curriculum has also been featured as a chapter in a new book called 'SEND Huh' by Mary Myatt and John Tomsett. Phil Leaney (Deputy- Quality of Education) and I were interviewed by the authors who used the transcript of our conversation for the chapter. In it we explain our approach to the curriculum and the impact it has on students. The authors of the book also included student Poppy Hearne's poem 'Just be yourself', which has also been recognised in a poetry competition this year. Poppy's poem highlights the challenges many students with Autism face prior to coming to Birch Wood and in society:





Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House**Just be yourself**

Changing my tone,  
So I won't be alone,  
I like the things that I hate just so I can have a mate,  
And all I hear is "just be yourself darling".

Become the person they want me to be,  
Although everyone can see,  
That this just isn't me!  
And they are all saying "just be yourself darling".

I have hopes and dreams like rowing boats down the streams,  
No one would know this fact,  
As long as I keep up this soul absorbing act,  
And again all I can hear is "just be yourself darling".

Because in a world of perfection and uniform,  
We are taught to be 'normal' and conform,  
To the standards that reduce you from being you,  
Until you no longer feel anything ...but blue.  
And I wish someone could've told me "just be yourself darling".

In this world our uniqueness defines our sense of self,  
And this system is damaging our mental health,  
But no longer will we conform for society,  
Because being you is your new priority,  
And you will say "I can just be myself darling".

We are taking a stand and turning the table.  
We are going to create a society that embraces and enables.  
Our personalities aren't a disease so stop searching for that toxic cure,  
Because you don't have to act and play the part anymore,  
and you can simply "just be yourself darling".

**Poppy Hearne**  
**Birch Wood School**  
**Age 17**



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

Our hope is by bringing together our voices we can pave the way to improve understanding for all people who have disability and/or special needs as part of their life.

### Community

Our community beyond Birch Wood remains a real feature of our school identity. This is important for our student's inclusion in society and fits in with our drive to promote understanding of disability, diversity and inclusion. Our biggest community event is also our newest; led by Deputy Head Phil Leaney, the Birch Wood 10 community running walking/event and Family Fun Day will be held on September 10<sup>th</sup> this year. This is great way to bring the community together and raise money for the school. **Please do sign up to run or come along to the family fun day.**

[www.birchwood10.co.uk](http://www.birchwood10.co.uk)

or support by sponsoring us:

[https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/BirchWoodSchoolBW10?utm\\_term=VBe7GRWYZ&fbclid=IwAR1IXViuYR-XI4UX8DC2yp9luzCtDdoJ5HNFH9cLVFzTdF2nDQ2oSnJOjo0](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/BirchWoodSchoolBW10?utm_term=VBe7GRWYZ&fbclid=IwAR1IXViuYR-XI4UX8DC2yp9luzCtDdoJ5HNFH9cLVFzTdF2nDQ2oSnJOjo0)

Recently Music Therapist Neil Eaves applied to Ragdale Hall's Community Chest for more music instruments achieving a £500 donation. To receive the cheque Neil and I attended a presentation event which allowed us to meet up with other community groups such as Breathing Space, Melton-in-Bloom, Oasis Nursery and Melton Learning Hub amongst others. We have also had continued support from the Triumph Motorcycle Owners Club and significant donations from Melton Building Society and the Romy Fund, which have enabled us to buy an additional minibus this year, which will further support our students to get active in the community. We are so grateful for all this support- it really does make the difference for our students.

Incredibly we also have staff who take on massive physical challenges beyond the workplace to raise funds for the school. This term Tom Bradley Hewell- Head of School- GD, Jordan Meads- Teacher and David Grimes- IT Manager undertook the Adidas Maverick Marathon raising almost £1600 for outdoor play equipment.

### Birch Wood College

Our outward looking approach to the curriculum has also seen the development of a new link with Melton Vale Post 16 (MV16). From September Julie Peattie will be leading our new Birch Wood College base within MV16. Students have already been in to MV16 as part of their transition and were warmly welcomed by their peers and staff at the college. Students reported that they enjoyed the new facilities and environment. This is a fantastic opportunity for our learners from Ashton House and Birch Wood Vale to access the support of Birch Wood in a more grown-up setting alongside peers and for us to promote inclusion and diversity within another learning establishment.

