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Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House Summer Term 1 Newsletter 2026

Welcome to our Summer Term 1 newsletter. It has been a busy and exciting half term at Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House, with pupils taking part in a wide range of enriching experiences that reflect the breadth of opportunities across our school. Highlights have included the Ashton House residential trip to Lea Green, where pupils showed courage, resilience and teamwork, and the launch of Birch Wood Bargains, which has given our young people the chance to develop enterprise skills, communication and independence.

You will also see how our pupils have benefited from tennis lessons, esports, lunchtime clubs, the Bookology reading challenge, Ignite24 mentoring, and ongoing preparation for GCSEs and controlled assessments. Alongside this, our rehearsals, leadership work and creative projects continue to showcase the confidence, talent and determination of our students. Thank you for your continued support this term, and we hope you have a lovely half term break.

Tom Smith

Head of School, Birch Wood Vale

Ashton House - Lea Green Residential Trip

Pupils from Ashton House recently enjoyed an exciting residential trip to Lea Green, packed with adventure, teamwork and new experiences. Throughout the visit, children challenged themselves with a range of activities including canoeing, climbing, ziplining, obstacle courses and cave exploration, showing great determination and resilience. They also took time to explore the natural environment, searching for wildlife and learning more about the world around them. The trip was a fantastic opportunity for pupils to build confidence, strengthen friendships and create lasting memories, all while having fun and representing the school brilliantly.



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Birch Wood Bargains

This term, students at Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House have been busy launching *Birch Wood Bargains* — a brand-new stall entirely by our young entrepreneurs. The stall features a selection of small, affordable items that the students have carefully chosen, organised and displayed themselves. Through this exciting project, they are building important life skills such as communication, teamwork, money management and customer service, while taking great pride in making a meaningful contribution to our school community. We are extremely proud of their enthusiasm and creativity and are excited to see *Birch Wood Bargains* continue to grow.



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Discovery Esports FIFA

Some of our students at Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House began the summer term with an exciting Discovery Esports tournament at Keyham Lodge on 16 May, where they showcased fantastic teamwork and strategy while competing in FIFA. The atmosphere was full of excitement as players cheered one another on and celebrated some impressive goals and victories.





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Tennis Lessons

We would like to say a huge thank you to Melton Mowbray Tennis Club, and especially to Brent, Ryan and Bridget, for their generous support in allowing Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House to use their fantastic facilities. Through this partnership, our pupils have been able to take part in high-quality tennis sessions as part of our PE curriculum, developing their skills, confidence and enjoyment of the sport. The opportunity to learn in such a welcoming and professional environment has been greatly appreciated by both staff and pupils, and we are incredibly grateful for Brent's time, dedication and enthusiasm in making these sessions so enjoyable and valuable.





Ignite 24 Programme

Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House are delighted to be participating in a new initiative to deliver targeted mentoring programmes that use sport to support students who may struggle to engage in school for a variety of reasons. By using sport and physical activity as a vehicle, the programme aims to build self-esteem and confidence, with mentors acting as positive role models through one-to-one and small group sessions.



Ignite24 Ltd is an organisation with experience in delivering successful school-based mentoring programmes across Leicestershire and Rutland. Students will benefit from this expertise through support designed for those who are disengaged, lacking in confidence, experiencing anxiety, or finding school attendance difficult.

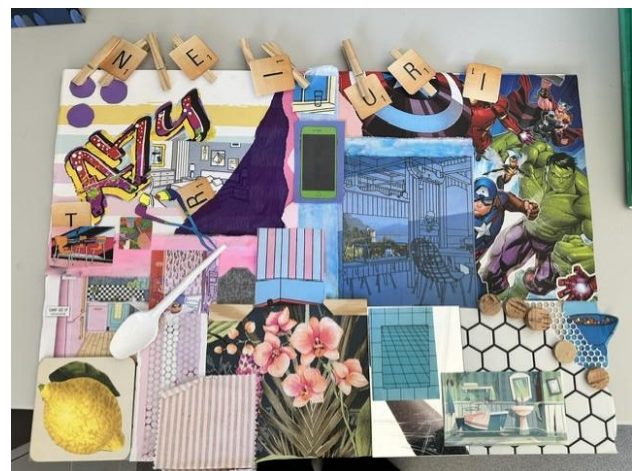
We are confident this collaboration will create effective, engaging programmes that help students thrive both in and out of school.





Controlled Assessments – Photography, Fine Art and Graphic Communication

Students from Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House are currently undertaking their controlled assessments for GCSE Photography, Fine Art, and Graphic Communication. This significant stage in their exams allows them to apply the skills, techniques, and creative ideas they have developed throughout their courses. We are extremely proud of their commitment, focus, and determination as they work under exam conditions to produce their final pieces. Their hard work and creativity have been evident, and we wish them every success as they complete this important milestone in their GCSE journey.





Preparation for GCSE's

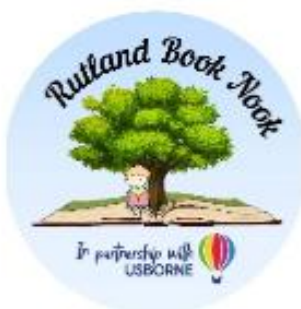
Students at Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House are working hard as they prepare for their upcoming GCSE examinations. With a clear focus on revision and building confidence, they are engaging in structured lessons, targeted intervention sessions, and independent study to strengthen their knowledge and skills across all subjects. Staff are providing ongoing support and guidance, helping students manage exam stress while encouraging resilience and a positive mindset. As the exams approach, there is a strong sense of determination and commitment across the school, with students motivated to achieve their best and take the next step in their education or future pathways.

