

A unique setting for the study of  
Environmental Science



**Dorset**  
Studio School



Autumn Newsletter - November 2024



### ► Message from the Principal

Dear Parent / Carer,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you our Autumn term newsletter. I really hope you enjoy it. I know that I write this every time, but I remain simply blown away by the education on offer to our students!

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you, our parents and carers for your ongoing and steadfast support of the school. This was most recently demonstrated through the attendance of hundreds of parents at our Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 information evenings, through the wonderful support of our Awards Evening this year, and just last week through the way you all came together to work with us to get students home safely after we had to close the school due to adverse weather. Thank you!

The future continues to look bright, with record breaking numbers of parents attending our recent open events. Over 500 people attended all told.

I am pleased to report that there is much on the horizon too. Year 11 students are completing mock examinations as we speak, and our year 10 students are busy completing synoptic assessments in both Travel and Tourism and

Animal Care. These assessments will form key components of their examination and qualification success.

Zero club remains on the calendar, with students who have remained free of any negative behaviour points all term, set to benefit soon!

Our Berlin trip departs in just a few weeks' time, and we look forward to our school Christmas concert at Stinsford Church on the 5th December.

I would also give early notice that there is a year 11 Parent Teacher Consultation evening on Wednesday 18th December.

In the meantime, if you are yet to follow us on Facebook, please do look us up. I wish you all a very happy Christmas when it arrives.

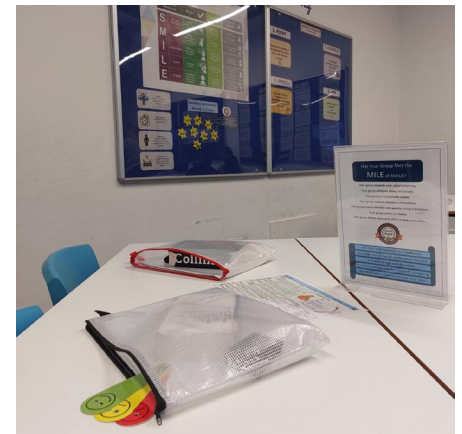
With very kind regards

P A Green  
Principal

### ► Teaching and Learning

Our Teaching and Learning focus this term has been all around teachers checking for understanding. This enables us to make sure that all students have understood the teaching before moving on to new content, making sure no student is left behind.

We have invested in new classroom resources to make sure students are well equipped to quickly and easily show their teachers what they think the correct answer is. Mini white board packs and red-amber-green traffic light cards are now available in every classroom to support learning.



In our most recent student survey 83% of students said they have noticed a change in the way their lessons are being delivered with the use of mini white boards and red, amber, green cards regularly becoming a feature in their lessons. Students also said they enjoy using these interactive resources as part of their learning.

Key tools for making sure students understand key knowledge and ideas in each subject are the Knowledge Organisers created by staff and available to parents and students in the Teaching and Learning section of our website.



## ► Science

Our new Year 7 have made an excellent start to their journey into the world of science. Lessons this half term have been focused on two of the most important foundations; the core idea that all matter is made of particles is key to much of physics and chemistry; the discovery that all life is based on cells is at the heart of biology. These key topics will continue to be built upon and developed over the next five years.

Year 8 have been focusing on healthy diets and our digestive system and also the structure of the periodic table and how it has helped us to understand the similarity in properties of some elements.



In October, we were delighted to welcome Timothy Stevens from Wessex Water to run a series of workshops for some of our year 8 students. They looked at the role of the company in supplying fresh water and treating waste water. They also discussed the issues and the impacts on the land and environment and the

local economy. The students were then set the challenge of designing and building a water supply network taking into account the costs and environmental impacts.



The students will have the opportunity to further develop these themes in their humanities and science lessons later this year. In the summer we hope all of the year group will choose to go on the trip to Monkey World and we have started the process of learning about the other primates and how we relate to them.

Year 9 have started their science GCSE course. Some have found this step change in the difficulty of the work a challenge whilst others have revelled in the academic rigour. As we work through the year and students develop a broad and secure understanding of the content of this course I hope they will also think carefully about how science relates to their other subjects and the schools' specialism. The work in Years 10 and 11 very much builds on the foundations laid in Year 9 and this is a critical time for the students.

