Thrive Newsletter
October 2026



A message from ***Richard Chapman,*** *CEO*

It has been a busy and rewarding start to the year, and a very warm welcome to everyone who has joined us since September.

Whether you have joined as a teacher, teaching assistant, therapist or member of our support teams, you are part of a community with one simple goal: giving every young person the very best chance in life. I hope you already feel at home and know that colleagues across the Trust are ready to help and share ideas.

We have welcomed new pupils too. Our first sixth form students at **The Warwickshire Academy** are already leading the way, and **Kitts Green Academy** has welcomed its first Year 10 pupils as it extends its age range. **Corley Academy** received a very special parcel from a much-loved children's author.

I am delighted to share some exciting news. **The Accordia Academies Trust** and its three specialist schools in Herefordshire are set to join Thrive, later this term, taking our family to ten schools.



Blackmarston School welcomes nursery and primary children with complex needs, including autism and multiple learning difficulties. **Barrs Court School** supports secondary pupils to build independence, communication and self-advocacy. **Beacon College**, opened in 2021, offers specialist post-16 provision for students aged 16 to 19. Together they serve families across Herefordshire, from Hereford to Ledbury, Ross-on-Wye and the outskirts of Leominster.

This decision has not been rushed. Over the last two years, Thrive colleagues have worked closely with Accordia staff, seeing first hand how closely our values align. Bringing two successful trusts together is unusual, and I am excited about what we will learn from each other. **Lisa Appleton**, Accordia's CEO and Executive Headteacher, will join us as Regional Director, providing continuity for pupils, families and staff.

For our new Herefordshire colleagues, joining Thrive means access to shared expertise, training and development, with more opportunities to progress within the Trust. For us all, it means more people to learn from and more ideas to share. Please give them the warmest of welcomes.

None of this happens without you. Thank you for everything you do, every single day, for the young people in our care. I hope you all have a restful half term.

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Three Herefordshire Specialist Schools Set To Join Thrive:
Blackmarston, Barrs Court and Beacon College

Thrive is growing to ten schools, as **The Accordia Academies Trust** and its three specialist schools in Herefordshire are set to join the Trust later this term.

Blackmarston School, just south of Hereford city centre, is a nursery and primary school for children with complex needs, including autism and multiple learning difficulties. **Barrs Court School** is a secondary special school focused on building independence, communication and self-advocacy, and preparing young people for life after school. **Beacon College** on Eastnor Drive offers specialist post-16 provision for students aged 16 to 19, and opened in 2021 following a successful free school bid. Between them, the schools serve families from Hereford to Ledbury, Ross-on-Wye and the outskirts of Leominster.

The move follows around two years of close collaboration between staff at both trusts, and brings together two successful organisations, which is an important part of our growth strategy at Thrive. **Lisa Appleton**, CEO and Executive Headteacher of Accordia, will become Regional Director within Thrive, providing continuity of leadership for pupils, families and staff.

Lisa said: "We haven't rushed this. Over the last two years we've worked closely with colleagues from Thrive so that staff and families could see for themselves that our values are aligned and that this is right for our children. Joining Thrive means we can build on our strengths and play a bigger part in supporting the wider SEND community. The future looks really exciting."

Richard Chapman, CEO of Thrive, said: "Staff across the three schools will gain access to shared expertise, training and leadership development, with more opportunities to progress their careers within the Trust."

Dominic Broad, Deputy CEO of Thrive, said: "What Accordia has achieved in a short space of time is impressive, and we're excited to bring what works for them into Thrive. It's a real opportunity for staff to be part of a bigger collective and make an impact across the Trust."

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Corley Academy: Dolly Day and Reading For Pleasure

Pink outfits, sparkles and pink cupcakes set the tone at **Corley Academy** for Dolly Day, celebrating **Dolly Parton's** legacy of putting books into children's hands. Reading ran through every lesson, and signs around the school linked Dolly's legacy to Corley's values of inclusion and aspiration. Students tried everything from studying song lyrics to exploring velocity through the roller coasters at Dollywood.

Every student at Corley has a reading offer, from early readers to fluent 17 year olds, with **Carnegie** shadowing, **Fresh Start** intervention, and staff and students pairing up to read together. Assistant Headteacher **Kate Foxon** said that once you can read, you can become a leader.

