



Orchard Round-Up

FRESH FROM THE FARM



A LITTLE NOTE FROM KIM

*Our Orchard Therapeutic
Centre Manager*

As this term draws to a close, what truly shines through is the courage, creativity, and resilience of our young people. Since September, we've seen them take on new challenges, rediscover confidence, and find joy in learning again. Every day brings moments that remind us why this work matters, whether it's a quiet step forward or a big leap that changes everything.

Although I only joined at the end of September, I feel deeply privileged to be part of this journey. From the moment I arrived, I was welcomed into a team whose passion and commitment are nothing short of inspiring. And most importantly, I've had the honour of seeing our incredible young people grow, not just in skills, but in self-belief.

This term has been full of exciting developments for our learners. Our qualifications, now part of OTF, open doors to a wide range of pathways including trades, mechanical engineering, art, sports, catering and hospitality, and animal care. These opportunities give learners practical skills and recognised qualifications that prepare them for life beyond school.

One of the highlights was the launch of our tipi coffee shop, starting with a Macmillan Coffee Morning for a wonderful cause. Our young people led the way, gaining barista training, hospitality skills and real work experience. Their enthusiasm and professionalism made the event unforgettable. Thank you to parents, carers and guardians who visited the coffee shop and attended our open afternoons. Your support means so much and helps create a strong sense of community around our provision.

We're also growing our Post-16 pathways, ensuring learners can achieve qualifications, gain meaningful work experience, and receive the outstanding support and encouragement that defines our provision. Alongside this, we continue to strengthen the therapeutic side of our offer, including one-to-one sessions, PSHE, and animal therapy, because wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do.

None of this happens without the dedication of our team, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to create a safe, nurturing environment where every child can thrive. To them, and to our families: thank you for believing in what we do.

As we look ahead to the Spring term, we're excited for more opportunities, more growth, and more moments that remind us why this work matters. Until then, we wish you all a restful, happy holiday. It is an honour to walk this journey with you all, and I cannot wait to see what we achieve together in the months ahead.

Gardening



Seeds for the future

Autumn and Winter in the garden are all about patience, preparation, and setting the foundations for Spring. This term, students have been busy clearing away the last of the summer growth and refreshing the beds. We've planted lots of spring bulbs in pots, which will bring beautiful colour when the warmer weather arrives. Students also made great use of the last of our fruit and veg, including raspberries, rainbow chard, and of course pumpkins, which were carved for Halloween to decorate the tipi during our events.

Work continued in the polytunnel, giving it a good tidy and reset for the colder months ahead. While it may feel like a quieter season, a huge amount has been happening beneath the surface all preparing for a vibrant, productive spring.



Art



A term of imagination and making

This term in Art, students have been developing creative skills through practical projects that build confidence, encourage self expression and introduce different artistic techniques.

They began with a Fireworks Night theme, exploring colour, pattern and movement to understand how visual elements can convey energy and atmosphere. This was followed by work for Remembrance Day, where students focused on symbolism and emotion, using art as a way to express reflection and respect.

The final project of the term introduced a new theme centred on Angels. Taking inspiration from the Angel of the North and the natural, sculptural work of Andy Goldsworthy, students explored form, texture and structure, producing a varied and thoughtful collection of individual responses.

A key moment this term was the opportunity to exhibit their work at the Macmillan Coffee Morning, alongside their Art teacher and renowned artist Nicholas Maitland. Presenting their work to others helped students build confidence, take pride in their achievements and see the value of their creative progress.

Cooking



Winter warmers

This term in Cooking, students have been preparing warm, hearty meals perfect for the season. They've cooked Spaghetti Bolognese, roast dinners, and a variety of healthy puddings, building both confidence and practical skills in the kitchen. As the term comes to an end, the focus has shifted to Christmas treats and party food, giving students the chance to experiment with festive recipes and get creative. Excitement is already building for next term and the delicious challenges ahead!



Bushcraft update



Knots, Fire and Confidence

Bushcraft sessions this term have been full of hands-on learning and outdoor adventure. Students have been learning new knots, crafting tent pegs using pen knives and axes, and practicing making fire from scratch, all while following careful safety procedures to handle tools responsibly.

