



Students create garden retreat and library

By Diana Cormack

Months of hard work put in by sixth-form students at Oak Lodge School came to fruition at the end of June with the opening of a new garden and library.

The school, situated in Heath View, N2, is an academy managed by Barnet Special Education Trust offering 200 places for students aged 11-19 with a wide range of learning difficulties.

Under the guidance of Class P4 teacher Helen McElhinney, 18-year-old Nico Luis has been working for his Introduction to Land Maintenance WJEC exams to fulfil his ambition of becoming a landscape gardener. Since last September he worked with his classmates to create a garden on an unused piece of land at the school. The derelict area now supports patches of perennial plants, edible produce such as strawberries, a glasshouse and a little fish pond.

As well as money, some seeds and plants were donated for the project whilst, despite a tight budget, others were bought.

What was originally the school's multi-faith room is now a book-lined room, which even contains a copy of The Archer. Students bought and built shelves and advertised for books, which were donated by families and staff, before sorting and categorising them and ensuring the library was well-arranged.

Classmates Jack Aggio and Robert Mwamba have been running the library for students across the school. The feedback is excellent, with both engaging and informing students on a good read and completing other roles perfectly.

Highly rated

Visit www.oaklodeschool.org for more information about this highly rated place of learning, which has been judged



Peaceful place: Oak Lodge students in the garden they created.
Photo Helen McElhinney

Books are back

The P4 Class Sixth Form students were also involved in the creation of a new school library. The previous library years earlier had become an IT room.

'Outstanding' in three successive Ofsted inspections and given Advanced Status by the Autism Accreditation Award Committee of the National Autistic Society.

Community skip service

The community skip service will be returning to two locations in East Finchley on Saturday 9 August. The free service offers residents the chance to get rid of up to three large household items if they can bring them to the skip.

The two N2 locations will be Vivian Way, at the junction with Deansway, and Trinity Road, at the junction with Elmhurst

Avenue. Find other locations and dates by searching 'community skips' at www.barnet.gov.uk



On the air: Oak Lodge students with the Dislabeled podcast team. Photo Community Focus

Pupils turn into podcasters

By David Melsome

Students at Oak Lodge School in East Finchley found their voices when they took part in a podcast project in conjunction with Community Focus and the City Bridge Trust.

Eleven boys aged 16 attended an eight-week workshop as part of their Skills for Work class, giving them the chance to talk with each other in a fun and meaningful way. At the end of the eight weeks, the students produced their own 30-minute podcast, complete with their own jingle.

The project was led by Community Focus, the North Finchley-based arts centre for adults and children with

disabilities, whose podcast Dislabeled explores topics around accessibility and inclusion in everyday life.

It helped the Oak Lodge students build confidence in asking and answering questions, especially in group settings. Many reported feeling more confident in using their voices. One student even expressed interest in becoming a voice actor, and the experience gave him greater confidence during his work experience at London Zoo.

Oak Lodge Head of Post 16 Sarah Dann described it as "an amazing project" and is looking to embed it further into the school curriculum. You can find episodes of Dislabeled at <https://dislabeled.buzzsprout.com>

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School's change of leadership

By Charlotte Charlesworth

Oak Lodge School in East Finchley is preparing for major changes to its leadership team. Both headteacher Lynda Walker and deputy headteacher Teresa Ellis are set to retire, marking the end of an era for the school for pupils with learning difficulties.

In her letter to families, Lynda Walker reflected on her 28 years as headteacher: "Throughout my tenure, I have had the privilege of experiencing six Ofsted inspections, with the last three resulting in an 'Outstanding' rating. I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a dynamic and forward-thinking community."

Lynda also expressed thanks for the dedication of staff, the support of parents, governors, and trustees, and the collaborative spirit that has driven the school's continued success. She will not be leaving the Oak Lodge family entirely as she will continue to support the school as CEO of Barnet Special Education.



Departing: Lynda Walker

The news of her retirement has touched many in the school community. Skye, a student, said "Mrs Walker was the best head teacher," while Daniel in the sixth form added, "Mrs Walker will be missed a lot and I very much hope the next

headteacher can do as good a job."

Crucial role

Deputy headteacher Teresa Ellis is also retiring after 24 years of service. Teresa played a crucial role in supporting students and collaborating with external agencies. She established in-school paediatric clinics and drove the highest standards for students with additional needs. Gabi, a student, said: "Ms Teresa always helps me when I am hurting, and she makes me feel better."

To ensure a smooth transition, current Deputy Headteacher Charlotte Charlesworth has been appointed as interim headteacher until April 2026.

What our dreams really mean

Have you ever wondered what happens in our brains when we sleep or why we dream and what our dreams really mean? Neuroscientist Professor Catherine Loveday will reveal all in her latest talk which takes place on

Wednesday 20 August from 6.45pm to 8pm at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, N2 8LT. Talks are free but donations welcome. To register, email teresa.gallagher@ageukbarnet.org.uk or call 07502 989403.

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