

College Beat

Growth and Transition

DESS College Newsletter
June 2025



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The end of the school year is a moment rich with meaning. Every student is a leaver of sorts - leaving behind the year they've known and stepping forward into new challenges, new opportunities and new horizons.

This edition captures the spirit of growth and transition that defines our community. Our Year 12s, preparing to move on from DESS and embark on their next chapter, remind us all what it means to carry confidence, curiosity and kindness into the future. Alongside them, every student from Year 7 to 11 is also moving forward, building skills, exploring passions and growing in character.

This year, our community has embraced change with resilience and enthusiasm. The Psychology Peer Mentor Programme is a perfect example, where leadership and support flow between older and younger students, creating bridges that strengthen us all. Meanwhile, BTEC Travel and Tourism students gained valuable real-world experience at prestigious hotels, taking their classroom learning into the wider world.

Our vibrant Performing Arts students continued to push creative boundaries, from intimate vocal showcases to a show-stopping Disneyland Paris trip - and in doing so demonstrated how exploration and expression nurture confidence and connection.

Academic achievement and personal growth go hand in hand across the College, whether in fierce Junior Maths Cup competitions, spelling bees, Arabic challenges or pioneering AI projects. Each step forward brings students closer to their goals and helps shape the leaders they will become.

As this academic year closes, we celebrate a community defined by curiosity, courage and care. To every student, teacher and parent, thank you for being part of this journey. Let's embrace the transitions ahead with open minds and eager hearts.

Have a fabulous summer break!

Matthew Cotgrove
Head of School

MEDIAN

A Night of Creativity and Community

In mid-May, the gallery space came alive with colour, texture and emotion as we opened the MEDIAN exhibition, celebrating the work of our GCSE and A Level Art and Photography students.

The title 'Median' was chosen to reflect the midpoint of a decade, but also the transitional moment many students now find themselves in. For some, this marks the close of their secondary education and the beginning of a new creative journey.



The exhibition offered a diverse collection of work, from bold portraits and abstract compositions to carefully observed photographic studies. Each piece invited viewers to pause, reflect and connect with the artist's perspective. It was clear that every project had been approached with care and depth, combining strong technical skill with imagination and originality.

Visitors spent time moving through the gallery, drawn in by the stories behind the artwork. Whether exploring identity, memory, or emotion, the pieces on display spoke with clarity and conviction. The standard of work across both GCSE and A Level was exceptional.



What stood out most was the atmosphere. This was not only a celebration of artistic achievement, but a moment of shared appreciation. The exhibition reminded us how art builds connection - between ideas, people and communities.

We are proud of every student who contributed and thankful to all who came to support them. MEDIAN offered more than an end point; it was a powerful reflection of where our young artists are now, and where they're headed next.



Healthy Choices Week

A Celebration of House Spirit, Creativity and Teamwork



During the first week of June, the College came together for Healthy Choices Week, led by the Food and Nutrition Department. The aim was simple: promote nutritious eating, inspire creativity in the kitchen and strengthen House identity through a series of food-focused challenges.

Throughout the week, fruit stations popped up across campus, offering staff and students a rotating spread of fresh options. Over 113 kilograms were enjoyed in total, from juicy grapefruits and ripe plums to crunchy apples and sweet bananas. The colourful displays were hard to miss and quickly became a daily favourite.

One of the standout events was the House Cooking Challenge. Students from Years 7 to 10 competed in teams, representing each tutor group. The challenge began with a twist: a mystery box of ingredients and just three minutes to decide what to make. Each team then had 40 minutes to plan, cook and plate two dishes, with the condition that every plate included at least three fruits or vegetables.

Judges assessed the results on presentation, teamwork, creativity and even kitchen cleanliness. The standard across the board was impressive.

Here are the final results:

1st Place: Sky House

recognised for excellent planning, creative plating and bold flavour combinations.

2nd Place: Coast House

praised for teamwork and strong execution.

3rd Place: Earth House

noted for clear communication and vibrant presentation.