Shelter-building has also been a key focus, giving students the chance to work creatively with natural materials and develop problem-solving skills in the outdoors. These sessions provide a fun and engaging way to connect with nature, build confidence, and learn practical bushcraft skills safely.



Wellbeing and mental health

A safe space to be you

Our one-to-one sessions continue to offer young people a safe, calm, and supportive space to simply be themselves. These sessions are designed to give students the chance to open up, talk through any worries they may be facing, and explore strategies to help them feel more confident and understood.

Whether it's working through personal challenges, chatting about day-to-day stresses, or just having a quiet moment away from the busyness of the farm, one-to-ones provide meaningful time focused entirely on the young person's wellbeing. It's all about listening, supporting, and helping them feel grounded.



Reptiles



Exploring the Reptile World

This term in Reptile Care, students have been diving into all aspects of looking after these fascinating creatures. They've been learning about common health issues, how to carry out checks, and how to treat them, as well as exploring habitats, classifications, and how to create bioactive enclosures (VIBs).

We've also welcomed some new reptile friends to the farm, including Albus Dumbledore, our Royal Python; Moo Moo and Leonardo DiCaprio, our Bearded Dragons; and the Leopard Geckos, Lady Lemon, Biggie, and Pikachu.

Students have been caring for them by bathing, handling, and even making Bearded Dragon 'burritos', while learning about their behaviour, feeding routines, hibernation, and habitat setup.

Alongside hands-on care, the group has been growing plants and planning enclosures, creating timetables for feeding, and exploring how to make their environments bioactive and engaging.

It's been a term full of curiosity, practical skills, and plenty of adorable moments with our reptile residents

Fishing

Patience by the water

Fishing sessions have been full of excitement and patience! Students have been using their favourite bait (sweet corn) to try and catch a variety of fish, experimenting with different techniques and seeing what works best.

At the start of September, we enjoyed spotting the baby fish, a real highlight for the group. We also had to get creative when a Heron kept visiting and snacking on our fish, but it was a good reminder that sometimes challenges are just part of being in nature.

As with all activities at our farm, fishing isn't just about the catch, it's also about connecting with nature, enjoying the calm of the outdoors, and learning to focus and observe. Every session gives students the chance to relax, try something new, and celebrate their successes, no matter the size of the fish.



Woodwork

Creating across the farm

It's been a busy and hands on term in Woodwork. Students have been working on a range of practical projects designed to develop their skills while creating something meaningful for the farm.

One of our biggest builds has been the mud kitchen. The group created two versions - one for burning during an event and one to keep. The finished Mud Kitchen will be placed in the other field ready for students to enjoy in the spring, when the weather warms up.

Alongside this, students have been crafting their own wooden toolboxes. These boxes have been carefully built from scratch, with learners shaping, assembling, and sanding each piece. A special shout-out to that particular student, who put in brilliant effort and took extra time to round off all the edges perfectly.

The group also created small wooden apples and pumpkins to decorate the tipi for recent events, bringing a lovely seasonal theme to the space.



Sports



Building strength, skills, and team spirit

Students have enjoyed a mix of old favourites and brand-new activities this term in our Sports curriculum. Football and tennis are still the classics everyone loves, but we've introduced baseball, kickball and volleyball, with baseball quickly becoming a new student favourite. It's created a fun new connection between our older and younger groups.

A surprise hit has been simple rope-skipping. Students have massively improved their coordination and confidence, and we even have a current record of thirty three skips that the younger ones are determined to beat!

For our older students, we've added light circuit training and regular trips to the outdoor gym to build strength and understand how the body works. We've also been talking about healthy eating, heart health, and why moving our bodies matters.

Animal Care

Animal Care sessions have centred on developing responsibility, consistency and practical care skills.

Students begin each morning by feeding the animals, learning how to meet the different needs of each species and why routine matters for animal health and wellbeing. They work with a wide range of animals across the farm, including horses, donkeys, goats, sheep, chickens, ferrets, cattle, guinea pigs and rabbits. Daily tasks include health checks, maintaining living spaces and observing behaviour, giving students a clear understanding of what good animal care involves.

One of the most anticipated parts of the day is opening up the enclosures and moving animals safely into their outdoor spaces, reinforcing calm handling and awareness.

