



Orchard Round-Up

FRESH FROM THE FARM



A LITTLE NOTE FROM OUR HEAD OF CENTRE

Emily Mayne

As we come to the end of another busy and rewarding half term at Orchard Therapeutic Farm, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the incredible progress, opportunities, and experiences our young people have engaged in over recent weeks.

One of the highlights this half term was supporting the local May Day event. Our young people represented Orchard Therapeutic exceptionally well, helping with the running of the event and engaging positively with members of the public throughout the day. We were incredibly proud to receive such lovely feedback from visitors about the manners, confidence, kindness, and hard work demonstrated by our young people. Opportunities like this are so important in helping build confidence, communication skills, independence, and a sense of belonging within the wider community.

This half term has also seen the introduction of several exciting new subject areas within our curriculum offer, including Taxidermy, Photography, and Specimen Design. These subjects have provided unique opportunities for creativity, exploration, practical learning, and therapeutic engagement, and it has been fantastic to see the enthusiasm and curiosity shown by students taking part.

Looking ahead to next half term, we are excited to further expand our curriculum with the introduction of Sewing and Agriculture sessions. We are continually striving to provide meaningful, diverse, and engaging learning experiences that support both personal development and future pathways for our young people.

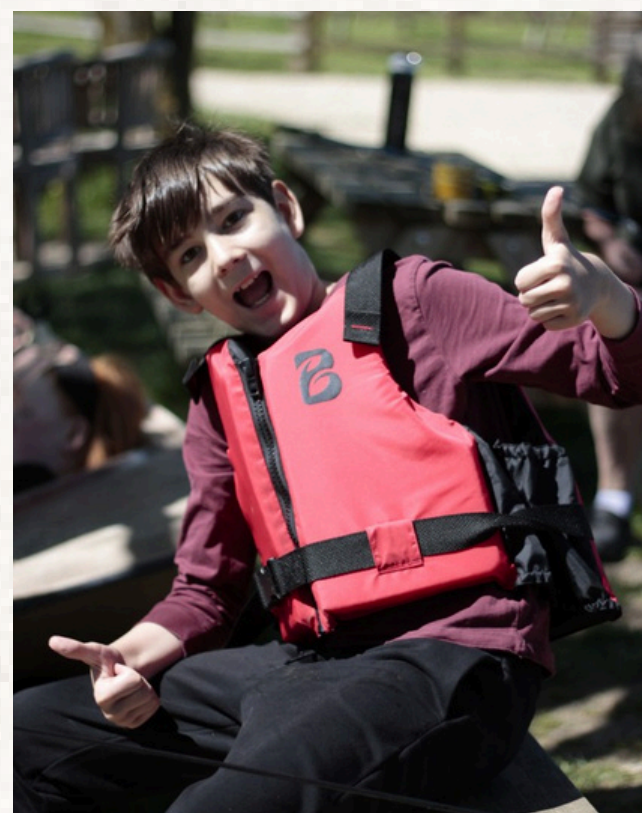
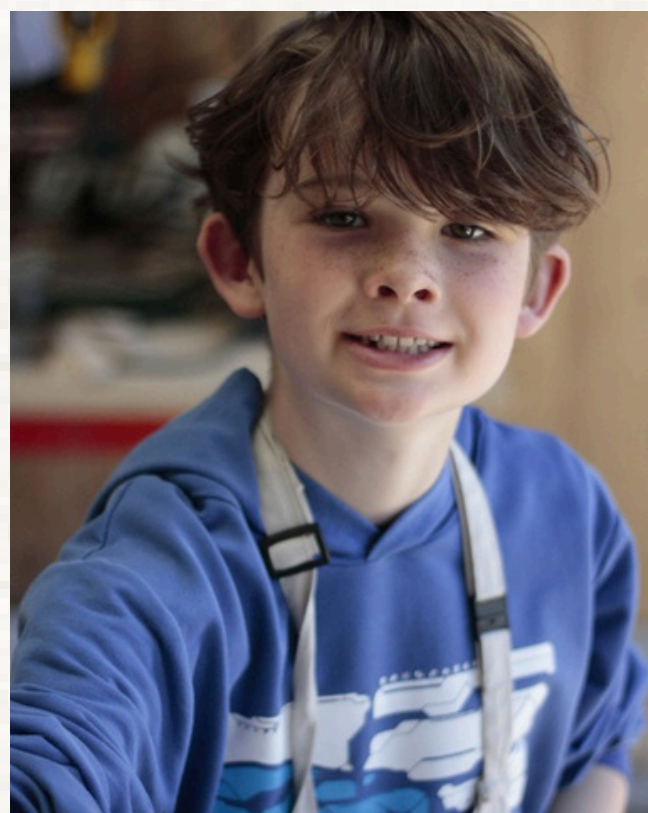
We are also very pleased to be welcoming Phyliss to the Orchard Therapeutic team next half term. Phyliss brings with her a wealth of teaching experience from SEN settings, and we are looking forward to the knowledge, care, and expertise she will bring to our provision. In addition, we have recently welcomed Glenn to our Mechanics and Trades team. Glenn brings extensive experience within the mechanics industry alongside previous City & Guilds delivery experience. His practical knowledge and passion for vocational learning have already had a positive impact within sessions, and we are excited to continue developing this area of the curriculum further.

