



Hope Tree School....

Volume 11, Issue 1

Skye's News

December 2025



Christmas at school can be fun and exciting with extra opportunities to be 'off timetable', doing things that students enjoy. It also brings differences to usual routines, how the classrooms look and feel alongside gentle exposure to lights and decorations across the school. Whilst decorating a Christmas tree might seem an ordinary activity for some, for our students it can be a challenge.

Well done to all our classes for an amazing display, adding to each classroom a bit of sparkle.



Outside our comfort zones



From here

School trips are an essential component of life at HTS. Apart from being an enjoyable experience for some, it also allows students to work on those fundamental underlying life skills of Independence, Resilience, Perseverance and trying new things.

A trip to London to see a musical is a big trip for many of our students. Particularly for those who have not felt able to in previous settings.

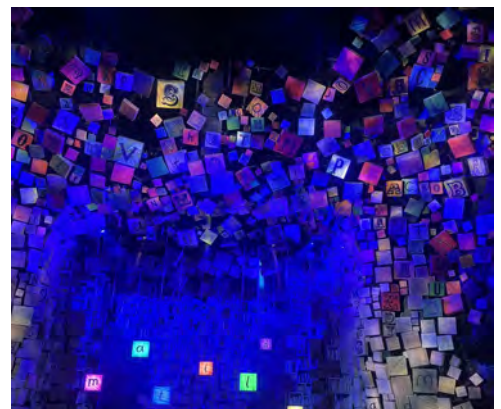
It starts with a convoy of cars rather than a coach which would overwhelm the students. A train ride into London rather than sitting in traffic. The chance to experience a tube journey and a walk to the theatre, looking at the Christmas lights in London.

Sitting in a theatre with hundreds of others, managing the bright lights and unexpected noise and eating an ice-cream half way through.

Despite the challenges that a trip like this can mean, the students are always pleased that they coped, got through, persevered and did it.

Well done everyone!

To here



The brand new Lab



Skye-Lab

Over the summer a number of staff members gave up their time to come into school and set up our new lab. It is known as the Skye-Lab and gives students across the school access to a range of specialist equipment needed to complete GCSE science experiments, undertake art projects and use a range of tools and equipment in their D&T lessons. We received a very kind donation to the school which we used to buy much of the equipment for a variety of different science experiments.

In addition to a new lab, we were excited to be able to employ our first lab technician. David works in the Skye lab supporting Science, D&T and Art, and has fast become the go-to person for helping out all over site also! He provides in lesson support to the creative subjects, and supports them with resourcing of their lessons. David trials and sets up practicals for Science, supports in lessons and has already ingeniously made a wooden car ready for a Physics experiment. Welcome David, and thanks for all of your hard work so far!

Art and Design

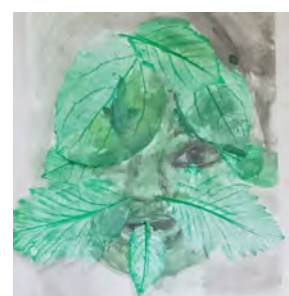
The first half of the autumn term saw Year 10 commence the induction period of GCSE Fine Art. The students spent time experimenting with a range of new and familiar media to explore mark making and improve their observational drawing skills, while simultaneously developing their sketchbooks. After half term, the students moved on to complete a mini project based on the theme of 'Natural Forms - The Blue Planet'. Year 10 worked towards final pieces in clay and print, developing and refining ideas having researched artists, including Peter Randall-Page and Angie Lewin, who also find inspiration in nature. The group also had the pleasure of working with Sara from Bourn Pottery, who allowed the students to realise their designs in clay, running workshops to both make and glaze their own small scale sculptures.

