



JANUARY 2023

## Happy New Year from Director of Pupil Wellbeing, Jo Downie

**Happy new year and welcome back to a new school term.**

We hope all our pupils have had a restful break and time to reflect on their first term of a new academic year.

It has been great to see so many of our pupils settle into life at Dame Allan's, immersing themselves not just into their timetabled lessons but into their co-curricular endeavours as well.

Last term saw a new cohort of sixth form students sign up to be trained in listening skills and be assigned to mentor younger pupils across the schools. This develops both the sixth formers' skills and supports the younger pupils, helping them settle into life at Dame Allan's.

We also had talks for our Year 12 pupils about consent and a special session about being safe at festivals. As well as this we had talks for Year 9, 10 and 11 around the



long-term impact and consequences of vaping, and special wellbeing assemblies, led by our sixth form mentors.

This term, as well as our strong, regular pastoral provision, we will be celebrating Children's Mental Health Week with a range of talks and activities, so do keep your eyes peeled and encourage your child to get involved.

Wishing you all a productive and successful Lent Term.

# Last term's highlights

Our half term leading up to Christmas was a busy one, with plenty of wellbeing initiatives across school.

As we drew nearer to the end of last term, each pupil in Years 7 - 9 in Dame Allan's Girls School were given an Advent of Kindness bingo card to encourage them to do an act of kindness every day from 1 December until the end of term. It included acts such as: donating to the West End food bank; saying something nice to someone you sit next to; helping to put equipment back after PE; saying thank you to a member of staff or helping out with something at home. There was also a column dedicated to acts of kindness to oneself, a reminder to look after ourselves, something we can forget to do when we are tired.

India from Year 8 told us her favourite act of kindness was having a long bath because it was very relaxing, while Scarlett's (Year 7) favourite act of kindness was giving to a local food bank because it takes some preparation and thought. Lily from Year 9 told us the Advent Calendar of Kindness has made her more mindful of her actions and Fiona from Year 9 told us it made her want to do more acts of kindness.

A success all round and a great way to focus on being kinder not just during the festive season but always.



*Lily, Maya, Fiona (all Year 9).*



*India (Year 8) and Scarlett (Year 7) proudly display their calendars of kindness.*

Higher up the school, we had some great talks around consent and vaping to increase our pupils' understanding of the topics.

As our sixth form students become young adults, the topic of consent is an important one. Dorothea Scales, a former police detective, gave a talk which covered the legal explanation and interpretation of consent using a number of interactive tasks which included discussing scenarios and examples.

Vaping is another issue prevalent amongst young people, with a recent study suggesting that nine percent of 9 - 15 year olds are using e-cigarettes. Back in November, Zoe Shuttleworth, Director of 'It Happens Education' delivered a 'Deep Dive into Vaping' talk to our Year 9 to Year 11 pupils which opened their eyes to the long-term impact of vaping.

Zoe also delivered a special session entitled 'Fun, Freedom and Festivals' to our Year 12 pupils on the adolescent brain rewards systems, risk, recent data around illegal substances and discussed the debate surrounding harm reduction.



# Settling in at Dame Allan's Schools

Last term a number of new pupils joined us. Starting a new school can be a nerve-wracking experience - a new environment, a new timetable, unfamiliar faces. After a term at Dame Allan's we caught up with some pupils to see how they have settled in.

Roshni and Emma from Year 7 both came from different primary schools which meant they were not familiar with Dame Allan's Girls and Boys School. Emma told us she was nervous during her first week but soon made friends. Co-curricular clubs have been a big part of them settling in with Roshni being part of the netball and cooking clubs, and Emma being part of the climbing, science and karate club. The smaller classes are a positive too, with Emma saying it makes it easier to concentrate.

Similarly, the Year 7 boys have jumped into the co-curricular activities with gusto. Seb, Dhilan and Joseph are part of several clubs including football, karate and rowing. They told us one of their favourite things about school is the freedom and responsibility they are given.



*Some of our new Year 7 girls, Emma and Roshni.*



*Some of our new Year 7 boys, Dhilan, Joseph and Seb.*

It's not just the Year 7s who are new starters either. In September we welcomed several new sixth formers including Francesca, who told us she has felt very welcomed into the school. Previously home-schooled, Francesca enjoys a range of co-curricular activities including orchestra and choir. Another new Year 12 starter, Rameen, told us that sixth form has given her the opportunity to push herself and achieve more than she expected 'as the teachers here are willing to help out whenever needed.'

As well as co-curricular activities, our sixth formers have benefitted from our bi-annual "Futures Fair", which offers talks and information sessions around a range of career paths. Rameen told us the fair and careers talks have enhanced her knowledge about the university application process and made her much more confident about applying to study medicine.

# Spotlight on: Sixth Form Mentors

Dame Allan's offers a range of pastoral support, from your child's form tutor, heads of years and pastoral leaders, to our school counsellors and nurse. We also have an art psychotherapist and a therapy dog to help support our pupils.



We find peer support is effective in helping pupils through challenging times, and our latest cohort of sixth form pupils are able to provide this on a one to one basis.

Last term 24 sixth formers chose to do the Peer Mentor and Listening Skills course - a programme described as 'life changing' by Allnian Katy Lyall, who is now studying towards a degree in counselling at Northumbria University.

The 20-week course enables pupils to gain a greater understanding of counselling, mental health, and safeguarding, as well as develop active listening skills that can help build relationships and solve problems.

On completion, they are then matched to younger pupils to support them on a one to one basis as a peer mentor, meeting weekly to offer a listening ear and to work on goal setting and action plans.

Mrs Downie, who has been running the course for the last 13 years, said: "I have adapted the course to include more information on safeguarding and mental health, but at its heart it teaches pupils basic counselling techniques and gives them practical skills to become wellbeing mentors in Year 13.

"Mentors are matched with younger pupils who might need support with things like boosting confidence and self-esteem, organisation, or friendship

issues. The two then meet once a week, in the Snug or the Library, for between six to eight weeks."

Mrs Downie, who delivers the course on Monday lunchtimes throughout the Michaelmas and Lent terms, said it is very popular among pupils completing their Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and those interested in pursuing careers in medicine, dentistry, education and psychology.

She added: "As well as gaining useful inter and intrapersonal skills, another benefit of the course is that pupils become better equipped to help themselves, and their friends, in times of crisis."



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