Our enrichment and community experiences have continued to grow this half term, with trips including visits to Millets Farm Centre and the Thame Country Fair. Young people have also supported in collecting additional fish for the farm and helping rescue two long-tailed geckos, which has created fantastic opportunities for responsibility, animal care, and curiosity-led learning.

Another memorable experience this half term was welcoming a local metal detecting group into the provision to deliver sessions with our young people. Students thoroughly enjoyed the experience, showing great enthusiasm and engagement throughout the activities.

As always, I would like to thank our staff team, families, referrers, and wider community for their continued support. Most importantly, I would like to recognise our young people, whose resilience, growth, humour, and achievements continue to make Orchard such a special place to be. We are looking forward to another exciting half term ahead.

ORCHARD THERAPEUTIC BARN



Italy, Transition and Growth

Firstly, we would like to welcome and introduce Vicky Nicolosi who has joined our team. This has been wonderful for both our young people and staff alike having another team member to teach and support our smaller provision at Orchard Therapeutic Farm.

We now have all three Barns open that have been named as Blackberry, Loganberry and Juniper. This term, our young people have embraced a vibrant journey through Italy, using food, creativity, and community experiences as a backdrop for learning. Alongside this, we have seen a strong focus on welcoming new starters along with transitions to the Farm and preparation for moving to Post 16 provision for those in Year 11.

New Starters: Settling Into the Barn

For our new starters, Term 5 has been all about building trust, routine, and confidence. Young people have begun to understand expectations, develop relationships with staff and peers, and explore the environment through hands on activities such as cooking, craft, and animal care. Many are now starting to use independent regulation strategies—taking space, seeking support, or engaging with animals to help manage emotions.

Transitioning to the Farm: Growing Independence

For those moving onto the Farm, this term has highlighted increasing maturity, responsibility, and readiness. Young people are demonstrating greater independence in everyday tasks such as cooking meals, preparing food, cleaning, and working within real life routines.

We have also seen young people stepping into leadership roles, supporting younger peers, modelling positive behaviour, and showing empathy within group activities, as well as starting work experience in the Tipi Coffee Shop on Fridays. Their ability to engage socially, follow expectations, and contribute meaningfully reflects growing confidence and resilience.

Italian Theme: Food, Culture & Creativity

Our Italian theme has brought learning to life through food, creativity, and collaboration. Young people have developed key life skills through preparing fresh pizza, pasta, ravioli, and other Italian inspired dishes, while also exploring food sourcing, budgeting, and shared mealtimes. Trying to build the Leaning Tower of Pisa with spaghetti and marshmallows has led to equal part frustration and laughter. As well as learning collage techniques to blend colours and textures for artwork based on this iconic structure. These activities have strengthened teamwork, communication, problem solving, and independence, while also creating opportunities for young people to take pride in what they produce and share with others.

Learning Beyond the Barn: Millets Farm Trip

A highlight of the term was our trip to Millets Farm, where most of our young people were able to take their learning beyond the Barn and into the wider community. This experience provided valuable opportunities to practise social communication, independence, safety awareness, and real world skills in a new environment. Young people engaged positively with peers and staff, demonstrated responsibility, and built confidence navigating community spaces—an important step in their ongoing development.

A Term of Transition and Achievement

Overall, Term 5 has been a powerful period of transition, growth and achievement. New starters are becoming settled and secure, while others are progressing confidently onto the Farm, showing readiness for greater independence.

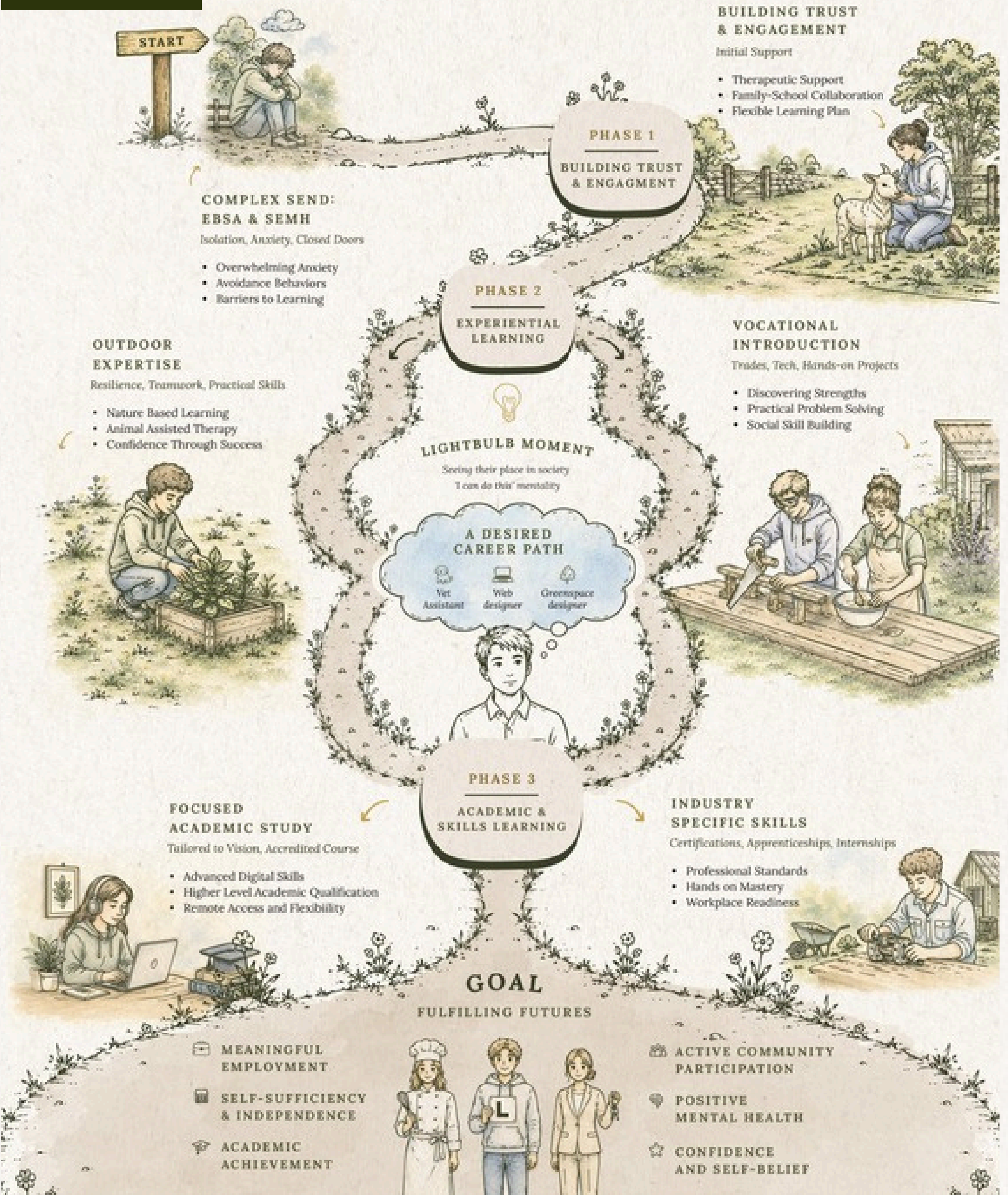
We wish you all a wonderful half term and look forward to using Greece next term as our country of choice to Explore, Engage and Empower our young people in their learning experiences, continuing to provide a slow-paced nurturing environment to enable them to grow at their own pace.