In year 9 students spent the first half term responding to the theme of mythical creatures. Inspired by the work of J.R.R Tolkien, the students were encouraged to experiment a range of media to represent mythical creatures of their own choice or invention. During the second half term they looked at the role of book illustrators. Having evaluated the work of a range of artists, including Lauren Child, Elys Dolan and Satoshi Kitamura, the students were offered the opportunity to respond to an illustration brief and develop some characters of their own. It was pleasing to see how the students responded to some of those childhood classics and how excited they were to find unfamiliar books that they loved. In addition students have been working on a ceramics unit and have made hollow ceramic heads using the score and slip joining technique to join two thumb-pots. Students have learnt about using leather hard clay for weight bearing structures such as the neck. Students have formed and incised details on the face and hair. Students who disliked the feel of clay used plasticine or foam clay instead.

During the first half of term Year 8 students learnt about Pop Art and the work of Andy Warhol, creating colourful animal prints inspired by his series of 'Endangered Species'. They went on to explore sculptural processes, in response to the work of Dame Barbara Hepworth. Creating their own small scale gallery including the students' own miniature masterpieces and even a crowd of tiny visitors! In another year 8 class students have looked at the history of the legend of the green man and designed faces with foliage. They made rubbings of leaves and collaged wax resist leaves. They made ceramic faces using impressions of leaves. They learnt the clay joining technique of score and slip.

Year 7 students have also been putting their pottery skills to good use this term making ceramic fish using the score and slip joining technique to join two thumb-pots. Students have incised details such as fins and scales.

Our youngest students in year 5 and 6 have made paintings on the theme of underwater. They chose from photo resources of fish, mammals, coral, caves, and molluscs. They learnt resist techniques using wax crayons and candle wax. They have experimented using graduated watercolour washes and salt.

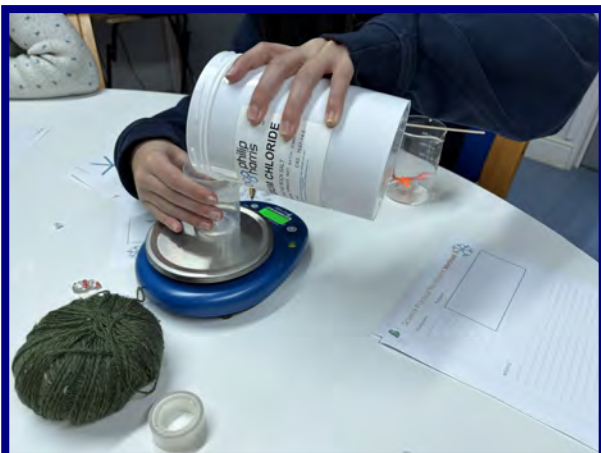




Science

Key Stage 4 have been busy studying the Biology topics of Inheritance, Variation and Evolution, and Ecology; the Chemistry topic of Atomic Structure and the Periodic Table, and the Physics topic of Particle Model of Matter through a mixture of theory, practical and maths in science lessons. The students did a really good job of completing the density and chromatography required practicals. The students have recently learned about electronic structure using marshmallows to represent electrons, and of course the electrons/marshmallows were enjoyed afterwards!

Within Key Stage 3 we have been busy studying Biology topics of plant and animal cells, classification, the human body and evolution. We have also carried out a variety of different practicals including collecting data using quadrats, building models of animal and plant cells, using microscopes and many more! Students have enjoyed using our new science equipment from the Skye Lab!