There was more good news too. **PSHCE lead Lucy** struck up a correspondence with **Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara**, author of **Little People, BIG DREAMS**, who was so inspired by Corley's work with reluctant readers that she sent a signed advance copy of her forthcoming book **Ten Years Dreaming Treasury**. It now has pride of place in Room 16.





Calthorpe Aids Research Into Evidence-Based Teaching

Calthorpe Academy has spent the past year taking part in a research pilot exploring how evidence-based, individualised teaching can support learners in special schools.

With **Pyramid Educational Consultants**, three classes implemented the **Pyramid Approach to Education**, supporting learning environments through communication and reinforcement systems, teaching through prompting and applying new skills in different situations.

Clinical Director Louise Maggs provided teachers and teaching assistants with training and ongoing coaching throughout the year. **The University of Warwick** evaluated this as a feasibility study ahead of a potential larger trial.

All three classes achieved **Pyramid Certified Classroom** status by year-end. The school is extremely proud of this recognition, hoping its contribution strengthens evidence for effective teaching for learners with additional needs both at Calthorpe and more widely.

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Building Confidence, POP Bus Returns To Mary Elliot

For some pupils, returning to education after a long time away can feel like an enormous step. When Eisa joined **Mary Elliot Academy** in September 2025, he had been out of education for 18 months. A phased timetable and adapted transport helped make his return manageable.

As part of this support, Eisa began weekly one-to-one sessions on the **Positive Outcomes Project (POP) Bus**, a space where pupils spend time with trusted adults and explore their interests. Music and gaming quickly became favourites, and he particularly enjoyed coming into school on bus days. That engagement has been part of a significant change. Eisa finished the last academic year with 72% attendance, and it now stands at 90%.

Grace Murphy, Assistant Headteacher and Careers Lead, said: "The POP Bus gives pupils a space where they can engage in a way that feels right for them. Seeing Eisa look forward to coming into school, build relationships and engage with activities he enjoys has been wonderful."

The POP Bus returns this November.



New Outdoor Spaces For Kingsbury Pupils

Kingsbury Academy staff and **Civil Service** volunteers gave up their own time over the summer to create new outdoor spaces for pupils.

Led by the **RG WM Fundraising and Volunteering Committee**, teams from the **Department for Education**, the **Department for Work and Pensions** and the **Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency** spent a very wet day painting benches indoors and working outside. They created a sensory bed planted with rosemary, lavender and lemon balm, an outdoor ball pit and a sandpit for learners with complex needs.

Volunteers described a wonderful day working alongside Kingsbury's staff and thanked Headteacher **Amjid Zaman** and his team for their warm welcome.

Amjid said: "I am so grateful to our staff, who gave up their own time over the summer to make this happen, and to everyone from the Civil Service who supported us. These new spaces are already making a real difference to our pupils."

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BAGINTON FIELDS ACADEMY

Work Begins on £8.5m Expansion at Baginton Fields
Room to grow and new spaces to thrive

Construction has begun on an £8.5 million expansion of **Baginton Fields Academy**, creating up to 74 additional specialist school places for young people in Coventry.

Pupils marked the start of the project with a ceremonial cutting of the ground over the summer, joined by staff from the academy, Thrive, main contractor **Jeakins Weir**, **Lungfish Architects** and representatives from **Coventry City Council**, which is funding the scheme.

The project will deliver a new teaching building, a replacement hydrotherapy pool elsewhere on the site, and a full internal and external refurbishment of the existing 1960s school. When the works complete in September 2027, capacity will rise from 126 pupils to 200.

Lungfish Architects has designed the new building around the way specialist education works in practice, with plenty of natural daylight and acoustic treatment to keep the sensory environment calm. The refurbishment will also modernise classrooms and internal areas across the existing academy, with external improvements bringing the older building into line with the new development.

Headteacher **Vikki King** said: "This matters enormously to Baginton Fields and to the families who rely on us. The new building will let us welcome more young people, but capacity is only part of it. We will have an environment built around our pupils, and the facilities our staff need to help every young person go as far as they can. Our pupils have been fascinated watching the work start. Seeing their own school grow around them is going to be something they remember."

Richard Chapman, CEO of Thrive, said demand for specialist places in Coventry is acute, and that growth like this will also mean recruiting more specialist staff and bringing fresh expertise into the school.

