

Issue 02 - Annual Newsletter

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Victoria Academies Trust

# Newsletter



# Introduction

## Dear Colleagues, Families and Friends,

I am delighted to welcome you to this year's edition of the Victoria Academies Trust Annual Newsletter. Following the success of last year's publication, we're proud to make this an annual celebration - an opportunity to dive deeper into the life of our Trust and share the incredible work happening across our schools.

It has been a busy and successful year. Our two Free Schools, Poppyfield Academy and Elm Tree Academy, continue to grow from strength to strength. In April, we were thrilled to officially welcome our eleventh school, Whitehall Nursery and Infant Academy, into the Trust. Having worked closely with the team throughout the year, it was a joy to see them formally join us as our second Walsall school and a new Infant partner for Devonshire.

Our shared vision continues to guide us, and our Values Champions - both colleagues and children - have worked tirelessly to embed our core values of Unity, Integrity, Courage, Curiosity, and Excellence in everything we do. A standout moment was our Trust-wide Values Day in July, where all schools came together for a special assembly before celebrating in their own unique ways.

Another highlight was our VAT Conference in March, where we brought together our entire Trust team, also celebrating ten wonderful years of Victoria Academies Trust! With inspiring speakers and a vibrant atmosphere, the day left everyone feeling uplifted and energised. A heartfelt thank you goes to our generous sponsors who made the event possible.

We are proud to report that none of our schools are currently in an Ofsted category, and all of our sponsored schools are rated Good or better in nearly all areas. This is a testament to the dedication and impact of our school improvement work.

Beyond our Trust, we led a Department for Education SEND project involving over 80 schools in Sandwell. This initiative showcased our expertise and our ability to collaborate for the greater good of all pupils.

This commitment to improvement was further recognised when I was seconded two days a week for two years to the Department for Education as a RISE Adviser, supporting schools across the West Midlands. While my focus remains firmly on our own schools, this role allows us to contribute to the wider system and creates opportunities for others within VAT to grow and lead.

In this newsletter, you'll find stories of success and celebration from across our schools and central teams - each one reflecting the passion, creativity and commitment of our pupils, colleagues, families and communities.

In a time of continued uncertainty, the stability and care our schools provide has never been more vital. I extend my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you who supports our mission **#ToBeTheBestWeCanBe**.

As we celebrate the year gone by and look ahead, let's continue to build on our shared work - acting in **#Unity**, showing **#Integrity**, having **#Courage**, staying **#Curious** and striving for **#Excellence** in all that we do.



Sharron

**Sharron Philpot, CEO**  
Victoria Academies Trust



## Executive and Central Teams

Our schools all continue on their own journeys; behind the scenes, executive leaders and central teams have worked hard to ensure that they are supporting schools across both education and non-education areas.

The focus as ever is always on providing the services that schools need to allow them to continually improve, with central teams 'heavy lifting' much of the non-education function, so that Head Teachers and schools can focus on educational improvements.

This year we have also had a key focus on wellbeing to support colleagues across our Trust to 'Be The Best They Can Be'.

## Education

It has been another busy year for school improvement. All our schools have been working hard to continually improve, and we have had many successes this year.

The School Improvement Team visited all schools in November as part of our termly visits, spending time with leaders, colleagues and children. The team noted that during visits to schools, children behave with consistently high levels of respect for others. Differences are valued and nurtured and attitudes to their education are positive.

In December we had a visit from Ofsted at Birchen Coppice Academy, Kidderminster. Birchen Coppice joined us in 2017 as a sponsor school who needed support in their improvement journey. The whole Trust and school team have worked incredibly hard to ensure that there is a strong and sustainable improvement journey to set the school up for the future. We were all delighted with the outcome, positioning the school in the strongest place it has ever been since it opened over thirty years ago. It was wonderful that the Ofsted Team noted that 'The school is a welcoming oasis that is firmly at the heart of the community' and that 'The pupils' positive attitudes to learning, and strong relationships with adults,

reflect the great improvements made...' A huge well done to all involved in supporting Birchen Coppice on their journey!

In February, Ofsted visited Devonshire Infant Academy; their first inspection in 12 years! The report was tremendously positive, achieving outstanding judgements in some areas. Inspectors saw that 'Pupils are proud to be a part of this inclusive school, which is rooted in the heart of a culturally diverse community'. They also noted the consistently excellent behaviour and attitudes of pupils. A wonderful outcome; congratulations to team Devonshire!

In the spring term, School Improvement Teams visited schools to look at a range of areas, including English, History and SEND provision. The quality of provision across our schools is extremely high; our children really are at the fore of everything we do, and the visits enabled us to share best practice and highlight where we can offer further support to schools to be 'even better'.

Our final Ofsted Inspection of the year was at Elm Tree Academy, in May; our first SEND Free School, based in Sandwell. The school has grown much more quickly than anticipated, due to the high numbers of pupils across Sandwell needing specialist places, and the whole

team has worked incredibly hard to develop the school and provision to meet the needs of all children. We were all delighted with the outcome of a strong 'good' in all areas and comments such as 'The school delivers a rich, high-quality education tailored to pupils. It helps pupils to feel confident, capable and empowered.' Well done to the whole Elm Tree team and those who have worked so hard supporting their journey over the past three years.