Cross curricular studies in KS2 and KS3

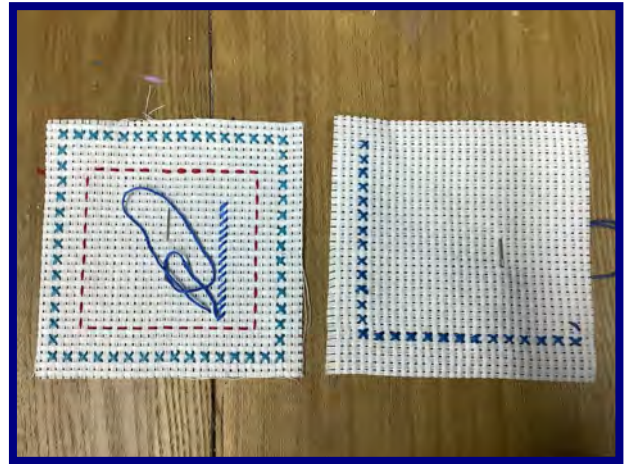
In our youngest classes students have been busy learning about the Victorians. We have investigated the Victorian way of life, what life was like for Victorian children and how modern-day life has been influenced by the Victorian Era through our topic based and English lessons. We were able to go on two interesting and educational trips to reinforce this learning - the Museum of Cambridge and Denny Abbey. We have enjoyed making Victorian based crafts like Victorian peg dolls. We also made a delicious Victoria sponge! Both classes have managed some other exciting trips to a Halloween experience at a garden centre, cinema visits, Matilda Trip to London and a Science based trip.



AQA awards at HTS

This academic year, in order to support our students with their ongoing skill development, we have begun to use the AQA unit awards with some of our KS3 students. Unit awards allow students to work on a particular topic of interest, undertaking both research and practical activities to achieve a certificate. Two students have been working hard this term and have achieved several certificates.

Examples have included sewing skills, learning a range of stitches, the tricky task of threading a needle and making a design using Binka. Additionally the students have been washing cars, both inside and out with chamois leathers and wax polish.



Thinking about the future:



The purpose of Hope Tree School is to give students access to education, opportunities for a peer group and enable the development of life skills along the way. We are, however, also mindful that our students will one day move on to post-16 opportunities and beyond and they need to be ready for this.

This term, our Year 10 students took part in a taster day at a local sixth form college in Cambridge, giving them a valuable opportunity to explore their possible next steps in education. Designed to help students prepare for life beyond GCSEs, the day allowed them to experience what studying at a mainstream sixth form might be like.

Students took part in three sixth form lessons, beginning with Art and Design. Here, they learned about contemporary artist *Michael Craig-Martin* and produced their own creative responses inspired by his bold colours and distinctive flat imagery.

The next session introduced students to Film Studies, where they explored the impact of different camera shots and angles. They worked collaboratively to arrange and discuss film sequences before analysing the opening titles of *Legally Blonde*, considering how camera choices help to create meaning and mood.

The day concluded with a Criminology lesson, during which students discussed different types of crime, possible sentences and their wider consequences. This was a fascinating insight into a subject many students had not encountered before.

Overall, the visit was a rewarding and eye-opening experience. Students not only gained a taste of a variety of sixth form subjects, but had the opportunity to step into a new learning environment. While the day was challenging for some, we are incredibly proud of the students for their resilience, maturity and willingness to try something new.



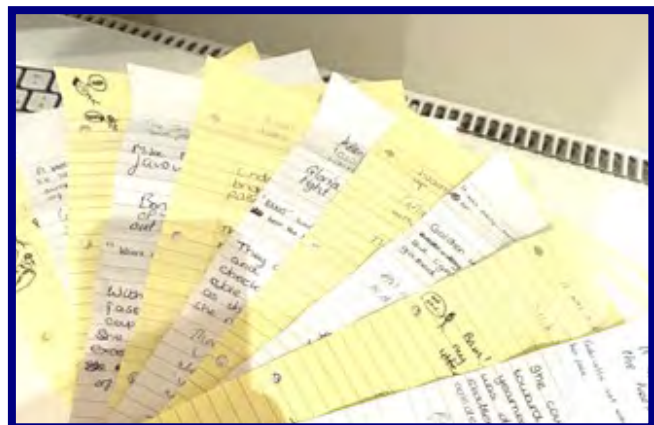
English

Here at Hope Tree School, we have had a wonderful term in English class! Our Year 8 students have been reading poetry and Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. We have been working hard to understand the contexts of the author's background and time period to better understand the purpose and meaning of the writing. The Victorian Era allows for in-depth discussions surrounding social class, humanity, and empathy. In Year 9, we have similarly been reading poetry and *The Crucible*. The students' writing stamina has significantly increased as they learn to identify language techniques and integrate them into their own writing as well as develop their analysis. Many students have also enjoyed learning about the scandals of the Salem witch trials and their allegorical relationship to the 1950s American Red Scare.