### Trips, community visits and residential opportunities

This academic year we have worked hard to embed trips, community visits and residential opportunities throughout our curriculum. This forward planning has enabled us to show progression from EYFS to Post 16, ensuring our students get a range of experiences throughout their Birch Wood



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

journey. The impact of this is that all our students have had the opportunity to access the community throughout this year. Community visits have varied from going to the park, theatre trips, having a snack at the cafe, shopping for cooking ingredients to horse riding, climbing at outdoor pursuits and developing animal care knowledge at New Leaf Triangle. There are many examples of how we have continued to make curriculum links with community experiences, such as; year 9 (BWV) completed a historical tour of Melton and buildings that were linked to the war, which supported their understanding of their local community. Year 9 also travelled by train to Leicester exploring independent travel whilst also developing local history knowledge by visiting the Richard III Centre.

To develop our residential offer, we have worked in collaboration with Beaumanor Hall, Lea Green and Calvert Lakes to provide students with the opportunity to experience nights away from home with their peers. We plan to continue to build on these valuable enrichments to our curriculum next academic year.

#### **EYFS Provision**

This year also saw our new EYFS group flourish in their new surroundings after the major internal development of 2 new EYFS classrooms following the last-minute demand in county for EYFS SEND places. Our EYFS provision is a clear strength in the school, where the lessons observed both by internal low stakes lesson visits and external evaluation highlighted EYFS is an example of best practice particularly in early reading and phonics.

#### **Site Developments**

To provide more adequate space for the numbers of students who are now on roll at Birch Wood Vale and to improve and upgrade facilities, a mezzanine will be installed in the atrium at BWV over the summer holidays. This will provide an enclosed multi use space downstairs and an art studio upstairs at Birch Wood Vale.

Extensive sensory lighting and a sound system has now been installed in the hydrotherapy pool which has been renamed the 'Ellis Page Hydrotherapy Pool' in memory our wonderful student Ellis who died last September. A plaque and signage with Ellis's photo have been added outside the pool; this tribute serves as a fitting reminder of how Ellis loved hydrotherapy and of the benefits it brings to many of our students.

This year also saw the addition of our new soft play and multi-sensory building at Grange Drive which opened this term. This has provided us with a fully accessible soft play area which will help students self-regulate and learn key communication and interaction skills.



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

### Food for Life-Silver Award

On June 6<sup>th</sup> Birch Wood had a special presentation event to celebrate us achieving the Silver Food for Life Award, we are currently the only special school in Leicestershire to achieve this award. The Food for Life initiative has been woven into many areas of the curriculum across the school to enrich the pupil's educational experience and support connections with the local Melton community and industry. Food for Life activities in the school, have enhanced the pupil's experience of food and created a positive food culture that has allowed passions in growing, cooking and food production to develop. As a result, pupils have moved on to college courses in horticulture, completed cooking career qualifications



and have started jobs working in local restaurant kitchens. Birch Wood staff and students welcomed Councillor Louise Richardson, Mayor Alan Hewson and Mayoress Jane Hewson as well as representatives from Food for Life and Leicestershire Traded Services to share the impact the Food for Life work has had on the school at the Silver Food for Life Awards event. Councillor Louise Richardson presented pupils with their Silver Food for Life award, congratulating them for all their hard work and enthusiasm for Food for Life.



### The Curve

On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July students went to the Curve Theatre in Leicester to perform with the wonderful Moving Together group. They danced on the big stage to perform their rehearsed song 'Six the Musical'. The students were amazing and loved experiencing the theatre, coping well with things like the lights being turned off and on, loud music playing and lots of other schools moving around the theatre at the same time. They were such positive role models and representatives for Birch Wood. The parents and caregivers, at the theatre, were so proud and cheered loudly for our young people. Well done to Lilly Gibbons, Walter McKay, Jasmine Sochacki, Louise Thorpe, Meeka Vermeulen, Olivia Boyle-Smith, William Cuthbert, Joseph Ashmore, Phoebe Giles, Katie Sedgewick, Emma Vigor, Bramroy Baker-Lowe, Madison Chambers, Urban Townes, Sosthenes Deleuil, Paige Faulkner, Aimee Hutchinson, Corwin Meynell, Laura Palmer, Holly Curtis, Caitlin Drinkwater, Annalise Nugent, Kerenza Gee, Lily-May Grant, Chelsy Marshall, Poppy Hearne, Raahi Patel, Ellie Brightwell, Skye Smeeton and Connor Laszcz You shone so brightly for Birch Wood and we are all so proud of you. None of it could have happened without the extra dedication of staff who gave up their free time to support on the day. Go team Birch Wood!

