



Grange Drive



Birch Wood Vale School



Birch Wood Ashton House



## Birch Wood School

### Summer Newsletter July 2024

#### Executive Head Teacher Update

This academic year has marked the 19<sup>th</sup> year of Birch Wood Special School, with us commemorating our 20 year anniversary next month in August (details below). I have been proud to serve Birch Wood as Head/Executive Head for 8 of those years and can attest to what a truly remarkable school Birch Wood has become. Our ENABLES ethos which was established in collaboration with the whole community at the beginning of my tenure, is now in living evidence and is shown through our curriculum, pupil experience and outcomes.



The school year 2023-2024 has been one of our most successful to date due to the hard work of pupils, staff, governors and our incredibly supportive community who enact our ENABLES culture. As you will be aware this term we received our long awaited Ofsted inspection, although we'd have preferred a full section 5 inspection, the outcome of the section 8 was the best we could have possibly hoped for, concluding that 'the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now.' We were very proud of our inspection letter, which commented that 'Pupils are helped to achieve their personal best in an environment that is aspirational and caring.' It also stated that inspectors found Birch Wood to be a 'kind school' where pupils behave 'exceptionally well'. Our work in preparing pupils for adulthood was recognised as a strength, along with reading and phonics, 'Reading is prioritised so that all pupils can access the full curriculum.' The strength of the school's leadership was also identified 'The school is exceptionally well led and managed... They have an unwavering commitment to providing a high quality of education for all pupils.' Therefore, I feel we are in an exceptionally strong place as we move in to the new academic year, our aim as always is to continuously improve our school for pupils,

which will also prepare us for a return visit from Ofsted.

We were pleased that Ofsted had picked up on the impact of our reading curriculum, as pupils are now making greater progress with phonics and reading than at any other time. Over the years we have seen a deeper focus on our communication curriculum with Makaton and PECs being used across the sites by many groups of students as a core part of their communication or to reinforce learning. This is another area that we intend to continue to develop to further embed all forms of communication technology within the classroom. Other areas that we are introducing to our curriculum is a modern foreign language (French) and British Sign Language at Birch Wood Vale. Whilst at Grange Drive, in the summer break the site team will be working hard to develop our own Forest School base, which will provide more opportunities for pupils to benefit from this experience.





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All our curriculum pathways are now established and delivered by expert teachers ensuring every pupil achieves their personal best. Our work in this area has attracted external attention including in Mary Myatt and John Tomsett's book SEND Huh and more recently in April, working with the National Autism Society (NAS) to host visitors for 3 days from Qatar's first ever special school. In June we hosted visitors from a Belgian special school in partnership with the Exemplary Leadership Programme. Our mission to celebrate diversity and champion the journey towards greater inclusion in all schools has also seen the successful establishment of our SEND & Inclusion Hub in partnership with Leicestershire & Rutland Teaching School. Through the hub we have supported mainstream schools from across the county and beyond, providing school centred training days, outreach, CPD, school trust support and quality assurance to improve and develop SEND practice beyond Birch Wood.

The school has continued to grow in size and number and remains oversubscribed. Between 2016 and 2024 numbers on roll have increased from 147 to 228. Alongside this we have worked with the local authority to develop the site and expand facilities. Our site team led by Neal Collington have worked tirelessly on major projects over the years to maximise the sites potential and ensure the growing pupil population have the best possible facilities. This has included but not limited to the installation of a mobile classroom, specialist food room, DT room, mezzanine art studio, sensory garden, outside gym equipment and renovations to create the Ashton House Autism Provision at Birch Wood Vale. At Grange Drive we have seen further development with the extension of the school building to create a new Post 16 classroom, renovations to expand our EYFS provision providing a brand new play area in the quad, a multi-sensory soft play room, upgrades to sensory lighting and equipment in our hydro pool and the introduction of a rebound therapy trampoline.