Year 10 have been studying ecology from a scientific perspective. This has enabled them to more securely see how science relates to their other subjects and the school's specialism. They have also been looking at how atoms combine to make different types of molecules. Which you start to realise is extremely important when we consider the positive and negative aspects of synthetic and natural chemicals on the environment. In their physics lessons they have been looking at forces and their effects. In the first two weeks at the start of the next half term year ten will be going to the Sutton Bingham reservoir to see the water treatment process as part of their GCSE science course.

Year 11 have started the final topics and for them this is going to be a busy year. With two mock exams to monitor their progress and a significant amount of material to revise and learn there is plenty of work for them to be doing at home. The Seneca learning platform is something they can access on any digital device and they can use it to revise topics from any part of the course. It will be a challenging year for many but, we believe that with the right approach to their studies all the students can achieve their goals.

Mr Hampshire - Head of Science



### ► Maths

At key stage 3, students have been learning where maths is applied to other subjects; using formulae for compound measures from science such as pressure, density and speed; scale drawings from geography; in conjunction with English looking at the prefixes associated with metric units, and what these have in common with words we use for animals, such as millipedes and megalodons.

Students have been acting out the movements described in distance time graphs for each other to draw, and have been understanding symmetry through reflection and origami.

Year 10 have started their GCSE curriculum and have been learning about indices used in units of measurements, and more complex maths vocabulary such as reciprocals.

Year 11 are approaching the end of the course and are honing their skills in applying what they have learnt in their time at DSS to the challenges of their GCSE papers. In this respect, our November mock exam series is a vital opportunity to rehearse the preparation and exam technique necessary to achieve their target grades in the summer term.

Mr James - Head of Maths

### ► English

Our Year 7 students began their time with us by looking at the World War One story *Private Peaceful*. The story is told from the point of view of the fictional character Thomas "Tommo" Peaceful, a young man from a rural village in England who fights in the First World War. Given our own rural setting, it has been interesting for our students to see how rural areas were affected by the First World War as well as developing their understanding of the greater conflict itself as we prepared to commemorate Remembrance Day.

Year 8 started by looking at George Orwell's *Animal Farm* – the classic story about the abuse of power and individual greed. As well as exploring characters and themes in the novel, the students have discussed political systems and the benefits (and drawbacks) of both socialism and capitalism. In their assessment work, students created their own dystopian stories in the style of *Animal Farm* using descriptive and narrative writing skills.

Year 9 began the year with their unit on Greek Mythology, so as well as reading classic Greek myths and understanding some of the elements of Greek drama they have also written their own stories based on the fall from grace of a tragic hero

for the modern era (often in an agricultural setting!).

Year 10 have started their study of GCSE with *An Inspector Calls*. As well as taking roles and performing as characters in the play, we have explored key themes and the context of the play approaching exam-style questions and using the PEEL system to analyse and evaluate the author's use of literary devices.

Year 11 have been studying *Macbeth* this half term in preparation for the November mock exams and final summer exams. As well as reading scenes together to practise their drama skills, we have watched various interpretations of the text and spoken about the roles of various characters.

Mr Blake - Head of English

### ► The Arts

This term The Arts department began their new curriculum with Miss Ping teaching music and Mrs Hill teaching art.

Music - In music, the Year 7s have been studying the elements of rhythm and melody and have started to apply this knowledge to a keyboard performance of 'Oh When the Saints.'

Relating to Black History Month,



Year 8 students have been studying the origins and features of The Blues. This will culminate in class performances featuring chords and an improvisation using the Blues Scale in the coming weeks.

Arts dates for your diary:

Thursday December 5th, 6pm  
Christmas Celebration at  
Stinsford Church

Wednesday December 11th,  
10 - 11am  
Year 7 Christmas Celebration

Mrs Ping - Head of Music

Art - Year 7 have been studying the formal elements of Art, using a range of art skills and materials including paper collage, tonal drawings, animal drawings.

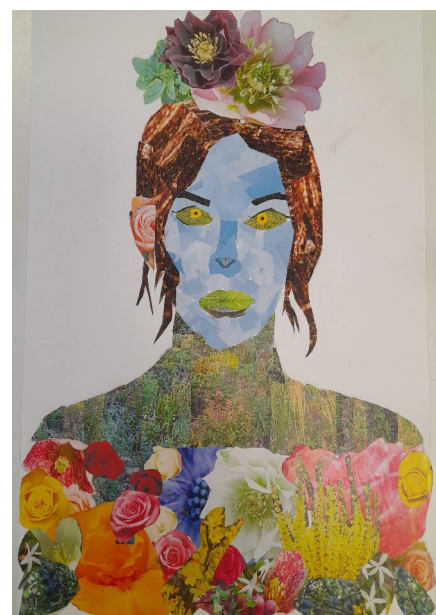
We have also studied work by Rosalind Monks, who combines the use of line and pattern to interpret the shapes and forms of insects, birds and other animals.