### Sports Day

**Grange Drive, Birch Wood vale and Ashton House Sports Day 2023** was a huge success, with some many young people taking part across an array of disciplines. Our young people had the opportunity to run 75m and complete an obstacle course as fast as they can, as well as take part in field events such as howler throw, shot put, standing long jump, chest push and speed bounce! There were also



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

some amazing creative t-shirt and football designs for the FIFA Women's World Cup which starts soon. Groups also took part in MATP sports events, showcasing some of the new skills students have developed throughout the year

It was amazing to see so many smiling faces at the awards presentation, and very up-lifting to see our people cheer and clap for their peers for their achievements, which included Bronze, Silver & Gold for each Key Stage, Class Spirit of the Games and Grange Drive Sports Person of the Year, and all received certificates for their effort.

### Parental Survey Results

The overall results from the parent's survey were positive, with strengths in care, safety, learning and development. We did not fall below a 4-star rating for any questions, the lowest score being 4.35, the highest being 4.8. However, the survey also usefully highlighted that the automated parents evening booking system we introduced during Covid is now causing more problems with regards to communication. We have therefore decided to go back to our previous method of direct contact from tutors. Some parents would also like to be communicated with about their child's progress, general wellbeing, and school day in additional ways to our existing online system with Kinteract and emails. We will drill down into this and look for further ways to develop communication. Actions were also taken since the results of the survey to respond to parents' individual comments for improvement. Thank you to all who contributed.

### In the spotlight- Grange Drive- Tom Bradley Hewell- Head of School

Pupils have made so much progress within their curriculum pathways this term. We have seen our youngest children make friends, build fantastic interactions with staff and some say their first words or develop new communication. As we move through the school, there is evidence of good progress with reading and phonics and many students developing greater independence via the increase in community visits we have been able to deliver this year.

Callum Torgerson and Charlie Grove from the Treehouse both completed Key Stage 2 SATS this term, which is a phenomenal achievement. Both students have shown determination and a positive attitude throughout the examination period, and we are immensely proud of them.

Congratulations also to Grace Davies who played in the Leicestershire County Cup Final and was awarded man of the match! Grace has also taken part in a national football competition and her team got to the quarter finals, what a great achievement!

The Student Voice team have had an enormous impact at Grange Drive and have been instrumental within the interview process for new staff, where they have been welcoming and able to demonstrate what makes our community so special. The Student Voice team have also helped the school with environmental walks, which has led to the library being redesigned.

We have several students who are moving on to Ashton House and Birch Wood Vale, these include Lucas Vandoros who is going to Birch Wood Vale and Odin Howley, Oscar Smith, Callum Torgerson, Charlie Grove, Oliver Alexander and Jacob Kilbon who are moving to Ashton House

We also say a fond farewell to students who will be leaving Grange Drive; Ellie Harris, Claudia Bishop, Laura Palmer, Millie Baker, Amelia Wright and Grace Davies will be leaving at the end of this



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

academic year, they have achieved so much and will be missed! This is a big step, but they will always be part of Birch Wood! We wish them all the best for the future.



### **In the spotlight – Birch Wood Vale- Tom Smith-Head of School**

Birch Wood Vale students have had an incredible year. This term 15 students took part in their GCSEs in subjects including English, Maths, Science and Photography. Students have also recently completed BTECS in PE, Construction and DT as well as Bronze & Silver Arts Award and Duke of Edinburgh. They showed hard work and resilience throughout and we are immensely proud of their effort and attitude. Results day is August 24<sup>th</sup> and students can pick up their results between 9am-11am, otherwise they will be sent out to you.