In the Year 10 English Language classes students have been focusing on Paper 1, developing their skills in fiction reading comprehension and imaginative writing. They have explored a wide range of challenging and engaging texts, including extracts from *The Woman in Black*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Arrival*, building confidence in tackling questions that require them to select, explain, analyse and evaluate key ideas and language choices.

Alongside reading, students have been honing their creative writing skills. Lessons have focused on crafting effective story structures, using rich descriptive detail, developing character perspective, and writing convincing dialogue. Students have had opportunities to practise writing their own imaginative pieces, while also revisiting essential technical skills such as paragraphing, punctuation, ambitious vocabulary choices and accurate spelling.

Next term, students will move on to Paper 2, where the focus shifts to non-fiction texts. They will develop their ability to analyse and compare writers' viewpoints across a range of real-world texts and will practise writing transactional pieces, including letters, leaflets and speeches. This work will continue to build the skills and confidence students need to communicate clearly, persuasively and effectively.



Creative iMedia

This term in Creative iMedia, our Year 10 students have been immersing themselves in the exciting world of branding and visual identity as they prepare for their upcoming controlled assessment. Working with industry-standard tools such as Adobe Express, Canva and Adobe Illustrator, they have been creating professional logo designs in response to a real-world client brief.

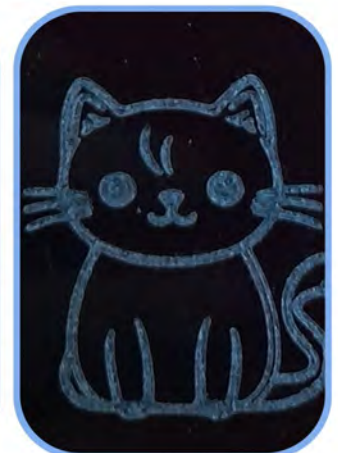
Through this process, students have explored the impact of typography, colour theory, graphics and slogans, ensuring their designs are truly *fit for purpose*. Alongside the creative elements, they have also developed valuable technical skills, including using a range of design tools, justifying their creative decisions, and saving and exporting files in appropriate formats.

The creative juices have truly been flowing, and it has been fantastic to see students' confidence and creativity grow as they take another exciting step towards their Spring term controlled assessment!



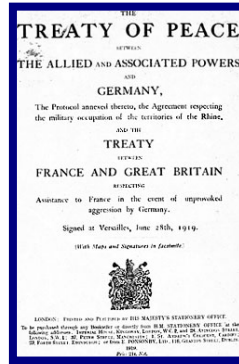
Design and Technology

The students have been very busy in design and technology this term. The year 6 and 7's focussing on linkages and robotics. The year 8's learning to solder a Christmas tree kit and others are developing their cooking skills in a professional kitchen. The year 9's have created their own circuits to light up a sign they have hand cut from acrylic. Well done to them all.



History

History lessons this term have witnessed the depths of the Norman conquest and the resulting French influence on British society and culture forevermore. From the Domesday book to the black death and the peasant's revolt, year 8 has moved through around 600 years all in one term! In year 9, the horrors of WWI and WWII have been carefully examined and learned to help the next generation understand the mistakes of previous ones. Year 10 has explored the intricacies of tumultuous international alliances and the irony of an alliance or peace treaty that actually triggers a war - history is full of surprises!



And finally.....

HTS continues to grow: new year groups, new staff, new class spaces, new ideas and new and improved ways of doing things. It has taken us three years to get to where we are now and who knows what the next three years will bring.

We would like to thank our students for all their courage and determination, our parents for continuing to believe in what we are doing and our staff for going above and beyond in all they do.

We would to wish all who are linked with HTS in any way a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and prosperous new Year!

See you in 2026



Time for a rest Skye!

Watch out for that cat!

