



Orchard Manor School News

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"There is no such thing as bad weather—only the wrong clothing."

Anonymous

Adventure, Teamwork and Determination at the Jubilee & Granite Challenge 2026

Excitement filled the air, walking boots were laced tight, and tents stretched across the campsite as students embarked on one of the most memorable weekends of the year at the Jubilee and Granite Challenges during the legendary Ten Tors event. From early morning wake-up calls echoing across camp to long walks over Dartmoor's rugged landscape, this year's challenge weekend was packed with adventure, resilience, laughter, and unforgettable memories.



What is the Jubilee Challenge?

The Jubilee Challenge is an incredible opportunity designed to run alongside Ten Tors, allowing SEND students to experience the excitement, independence, and teamwork that makes the famous event so special. Based at Okehampton Camp, students tackle routes ranging from 9 to 11 miles across the stunning and often unpredictable Dartmoor terrain. For many students, the challenge is about far more than simply completing a route. It is about building confidence, learning to work together, developing independence, and proving to themselves just how capable they are. Whilst camping overnight is optional, students are encouraged to fully immerse themselves in the experience by staying at camp before the event begins. This year, every single student embraced the opportunity, creating a real sense of camaraderie and excitement from the moment they arrived.

Months of Preparation

Although the main event takes place in May, preparations begin many months earlier. In October, staff attend the managers' event and begin organising the teams, planning routes, and preparing students for the journey ahead. From December onwards, training sessions take place every week, helping students steadily build the stamina, teamwork, and confidence needed for the challenge. Training is not limited to walking. Students also have opportunities to practise camping, learn essential outdoor skills, and become familiar with the routines and responsibilities involved in an expedition-style event. By the time the big weekend arrives, students are not just prepared physically — they are ready mentally too.



Building a Small City on Dartmoor

The scale of the operation behind the scenes is truly remarkable. Staff members travelled to camp on Thursday to begin setting up what could only be described as a temporary village. An incredible 27 tents were pitched, alongside a huge mess tent that quickly became the social hub of the campsite. The dedication from staff was extraordinary. Nearly 30 staff members gave up their time to support the event, ensuring students felt safe, encouraged, and fully able to enjoy every moment of the weekend. For the Granite Challenge, an additional team of 8 staff stayed out on the moor overnight to support

students during the toughest stages of the expedition.

Friday: Excitement Builds

By Friday morning, anticipation was everywhere. Students attended the huge Ten Tors assembly, surrounded by hundreds of other participants from across the region. One of the highlights of the morning

was the presentation of the event hoodies — a proud moment that made the challenge suddenly feel very real. Later in the afternoon, everyone attended team briefings to prepare for the day ahead. Students spent time exploring the impressive army stands around camp, watching helicopters fly overhead, and soaking up the atmosphere that makes the Ten Tors weekend unlike anything else. Friendships grew quickly as students relaxed together, shared stories, and prepared for the adventure awaiting them the next morning.

The 5AM Wake-Up Call

Saturday morning arrived early — very early! At 5am, the camp loudspeakers burst into life with the iconic sounds of Chariots of Fire, signalling the start of challenge day. Bleary-eyed students emerged from tents to chilly Dartmoor air, but excitement soon replaced tiredness as everyone prepared for the day ahead. Breakfast was served quickly, with sausage baps helping fuel walkers for the miles ahead. The atmosphere around camp was a mixture of nerves, determination, and excitement as teams completed final kit checks before setting off. At 7:30am, the Jubilee Challenge teams began their routes across the moor.

Across the Moor

Throughout the day, students tackled demanding terrain, changing weather conditions, steep climbs, and long distances— all while supporting one another every step of the way. There were muddy boots, tired legs, and moments where determination was tested, but there were also huge smiles, constant encouragement, and an overwhelming sense of achievement. The teamwork on display throughout the day was inspiring. Students motivated each other through difficult sections, celebrated milestones together, and showed incredible resilience from start to finish. Remarkably, every Jubilee Challenge team completed their route before 2pm. For many students, crossing the finish line was emotional. Months of preparation, training, and anticipation had all led to that moment.

The Granite Challenge: Taking Things Even Further

While the Jubilee Challenge itself was a huge achievement, a smaller group of students took things one step further by participating in the Granite Challenge. Eight students, split into two teams of four, undertook an even more demanding expedition involving two nights away and more than 20 miles of walking. The challenge began alongside the Jubilee Challenge at Okehampton Camp before continuing deep onto the moor, where students spent their second night camping at Cullever Steps. Sleeping out on the open moor brought an entirely different level of adventure. Carrying equipment, navigating difficult terrain, and camping in remote conditions demanded resilience, teamwork, and independence at every stage. Students rose brilliantly to the challenge.



Food, Friendship and Camp Life

Of course, no expedition weekend would be complete without sharing good food together after a long day outdoors. Evenings at camp became a chance to relax, laugh, and reflect on the day's achievements. Whether sitting together in the mess tent, chatting in groups outside tents, or simply enjoying a hot meal after hours of walking, these moments became some of the most memorable parts of the entire experience.

More Than Just a Walk

What makes the Jubilee and Granite Challenges so special is that they are about far more than distance or endurance. The weekend builds confidence. It develops independence. It encourages teamwork, resilience, and self-belief in ways that cannot always be taught in a classroom. Students returned home with muddy boots, tired legs, and plenty of stories to tell — but also with memories and achievements they will carry with them for years to come.

Congratulations to Everyone Involved!

The determination, teamwork, and positivity shown throughout the weekend were truly inspiring. What an unforgettable adventure. Thank you to all who made it possible, and well done to all the participants!