



SEPTEMBER 2023

Fostering Self-Confidence and Resilience

Starting a new school or even coming back to school after the long summer holiday can be a daunting experience for some pupils.

At Dame Allan's we work hard to ensure that all pupils feel as settled as possible, as soon as possible, but this feeling of security in a new school, class or year group will naturally take longer for some than for others. Learning to develop a healthy level of self-confidence and resilience is part of growing up, although more self-confidence is something all of us full grown adults would like a bit more of from time to time.

At Dame Allan's, we explore the issue of self-confidence through praise and by talking about it in lessons such as PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education) and drama. During stressful periods like exam time, we help to foster self-confidence and resilience with thorough exam preparation and a positive attitude to the importance of exams, as well as recognising success and giving encouragement. Additionally, we seek to promote a healthy lifestyle in our young people, with good sleeping patterns, exercise and nutrition, and we continue the uphill struggle to educate pupils about the problems of social media and the negative impact it can have on self-esteem.

One of the most important ways we encourage self-confidence and resilience is by advocating participation in our extensive co-curricular programme, where there really is something for everyone. Pupils are sure to find new



Miss Shaw, Vice Principal (Pastoral)

friends, plus improve their confidence by getting stuck into a new skill and pushing their boundaries. They'll have a lot of fun as they take part, too!

We also promote Dame Allan's Attributes for Success - which focus on being respectful, strategic, motivated and a meta-thinker - with discussions and tasks in form time designed to get pupils thinking about these important qualities. We're very proud that our staff also model the behaviours that we wish to engender in the pupils and act as positive role models; from speaking in a packed assembly, to camping in the depths of the Mozambican savannah with pupils on a World Challenge expedition - activities that can be daunting, but once done, certainly breed self-confidence and resilience!

Our Heads of Year have some sound advice for those new to Dame Allan's



*Ms Ward, Head of Lower School,
Dame Allan's Girls' School*

For those who don't know you, can you please explain your role at Dame Allan's?

I teach English to all year groups, from Year 7 to A Level, and enjoy developing pupils' love of language and literature throughout their time at school. I also teach PSHE to all Year 7 girls' classes,

which is great because it allows me not only to get to know every pupil really well, but also to explore the key issues that really matter to them, with them.

As Head of DAGS Lower School, I have pastoral oversight of girls in Years 7-9. I manage the transition between schools for our new pupils, and, with our incredible Form Teachers, give pastoral support to our pupils. If a pupil is finding something difficult, they can come and speak to me or another member of the team and we will try to find a way through the problem together. Other important parts of the role include celebrating pupils' successes and setting personal and group challenges, such as the Advent of Kindness bingo.

In addition, I work closely with my colleagues in the Boys' School, especially Mr Gardner, with whom I organise the all-important residential trip and other fun events such as the Year 7 Christmas cinema trip.

What advice would you give to new pupils who are feeling a bit nervous?

Well, I asked last year's Year 7s that exact question, and the thing that was most frequently recommended was, 'Just be yourself!' I agree: the Girls' School is such a wonderfully welcoming place, and every individual is valued and encouraged to be who they are. Also, our Form Tutors are amazing: they are super supportive and look after everyone, whether they are new to the school or have been with us since Nursery.

Other advice included:

- ◆ 'Try to talk to the others and find something in common. You could start by talking about your old school and some fun memories you made.'
- ◆ 'There is nothing to worry about! I came to Dame Allan's only knowing one girl, but everyone was very welcoming and I settled in quickly. I'm sure you'll be no different!'

What positive steps would you advise that pupils can take to make them feel a bit more at home?

Get involved! We are lucky to have brilliant teachers, each of whom will make sure you have plenty of opportunities to contribute to lessons and work with your new friends. Even more exciting, perhaps, is our co-curricular programme, which features LOTS of clubs and activities, from archery to debating and coding to surfing. We encourage you to try as many activities as you can, and it doesn't matter if you haven't done something before – you will learn about it at the club! Pupils love co-curricular clubs because they mean they get to do exciting new things and get to know people in other classes and year groups.

Finally, what would you say to parents who might be understandably anxious about their child joining the Senior School?

The reasons that you chose for your children to join the Dame Allan's family are the reasons they will thrive here. We are adept at managing the transition process, and we are here to help both pupils and parents throughout their time at the Schools. Of course, things will not run smoothly for everyone all the time, so, if you are worried about anything at all, please get in touch with your children's Form Tutors, Head of Year and/or me, and we will work through things together. It's not just the teachers who are here to help: your children will also benefit from the support of our wonderful Sixth Form Peer Mentors and Year 10 buddies. I don't think there's a person in the school who isn't interested in supporting others, so you can be assured that, if your children ever need assistance, someone will be on hand to help.



Mr Gardner, Head of Lower School,
Dame Allan's Boys' School

For those who don't know you, can you please explain your role at Dame Allan's?