Year 8 have been focusing on Natural Forms and have worked on developing their colour mixing, clay work (producing rock pool pinch pots) and even printing their own wallpaper in the style of William Morris. Their homework (see photos) was based on work by the 16th century Italian artist Giuseppe Archimboldo, whose



imaginative portraiture created entirely from images of fruits, vegetables, flowers and animals was hundreds of years ahead of its time when we consider the composite Photoshop images that we see in the media today.

Mrs Hill – Head of Art



### ► Humanities

It's been another extremely busy term in Humanities with students producing some outstanding work across board in key stages 3 and 4.

Our Year 7 students have settled in and completed baseline tests in both history and geography. They have been engaged in learning about the UK with specific focus on the weather and the varying British landscapes within 'Our Island' home. They have developed map interpretation skills and learnt how to read four and six figure grid references...a skill that is vital to be successful in GCSE Geography later in their academic journey. This half term they have moved on to a unit studying the successful Norman invasion of England in 1066.

Year 8 students have been studying the impact of the British Empire and have spent a lot of time exploring the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. They have used sources to investigate the terrible journey endured by Africans being transported to the Americas; looking at how they were sold and then treated on the plantations of the Caribbean and the southern United States. Importantly, they have investigated the emancipation movement and learnt how and why the slaves eventually secured their freedom.



Year 9 students have been studying the rise in popularity of the Nazis in Germany in the 1920's and 1930's. They have completed timelines mapping how the Nazis eventually came to power in 1933 and explored the appeal of fascism during this period of history. They have also investigated this appeal and explored the impact it had on minority groups within Nazi Germany. Later this academic year they will focus specifically on the Holocaust and consider the lessons learnt from this catastrophic human tragedy.

Our Year 10 students have settled well into their GCSE studies and have been working on the GCSE Paper 1 topic – Natural Hazards. Here they have learnt about both tectonic and weather hazards around the world and within the UK. I want to give a special mention to Amber W, Lexi B and Joshua H who produced some fabulous work on this topic.



The recent devastation of Hurricane Milton's in Florida, the extreme weather event causing

flooding in Eastern Spain, along with the snowfall and flooding we have experienced in Dorset this month, have provided a sobering insight into the terror caused by natural hazards and served as a stark reminder as to the potential problems caused by the increase of unpredictable weather events.



Meanwhile, Year 11 Geography students have been completing their urbanisation case study work on Rio de Janeiro and Southampton, whilst in Travel & Tourism, they have been working on their Component 2 synoptic assessments which make up 30% of their final grade. In addition, students are now preparing for their GCSE mock exams which begin this week.

Mr Dearden - Head of Humanities

### ► Land & Environment

Year 7 Forest School - For a school with over 50 feeder schools, forest school plays a vital role in helping the children form positive friendships. Team games, collective challenges, adventure, crafts and exploration

all intertwine to help form those all-important social bonds which often last into year 11 and beyond. The forest school team were particularly proud of the warm welcome back Ewan received from his peers. All mucked in and made him an all-day breakfast sandwich which as you can see, went down very well!



Year 8 Land & Environment lessons have been comparing coniferous and deciduous woodlands by visiting Puddletown woods. Incorporated into these sessions has been some important team building activities which are building important employability skills such as planning, review and improve process.





In Land Based Studies, Year 9s have been learning the farming calendar and its seasonal jobs. Here year 9 are learning how the use the sheep race to carry out health checks including how to carry out a conditioning score to assess whether it is fair to put the ewe to the ram in another round of production. The red X indicates that this ewe was too thin and had lumps in her teats showing scar tissue from mastitis. She had to go!



Year 10 Land Based Studies - Huge thanks extend to yet another business in our local area - The Watercress Company - for bringing our curriculum off the page and into real life. Year 10 students visited the Tincleton-based business at harvest time to understand how the chalk geology plays a vital role in creating the perfect conditions for this water-based crop. Students saw their ingenious germination technique before having a demonstration of the

bespoke harvester which jiggled away the bugs therefore negating the needs for pesticide use on this superfood.



