



Acorn Park

Acorn Park
Spring 2024

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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.

We are Acorn Park

In January we started a new year with some significant changes to our leadership model, welcoming Adam and Emma to their roles as co-Heads of School for our Semi-formal and Formal curriculum pathways respectively. Since then, I was delighted to see Karen McAtear and Sarah Short join the team as Deputy Headteachers. In addition, we added a new positions to our structure, a Quality and Compliance Manager, and Emma Thompson was successfully promoted to this position, working across our services to ensure that

"This exciting new facility will allow us to immerse children in a wide range of simulated environments"

we meet all our regulatory and policy requirements. We have also appointed new curriculum leads and a host of other leadership posts.

Of particular note, I'd like to congratulate Ricky Hughes who took a new role to support our Behaviour and Attitudes and Melissa Bolton now supports pupils and family's mental health and wellbeing alongside Amy Young. Finally, many congratulations to Georgeena Taylor who takes over from Selina as our Lead Clinician.

We have seen some benefits to this new way of working, but I'd be really interested to hear your feedback. From our perspective, the appointment of leaders to each of our two curriculum pathways has helped us to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning. Partly, this is because staff teams have more opportunities to plan collaboratively within each pathway and our training for staff is now even better matched to our pupils needs.



We are also seeking benefits from having leaders who specialise in formal and semi-formal provision leading our quality assurance processes, leading to better quality feedback to staff.

I don't have a building plan to share with you yet, as I have done in past years, but reflecting on the works achieved to date I'm sure you'll agree that our facilities have never been stronger. This said, I will share one thing, the installation of an immersion room for our semi-formal cohort. This exciting new facility will allow us to immerse children in a wide range of simulated environments through the sounds, smell and images that are projected on three walls and the floor. So, we can be sat in the barber's chair de-sensitising to all the various possible circumstances - with tech that allows us to make it quiet or busy, loud or quiet while we handle scissors, turn on trimmers and spray water into the air near our faces. Equally, we could be walking through the rainforest or following blood around the human body. This invaluable new facility will hopefully be up and running by the time we get to Acorn Fest. As always, I look forward to seeing you there.

Peter Marshall
Head of Service

Students launch new enterprise

Students from Acorn Park School have launched their new enterprise – by opening their own coffee shop!

by Tracy

This project aims to provide young people with the opportunity to experience setting up and running a business, while also developing new skills to showcase on their CVs. The students have already acquired a range of skills, including working as part of a team to create a logo, costing menus, conducting product research, and taking



a Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate. They have also presented business plans, applied for various positions within the coffee shop, and taken their roles very seriously during the opening.

This project has been fantastic in enabling students to develop workplace skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, customer service, catering, and more. It has also provided cross-curricular links with subjects like money, English, IT, and DT.

I am super proud of all the students who are taking part in this project, and it was lovely to see them acting so professionally and taking their roles seriously.

Their long-term goal is to raise enough money to invest in a horse box that they can turn into a mobile coffee shop which can then be taken out into the local community.



Top: Harley cutting his wonderful Biscoff cake.
Left: Jack serving a customer
Below: Staff enjoying a break in the café.



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even had the luxury of being valeted around to the cleaning spot and safely returned to their spot. We also arranged multiple cake sales - run by the students, in which students baked at home and sold them to both staff and students alike, same goes with the hot chocolate stall which included the opportunity of marshmallows on top along with cream which I'm very much partial too.

We have other fundraisers ready with another run of bag-packing at Morrisons and a sponsored walk.

The students' hard work and dedication is truly inspiring, as they balance their academic responsibilities with these fundraising efforts - ensuring the success of their trip. What they have done shows our students have great character and motivation, demonstrating a great determination and ability to interact with others and the public to achieve a collective goal.

by Joshua Mcleman

Left inset: Freya working hard. Right inset: Theo getting into the festive bag packing spirit.

FUNDRAISING

Helping our students set sail for Amsterdam

In July Year 11 students are embarking on an overnight ferry to Holland, to explore Amsterdam, going on boat tours, visiting museums, and experiencing Dutch culture: going on a Pancake tour is also on the cards! However, a trip for 18 people requires an extremely big budget! So, the students have been tirelessly pulling out every stop to ensure their trip is

a success, a lot being off their own back, through various fundraising events run by the year group.