In the summer, Head Teachers visited each other's schools as part of our focus on teaching and learning, leading to some really positive sharing of practices. Schools have been working together to develop and embed a consistent approach to teaching and learning and it has been wonderful to see the school-to-school support through the year.



## Community

As part of our longer-term vision, we have begun to move forward with our work to develop links with Community Partners.

The team has created a 'directory' for our schools of community links who can support with their work; whether curriculum, pastoral or enrichment. The culmination of the year's work was our 'Community Partners Day' in June, where we brought together

over fifty people, including our Head Teachers and pupil representatives, to discuss how we can work together to support our vision. We were delighted with the response and enthusiasm from local companies and partners and look forward to developing this work in the future. We are always looking to partner further through Corporate Social Responsibility and sponsorship as we move this work forward.



## Professional Development

This year we have been working on a Victoria Academies Trust project based around teaching and learning. This began at the start of the academic year with the adaptation and development of the teaching and learning approach. The project has involved all teachers and teaching assistants across our mainstream schools. All schools were part of a triad with two other Victoria Academies Trust schools. Within those triads it has been wonderful to see the collaboration, peer support, joint training and good practice sharing between our school teams. Head Teachers have been leading the work in their own schools, supported by either Paul Blakey-Harris, Lisa Worgan or Louise Fowler who, alongside other school colleagues, have devised and delivered both online and in-person training. Much of this training formed the basis of our VAT Professional Development twilight sessions across the year.

In March we were fortunate enough to secure Doug Lemov as a speaker at our Trust conference, allowing everyone

the opportunity to hear him speak about 'Teach Like a Champion', which forms the basis of our teaching and learning work. During the summer term, Head Teachers have carried out peer reviews, allowing all colleagues to demonstrate how their training and development is put into practice by showcasing it through these visits.

Once again, we were able to utilise external subject experts to deliver training across all foundation subjects, open to all subject leaders. The feedback from these sessions was very positive and we hope subject leaders have managed to disseminate this knowledge back in schools. We also provided opportunities for all subject leaders to access support in planning leadership activities in their own school, as well as completing their Annual Impact Report. This year, for the first time, our English subject leaders joined PEN, an English Network run by Ruth Leask - an external English expert who provides up to date information, training and resources.

Our partnership with Best Practice Network has enabled many of our leaders and specialist teachers to access National Professional Qualifications and our Early Careers Teachers' training through the Early Career Framework. Many of our sessions have been delivered by our own leaders who are facilitators for BPN - feedback from their sessions has been phenomenal.

The Professional Development highlight of this year for the Trust was our conference which was held at Aston Villa football stadium. Feedback from this day has been very positive and we want to thank our fantastic array of speakers who deepened our knowledge, challenged our thinking and held our attention with their input and insights.

## Wellbeing

We welcomed our Pluxee account manager, Hannah, to the stage at our conference in March to relaunch our employee platform. We were reminded that this platform can help in many ways, including financially, through the voucher scheme, cycle to work and gym membership, as well as supporting our wellbeing through access to the employee assistance programme.

Following this relaunch, we have seen a real increase in usage of all elements of the platform across our schools.

We continue to focus on supporting colleagues with their wellbeing. We know from our annual wellbeing survey that access to medical appointments and ability to manage personal time may contribute to stress.

Therefore, we have been working this year to develop our wellbeing offer so that we can support our teams with some of the things they struggle with most. We are very pleased to announce a partnership with Schools Advisory Service which will support colleagues in a wide variety of areas to improve wellbeing.

## Systems and Support

This year we have continued to embed our HR systems and processes; including continuing to implement our central HR system, Every, with the roll-out of further modules. We have also developed our long-term HR Strategy which will execute the systems and processes to support the Trust People Strategy.

In finance, we have streamlined the team, reducing headcount by 25% whilst maintaining support for schools and meeting our regulatory requirements. This was the second year of centralised equity approach for budgeting. Thanks to all those involved, budgets were completed on time and within the requirements needed as a trust. Systems have been improved with the implementation of new reporting software, using AI to automate and enhance reporting for all stakeholders. It has also been the first full year we have implemented the Trust investment strategy - investing our cash in high interest accounts. This has borne fruit generating £90k in interest for the Trust, which can be utilised to improve our schools.

The Estates strategic work has focused on keeping our schools safe, warm and dry, with the completion of over £700k worth of capital improvements; the vast majority focused on heating and boilers. This year has seen the completion of the Trust's five-year condition surveys for all schools, setting out our roadmap for large capital projects and ensuring the school estate is the 'best it can be' for years to come.

Richard, our Head of IT, has been supported this year with the recruitment of Zain - ICT Apprentice. This increases the capacity available to support schools with day-to-day ICT needs.

Richard has also been busy centralising our ICT network and implementing asset tagging, so we can better record and track all ICT assets across the Trust. This year saw the completion of the DfE backed 'Connect-the-classroom' works. In addition, we have been successful with 'Connect-the-classroom' funding from the DfE to enable infrastructure at Birchen Coppice to be upgraded.

Procurement this year saw the implementation of our new catering providers, as well as tenders for cleaning services and supply insurance. We will continue to drive efficiencies through economies of scale next year.



