

Issue 7

October 2023

DBSEH

HALF-TERMLY JOURNAL

ENJOY • ASPIRE • ACHIEVE

MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Parents,

Welcome to Issue 7 of the Half-Termly Journal. As this edition has come together I have been struck by the incredible progress we have made as a school over the last year with regards to student agency.

Increasingly I find myself engaging with our students on ideas they have, or initiatives they'd like to roll out to improve their school experience. I was even taken to task by Year 6 students who stood their ground recently around particular leadership opportunities they felt strongly about, and made changes accordingly!

Throughout these pages you'll spot that the theme of agency is not limited to the section with the same name: it's permeating throughout, just as it is in school. Students are stepping up to the plate and making their voices heard, and it's exciting to be a part of.

They've even muscled in on the action in the Half-Termly Journal itself and will continue to do so, as we welcome our first student-written article in our closing pages.

I hope you enjoy, and wish you all a restful half-term break,

Sarah Reynolds



Sarah Reynolds
Principal



@dubaibritishsch



Dubai British School



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Our new secondary library, pictured here, has been kindly refurbished by the PTA to provide our students with a beautiful, quiet space to take time out of their busy lives to enjoy the tranquility of a book

WELLBEING

MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH

We started the academic year with an incredible set of A-Level results that saw 98% of our students securing places at their first choice universities (see our final section, 'Excellence' for more information). Whilst we clearly prepare our students well academically for the next stage of their education, our Head of Sixth Form Emma Pennock reflected on what more we could be doing to prepare students for the move away from school and into adulthood.

Year 13 already receive practical life skills instruction on areas such as first aid, cooking on a budget and how to open a bank account, but what Mrs Pennock felt would also benefit the students would be the teaching of practical strategies to support, maintain and improve their mental wellbeing. Particularly to help students with the stresses that come when moving into tertiary education, as well as all the life changes that accompany such a move.



Consequently, our Sixth Form students now receive weekly directed sessions from form tutors to help them understand themselves; recognising what matters to them – their values, how they handle certain situations, where their vulnerabilities lie, and how they might overcome them. These sessions, wrapped up with the delightfully alliterative title ‘Mindfulness Mondays’ allow for students to identify areas for growth which they can follow up in one-to-one sessions with their tutor.



Mrs Pennock, along with other sixth form pastoral staff, say that these sessions have been warmly received by students and are a highlight of the week for them. Complemented by external visitors, such as the ‘Mental Health Warrior’ who provided practical tips on advice on what to say (and what not to) if you notice a friend is struggling, as well as knowing when to ask for help yourself, our students are adding a new feather to their bow when it comes to the skills that they will take with them as they leave us and begin the next, more independent, stage of their education.



mind your health

**Mental Health First Aid & Wellbeing
training programmes and packages
for schools and businesses**



Sending the message out beyond the Sixth Form, Head Peer Mentor Mathilde took to the stage this week to bring the importance of mental health to the wider school community. To mark World Mental Health Day, Mathilde drew students' attention to this year's theme of 'Mental Health in an Unequal World' through a series of assemblies to different age groups.

To have students teaching students about such crucial issues not only empowers the student leader but also allows for recipients to hear someone 'like them' talk on the matter, which supports greater engagement and retention of the subject.

We are proud to see our students taking the lead so authentically, and engaging students in learning that will benefit them both now and in the future.



AGENCY

I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.

Michael Jordan

ASPIRATIONAL AMBASSADORS

The start of the school year has seen our student body chomping at the bit to represent the school more than ever before. Whether it be a sports squad, cheerleading team, rock band, School Council representative or House Captain our students are clearly placing themselves in the driving seat of their school experience and demonstrating the courage and resilience required to 'put themselves out there' and take the jump, not knowing quite how they will land.

Undertaking trials and auditions for leadership roles can be both exciting and challenging. They provide students with an opportunity to step out of their comfort zones, face new experiences, and discover their hidden potential. The process of trials and auditions allows students to showcase their unique talents and abilities, while also learning valuable lessons about perseverance, resilience, and the importance of embracing failure as a stepping stone towards growth.



Of course, the benefits of student agency and leadership extend beyond personal growth. By offering a wide range of leadership positions, we create a vibrant and inclusive community where every student has the opportunity to contribute and make a difference. Through their leadership roles, students become role models, inspiring their peers and younger students to strive for excellence and actively participate in school life.

