

DARWEN VALE HIGH SCHOOL

An Aldridge Community Academy



31st March 2023

Dear parent/carers,

I am writing to you at the end of our spring term to share with you some of the successes and achievements of our young people and the school community. I apologise for the length of this letter but it does in many ways replace our newsletter for this term. We will provide a parent/student newsletter in the summer term.

Firstly, can I say how delighted we are with our thriving and active parental forum. This new group has met three times now on Tuesdays in Vale between 6pm and 8pm – sometimes later! We have regularly had over 25 parents at this, which is representative of the huge strides the school has made in recent years. Most of our parents now, chose Vale as their first choice school. We will have another 240 students in Vale's Year 7 next year and these are all from parents who selected the school as their first choice. I have been inundated with calls from disappointed parents of children who have not been successful in their application and are going to appeal that decision. As a result, our parents quite rightly demand a lot from us, and the parental forum is both supportive and challenging.

The challenge posed to us was largely around our rewards systems and the Bromcom app. It is extremely useful to get feedback to prompt our leadership to reflect on what is going well and what is not going well in terms of our behaviour policy and the awarding of points.

We will be reviewing the current systems, seeking feedback from all stakeholders and refining the policy for September 2023. In addition, we will continue to work with the external provider Bromcom to eradicate inconsistencies with the system.

In terms of support, at our first parental forum there was a lot of discussion about lunchtimes. Parents expressed concerns around queues for both food and toilets. As a result, I encouraged parents to visit the academy at lunchtime to observe and form their own opinions on how we conduct them. We have now had 4 separate parent visits to lunchtime operations and feedback was as follows:

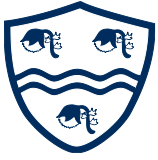
There were quick moving queues with 16 minutes left of lunch and all the food serveries were empty. There were no toilet queues. There were 14 staff members wearing high vis who were present in the canteen, and several more outside.

Other parents gave additional positive feedback. Parents liked the entrance back into the building after lunch and having to take coats off when the students re-entered the academy. Some feedback regarding the service provided by Aspens (our caterers) was also taken which we will convey to Aspens.

This is the email I received from one of our parents:

Below is Thank you for welcoming me into the school on 28th March and the time out of your busy schedule to show me around.

My visit was to observe the lunch time and also the toilets, I was given a full tour and observed the children and staff which I found to be really positive, the children clearly know what is expected of them and the staff were quick in moving children down the lines, but also moving on when they were finished which means there is plenty of space to sit, eat and space to catch up with friends, the children benefit from extensive outdoor areas which means the inside is not overcrowded.



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The toilets are managed and accessible and did not appear to be an issue and did not appear to be restrictive, but teachers do manage the toilets to prevent any issues and damage occurring, which for the minority I can understand why they would take a dislike to this but given the size and the nature of the school, staff are doing the best they can.

It was good to see positive teacher and pupil interaction and the behaviour of the children was good, they greet teachers with respect, and this is given back to them. As you shared you are continually monitoring, adjusting, and taking feedback to where you can make changes which I applaud.

On Tuesday 28th March Miss Bridges and I met with parents at the most recent parental forum to discuss a range of issues which will be shared more fully with parents at the start of next term. As always, the meeting was incredibly helpful in allowing us to reflect on our policies and procedures in order to improve practices within the academy.

In terms of staffing, I am delighted to advise the appointment of Steve Broderick to the position of SENDCo and Victoria Sharkey to Director of Inclusion. Further additions to staffing this year include:

- Supatra Sri-Udon - Lead Practitioner in Geography
- Molly Walsh - Head of Design Technology
- Grace Hilton - Teacher of English
- Elliot Welsh - Teacher of Science and PE
- Candida Catterall - Lead Practitioner in MFL
- Jennifer Keeler – Teacher of English (temporary)
- Victoria Sharkey – Director of Inclusion

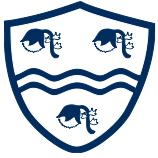
And from September:

- Beth Waddicor – Teacher of History
- Harrison Woodall – Teacher of History

As the school continues to grow – we will have over 1100 students in September, which will require us to recruit additional staff to our growing core of teachers and other key positions.

I am going to take this opportunity and appeal to our parent community over a national staffing crisis for schools. We feel in a strong position for September in relation to teaching staff, but we are experiencing real difficulties recruiting to the following positions. We would love to receive applications from suitably experienced parents – please ring and ask if you are unsure. Or, from friends/associates to the following positions:

- TA x 2
- Cover supervisor



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- Inclusion manager
- Data Manager
- Exams officer
- Attendance manager
- Maths teacher (1 vacancy)
- Assistant Head of Year

Last but certainly not least I would like to outline some of the experiences and opportunities our students have enjoyed this term. We have seen our children visit the French Capital Paris, visiting cultural landmarks such as the Eiffel tower and the Arc de Triomphe, along with an American cultural phenomenon in Europe: Disney land Paris. We took a group of students to Lego masters in Manchester who were wowed by some amazing creations. Our students have also met local counsellors and our student Council had the opportunity to interview an MP. Other cultural capital activities have included trips to the theatre and the chance to listen to a Holocaust survivor – Ruth Posner.

In careers, students have had lots of great opportunities with our year 11 students having their one-to-one appointments and year 10 students visiting WEC engineering for a taster day. These opportunities have helped our Year 9 students choose their key stage 4 options choices.

In sport volleyball has taken off and our year 10 sports leaders have supervised two separate primary indoor athletics events for our partner primary students in years 3/4 and 5/6. A standout sporting success has to be Kara Dacosta in Year 11 who won the English schools' girls 300 metres making her 1st in the Commonwealth and 4th in the world! What an achievement! Girls and boys football in all year groups have seen some impressive performances with the boys in Year 7 reaching the Lancashire schools cup final. We even took a group of students to watch a premier league match between Man City and Tottenham, although personally that felt like a punitive trip!

Finally, this week saw the culmination of Mr Hartley's fund-raising circuit training for Derian House. Mr Hartley along with other staff and students from the school did a full day of circuit training to raise money for the charity. This phenomenal event was supported by many other staff and students who have completed personal challenges as part of Mr Hartley's "1000 hours for Derian".

Next week sees Vale on tour again with Mr Broderick leading a skiing trip to Pila in Italy.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a restful break and remind students that the new term starts on Tuesday 18th April at 8.45am.

Kind regards

Matthew Little
Principal