

A word from our CEO...

As we come to the end of another busy year at Esteem, I want to thank everyone across the Trust for your hard work and commitment. This Christmas newsletter is a significant one for me, as it is my final message to you as CEO and marks the end of my career in education over more than 30 years.

I have always felt privileged to work with and support children and young people in a range of school settings. Establishing Esteem Multi Academy Trust and seeing it develop into the organisation it is today has been immensely rewarding. What we have achieved together has only been possible because of your professionalism and dedication to meeting the needs of our pupils and helping them to thrive. This couldn't have been done without the support of our trustees, governors, families, and—above all—the young people themselves.

This year has again shown the strengths of the Trust: great practice, strong collaboration between schools, and many individual successes that reflect the daily work taking place across Esteem. What we have achieved has also enhanced our reputation with our external partners as a strong, specialist trust.

As I move onto retirement, I do so feeling confident that the trust is well placed for the future and in capable hands.

Thank you for your continued commitment, professionalism, and support. I wish you a restful Christmas break and a positive start to the New Year.



Julian Scholefield - CEO

Tribute to David Symons

It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the sudden passing of David Symons, the long-serving Chair of Governors at Fountains High School. David also served with commitment and pride across several Esteem schools, including Elmsleigh, Fountains Primary and Esteem North. His loss will be felt profoundly across our Trust community.

David dedicated nearly four decades to voluntary service in education, championing children and young people, particularly those with additional needs or facing disadvantage. His involvement with our schools dates back to the late 1980s, and he played an important part in shaping the ethos and direction of what eventually became Esteem MAT. He believed wholeheartedly in inclusion, high aspiration and doing what is right for the most vulnerable – values that continue to guide our work today.

Gareth Allen, Executive Headteacher at Fountains High School, said:

"David was an extraordinary individual whose contribution to education and community life spanned nearly four decades. His commitment to children and young people, especially those at Fountains was unwavering and he was known for bringing wisdom, compassion and integrity to every role he held.

"David was more than a governor, he was a mentor, a supporter, and a friend to many of us. His presence at school events, his thoughtful challenge in meetings, and his genuine care for staff and students made him a deeply respected figure in our community."

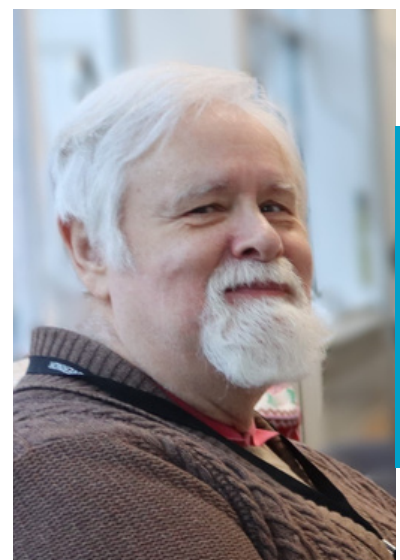
Many school leaders across Esteem, including Gareth, benefited from his guidance, encouragement and strategic insight.

David's son shared the following reflection, which captures the warmth with which he was held:

"He was a good man. He loved having a role to play in the community, and it's so lovely how the schools were warm and welcoming to him, including him in events throughout the school calendar."

In the coming weeks, we will consider as a Trust how best to honour David's legacy and celebrate the significant contribution he made to our Trust and its schools. We know many of you will wish to share your own memories and reflections.

For now, we hold David's family in our thoughts at this difficult time.



Esteem Valley Academy Rated 'Good' by Ofsted

We are immensely proud to announce that Esteem Valley Academy has been rated 'Good' in all areas following their recent Ofsted inspection in July 2025. This achievement is a significant milestone in their journey and reflects the unwavering dedication of the entire school community, students, staff, parents, governors and Trust alike.

"This judgement is not just a snapshot in time; it represents years of hard work, progress, and collaboration," shares Kevin, Headteacher. "While we celebrate this success, we remain focused on our ongoing mission to create a "Culture of Success." Our commitment to students' growth and achievement continues every single day, far beyond any inspection outcome."

The Ofsted report praised the strong foundations built. Inspectors noted that positive, trusting relationships are at the heart of the school and that the care and support provided, enable pupils to feel safe and happy. They highlighted high expectations for behaviour and commended the strength of leadership at all levels,



describing a united vision and ambition for pupils to achieve as highly as possible. Furthermore, the report recognised that staff are deeply committed to the school's values and receive effective support for their workload and wellbeing.

