



28 August 2024

Dear families,

Welcome Back 2024

Next week, we look forward to welcoming back our pupils for a new year at the Academy. This letter covers our usual welcome back information, as well as some updates. I am also delighted to be writing to you for the first time as the permanent Principal here at The Dukeries Academy, which is a real privilege.

A reminder that Year 7, Year 11 and Year 13 are to return on Tuesday 3 September, with the rest of the Academy returning on Wednesday 4 September. All pupils should be on site no later than 8.40am.

Summer Exam Results

This summer we had much to celebrate as a community, as we saw our exceptional pupils collect our best set of results post-pandemic. There was real excitement and happiness as pupils collected their results, with many receiving better than they expected. Maximising opportunities and helping our pupils take steps toward achieving their dreams are fundamental to why we exist. Once validated, results are likely to be much improved, but also see us as high performing in the local area. As a community, we can recognise this as part of the process in becoming a truly great local school. This year, we continue to strive for improvement and to get even better. Work starts immediately with our new Year 11 cohort, who also have all the potential to achieve the extraordinary. Our focus on achievement this year widens, and strategies we have used to improve outcomes will be implemented in every year group and for every child.

New Year 7 Pupils

We are also excited to welcome our second ever cohort into The Bridge for their first year with us. In the summer, we were open on GCSE results day for families to collect ties. For those who do not yet have a tie, these will be provided free of charge on the morning of arrival as pupils line-up in the Year 7 yard. The Year 7 Bridge is a truly exceptional provision, and I look forward to watching our new pupils closely as they settle in and begin their journey with us.

Uniform and Equipment

I would like to remind all families about the expectations and policies for uniform and equipment as the new year begins. Information about this can be found on our website:

<https://www.dukeries.attrust.org.uk/parents/uniform/>

We do expect that all pupils meet the standards outlined in our policies, which are similar to any secondary school nationally. Our pastoral team has expanded this year, with a dedicated Head of Year for each year group, as well as a Pastoral Leader and experienced teams of coaches. As an Academy, we will always work positively with you to support high standards of uniform. We already invest in Standards Gate, providing items of new uniform and equipment for pupils to borrow, and we expect that our families work with us in the same way. High standards of uniform set the bar for everything else we are working hard to achieve.

These standards of uniform extend to our PE kit. The expectations and policies for this are also clearly detailed in the link above. We also provided clean, washed PE kit for pupils who do not have theirs and would expect pupils to participate in kit provided for them.

It is also important that your child arrives at the Academy equipped to learn. Pupils are expected to arrive with blue or black pens, a green pen to improve their work, with a ruler, rubber and pencil as a minimum. We would also expect pupils to have a scientific calculator which are reasonably priced and readily available from our Maths department. Being equipped means that teachers are not wasting time at the start of lessons handing out equipment and learning can begin immediately.

Mobile Phones and Electronic Devices

Many of you will have seen the increase in media coverage regarding mobile phone use amongst children and young adults, especially teenagers. Constant exposure to social media and short-form content is damaging to children's ability to learn and negatively impacts their engagement with and interest in long-form content commonly found in schools, such as reading or extended writing.

I would like to thank those of you who attended the Academy Consultation on mobile phones in the summer term. Our mobile phone policy is clear in that mobile phones are not to be seen or heard whilst on the Academy site. As a result of consultation, I have made amendments to our policy which I will release in a separate letter.

We understand that pupils may need a mobile phone to contact family on the journey to and from school, but beyond that, we are phone free. They should be always switched off and in bags. This prevents pupils engaging in phone misuse.

Families should not be contacting their child by text or instant messaging apps during lesson time, nor should phone calls be made between parents and children on private mobile devices during the Academy Day. In an emergency, or if required, we will always provide space for children to speak to family members in an appropriate setting, such as in a Pastoral Office and supervised by a member of staff.

Rewards and Recognition – 100% Club

We are looking again at our strategy for rewarding pupils who get things right all the time. This year, we are releasing a new series of lapel badges that can be earned year-round. There are six to collect during the year in different colours, all with the **100%** displayed. Pupils who collect the first five badges will be eligible for the end of year rewards trip to Alton Towers.

Pupils can collect our 100% badges by meeting the following criteria in a six-week window:

- Have three consecutive weeks of no negative behaviour points.
- Have three consecutive weeks of 100% attendance.



I know pupils will be excited to collect these and be more regularly recognised for the amazing work they do every day.

Attendance

Our focus on attendance continues this year, as we continue not to see the standards of school attendance we would expect, although it improved last academic year.

You will have noted changes to government guidelines on attendance, which reflect the improvements we are working towards as an Academy. Attendance at school is now part of the national agenda. You can access the updated guidance here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

This includes updated information about Fixed Penalty Notices and Term Time Holidays, which can also be found here:

<https://www.dukeries.atrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2024/06/FPN-Information-from-19-August-2024.pdf>

The importance of attendance in school was seen again this year. Every child who had attendance of 95% or higher in Year 11 achieved better than national average in their GCSE exams and outperformed pupils from similar starting points.

Your child should be in the Academy every day. We offer a wide range of support and maximise the opportunities on offer to improve school attendance. For example:

- We offer free breakfast for all pupils every day from 8.20am in the cafeteria.
- We timetable enrichment and extra-curricular activities, this year on a Tuesday morning during Period 1.
- Our enrichment offer extends after-school with a comprehensive list of activities pupils can take part in.
- Our attendance team work proactively with families to identify attendance barriers and plan to remove them. This includes staged meetings we invite families to on a systematic basis.
- Every child has a dedicated coach, Pastoral Leader and Head of Year.
- We create a warm, welcoming and kind environment and teach pupils what it means to belong.
- We work with numerous external agencies and partners to provide additional support outside of the Academy, including our own on-site counselling service.

Our commitment to improving attendance, alongside our families, is steadfast and I hope that together we can make even more significant improvements in the year ahead, because attendance must improve.

Late Bus and Detentions

At the end of last term, we conducted an analysis of late bus passengers and looked closely at how often this was used. Currently, the number of passengers on the late bus is too small, and therefore, this provision will not continue this year. We are exploring alternative options of transport for pupils at busy times of year, such as in the build-up to the Academy show, and especially during busy periods of revision or intervention. I will write to you on this in due course.

We recognise for some pupils this means we will need to adapt the way we operate. Therefore, this year we are moving to a model of next day rather than same day detentions. This should allow



families greater flexibility to plan for the sitting of detentions should these occur, including discussing any negative points with your child and making appropriate arrangements.

Staffing and Recruitment

After a successful round of recruitment, we have managed to ensure that the Academy is staffed with subject experts. We are excited about the highly qualified and experienced new colleagues joining us for September. Details of our staffing changes can be found in my latest newsletter which is on the website and can be found here: <https://www.dukeries.attrust.org.uk/news-and-dates/newsletters/>

New Building Update

Work has continued over the summer with our partners from the DfE, and other stakeholders involved in the building project. This is moving at pace, and we have now explored several options for what this could look like. We are very quickly approaching the next phase of this development and when the planning process is complete, families will be invited into the Academy for a full update.

The proposed project centres around a new build school for The Dukeries' which represents a much-needed investment in the long-term future of the school. The views of the Local Planning Authority, with whom engagement will begin shortly, will be crucial

I am looking forward to our work together continuing this year. We are going to raise the bar again. My commitment on taking up this post was to deliver a truly great school that our Ollerton community can be proud of. Last year, we took our first steps in doing that, but now we reset and begin anew with a new sense of possibility and optimism.

Thank you for your continued support,



Mr M Brett
Principal

