



Acorn Park

**Acorn Park
Autumn 2023**

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back to life
Nurturing Schools



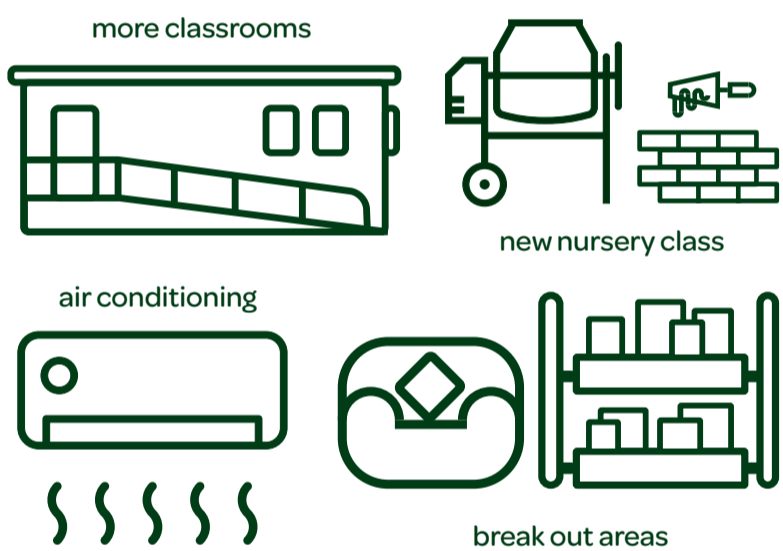
Acorn Park is a unique 30-acre private estate where children and young adults across the breadth of the autistic spectrum can live, learn and play in a holistic, happy and safe environment.

Renewing our focus on investment

I recently re-read a previous edition of this publication and was reminded of the commitments we made to a new playground, new classrooms and a wide range of other facilities. I'd be lying if I said that we achieved all of these easily - not least because the building work was challenging and led to lots of changes in the way we all get around and for a while, how much space we had for play. But, regardless of the challenges, it was worth it! It was a delight to see so many of you at AcornFest, enjoying the new equipment and visiting our new classrooms. The response of our young people has been an absolute delight - they make excellent use of every part of the new scheme and it is clearly supporting self and supported regulation, communication, social interaction and managed



open a new nursery class to support those families who need provision from a younger age than we currently provide. Over the past few months The School, the Care Homes and our Adult Services have all achieved, or maintained a 'Good' rating in recent inspections. I'd like to thank you for your support with these processes. Your feedback to questionnaires from the school, your comments within DOJO and,



risk-taking. We are continuing to invest in play equipment for younger pupils, and particularly so where we have open new classes. More on this to follow.

This year, our focus on the environment continues with investment in more classrooms, but also lots of break-out spaces and rooms for intervention and therapy. We will fit air-conditioning to some of our classes, and will

for our Care services, those of you who talk to our Visitors, Advocates and Social Care Inspectors - thank you for you positive, open, honest and supportive feedback. We know that we don't always get it right, but we do try! If ever you need to raise a question or concern, please don't hesitate to do so.

Peter Marshall
Head of Service

Contact us

Please send us your pictures and stories for future editions of our newsletter. Send them to our editor Adelene.

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Ofsted check

Back in July, we welcomed an inspector from Ofsted for a one day inspection. This was not to give us a grading. Instead it was to check we were meeting standards in particular areas. Senior leaders and a broad group of staff and pupils were asked questions and documents and records were checked.

by **Philippa Whipp**

Findings
Findings were wholly positive, with the reassurance that 'Leaders continue to have a robust approach to safeguarding pupils.'

Our systems
Ofsted were satisfied that our systems stood up to this scrutiny and that we met all independent schools standards on the Welfare, Health and Safety of pupils that they checked. It was pleasing that Ofsted recognised that pupils join the school with a range of complex needs. Pupils' needs can sometimes mean that they struggle to regulate their behaviour independently and our staff are very well trained to understand pupils' complex needs and behaviours. Our behaviour support plans are regularly

updated in partnership with pupils and their parents and/or carers. These plans provide clear guidance to staff about the best strategies to use to support pupils in managing behaviour and emotions.