The fundraising started with a car wash, in which the students used their own lunches/free periods going around from class to class collecting names of those who wanted their cars washing, collecting donations and IOUs from them: some individuals

Students at Acorn Park School are eager to embark on the first of potentially many future opportunities to go abroad with the school; a trial run if you like. The first trip abroad is taking place in Amsterdam.



£846 raised so far!

'Thank you to everyone who donated, we really appreciate it.'



Some of the Year 11 girls supported by Molly.



Above: James, Theo and Tate selling cakes in Austen class. Left inset: Freya helping customers at Morrisons supermarket.

Below: Stanislaw and Tia try on the lifeboatman uniform.

Inset: Painting of Henry Blogg – famous Cromer lifeboatman.



STUDY TRIPS

Henry Blogg Museum

Kinney Class took a trip to Cromer in Spring term, to the Henry Blogg Museum and Cromer Lifeboat Station. We explored the lifeboat station first, where we saw the current life boat, The Tamar Class Lifeboat. We found out about the crew who man the lifeboat, who are all volunteers. After this, we went to explore the Henry Blogg Museum, this was a fantastic museum, with so many interactive activities, such as dressing up as lifeboat crew and using morse code to communicate messages. We all learnt a lot about Henry Blogg, a local hero who saved countless lives in his time as captain of Cromer Lifeboat. Henry had a dog called, Monte, who he rescued from a sinking ship and although Henry was referred to as the 'greatest of lifeboatmen' he could not swim!

by Erin McDaid

Lawrence & Kinney

Lawrence class and Kinney class each week take part in cooking lessons where our students follow a step-by-step recipe and work independently with support to cook delicious food. During this lesson students develop knowledge of safety in the kitchen, how to use different kitchen equipment and skills and techniques that are needed to compete different skills. For example, chopping, weighing, mixing, and learning about the health and safety aspects when in the kitchen and dealing with different food. Within these two classes we also have some allergies, this allows students to learn about what this means and how important it is to not cross contaminate and also what allergies are. Lawrence class also complete the shopping for this where students take a trip offsite to the supermarket and follow a list of shopping ingredients for the recipe that they will be following. This enables students to develop their social skills in the community and learn about different budgeting as they have an allowance for the ingredients. This term we have made, pizza pockets, rice crispy cakes, leek and cheddar muffins, fish finger rolls and wedges, and halloumi and vegetable skewers.

Emily F



Oscar Porter

I am the Wellbeing Lead for our staff at Acorn Park School. I am a mental health first aid in adults and children, I am also a domestic abuse champion and study psychology to support my practice. My job is to make sure that the staff feel safe and supported in a nurturing way that enables them to care for our children in the best way possible. Whether that is a debrief, a one-to-one chat or simply a reflective practice session. As well as looking after our children, it is equally important to look after the staff that make the huge difference to our children's lives. One saying that you'll hear me say is, "if we cannot love and look after ourselves, then how are we meant to have the ability to care for and educate others."

Christmas Dinner

Karen, Nang, Emma, Kathy and Peter.



Did you know most people go through an astounding 7000 calories at Christmas Dinner? I don't know about you; I feel like I eat much more than that! Usually a family feast, Christmas dinner is the crux of the celebration of Christmas, consisting of many belly-warming foods. You should never enter the kitchen of someone holding the chef duty in the kitchen on Christmas, though. However, there was no need as you could smell it from a far stretch, the wonderful aroma of roasting filled the school halls at Acorn Park and the sound of joyful students and staff rang around, ecstatic at the arrival of the decadent cauliflower cheese and beautiful baked Brussel sprouts, the marmite of Christmas; though one of my favourites, along with crispy roast spuds coming as a front-runner. Red and green are the primary colours of Christmas, and you can certainly see the evidence of that with beautiful decorations hanging from the ceiling. The Christmas dinner was held at midday, giving our wonderful chefs time to prepare and the children plenty to play and work up their appetite. The enchanting elves of SLT provided service with a smile and Christmas cheer, with mountains of the best grub you ever did see, consisting of succulent roast turkey, glistening honey glazed carrots and parsnips, the Brussel sprouts, cauliflower cheese, and roasties, fluffy Yorkshires, thick flavoursome gravy and not to forget the pigs in blankets, an absolute staple. I think those who indulged were in majority agreement due to the array of empty plates dotted around, and no wondering why with the best roast prepared to date! This was shortly followed by the luxurious chocolate Christmas tree ice cream dessert and a yule log, with the option to have both if any room was left. Thanks to our fantastic staff team, who gave their extra hands to make this a success, and the staff and students for making it a dinner to remember!