My role involves pastoral oversight of pupils' development, academic oversight of pupils' work and disciplinary oversight of pupils' behaviour. I also have specific

responsibility for boys in Year 7 as their Head of Year, and a key part of that role each year is to help boys to settle into Dame Allan's and to support them as they negotiate the transition to Senior School. In their first year at Dame Allan's I teach all the boys for either geography or PSHE and so will get to know them very well.

What advice would you give to new pupils who are feeling a bit nervous?

This is understandable as joining a new school can be daunting. There are many aspects of life in the Senior School that will seem unfamiliar and different compared with their previous experience of school. The important thing to remember is that everyone feels nervous to some extent when they start a new school, but that within a few weeks everyone finds that they have settled into new routines and made new friends. The pastoral team, and the Year 7 Form Teachers in

particular, will be working hard to help pupils to settle in and encouraging them to make friends by joining in with the wide range of co-curricular clubs and activities that we offer.

What positive steps would you advise that pupils can take to make them feel a bit more at home?

One of the best ways to get to know people is to join some school co-curricular activities. These take place at lunchtime and after school and are a great way to meet people with similar interests and enthusiasms. The PGL residential trip at the start of term is also a brilliant opportunity to make new friends from within your form group and across the whole year group. We have recently returned from an inspection visit to the centre and were very impressed by the facilities and the exciting activities that are offered. We are certain that it will be a fabulous trip and that everyone is going to have a huge amount of fun.

Finally, what would you say to parents who might be understandably anxious about their child joining the Senior School?

If you have any concerns, however small, please do not hesitate to contact your child's Form Teacher or Head of Year. An early conversation will enable us to reassure you or put appropriate support in place to help resolve any issues promptly.



Mr Kelly, Head of Year 12

For those who don't know you, can you please explain your role at Dame Allan's?

As well as being Head of Year 12, I also teach biology. Previously, I have been Head of Year 8 and Year 9 at Dame Allan's Boys' School

and I am excited to begin working with our older students and the Sixth Form team. I will be working to ensure that all of the students in Year 12 are supported both pastorally and academically, and are given the best chance possible to become the successful individuals they all have the potential to be.

What advice would you give to new students who are feeling a bit nervous?

Coming into a new school environment can be nerve wracking, so if you're worried or need some support, ask, ask and then don't be afraid to ask again - there is so much support here at Dame Allans. We have an excellent teaching and pastoral team, and everyone really does just want the best for our students. Our Sixth Formers themselves undertake courses in Listening Skills and Mental Health First Aid,

so there is always a supportive ear on hand.

What positive steps would you advise that students can take to make them feel a bit more at home?

I think it is important that you find your passion. Whatever it is you love, from computing to sport, drama, art, board games, music or movies, there are people here that love it too. And if you don't know what you really love yet, find out. Be bold, get stuck into a new club and you are sure to settle in with a whole group of like-minded people.

Finally, what would you say to parents who might be understandably anxious about their child joining the Sixth Form?

I'd say that they have picked a school that values all of their son or daughter. Dame Allan's looks after the whole child, not just focusing on academic success. They are in very safe hands, and we will help them to develop confidence and to embrace every side of their personality. Everyone wants them to succeed, and you can rest assured that they are in the best possible place to tackle their next steps and begin to look beyond education into the wider world.



Miss Medway, Head of Year 13

For those who don't know you, can you please explain your role at Dame Allan's?

I wear many hats! I teach academic music, as well as some of our co-curricular music activities, like our chamber orchestra. I'm Head of Year 13, Head of EPQ (Extended

Project Qualifications) and Early Entry Coordinator, which means that I help to support students who are looking to study at Oxford or Cambridge from an early point in their schooling, ensuring they are on the right track.

What advice would you give to new students who are feeling a bit nervous?

Entering the Sixth Form is a new experience for every student, even those coming from Dame Allan's Senior School. It is co-ed and a bit more independent, with free time and study periods that need to be managed well. It can be challenging, but don't be disheartened! My advice would be to get to know people outside of your subjects and build relationships - come in with a fresh mindset. Form Tutors, our pastoral staff and our counsellors are all on hand to offer

support. See the new start as good practice for big life steps, like entering university or a new job.

What positive steps would you advise that students can take to make them feel a bit more at home?

Our co-curricular fair is a great place to start. You'll find lots of clubs and societies to choose from. If you're already into sport or music, do keep it up in Sixth Form - it is so important and has a great positive impact on mental health. When you have study periods or free time, try to get out and study or socialise with your peers. It can be easy to isolate away, but if you make an effort it will definitely help you settle in more quickly. You'll soon find your people. Sixth Form is a great place to try new things and meet new people, think of it as a trial run for the real world!