ORCHARD THERAPEUTIC POST-16 PATHWAYS

A Personalised Journey from EBSA & SEMH to a Fulfilling Adulthood

This illustration represents the personalised journey we create for young people at Orchard Therapeutic Farm. It shows how we begin by building trust, engagement and emotional safety before gradually introducing experiential learning, vocational opportunities and academic pathways that are tailored to each individual's strengths, interests and aspirations.



Art

Mono Prints, Portraiture and Van Gogh Inspired Landscapes

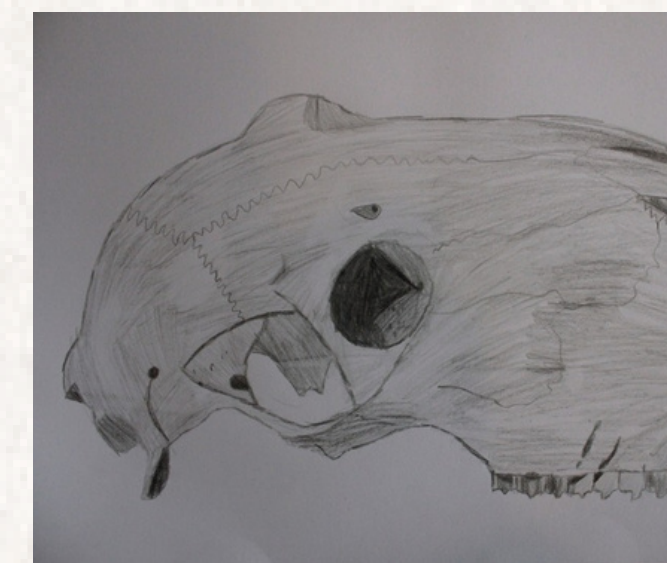
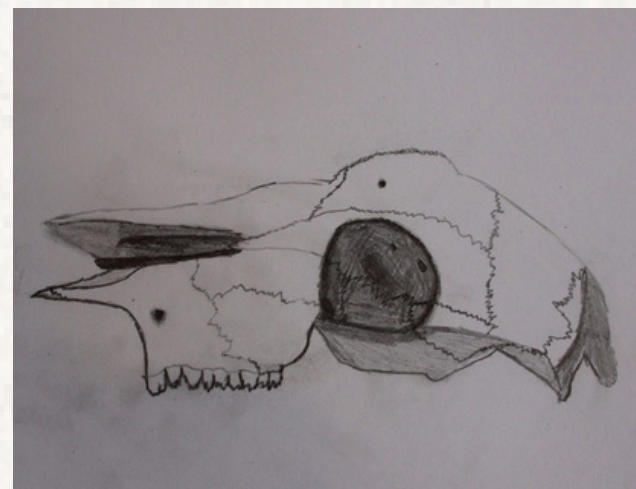
This term in the Art Department at Orchard Therapeutic Farm, students have explored a wide range of creative projects while developing their artistic skills and confidence.

One of our highlights this term has been the creation of a beautiful series of mono prints featuring silhouetted wildflowers. Students experimented with printmaking techniques to produce striking botanical artworks, which are now displayed in the new Post 16 room, helping to create a calm and inspiring environment for everyone to enjoy.

Students also focused on portraiture, exploring facial proportions and developing their observational drawing skills. Through careful study and practice, the young people gained a greater understanding of facial structure and learned how artists use proportion to create realistic portraits. They also created observational drawings of animal skulls, which helped to develop their hand-drawing skills and concentration.