Dealing with behavioural issues
A culture of respect and positivity is very important to us at Acorn Park. It was recognised that leaders have established a culture where staff approach pupils' behaviour in a calm and measured way. Staff de-escalate most behaviours through calm conversations with pupils. They work closely with pupils and their parents to help pupils develop strategies to manage their own behaviour. Over time, inspector spoke to a very most pupils learn to do this

very effectively. The vocal group of pupils from across the school. They told the inspector that they trust adults to deal with any behaviour and bullying issues. They have a range of adults to talk to and report concerns to. Pupils are very positive about school life and the way staff deal with any incidents that occur.

Recruitment process
Our leaders are trained to recruit safely. We use appropriate selection and recruitment procedures when appointing new staff in line with legal guidance. Appropriate pre-employment and background checks are in place for all staff, including those who work for an agency and members of the proprietor body and we check staff files regularly to ensure they are up to date.

Dealing with concerns and our Complaints Policy Procedure
Sometimes, we receive concerns or complaints, as any institution might. The Ofsted inspector was satisfied that our Complaints Policy is detailed and shows the process of how parents or pupils could make a complaint. Leaders then ensure that they follow this policy well when they receive any complaints, and complaints are dealt with appropriately within the designated timescales.

OFSTED FINDINGS

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Ofsted reports are available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/27/135066>





What we plan to grow next:
 Brussel sprouts, kale, and we will also be planting beans for the spring as well as a whole host of fruits for the late spring/early summer – such as honeyberries, black raspberries and clove currants.



Left: Freya sweeping the polytunnel.
 Above: Mark and Louis examine some of the produce.

should go to Mason, Ethan and Frankie) we shifted more than a ton of soil from the raised beds in animal care into the polytunnel. The first beds were created using this soil. Waste bedding, manure from the care farm and hedge and grass cuttings were added in layers making a sort of horticultural lasagne. Most of the initial planting was created from plants grown from seed. Classes have learned the benefits of watering seedlings daily and how young plants, with a bit of care, can thrive and grow. Most of the classes in the school have contributed to the creation, care and development of the food forest. Once fully established we hope to be able to provide a large range of fresh fruit and vegetables for our school kitchen.

HORTICULTURE

Bringing the polytunnel back to life

Thanks to the help of our students, plants are once again growing in our polytunnel. Our new Horticulture teacher **Mark Lord** reports on how his plans are proceeding and the great learning opportunities that lay ahead for our students...

"I joined the school in the last summer term, and I was determined to create a holistic space where everything in it would feed our senses as well as our bodies. As well as gardening organically, I also practice biodynamic and agroforestry techniques. This means that everything is grown without using chemicals. We try to garden according to the phases of the moon.

The polytunnel was very much a blank canvas when I joined in May, and I decided early on we would create a garden in the tunnel that could be gardened through all the year.

During the last 15 years of working within horticulture I've created two food forests – one of a square metre and one of more than two acres. So, I decided that we would do the same in the polytunnel. With help of pupils (special mention

What is a 'food forest'?

A food forest consists of seven different layers of edible foods and mimics the various levels that make up a forest habitat: tree level, down to climbers, large shrubs, smaller shrubs, ground cover, the root and tuber layer and the fungal layer.

What next?

