

## **Inspirational Ridgeview visit for Woodlands Meed Students**

Ridgeview recently treated a group of enthusiastic Woodlands Meed students to a day of inspirational insights into what goes into making their award winning wines

Students accessed a unique behind the scenes tour of the operation and followed the whole production journey from grape to glass. The day was jam packed with information about the company, some hands on work experience and finding out about the different roles within the organisation from Ridgeview employees.

Since 1995, Ridgeview has been producing world-class English sparkling wine in Sussex. They are a purpose-driven business committed to making a positive impact on the world. They are a family run business who profoundly believe in treating everyone fairly, equally, with respect and encouragement. They support equality and diversity employment practices and are a member of Disability Confident.

This progressive company ethos is a great fit for what Woodlands Meed is working to achieve with breaking down barriers to disability employment and supporting their students and potential employers to find strategies to make working with someone with additional needs work successfully.

The day began with a tour of the vineyard, seeing the different jobs and processes that are carried in the early stages of growing the grapes to produce award winning wines.

Students then took part in cutting and collecting the grapes from the vines. They heard from Toby Loxton, who is autistic, who shared his experience of being employed by Ridgeview and inspired the students to not give up in their search for employment as he had found a great fit with Ridgeview. The mechanical process was explained and students got to see the production line from where the grapes enter the factory to the end product bottled and boxed.

The student tasted juice from grapes that were taken off the vine the day before as well as honey from the vineyard's own hive. They were walked through the role of the bee keeper and had the opportunity to try on a keeper's outfit. To finish the day the students worked on the Ridgeview Bug House which is being built to encourage and protect insects and wildlife and support Ridgeview's ecological environment.

Alex Watts from the Meeds Job Club said,

*"Days like today at Ridgeview have a lasting impact on our students. Actually being able to see, talk to and have hands on experience what a job might look like is so important in firing their ambition to find a future role in employment of something they have a genuine interest and passion for. The students had a brilliant varied day, experiencing the whole process from grape to glass – the a wide range of jobs they saw and heard about, hearing and seeing the company's end product, trying their hand at a role that exists within the organisation, creating the bug house and to top it off having the chance to sample the juice from the grapes that were on the vine the day before! It well and truly met all our objectives for a work place visit and clearly helped the students better their understanding of the bigger picture of what goes into the production of an award winning wine."*

Katharine Archer, People Manager at Ridgeview said who organised and ran the day for Woodlands Meed said

*'I thoroughly enjoyed my day with the students, it was a pleasure and a privilege to spend the time with them. Partnerships with local schools such as Woodlands Meed are so important to Ridgeview as we are passionate about supporting education and our community. We also want to do all that we can to remove barriers, create pathways and welcome everyone who has passion and purpose. We look forward to building our partnership with Woodlands Meed.'*