Alongside these projects, we enjoyed several mindful colouring sessions, which provided opportunities for relaxation, concentration and creativity. These sessions encouraged students to slow down, focus and experience the calming benefits of art.

We are currently working on expressive landscape drawings inspired by Vincent van Gogh. Students have been studying his drawing style and mark-making techniques and will soon begin developing their work further using colour. We are excited to see these vibrant landscapes come to life over the coming weeks. It has been wonderful to see the creativity, enthusiasm and growing confidence of all the young people this term, and we look forward to sharing more of their fantastic artwork in the future.



Catering

Tex-Mex Cooking, Homemade Tortillas and Kitchen Skills

This half term, our Catering Team has been exploring the vibrant world of Tex-Mex cuisine while developing practical kitchen skills, confidence and teamwork. Students enjoyed a range of hands-on cooking sessions, including making homemade tortillas, building tacos, creating loaded nachos, cooking Mexican rice and experimenting with fusion dishes such as Mexican Mac & Cheese and chilli brownies. Learners also explored traditional flavours through homemade Chilaquiles.

Throughout the sessions, students developed knife skills, food preparation techniques, teamwork and confidence working more independently in the kitchen. It has been fantastic to see their creativity, enthusiasm and willingness to try new flavours and cooking methods.

We are incredibly proud of the progress shown this half term and look forward to continuing our culinary adventures next term.

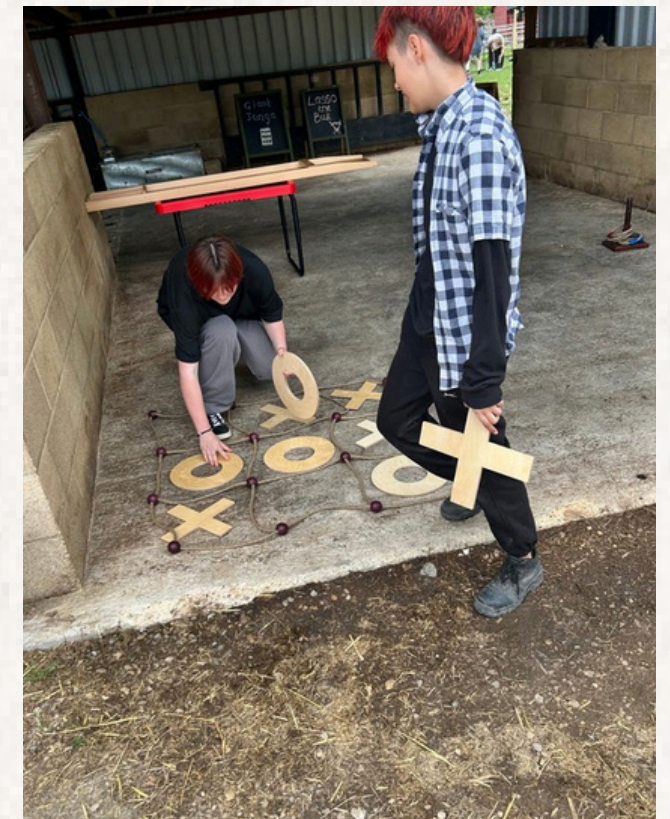
Thrive

Building Confidence, Teamwork and Responsibility Through Thrive

This term, our Thrive groups have been busy developing their self-confidence, strengthening their group-work skills and practicing positive rule-following through a range of creative and practical activities.

Some pupils have taken part in fun team-based experiments that encourage communication, problem-solving and cooperation. Others have continued the exciting planning of our new sensory room, which is really starting to take shape thanks to their ideas and commitment.

We've also been giving young people meaningful responsibilities around the farm, offering them the chance to feel trusted, capable, and proud of the contributions they make to our community.



PSHE

Community, Wellbeing and Healthy Decision-Making Across PSHE

Our primary year groups have been exploring Living in the Wider World during PSHE, focusing on community, money, rights and responsibilities. Pupils have been learning about the communities they belong to, how money is earned and used, and the importance of making sensible choices. They have also discussed the rights all children have and the responsibilities that come with them, helping them understand how their actions can positively shape the world around them.

Our secondary year groups have been focusing on PSHE topics that support wellbeing and decision-making as they grow. This term, students explored mental health basics, including how exercise, diet and body image awareness contribute to overall wellbeing.

They also learned about substances and health, the importance of routines, and strategies for maintaining both mental and physical wellbeing. Alongside this, students discussed substance avoidance, how media can influence body image and how setting long-term goals can support positive choices for the future.

Our Post-16 students have been focusing on PSHE topics that support safe and healthy decision-making as they move into adulthood. This term, they explored sex and sexual health, including understanding consent, healthy relationships and how to look after their physical and emotional wellbeing. Students also learned where and how to access support, both within school and through trusted external services, helping them feel confident and informed as they navigate this stage of their lives.