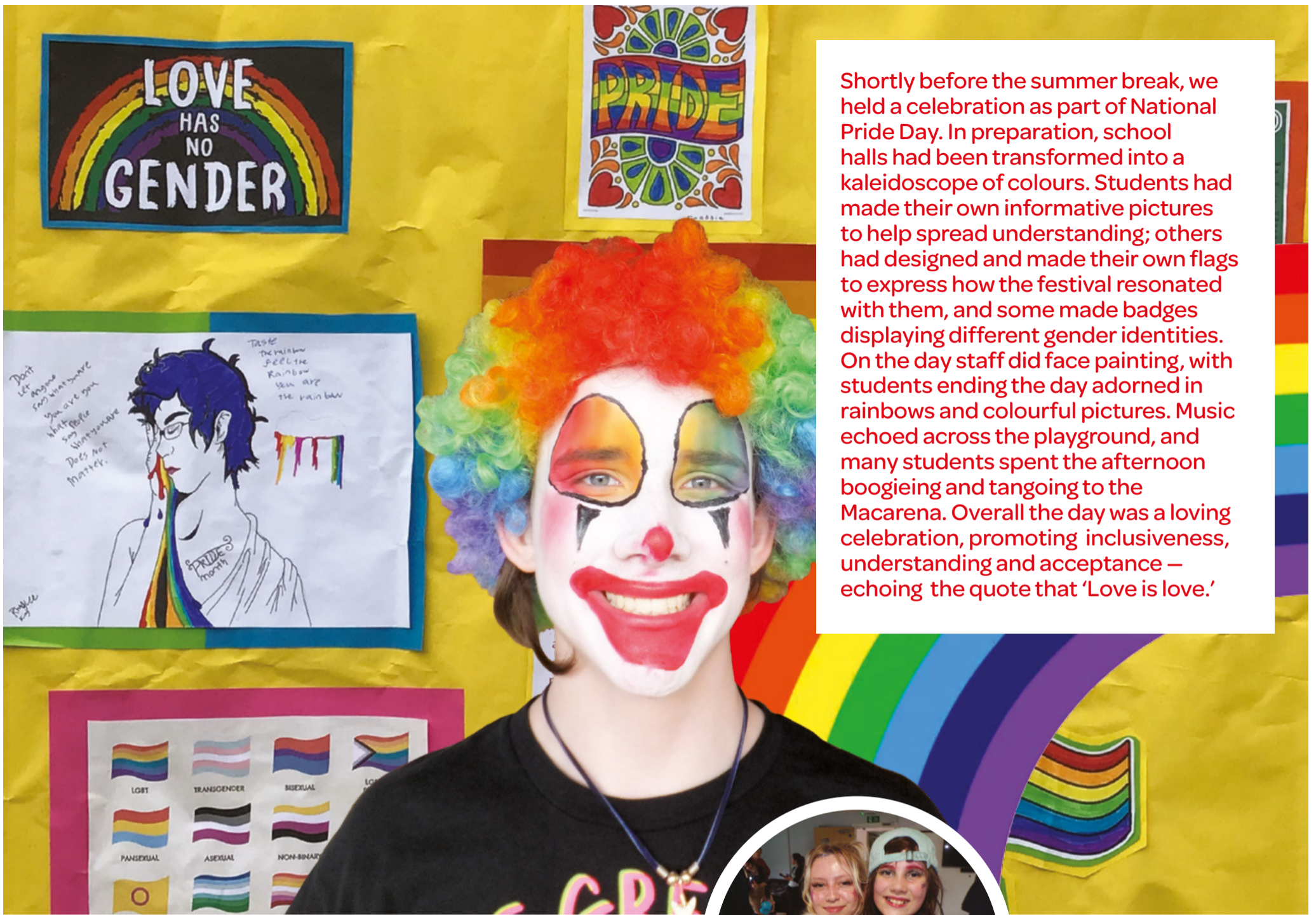
Over the coming months we will be exploring a range of topics including 'the magic of nettles' – by using nettles to make liquid fertilizer and use them to making nettle and honey cake. We will also be grafting fruit trees and exploring how and why most seeds and plants can only grow in the spring."

Edible mushrooms for the school kitchen.



Below: Mark with GCSE students Luke and Jesse.