As a therapeutic farm, the learning extends beyond the practical. These sessions support students to build patience, empathy and confidence, while developing a deeper understanding of nature and responsibility. Caring for animals provides a grounding experience, helping students recognise the impact of their actions and the value of steady, attentive work.



MEMORABLE MENTIONS



NEW QUALIFICATIONS

Animal Care ASDAN



Students have made great progress in their Animal Care ASDAN qualification. They have been carrying out surveys, practicing self-handling, and learning all about the animals' needs. Students also took the time to give the animals plenty of care and attention, writing fantastic diary entries to reflect on their work. Their dedication and hard work have been truly impressive, showing both skill and compassion in every session.



Level 1 Animal Care

Our students have made a fantastic start on their Level 1 Animal Care qualification this term. They've begun building a solid foundation of knowledge and practical skills, starting with key topics such as health and safety on the farm and basic first aid.

Learners have also explored animal nutrition, looking closely at what goes into our animals' hard feed and how much each species should be eating. Alongside this, we've covered important legislation around animal care, helping students understand how to meet and follow welfare standards daily. And of course, no animal care course would be complete without plenty of hands-on time, including cuddles, grooming, and general day-to-day care, all essential for keeping our animals healthy and happy.



Level 1 Engineering

Students have been developing practical engineering skills this term, starting with a strong focus on health and safety and understanding how to work safely in the workshop. They then moved on to toolbox training, learning to identify tools, understand their uses and recognise differences between equipment such as single and double hex sockets. The group has also been working with two training buggies, labelling and identifying parts and practising dismantling and reassembling components. One buggy is being repaired following damage, while the other is used for comparison and hands on learning.



Level 1 Trades



Students studying Trades Level 1 have begun by focusing on health and safety, ensuring they understand safe working practices before moving into practical trade based tasks.

This groundwork is preparing students for hands on projects such as tiling and wallpapering, helping them develop the core skills, confidence and awareness needed to work with tools, materials and real working environments.



Level 1 Catering

This term, students working towards their Catering and Hospitality Level 1 qualification have been busy gaining both practical kitchen experience and completing their theory work.

As part of their practical learning, students have been preparing breakfasts and lunches for their peers, giving them the chance to work in a real catering environment while building confidence and teamwork skills.

In the qualification sessions, the focus has been on food hygiene, allergens, food safety, and preparation techniques. Students are learning how to keep a kitchen safe, how to handle ingredients properly, and how to create meals that meet a range of dietary needs.

Level 1 Sports

This term we have been getting to grips with the science behind movement. We've learned about the body's bones and muscles, how they function, and how to train and stretch them safely. We've also explored the cardiac and respiratory systems, understanding how the heart and lungs respond to exercise and we're now wrapping up a full unit on nutrition, helping students understand how food fuels performance and the importance of eating a healthy diet.

Engagement in the sports qualification has been fantastic, and next term we'll be focusing on how to teach others to play sports; building patience, leadership skills, and exploring future career paths such as personal training or leisure centre support. We're also excited to start using our brand-new axe-throwing target and the archery target being built by the woodworking team in the Spring!



BTEC Art



Our students have been exploring natural forms as the foundation for developing their own creative projects. We began with mind mapping, encouraging every student to generate their own ideas and take ownership of the direction of their work. This early stage was all about imagination, independence, and discovering what inspires them personally. Most of our sessions have focused on drawing, allowing students to build confidence in observation, detail, and technique. But we also took our creativity outdoors, heading into the local woods for a hands-on art session inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy. Using leaves, sticks, stones, and other natural materials, students collaborated to create site-specific sculptures that celebrated pattern, texture, and the beauty of the environment.



CAREERS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Events at Hitchcox

If you follow our social media, you'll already know how lively things have been at the tipi this term. Our students have become an essential part of the events Hitchcox Group runs, taking on roles in waitressing, serving drinks, and greeting guests with confidence.

Their enthusiasm has truly made them the life of the party, bringing warmth and energy to every event. Staff members often pop in just to support them and celebrate the progress they're making, not only on the farm, but through real work experience that builds independence, communication skills. They've become a valued part of the team, and we couldn't be prouder.