## Sustainability And Growth

Whitehall Nursery and Infant Academy joined the Trust on 1 April 2025, adding an additional 270 children to the Trust. All school systems and services, including pension, payroll, procurement, finance, estates, HR, catering and legal, have transitioned from Walsall Council to the Trust.

This year has seen the continued expansions of Poppyfield and Elm Tree. Next academic year both schools will have a full cohort of children. This will mean we will be able to accommodate a total of 3,536 (excluding nursery) in the Trust, a near nine-fold increase from when the Trust started with Victoria Park in 2012!

At Birchen Coppice and Foley Park, we have been successful in securing a combined £298k of School Based Nursery Grant funding to enable the schools to expand their respective nurseries. Both schools' nurseries will now be able to accommodate two-year-old children, increasing the number of nursery children in each school.

This year saw the drafting of our Sustainability Strategy, which will be launched across our academies next academic year. This does not mean work has not started; we have already implemented LED lights at Rowley Park and Foley Park, with more schools to be completed this summer. We also successfully won grant funding from Solar-for-Schools to complete solar installations at Devonshire Infants, Poppyfield and Foley Park. All of these will help move the Trust towards meeting its Net Zero target.

It has definitely been a successful and busy year across our central services - thanks to the whole team who have supported us to make sure our schools are 'The Best They Can Be'.

**Kate Tewley**  
Director of Schools  
(School Improvement,  
Compliance & Community)

**Hayley Mapp**  
Director of Schools  
(People, Inclusion &  
Innovation)

**Ian Kirby**  
Chief Operating Officer





**Birchen Coppice**  
Primary Academy

# Birchen Coppice Academy

**This year, we have been working on projects that will ensure Birchen Coppice continues to grow and thrive long into the future.**

One such project is around creating provision for two-year-olds. In May, we were delighted to be awarded £150,000 of DfE funding to make this happen.

We now have our refurbishment, staffing and education plans in place and are on track to open in September. Parents are keen for places, and we are keen to begin supporting our families much sooner in the lives of their children than we have been able to before. This will



undoubtedly make a positive difference to our pupils' early development and longer-term outcomes. This is a great step forward. We have also furthered our commitment to building a rich, high-quality curriculum that really meets the needs of all our pupils. We have continued our strong work with the English Hub, ensuring that 100% of pupils who could meet the government phonics benchmark, did so. We also introduced our new writing scheme and developed our own History and Geography curricula. We began work with our local Maths Hub, building on our existing efforts around maths fluency; this is providing a foundation for strong maths outcomes in



the future - indeed, our Year 4 have significantly raised the bar this year in the government Multiplication Check.

We have also focussed on developing our own teacher learning culture by taking part in DfE research projects for Reading, Maths and Assessment. These projects give us insight into new approaches and resources. Being part of our excellent VAT teaching and learning project is also supporting the development of a highly trained team with strong pedagogical and subject knowledge.



In addition to our core curriculum offer, we are further enhancing our trips



and experiences by creating opportunities for pupils to work with inspiring experts. The Royal Shakespeare Company and film actor, Antonio Magro, volunteered two days of his time to work with our Year 4 and 5 pupils. The children had a wonderful time developing their drama skills whilst trying to gain his autograph! Antonio has committed to remain a friend of Birchen Coppice and revisit us each year.

A strong learning environment needs a central heart, and our new library provides this. Local company Lens On-Line prepped and decorated, while Webbs Garden Centre

provided and installed display materials. We also had two 'reading pods' donated which the children absolutely love. Our wonderful, dedicated Academy Councillor, Cathy Harris, helped lead the project and she is continuing to ensure the library will remain well-stocked into the future.

Of course, we have continued with all the activities, events and traditions that make us uniquely Birchen Coppice. We had a wonderful Christmas and Easter filled with singing, acting and fun; we climbed some personal and literal mountains on our challenging residential; and we have taken part in many sporting events and experiences. Our clubs continue to run after school, and we are developing some really skilled and enthusiastic chess players and dancers.

And finally, we are incredibly proud to share that our Family Liaison Lead, Charlotte Jeynes, was honoured with an invitation to attend the royal garden party at Buckingham Palace. During

this prestigious event, Charlotte was introduced to Her Majesty, Queen Camilla. It was a moment of great pride; not only for Charlotte, but for the entire Birchen Coppice Academy community. It is fantastic that her dedication to the well-being of our children has been recognised at the highest level. By all accounts she had a memorable day: the sun shone; she enjoyed spreading the word about our wonderful school; and she also said that the cakes were the best she'd ever eaten!



**Sandra Pennington**  
Head Teacher



**Devonshire  
Infant & Junior  
Academies**

# Devonshire Infant and Junior Academies

As we draw the curtain on another academic year, we reflect on the vibrant experiences that we've had at Devonshire. The dedication of our staff, coupled with the unwavering support of our school communities, has truly strengthened the alliances between both the infants and juniors.



A core component of our continued journey with teaching and learning, and part of our involvement in the ongoing 'Teach Like a Champion' (TLAC) project this year, has been our focus on 'preparation'. We have placed a significant emphasis on what we expect to see in pupils' work, and how to facilitate quality responses. This entails planning deliberately for purposeful participation and formulating probing questions that lead to deeper understanding.

Additionally, predicting possible misconceptions has been a key focus, and staff have diligently worked on strategies to address these effectively.