Animal Care

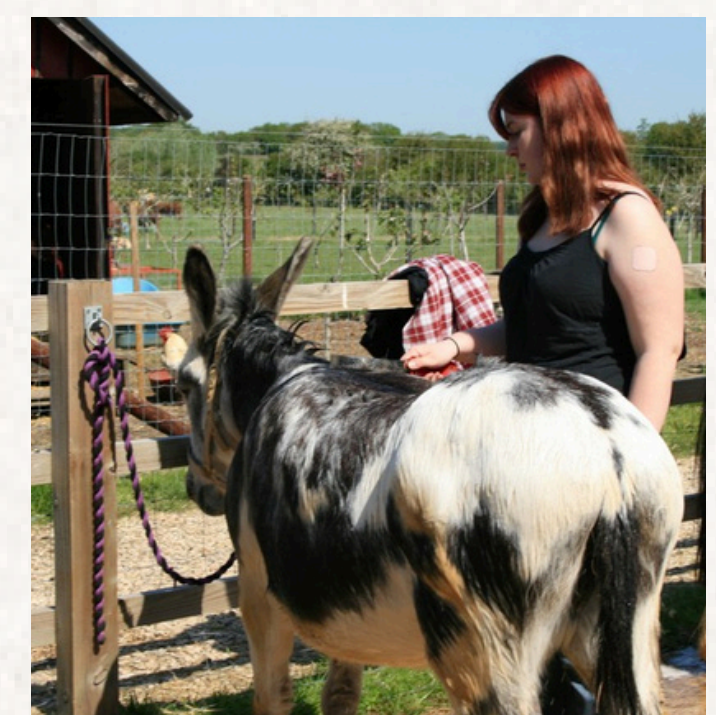
Animal Health Checks, Welfare Skills & Learning about Livestock Care

The arrival of some sunshine has meant that, this half term, our animals have finally been able to get outside into the fresh air. When the weather has allowed, students have been safely moving animals around the site, from indoor pens to outdoor paddocks. Occasionally, Hairy Mary has required a little redirection, as she can lose her way along the journey.

Alongside their usual farm duties, learners have been carrying out daily animal health and environment checks, exploring what a happy, healthy animal looks like and identifying any hazards or concerns within their pens.

There has also been some sadness on the farm this term, as we have lost a few of our much-loved animals. While it is painful to say goodbye, our students have shown real emotional resilience and have deepened their understanding of the signs and symptoms of poor health.

Animal Care Level 1 students have been working hard on their unit focused on preparing, cleaning and maintaining animal accommodation, while ASDAN students have been exploring health and safety on the farm. Next term, Level 1 learners will focus on farm animal health, and ASDAN students will move on to animal care, including training.



Photography

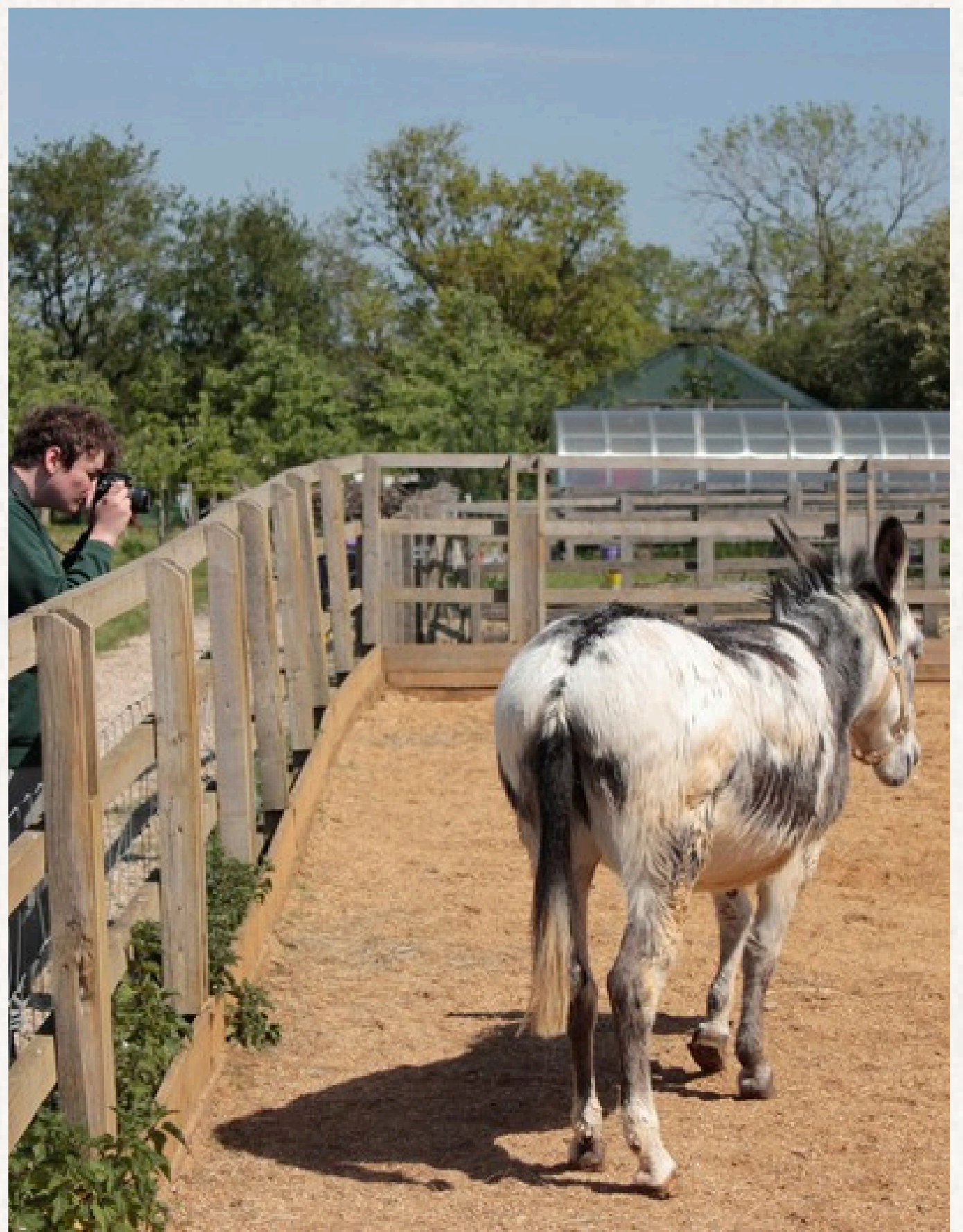
Landscape Photography, Visual Storytelling and Exploring Life Around the Farm