After Covid we were keen to reinstate and develop community trips and visits and introduce a wider residential trip offer. This residential project has taken immense additional time and energy as residential trips rely solely on staff to volunteer their free time to facilitate the overnight stays. We are fortunate to have a dedicated staff team who understand the positive impact that residential stays have in enriching and developing our pupils. Associate Assistant Head Teacher Poppy Marriott has spearheaded this development so that more pupils than ever can benefit from these opportunities; in fact 94 pupils from all three sites participated in eight residential trips to Beaumanor Hall and Lea Green. Pupils have demonstrated



incredible enthusiasm and resilience as they tackled a variety of new activities, including bridge building to cross rivers, team swing, canoeing, climbing, archery and den building. Through these experiences, they have significantly developed their teamwork and communication skills. We are proud of how our students embraced every challenge with determination and cooperation, making this a memorable and rewarding term for everyone involved.

The Birch Wood Prom continues to be a highlight of my school year; seeing our young people come together across both sites and all provisions in Key Stage 4 and Post 16 is an experience of pure joy! It is at this event when we really see the beautiful diversity and inclusive culture of our school come to life. Students arrive expressing themselves with their favourite clothes, looking absolutely fabulous. They come together and truly celebrate each other, socialising independently and with growing self-pride and confidence, creating positive memories that should last a life time.



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There are plenty of beautiful photos of the evening on our school Facebook page, thanks to Hannah O'Mara- Assistant Head and designated photographer for the evening.

### **Birch Wood School Senior Leadership Team developments**

As the school has grown, so has our Senior Leadership Team (SLT); this is now a well-established team ready to lead the school and continue to take developments forwards. Next academic year there will be some internal changes within the team as people take on new responsibilities to reflect the needs of the school. Significantly, Phil Leaney our existing Deputy Head for Quality of Education will be stepping up to take on the role of Associate Head teacher across all sites at Birch Wood. I will remain in my role as Executive Head teacher to oversee the strategic direction of the school.

#### The SLT Team:

Executive Head- Rosalind Hopkins

Associate Head Teacher- Phil Leaney

3 Heads of School- Amy Dunstan, Tom Bradley Hewell (Grange Drive- GD site), Tom Smith (Birch Wood Vale)

1 Senior Assistant Head-Claire Wood (BWV)

3 Assistant Heads- Hannah O'Mara (Grange Drive), Joe Knowles (Ashton House/BWV), Michelle Walker (BWV)

1 Head of Post 16- Julie Peattie (MV16 Post 16 Centre & Lodge)

1 Associate Assistant Head- Poppy Marriot (GD)

1 School Business Manager- Amy Fairchild

1 Full time Designated Safeguarding Lead- Lauren Carroll

### **Leavers and New Staff**

It is always hard to say goodbye to valued staff members and this term is no exception. Firstly, we wish a fond farewell to Nicky O'Dare who has been working at Birch Wood for 19 years in many different roles. For the last 3 years Nicky has been Health and Wellbeing Officer based at BWV. We are so lucky to have had Nicky's dedication over this time and know she will always be part of the Birch Wood family. Nicky will be replaced by Nicola Roberts in the role of Health and Wellbeing Assistant, Nicola has a wealth of experience working in special schools supporting the healthcare of pupils. We will be welcoming Nicola in the new academic year, when she will formally introduce herself to parents.

Learning Support Assistant's Jane Coe and Zoe Carvell also left this term, both are long standing members of staff who made such a positive impact with pupils in their time with us- good luck with your future plans. We are also saying goodbye to Jason Chan and Dan Hudson- Aspirant Teachers who are off to pursue their careers in different fields in education, with Jason taking up a teaching post in Korea! We wish them both well in these new adventures. Candice Hall who currently works in the role of STA will be stepping up as Aspirant Teacher for Drama, whilst we will also welcome 2 new Early Carer Maths teachers Caelan Freemantle and Donita Thakore to increase our curriculum offer for Maths and replace Jason.