Having collected data over time on where our students' interests lie we can see that demand for the opportunity to represent the school is increasing, and whilst this is a great metric for the school's ever-growing success it also means that more students were left disappointed this term, with increased numbers of students trying out for the same number of positions as previous years.



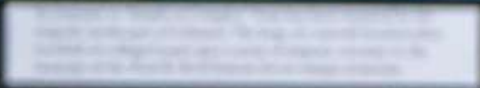


Whilst we know that failure is an important part of learning, as Michael Jordan makes clear in his quote, we also want to ensure that we are not extinguishing any embers of enthusiasm before they have had chance to turn into a flame.

Therefore, please be assured that this surge in demand has been well noted, students' voices have been heard and school leaders are working hard behind the scenes to ensure that more opportunities are available to more students in the near future.

Watch this space...!





OPPORTUNITY



YOU SAID: WE DID

Since returning to normality last year, the first academic year of uninterrupted learning since 2018, we worked hard to bring back 'Joy' in a big way; this meant we focused on doing all we could to provide every single student with something to look forward to during their school week. These opportunities came through the weekly timetable, the ECA programme, day trips and residentials – both in the UAE and overseas, and sure enough, we have a lot of happy students as a result.

In their wake we know that many of you, our wonderful parent body, would also like 'in' on the joy agenda, so this year we are working hard to get you back over the threshold and into the beating heart of school life again.



In our parent survey towards the end of last year a whopping 17% of you who responded (representative of approximately 4% of our parent populus) expressed a desire for more opportunities to talk to the teachers about your child, either in the form of more parent teacher meetings, or simply more face-to-face time. As a direct result of this, our school leaders have been busy shuffling school priorities to enable staff to spend their time providing you with what you need to best help your child at home.



In the secondary school – where logistics around consultations become particularly challenging – we have disaggregated professional development days for staff to allow time for parents to come into school with their child to facilitate a powerful three-way dialogue between teacher, student, and parent, while still offering online learning opportunities throughout the day.

In the primary school the Term 1 consultations have evolved to offer face to face meetings as well as online meetings, which we know are still important to support many of our working parents. In Term 2 we have an assigned face to face consultation day at the end of the first half term, which will also engage with students directly as agents of their own learning.

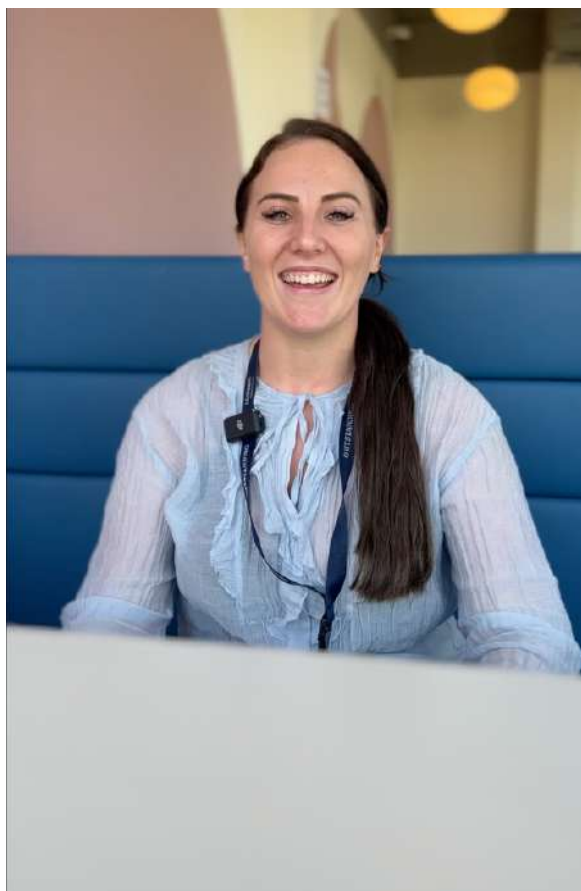


We will review the impact of the changes we have made to parent teacher meetings at the end of the year and will once again welcome your feedback. As with the introduction of any new element to school life, we can't add more in without taking something away. The balancing act required of leaders must ensure that the ingredients which create a successful school year all directly contribute to supporting students in achieving their potential. We are hopeful that the support parents will be able to provide to their child as a direct result of greater opportunity to engage with the academic team will make this impact clear.



