



Two weeks ago all our students left their textbooks at home for the day and came into school for a 'Drop Down Day'. It was very different from a typical school day, but just as important and worthwhile.

Pupils across the school spent the morning taking part in activities focused on wellbeing - from relaxation, mindfulness and meditation sessions, through to anti-bullying workshops, resilience building and careers guidance.

Later in the day pupils were able to select what they'd like to take part in, from a range of activities provided. They baked, took part in sport, set up crazy science experiments, created origami, sang karaoke, did scavenger hunts and more. The choice was theirs, as long as it involved trying something new and having fun.

Why? Well, during lockdown, we all became aware of the positive outcomes that can be gained from pressing pause, learning new skills and spending time with others. Even our keyworker pupils, who came into school throughout the lockdown, benefited from a less structured, more varied school day during that period.

Mixing things up every now and again builds new friendships, enables learning and broadens our horizons. Maybe this appreciation of variety, and the importance of play, is still just as important after lockdown.

The response from our pupils confirmed this to be true. They bustled out of school at the end of the day, buzzing about what they'd learned and stopped me in the corridor to show me what they'd made or say how much they'd enjoyed it.

As teachers (and adults) it's important we practice what we preach, so our teaching staff also took part in similar activities during an inset day the following day. A morning of shared learning activities was followed by an afternoon of fun (thankfully karaoke was not involved!)

The timing was perfect for all of us, especially the students. Our induction programme in September usually focuses on wellbeing, however this year much of it needed to focus on new school practices for COVID-safety. So, the Drop Down Day enabled us to focus on what is a priority for everyone at Alder Grange - mental health and wellbeing.

For anyone who thinks this may not have been the best time for children to take a day out of the curriculum when they've had such disruption to their learning over recent months, I say this is the perfect time.

I firmly believe that if our children feel happy and safe then they will thrive, and their learning and academic success will follow.

During these challenging times we all need to pick things up a gear - and the occasional Drop Down Day helps us to do exactly that.