Downend School

PARENT NEWSLETTER: Start of Term 1

1st September, 2025

Head's Messages

It is my absolute pleasure to welcome you and your children back to the new school year; I hope everybody has had a lovely holiday and some well deserved rest. There is a huge amount to be positive about heading into the new school year, not least a celebration of an extremely positive set of results at both GCSE and A Level. It was wonderful to be present on result days and see the students collecting results and talking excitedly about their next steps. Huge congratulations to the outgoing year 11 and 13, who have overcome many challenges during their time at secondary school. We wish each of them the best of luck as they take their next steps in education, training or employment.

Please find below information about the new school year to help ease the transition into term time. If there's anything else you need to know, please just ask!

First Week Reminders

Incoming year 7s and year 12 will have received separate communications regarding **Tuesday 2nd September**. For years 8 - 11, the first day will be **Wednesday 3rd September.** Students should arrive promptly, ready for an 8.45 start to tutor time in full school uniform. Period 1 will be with their tutor group and lessons will begin period 2.

High standards of **attendance**, **punctuality** and **uniform** remain priorities into term 1. There is more detail at the end of this newsletter. We hugely appreciate your support in maintaining our high expectations in all areas of school life. For our new year 7s, please be reassured that teachers will be understanding if lateness results from some uncertainty in finding your way around the school site.

PE Kit: a polite reminder that Nike Pro sports shorts are **not permitted** kit. Students must wear navy sports shorts or leggings. Any leggings must be purchased from our uniform provider, Monkhouse.

Open Evening 11th September

The school's open evening will take place on Thursday 11th September and therefore **school for the students will finish at 12:25pm**. Any students who can volunteer to act as guides during the evening would be greatly appreciated as ticket bookings suggest it's going to be busy!

What will my child be learning this year?

To help you support your children's learning at home you will find details of what your child will be learning about on our website. We would really encourage you to look here for years 7, 8 and 9: http://www.downend.com/KS3-Curriculum/ and here for years 10 and 11: https://www.downend.com/KS4-Curriculum/ where you will find lots of suggestions for additional reading, support and help.

For years 12 and 13, Subject Handbooks can be found here: https://www.downend.com/Subject-Handbooks/.

Do remember that the website contains a wealth of information and is a good starting point for any queries you may have. We are, of course, happy to answer any questions to help you all settle in to the new year.

Class Charts

As a school we moved in September 2024 to using Class charts for communicating information about positive behaviour points as well as incidents of failure to meet school expectations. Class charts is the **only** method we use to communicate detentions. It is therefore important that all parents are signed up so they can reinforce the praise given to their child at school as well as following up on any negative incidents recorded. The following guide will help with setting it up but please do contact us if issues with access continue.https://www.downend.com/docs/Parent_Guide_to_Class_Charts__2_.pdf

Parents of children in year 8 to 11 will have access as per last year. The data will reset so everyone starts on 0 for both positives and negatives. More information will follow for Year 7 parents. In the meantime, please ensure you have the app downloaded in preparation.

Online Platforms

We use a range of online platforms to support student learning and aid communication. Please find links to some useful 'how to' guides on our website here, including for Google, the main platform we use for email, file storage and setting work: https://www.downend.com/Online-Platforms/.

For new students to the school, your child will be issued with a school email address and log in for Google during their first Life Skills lesson in September.

Some key reminders: Attendance, Punctuality and Term-Time Holidays

Attendance

We know and understand that the challenges that school provides to our young people come in many different forms. For some of our students at Downend and Nationally, attendance is one of those challenges.

Access to education is a legal right for all children. High attendance (above 97%) is a precursor to high achievement and as such we believe that we all have a legal and moral obligation to support the high attendance of all our students. This is to ensure that they have the best possible opportunity to be successful in their academic achievements, but also in their ability to form positive relationships with their peers and adults outside their family circle. From early analysis of GCSE results, there is a very clear and stark link between consistently high levels of attendance and attainment.

Working in partnership is a key to overcoming any barriers which may be present for students. If we have concerns about your child's attendance we will contact you to alert you and discuss how we can support them. Similarly, if you have concerns we ask you to contact us. Your first point of contact is your child's tutor. The 'Attendance matters' newsletters previously shared can be viewed through the following links:

Attendance matters newsletter 1: May 2025
Attendance matters newsletter 2: July 2025

Changes to the law regarding unauthorised absence were shared in numerous communications firstly sent out in July 2024 below, the information below outlines these changes:

You may be aware that there has been national concern about falling school attendance rates across the UK. The Department for Education introduced new statutory guidance which took effect from September 2024, which is aimed specifically at reducing the number of term-time holidays and unauthorised absences.

From September 2024, parents / carers will receive a penalty notice for any child who has ten or more unauthorised absences over any period of ten school weeks. Every day's absence counts as two absent sessions (morning and afternoon). Unauthorised absences include term-time holidays, lateness to school after the register has closed, or any other unauthorised absence. The ten week period can be counted over different terms or even academic years.

For example, if your child has three days off school for a holiday in July, and then arrives late after the register closes four times between September and October, you will receive a penalty notice. Any holiday of a week or more will attract a penalty notice.