This success belongs to everyone who plays a part in making Esteem Valley Academy a place where every individual can thrive. It is a reflection of our shared belief that education is about more than academic achievement, it is about creating an environment where relationships, engagement, and opportunity flourish.

EVA are thrilled with this outcome, but this is just the beginning. Together, we will continue to build on this success and ensure that every student has the chance to reach their full potential.

Opportunity for Students to Become Ambassadors for the Holocaust Education Trust

On Remembrance Day, Mrs Skelton accompanied two Post 16 learners from Fountains High School on a sobering and poignant visit with the Holocaust Educational Trust, joining 160 learners from across the West Midlands on a journey to Oswiecim in Poland.

The group visited two significant historical sites - Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II (Birkenau) - to deepen their understanding of the Holocaust. The experience had a profound impact on everyone involved, offering powerful and thought provoking insights that will stay with them for years to come.

Throughout the day, Rabbi Epstein and Rabbi Hughes provided invaluable perspectives from the Jewish community, helping learners reflect on the human stories behind the history.

The visit concluded with a moving memorial service and a powerful message of hope, kindness and tolerance in our world today.

In addition to the trip, the students had an orientation seminar in Birmingham the week before, hearing from an 82 year old Holocaust survivor called Annick. The two students have completed 3 online modules, had a follow-up reflection seminar after the trip and now have to complete a project sharing their experience with others - Mrs Skelton is hoping to do this in the form of an assembly just before Holocaust day on 27th January. They also have to write a 500 word reflective piece about their experiences and learning. If they complete both of these they will become ambassadors for the Holocaust Educational Trust.

This experience only cost £59 each and is open to all settings with a post 16 department. We would be delighted for more young people to access this opportunity as it was truly a life changing experience.

If you would like to find out more, here is a link to the Lessons From Auschwitz project . [Holocaust Educational Trust - LFA Project](#)

Holbrook Launch New Inclusive Library

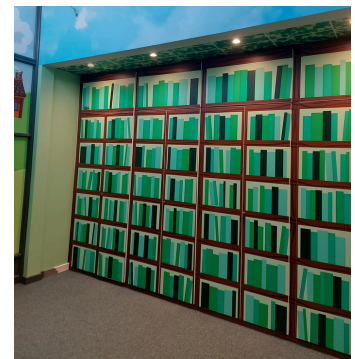
We are excited to share that Holbrook's new library has been designed as an inclusive, impactful space catering to the diverse needs of all students.

The environment has been carefully planned to support sensory needs, flexible seating, and accessible resources, ensuring that every child can engage comfortably and meaningfully.

The design is in-keeping with other renovated areas of the school sites. The space is being actively used to foster early reading skills, encourage independent learning and transition, and support literacy development across all age groups.

Staff have reported that students are more motivated to explore books, engage in story sessions, and participate in small group reading activities. The revamped space is helping students develop confidence and communication skills in a welcoming, supportive setting.

Staff are thrilled with the positive impact the library is already having and look forward to continuing to nurture a love of reading and learning for all students.



Bennerley Awarded Gold!

Bennerley Fields School has recently been awarded the Skills Builder Gold Award, recognising their commitment to delivering a high-quality, fully embedded approach to essential skills development across the curriculum.

Over the past year whilst undertaking the Accelerator Programme, staff have worked together to ensure that the Skills Builder Universal Framework is not just an add-on, but a consistent and meaningful part of daily learning for all pupils. This has involved careful curriculum planning and opportunities for pupils to apply key skills, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving and creativity, in real, purposeful contexts.

Teachers have integrated the eight essential skills into lessons, personal development sessions, and wider school experiences, enabling pupils to make visible progress and to recognise their own achievements.

Achieving Gold places Bennerley Fields among a select group of schools nationally recognised for exemplary essential-skills education. It reflects the dedication of staff, the engagement of pupils, and the support of families and partners across their community.

Beyond Inclusion at FPS

Fountains Primary School has been recognised as a Beyond Inclusion School for their commitment to supporting children's communication and promoting inclusive practice.

This recognition comes from Beyond Words Creative, an organisation dedicated to celebrating schools that go above and beyond in creating inclusive environments. Jo Smith, founder of Beyond Words Creative, was inspired by the Communication Station initiative at FPS, describing it as "exactly what inclusion should look like in practice."

