



JANUARY 2025

The Power of Authenticity



*Mrs Downie,
Director of Pupil Wellbeing*

When the new year rolls around, the external pressure to transform and reinvent yourself can be intense. If we feel it as adults, we know that the children in our care, with constant messaging from social media, influencers and their peers, are feeling it too.

At Dame Allan's we always encourage children to be themselves. Smaller class sizes mean that we get to know our pupils well - we know who is

the most likely to crack a joke at the end of a lesson, who will be the first to volunteer for any charity events, and who will come to us brimming with their weekend news. This is the beauty of allowing our pupils to be themselves authentically; whether your child is passionate about art, engineering, dance, or science, they'll be supported to achieve their best.

Authenticity can be hard to achieve, but this is helped when children know they have a supportive, solid base behind them. At school, this comes

from knowing they have teachers that they can trust, a regular routine, and pastoral support available to them whenever it is needed. At home, you can also help your child to be their most authentic self, by encouraging them to celebrate what makes them uniquely them, and to live by standards that they are proud of.

If your child is struggling to find their niche and feeling a bit lost this term, encourage them to chat to their form tutor, teachers, and the pastoral team. We can often provide advice to help them find their way forward. We'd also encourage pupils to approach us with their interests to see how we can make the most of these whilst at Dame Allan's - are they a budding musical star? Why not sign up for a lunchtime Live for Five concert? Are they passionate about politics and justice? The Politics Society or Debating Club will help them to embrace these values.

So, this January, let us all promise to avoid the pressure to reinvent, but rather embrace the best bits of us that make us unique. It is, after all, what makes the Dame Allan's community so special.

Where to get Exam Support

January will see many of our students undertaking mock exams. Whilst these are important and a trial for 'the real thing', it is important that students don't let exam stress overwhelm them. We'd like to remind your child that:

- all students can reach out to the Pastoral Team if they are stressed and need support or a listening ear. Therapy dog Heidi will also be on hand to offer comfort
- teachers will be available for last minute revision sessions and advice, make the most of them
- there will be time to learn and improve after these exams. They are a benchmark and will help them see where they need to focus and study.



New Tech for Christmas? Be Safety Smart

New phones, tablets and games consoles often top the Christmas wish list in many households. If you've treated your teenager (or younger child) to a new bit of tech for Christmas, follow our top tips to make sure they're being safe with it:

- remind your child never to speak with someone they don't know on their phone or via any social media or chat platform. This may be easier said than done when considering some platforms, such as online chat within video games, but it is a fundamental rule to abide by. If they don't know who is sending them a Whatsapp or a Snapchat, they should know to reach out to a parent or trusted guardian for advice
- turn off any tracking settings. Most devices and social media channels will offer this option within their settings. You can find a comprehensive guide [here](#)



- remind them about the longevity of pictures. Anything they put online can live online forever and can impact their future choices (including university and career options). Remind your child to be smart with what they upload and to never share any pictures with strangers
- we know that smart phones can be addictive. Apps like one sec, which encourage users to pause and take a breath before using social media and other similar applications can help with this.

The charity [Internet Matters](#) is a great resource for more online safety tips, but if you or your child have any concerns about any aspect of their online life, you can reach out to the Pastoral Team for advice and support.

News from the School Nurse

As we begin the new term, I wanted to share some tips on helping your child maintain their health during this crucial period of revision and exams to give them the best possible chance of achieving their potential.

Diet

We all know that we should have a 'good diet' but what exactly does this entail and what does 'five a day' look like? How do we ensure pupils have time to eat breakfast in the mornings and make healthy choices at lunchtimes?

A wealth of information, from portion sizing, to being a good health role model, can be found via the NHS websites [Live Well](#) and [Better Health](#). These are great resources to read and share with your child. If you have any individual concerns regarding your child's dietary intake, please do get in touch with me.

Exercise

Our pupils enjoy a huge range of sporting activities within school to encourage physical activity. We know it can be difficult in the colder, darker months to maintain enthusiasm for exercise, but it is important to maintain movement. Regular exercise has been

shown to improve a child's mental wellbeing as well as their physical health. You can find out more about the recommended daily exercise for children of all ages via this [NHS website](#).

Hydration

Hydration is vital in maintaining focus, concentration and preventing headaches. Please ensure your child has a water bottle to help them stay hydrated: six to eight glasses of water each day is advisable, more if they are unwell or exercising. Remind your child that they should only fill up their water bottle over break and lunchtimes.

