

WELCOME TO DOWNEND SCHOOL

Downend School

PARENT NEWSLETTER: Start of Term 1

3rd September, 2026

Head's Messages

It is a real pleasure to welcome you and your children back as we begin the new school year. I hope everyone enjoyed a restful break and found time to recharge. We start the year with much to celebrate, including an encouraging set of GCSE and A-Level results. Being present on results days was an absolute pleasure, watching students open their results and share their excitement about the opportunities ahead.

We are very much looking forward to welcoming back Year 11 students who have decided to stay at Downend for the Post 16 studies as well as new Year 12 students joining us. Similarly, we are excited to welcome the Year 7 cohort.

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 their first day on **Friday 3rd September**. For years 8 - 11, and 13 the first day will be **Monday 7th 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 **attitude to learning** 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 (or similarly very short, tight 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 10th 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!

Mobile phones

During term 6 we moved to a phone free site and all students were issued with a Yondr pouch. New Year 7 students will be issued with their pouch on the first day of term. All students are expected to place their phone into the pouch and lock it before they cross the red line at the school gates. Any phones found to not be in a locked pouch will be confiscated.

We appreciate that these habits are still in the early stages for students and staff will be on hand to support with establishing these routines. Please check your child has their Yondr pouch everyday as part of their school equipment.

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, curriculum maps can be found here: <https://www.downend.com/Curriculum/>

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.

Independent Learning

At Downend School we aim to develop confident, capable and resilient learners who are equipped with the independence and self-regulation skills needed to take responsibility for their learning and progress. To emphasise this focus, we have replaced the term 'homework' with 'Independent Learning' at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Following parent feedback we have reviewed our practices regarding learning outside of the classroom which will now be referred to as Independent learning rather than homework. The following document which details our principles for Independent learning and outlines what you should expect Independent Learning to look like for your child. [Independent learning principles](#)

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 few days in September.

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.

Some key reminders: Attendance and Punctuality

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.

Unauthorised absence is any absence which has not been agreed by the school. This includes absence for appointments when evidence of the appointment has not been received by the school, term time holiday regardless of length or when no communication has been received to explain absence. It is important that absence is reported to the school as the school attendance register forms part of the school safeguarding procedures.

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.

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 Friday 3rd September 9:30-2:00.

Year 13 return to school on Monday 7th September at 9:05am

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 continuation of extensive refurbishment in the older parts of Science, including new windows, painting, and the refurbishment of the toilet block.

In addition, the canteen has had a new roof fitted which has been needed for some time as we have been gradually experiencing more areas that were leaking. Hopefully, the canteen will remain dry and warm for many years to come.

We have continued to re-tarmac the area outside the canteen where it was uneven and liable to flood. The site team have redecorated numerous areas of the school including the I rooms and corridors 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.

Term time dates for 2026/2027 and Inset dates

This is just a reminder of the term dates and inset dates for the academic year.

The term dates for **2026/2027** are:

Term 1: 3/9/26 - 23/10/26	Term 2: 2/11/26 - 18/12/26	Term 3: 4/1/27 - 12/2/27
Term 4: 22/2/27 - 25/3/27	Term 5: 12/4/27 - 28/5/27	Term 6: 7/6/27 - 23/7/27

It is important to highlight that the term dates **do not** align 100% with South Glos Local Authority dates (start of term 1 and end of term 6 are different) and therefore if you have a child in another school which is not within our academy, these dates will be different.

The INSET Days for 2026-27 are as follows:

Thursday 3rd September Friday 2nd October 2026 Monday 2nd November 2026

Monday 4th January 2027 Monday 12th and Tuesday 13th April 2027

Monday 5th July 2027 All INSET days are full days and there are no half INSET days.

This Term's Key Dates

3rd Sept	First day of term for staff: INSET Day (1)
4th Sept	First day of term for year 7 and 12 (Induction day)
7th Sept	First day of term for whole school
10th Sept	Open Evening -Early Closure for all Students (at 12.25pm)
15th Sept	Community Council Meeting (1)
17th Sept	Year 12 Information Evening
24th Sept	Year 7 and 13 Tutor Evening
2nd Oct	INSET day (2)
22nd Oct	Post 16 Open Evening
23rd Oct	Last day of term 1