



The Downs School

The Downs School is a secondary school and sixth form set in the heart of the West Berkshire Downs. Their vision is one where students and staff learn together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and fairness.

No Isolation sat down with Stephanie Jones, KS3 Student Manager & Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, to discuss how they used AV1s (loaned through West Berkshire Council) to support two of their pupils.

Q Why did you start using AV1?

A We had two students in year 7 and year 8 who were both struggling to get into lessons. This was due to fears around being at school as well as anxieties caused from being away from home and family. One of the students had a huge fear of getting on the school bus whilst the other was often only able to be on site for 5-10 minutes before needing to leave.

When we went to review what more we could do to support these students, West Berkshire's EBSA forum suggested we try two AV1s.

Q What did you have to consider before using the AV1s?

A We felt it important to consider whether this would work as a bridge to getting the students back into lessons or act as a crutch that might make it easier to stay out of class.

We had already got to the point where we could get the students on site. So we decided to start trailing AV1 whilst they were in our student support centre. The students would connect from there, with the AV1s being in their normal lessons. We suggested they try using their AV1s to attend a core subject to begin with.



Q How did you introduce AV1 to the two students?

A I'd met with the students in the student support centre to demonstrate the AV1 and how it worked. I made sure they understood the purpose of it, as a tool to make it easier for them to return to the classroom when they were ready.

The year 7 chose English as the first subject and the year 8 chose Maths. What we absolutely made sure of is that they understood that, right up to the point they were going to click to connect, they were in control. It was up to them and if they didn't want to connect they didn't have to. They were also able to choose where the AV1 sat in the classroom.

Q How did you introduce AV1 to the other students in the class?

A Before I showed them the AV1, I wanted to make sure they understood the purpose behind it and why it was needed in the class.

Example lesson transcript:

Mrs. Jones: How would we feel if we couldn't come into school tomorrow?

Student in class: That would be great, Miss!

Mrs. Jones: Ok, but what if (rather than having a day off to do whatever we wanted) we were at home and really poorly?

Student in class: Oh, that's not quite the same Miss

Mrs. Jones: And if we were out of school for weeks or months, what would be some of the downsides to that?

Student in class: You wouldn't feel part of things

Student in class: You'd be worrying about your school work

[I went on to explain that we might not always be struggling physically, but with our worries instead.]

Mrs. Jones: So we need something don't we? Something where anyone unable to attend lessons could be in the class but not in the class

[One student came to the idea of using a robot before I'd even mentioned it.]

Student in class: ...We need a robot Miss!



I demonstrated the AV1 and made sure to leave the room so they could have an idea of how it worked, as well as to avoid any feedback noises. I let the students know that there would be an absent pupil joining their lessons through the AV1. I felt it was important not to give too much detail as to their situation but they were aware of who it was.

Q Was there any pushback from teachers?

A The very first step that was taken was that our relevant school policy was updated to take this kind of support into account. We held an information session and I demonstrated AV1 to the two subject teachers. After the practical demonstration it was made clear how easy it was going to be to use and integrate into the lesson. They were both onboard and enthusiastic about using it. The only thing they needed to look out for is the passive mode, hand up and emoji eyes. That is one of the best things about the AV1 - It's a bit of tech that works and it does what it says on the tin.

Q How have the AV1s affected the students' ability to engage with their classmates and teachers?

A The year 7's first experience logging on was when they joined a lesson just before Christmas and the class were making posters. The student had been brought over the supplies they needed and they were able to get on with that whilst also chatting with their friends in the lesson. It was great to see it used in such a social way.

Having transitioned to secondary school, this student could not bring themselves to walk to their classroom. However, with the AV1, they got to the point where they stood in the classroom doorway and said "Miss, remember you need to turn the AV1 on" before heading back to the student support centre.



When the year 8 student completed their first lesson with the AV1 they were so happy and said “Miss, I learnt so much!”. From the get go they could see how much better it was than just being provided with work to complete online. They got so much more from it.

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At its heart I think AV1 has absolutely played a role in successfully transitioning both the students back into those particular subjects.

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Q Why do you think the students felt more comfortable accessing the lessons through the AV1s?

A If we think about where the anxiety from EBSA is coming from, it is the fight or flight instinct kicking in saying “oh that situation is really scary, you don’t want to go there”. What the AV1 did was allow them to experience the lesson without having to go to it. Which in turn gave them the evidence that they needed to speak back to that voice and say “actually you’ve got that wrong”. It builds up trust. With EBSA it’s the fear of the unknown and having the AV1 provided a bridge back to the classroom.

Q What do you think contributes to AV1 working successfully with EBSA?

A I see AV1 being best used as part of a bespoke, flexible plan to get the student back into school or lessons but there is a lot of groundwork that needs to be done before introducing it.

It's absolutely about starting at the right level and not forcing the student to do anything they are not ready for. In our experience a little each day is the way to go. For one student we might say "all you need to do today is spend five minutes chatting with me in a small room by reception". For another student it might be that they spend two periods at school and then they go home.

There needs to be good communication between school and home. In order for interventions to work you have to have parents that are engaged and understand the short and long term goals. Parents will need to guide and encourage the child rather than taking them away from the situation. For a student to try something like AV1 they need to be prepared to dip their toe in the water.

Q What has the lasting impact of the AV1s been?

A The year 8 has still got a huge amount of anxiety around school but the AV1 worked to show them that they could get to lessons. With a bit of perseverance and helping them to understand that setbacks are a normal part of the process they have now attended all of their Maths and English lessons.

For the year 7, The AV1 showed them that the classroom need not be a scary place. The AV1 helped them to transition back into English lessons and even helped them to get into Maths and Science as well. They learnt very quickly that what worked for them was small goals and they've now been going to lessons for about 4 months. The last little bit was getting them on the school bus and they've been doing that for a couple of weeks now.

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Would we have got there without the AV1s?
Probably. However, I don't think we would have
seen as quick or smooth a transition without them.

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