Looking ahead, this focus will remain central as we enter the next academic year. Our coaching system, which has evolved throughout the year, has resulted in increased confidence among both coaches and coachees and has fostered a low-stakes culture where teachers feel encouraged to invite colleagues into their classrooms for observations. There's a genuine openness to being filmed too - this initiative aims to develop a portfolio of videos that can be shared across the Trust to support our CPD efforts.

In March, our TLAC implementation team had the privilege of attending the final event at Walsall Football Club alongside Doug Lemov and his team, connecting with other schools involved in the project. This experience provided valuable insights and reaffirmed the commitment we all share towards our educational ambitions.

A particular highlight of this academic year was our first joint schools Christmas Fayre. The event turned out to be a tremendous success, creating a real festive atmosphere. It truly showcased the spirit of our Trust and the strengthening ties between our schools.

In February, we had the opportunity to share our hard work and accomplishments with some very special 'visitors'. The long-awaited Ofsted inspection for the Infant school finally took place, and we were absolutely thrilled with the outcome. The positive feedback has energised our staff, and we are now focused on building upon this success as we move forward.



Throughout the year, our pupils have enjoyed a range of enriching experiences, from educational trips to welcoming visitors into our schools. These activities have provided invaluable opportunities for our children to engage with the wider world and enhance their learning through practical exposure.

The Black Country Living Museum was a real highlight for Year 2, as they experienced what life was like for school children during Victorian times, and Year 5 were inspired by their visit to the Thinktank, with so many expressing how much more science they wanted to experience!

As we conclude this academic year, it is important to recognise the incredible journey we have undertaken together. The dedication and commitment of our staff, the enthusiasm of our pupils and the support from our families have all contributed to a truly engaging and productive year. We look forward to building on these successes as we embark on a new academic year, filled with more opportunities and possibilities.

**Elise Waldron**  
Head Teacher

This year has seen an increase in collaboration among subject leaders, who have actively worked together to enhance our curriculum offer. Staff have willingly developed their leadership roles - some not only in their own school but across both - fostering a culture of shared expertise. This has decisively impacted our continued professional development (CPD), allowing us to gain a clearer understanding of the start



**Elm Tree**  
Primary Academy

# Elm Tree Primary Academy

What a fantastic year we have had at Elm Tree. We have grown from 54 children to 90 and our team has grown alongside.

We have worked with Open Theatre and Big Top Musical Adventures to develop our creative curriculum, and our children have enjoyed a range of enrichment activities and trips, including music and drama performances, the Black Country Living Museum, Forge Mill Farm and more.

relaxing sensory garden. Our new areas will be used to support sensory integration, gross and fine motor development, communication and interaction, wellbeing and so much more.



Our site has also been enhanced with beautiful breakout spaces, our very popular Jungle Gym and our



Our coffee mornings and workshops have been a huge success and have covered topics including phonics,

sensory integration, communication and online safety. One of the highlights of the year was our inclusive sports day which had an amazing turn out from parents and carers.

Toffee, our Therapy Dog, is hugely popular and is already having an impact on our pupils' wellbeing and outcomes, alongside our newly developed pastoral support team and the range of interventions they provide.



Pupil voice and self-advocacy is at the heart of Elm Tree; our school council has been amazing at making key

decisions about the school, such as the colours and name of our Jungle Gym. We have expanded our range of communication devices to ensure all children have access to communication that works for them, and all pupils have a voice.



The parent forum has been launched both in-person and virtually to ensure every parent or carer that wants to get involved has the opportunity.

In the summer term, we also had our very first Ofsted inspection. We were delighted that the 'uniqueness' of Elm Tree was recognised and celebrated. It was wonderful to showcase our provision,

celebrate our successes and receive such wonderful feedback in our report. This sets us up to make sure that we continue to build on the great start we have made.

It is a good time to thank all of our Elm Tree family for their dedication, hard work and overwhelming support over the last three years, enabling us to share our vision, passion and drive for excellence during Ofsted this year and contributing to the 'Elm Tree Magic'.

**Beth Barnsley**  
Head Teacher





Fibbersley Park  
Academy

# Fibbersley Park Academy

## What a year it's been at Fibbersley Park Academy!

We've enjoyed a fantastic year filled with exciting learning experiences, memorable trips, and the warm welcome of new staff and families joining our school community. As the academic year draws to a close, we look back with pride on the achievements, growth and sense of community that have made 2024-25 so special.

Educational visits have brought learning to life. Year 1 explored the Art Gallery, the Black Country Living Museum and Dudley Zoo. Year 3 delved into history at the Dudley Canal Museum, and Year 4 studied Willenhall's past at the Locksmith Museum.



And, of course, who could forget our royal visitor? Prince William delighted the children by high-fiving more of them in ten minutes than we could count. Some even said they were never washing that hand again!

Year 5 journeyed to the National Space Centre, while Year 6 enjoyed a brilliant residential at Culmington Manor and a celebration trip to Drayton Manor. In Early Years, children met Father Christmas and his elves, and Nursery welcomed the Farm on Wheels. Our choir also proudly represented the school at Young Voices.



A major highlight has been the success of our OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme. Lunchtimes have been transformed with richer, more inclusive play experiences, benefiting both children and staff. Next, we plan to introduce a large sandpit and ensure every child has access to outdoor clothing and wellies. Huge thanks to Laura Burns, the Play Team and all who've donated resources.

