



APRIL 2024

Conquering Conspiracy Theories

When you're online, can you always tell what is real and what is fake?

One of the most enduring side-effects of our digitally-connected age is the creeping spread of rumour and disinformation. With even adults taken in by slick online influencers - most people now are aware of figures like Andrew Tate who spreads extreme misogynistic views across the internet - and click-bait blog posts, it is essential that young people have a strong level of digital literacy. They live their lives online and therefore need to be wary of what they consume.

Fiction is often more exciting than fact but sometimes the more mundane is actually the truth. Adults need to ensure young people question everything, but must also understand that it is increasingly easy to fall for misinformation as technology advances.

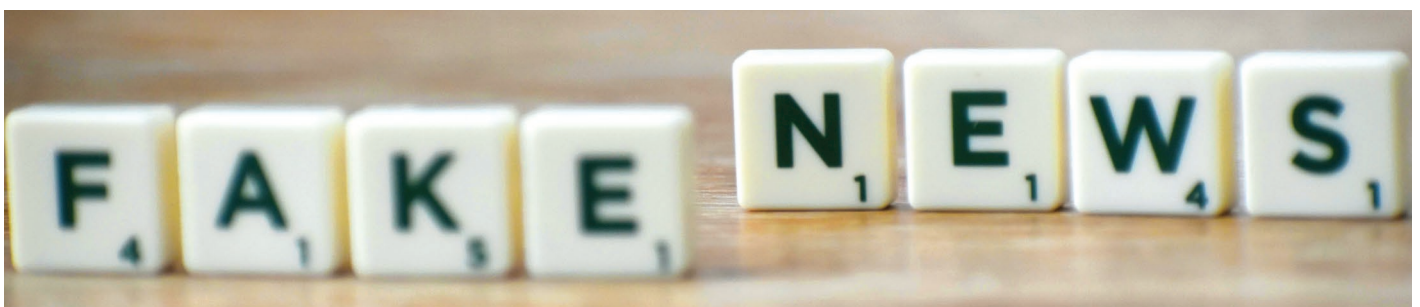
At Dame Allan's, we conduct ongoing learning about digital safety and the limitations and lies of social media. Within school, pupil Chomebooks



are protected with security software to prevent access to harmful content, and all senior staff have completed the [online safety alliance certificate](#).

Social media algorithms are becoming increasingly clever, learning to feed viewers 'edgy' content that will leave them scrolling for longer.

All pupils are encouraged to reach out should they be struggling with something they have seen on social media, or if they are noticing worrying viewpoints amongst their friends or peers. The pastoral teams are always there to offer individual help and clarity and to support the wider year groups with these types of insidious challenges.



We want to make sure that all of our pupils have the skills, confidence and emotional maturity to see such online content for what it is. Often misleading, sometimes dangerous, and definitely not something that should shape their own views.

At home, families can help to support their children to challenge conspiracy theories and misinformation:

- Ask your child to show you some of the influencers they follow on social media. What do they like about each? What do they think that person or company is trying to get them to think or do?
- Try starting a conversation with your child using yourself as a real-life example. Have you ever been misled by fake news? Ask them if this has ever happened to them.
- Ask your child about what they would do if a friend posted something that isn't true on social media. How would they verify the accuracy of the information? What would they do next?
- Emphasise the need to check sources. Who wrote the article, could they be biased? Are there excessive typos or poor grammar? Can you find this information anywhere else?

April is Stress Awareness Month

The power of #LittlebyLittle

Stress can impact people of all ages, whether it is exam stress, social stress, or simply day-to-day stress caused by everyday roadblocks. April is Stress Awareness Month and the theme #LittleByLittle highlights the transformative impact of consistent, small positive actions on overall wellbeing.

We asked our community which little activity helps them to manage their stress:

"I find it useful to get outside as much as I can." - Aidan, Y13

"I really enjoy exercising or baking to relieve stress.

Talking to my friends or family really helps." - Liv, Y13

"Something simple, like meeting friends for a coffee or going on family walks." - Saniya, Y13



Pupils are encouraged to reach out to the pastoral team if they are struggling with stress at any time. The team are there to help, whether it is offering a listening ear, a quiet place to study, or even just a cuddle with therapy dog Heidi (above).

Exercise away Exam Stress

With external exams just around the corner for our Year 11 pupils and Year 13 students, exam stress and anxiety may be creeping in. One of the best ways to relieve this stress (apart from revising well!) is by taking time out for some exercise and movement.

It may seem like an additional thing to add to your to-do list, but getting moving for even a short period of time can create mood-lifting endorphins, allow you to get out of your head, and can even allow for time with friends and family (if it is a team sport). Taking a pause from revision will also allow your brain to rest, leaving you refreshed and ready to tackle the next chunk of your study plan.