The Kitchen at Hitchcox



This term, our students have been gaining valuable work experience skills as part of their careers learning. They have been helping at Hitchcox's Kitchen Coffee Shop, practising real-world tasks such as using the coffee machine, serving customers, and following health and safety procedures.

These sessions also provide a chance to apply English and Maths skills in practical ways. Students are reading menus, following instructions, practising speaking and listening for upcoming exams, and handling money, reinforcing fractions, decimals, and basic numeracy in a real-life context.

By combining functional skills with hands-on work experience, students are building confidence, learning responsibility, and preparing for the wider world of work in a supportive and engaging environment.

OUTREACH

Our outreach work has continued to grow in the most heart-warming ways this term. Wendy has been doing the same incredible work she delivered last term, supporting young people in the community with patience, creativity, and care. One of her biggest achievements has been helping several of her outreach students transition into the Orchard Therapeutic Barn. To make the move feel safe and exciting, she's been organising gentle meet-ups where the children can bond, explore the space, and realise that being around others isn't as scary as it once felt. These small moments of connection have been truly powerful and have helped build confidence step by step.



Of course, Nero (Wendy's dog) remains a superstar of the outreach routine. Together, they go on calming park walks, practise dog grooming, and learn how to care for him with kindness and responsibility. Students have also been getting hands-on with practical life skills; doing the shopping, practising functional skills, and learning how to navigate everyday tasks independently through therapeutic approaches and play.

Wendy is also thrilled to be welcoming new members to her outreach group next term, expanding the support available and opening more opportunities for young people to grow, connect, and feel part of something bigger.

Outreach continues to be a beautiful bridge between home, community, and the Orchard family, helping children build trust, confidence, and a gentle belief in themselves.

ORCHARD THERAPEUTIC BARN

Over the summer, Orchard Therapeutic Outreach became part of the Orchard family and has continued to grow beautifully. As more young people joined us, it became clear that some needed a gentle next step; something more structured than Outreach, but calmer and smaller than the Farm. From this need, the Orchard Therapeutic Barn was created and opened its doors this term.

The Barn is a small, nurturing setting designed for young people who find larger groups challenging. With a very small staff team, Gemma and Katie work closely with each young person, building trusting relationships and supporting confidence, life skills and engagement with learning. Learning is practical and meaningful, with Maths, English and science naturally woven into everyday activities and routines.

One of the Barn's real strengths is its role as a bridge. Some young people supported through Outreach will be joining the Barn next term, while others have already grown in confidence and begun transitioning to the Farm. Gentle shared sessions between Outreach and Barn help young people see what the next step looks like and feel reassured that they can take it when they are ready often with Nero the Barns' therapeutic dog close by, providing a calm and familiar presence.

This term has been full of special moments. The arrival of our chickens has brought daily care and routine, weekly shopping trips have supported independence, and joint sessions between Outreach and Barn have helped young people explore new experiences together. Our Christmas activities week brought warmth and celebration to the end of term. Nero continues to be a firm favourite, offering comfort, companionship and confidence, particularly for those who find new environments challenging.



ORCHARD THERAPEUTIC ACTIVE

A journey from fear to fearless

Our Active programme which ran throughout 2025 began with children who were nervous to even dip a toe in the water, and ended with students who didn't want to get out of it. From refusing to go near deep water to confidently jumping into the middle of the lake, their courage and transformation have been incredible.

We've watched improvements not only in skill, but in mood, confidence, perseverance, and resilience, both in the Active sessions and back in schools.



After the October half term, we had to get out of the water and move on to other activities. Land-based activities demanded a different kind of perseverance; technique, focus, and the willingness to try, fail, and try again. And our students rose to the challenge every single time.

One of the highlights of the programme was watching a young person who once struggled to speak to others grow confident enough to request one-to-one sessions with the instructor. Not only did they feel safe, supported, and seen, they discovered something they truly love. So much so that they are now considering a future career as an outdoor instructor.

A huge shout-out to everyone who supported us throughout, and a special thank you to our CEO (Ludi), whose incredible vision continues to shape life-changing opportunities for our young people.

