



20 April 2020

Dear parents and carers,

I hope this letter finds you safe and well.

As promised in earlier communication, this letter intends to give you an update on a range of school matters, particularly in the context of the current national situation.

School closure.

It is a month since the Government took the decision to close all schools and the country went into 'lockdown'. We have all had to quickly adapt to new daily routines and ways of living.

We know this situation is temporary and the crisis will pass, but we do not know how long schools will be closed for at this point. The decision to close schools was not taken lightly and equally the decision to re-open schools will be a carefully considered one and when it comes (as it will) we will do so with careful planning and clear communication with you. We will follow the Government's guidance on this when the time comes. For now, the school remains closed until further notice.

Stellar Award winners (pupils and staff).

During the last half term, an anonymous donor provided funds to the school to allow us to launch a very special award to be known as *The Stellar Award*.

This award was open to both pupils and staff – the intention being that one pupil and one member of staff would be awarded this accolade at Easter. The purpose of the award is to recognise **'the star of all stars'**.

It is about recognising a person whose light shines bright, that however tough a situation is, their light shines bright in any darkness, they always give of their best, go above and beyond and seek no recognition or reward for what they do. They may or may not be a high achiever, but whoever they are, they are a role model for others, they rarely, if ever, drop their standard and if they are knocked they quickly pick themselves up and their normal stellar self is restored. I am delighted to now be able to announce the winners.

For pupils, because of the strength of the nominations received there are *two* pupil winners. It was impossible to separate out a single winner and so both **Leah Robinson** in Year 10 and **Maiya Talbot** in Year 11 were awarded the first ever Stellar Award for pupils. **Leah** was recognised for her resilience, her kindness to others, how she looks out for others and what a strong role model she is. **Maiya** was recognised for how much she has flourished since she joined the school, how kind she is and for the amazing progress she has made across all her subjects.

The staff award was given to **Mrs Kath Burridge**, who works in reprographics. She is well known in the school and in the community. She is known for her selfless giving, her 'can do' attitude and her total commitment to the school over many years. She is the most worthy first ever winner of the Staff Stellar Award.

All three individuals are shining examples of our STAR values – Service, Teamwork, Ambition and Respect. All three are well deserving winners and as a school we are very proud to have them as part of our community.

There were so many nominations made by staff and pupils. It was a long and tough task to settle on the winners. It was great to have so many people recognised within the school community for what they do.



Current priorities while the school is closed.

At this time when the school is closed our way of operating has had to change. Like you, we are observing the Government's guidance to stay at home as part of our national effort to reduce the impact of the coronavirus and save lives.

We have a skeleton staff in place at school and continue to provide education for a small number of children on a daily basis who need it, including for children of key workers who are so heroically supporting the national effort at this time.

We have two main priorities at this time (i) ensuring **all pupils are safe and well** and (ii) to continue to **support your child in their learning from home**.

Firstly, to ensure all pupils are safe and well, you will know that we are maintaining contact with you to ensure that we can do whatever we can to support you at this time. Our commitment is that each family will have contact at least once per week by phone.

Please use this contact to let us know of any concerns that you think we can help with. This may include letting us know about wellbeing or health issues. We will do all we can to give you or point you to the right support. It may include advice and support in making the best use of the work packs we have sent home. If this is the case, we will look to link up your child's subject teacher with you to provide the guidance needed.

Our second priority is to continue to support your child in their learning. Since the school was closed on 20 March this has been a huge adjustment for all of us. You are used to sending your children to school to be taught for six hours a day for five days each week. At short notice, schools were closed and we have all had to adapt to a new way of living.

I appreciate the difficulties this presents and that a single approach does not work for everyone. So our approach going forwards has three elements to it:

1. **An initial pack of materials was sent home on 20 March** (and for those not in school on that day either you have picked them up or they have been delivered to you). All the materials we have published so far can be found on our website under the *Information* tab and then by going to *Home Learning Resources*. You can also access them via this link: <https://www.thevalleyleadershipacademy.com/home-learning-resources/>
2. **A further work pack will be posted home from 27 April for all year groups in all subjects.** Where possible, we have tried to match this to the curriculum that your child would have been following in school. I recognise this is not a replacement for actual lessons. We will address that when the school re-opens.
3. **We aim to start 'online' lessons using Microsoft Teams from Monday 27 April.** We will start with Year 10 and then following that will roll the approach out to other year groups in the coming weeks.

Later this week, you will receive a text containing the username and password unique to your child to allow them to access *Microsoft Teams*. This is the IT platform we will use to store work and allow access to online lessons. A quick guide on accessing *Microsoft Teams* can be found in the *Home Learning Resources* section of our website. We will send more information out later this week for Year 10 on how this will work in practice.

I recognise that this may present some difficulties with internet access and access to devices (laptop, tablet etc.) and so we will continue with both providing work packs as well as enabling access to direct teaching online. In your weekly call from school please let us know how this will work best for you and any issues it may present. I recognise it is not ideal and that this is a temporary approach.

Planning for next year.

The school became an academy with Star less than a year ago. The plans to implement and embed the Star model continue at pace. You will know that we implemented our binary behaviour programme, we have introduced the Star curriculum used in other successful Star schools, we have invested in weekly programme of training for teaching staff and we have been ensuring that staffing is closely matched to the school's priorities. The current school closure means we have had to adapt our plans but, nonetheless, we are continuing with the improvement plans and priorities laid out to you when the school became The Valley Leadership Academy. Thank you for your support in helping us make these changes.

As you know, I joined the school in January from my Education Director role in the central team at Star to lead the school for the spring and summer terms. This will continue through to the end of August and from September Mr. Andy O'Brien will take up the role of Executive Principal.

It is common for schools to have a number of staff changes each year, particularly at the end of the summer term. We will have people retiring, moving for family reasons or to new chapters in their career. To that end, a number of teaching and support roles have been advertised recently (all advertised on the school website). In the next two months, we will complete the recruitment of staff needed for September to match the school's priorities. My intention is that Mr O'Brien and I will outline the detail of this to you towards the end of May. These changes will help ensure the school has the right expertise and skills to build on the improvements already made and bring about further improvements in academic standards and pastoral care

Free school meals.

A separate letter to parents of children entitled to free school meals was sent on Friday 17 April. This followed on from a text sent to all parents on 22 March with a link to a letter outlining what is going to happen going forward if your child is entitled to free school meals. The letter can be found on our school website via this link: <https://www.thevalleyleadershipacademy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-parent-letter-FSM-230320.pdf>

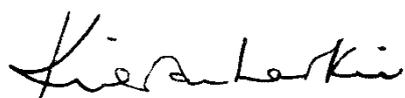
It is very important that we have an up to date email address for you so that we can ensure you are able to access the free school meal vouchers that will be provided. We will move to the Government's national scheme in the very near future. Star are working closely with the Government designated agency to provide this across their schools. Further details on this will be provided in future communications. If you have any questions regarding this scheme please send them to fsm@thevalley.staracademies.org

Keeping in contact.

We will be using texts, our Facebook page, our Twitter feed and the school website to keep in touch as well to make contact by phone at least once per week. You can keep in touch with us at school on 01706 873 896 or via email at info@thevalley.staracademies.org. On occasions you will get a letter that is being sent to all Star schools from our Chief Executive and on other occasions it will be from me directly.

Let me close by asking you all to continue to follow the Government advice to stay at home, keep safe and observe the guidance protecting yourself from the coronavirus and looking after your loved ones.

With all best wishes,



Kieran Larkin

Interim Executive Principal