Our commitment to excellent teaching continues through the 'Teach Like a Champion' (TLAC) approach, led by Amy Hubble and Louisa Flemings. Weekly newsletters and regular coaching have helped us embed consistent, high-quality teaching strategies across the school. Louisa



We are proud to have graduated from the English Hub phonics support programme. Since implementing Little Wandle 18 months ago, our early readers have made excellent progress. To meet the varied and growing needs of our pupils,

Flemings was appointed Deputy Headteacher at the end of the spring term and we're all enjoying working with her in this new role.

Music has flourished thanks to Nicola Day, who has led the choir, recorder group, rock band and guitar performances. We've also applied to join the West Midlands Music Hub, which will further enrich our music curriculum next year.



Our Trust and school values remain central to our work. A special highlight was our joint trip to Whitehall Nursery and Infant school to share and celebrate those values together.

we've further developed our wider provision. Our in-house resource base now supports 21 children, alongside nurture provision and strong partnerships with Kings Inter High, Breathing Space, Liminal Education, School Nursing and Imagination Arts. These efforts ensure all children receive the support they need to thrive. This year also saw the beginnings of a parent forum for families of children with SEND, as we continue to strengthen partnerships and ensure every voice is heard.



One of the most special things about Fibbersley is the strength of our Fibbersley Family. From the children who bring energy and joy each day, to the dedicated staff and supportive families who stand with us - there's a genuine sense of belonging, care and pride that makes our school so special.

It is a true honour to be Head Teacher at Fibbersley Park Academy. Thank you to every child, staff member and family for making our school such a fantastic place. We can't wait to see what next year brings!

**Kathryn Sugars**  
Head Teacher



## Foley Park Primary Academy

# Foley Park Primary Academy

We began the academic year on a high following our successful Ofsted inspection, where we achieved the much-anticipated GOOD grading. This was a milestone that set a positive tone for the months ahead. We were also thrilled to welcome our new Deputy Headteacher, Vanessa Baker, who has already made a significant impact and built strong relationships with pupils, colleagues and families.



Our focus this year has been on improving student outcomes and enhancing both our SEND and pastoral provision. A key development has been the launch of our nurture provision, which has quickly

become an integral part of our support offer, and the impact has been measurable using Boxall Profiles. Our full-time SEND base has supported seven pupils in accessing a personalised, balanced curriculum that meets their individual needs. In the summer term, we welcomed Rachel Palmer to our leadership team as our new SENDCO, bringing further strength and expertise to our inclusive approach.

We are proud to have launched our family courses this year, coordinated by our family link worker, Michelle Kirk. These weekly sessions have grown in popularity and have become a cornerstone of our work with families. Parent workshops throughout the year have included sessions on sleep, transitions and other key areas to support family life.

Our School Council played a key role in organising a food bank initiative as part of our Harvest celebrations. Pupils led a successful collection, learned about the importance of food banks and personally delivered donations to local

families in need. They also had the unique opportunity to tour Kidderminster Town Hall during its renovation, complete with hard hats and behind-the-scenes insights.

We have changed our phonics scheme to Little Wandle – which has been a huge success!



Children in Years 4, 5, and 6 took part in the Bikeability programme, learning valuable cycling skills and road safety. Partnering with the Wyre Forest Partnership has continued to offer inclusive and exciting sporting opportunities, while our football team has grown in both confidence and skill. Residential trips for Years 4

and 6 gave pupils the chance to build resilience, independence, and teamwork in adventurous settings.



A particular highlight was our first-ever Year 6 Careers Week, organised by Kirsty Fellows, which saw a range of professionals – from police officers to safari park staff – inspire pupils with talks and hands-on experiences to raise aspirations.

Thanks to generous volunteers from Specsavers, our forest school area was revitalised, and several internal spaces were refreshed with a new coat of paint – giving our school a vibrant new look. Our ongoing partnership with Neighbourly has allowed us to continue collecting weekly

food donations to support families in need. Our Friends of Foley have also been busy organising events that bring our community together – most notably the Easter Bake-Off, which was a fantastic celebration of creativity and teamwork.

We successfully secured DfE Nursery Capital Grant funding, which will allow us to extend our provision to include two-year-olds. In addition, we were awarded funding to install an outdoor gym, promoting health and wellbeing across the school community.



As part of our school's Values Agenda, we enjoyed a memorable school swap with Elm Tree Academy. This

initiative provided enriching experiences and helped build new friendships among pupils and staff alike.

We are especially proud of our Year 4 Maths genius, who sat the Higher Maths GCSE – an extraordinary achievement – and is now receiving physics tuition as part of our wider commitment to stretch and challenge all learners.

Finally, we are delighted with our Key Stage 2 writing results, which were externally moderated and showed a strong upward trend over the past two years – demonstrating clear and sustained improvement.

What an incredible year it has been! Thank you to all our staff, pupils, parents and community partners who have contributed to our journey. We look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

**Soneeta Reynolds**  
Head Teacher



**Northfield Manor**  
Primary Academy

# Northfield Manor Primary Academy

Over the past year, pupils at Northfield Manor Academy have taken part in a wide range of purposeful and engaging activities that have extended learning beyond the classroom.