This term has marked an exciting new chapter at Orchard Therapeutic Farm with the launch of Photography as a core subject. From the very first sessions, students embraced the opportunity to explore the world through the lens of a camera, producing thoughtful and creative work inspired by photographers such as Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, Ansel Adams and Josef Koudelka.

Students explored texture and pattern through close-up photography of natural forms found around the farm, experimenting with composition, light and detail while capturing leaves, bark, feathers and stones. They also developed landscape photography skills by photographing the fields and copse around the farm, learning how light, weather and perspective can transform familiar surroundings into powerful images.

The course also introduced documentary and reportage photography, with students creating visual stories that captured everyday life around Orchard Therapeutic Farm. Projects included documenting Ferret's first birthday celebrations, the arrival of Rain the calf and a "day in the life" of Trades and Engineering at Orchard Therapeutic Farm.

Alongside developing technical photography skills, students have built creativity, patience, observation and confidence in expressing themselves through visual storytelling. It has been a hugely successful start to Photography at Orchard Therapeutic Farm, and students should feel incredibly proud of the imagination and enthusiasm they have shown throughout the term.



Careers & Work Experience

Work Experience, Responsibility and Supporting the May Day Shindig

This half term, students played an instrumental role in the organisation and delivery of the hugely successful Great Hitchcox May Day Shindig, held on 2nd May 2026. The event welcomed visitors throughout the afternoon and evening for a traditional May Day celebration featuring maypole dancing, live music, arts and crafts, food, fires and family activities beneath the orchard blossom.

Young people from Orchard Therapeutic Farm played an important role across the event, supporting hospitality and catering, serving food and drinks, guiding visitors around the site and helping activities run smoothly throughout the day. Students also helped lead arts and crafts sessions for children, showing fantastic communication, teamwork and leadership skills.

The event provided meaningful real-world work experience opportunities, helping students build confidence, responsibility and independence within a busy public setting. Young people demonstrated professionalism, adaptability and pride in their work while contributing positively to the success and atmosphere of the event.

It was fantastic to see students engaging so confidently with visitors and taking genuine ownership of their responsibilities throughout the day. Opportunities like these are an important part of life at Orchard Therapeutic Farm, helping young people develop practical employability skills while becoming active and valued members of the wider community.

Our next event is on 27 June - A Midsummer Gathering with three live bands, from 6pm till late. We really hope to see you there to support the wonderful work our young people do!



Fishing

Building Confidence, Patience and Teamwork Through Fishing

This term in Fishing at Orchard Therapeutic Farm, students have been developing their skills using basic fishing equipment, including 12-foot fishing poles and simple baits such as sweetcorn and maggots to help encourage quick bites and build confidence.

Learners explored how to observe the water carefully and identify where fish are most likely to feed, including margins and deeper areas where carp and roach can often be found. Students discovered that roach are ideal for building confidence, while carp require more patience and stronger tackle using rods.

Alongside learning practical fishing skills, students have also enjoyed the social side of fishing, spending time together on the bank and building patience, communication and confidence throughout the sessions.



Gardening

Growing Sunflowers and Tomatoes

This term in Gardening, students have been working hard to care for the garden, keeping on top of watering and maintaining the growing areas despite the lack of both sunshine and rain.

After some newly sown seeds were discovered by the guinea fowl and pheasants, students quickly got to work re-sowing crops and improving protections around the garden. Learners have continued planting a variety of seeds, with the sunflowers, tomatoes and salad leaves all growing well. Students have also built supports for the rapidly growing raspberry canes.

Alongside the practical gardening work, the garden has provided a calm and enjoyable space for students to relax, socialise and enjoy being outdoors. It has been wonderful to see young people spending time creatively in the fresh air while developing responsibility, patience and teamwork through caring for the garden.

Reptiles

Reptile Handling, Animal Care and Understanding Phobias

This term in Reptiles, students explored a range of topics linked to animal care, confidence building and cultural learning.

Learners developed an understanding of phobias and discussed simple ways to recognise, understand and manage fears in a calm and supportive environment. Students also learned about reptile growth and behaviour, including moulting and shedding, and explored why these processes are important for reptile health and wellbeing.

Throughout the term, young people practised safe handling techniques while following animal welfare guidelines, helping to build confidence, responsibility and respect for the animals in their care. Students also explored different countries and cultures, learning about reptiles that hold importance and symbolism around the world.

It has been fantastic to see students grow in confidence and develop both their knowledge and practical skills throughout the sessions.



Taxidermy

Insect Pinning, Resin Art and Exploring the Foundations of Taxidermy

This term in Taxidermy, students explored insect pinning and its history, pinning their own butterfly or moth specimen. They also collected natural materials during a nature walk, which were later used to create resin pieces and trinket boxes.