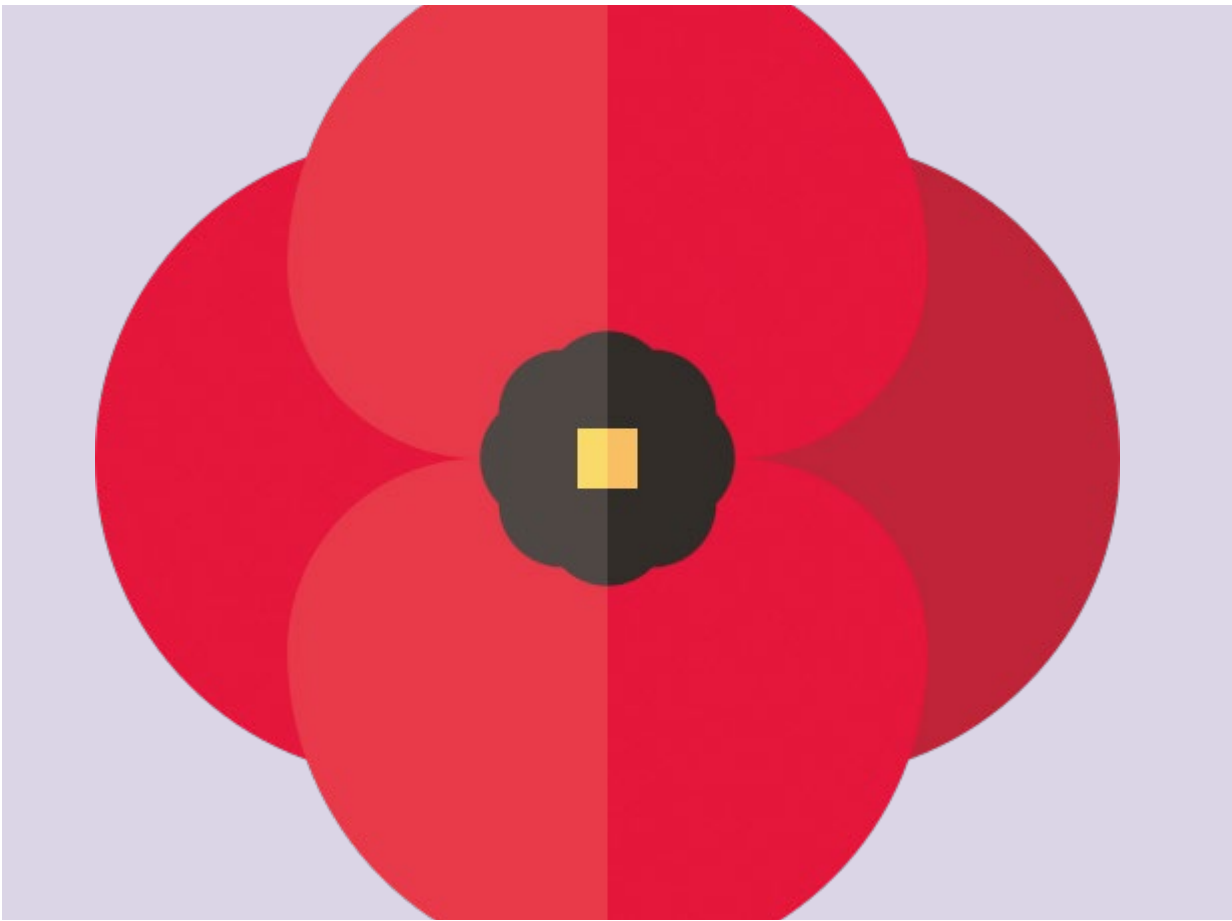
by Joshua Mcleman

Class Notes

Murphy Rosen

Murphy Rosen class have had a great term working on ASDAN and practicing their independence skills in the community visiting Abbeycroft Leisure centre to attend the 'I Can Swim' sessions. They have been able to meet staff that work there and ask them questions to practice their communication skills and researching future careers as well as knowing who is a 'safe' person to go to in the community. After half a term we decided upon a new challenge of going to a new pool at a school in Harleston. This meant being able to adapt to changing and showering somewhere unfamiliar, following different instructions and being in a mainstream school environment. Both classes rose to the challenge growing in both confidence and independence.