As part of this recognition, FPS received a signed copy of Harvey's Silent Discovery—a beautiful book that helps children understand that everyone communicates in their own way and that every voice matters. Staff can't wait to share this resource with pupils!



Elmsleigh win Regional School of the Year!

We are incredibly proud to announce that Elmsleigh Infant and Nursery School has been named the **Modeshift STARS Regional School of the Year 2025/26!**

This fantastic achievement reflects the dedication, enthusiasm, and teamwork shown by their pupils, families, and staff in promoting active, safe, and sustainable travel every day.

Thank you to all of the families who support walking, wheeling, and cycling to school. This award belongs to the whole school community!

Elmsleigh has been invited to attend the **National STARS School Travel Awards**. 2 staff members and 4 pupils will be travelling down to London to represent Elmsleigh and receive their regional award. Pupils will also have the opportunity to give a short 3-minute presentation showcasing the impact of their sustainable travel work.



REGIONAL SCHOOL OF THE YEAR 2025

Fountains High Open New Sports Hall

This term marked a major milestone for Fountains High School as they officially opened the Helen Almey Sports Hall – an outstanding new facility four years in the making.

Before the ribbon was cut, guests enjoyed tea, coffee and cakes from the Coffee Bean Cafe, a student enterprise project giving young people valuable real-life experience of working in hospitality.

We were delighted to be joined by the Madam Mayor of East Staffordshire, who invited our CEO Julian Scholefield, Headteacher Gareth Allen and Head of School Bev Rowley to join her in cutting the ribbon.

The celebrations continued with two wonderful performances from the Fountains Signing Choir, followed by students taking part in wheelchair basketball in the new space.

A huge thank you to everyone who helped organise and attended this special event.



Students at The Aspire Academy attend the World Kickboxing Organisation Awards

Kickboxing, and boxing, has been a key part of the vocational provision at The Aspire Academy since 2017 in partnership with White Lotus Martial Arts & Fitness and Michelle Gardiner, the founder and tutor.

Over the years pupils have trained with Michelle in the fitness gym and have worked towards the White Lotus belt grading syllabus and a AQA Unit Award programme, and occasionally attending Kickboxing tournaments around the country, representing both the school and White Lotus Martial Arts & Fitness.

Four pupils in particular have led the way, attending three WKO Tournaments, up in Barnsley, from February to August 2025

A Yr9 pupil led the way, becoming a three times World Grand Prix 'Grand Champion' at his age and weight category in all three tournaments!

One of their Yr11 pupils also became a two times World Grand Prix 'Grand Champion' at both the European and

World tournaments, and two other pupils also achieved World Grand Prix 'Grand Champion' at their age and weight categories.

To round off a truly fantastic year, four pupils were all invited to the The World Kickboxing Organisation (WKO) Annual Awards Ceremony, back up in Barnsley, at the end of November to receive their trophies and certificates.

Michelle Gardiner, reported "The pupils who won awards came first out of approximately 2500 competitors - which is a massive achievement. It took lots of time, dedication, hard work and resilience. We are all so grateful to the staff at The Aspire Academy for taking time to accompany our pupils to the tournaments across the year and to these awards"



ESA students thrive using new reward system

Esteem South Academy introduced a new reward system this term: Postcards of Praise. The first pupils to earn 10 Postcards of Praise enjoyed a special treat: hot chocolate with Sally, Head of School at ESA. Well done to all of the students and staff involved in this new initiative!



Practical Salon Skills

Year 10 pupils at The Aspire Academy have been getting creative in their KS4 Hair and Beauty vocational lessons with a vibrant "Crazy Colour" hair tinting session! This hands-on activity is all about developing practical salon skills, boosting confidence, and encouraging artistic expression. Pupils experimented with bold shades and trendy techniques, transforming ordinary styles into eye-catching looks.



Construction at Aspire

This Autumn term has seen a variety of projects being undertaken by the pupils at The Aspire Academy.

Wood Joints & Finishing:

The pupils have been asked to make finger joints and lap joints for the Christmas Tree and finish the timber to a high standard.

This has been achieved by using the band saw, thicknesser and different sanding machines.

They have seen the difficulty of getting consistency and how to adjust their work. Some have shown real resilience when things haven't quite gone to plan.