As the term progresses, students will begin learning how to build skeletons, identify animal species and care for bones correctly. It has been fantastic to see students developing creativity, patience and attention to detail throughout the sessions.



Sports

Softball, Trampolining and Paddleboarding Opportunities This Half Term

This half term, young people have been exploring and engaging in a wide range of sports and physical activities, helping to build confidence, teamwork, resilience, and communication skills through active participation.

Students have enjoyed experimenting with sports including softball, cricket, and trampolining, with sessions encouraging young people to try new experiences, challenge themselves, and develop both physical and social skills in a supportive environment. It has been fantastic to see growing confidence, positive peer interactions, and increased engagement throughout sessions.

Looking ahead to next half term, we are excited to begin introducing a range of community-based sports trips within our Post-16 provision. One of the highlights will include paddleboarding sessions at the Andrew Simpson Sailing Centre, providing young people with opportunities to develop independence, confidence, teamwork, and wellbeing through outdoor adventurous activities.

We are looking forward to continuing to expand our sports offer to engage in new experiences both within and beyond the farm environment.



Trades

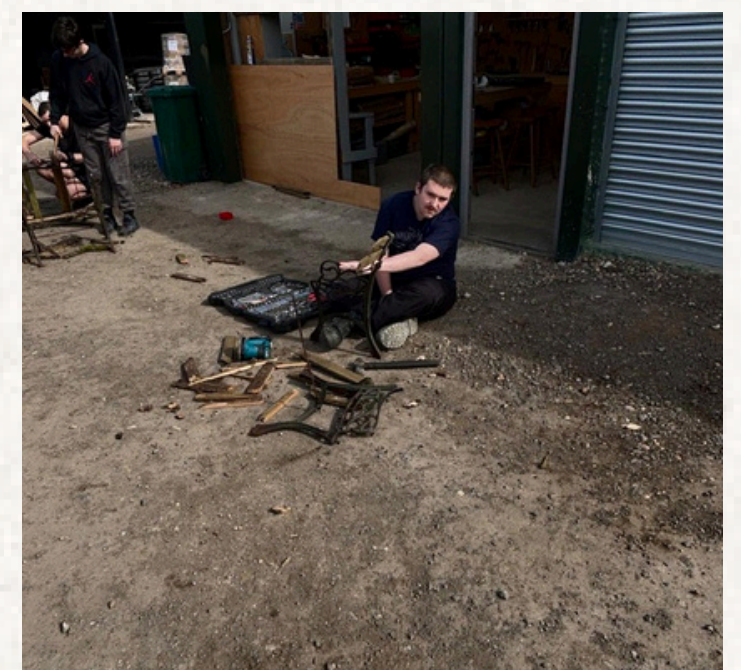
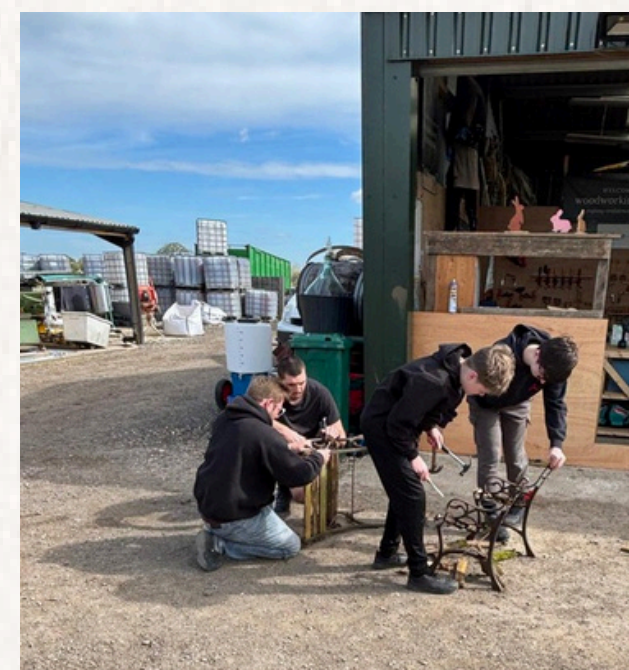
Practical trade skills through hands-on projects across the farm

Students have enjoyed upcycling furniture, transforming old and unused pieces into refreshed and purposeful items through sanding, painting, repairing, and redesigning. These projects have encouraged creativity, patience, and attention to detail, while also promoting sustainability and pride in their work.

Young people have also supported with general maintenance tasks around the farm, helping to improve and care for the environment while learning valuable practical skills. From repairs and painting to problem-solving and teamwork, students have taken real ownership of projects and contributed positively to the wider provision.

Another highlight this half term has been creating resin chopping boards. Young people have explored design techniques, safe tool use, measuring, preparation, and finishing processes to create unique, high-quality products. It has been fantastic to see students develop confidence, resilience, and independence while producing pieces they are proud of.

Trades sessions continue to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to build vocational skills, confidence, communication, and engagement through practical learning experiences.



Engineering

Bike Mechanics and Bringing the Farm Buggy Back to Life

This half term, we are excited to welcome Glenn to the Orchard team. Glenn brings with him a wealth of experience within the mechanics trade, alongside previous experience working within a college setting delivering City & Guilds courses. His knowledge, practical expertise, and passion for vocational learning have already made a positive impact within the provision.

