



DARWEN VALE HIGH SCHOOL

An Aldridge Community Academy 

June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope you have had the opportunity to watch the fantastic video that Simon Pilkington – our Head of PE put together – with messages of support and encouragement from our staff to our young people and parents during the current lockdown. As often happens in a crisis – communities really pull together and Vale has truly become “Team Vale”. That concept has become more than a hashtag. Our students have been amazing – battling though adversity in terms of technology and the difficulties of home/online study. Our parents have demonstrated remarkable versatility and resilience balancing the demands of working – sometimes from home sometimes not – with home schooling and looking after children and keeping a house! Our staff have adapted to delivering online lessons with ingenuity and a real can-do attitude.

During the lockdown we have attempted to provide online “live teaching” for Year 11 and Year 10 initially and have extended that to Year 9 after half term. Year 11 online teaching has ceased now, and we are in the final stages of submitting assessment grades to the exam boards. It is important to note that these grades that we assign will not be the students’ final grades. The grades will be decided using a range of factors including KS2 scores, a school’s previous results and national pass rates.

We had mock exams for Year 11 before the lockdown and once again the current crop of Year 11s performed amazingly. Based on the trajectory of travel from last year and between their first mock exams in November and these latest mocks it is obvious that they would have bettered the superb results of the class of 2018/19. Who was ever disappointed to not be sitting exams? Well, many of our Year 11 students who had worked so hard and were set to achieve results well in excess of what their prior ability might suggest they were capable of. It is inevitable that some will be disappointed and some elated as with any other results day. We will be there for them in August to share their successes and support them in their progression to their next stage of education and employment. We hope to be able to welcome them back next year for a fitting awards evening and to say more fitting goodbyes.

Our Year 10s have really bought into online learning, with some great statistics for engagement with the online lessons. We know that this year group have potentially missed over a term of “in school” learning and that is ground that we will need to make up. They have made a great start – Vale attendance to the Aldridge Education maths and English master classes are higher than any other school in the Trust and this is testament to the commitment of Team Vale. Year 10 and subsequent year groups will be competing with their peers nationally and some interesting statistics are emerging about the gaps between state school pupils and their more affluent peers in private schools. A recent article in the Financial Times stated that:

“Half of teachers in private schools reported having more than three-quarters of work returned, this dropped to less than a third in the **most advantaged state** schools, and just 8 per cent in the **least advantaged** state schools. Children from the richest fifth of families were spending over 75 minutes more than their peers in the poorest fifth of households on educational activities.”

We are determined that Vale students will not be left behind and to that end we are preparing for some Year 10 students to begin to return to Vale from 22nd June in line with DFE guidelines. It is important to note that

Darwen Vale High School, Blackburn Road, Darwen, BB3 0AL | Tel: 01254 223000 |

Darwen Vale High School is a member of the Aldridge Education family of schools.
Aldridge Education is registered in England & Wales number 05670663
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Vale never closed, we have been open for the duration of the lockdown – on bank holidays, during school holidays and even on some weekends - to provide a safe place for students who are vulnerable or children who are the children of key workers.

We will not rush any return for students. We must be satisfied that we have done all we can to make the school safe. We are following all the available advice; from the DFE, Public Health England, the local authority and Aldridge Education to ensure that our plans are watertight. We are conducting a risk assessment and will not be opening to more students until the Trust has signed off our plans and judged our risk assessment as sound and rigorous.

The timeline is flexible and may change as more information becomes available. The school senior leadership team are in Vale over the half term holidays drawing up detailed plans for a wider reopening. This is important – effective plans cannot be made remotely – we need to walk the building and rehearse our processes.

From June 1st Vale staff will begin to return to take part in staff training on the new procedures. Towards the end of that week and the following week some students may return for 1-1 meetings. From 22nd June groups of Year 10 students will begin to return in designated groups or “bubbles” for some part-time provision. Online tuition will continue in line with the timetables that have been issued. I will write to parents to explain the timeline and protocols in much greater detail.

For Year 9, we have been in constant contact, completing their options process. The plan is now to extend online tuition to Year 9 and offer a “preparation for GCSE” online teaching module in each of the subjects they will study in Years 10 and 11.

We have had superb engagement from our students in Years 7 and year 8 with the online work we have provided through the class charts platform. However, we recognise the need for these year groups to experience some “live teaching” and we are currently planning how to train these year groups on the use of Microsoft teams and planning a timetable for students in Key Stage 3.

We will be also looking to devise a plan for virtual induction for our new Year 7 students who are joining Vale in September. A real reflection of the progress Vale has made in the last 3 years is our increasing popularity in the local community. We believe that our emphasis on high standards for student behaviour and application and our relentless drive to be reflective and improve our own practice as teachers are the driving factors behind the school’s significant improvements in exam results. These improvements have given new parents the confidence to place their trust in Vale and we have 250 students joining us in September. This will be our first oversubscribed year group. This is a sign of things to come and in future years if you don’t put Vale as first choice you will be unlikely to get in! We had less than 750 students in 2017 and that figure has grown to 960 in September 2020.

Equally pleasing were the results from the parental surveys we conduct each year and the surveys we have conducted during lockdown. Over 85% of parents would recommend the school to another parent and the parental scores agreeing that their child is happy at the school are above the latest Ofsted national averages. Parental scores agreeing that their child feels safe are also above the national average and more Vale parents than the national average agree that “this school makes sure that its pupils are well behaved”. From the Vale survey on our actions during lockdown we know that 91 out of 103 parents felt that the school’s guidance during lockdown has been clear.

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As much as these efforts to provide the best education we can during lockdown are important. They are no replacement for school.

I look forward to seeing our young people back at school as soon as it is safe.

Yours sincerely



Matthew Little

Principal