Shortly before the summer break, we held a celebration as part of National Pride Day. In preparation, school halls had been transformed into a kaleidoscope of colours. Students had made their own informative pictures to help spread understanding; others had designed and made their own flags to express how the festival resonated with them, and some made badges displaying different gender identities. On the day staff did face painting, with students ending the day adorned in rainbows and colourful pictures. Music echoed across the playground, and many students spent the afternoon boogieing and tangoing to the Macarena. Overall the day was a loving celebration, promoting inclusiveness, understanding and acceptance – echoing the quote that ‘Love is love.’

Exam results

This year our students achieved some outstanding results in their examinations. Here are the highlights...

Year 10s

A first for Acorn Park – our Year 10 group had the opportunity to complete some of their key qualifications a year earlier than normal. All sat Functional Skills exams in English and Maths. The results were magnificent! An essential component of the English exam was Speaking & Listening. Our students did so well at this, they received a commendation from the Chief Examiner at AQA along with a letter to the school praising their work. **Almost 100% of students achieved a pass in either or both, maths, and English.**

Luke

One of this group – Luke, is a full calendar year younger than his peers. However, this did not stop him from sitting and passing his English qualification, while still in year 9! Congratulations to Luke. He is the youngest student in our school to sit and pass a formal qualification in English. Throughout the year, Luke worked tirelessly to ensure he was ready and able to complete his exam.



Year 11s

Our Year 11s have also shown a steely determination to succeed. It could be said, this year group was the most disrupted by the Lockdown. Therefore, their results are truly exceptional. They sat a wide variety of qualifications: **100% of students entered for English, Maths, Statistics, Science, History, Classics, Art, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Ethics received a GCSEs pass grade. Of students entered, 100% passed their Gateway qualifications exams.**

Year 12s

Like their younger peers, Year 12s achieved a wide variety of qualifications – some improving on previous results and some taking on extra GCSEs. As with our Year 11s, many have now left Acorn Park and are off to college. Some have returned to our growing sixth-form and are embarking on further studies, from Business Studies to Triple Science and Higher Maths.

Karen McAtear
Head of English



At Acorn Park we celebrate events that inspire, change and encourage those who dream big and Eurovision does just that. Eurovision encourages us to embrace the beauty of unity in diversity – a sentiment echoed in our own school ethos.

During our celebration, the school lunch hall was adorned with international flag tattoos as the students covered themselves with glitter and wore fantastic vibrant costumes inspired by the event and outshone their individuality with fake moustaches and extravagant face masks, in which the best dressed received a prize.

Bright, sparkly waistcoats and colourful paints shrouded the playground. We heard the echoes of 'Never Going to Give You Up' sung by Rick Astley around the room as students sang in Karaoke, providing some fantastic performances; others danced and partied around the lunch hall, with smiles ear to ear. Staff also conducted a face painting space where students could get any competing country's flags temporarily tattooed by our excellent Art teacher and helpers.

This was a great day of celebration and inclusiveness for all, as it invited all to be involved in the joy and laughter around them.



Trip to the Tate

19 JUNE

GCSE students from Orwell and Shakespeare classes, went on a trip to the Tate Museum of Modern Art in London, to drink in the creativity on show.

Top: Elle Mae and Callie at Tate Modern.
Right: The Infinity Mirror Room.

We went by train, the day was sunny and bright. Minds were sharp, ready for an exciting day full of adventures in our big, charming capital. With no unforeseen issues, the Art students and teachers arrived at the magnanimous Tate Museum. We entered several rooms, full of art exhibitions that fed our eyes and minds as water in a desert.

The first room was Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms. These immersive

installations transport you into Kusama's unique vision of endless reflections. *Infinity Mirrored Room – Filled with the Brilliance of Life* is one of Kusama's largest installations to date and was made for her 2012 retrospective at Tate Modern. It is shown alongside the *Chandelier of Grief*, a room that creates the illusion of a boundless universe of rotating crystal chandeliers. A small presentation of photographs and moving images – some on display for the first time – provides historical context for the global phenomenon that Kusama's mirrored rooms have become today. This

was an extraordinary experience.