Sleep

Getting enough sleep is crucial for balancing mood, maximising focus and consolidating learning. Whilst sleep habits can slip during the holidays, it is important to help your child get back on track now that we have returned to school. An excellent website



School Nurse Mrs Procter

which includes tips, sleep diaries and a helpline which is tailored towards children and teenagers can be found at the [Teen Sleep Hub](#).

Mental Health

Finally, as important as it is to study and revise, relaxation and social activities are just as crucial in helping to create a healthy balance. [Mind](#) offers a vast range of support in this area from tips on relaxation and exam stress, to getting further support when needed. If you feel your child struggles with their wellbeing, please speak to me or a member of their Pastoral Team to discuss support options within school.

Be aware of: Child Domestic Abuse

Leading children's charity NSPCC is raising awareness of child domestic abuse, having seen a 19% surge in calls from adults worried about children being impacted by this issue compared to 2023 stats. More than 500 children also contacted the charity directly about this issue during a recent six-month period.

Child domestic abuse can involve the child directly (eg, threats, violence, coercive control), or it could be the child is affected by witnessing or hearing abuse take place in the home.

Signs that indicate a child may have witnessed or experienced this behaviour include: aggression or bullying;

anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts; bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia; constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers; problems in school or trouble learning; tantrums, or withdrawal.

If you are worried about a child, or need support on this issue, we'd recommend that you reach out to the following helplines. The Pastoral Team can also offer support and sign post children to further help.

For children and adults:
NSPCC Helpline - 0800 800 5000

For children:
Childline Helpline - 0800 1111 or use the [online chat](#)

New SEND Ambassadors Programme

Our Assistant SENDCo, Ms Lopes-Mulhearn, has set up a brand new SEND Ambassadors Programme, which aims to empower our pupils' voice in relation to special education needs and disability, as well as raise awareness of SEND across the Senior School. The recently recruited ambassadors are pupils who have an interest in SEND advocacy for a variety of different reasons.

An early member of the ambassadors group is Rory, who has been a passionate advocate for neurodivergent pupils within the Senior School.

After weeks of research, the ambassadors recently gave their first lunchtime talk in the library on the topic of Disability: Livelihood and Employment, in celebration of Disability History Month 2024.

Following their talk, they also met our recent guests from Percy Hedley College for lunch.



More about SEND

SEND is recognised when a pupil has a learning difficulty or disability where they may require special educational provisions.

SEND may stem from different factors that may cause the person to learn differently. This could be related to physical or sensory, developmental or cognitive differences. SEND conditions include, but are not limited to:

- Autism
- Dyslexia and/or Dyspraxia
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Physical disability e.g. Cerebral Palsy
- Hearing and/or visual impairment
- Learning disability e.g. Down's syndrome
- Medical conditions e.g. epilepsy

New Wellbeing Survey

As part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring the highest possible standards of pastoral care, we are introducing a new wellbeing platform, Govox, in the Senior School.

Govox is a quick and user-friendly mental health survey to support pupil wellbeing and mental health. The survey will help us to identify individual pupils who may need more support, spot any emerging issues, and track change over time for individual pupils and groups.

Pupils will be surveyed each term during form time, using a series of multiple-choice questions based on themes around health, wellbeing and connection. They will receive a personal wellbeing report, including self-help tips, immediately after completing the check. Our pastoral team will be alerted to any potential concerns, and your child will also have the opportunity to request to speak to a member of staff about their wellbeing following each check-in.

How to access Pastoral Support

Advice for pupils

Talk to your Form Tutor: they are there to help! Reach out in person or via their email address. No concern is too small.

Ask the Pastoral Team: you can reach out to them directly, or via email. It's likely you will be taught by one of the team, but if you are not sure who they are, any member of staff will be able to take you to them. You can also speak to Mrs Downie or Ms Shaw.

Whisper: this is an anonymous way to contact the Pastoral Team, which means you can get help completely privately online or via text. Whisper can be found on the pupil wellbeing site, which is accessible by all pupils.

Access The Snug: The Snug offers a range of support to pupils, including sessions with dedicated counsellors, learning support services, and even the support of therapy dog Heidi. The Snug 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 or Mrs Downie.

Seek Peer Mentoring: peer mentoring is offered to younger pupils by our Sixth Formers. They are a lovely group and can help with anything from friendship problems to academic support. Ask your Form Tutor, who can put you in touch with the Peer Mentoring Officers, Abdul and Sophie.

Advice for parents

The pastoral team can be contacted via enquiries@dameallans.co.uk or call the schools directly on 0191 275 0608.

Information for parents and pupils can also be found on the [wellbeing portal](#)



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