Bookology – Sponsored Reading Challenge

We are delighted to be partnering with Usborne Books for an exciting, sponsored reading challenge! Our goal is to raise an incredible £600 to refresh and enhance the non-fiction section of our school library.

This is a brand-new initiative for Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House, and we are thrilled to offer our pupils the chance to develop a love of reading, take pride in their achievements and share stories with confidence. As an added incentive, children will also be able to earn silver tokens as part of the challenge.

The event will be led by Caroline from Usborne and will take place from 9th–16th May. We look forward to celebrating the fantastic efforts and achievements of all our students!





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Lunchtime Clubs

Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House offer a wide range of inclusive and engaging lunchtime clubs, giving students the opportunity to explore their interests, build friendships and develop valuable skills. Students can enhance their communication and confidence through Makaton, while Dungeons and Dragons encourages creativity, imagination and teamwork. For those who enjoy strategy and problem-solving, Scrabble and Chess offer stimulating challenges, while Darts helps to build coordination and focus in a fun setting. Creative expression is nurtured through Art Club and Craft Club, and ICT Club supports the development of digital skills in an interactive environment. Choir allows students to come together through music, building confidence and a sense of belonging, while Moving Together prepares students for the upcoming Curve performance, promoting teamwork, rhythm and self-expression. These varied lunchtime opportunities help to ensure that every student can find something they enjoy and feel part of the Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House community.

Here are some of our students enjoying the Makaton Choir, Gaming, and Chess.





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Exemplary Leadership Programme (ELP)

What is the ELP?

Research shows that a strong behaviour culture, combined with a well-sequenced, ambitious curriculum and excellent teaching, transforms pupils' outcomes and life chances. The ELP, developed by The Knowledge Hub with expert school leaders and educationalists, is designed to help leaders drive whole-school improvement. It focuses on three key areas:

- Building and sustaining an exemplary behaviour culture
- Developing a knowledge-rich curriculum with subject leaders
- Delivering the curriculum effectively, grounded in evidence and subject expertise

The programme is led by experienced tutors from a range of school contexts, including inner-city, rural and coastal settings, across primary and secondary phases.



What does Birch Wood do?

Through our work in curriculum development and high-quality teaching and learning, we are proud to be a host school. In this role, we welcome senior leaders from across the country, offering them the opportunity to see first-hand the exceptional work of our staff and pupils in everyday practice. This term's visit focuses on curriculum enactment—exploring how our ambitious curriculum is brought to life through effective teaching and learning in the classroom.

Rehearsals for *Murder in Nursery Land*

Students from Birch Wood have been working incredibly hard in weekly rehearsals for their upcoming performances of *Murder in Nursery Land*, a fast-paced detective story written by Suzanne, our Drama Lead.

They will be performing for their peers in two exciting shows during the week before we break up for the summer. It is a classic whodunnit, filled with memorable characters, plenty of red herrings and lots of laughs along the way. Our students have risen brilliantly to the challenge, and it promises to be a performance to remember.



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Attendance

In August 2024, the government introduced statutory guidance “**Working Together to Improve School Attendance**” and to comply with this, Birch Wood School’s Attendance Policy was updated. It can be found on the school website.

Above
95%

Excellent! Well done!
This will help all aspects
of their progress and life
in school.

85% -
95%

Average! Well
done! Try to build
on this

Below
85%

Cause for Concern
It **IS** affecting attainment
and progress and is
disrupting students
learning.

At Birch Wood School, we fully understand that some pupils face more complex barriers to attendance, including long-term physical or mental health needs. We will always take a support-first approach to improving attendance, with a focus on practical and compassionate support. Each situation will be considered on a case-by-case basis and reviewed regularly to ensure the right help is in place for the child and family. We will also make sure that joined-up pastoral care is provided where needed. The school’s Senior Attendance Champion is Kate Draycott.

Absence from school:

If your child is going to be absent from school, a parent or carer must notify the school of the reason for absence by 7.30am, or as soon as reasonably possible, by calling the school office on 01664 483340.

Leave of Absence Requests

A leave of absence is granted at the Headteacher’s discretion, including the length of time a pupil is authorised to be absent. As leave of absence is granted only in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that requests for family holidays during term time will be approved. The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant background context behind the request. Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least 4 weeks before the absence. Please ask your child’s teacher or the office staff for a Leave of Absence Form.



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Key Dates:

Monday 1 st June 2026	Summer Term 2 – Students back to school
Sunday 28 th June 2026	Curve Performance – Moving Together!
Wednesday 8 th July	Key Stage 4 and Post 16 Prom
Thursday 9 th July	End of Term



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Academic Year 2026-2027

Autumn Term

School Opens to students: Monday 24th August 2026
August Bank Holiday: Monday 31st August 2026
Mid Term Break: Monday 19th October to Friday 23rd October 2026
School Closes: Friday 18th December 2026

Number of school days 78 days

Spring Term

School Opens to students: Tuesday 5th January 2027
Mid Term Break: Monday 15th February to Friday 19th February 2027
School Closes: Friday 19th March 2027

Number of school days 49 days

Summer Term

School Opens to students: Monday 5th April 2027
May Day Bank Holiday: Monday 3rd May 2027
Mid Term Break: Monday 31st May to Friday 4th June 2027
School Closes: Thursday 8th July 2027

Number of school days 63 days
Total school days 190 days

5 Staff training days: Wednesday 19th August 2026
Thursday 20th August 2026
Friday 21st August 2026
Monday 26th October 2026
Monday 4th January 2027