We want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who made this possible:

- the amazing instructors at Engage Water Sports who showed endless patience and dedication
- the parents who sent their children in each week knowing they'd come home soaked
- the staff from Orchard Therapeutic that were always willing to jump on a boat and lead by example.



WE CANNOT WAIT TO SEE WHAT THE FUTURE OF THE ORCHARD THERAPEUTIC FAMILY HOLDS AS THIS JOURNEY CONTINUES.

STAFF UPDATE

A few words from all the new members who joined the team this term.



Emily

I am the Post 16 Lead, overseeing the development of Post 16 Pathways that support young people to become ready for engagement in the working world after their time at Orchard Therapeutic Farm.

Alongside this, I have introduced a careers programme across the farm, supporting students to develop essential life and employment skills. This includes managing money, completing job applications and building the skills needed to sustain independence after education and into employment.

I have also taken on the delivery of Functional Skills Maths and English, supporting young people to work towards and achieve these important qualifications.

Helenie

I am the Trauma Informed and Mental Health Practitioner at Orchard Therapeutic Farm, with a background in crisis and intervention work and a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology.

A few fun facts: I have a dog called Obi Wan Kenobi, I can still do a backflip on a trampoline, and I have swum with sharks. You are always welcome to come and have a chat with me in the sensory room.

Gemma

I'm excited to join the team as the new Therapeutic Lead Teacher in the Barn. I've been working with children and young people for over 15 years, exploring a variety of roles across different educational settings, including SEN schools and the Mental Health Support Team.

I'm passionate about bringing my personal interests (baking, gardening, arts and crafts, reading, and my love for animals) into the workplace to inspire creativity and help young people explore their own passions.

Tash

I'm the Administrator at Orchard Therapeutic. In my spare time, I love riding my horses, walking my dog, and spending time with my family. And one thing I absolutely cannot live without is being outdoors. I need fresh air and open space to feel like myself!

Nick

Hi, I'm Nick and I love Art! As well as being a qualified teacher of art and design, I am a practicing artist with a long history of exhibitions. I am really thrilled to be teaching art and woodwork here at Orchard Therapeutic farm.

Kim

I am pleased to introduce myself as the new Head of Centre here at Orchard Therapeutic Farm. I've worked in education for nearly 20 years and for the past five years, I led a department supporting children and young people with additional needs.

I am deeply passionate about creating opportunities for every child and young person to thrive.

I have been warmly welcomed and supported by the team. I look forward to working together to continue to build a safe, nurturing and inspiring environment for everyone who comes through our doors.

Katie

I'm excited to be part of the team at the Orchard Therapeutic Barn as a Therapeutic Support Assistant.

I studied Criminology and Forensic Science at University and have since worked with children and young people with additional needs and mental health challenges.

I'm passionate about helping others build life skills, manage behaviour, and develop positive coping strategies.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with animals, travelling, and going to the gym.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Term Dates

Academic Year 2025/26

To help everyone get those all-important dates locked into calendars nice and early, please find below the term dates for the upcoming 2025/26 academic year.

We recommend keeping a copy handy and checking in with us regularly for any updates or changes as the year progresses.

Term Dates Spring Term 2026

Term 3:

Starts: Tuesday 6 January 2026

Ends: Friday 13 February 2026

Term 4:

Starts: Monday 23 February 2026

Ends: Thursday 26 March 2026

Other important dates

Inset Day: Monday 5 January 2025

Open Afternoon: Thursday 5 February 2026

Open Afternoon: Thursday 19th March 2026

Inset Day: Friday 27 March

Important Reminders

for Parents, Carers and Guardians

As we prepare for the new term, we kindly ask all Parents, Carers, and Guardians to notify us of any concerns, incidents, or updates regarding your young person before they return to Orchard Therapeutic Farm.

This information will help us prepare appropriately and ensure that a specific staff member is available to welcome and support them. Our aim is to make their transition back to OTF as smooth and positive as possible.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT AND COOPERATION.

Final Housekeeping Note

We'd like to kindly remind everyone that no dogs - whether loose or on leads - are permitted on site.

This is essential for the safety of all visitors, young people and staff, and the wellbeing of the animals here.



Wishing you a very
merry Christmas
& a happy new year
from the team at
Orchard Therapeutic