From Exclusion to Excellence

GCSE Results Day 2025 was a day of pride and celebration at Esteem Valley Academy as they welcomed back many of their Year 11 students to mark their incredible achievements. For many, this journey began in challenging circumstances, students who had faced permanent exclusion from previous schools and significant barriers to learning. Today, they stand as shining examples of resilience, determination, and success.

This year's results reflect not only academic progress but also the personal growth and confidence students have developed. We are thrilled to announce a 65% increase in students accessing GCSE English and Maths at EVA, a remarkable improvement that demonstrates the impact of their tailored support and broad curriculum. At their KS4 Sawley site, every single student achieved five qualifications, including GCSEs in English and Maths, and an impressive 80% secured a grade 4 or equivalent in these core subjects. Congratulations to all students!



Money Week at Bracken Hill

This term, Bracken Hill School immersed themselves in all things money for a whole week.

They recognised, sorted, drew and rubbed coins, counted and spent money in shops and cafés and kept simple accounts for mini-enterprise projects.

Barclay's showed them how to spot frauds and scams and explore needs and wants and the difference between the two. They brought their banking van and taught students how to recognise fake bills.

Two members of the Nottingham Forest community team talked to older students about tech in sports and related job opportunities, and everyone was excited to see the European Cup they brought with them.

Students learned about taxes with the DWP, how to price a building project with Lovell Construction and emergency food parcels with Citizen's Advice.



James from Ashfield District Council explained where the council's money comes from and asked students to think about how they would spend it.

It was a packed week full of new experiences, thanks to all the visitors who supported learning at Bracken Hill so generously.

Bird of Prey visits EVA

Esteem Valley Academy recently welcomed a very special guest: Nodin, a five year old Harris' Hawk. Students from Explorers, Discovery and KS3, along with several excited members of staff, had the opportunity to meet Nodin up close, making the day one to remember.

For many pupils, this encounter was their first time seeing a bird of prey at such close range. Some approached with enthusiasm, while others took small, brave steps forward despite initial nerves. Watching students conquer their fears was one of the most rewarding parts of the experience.

Moments like these help young people build confidence, resilience, and a deeper understanding that fear can be transformed into curiosity with the right support.



FPS is lead provider for SEDIS across 60 schools in East Staffordshire

In Staffordshire, schools are using SEDIS – Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Support. SEDIS helps schools spot and remove barriers to learning, create classrooms that include everyone, and reduce the need for more formal support later.

SEDIS focuses on early, practical support, helping schools build inclusive communities, give staff confidence, and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Since Autumn 2024, Fountains Primary School was awarded the contract to be the lead provider for SEDIS across 60 schools in East Staffordshire, working with Fountains High School, William Shrewsbury Primary, and De Ferrers High School. This team provides a network of support for all schools. Schools can take part in training, workshops, conferences, and networking events to share ideas, learn new strategies, and stay up to date with SEND policies. Direct support is offered to pupils and wider groups of learning and advice is given on a range of different research led initiatives. This ensures staff are equipped to meet the diverse needs of their learners

This year, The SEDIS team held the East Staffordshire Inclusion Conference, bringing together school leaders and SENCOs. The conference offered a full day of learning, networking, and practical support. Attendees took part in workshops on key topics such as managing challenging behaviour, supporting mental health, autism inclusion strategies, building resilience in pupils, and using new interventions like the Maths EPATT programme. There are also sessions on relational and restorative practices, speech and language support, and other strategies that schools can use immediately.

The conference also featured Richard McCann an inspiring keynote speaker, who talked about his personal journey, highlighting the difference adults can make in children's lives. In addition to workshops and presentations, there is plenty of time for staff to meet colleagues, share experiences, and connect with local support agencies. By bringing together schools across East Staffordshire, the conference reinforces collaboration and shows the power of working together to make schools inclusive for all children.

PSHE at Peak

At Peak school, In PSHE this term, Scafell Class have been learning about Nutrition and Society. Within this topic the students found out all about the brilliant work that Food Banks do.

They planned their own food bank collection, wrote letters to staff and parents asking for donations and contacted the food bank with key questions. They were then able to deliver their donations to Zink Foodbank in Buxton, conducted a Q and A with the people running the organisation, found out about job roles in a food bank and learnt more about the fantastic work that they do for the community.

MP Visits Elmsleigh

We were delighted to welcome Samantha Niblett MP to Elmsleigh Infant School on Friday 21st November 2025. During her visit, Samantha spent time meeting the pupils and staff, hearing firsthand about the exciting improvements we hope to make to our learning environments.