Next term we will also be welcoming some more new faces to the staff team at Birch Wood. As part of our plans to offer further outreach support to parents we are excited to introduce an additional Family School Link Worker- Lisa Bramall to join Sarah Alldridge. Lisa has previously been a parent governor at Birch Wood, has a professional background in law and lived experience of SEND, she will work with Sarah 1 day a week. We would also like to introduce Gigi Florentin-Lee as Family and Staff Support Worker, Gigi also has lived experience of SEND and a vast knowledge and understanding of Autism and PDA. Gigi is coming from a psychology background and will provide additional support to parents as well as support and mentoring for staff wellbeing. Parents will have the opportunity to meet both Lisa and Gigi in the new term. Finally, Dhruv Atherton will be joining us as Senior Teaching Assistant at Ashton House, Dhruv is a familiar face at Birch Wood having been working as a Student Support Worker over the last term.



## Stage 2 SATS & Multiplication Test Check

We are keen to provide pupils with the opportunity to take part in national testing when it is appropriate for them. This year we are so very proud of our pupils who took part in Key Stage 2 SATS, a big well done to Oliver Alexander, McKenna Rae Tozer and Charlie Carr who all excelled with their exams, achieving their personal best. The SATS results highlight the impact of our aspirational curriculum illustrating the young people's significant progress within Literacy and Maths since they have joined the school. Also congratulations to Lily Durrance and Eddie Jordan who completed their Year 4 Multiplication Checks and did really well!

## Round and About Birch Wood

It has been a hugely positive year at Grange Drive, Birch Wood Vale, Ashton House and Birch Wood College, with significant numbers attending their very first residential trip and taking part in purposeful community visits and curriculum experiences, boosting pupil's independence, skills and knowledge. Also please see the Birch Wood College newsletter to find out more about what has been happening within our P16 settings.

## Birch Wood Sports

Two sporting highlights at Grange Drive this term go to the Treehouse & Robins pupils who took part in a Tennis Festival and Saffron Lane Athletics Tournament. Students did really well, with one coming 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in the tournament for Standing Long Jump. The Lodge have also continued their Tennis sessions at Melton Tennis Club, which has been a valuable experience and great opportunity to use facilities in close proximity to our school.

Focusing on our key priority of inclusion, the summer term was an opportunity to host 2 amazing sports days, with all pupil's taking part in a range of activities which was well received and provided more opportunities for them to develop positive relationships across the school.

The BWV and AH **sports day** was themed around the upcoming Paris Olympic Games. Students competed in the speed bounce, standing long jump, shot put, rainbow throw and shuttle sprint event, outstanding performances were seen across all classes. Student's activities also reflected the 4 areas of the PE Curriculum: Competence; Creativity; Communication and Challenge. The day finished with the presentation of awards, in which a special mention needs to go to Charlie Woolaston in Year 10 who won this Year's Sportsperson of the Year award!



Grange Drive's Sports Day 2024 was our most inclusive event to date! The day began with an opening ceremony where all classes paraded through school, waving their banners, interacting with different motor development activities along the way. All pupils were divided into four colour teams; red, blue, green and yellow. Pupils participated in field and track events for their teams, all of which had been adapted to challenge their





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individual physical skills. These activities included howler throwing, races, obstacle races and water balloon catapulting! All pupils were able to participate in our newest event, the Sensory 360 race! This saw all our pupils navigate their way through different sensory obstacles, exploring their taste, hearing, smell, touch and proprioceptive and vestibular senses! The day finished with a closing ceremony where medals were awarded for individual sporting achievements, spirit of the games and the overall winners...the red team! A video of the day will be shared on our social media shortly.

A big thank you to Alison Nix and James Collington, our PE teachers, who worked closely with staff to organise two brilliant sports days.