4th Place: Desert House

commended for high energy and attention to hygiene.

The Food and Nutrition team extends thanks to all who took part. Events like this are about more than food. They build confidence, strengthen peer connections and offer a chance to practise real-life skills in a setting that is fast-paced and fun.

Well done to everyone involved, and congratulations to Sky House on their well-earned win.





A Season of Success for the Arabic Department

It has been a season of growth, achievement and recognition across both strands of the Arabic Department.

In Arabic A, students in Key Stage 3 took part in a series of reading comprehension and spelling competitions, all centred around a curated selection of short stories. The process was designed with inclusion in mind, offering every student the chance to participate and succeed in a way that reflected their strengths. Finalists were recognised in a special ceremony at the school theatre, where prizes and certificates were awarded in front of peers and staff.

In Arabic B, the focus was on transition and encouragement. Year 10 students marked the completion of their foundational Arabic studies with a certificate presentation that recognised both progress and potential. While this stage of their language learning is complete, they were reminded that the journey is far from over. Many have expressed interest in continuing to explore Arabic in the years ahead.

Beyond campus, the department has also gained regional attention. The Ministry of Education in Ras Al Khaimah invited DESS to take part in a panel discussion on improving Arabic teaching in British curriculum schools. Mr. Mohammed Mumtaz represented our team, sharing insights and practices that have helped raise standards and engagement.

Adding to this recognition, Mr Mumtaz was recently invited to speak on Fujairah TV's "Sabah Al Khair Ya Watan" programme. The segment, which aired on Tuesday, 3rd June, explores the richness of Arabic dialects and looks at how schools can support the language's role in UAE identity and culture.

These milestones reflect not only what our students are achieving now, but also how DESS continues to shape the conversation around language learning across the region.

Eid Al-Adha at DESS A Celebration of Culture and Community

Staff came together for a special event hosted by the Arabic and Islamic Education Department to mark Eid Al-Adha with an afternoon of culture, conversation and connection.



The gathering offered insight into how Eid is celebrated across the Arab world. Teachers from the Arabic and Islamic teams shared stories, traditions and reflections, highlighting the richness and variety of customs in different countries. From the spiritual meaning of the holiday to the unique ways families celebrate, colleagues were invited to explore a wide and meaningful cultural landscape.



A favourite moment came with the arrival of traditional sweets. The table was filled with handmade treats from the UAE, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen and Morocco. Maamoul, baklava, basbousa and other



favourites were passed around, each one telling its own story of hospitality and celebration.

What made the event special was the atmosphere. It was more than a cultural showcase. It felt like a shared celebration, one where curiosity met kindness and traditions were honoured through conversation.

At its core, Eid Al-Adha reflects values of generosity, gratitude and community. That same spirit was felt in every detail of the event, and in the conversations that followed. It was a celebration not only of a holiday, but of the kind of school culture that values connection and mutual respect.



BTEC Travel & Tourism

Students Gain Valuable Work Experience

This term, our BTEC Travel and Tourism students took an exciting step into the hospitality world with placements at two well-known hotels, Marriott and Mövenpick.

Over two weeks, students rotated through key departments such as front office, food and beverage, housekeeping and event management. This hands-on experience helped them develop important skills like customer service, teamwork, problem-solving and time management, all essential for their future careers.