From cultural exploration to career inspiration and the development of strong communication skills, these experiences have contributed meaningfully to our wider curriculum and school ethos.

## Culture Day

Among the many highlights was our school-wide Culture Day, a vibrant celebration of diversity and aspiration, thoughtfully organised by our School Council.

The day began with children from across the school greeting the audience in their home languages, setting the tone for a powerful assembly hosted by the council to reflect on what makes our school community unique and the values we aim to uphold in the future.



Following the assembly, pupils engaged in a variety of workshops that explored cultures from around the world. These included creative activities with class teachers and a hugely popular African drumming session that got everyone moving – including the teachers!

In the afternoon, students expressed their own cultural identities by creating, writing and performing their own poetry, drawing inspiration from the morning’s learning. These heartfelt reflections were proudly shared with parents in a showcase that celebrated not only our diversity, but also our unity.

## Oracy Centre of Excellence

We’re also incredibly proud to have been recognised as an Oracy Centre of Excellence, following three years of dedicated development of our Oracy approach. This achievement marks a significant milestone in our commitment to raising confident, articulate communicators who listen actively and express their thinking with greater confidence.



Through structured classroom talk, Poetry Slam competitions, Debate Mate club, Oracy-focused



assemblies, and our engaging “Dine and Discuss” lunchtime prompts, our pupils have developed stronger reasoning, empathy, and confidence. Oracy has not only enriched teaching and learning but also built deeper relationships and classroom engagement.

We look forward to growing this work in partnership with Voice 21 and are keen to contribute to the wider conversation about embedding Oracy more permanently into the national curriculum.



## Annual Careers Week

Finally, we were thrilled to host our second annual Careers Day, building on the incredible success of last year. We welcomed back familiar faces such as the military medical team – complete with ambulances and trucks – and were joined by an inspiring range of new visitors, including an international musician, a surgeon, a professional dancer, a researcher and a poet.



The week ended on a high with an unforgettable visit from British Olympic rugby player, Abbie Brown, who spoke

powerfully about resilience, teamwork, and chasing your dreams.

It’s been a remarkable year, and we are so proud of all our pupils, staff, and community partners who make Northfield Manor Academy such a special place to grow, learn and achieve.

**Tom Hull**  
Headteacher



**Poppyfield**  
Primary Academy

# Poppyfield Academy

2024-2025 marks the end of the sixth year since Poppyfield Academy opened its doors to the families of Hednesford, Cannock. We have strived to become a hub for our local community and to provide an education full of valuable experiences and excellence for all who attend, work at and support the school.

Over the last twelve months, the pupils have continued to have an impact on their wider community and develop their skills to be active citizens – now and for their future. They have continued to work with community partners including Littleton Lodge Care Home, Hednesford Council, NSPCC, Cannock Chase and Guide Dogs For The Blind.

The beginning of the year saw pupils working on a new Transition Unit entitled “Friend or Foe?”. The children throughout the school developed their personal development skills through identifying what makes a good friend and how we can support one another when this goes wrong. Our youngest

pupils worked on sharing and kindness and older pupils learnt about friendship, the impact of bullying, cyber bullying, stereotyping and prejudice, and made links to recent events in the news.

We have celebrated two “Everybody Write” days this year. The first linked to fairy tales. When the children entered the classrooms, they were faced with something from a fairy tale; classrooms destroyed by the big bad wolf, crime scenes and huge beanstalks. The children then used their skills to retell a story with a twist. They changed characters, settings and even made the bad characters good. It was a truly inspiring day. The second Everybody Write took place over a week. Children came to school Monday morning to find a large nest with four huge eggs on the school field.

The local PCSOs supported the school helping to tape off the nest, making information request posters and were interviewed by the children. On Wednesday the children noticed that one of the eggs

had “hatched”. Over the week they collated information and interviews producing newspaper reports and news broadcasts. An extremely “eggciting” week!



Science has been a key focus this year as we encourage our pupils to investigate the world around them. They have been involved in engineering competitions, including visits from aerospace engineers, and took part in national science week. This year we worked alongside SteamCo who provided the children with workshops on rockets and space. The children made their own rockets, launching them from stomp pads, and witnessed the launch of a dynamite rocket

on the school playground. It was a truly inspiring week which supported our science curriculum and encouraged pupils to think about science in the real world.



During the summer term we were extremely lucky to work alongside Kanj Nicholas, a local artist and author. She came into school to launch our “I can be anything!” project. This saw the children developing their art skills in order to demonstrate what they dream of being. Kanj supported staff training, as well as delivering workshops with the children, so that everyone could build their artistic skills. The final pieces then became an art gallery to share with parents and carers. The whole project

not only inspired the children to dream big, but to also develop belief in themselves and celebrate their differences.

The children have been involved in Anti-Bullying Week, Safer Internet Day, World Book Day, National Storytelling Week, Sky Access All Arts week, Restart a Heart Day and workshops from Severn Trent Water and Barclays Bank. All of these encouraged the children to learn and apply new skills that will continue to support them as they grow.