Another huge thank you extends to Ralph Messenger at Galton Manor Farm in Owermoigne for allowing our Year 11 to visit and explore his diversified farm. Students learnt how Ralph has worked with governmental agencies including Natural England and The Environment Agency to slowly transform his intensive dairy farm to organic beef, solar farm, camping and holiday lets – it was incredible to see how what was an intensively engineered piece of land was now a wetland providing vital habitat to nature and flood alleviation to Wareham and Wool.



### ► Animal Care

At our Kingston Maurward campus, the students in key stage 3 have been learning about the correct methods of handling animals. As part of the course students must handle the following groups of animals: large animal, small animal, birds, reptiles and invertebrates. The students have been learning how to handle rabbits and calves appropriately. The students have also learnt how to use handling equipment such as halters making sure they are fitted correctly on the calves. Some students have progressed to using weighing scales and recording their weights in order to calculate growth rates in the future.

At Poundbury, our year 11 students have been completing their BTEC animal care synoptic assessments for component 2 (Animal housing and accommodation). Students have had to show how to set up a vivarium for a corn snake using the correct fixtures and fittings. They have also had to demonstrate how to clean out giant African land sail accommodation. There are also reports that have to be completed, which review their practical tasks. In addition, there is a report that the students have completed on the factors affecting the selection of animal accommodation and how it meets the 5 welfare needs.



► Physical Education

Dorset Leadership Academy 2024

Eight students, four from year nine and four from year eight were selected to attend the Dorset Leadership Academy 2024, held at Bryanston school on the 22nd of October.

The year eight students attended a Sport Leaders workshop that developed leadership skills through a range of games and activities. The workshops were based around six key principles: Communication, Co-operation, Responsibility, Safety, Organisation and Enjoyment.

The year nine students attended Young Ambassador workshops and a conference that developed their ability to be role models to advocate PE and sport in their schools.



Yr 8 students - Milo A, Harry SA, Leanna C, Belle G

Yr 9 students - Honor R, Lily E, Achilles C and Harry S

National Fitness Day - Rowing



At the end of September, 38 students from years 7-9 took part in a Rowing challenge. The challenge was to see who could row the furthest in 1 minute. The student who rowed the furthest was Harry S, with a distance of 328 meters. The event took place over lunch time, to highlight National Fitness day.

Even Mr Chapman and Mr Canham got involved!



Year 8 Cross Country Success

Off the back of the impromptu snow day and following Storm Bert, the PE Department had the



pleasure of taking eight of our Year 8 students to a cross-country fixture at Budmouth Academy. We are incredibly proud of their effort, determination, and sportsmanship as they tackled the challenging course.

A huge thank you to Budmouth Academy for hosting such a fantastic event – our students loved the experience!



Well done to everyone who represented our school so brilliantly.

County Selection



Congratulations to Year 10 student Jess W, who was selected to represent the Dorset County Rowing team, and subsequently competed in the National County Rowing Championships in Plymouth in October

Following a successful application she attended trials in August, and was then invited to represent Dorset in the Under 14 girls category, finishing a very creditable third place!

Congratulations also to Harry S, who has once again this year been selected for the Dorset County Hockey Team.



Harry plays for Bournemouth at the weekends but is now looking forward to some regional tournaments coming up in November.

Really well done Harry on a fantastic achievement

► **National Schools Equestrian Association - NSEA**

In mid September, Beau W took part in a qualifier for DSS in the NSEA National Schools Show Jumping Championships at Moreton Equestrian Centre. Although she narrowly missed out on qualifying for the finals, she completed a clear round and did herself proud.



Well done Beau!

First dressage rider for the new Dorset Studio School NSEA team was Poppy E riding her own pony Neuaddparc Welsh Dream with a calmly ridden test. Pony and rider sparkled in the sunshine at Moreton Equestrian Centre. They are a great team and one to watch for the future!



The first competitor of the second half-term for the Dorset Studio School NSEA team was Darcie E riding her own pony Solo. Pony and rider worked beautifully together to produce two clear rounds at the Kings Sedgemoor Equestrian Centre. Watching the smooth flowing ride and Darcie's calm and confident style it is clear to see that there is a lot of potential here.



Well done all and a big thank you to our NSEA Link Teacher Mr Hampshire for all of his support.