Amongst many rooms, we experienced was the Tate's iconic Turbine Hall. We saw how artists create new ideas in the Natalie Bell Building. We also looked at the ways in which artists have responded to mass media and ever-changing technologies. Including a diverse range of techniques and materials – from posters and paint to analogue and digital technology, the display raises questions around feminism, consumerism, and the cult of celebrity.

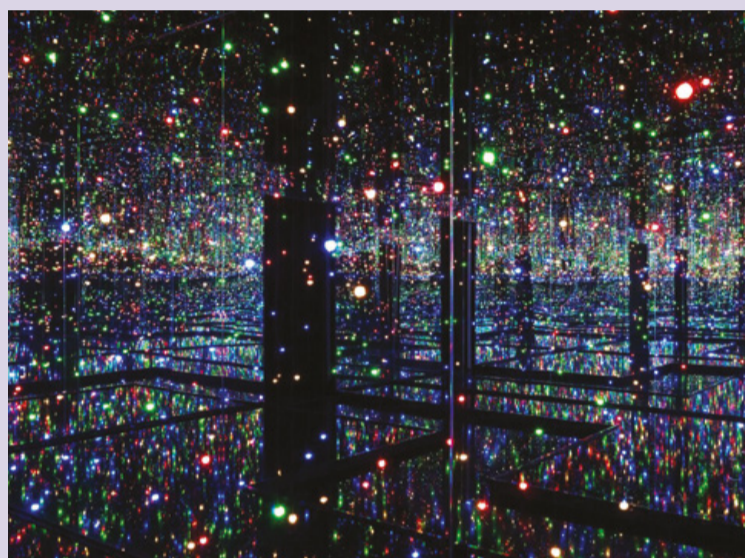
Another room had "The Materials and Objects" display, it looks at the

Tate Modern has over a hundred years of art, from modernism in the early 1900s, to exciting works created today. This includes paintings, sculptures, and more made by artists all over the world such as Pablo Picasso, Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Jenny Holzer.

inventive ways in which artists around the world use diverse materials. Increasingly over the last hundred years, artists have challenged the idea that certain materials are unsuitable for art. Some employ industrial materials and methods, while others adapt craft skills, or put the throwaway products of consumer society to new uses.

Lastly, we saw the "Performer and the participant" where we could Discover how artists working between the 1960s and the 1990s opened new spaces for participation.

At the end of the day, we have returned to our school and homes with a full heart and a big smile.



Sports Day

On 26th of June Acorn Park held it's annual Sports Day, – an occasion to celebrate athletic ability, teamwork trying and taking part.

by Charlotte Loveridge

Despite the scorching hot weather, everyone tried their best, participated well and cheered on their peers from the side-lines.

Held in the sports hall as well as outside near Mpanga building, the Upper School competed in a 100-metre sprint, shot put, hurdles, discus and long jump whilst the lower school participated in egg and spoon races, running races, and jumping races.

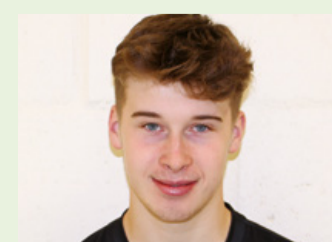


To round off an afternoon of exercise and fun, staff competed in a running race and a staff relay race. The school then gathered back in the Sports Hall to celebrate the achievements of each class and those who competed in each event by giving out certificates and medals. A special mention goes to Robin who won 'Sportsperson of the Year' for developing not only his physical sporting skills but demonstrating a growth in maturity and sports values.

Finally, this all wouldn't have been possible without the work and dedication of Saffron, Kirstie and Emma C-D who supported the organisation of the awards at the end of the event.

Congrats Jack!
Congratulations also go to Jack in Zephaniah who competed in the Paralympics in Germany this year and was awarded gold medals fo gymnastics. Very well deserved!

Top: Ben racing in the hurdles race.
Above: Sam doing the long jump.
Left: Staff and student relay.