This year has seen the development of three football teams within school. We have had support from pupils at a local secondary school, who attend after school weekly to

help with coaching. We have also been sponsored by Nexus Fostering, allowing us to develop and purchase our own football strip. The children are extremely proud every time they wear it, and their team skills have seen many wins over the year. We have also made connections with Flexus Dance Collective. This professional dance company led a number of in-school dance creation sessions, linked to a new author and artist. The children were then invited to Wolverhampton’s Arena Theatre to experience performing on stage with lighting and technical support. The performance was so very special, and we were all extremely proud of them.

Poppyfield Academy continues to be a hub for the local community, but also an inspiring place which educates and nurtures truly remarkable children, who make us proud every single day!

**Becky Scordis**  
Head Teacher



**Rowley Park**  
Primary Academy

# Rowley Park Academy

What an unforgettable year it has been at our school – a year that began not so quietly, with a bold, joyful celebration of community to kick-start developing our community links further; ‘The Great Big Rowley Get Together’. The event was inspired by the words and work of Jo Cox: “We are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.”



This message lit the spark for a whole school art gallery. Over two creative weeks, every pupil became an artist and collaborated in our special art project. The school buzzed with colour, conversation, and connection as we explored what community means to us. The project ended in

a stunning art gallery – a showcase of hope, unity, and pride that reminded us all how powerful we are when we come together. We opened our doors for a wonderful community event, welcoming parents and groups from across the area – from the Scouts to the Children’s University, local high schools, fire services, youth groups and many more.

It was a true celebration of the people who help shape and support our young learners. We were even honoured with a visit from our MP, Leigh Ingham, who came to see the magic of our community in action.



This incredible beginning set the tone for the entire school year. It reminded us that learning goes beyond the classroom – it’s in the relationships we build, the values we share, and the belief that everyone belongs.

Another highlight of the year was our continued work with ‘Time 4 Sport’, offering high-quality sports coaching, access to HAF clubs (Holiday Activities and Food) and a growing range of inclusive physical opportunities for all pupils. With T4S, we took on a new challenge: giving children the chance to swim. We know how important water safety is, and how many children can miss out due to cost, access or confidence.



That’s why we trialed something new and bold – a swimming pool right on our playground. By bringing the pool to school, we broke down barriers and gave every child a chance to learn, to grow and to feel proud. The response was incredible. One pupil’s words said it all: “I can swim now!” Parents shared their appreciation and pride, and children left the sessions with more than just new skills – they left with confidence and joy.



Our strong community links continued to grow throughout the year, creating even more exciting opportunities for our children to represent our school. We took part in competitive sports tournaments with

local primary schools and in the world of science and innovation, a group of pupils proudly participated in a STEM competition at the local Grammar School, showcasing their curiosity and creative thinking.



As well as continuing to use our local area for trips and experiences, we also engaged with local authority initiatives, including the “Attendance Heroes” programme, which has helped to sustain and celebrate our improved attendance across the school.

We also supported independence and safety with pupils benefiting from Bikeability training and road and seatbelt safety workshops,

equipping them with real-world skills that will serve them well beyond the school gates. Children also tested out their first aid skills and learnt all about the role of the paramedic when we teamed up with Staffordshire University’s paramedic students – raising the children’s aspirations. These meaningful experiences show how our wider community plays a vital role in enriching learning and helping every child thrive.

Keep your eyes peeled next year, as we have just been interviewed and accepted onto the climate school 180 project with Learning Through Landscapes, where we take part in a climate-focused initiative. The process will challenge our school to embed climate change as a theme across the curriculum and use the school grounds as a learning environment for all pupils.

**Annika Beaumont**  
Head Teacher

# Victoria Park Primary Academy



**Victoria Park**  
Primary Academy

The end of a school year is a fantastic time to reflect with pride upon all of the achievements and successes that our pupils, colleagues and wider community have created and shared together. I've been amazed and inspired by how far their hard work, dedication, passion and enthusiasm has taken them, demonstrating how much stronger we are when working together. The clearest evidence of this has been across our Early Years team, where we have established a secure network of sharing good practice and family support that has resulted in our first Parent Teacher Association meeting in over a decade.

The best possible start... Our Early Years team made the earliest possible interventions this year, working with families - before they joined our setting - to help them to be school ready. In partnership with Barnardo's and the Smethwick Family Hub we hosted Wellies in the Woods sessions to get to know our new starters and support families to develop routines. Once into Nursery, they partnered with the National Children's Bureau and the National Literacy Trust to complete the REAL Programme to Raise Early Achievement in Literacy. Supported by the Educational Endowment Foundation, the project helped to build parents' knowledge and confidence in creating a home learning environment that supports and encourages children's reading, writing and oral language. In our case, this culminated in a visit to the German Christmas Market for 20 of our families, where we searched for words and symbols as part of a winter scavenger hunt (that even a snow day and an unplanned train cancellation could not halt). Ordering 20 hot

chocolates and 25 babyccinos from a coffee shop at New Street, as a busy queue of commuters built up behind me, was a particular joy...



Throughout the year this two-way relationship grew - as did friendships and support amongst the parents, as we saw a steady increase in attendance at our weekly Wednesday coffee afternoons. Themes included a packed audience for a visit from the School Nurse, home phonics and Mehndi sessions. From these sessions, parents began to volunteer to help plan the end of year EYFS Family Festival, which has now developed into a full PTA. The first AGM is scheduled before we break up, so that we have a clear remit and structure for 2025-26.

**Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL):** Our outdoor provision has gone from strength-to-strength this year. Having started last spring with some recommended quick-wins (combining age-groups, opening up new spaces) we now have five fully established zones, each providing different types of play and challenge.



We have also developed a SEN specific OPAL experience to incorporate varied daily play and create areas of outside continuous provision used throughout the day. This term we invited parents in for a day-of-play - and have promised the children that this will now become a regular fixture as we strive for our accreditation next year. We have just secured

20 volunteers from HSBC to help dig a giant sandpit complete with sailboat - watch this space!

**Teach Like a Champion:** Again, in its infancy last year, we continued to develop and embed TLAC teaching strategies across school. Under the guidance of Doug Lemov and a mixture of UK and US experts, the calibre of coaching and mentors coming into school has been phenomenal. One standout quote, from Denarius Frazier, the Regional Superintendent of Instruction for Uncommon Schools in New York City, and a Senior Advisor on the TLAC programme, made me understandably proud after describing; 'the best Y1 class I have ever seen, expectations so high and so well behaved... there's no way... that the class could work so well, so independently, without the underlying systems and mastery teaching that has been put in place.'

Initially through the programme, and now with the continued support from the Trust, we have access to Steplab for all teachers, an

online system for supporting and recording instructional coaching. Through use of this, and planned, supportive professional dialogue, our challenge is to support all teachers in our school and in the wider community to recognise the strategies embedded, so that every classroom can recognise and embed the same mastery teaching.



Add this to our commitment to revisit our 'VICI Pupil Commitment' of experiences and trips and our Poverty Proofing Charter to help all families - it's looking like another exciting adventure into 2026!

**Rob Reed**  
Head Teacher





# Whitehall Nursery and Infant Academy

Where has this year gone? It seems to have flown by in the blink of an eye – and what a year it has been at Whitehall Nursery and Infant Academy. In April 2025 we became the newest member of the Victoria Academies Trust family of schools. We are really excited and looking forward to this new partnership, and we already feel very much part of the team.

To celebrate becoming part of the Trust, we organised a fantastic Values Day; all the children and staff actively participated in a range of activities that promoted excellence, integrity, unity, courage and curiosity. We had many visitors during the day, such as school councillors from Victoria Park Academy and Fibbersley Park Academy, who joined in with our children. The Trust's CEO, Sharron Philpot, led an assembly with our children and also joined our children and staff outside on the playground (my pupils told me she was very good on the monkey bars). We were particularly pleased with a set of batik art installations that

the children designed, based on the core VAT values. They then worked with an artist in residence to bring these to life in the form of five pieces of art, displayed in our main corridor for everyone to see.



As a school we are always trying to encourage excellence, courage and curiosity in our curriculum delivery and this year has been no different. To get the whole community united together and to champion our value of unity, we staged a Peace Walk to our local Palfrey Park. Parents joined us, dressed in white, to walk the streets of Caldmore – waving our peace lilies that the children had made from their handprints, with words of peace, reconciliation

and anger management ideas. At the park, we made a circle of peace and sang a song to unite everyone in the call for dialogue and not confrontation. The lilies were then 'planted', to leave an installation for the community to consider.



Whitehall is blessed to be immersed in a rich cultural environment where many festivals and religions are celebrated. We bring these elements of children's lives into our school, to share with the whole school community these important events, so that understanding and tolerance can be learnt. A wonderful part of celebrating is eating (!) and with the great relationships built up with our local

community businesses, we've enjoyed donations of Chinese food and fortune cookies, Indian sweet and savoury snacks and, when visiting the Sikh temple and the Mosque, we were excellently hosted and given food and drink there. Our children experienced the richness of art through dance and music – something that they don't encounter in their everyday lives – dancing to Brazilian and Indian music, and drumming in the Ghanaian style in a full 30 drum circle.



To ensure that we develop cultural capital and bring learning to life in our curriculum, children were taken to Warwick Castle to experience the architecture and drama of the setting. The

Black Country Museum also provided a great learning environment for our Victorian Day and specialist art workshop. The West Midlands Safari Park helped us to teach about living things and their habitats – especially useful in showing lions as being carnivores!



To develop a greater excitement and acquisition in English we have really benefited from two Artis specialists – Ding and Clip-Clop! Their drama-based sessions have supported children to engage with language in a fun and energetic way, enabling them to develop a resilience towards speech and giving them a confidence to speak and perform, even in front of an audience.

As the year draws to a close some of our children will be performing a cello ensemble for their friends and family, after a year's hard work learning the instrument.

Our choir, full of talent and enthusiasm, will once again be representing our school at the Primary Singing Festival and, after their brilliant performances at Christmas, are sure to do well. Year 2 will be going out with a bang as they perform – through speech, song and dance – '1001 Arabian Nights' (a tradition that is almost, but not quite, as popular as our pirate day and soaking the teachers with water guns...)

**Lee Kilkenny**  
Head Teacher



# Our Schools, Our Journey





**Victoria Academies Trust**

Ballot Street,  
Smethwick,  
West Midlands  
B66 3HH

**Web:** [victoriaacademiestrust.org](http://victoriaacademiestrust.org)

**Email:** [enquiry@victrust.org](mailto:enquiry@victrust.org)

**X** [@VicAcademies](https://twitter.com/VicAcademies)