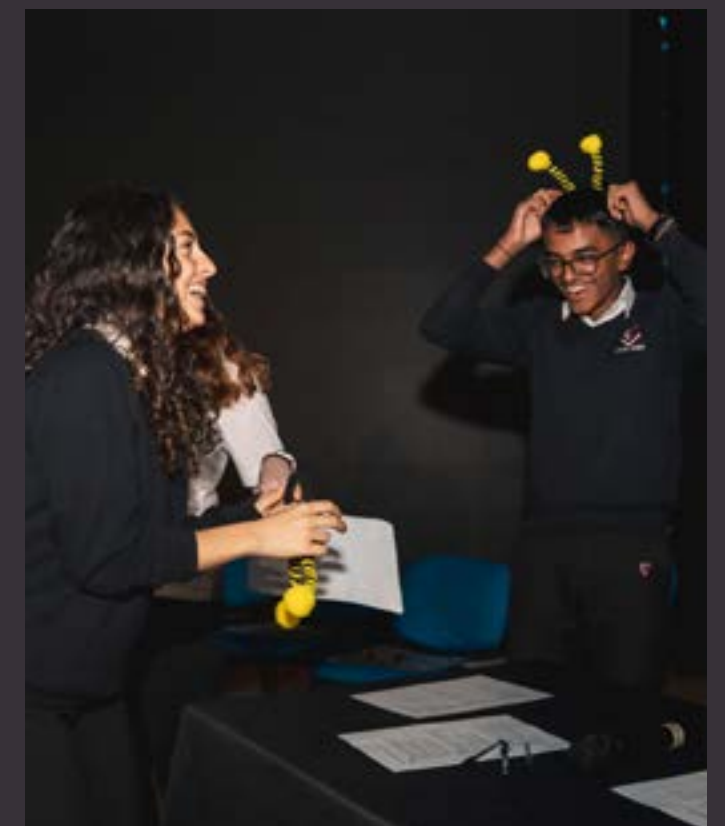
Working alongside hospitality professionals, students learned about hotel operations and guest relations, discovering the value of consistent, high-quality service.

The placements also gave students a chance to build industry contacts and gain confidence in their career choices. Experiencing different roles helped them better understand the tourism sector and plan their next steps.

We thank Marriott and Mövenpick for supporting our students and opening their doors to this valuable learning experience. Congratulations to all involved—you should be proud of what you have achieved.



DESSpelling Bees!



In May, the Theatre buzzed with excitement as students gathered for the much-anticipated DESSpelling Bee Competition. Open to KS3 students, the event celebrated not only vocabulary knowledge but also courage, focus and dedication. Over three weeks, participants learned more than two hundred spellings, culminating in this thrilling final round.

Fifteen eager contestants took to the stage, each determined to spell their way to the top. The competition grew tougher with words like antiquarian, cacophonous and onomatopoeia. After an hour of impressive spelling, Sethuki (Year 7), Saisha (Year 8), Samridh (Year 8) and Isa (Year 9) claimed first place in their respective categories. All showed remarkable poise and confidence under pressure. Every participant received a certificate of achievement and an Amazon voucher. Congratulations to all our brilliant spellers!

A special thank you goes to our new SSLT members; Alex, Defne, Pheobe and Jeff, who helped organise, run and judge the event.

As our DESSpelling Bee champions have shown, spelling is more than just words. It's a powerful tool for clear communication, confident writing and lifelong learning. Whether competing on stage or crafting an email, every correctly spelled word brings us closer to becoming stronger, more thoughtful communicators, one word at a time.



A Celebration of Character and Achievement



DESS College proudly hosted our annual Prize Days, a celebration of student success, growth and values. This year's events included five ceremonies: one for each House (Desert, Earth, Sky and Coast), and a new, dedicated event for Year 12 students. Each ceremony reflected its House's unique spirit while coming together around a shared theme of courage, legacy and discovery, inspired by the story of Moana.

Around 800 parents joined us throughout the week to mark the culmination of a successful year. Prize Days offered a moment to honour students' hard work, personal development and commitment to the values that define the College. From academic excellence and outstanding progress to character and community contribution, 51% of students received medals, a clear testament to the dedication and potential within our community.

The Moana-inspired theme provided a powerful narrative running through each ceremony. Like Moana's journey to restore the heart of Te Fiti, our students have shown resilience, bravery and leadership throughout the year. Their paths have echoed Moana's values of purpose, courage and legacy, qualities we proudly celebrate.

Each ceremony blended student performances, speeches and medal presentations. Parents and

guests enjoyed music, thoughtful reflections and moments of celebration that highlighted individual and collective achievement. One of the most moving moments came as students beamed with pride upon receiving recognition for academic achievement, progress, living our values or being role models in their Houses.