Children shared their ideas for brighter, more flexible spaces that help them learn, play, and grow. Staff also had the opportunity to discuss the impact these changes would have on wellbeing and achievement across the school.



Staff Member at FHS Saves Life

Natalie, a staff member at Fountains High School who runs their Coffee Bean provision, recently received recognition from the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity. Whilst at the Stretton Bowls Club, an individual became unwell and collapsed. As a result of Natalie's quick thinking and First Aid knowledge she was able to save someone's life.

Music at ENA

Derbyshire Music Partnership visited Esteem North Academy across its Primary and Secondary sites in November.

Children explored creativity through an immersive music and coding experience that blended technology with imagination. Using simple computer-based composition tools, they experimented with melody, rhythm, and sound design to create their own original music.

There were plenty of activities to choose from, some pupils learnt basic coding skills to turn their ideas into playable computer games, designing characters, settings, and interactions that responded to the music they composed. Custom soundtracks shaped the mood and action of their games, pupils gained confidence in both digital music making and programming, discovering how art and technology work together to bring stories to life.

Pupils were encouraged to use their imagination as they explored rhythm and melody, developing bespoke and unique compositions. Throughout the project, pupils strengthened their ICT skills and gained a deeper understanding of how technology is used in the music industry, as well as how digital skills are applied across a range of careers. All pupils demonstrated resilience as they learned how to compose and produce music in their own style.



DPA visits Westminster

Students at DPA were fortunate enough to have the opportunity of an exciting trip to London. Eighteen students and 8 members of staff set off on their journey to London. They travelled on the train from Derby to St Pancras and then used the London Underground to make their way to Westminster. The day began with a visit to the iconic Houses of Parliament, where students had the opportunity to explore the heart of British democracy and the students got the chance to ask their own questions about the building, politics and the role of Parliament. Students also got the chance to see the famous Big Ben clock tower up close.

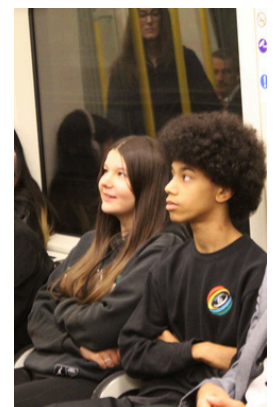
Afterwards, they headed to Trafalgar Square, a bustling landmark filled with impressive statues and fountains. Students enjoyed soaking in the lively atmosphere of one of London's most famous public spaces. Students then enjoyed a well-earned break, heading off to their favourite local spots for a delicious lunch of their choice!

To finish the day, students had a whistlestop tour of Leicester Square, known for its vibrant entertainment scene.

Surrounded by theatres, cinemas, and street performers, students decided they would like to come back to London and explore more.

It was a memorable trip full of learning, sightseeing, and fun, giving everyone a deeper appreciation of the history and energy of our capital city.

Staff are incredibly proud of students for their behaviour and attitudes whilst offsite in a very busy city! They showed true determination when some of the original plans needed to change.



Bennerley Fields Students Honour Remembrance Day with Pride and Respect

Students from Chatsworth Class took part in a series of thoughtful and meaningful activities to mark Remembrance Day, demonstrating maturity, compassion, and a deep sense of respect throughout.

In the lead-up to the day, students worked together to design and create their own Remembrance wreath. Their creativity and teamwork shone through as they produced a beautiful tribute, which has now been entered into a local competition. They are eagerly awaiting the results, and regardless of the outcome, we are incredibly proud of the effort and care they put into their work.

On a dedicated Remembrance visit to the Ilkeston Market Place Cenotaph, students attended a commemorative event and were honoured to lay their handmade wreath as part of the service. Standing alongside members of the community, they paid tribute to those who gave their lives in service. Their conduct was impeccable, and they showed sincere respect throughout the proceedings.

As part of their learning, students also visited the Commonwealth war graves, where they spent time discovering more about the real people behind the names and stories of the wars. This experience gave them a deeper understanding of the sacrifices made and helped bring history to life in a profoundly personal way.

Staff could not be prouder of how students conducted themselves throughout all these activities. Their behaviour, engagement, and empathy were exemplary, and they truly embodied the spirit of remembrance.