Melissa C



Remembrance Day: Lest we forget

As a school we love to show our respect and support to important days within the year. So, Remembrance Day was of course within the list of events that we would happily make time for. To show our respect, our students within their classes, created their own poppies out of various materials and together created a lovely collage within our library.



Oscar and Seth taking part in the one-minute silence.

As well as this, we came together as a whole on the main playground and completed a minute of silence to show our respects to those who fought for our country in World War 1 and 2. Before our moment of silence, we had one of our students read out a poem that reflected on Remembrance Day and what we think about when we hear the words Remembrance Day.

by Oscar Porter

Wellbeing Lead and Student Council Co-Chairman

EVENTS

World Book Day activities

World Book Day is an annual charity event that began in 1995.

On World Book Day, every child in full-time education is given a £1 voucher to spend on a book, with the hopes of encouraging kids to read more. World Book Day is a day of celebrating both the joy and importance that reading has around the world and the effect it has on us every single day.



Every child in education is given a £1 voucher to spend on a book



Books are used to educate, inspire, and entertain us. Enriching us with cultures and worldwide events that we may have never encountered otherwise.

Reading not only helps us explore different worlds, but it also provides great benefits for our mental well-being, with many studies showing the improvement reading can have in furthering our cognitive skills, empathy, and stress, and potentially helping you live longer! Not a bad hobby to partake in. No matter how we take part in turning pages whether it be physically or in recent times on E-books, we encourage you to pick either of these whether it is an old favourite or a new one and reap the rewards.

However, we must also recognize the importance of access to these books and allow all to be able to take part in this, as not everyone has the capacity to afford books and access to local libraries. During this event, we try to consider ways in which we can support and aid the initiatives to promote this

access to reading for all. Acorn Park celebrates this once-a-year event profusely, where students and adults alike can express their creative minds by dressing up or even curating their own, celebrating a book of their choice, we had class-based books ranging from Shakespeare to Winnie the Pooh and Harry Potter, many partook in this wonderful day. The children also wrote their book reviews throughout school and held group reading, movie and activities surrounding their chosen books, the children also received book vouchers they could use to indulge in new reading.

by Joshua Mcleman

Far left: Fletcher Class
Left inset: Adele and Charlotte as the witches from Macbeth.
Left: Stanislaw and Ruby.



STUDY TRIPS

Natural History Museum trip

Key stage 2, 3 and 4 students made the trip to London to explore the Natural History Museum and connect classroom knowledge with real-life exhibits and stories.

Armed with amazing goodies from the school chefs and kitchen, 67 students and adults made the trip. The London Natural History Museum located in South Kensington, is a centre of scientific excellence in the discovery of new living things. This world-famous museum promotes the discovery and enjoyment of the natural world through exciting exhibits like the Life and Earth Galleries, Wildlife Garden, and Geological Collections.

Acorn Park KS4 students spent time with a scientist involved in deep sea diving and exploration of new living things. They got a chance to see first-hand some newly discovered species.

The following zones and galleries were visited:

- **Hintze Hall:** featuring a 25-metre skeleton of a blue whale, the American mastodon, a 300-kg coral.
- **Dinosaurs Gallery:** collection of dinosaur skeletons, part of the first Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton to be found, a Triceratops skull, and more.
- **Volcanoes & Earthquakes Gallery:** through film footage, interactive games for lower classes, and an earthquake simulator.
- **Zoology Spirit Collection:** housing 23 million specimens stored in alcohol.

It was a truly fantastic trip enjoyed by all.

Top: Shakespeare class fighting off a dino (left to right: Megan, Adele, Charlotte, Molly, Josh).
Below: Reece and a Polar Bear.



Art at Acorn School

Some societal challenges could, in part, help explain developmental trends suggesting levels of expression in children's artwork declines during the primary school years, and that many children give up art around the age of 11. At Acorn Park School, we persist in providing art for all our students. At a time when mental health issues are on the rise in children and happiness and well-being are declining, this disconnect with art could be significant, so we are proud to contribute the reported benefits of creativity, meaningful engagement with the arts is more important than ever.

What is art?

First, we will define a general Art concept. What do you define as art? Art is the expression of ideas and emotions through a physical medium, like painting, sculpture, film, dance, writing, photography, or theatre. If you love the creative process, maybe you'll devote your life to art.

The visual arts, taught by Paula, are art forms such as painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, filmmaking, comics, design, crafts, and architecture. Art engages children's senses in open-ended play and supports the development of cognitive, social-emotional, and multisensory skills. As children progress into elementary school and beyond, art continues to provide opportunities for brain development, mastery, self-esteem, and creativity.