Our students have continued to show us that they can shine in and out of school; we are incredibly proud of Florence Pick-Glenn who was interviewed by the BBC at St. George's Park, the England football team training HQ. Flo is an ambassador for the England

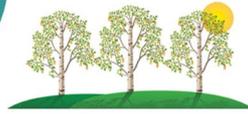
Transplant Football team. She is part of the youth academy and is currently the only girl playing. Flo's football team has now also gone on to win the Menphy's Tournament- magnificent work!

This is also the time of the year we say goodbye to students as they move on to college. This is a big moment for students- some who have been with us for 12 years. Good luck and well done to Ellie Brightwell, Emma Atterbury, Leanna Henson, Melanie Hallam, Caitlin Drinkwater, Adell Quincey, Alex King, Lucas Henson, Haydon Bradshaw, Dylan Atterbury, and Daniel Geyer. You should be very proud of everything you have achieved at Birch Wood.

### **In the spotlight- Ashton House – Joe Knowles – Assistant Head Teacher**

Ashton House students continue to surpass my already high expectations of what they can achieve. We began this year transitioning a few Birch Wood Vale students into the Ashton House Classrooms and also a brand-new class from the Grange Drive Site. This is a challenging process for our young people, but with the help of our fantastic staff team and the courage of our students, it now feels like this group of young people have been together for years. Friendships have grown within classrooms and between classrooms and a sense of community is strongly felt throughout Ashton House, from the Post 16 class and down to The Yard. These social achievements extend to lunch and break times now also, with **all** students accessing the main playground, playing and interacting with Birch Wood Vale students and growing their social circles. I am so proud of our young people for how far they have come, in their social development.

Academically it has been a strong year for students in Ashton House. All students have made progress, which reflects their ability and tenacity to engage with their curriculum. The option subjects have been a particularly pleasing success story as the students are consistently accessing these sessions that involve transitions and integration with other students outside of their class peers. When this has become too challenging at times, students have been able to use the 1-1 rooms within Ashton House, to ensure that they continue to make progress with their course. I also would like to congratulate all the young people that sat their GCSE exams this year such as Kerenza, Stuart, Kyle, Tegan, Charlie and William. There has been lots of preparation and determination from



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

both the young people and their staff teams to ensure that these were successful, and the young people did themselves proud.

This year we have also seen many personal achievements outside of the academic curriculum. Many of our students successfully took part in a 3-day, 2 night residential. All the young people were fantastic across the trip, showing resilience in their high ropes and rock-climbing activities, and also great independence with coping being away from parents and carers for an extended period of time. Our Post 16 students have also achieved many milestones in relation to their preparation for adulthood such as Poppy, Joel, William and Charlie successfully applying and obtaining their first paid jobs. Most students took part and completed their Duke of Edinburgh Award, by tackling a 2-day expedition amongst setting up tents and cooking for themselves in the outdoors. William also passed his driving theory test whilst others are currently studying to take theirs or applying for provisional licences.

Finally, we must say our fond farewells to students leaving Ashton House this Year. William, Kale, Joel, Poppy, Ellie, Noah and Liam have had such great impact on peers and staff, during their time at Birch Wood School, and they will be sorely missed. However, it is important to remember that this is the next stage in their personal development and we wish them the best of the luck in their future endeavours. They will all, no doubt, go on to have a positive impact on the world.

#### **Behaviour & Culture- Amy Dunstan- Deputy Head**

The end of the school year always brings a huge range of emotions. I feel proud of all we have achieved as a community this year, sad to have to say goodbye to those students who have reached the end of their Birch Wood journey and hopeful for what the coming year may bring.

Since my last update on a Birch Wood Newsletter, I am thrilled to report that the school completed the rigorous assessment process and was subsequently awarded Advanced Status from the National Autistic Society (NAS). I wanted to share with you, a segment from the Final NAS Assessment Report for Birch Wood School.

---

*'Throughout the assessment it was evident that the schools 'ENABLES' ethos is embraced across the school. Staff are passionate about empowering pupils to be the best they can and have high aspirations and unwavering passion and determination to provide outstanding outcomes for every pupil. Throughout all observations, pupils were treated with dignity and respect. In interview staff spoke passionately about supporting pupils to achieve their best possible outcomes.'*

---



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

Growing a Culture and cultivating the school environment that the NAS advisors witnessed takes a huge and continuous effort from the whole school community. This is an ever-evolving task, one that we will never complete and one we must tend to daily- 'not because we aren't good enough, but because we can always be better.' Finally, I wanted to share the thoughts and feelings of one of our students who wrote to the NAS Advisors during our assessment process.