## Football

Students from Ashton House, Birch Wood Vale and Birch Wood College took part in a friendly (but still competitive) football match against Forest Way School. Students demonstrated some awesome performances and all represented Birch Wood School fantastically by showing outstanding sportsmanship throughout. The students came from behind to finish in a draw with goals scored by Oliver Timms, Leo Jones, Dion Budwall and Alex Ball - well done all! Coach Jamie Smith (Senior Teaching Assistant) was very proud of their efforts.



## 80th Anniversary of D-Day

Thursday 6th June commemorated the 80th anniversary of D-Day, which took place on 6th June 1944. Students took part in a number of activities in their Humanities lesson across Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House. They explored the significance and importance of this day.



## The Curve- 'The Boy at the Back of the Class'.

This term, we took a group of 8BO and 9ES students to the Curve Theatre in Leicester to watch 'The Boy at the Back of the Class'. The performance was outstanding! The cast and directors had put together a show that was entertaining and funny at all the right moments, but also poignant and emotional enough to get the message across about the struggle of refugees moving to a new country. All the staff and students thoroughly enjoyed the performance, and we even received an email from the Curve recognising how well-behaved the students were, and how well they got involved in the experience.



## The Retro Computer Museum Trip.

The Den and The Yard had an enrichment visit to the Retro Computer Museum, where they enjoyed various specialist computer rooms including a multi-gaming room, a room with consoles and handhelds dating back years and finally an arcade room. There was lots of healthy competitiveness and laughter, providing a great opportunity to build positive relationships and learn about the history of gaming!





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## Pride 2024

On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June Birch Wood School held our annual Pride Celebration Day as part of "Global Pride Month", with this year's theme being "Celebrating Differences – Everyone Can Sparkle!" Students and staff proudly wore their brightest rainbow colours and sparkles and took part in a variety of Pride activities, including art work, nail painting, sparkle tattoos and discos.



## Moving Together Performance at Curve Theatre

On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July, 18 Students from across Birch Wood School attended The Curve Theatre to take part in the performance of "Exploration". Our students took part in both technical and dress rehearsals before performing to a sold out audience, showcasing their hard work from throughout the year. Our performance this year showcased dances from across the world, including dances from India, South Africa and Brazil. We are really proud for how they represented Birch Wood School throughout the whole day! Huge thank you for staff who gave up their Sunday to support this event, especially Rob Peet for organising



**Please do check out our Facebook page for more photos and information about all the fabulous things pupils and staff have been doing this term!**

## Key dates:

Autumn Term 1 2024	Summer Holidays
Thursday 22 <sup>nd</sup> August 2024	GCSE Exams results Day – collection from BWV 8.00am – 9.30am
Thursday 22 <sup>nd</sup> & Friday 23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2024	Staff Training Days
Tuesday 27 <sup>th</sup> August 2024	School re-opens to students
<b>SATURDAY 31<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST 2024 BIRCH WOOD-STOCK FESTIVAL – CELEBRATING OUR 20<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY!</b>	
Monday 21 <sup>st</sup> to Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	Half Term



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## Residential Visits

Residential visits promote personal growth, life skills, and resilience among our students. Below is a list of residential visits that will take place for students across Birch Wood School. We continually assess our trips and visits to ensure that they are safe and this may mean that closer to the time, plans need to be changed or cancelled based on the needs of the group or changes to the accommodation.

Residential	Date	Class
Bendrigg Trust, Lake District	7 <sup>th</sup> – 11 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	The Merlins
Lea Green	May 2025	The Lodge
PGL Chateau de Grande Romaine, Paris	30 <sup>th</sup> June – 4 <sup>th</sup> July 2025	8BO, 9ES, 10CM, The Den, The Nook

## Summer Holiday Time

As a school we are very lucky to have the support of local charities who make donations and fundraise for us, this is so very much appreciated and helps provide further opportunities for our pupils- a heartfelt thank you to everyone involved in this. A huge thank you to all of our staff who it is a privilege to work with and as always, strive for the best for our young people. A final thank you to our families for your support in helping develop such a positive and successful school community.

Have a wonderful summer break!

Rosalind Hopkins

Executive Head