Our students benefit from one hour per week of Visual Art, Music, and Drama with expert teachers, and some students benefit from 3 sessions depending on their choices.

The experience of art

In our Semi-Formal curriculum, Art is embedded in all activities. It's not painting to create a display piece but rather painting to experience what the paint feels like when it hits the canvas or whatever material the child chooses. It's finding different ways to use the paint and or figuring out what happens when different colours are mixed.

Process Art

Another key component of process art is that it's self-directed and choice-driven using lots of sensorial input. The teacher can still pick a specific project. Then, within the project, they allow the child to let his or her imagination and creativity run wild! Our formal classes benefit from an adaptation of the national curriculum to their interest. Classes are prepared regarding students' interests and using differentiated strategies for each child to achieve the targets. These Art lessons are also inclusive of other cultures and subjects. We try to coordinate all subjects into one big project so that the curriculum is interlinked.

Art for Post-16 students

Post-16 students have a more directed learning towards each Art project. They develop work according to their interests, and skills to use within the community, so they can be better equipped for the world outside. The team working with Post-16 is extremely creative and competent in promoting Art events and making beautiful and engaging Art projects.

Did you know?
Art used to be an Olympic sport! Medals were awarded for architecture, music, painting, sculpture, and literature.

What is Process Art?

Process Art is unstructured and full of choice! Children are born with a need to have autonomy, so not only are they able to express themselves through art, but they are also able to be creative. Engaging in Process Art also gives kids the freedom to be who they are. Indeed, all this amazing dynamic is only achieved due to one of the most prized benefits of good teamwork, camaraderie and a sense of friendship among team members.

- Process Art helps develop:
- Creativity and imagination skills
 - Critical thinking skills
 - Curiosity
 - Independence and self-sufficiency skills
 - Self-esteem and self-confidence
 - Collaboration (if creating with others)
 - Leadership skills
 - Resilience and grit as they overcome challenges
 - Fine and gross motor skills
 - Sensory skills.



STUDENT STORY: REUBEN

Our photographer hero

Here, we have our world-class photographer, Reuben, who has collected several of these photos throughout the year. At the end of this year, Reuben will be going on to study Music Production and an A Level in Photography at college. He has been getting some well-needed practice in and around the school, capturing some unforgettable candid moments that would have been unseen without him.



One of Reuben's fantastic photos.





March 25th

Holi Festival

As part of learning about different cultures, students recently took part in Acorn Park's own Holi celebration – otherwise known as the Festival of Colours.



Holi Festival, also known as the festival of colours, is an ancient celebration, marking the victory of good over evil. It is a time for bidding farewell to winter and welcoming the vibrant spring. This year, it fell on the 28th, aligning with the full moon day in the month of Phalguna on the Hindu calendar.

Top: Shakespeare Class and staff – Adele, Megan and Josh.

Inset above left: Maximillian and Melissa.

Inset above right: Kenny. Above: Maxmillian.

Left: Sissay class and their staff Rhys, Brogan and Lynn. Below: Adele, Josh, Nancy, Reuben, and Charlie.

The Acorn Park Holi Festival celebration was a resounding success, a testament to our community's spirit and enthusiasm. However, we can take this opportunity to make it even more impactful for our young people. Let's expand it into something that resonates deeply with them, making the festival an unforgettable experience for all. Seeing everyone having fun and taking it all in was fantastic.

On Monday, 25th March, Acorn Park celebrated yet another Holi festival, where the children found both a learning experience and were allowed to make a mess, all while learning about the traditions of where this festival comes from and its origins. During Acorn Park, classes worked on Holi-based poetry and making their own Holi paints within the art department during this period. Some studies suggest this festival has therapeutic benefits: having fun with friends and throwing paint at each other can't be wrong – right?

The festival is a beautiful amalgamation of colours, music, and feasting, where people from diverse

backgrounds come together to celebrate. The most iconic part of the festival comes from throwing or smearing vibrant hues of coloured powder/paint on each other; water guns and water balloons are also incorporated.

The heart of the Holi Festival, much like that of Acorn Park, is about inclusion. This year both formal and semi-formal being together at once at forest school, despite myself being personally targeted by many students getting their own back on me for telling them to do their work, with mouthfuls of the powder and blocked ears too, paint was exiting my ears for many days!