---

*'Birch Wood has helped me to understand myself and to be more confident in myself and my abilities. Not only do they understand and support me very, very, very exceptionally well, but they have taught me how I can support myself and to understand my emotions and to recognise and verbalise what I need in different situations.'*

---

#### **Quality of Education- Phil Leaney- Deputy Head**

Throughout this year, pupils have actively engaged in a diverse range of academic, therapeutic, and enrichment lessons and activities. Each student has taken significant steps towards reaching their personal best, and their progress has been truly remarkable. Although qualifications are only one measure of success, we are immensely proud of those who have sat their GCSEs, Entry Levels, ASDAN, AIM, and SATs this year, their dedication and hard work have been truly inspiring.

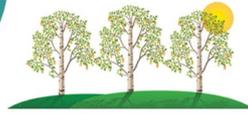
As we reflect on the achievements of this year, we are already eagerly looking forward to what the future holds. With our dedicated staff, supportive parents, and incredible students, we are confident that the coming year will be filled with even greater accomplishments and memorable experiences.

#### **New staff and Leavers**

The most difficult part of the end of the year is saying goodbye to colleagues who have been with us for a long time. This year we are bidding farewell to Rebecca Watson- Health and Wellbeing Officer, Amanda Bell- Behaviour Mentor and Phil Worth- DT Teacher.

Amanda has been with the school since it was built- a whopping 19 years! In that time Amanda has supported so many young people and their families and it is safe to say she has made an incredibly positive difference to lives of so many. Amanda is moving on to work in social care adult services for the local authority, so will continue to help others who really need it. We wish Amanda well in her future and know she will remain a friend of Birch Wood. Lee Burrows will be a familiar face to many as an Autism Mentor and STA. Next year Lee will have a bigger role supporting students with their behaviour at Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House. Lee has achieved his ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) qualification this year and is planning on introducing these sessions as an intervention next term as well as integrating these strategies to support students who may need some additional support with communication, interaction and regulation.

Phil Worth has been at Birch Wood for 8 years and in that time has helped establish DT, Art, Food and Construction as key parts of the curriculum offer at Birch Wood Vale. Phil is an exceptional teacher and P16 tutor who will now be developing his career further at MV16, so with any luck we



Grange Drive

Birch Wood  
Vale SchoolBirch Wood  
Ashton House

will still get to see him. DT and Art will continue to be delivered by Metesh and Jeanette, with teacher Jade Parker transitioning from Grange Drive to Birch Wood Vale as our new Food Teacher.

Rebecca Watson Joined Birch Wood, as HWO in 2020 and over that time has shown to be a caring, diligent and hardworking staff member. Rebecca has developed such extensive health care skills in this time that she is moving on to take up a post with the Diana Team working for the NHS. We are very proud of the progress she has made and wish her all the best for the future. Rebecca will be replaced by the familiar face that is Jen Neehuis. Jen will be moving on from the role of STA to HWO fully in September.

We would also like to welcome Hannah Jackson and Holly Wright who will be joining the teaching staff at Grange Drive next term. Hannah will be leading in the Treehouse group on Thursday and Friday with the familiar face of Joanna McKay Monday- Wednesday. Holly Wright will be taking up a teaching post in the Hummingbirds, replacing Natalie who will be working with Kate Hallam-Jones and Becky Spence in EYFS. Both Holly and Hannah are experienced teachers who we are excited to have on board!

### **To the Future**

It has been a great pleasure and privilege to complete another school year leading Birch Wood. Without doubt our students and families are central to making our wonderful school community a place where all can thrive. I want to thank parents and carers for your partnership and kindness in helping us all make that positive difference together. I am also eternally grateful for our amazing staff team who continue to humble me with their dedication and skill. Every year presents us with new challenges, but the commitment of our premise, admin, support staff, therapists, teachers and governor's makes Birch Wood a very special place to work. I wish everyone a fun and happy summer holiday and look forward to another great 2023-24 academic year!

**Rosalind Hopkins**  
**Executive Headteacher**