Finally, what would you say to parents who might be understandably anxious about their child joining the Sixth Form?

Dame Allan's is a very family-oriented school, with lots of support options. Myself and the Director of Sixth Form Mr Terry will always be on hand to support any student that needs it, and we encourage parents to get in touch too should they have any concerns.

The Snug

The Senior School has a dedicated wellbeing centre to offer a calm, quiet area to pupils, known as 'The Snug'.

The Snug offers a range of support to pupils, including sessions with dedicated counsellors, learning support services, and even the comforting services of therapy dog Heidi. The Snug also offers space for prayer. It can be accessed by all Senior School pupils who may be in need of additional support, and is a purposefully private space. For more information on accessing services in The Snug, pupils should reach out to their Form Tutor, Mrs Downie, or Miss Shaw.



How families can help build self-confidence

There are lots of ways that parents and guardians can help to boost a child's confidence at home:

Acknowledge their achievements:

Recognise and celebrate your child's accomplishments, regardless of their size. Whether it's a good exam grade, completing a challenging task, or participating in co-curricular activities, praising their efforts and highlighting their strengths will boost their confidence and motivate them to continue striving for success.

Seek professional support if needed: If you notice persistent signs of low self-esteem or your child is struggling with mental health issues, don't hesitate to seek professional help if needed, which can be accessed in school.

Encourage open communication: Create a safe and non-judgmental space for your child to express their thoughts and feelings. By fostering open communication, you build trust and strengthen your relationship, allowing children to develop a positive self-image.

Encourage them to explore passions and hobbies: Whether it's music, sports, writing or art. In doing this, you nurture their self-esteem and provide a platform for self-discovery.

Set realistic expectations: Help your child set realistic goals and expectations for themselves.

Encourage them to aim high but emphasise the importance of effort and progress rather than focusing solely on outcomes. Teaching them to appreciate the journey and learn from failures cultivates resilience and a healthy sense of self-worth.

Promote a growth mindset:

Instil in your child the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and dedication. Teach them to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than impassable obstacles. Emphasise the power of perseverance, resilience, and learning from mistakes. A growth mindset fosters confidence, as they understand that failure is not a reflection of their worth but an essential part of the learning process.

Foster a healthy body image:

Adolescence is a period of physical changes that can impact a child's self-esteem. Encourage a healthy body image by promoting balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, and emphasising the importance of self-acceptance. Discuss media influences and societal beauty standards, highlighting the importance of individuality and self-love. Talk to your children about the fake imagery social media promotes.

Bereavement and Grief

The very sad news of Ellie Garrett's sudden death last month has deeply affected the whole school community as pupils, parents and staff begin to try to come to terms with her loss. Every individual's experience of loss is unique, however it can be helpful to have an understanding of the nature of grief as you help your children navigate their often conflicting and confusing reactions.

Traditional understanding of grief suggests that people move through 'stages' however more recent models suggest that a person oscillates between 'keeping busy' and intense feelings of loss. A young person's reaction to death can present very differently to that of an adult and differs depending on age, a useful point to keep in mind if siblings react differently. Young children may have a limited understanding, whilst older children might prefer to avoid facts and feelings, becoming intensely private and avoiding conversations with adults; older teenagers however may exhibit more mature grief responses, reacting intensely to the loss.

Children and young people may exhibit their grief in their behaviours rather than in words: a well-behaved child may become moody and aggressive whilst an outgoing child could become quieter and withdrawn. Common emotional responses include anger, fear, guilt, longing and sadness, whilst physical and behavioural changes include lethargy, difficulty concentrating and physical illness.

Some people can be deeply affected by a death without having a close relationship with the person who has died and it is important to acknowledge that this 'vicarious grief' evokes very powerful feelings of loss, particularly if an individual has experienced a previous bereavement.

Similarly, some young people may not experience a grief response and this may cause them to feel confused, embarrassed or isolated. There is no way of knowing how someone may react to loss and there is no set time for feelings of grief to begin or end. Establishing good and regular communication with your child is therefore crucial, offering them a safe and calm place to talk openly about their feelings: going for a walk or a car journey can sometimes provide a less intense environment for a child to open up.

Grief is a normal reaction to loss and usually, with time and with talking about their feelings to a trusted adult these symptoms will recede. If however these feelings begin to disrupt your child's ability to cope on a daily basis, beyond the initial period of mourning, this could be a sign that your child needs more support. As always our staff will be keeping a watchful eye on all of our pupils and our Sixth Form peer mentors are available to provide a more informal listening ear for pupils on request. If you have any questions or concerns about your child, please get in touch with their Form Teacher or Head of Year or contact Mrs Downie, Director of Pupil Wellbeing or Mrs Procter, School Nurse.

More information and support on grief can be found online via Winston's Wish, Child Bereavement UK and Cruse.



DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS
building the future

North East Independent School of the Year

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