INCLUSION

Everyone is Different. Everyone is Welcome



The tagline from our school Inclusion Week this year struck a chord with so many of our community members who used it as a starting point for courageous conversations around their own vulnerabilities, most notably Miss Poneskis, Head of Year 7 who shared with the school community the challenges she faces as a person with dyslexia.

As has been written in these pages before: 'Inclusion, put simply, is about everybody'. From a staffing perspective this is incredibly important – our students need to see themselves in the staff role models around them, so what implications does this have for the systems we have in school?

Launched this year our academic staff are utilising bespoke teaching and leadership standards for Emirates Hills staff. These standards are aligned to the outstanding criteria found within the UAE inspection framework, and informed by the considerable experience of outstanding school settings both in the UAE and internationally amongst our leaders. Teachers self-evaluate and set challenging targets for themselves with the support of a coach or mentor to guide them; the nature of such practice means that we recognise everyone as having a different set of skills, challenges, and starting points, but that everyone is working towards a goal that inspires them, at a level that ensures the school continues to operate at the highest standards.



"It's estimated that as adults we spend about 1/3 of our lives at work, and so this should be a place where everyone feels included, valued and part of something. With this in mind, I started the staff social committee to help foster the idea of community and belonging, especially with all of us being so far from home. I wanted to create a happy work environment where teachers don't feel confined to their classrooms or departments and could connect with teachers and staff from across the school. We are offering a range of different activities and so far, it has been a very positive experience with quite a lot of staff engaging in one way or another. Hopefully it continues this way, and more staff feel comfortable to come along and join in the fun!"



This takes care of our staff's professional needs on an inclusive basis, but how do we support staff in feeling content and settled in coming to work every day, and being in the best place to provide your child with first-class pedagogical expertise?

Sarah Flockhart, Achievement and Progress Leader in the secondary school could see that while the school provided many avenues of support she felt that more could be done to promote relationships across the school between staff who may not otherwise interact.



Consequently, Ms Flockhart established the Staff Social Committee, a group of staff members who provide multiple opportunities for staff to get together to share common interests.

Amongst the many offerings so far have been a Sunday evening walking series – to enjoy the last of the weekend, dog hikes – to benefit our staff and their furry friends, a staff band (debuting on the last day of this half term in the foyer before school – don't miss it!) and a sports afternoon series for staff to enjoy some healthy competition and sweat off the strains of the day, amongst many other one off events.

All of these aim to support our staff in feeling included, valued, and well-supported both professionally and personally so that they are best placed to help your child thrive, and uphold the incredible community spirit that continues to bring so many people through our doors.





COMMUNITY

VARSITY GAMES

PE & Sports Heads of Department from DBS Emirates Hills and DBS Jumeirah Park wasted no time at the start of the school year in igniting our students' competitive spirit. Looking for an opportunity to compete ahead of the official DASSA sports league commencement, Mr Houghton collaborated with JP's Ms Rooney to design an inter-school Varsity event that saw our school communities come together in an impressive display of sportsmanship.

Over 110 students from Year 3 to 13 battled it out in football and netball against their Jumeirah Park peers. Over the course of the day the match wins and losses were continuously tallied to establish who, if anyone, was in the lead. The day drew to a close with an equal number of winning netball matches for both schools, but with one football match hanging in the balance to decide who would be taking home the Varsity trophy.

In a nail-biting final match, Emirates Hills U19 footballers secured a crucial goal in the final moments that secured our lead and led us to victory.

"The Varsity Games was an incredible day, which celebrated sporting prowess of all ages. Everyone displayed a mutual level of respect and sportsmanship which made the occasion even more special. The level of support shown by students from both schools was also outstanding – what's a rivalry without the fans, right? I know I, and many others, cannot wait for the next one in Term 2."

*-Tom Christon
Senior Sports Leader and Head Student*



Thomas Christon, Senior Sports Leader and Head Student was presented with the Varsity trophy that now stands proud on our reception desk for students to enjoy as they arrive at school of a morning.



Not only was this a great opportunity for our young sportspeople to get out and about, but it facilitated a rare opportunity for staff, students and parents to get together during the school day. Our PTA kindly provided the squads and their supporters with flags in the school's blue (JP are red), emblazoned with the #PTAPowered tag line.

With parents, teachers and peers cheering the teams on, Ms Donovan was delighted with the event, "It's been an amazing start to the season, and great to see parents, students and staff members come together to make some noise so early on in the term – we can't wait to host it next time!"