If you're after a gentle mental break, why not try yoga?

Or, take a run or brisk walk in the sunshine to get your heart (and mood) rising.



A Boost to Body Image



Children can be particularly vulnerable to this sort of media, especially during adolescence when their bodies are changing and they may be feeling insecure. Both boys and girls can be equally impacted, and this can have a significant toll on their confidence and mental health.

At Dame Allan's, we ensure that every pupil takes part in sporting activity, and emphasise a strong, healthy body as the most important thing. Pupils will also learn more about body image in their PSHE lessons.

If your child seems overly worried about how they look, are covering parts of their body, not wanting to change in PE, or showing a preoccupation with food and diet, they may be dealing with this issue.

Struggles with body image are often 'low-level' and can be overcome with support, however in some cases, the symptoms above can develop into disordered eating. We'd always recommend that a child talks to a trusted adult if they are struggling with body image - whether a member of the pastoral team, the School Nurse,

As the warmer weather approaches, we all have the urge to change up our wardrobe, and may be thinking more about our fashion choices and appearance. You'll also notice more and more social media or advertising fashion or fitness content featuring so-called perfect 'summer bodies'.

a teacher, or a parent - to allow them to access the support they need.

Generally, there are a few important messages you can also share with your child to help boost their body confidence:

- Be aware of the language you use when talking about different bodies (including your own body) or talking about certain foods. Labelling food 'bad' or 'naughty' can have a negative impact.
- Encourage your child to interact with a range of role models with differing body types. These could be body positive influencers, singers or actors, to show them that all different kinds of bodies are valid. You could even discuss the idea of image editing software, and how what they see on social media is often not real.
- Explore image and diet with a focus on health, rather than aesthetic. Eg - We're having broccoli with our dinner because it is healthy and full of vitamin C. We're going for a walk together as it will be fun and give us some feel-good endorphins, as opposed to a need to 'be good' or 'get rid of calories'.

Introduction to Whisper

The Senior School is trialling a new method to allow pupils to access pastoral support, completely anonymously.

Whisper will allow pupils to contact the pastoral team via an anonymous web platform to ask for help, whether you're struggling with friendship issues, worries about schoolwork, or even something at home.

The pastoral team will share more about this new system very shortly.

A notice on allergies

Our School Nurse, Mrs Procter, would like to remind everyone that Dame Allan's is a nut-free school, and asks that you please keep this in mind when providing any snacks for your child.

Nuts may be a healthy choice, but our nut-free policy protects the significant number of pupils within the school who do suffer from a nut allergy.

Thank you!

Neurodiversity Celebration Week



Last half term saw Neurodiversity Celebration Week (18 - 24 March), a worldwide initiative which challenges stereotypes and celebrates strengths brought by neurodivergence.

At Dame Allan's, we are proud to support pupils with any needs or accommodations that stem from neurodivergence.

Our pastoral team has specialists who work with neurodiverse pupils, including our art psychotherapist and counsellor. Our dedicated SEN coordinators also work one-on-one with pupils who may have differing learning needs. These teams operate from The Snug, a cosy and quiet area of the school that is dedicated to pastoral support.

The Senior School careers team also helped to mark Neurodiversity Celebration Week by signposting staff and pupils to a series of educational webinars surrounding neurodivergence. Topics ranged from neurodiversity at work, to creating a neuro-inclusive classroom, and how neurodivergence can fuel creativity.

This awareness week aimed to change the narrative around neurodiversity, showing that individuals living with conditions such as ADHD, Autism, or dyslexia have their own unique strengths and abilities:

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder affects an estimated 5-10% of children. Pupils with ADHD may struggle with maintaining focus, fidgeting and impulsivity.

Strengths: ADHD can allow hyper-focus on tasks that interest the individual, it can also allow for greater creativity and adaptability due to unique patterns of thought.

AUTISM

Autism is often characterised by challenges with social interaction and communication, such as reading social cues. It is a spectrum neurodivergence, meaning it impacts individuals differently, some with more mild traits, and some more severe.

Strengths: Attention to detail and the ability to hyper-focus on a particular task or topic, exceptional memory skills and a unique outlook on the world that can aid innovation.

DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia primarily impacts skills involved in reading and spelling. It's estimated up to 1 in 10 people in the UK have some level of dyslexia and it often runs in families.

Strengths: Problem solving is a key skill for people with dyslexia, who have often needed to adapt to their challenges to communicate. They are often creative and can see the 'big picture' when coming up with new ideas.*

*Source: <https://lexic.com/resources/>



DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS
building the future

North East Independent School of the Year

SUNDAY TIMES PARENT POWER 2023