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Progress For Post-16 Provision at The Warwickshire Academy

The Warwickshire Academy's post-16 provision is flourishing since opening in September, with students and staff shaping its development.

A purpose-built student kitchen and communal learning areas develop independence and life skills; fitness and creative spaces support wellbeing. Local work placements build workplace skills and confidence, while student leaders support younger pupils. Students pursue English and Maths qualifications, many advancing to higher-level Functional Skills, alongside independent living, employability and career planning.

Paul Hostead, Headteacher, said: "Since we opened in 2021, we have always planned to have a sixth form, and to see some of those students that started with us on day one now pioneers of our sixth form is wonderful. They will leave a legacy for all those who follow."

THE WARWICKSHIRE ACADEMY

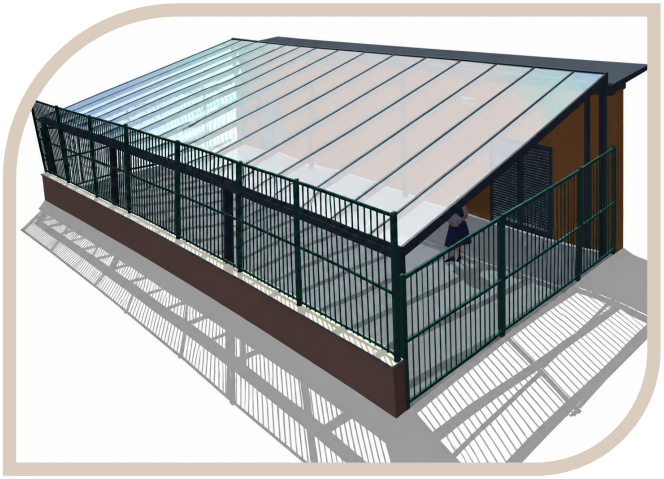
Year 10 Pupils Settle Into the Expanded Provision at Kitts Green

Kitts Green Academy's first Year 10 cohort has made a brilliant start in the expanded provision. Ten pupils joined in September, studying maths, English and science alongside options including ICT, construction, food technology, PE and art.

Construction has been a real hit. Pupils are learning painting and decorating, each responsible for their own section of a dedicated room. After covering health and safety, they are now preparing surfaces, filling holes and cutting in. The aim is to develop skills to repair the school, taking pride in the spaces they maintain.

The offer is growing too. A construction area canopy is due in November, and the school is working with local construction companies and **Birmingham City Council**, who are set to sponsor PPE and equipment. Future work experience placements with these companies are planned.

A warm welcome also goes to the new teachers who have joined to deliver the options.



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Students Have Their Say at 'I Belong HERE' Conference

Meeting a roomful of unfamiliar teachers didn't stop pupils from **Corley**, **Baginton Fields** and **Mary Elliot Academy** sharing what matters to them about school life.

They joined pupils from **Fullhurst Community College** in Leicester for the '**I Belong HERE**' **Conference** on Friday 16 October. Developed in partnership with **Professor Kathryn Riley**, the day brought pupils, school leaders and researchers together to explore how schools can help everyone feel safe, connected and valued.

One of the highlights was a session where pupils moved between tables to talk with teachers they had never met. They confidently shared their views and experiences, enjoying the opportunity while giving leaders plenty to listen to.

For Corley pupils, this was also a chance to build on their ongoing research with Professor Riley. They have been exploring belonging and designing their own survey questions. One student explained that Corley's friendly, kind atmosphere helps her feel part of a community.

It was lovely to see pupils from across Thrive schools taking such an active part, with their experiences helping shape the discussions.



Dominic's London Marathon Deal

Getting **Fatima Whitbread MBE** to speak at this year's Thrive Conference came with a catch: **Dominic Broad**, Deputy CEO of Thrive, agreed to run 26.2 miles.

Dominic struck a deal with the athletics legend. She agreed to speak at the conference for free in return for him taking on the London Marathon and raising money for a charity of her choice, **The Children's Society**. A great result for Thrive, though Dominic's legs may have a different view.

Now he's asking the Thrive family to help him keep his side of the bargain. Donations are welcome from as little as £1, so you don't need to make a marathon-sized contribution to support his challenge.

We'll leave the running to Dominic. Let's help him make those miles count. You can scan the QR code or go directly to his **TCS London Marathon 2027** page.

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