► **Personal Development**

Report by Keila A, Year 10:

Dorset Studio School recently welcomed three Members of Parliament to the Kingston



Maurward campus as part of the school's commitment to UK Parliament week.



Student hosts gave the visitors a tour of school and encouraged them to see lessons in action, including one of the specialist sessions, unique to this centre of excellence for environmental sciences.



MPs Edward Morello (West Dorset - Liberal Democrat), Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole - Liberal Democrat) and Lloyd Hatton (South Dorset - Labour) enjoyed hearing about the growth of the school, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. They also lent their support towards the school's long campaign to secure much needed new accommodation.

"It's a fantastic institution that is disadvantaged due to a lack of facilities," voiced Edward Morello.



Currently housed on a split site, the school has secured ministerial funding and approval for a new build and now awaits final confirmation from the newly elected government. "We meet the needs of a diverse intake of students from across the entire county," said Principal, Paul Green. "This is a unique school with a curriculum that meets the needs of many rural communities." Vikki Slade noted, "It's been inspiring to see the love of learning and passion of students as well as staff."



Chair of Governors, Andy Daw said, "During its short history the school has continued to go from strength to strength. This new building will enable us to take the important next steps towards providing a world class education for our students. We are very grateful for the support of Members of Parliament from across Dorset."

#### ► Careers

We were delighted to welcome local employers to Dorset Studio School's Poundbury site on the 20th November, for our annual KS4 careers event.



Organisations representing a wide range of industries across the region, worked with students in years 10 and 11, to give an insight into the extensive employment opportunities and career progression routes available to them, both locally and nationally.



Real life scenarios, discussions, practical activities and some high tech machinery brought the world of employment to life for the young people.



Employer engagement is an important strand of the school's curriculum provision. These events provide opportunities to apply learning, deepen understanding and establish a focus for the future.



Dorset Studio School would like to thank the following organisations for their support:

- Knighton Countryside Management
- Wessex Water
- George Crook Services

- Lynwood School of Veterinary Nursing
- Dorset Council – Animal Health
- Friars Moor Farm Animal Veterinary Services
- Dorset Council – Outdoor Recreation
- Tilbury Douglas (building, infrastructure, engineering and fit-out company)
- MJ Frys Agricultural Engineers

### Children In Need Ramble

The annual Dorset Studio School Ramble in aid of Children In Need was a roaring success!



Dorset Studio School students rambled their way around the 750 acre Kingston Maurward Estate in aid of Children In Need Ramble on Friday 15th November. Bathed in autumnal sunshine, students followed a trail of Pudsey posters to complete a circuit of the estate.

Students were rewarded with

mountains of cake which had been donated by parents and guardians for the bake sale. This beat all previous records to raise £365!



A huge thank you to our determined young people and their generous donations.

### ► Community engagement



Congratulations to Dorset Studio School Year 11 student Ruben, who was presented with the Dorset Police Cadet of the Year Award at their annual awards ceremony.

Having served in his local Police Cadet Unit for the last two years,



Ruben gives selflessly of his time in order to help others. We are so pleased that he has been deservedly recognised in this way. He has also been nominated for a South West Regional Award. We wish him much luck.

Also congratulations to Dorset Studio School year 11 student, Thomas M, who as an air cadet in 1032 Squadron, cleaned up at their annual squadron dinner and awards.

Thomas was promoted to corporal, alongside winning Cadet of the Year and Cadet's Cadet of the Year.



The awards were presented by guest of honour Air Marshall Sir Christopher Coville.

A truly fantastic and well deserved achievement.

► **World Mental Health Day**

On 10th October, Dorset Studio School celebrated World Mental Health Day through the "Hello Yellow" initiative to show young people they're not alone with

their mental health.



Right now, we appreciate that the world is a really tough place for children and young people to grow up in. We want young people to know that they don't have to go through this alone.

Things can get better. Because we stand brighter, together.

**Wellbeing activities: being kind to yourself - British Red Cross**

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/wellbeing-activities-being-kind-to-yourself/>

A set of activities from the British Red Cross to help young people to be kind to themselves and look after their own wellbeing.

**Self-care resources - Anna Freud**

<https://www.annafreud.org/resources/children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/self-care/>

A collection of strategies and activities for young people to support them to boost and look after their mental wellbeing.

**My self-care plan - Anna Freud**

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/my-self-care-plan-secondary/?searchTerm=self+care>

A set of simple activities and a step-by-step guide to help young people create their own self-care plan.