The amount of the fine also increased in September 2024, to £160 (reduced to £80 if paid within 28 days).If a parent gets a second penalty notice within a three year period, the fine is £160. Every adult with whom the child lives (including step-parents) will receive the fine, and the fine applies to every child who is absent. For example, if two adults take two children out of school, the fines will amount to £640 (reduced to £320 for a first offence paid within 28 days). Please be aware that this money goes to the local authority, NOT the school.

We understand that these penalty notices are not popular with families, but wanted to remind you of the changes. Headteachers are not allowed to authorise holidays in term-time unless there are genuinely exceptional circumstances and you will be asked to provide evidence of the circumstances you refer to. The law is specific that headteachers are expected to enforce these penalty notices robustly.

Fundamentally, of course, these measures are in place to encourage families to ensure that children do not miss their education. Every session of learning is an important building block in your child's education, and absences can seriously affect your child's progress. Thank you very much indeed for working with us to support your child's learning.

Punctuality to school

School starts at 8.45am. This is the point when students are expected to be sat in their tutor rooms ready to start the school day. Being on time to school is extremely important. Tutor time is the time when the routines for the school day take place, making sure that the students are set up to be successful in their learning for the rest of the day. Children who are regularly late miss out on these important interactions and support from their tutor and peers.

Any student arriving into their tutor room after 8.45am is deemed to be late. This will be monitored closely with sanctions imposed daily for those who are arriving late. If your child is more than half an hour late for school, they are deemed to have missed morning registration, and are marked absent. This has an impact on their overall attendance figure.

Punctuality to lessons

Students should move with purpose to their lessons once they have been dismissed from their previous class or at the end of break and lunch time. As the end of break and lunch time approaches a bell sounds to indicate that students need to move to lessons. The bell gives sufficient time for students to move in a timely manner so they are punctual to their next lesson. Students should use the

toilet, fill up their water bottles etc earlier during their break or lunch, not when the bell has sounded or when they should be in lessons. These are not acceptable reasons for lateness. At Downend we expect students to arrive ready to learn and being punctual is the first stage in this. Punctuality and the skills that are required to be punctual are life skills that all students will require in the future.

Research shows that children with consistent school attendance and punctuality make more progress. A student who is late to lessons misses important input from their teachers, discussions, questions, explanations and thinking that makes learning come alive. While punctuality will promote learning, arriving late can also be very disruptive for the child, the teacher and other students in the class.

Sixth Form Reminders

We are looking forward to meeting all of our new year 12 students and welcoming back year 13.

Year 12 induction day takes place on Tuesday 2nd September 9:30-2:00.

Year 13 return to school on Wednesday 3rd September at 9:05am

A Level Results

We are proud to report that 98% of our A Level entries resulted in a pass at A* to E, with 37% of entries achieving A* - B grades. These results are a testament to the hard work of our students, the unwavering support of their families, and the commitment and expertise of you, our dedicated teaching and support staff.

Our students are now set to embark on exciting new journeys. Many will be attending prestigious universities while others are beginning apprenticeships with top companies. Some of our students have also chosen to enter the workforce directly, leveraging the skills and knowledge they have acquired during their time with us.

We would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to all our students and wish them continued success in their future endeavours. Whether they are moving on to higher education, starting an apprenticeship, or entering the workforce, we are confident that the skills and knowledge they have acquired here at Downend School will serve them well.

GCSE Results

We are once again celebrating a positive set of GCSE results with strong performances across a wide range of subjects and students.

75% of students achieved a grade 4 or above in both English and Maths and 53% achieved a grade 5 or above in these two key subjects. As a result, our young people are set to progress onto the Sixth Forms, colleges and apprenticeships of their choice.

We know that so much hard work and effort goes into each and every grade. There were a number of students with a string of top grades, but other huge successes regardless of starting points. We will, of course, congratulate all of our students on their achievements, but huge thanks also to you all, who do everything you possibly can for our young people.

Site Updates

It has been an incredibly busy 6 weeks on site with a number of significant projects, some of which are visible and others less so, but all of which will benefit your children. Most obvious is the extensive refurbishment in the older part of Science (Class Rooms S1 to S8).

In addition, new lighting has been fitted across most of the school. Windows have been replaced in much of M Block from the offices through to music.

We have painted a zebra crossing by the main gate off the Westerleigh Road to allow the students to safely cross the car park when accessing school this way.

The site team have redecorated the corridors in both the M Block and H Block, as some classrooms around the school.

These works represent a significant investment and we rely on students to take care of their environment. Thank you to all staff who have worked tirelessly throughout the summer break to ensure these works are complete.

Next Term's Key Dates

1st Sept	**INSET Day (1)**
2nd Sept	**Year 7 and Year 12 Induction Day**
3rd Sept	**First Day of Term for Years 8-13**
11th Sept	**Open Evening (Early Closure at 12.25pm)**
16th Sept	**Community Council Meeting (1)**

18th Sept	**Year 12 Information Evening**
25th Sept	**Year 7 and 13 Tutor Evening**
1st Oct	**Inset afternoon (2) Early closure to students 12.25pm** **Please note students are expected in school in the morning as the INSET is for the afternoon only.**
8th Oct	**Year 12 University and apprenticeships fayre**
16th Oct	**Berlin trip departs (16th - 20th Oct)**
24th Oct	**End of Term 1**