IN FOCUS:



The National Nurturing Schools Programme

The National Nurturing Schools Programme allows staff to develop and embed a nurturing culture throughout the school, enhancing teaching and learning, promoting healthy outcomes for children and young people – all achieved by focussing the whole school environment on the child's emotional needs and development as well as academic learning. It also a way for Acorn Park to gain recognition for achieving a higher level of nurturing provision.

1

The six principles of nurture practice in National Nurturing Schools

Children's learning is understood developmentally
We all learn in different ways.





What does a Nurturing School mean?



For your child...

- **We track** the social and emotional needs of children each term to provide the best support for each individual.
- **We offer** children plenty of opportunities to talk about their emotions and feelings.
- **We listen** to children's thoughts and opinions through questionnaires, circle time and school council meetings.
- **We prepare** the children for changes in life.
- **We make** the children feel safe and secure whilst at school.
- **We understand** that each of our children are individuals and all learn and develop at different ages and stages.

For you...

- **We aim** to make all visitors welcome in the school.
- **We aim** to work with parents/carers and the wider community.
- Parents/carers and the community **support our work** towards the National Nurturing Schools Programme.
- **We involve** parents/carers and the community in our plans.

For us...

- We have provisions in place to support staff wellbeing.
- We aim to ensure staff are included in decisions and planning.
- We aim to make staff feel respected, valued and supported.
- Staff are able to access relevant training.
- Our policies will include a reference to the National Nurturing Schools Programme.



Quick fact:
Communication can be learned and improved. Communication is not always verbal, and non-verbal communication speaks volumes.

2

The classroom offers a safe base
The classroom is a safe place.

3

We understand the importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
Nurture helps us feel good in our mind and body.

4

We know language is a vital means of communication
How we speak and the words we do and do not use are important.

5

We understand all behaviour is a means of communication
How we behave tells you how we feel.

6

We acknowledge the importance of transition in children's lives
Everyone faces change but nurture can help.

Friday July 21st

AcornFest

"Today has been brilliant – watching friends in the talent show and setting up my PRIDE stall."

To celebrate Acorn Fest 2023, all of Acorn Park school came together to put on the best end-of-year party possible.

baby photos, a caricature art stall, teddy tombola's, the circus and even a pride stall! Karen McAtear, head of English was especially proud of her year 11 students for their witty blending of herself and one of the GCSE poems they were studying, Ozymandias, for her caricature piece!

Other staff ended up joining in with the entertainment themselves, which Kirsty leading some song and dance and Adam Matterson himself being enlisted by Steve Sausage - "Dancing with a man on a unicycle is NOT how I imagined spending part of my afternoon."

An exciting addition this year was a local airsoft company (that takes on a student, for work experience) set up a play zone at the front of the school! The kids had tonnes of fun running between the obstacles and trying to shoot the opposing teams.

We had a special visitor at this years AcornFest, Aaron King, a SEN advisor and director of 9000 lives. He was overjoyed with the event and spoke of how marvellous it was to see from his specialist perspective; 'It was amazing to see how all the efforts of the students and staff made an amazing community event! Well done all!'



This year at AcornFest 2023 we were very happy and overjoyed as a school to see the time and effort young people had put in to running their stalls, and lots of fun was to be had across the school!

There was such a wide variety of different stalls and sights for children, staff and families alike to explore; from guess the teachers

"An absolute delight to see so many happy faces – a perfect and a great year for Acorn Park."



"We loved the fun of Steve Sausage and everyone laughing together."

All profits were donated to a number of charities.

Left: Reuben rocking the sunglasses.
Above: Isaac and Fletcher's craft stall.
Right: Orwell class raising funds for their trip abroad next year.

Thankyou!
Of course, we can't finish talking about this year's AcornFest without a massive shout-out and thank you to our schools kitchen staff, who had a continuous supply of hot and cold drinks, biscuits and ice-creams or lollies for all the attendees on hand throughout the day! A vital part of enjoying any outdoor event.



"What a great event! So much to do! We love it."



"Such a lovely event put on for the children and their families!"

Above: Tia and Theo playing on the new equipment
Right: Students enjoying a game of laser tag.

