

DARWEN VALE HIGH SCHOOL

An Aldridge Community Academy



December 2023

Dear Parent/Carer,

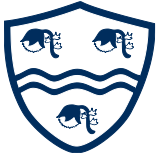
I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your continued support during the first term of this year. Firstly, can I start by thanking all stakeholders for supporting our young people on their return to school. It is a measure of how far we have come as a school community that the return to school was incredibly smooth and the culture around school was overwhelmingly positive. We welcomed 240 new students, coped with 28-degree heat, and introduced a new school day including a new start time and a spilt lunch. We also acclimatised students to the extensive building work that had taken place.

We hosted our annual open evening which was the best attended ever. Over 400 families visited the school on 27th September and had a wonderful evening seeing the best that Vale has to offer. As a result, we will be oversubscribed again next year. We have had over 500 applications for places in next year's year 7. Almost 300 of these applications were first choice applicants for just 240 places.

Our Remembrance Service in school was as powerful as ever. The Mayors of Blackburn and Darwen, along with many other VIPs were in attendance. The whole school witnessed an incredibly powerful assembly followed by a truly moving service at our 'Book of Remembrance' in the main school reception. The Last Post and Reveille were played, a wreath was laid, and VIPs and our school cadets paid their respects.

Perhaps the most pleasing events of the term have been the publication of our 2023 GCSE results and the Darwen Vale awards evening. Last year's year 11 once again – the sixth consecutive year – achieved the best examination results in the school's history. A combination of hard work, good teaching and student application led to students achieving English and Maths results above national average. Our P8 – the progress made across 8 subjects - is in line with National average, and this is an area I am confident we will improve on this year. We were able to celebrate the achievements of that cohort and students in the school currently at our awards evening on 23rd November. We were grateful to ex – vale student Lucy Townsend for presenting the awards and talking about her time after leaving Vale. As I write this, I am thrilled at the current set of mock exam data from our current year 11. If they carry on their current trajectory, they will achieve results that are significantly above their peers locally and across the country.

Life is not all about exams though as our school vision dictates; Students should enjoy an enjoyable education. To that end we try to provide a wide variety of experiences for our young people and this busy term is no exception. Students from Vale have taken part in Geography field visits to Lytham St. Annes, Business Studies trips to Jersey Girls Dairy Ice Cream Parlour, Performing Arts trip to watch the musical 'Hamilton', Year 8 students took part in the Faraday Maths Challenge, Year 10 experienced the world of work on their "go to work days". They visited employers such as Herbert Parkinson, Crown Paints, and a number of other local employers. Our Year 11 students got prepared for the rigours of their exam year with an English and maths boot camp, mixing up a bit of revision with team building, raft building and a range of other outdoor activities. Last but certainly not least our students were given the opportunity to visit Manchester to watch the award-winning hit musical Hamilton. Closer to home all students have been given the opportunity to take part in House competitions in school. Students from the four schoolhouses: Holmes, Turing, Shakespeare and Curie, have taken part in a range of competitions from constructions in maths to reading in a range of unusual places for English. My favourite of which was underneath a waterfall!



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Our parental forum goes from strength to strength. This started as a group of parents who quite rightly wanted to challenge the school about what they felt we were getting wrong. Don't get me wrong they are still a challenging group, and we welcome that challenge. This group have contributed to some strong partnership work around communication with parents. The evolution of our parental A-Z including the whole "C is for communication" section came from meetings with the parents. We are currently in discussions around how we can improve the rewards system, refine the MCAS app and improve our systems for monitoring attendance. We have a strong group who are our regulars, but I would encourage any parents who are interested to join this group to raise concerns in a constructive way. The next of these events is 30/01/24. I was also encouraged by Governors and the forum to hold a community forum which I did on Saturday 4th November. It was not well attended but I will attempt this again on the 23rd of March.

Finally, you may already be aware, we're going to be collaborating with our two other Aldridge secondary schools - DACA and DAES - to form the newly-created Darwen Aldridge Sixth Form – known as D6. The collaborative nature of D6 will see students based on the campus where most of their subjects are taught. D6 is going to provide A Level and BTEC qualifications, and students will also be able to study the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Depending on the options and qualifications they have chosen, students will move between sites to take lessons at the campus which specialises in each subject – making the most of each sixth form's expertise. For Vale, these subjects will be Maths, History, Chemistry, Biology and Physics. We will be doing extensive building work over the summer to create a 6th Form common room, study suite and a new statement entrance for our 6th Formers. This is an exciting step for Vale, as we enter the sixth form world. We're open to student applications now, to start studying with us in September 2024,

We will be expecting the students to remain focused in their academic studies up until Thursday the 21st December when close for the Christmas holidays at 12.30pm. We will start dismissing students gradually at 12.30 with all students being out of the building by 12.45.

On the last day of term, the school canteen will still be serving food at break time and will be providing sandwiches for any FSM students who ordered them via their form tutor by Friday 15th December.

I look forward to welcoming all students back to Darwen Vale on Monday 8th January at 8.30am.

Yours sincerely,

Mr M Little
Principal