



Few will have failed to notice that August is results season, when students find out what GCSE and A-level results they've achieved. Typically it's a time for nerves and excitement in equal measure, and never more so than this year. This year has been very different.

Not only have this year's students experienced a very tough end to school life, they've also been faced with huge uncertainty in terms of how their grades (and next steps) would be determined. The recent U-turn to a fairer system was a massive relief to our teachers, students and families. It's been a confusing and challenging time for everyone, especially the young people this affects, including my own daughter.

Prior to the results being released she told me she expected mixed feelings when they come through. She explained that regardless of how the grades are finally determined - if they turn out lower than hoped, would she feel disappointed in a system which she believes has let her down? On the other hand, if she does better than expected, would she still feel as proud as she would have been had she sat the end of year exams - and will the grades be regarded as highly by others?

Thankfully everything turned out ok. However - the key message I keep sharing with my daughter, and students at our school, is that examination grades are not the be all and end all. Which, given I am a Headteacher, may surprise some. But it's true.

Whilst obviously incredibly important, grades are one element of what our children achieve at school. After five years at Alder Grange (seven years in the case of sixth form) our students gain an enormous amount in terms of wider skills, friendships, personal growth and leadership. Basically all of those softer things that you don't get a certificate for. And these, probably, are even more important in the long run and are the skills that will make the difference in terms of how successful they go on to be in their future careers.

Let's rally round our young people. Encourage them to see themselves as rounded individuals, capable of achievement in many different areas, and promote their resilience and wellbeing. This works well for our students, who tell us they feel well supported. In fact, many continue to get back in touch with Alder Grange teachers years down the line for help, advice and support with different aspects of their careers.

That slip of paper (or email) showing examination grades does not seal anybody's fate, either way, and it's certainly not where growth or learning ends.

It's just the beginning.