The Varsity series will continue with Emirates Hills hosting volleyball and swimming tournaments in January, and we look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible through our doors to enjoy the spectacle!







EXCELLENCE

A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION



Our Year 11 students celebrated their historic achievement of producing the school's best GCSE results ever, with 63% of grades awarded being at 7-9 (the equivalent of A-A**), dramatically bucking the downward trend in achievement across the GCSE system globally.

Unsurprisingly, this led to an exceptionally high proportion of our students choosing to continue onto A levels and BTEC study at our sixth form, which coupled with high external demand for places has led to one of our biggest ever Year 12 cohorts.

A level achievement remained largely in line with our last set of comparable results in which no Covid concessions were applied in 2019 – a trend which was seen globally across the A level system. Again, impressive achievements abound with 62% of grades awarded at A*-B, slightly up on 2019, leading to 98% of our Year 13 students successfully gaining admission to their first-choice universities and courses, both in the UK and globally. Yet again, BTEC achievement was exceptional, with 98% of grades awarded at A/A* equivalent.

From these brief headlines it is clear to see why our Year 11 and 13 students had so much cause for celebration after a particularly difficult and uncertain period of study over the past two years as schools and the exam system strived to regain post pandemic stability.

READY, SET, ART!

It is a pleasure to welcome student authors to The Half-Termly Journal. This article has been shared with kind permission from the school newspaper team.

There were 2500 applicants, with only 30 finalists! Dubai British School Emirates Hills managed to acquire not one, not two, but eight finalist positions! The 'Create 2.0 International Art Competition' is a showcase of creative young minds displaying their artwork at this prestigious exhibition in the hopes of winning first place. This achievement not only distinguishes one's school from the rest, but a range of prizes are available, including money and sponsored local brand items.

One of DBS' own, Vasilisa Konovalova, a Year 13 Art student, successfully managed to wow the judges with her piece depicting "the Dubai Desert Landscape disrupted by a brush stroke revealing an oceanic scene," which acted as an homage to the history of Dubai. Alongside the runner up, there were various young aspiring artists who performed greatly, displaying their emotive and highly technical artworks. Bernadett Nagy, Deema Belal, Evie Ellis, Ruby Vela, Kaleah Nicholson, Amirah Higginson, and Sama Hasan were all finalists representing DBSEH.

The 'Artoze' competition was attended by Her Excellency Laila Elbv Atfani, Faisal Abdul Qader, local artist, and the Director of Visual Arts Dubai Culture, Khalil Abdulwahid, who showed a keen interest in the artworks and the young aspiring artists whilst also providing key insights into artistry. Additionally, Toufic Kreidieh, CEO of Brands For Less, provided an opportunity for the winners of the 'Artoze' competition to have their artwork featured on the bags of the BFL group.

by Kaleah Nicholson and Bernadett Nagy



"This work is themed around the change of seasons. The natural environment of the white tiger relates to winter, with the contrast of summer seas within the image of the tiger." - Deema Belal



"This is a mixed media piece to represent the movement through the loss of opacity"
- Bernadett Nagy

“This artwork is inspired by aging and the emotions connected to memories of life events” - Kaleah Nicholson



“Millions of years ago the UAE was underwater. This painting depicts the evolution in history through different changes of the landscape from seabed to desert.” - Vasilisa Konovalova



“This large-scale painting is inspired by the desert landscape, with an applique of sand creating the texture of the dunes. Native American pattern work adorn the skull of a large mammal, showing us there is beauty still to be found.” - Amira Higginson





Above: "This painting looks at the idea of being physically locked in an environment, along with the emotions that come with it. The figure's face pressed against a glass surface is brought to life with hypnotic lines and swirling brushstrokes."

-Evie Ellis

Top Left: "This artwork is a commentary on sexism and stereotypes of this world—linking to how people are 'locked' in who they are meant to be and already defined as who they should be before their life has properly begun. This piece explores this within the context of domestic violence as there is very little awareness for the voices of male victims that have yet to be heard." - Ruby Vela

Left: "This mixed media artwork blends the world of the living with the relics it leaves behind. Graphite has been used for the detailed shading on this gazelle skull, juxtaposed with the animal's natural hide and flowers to represent beauty." - Sama Hasan Al-Amin



Enjoy • Aspire • Achieve

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