FPS is an Eco-School

Fountains Primary School, are incredibly proud to share that they have achieved a Distinction in the prestigious Eco-Schools Green Flag Award!

The Eco-Schools programme is a globally recognised initiative that empowers children and young people to lead environmental projects and take real action on issues that matter to them.

Across school, FPS have been reducing waste, promoting biodiversity, promoting sustainable travel and including environmental education in their curriculum.

Together, we're making a difference.

The Aspire Academy Gives Back During the Festive Season

As the festive season approaches, The Aspire Academy community has once again shown its commitment to kindness and social responsibility.

Staff and pupils generously donated clothes, food, and gift vouchers to The Basement Project in Bromsgrove, a local organisation that supports children and families experiencing hardship during the Christmas period.

These donations will help ensure that children who might otherwise miss out receive essential support at this time of year. Nina and the team at The Basement Project expressed their thanks and confirmed that all contributions will be distributed to families in need.

This initiative reflects the core values of The Aspire Academy and the wider Esteem Multi-Academy Trust, highlighting the importance of community, compassion, and supporting others. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this effort and helped make a positive difference.



Christmas Card Competition at Esteem North

Esteem North Academy is pleased to share its Christmas card template, created in PowerPoint.

The images featured on the card are the winning and runner-up designs from the recent Christmas Card Competition, organised by Key Stage.

The high quality of entries and the enthusiasm shown by pupils led to the introduction of a Head of School's Commendation Award, ensuring that as many pupils as possible were recognised for their efforts.



Academy Ambassadors are now addressing and writing the cards, which will be delivered to local neighbours to wish them a happy Christmas and to thank them for their continued support of the Academy.

Well done to all involved!

The Aspire Academy at the Worcester Cathedral Christmas Tree Festival

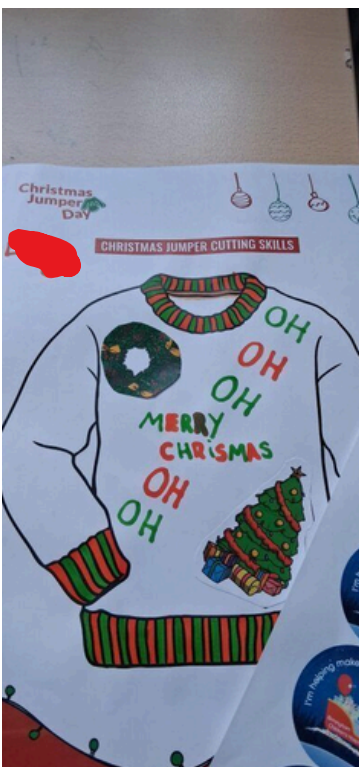
For the second year running, The Aspire Academy is delighted to be taking part in the Worcester Cathedral Christmas Tree Festival. This much-loved community event offers a wonderful opportunity for the school to shine, celebrate creativity, and showcase the fantastic work of pupils and staff.

This year's Aspire entry has been a whole-school project. Every pupil and member of staff contributed to bringing the unique tree to life. Mrs Payne coordinated the project, overseeing planning, logistics, and installation. Mrs Gill acted as project manager, leading the design and build with exceptional dedication. Mrs Conyers created a beautiful handmade tree topper. Mr McCormick and the SEND TA team supported pupils with painting, preparation, and hands-on creative work. Mrs Neil assisted in the construction room, helping pupils cut shapes and sand the wooden slats.

To construct the tree, pupils created around 80 wooden slats, each threaded onto a central pipe and rotated to form the final structure. Every branch was individually decorated, with pupils and staff crafting and painting their own designs.

Pupils studying construction cut and drilled the pieces needed, while the wider school community worked together on sanding, shaping, painting, and decorating. Templates were available in the workshop, enabling pupils to trace and cut designs during lessons.

We cannot wait for visitors to see this creation on display at Worcester Cathedral and to be part of this cherished community tradition once again.



ESA's Jolly Jumper Day

On 10 December, Esteem South Academy was brimming with festive cheer as staff and students donned their best Christmas jumpers for Jolly Jumper Day, raising awareness and support for Birmingham Children's Hospital. Highlights included:

- A Sustainability Jumper Swap, promoting eco-friendly choices.
- A Design-a-Jumper Competition, with creativity shining through in every entry.
- Fun Christmas activities that brought joy across the academy.

Thank you to everyone who contributed—your generosity is helping make a difference for an incredible cause