Over the past few weeks, young people have started exploring bike mechanics, developing practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and confidence through hands-on learning experiences. Sessions have focused on understanding tools, maintenance, repairs, and safe working practices, while also encouraging teamwork, resilience, and independence.

One of the biggest highlights this half term has been finally getting our much-loved farm buggy up and running again. Young people played an active role in supporting repairs and problem-solving throughout the process, and seeing the buggy back in action has been a huge achievement for everyone involved. Not only has this been an exciting engineering project, but it has also become a real game changer for transport around the farm.

It has been fantastic to see young people engaging positively within Engineering sessions, building both vocational and personal development skills as we continue to grow and develop this area of the curriculum.



Woodwork

Personalised Monogram Plaques and Practical Woodwork Skills

This term in Woodwork, students have been designing and creating their own personalised wooden monogram plaques, developing practical skills while expressing their creativity.

Our young people carefully measured and cut the initial letters of their names using coping saws and fret saws, building confidence in handling tools safely and accurately. Once completed, the letters were attached to wooden bases using small nails, helping students practise precision and construction techniques.

To finish their projects, students painted their plaques using acrylic paints, adding colour and personality to their designs. It has been fantastic to see creativity, concentration and confidence grow throughout the term, with students producing some high-quality finished pieces.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Term Dates 2026

Term 5:

Ends: Friday 22 May 2026

Term 6:

Starts: Monday 1 June 2026

Ends: Friday 17 July 2026

End of Term Family Celebration BBQ:

3 July (exact date tbc)

Other Important Dates

5 June: Paddleboarding at the Andrew Simpson Centre Visit

5 June: World Environment Day: Community litter pick

11 June: World Cup Kick Off Celebration (exact date tbc)

Date TBC: Transition trips to BCA and Abingdon and Witney College

End of June: Annual camp out (exact date tbc)

27 June: The Hitchcox Midsummer Gathering - Live Music & great food from 6pm till late

After half term, lunch will be served in the new restaurant space, as the art room has now moved into the cow shed. Following feedback from our young people, we recognised the need for more space during lunchtime and have made these changes in response to student voice.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT AND COOPERATION.

SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

FOR PARENTS & CARERS



Safeguarding... a shared responsibility

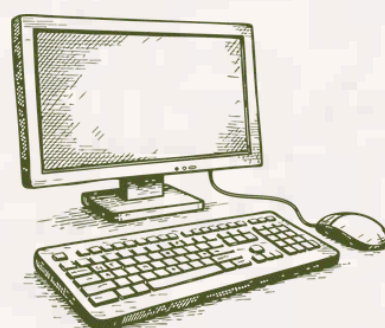


At Orchard Therapeutic Farm, safeguarding remains at the centre of everything we do. As safeguarding risks continue to evolve, particularly within the online world and wider community, we wanted to share some key themes currently being seen nationally and offer guidance on how we can continue working together to keep young people safe.

Online Safety & Social Media

One of the biggest safeguarding concerns nationally continues to be online safety. Recent reports have highlighted increasing concerns around:

- Online bullying and harassment
- Exposure to harmful or inappropriate content
- AI-generated images and “deepfake” content
- Sextortion and pressure to share images online
- Unsafe group chats and anonymous messaging apps
- Excessive screen time and the impact on mental wellbeing



We encourage parents and carers to:

- Maintain open conversations about online activity
- Regularly review privacy settings and parental controls
- Monitor the apps and platforms young people are using
- Encourage young people to speak to a trusted adult if something online makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe
- Remind young people never to share personal information, passwords, or images online

Meningitis – Spot the Signs

We also wanted to raise awareness around meningitis following increased national discussions and cases within some communities.

Meningitis can become serious very quickly, so recognising symptoms early is extremely important.

Symptoms can include:

- High temperature or fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Vomiting or feeling sick
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Cold hands and feet
- Muscle or joint pain
- A rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass (although not everyone develops a rash)



If you are concerned that your child may have symptoms of meningitis, seek urgent medical advice immediately by contacting NHS 111, your GP, or emergency services where appropriate.

Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

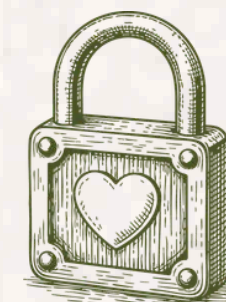
National safeguarding updates continue to highlight the increasing link between mental health and safeguarding concerns, including anxiety, self-harm, emotional distress, and social isolation.

As a therapeutic provision, we continue to prioritise emotional wellbeing, emotional regulation, and relationship-based support. We encourage families to continue open conversations at home and seek support early if concerns arise.

Child Exploitation & Risk Outside the Home

Another emerging safeguarding trend nationally is the growing awareness of risks that occur outside of the home environment, including:

- Criminal exploitation and county lines
- Peer-on-peer abuse
- Harmful sexual behaviour
- Grooming both online and within the community



We continue to support young people in understanding healthy relationships, personal safety, boundaries, and trusted adults they can speak to if worried.

Working Together

Safeguarding is always most effective when schools, families, and external agencies work together. If you ever have concerns about your child's wellbeing, behaviour, online activity, friendships, or mental health, please speak to a member of our safeguarding team.

No concern is ever too small, and early conversations can often prevent situations from escalating.

Thank you for your continued support in helping us maintain a safe, nurturing, and therapeutic environment for all young people.

**If you have concerns about a young person
contact our DSL- emily@hitchcoxgroup.co.uk**