► **Working together to support young people to build emotional resilience**

At Dorset Studio School our whole school curriculum and pastoral team are organised to provide age appropriate guidance for our young people as they navigate our ever changing society.

We also work closely with the local NHS Mental Health in Schools Team (MHST) where pupils may need additional support, and this term we have built on this enhanced provision by signing up to the Schools and Colleges Early Support Service (SCESS) from Anna Freud, which provides CBT-based support via online practitioners.

Our partnership with parents and carers is essential in our wider support, and we would like to share with you the following two guides which provides tips and advice that we can all use in our day-to day support of our young people. As always, if you have any worries or concerns for your child, please do not hesitate in contacting us.

# 10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

## SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO BUILD EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

With increasing societal pressures, many children struggle with managing emotions, facing challenges and processing failure in a healthy way. This is why building emotional resilience in young people is vital for their mental health and personal success. This guide provides practical strategies for parents and educators to help children develop resilience and foster confidence, adaptability and a positive mindset.

### 1 ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Regularly engaging children in open dialogue fosters trust and emotional expression. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings freely without judgment. Set aside time daily, perhaps during dinner, to ask open-ended questions such as, "What's made you happy today?". This encourages children to express themselves openly.

### 2 MODEL POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Children often learn how to manage emotions by observing adults. By modelling calm and positive responses to challenges, you can teach them valuable emotional management skills. If you've had a difficult day, verbalise how you're feeling and explain how you plan to handle it, such as "I'm a bit worked-up, so I'm going for a walk to clear my mind."

### 3 TEACH PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Helping children break down challenges into manageable steps encourages a proactive mindset. Explain that every problem has a solution, even if it's not immediately obvious. For example, if a child is stuck on homework, support them in breaking the task into smaller steps, saying things like "Let's focus on just this first question for now."

### 4 FOSTER A GROWTH MINDSET

Encourage young people to view mistakes as learning opportunities. A growth mindset helps them see setbacks as part of the process, rather than something to be upset about. After a child loses a game or performs poorly on a test, for example, ask them what they've learned from the experience. This reinforces the idea that effort – and even failure – leads to improvement.

### 5 PROMOTE SELF-CARE PRACTICES

Teaching children about self-care helps them understand the importance of balancing work with relaxation to maintain emotional wellbeing. Parents and carers could start a screen-free hour before bedtime where the family engages in relaxing activities like reading, setting an example to the child for how to unwind.

### 6 BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Strong relationships with peers and adults provide a support system that enhances resilience. Encourage positive, respectful interactions to develop social skills. Playdates or group activities can be instrumental in teaching children how to resolve conflicts with friends by modelling and practicing calm communication.

### 7 SUPPORT EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

Helping children to identify and name their emotions allows them to manage those feelings more effectively. When a child's upset, encourage them to talk to you about what they're feeling in an empathetic and supportive manner, and ask them why they might be experiencing these emotions.

### 8 ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

Giving children opportunities to make their own decisions boosts confidence and problem-solving skills. A good example of this would be letting children choose and pack their own lunches for school, guiding them with options but allowing them to assume responsibility for the task to help them take ownership.

### 9 DEVELOP COPING STRATEGIES

Teaching children techniques like mindfulness, deep breathing or journaling can help them to manage stress. Show them how to perform breathing exercises when they're feeling anxious, and practise this regularly. Reinforcing this behaviour in young people will make it easier for them to use these techniques of their own accord during stressful moments.

### 10 CELEBRATE SMALL WINS

Recognising effort, no matter how small, reinforces perseverance and encourages children to keep trying. After a child completes a difficult task, makes progress on a project or reaches another type of personal goal, praise their efforts. Emphasise the hard work they've put in and be sure to let them know how proud you are!

## Meet Our Expert

Adam Gillett is Associate Vice Principal for Personal Development at Penistone Grammar School and works on secondment one day a week for Minds Ahead, which works with schools on improving their mental health provisions.



#WakeUpWednesday®

The National College®

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so entralls young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

## 1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

## 2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

## 3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

## 4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

## 5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

## 6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

## 7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

## 8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

## 9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

## 10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

## Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Aziz is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of *The Rainbow Within*, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.



Sources: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-63204605>  
<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-algorithms/>

**NOS** National Online Safety®  
#WakeUpWednesday