Alongside the formal events, all students took part in informal tutor group celebrations. These smaller gatherings gave space to reflect on personal successes, reinforce belonging and set new goals. Prize Days are for everyone, whether or not a medal was awarded this year; they are designed to motivate, inspire and bring the community together.

We extend heartfelt thanks to parents, staff and students who made these celebrations such a memorable part of the year. We hope you leave inspired, like Moana, to journey forward with courage and purpose.



Honouring Year 11 and Their Achievements

In early May, we came together as a College community to mark an important milestone for our Year 11 students. The Good Luck Assembly was not a farewell, but a heartfelt send-off as students prepare to take their GCSE examinations, with many planning to return for Sixth Form in September.

The assembly offered a powerful reflection on the students' journey so far. A standout moment was the Legacy Video, which captured memories from the past five years, including laughter, friendships, achievements and growth. The video was set to the Friends theme tune "I'll Be There for You," recorded by our Year 11s, a reminder of the strength of their bond and the support they share.

Each tutor delivered a warm, personal message to their form group, sharing memories, inside jokes and hopes for the future. Student reflections followed, giving Year 11s a chance to speak honestly and proudly about the highs, lows and unforgettable experiences that have shaped them. To mark the occasion, every student received a special certificate, celebrating not only the end of Year 11 but also their individuality, contributions and progress.

We are incredibly proud of this cohort and everything they have achieved so far. As they move forward, we know they will continue to shine. For most, this is not goodbye, but the next chapter. Good luck, Year 11!



DESS College Junior Maths Cup

A Celebration of Young Mathematical Minds!

On June 2nd, DESS College proudly hosted the annual Junior Maths Cup, bringing together Year 5 students from schools across Dubai for a day filled with excitement, collaboration and mathematical challenges.

The competition featured four dynamic rounds designed to test and inspire: from rapid-fire mental maths to intricate logic puzzles, and from the creative 'Make a Number' challenge to the exhilarating relay round, where teamwork and speed were paramount.

The atmosphere was electric as young mathematicians showcased their problem-solving prowess, cheered on by peers and teachers alike. This event not only highlighted the students' numerical skills but also fostered a spirit of camaraderie and a love for learning. Thank you to our Year 12 A-Level Mathematics, Further Mathematics and Mathematical Studies students for supporting with the event.

We extend our congratulations to all participants for their enthusiasm and determination.

DESS Students Rise to the ADNOC STEM for Life AI Challenge

We are proud to announce that eight of our students recently took part in the ADNOC STEM for Life AI Challenge, a programme that introduces young learners to real-world uses of artificial intelligence.

Each student completed the challenge successfully and earned a certificate of completion. Congratulations to all for their hard work and achievement.



Performing Arts

A Half-Term of Showcases and a Trip to Disneyland

Vocal Showcase: An Evening of Expression and Confidence

Our recent Vocal Showcase was a warm and inspiring evening, shining a spotlight on the vocal talents across our school community. Designed as an intimate platform, the event gave students the chance to share their work in front of a supportive audience of friends and family.



Performers from multiple year groups took to the stage, presenting a diverse selection of pieces that reflected both range and commitment. For many, this was their first solo performance in a public setting. The showcase gave them the chance to build confidence and gain valuable experience in a relaxed, encouraging environment.

Several students used the evening as preparation for upcoming exams, auditions and public performances. Their focus, emotion and bravery left a strong impression on everyone in the room.

The event was a reminder of how the performing arts support not only skill development, but also self-expression, resilience and connection.

Key Stage 3 Showcase: Heroes and Villains



The Key Stage 3 Showcase lit up the studio space with imagination, energy and heart. This year's theme, Heroes and Villains, gave students the chance to explore character, conflict and storytelling through performance.

Across a range of scenes, songs and choreographed pieces, students tackled familiar figures and big ideas. Whether reimagining classic tales or delivering powerful original work, they brought courage and creativity to every moment on stage.

For many, this was a first live performance. The pride was visible, both on their faces and in the audience response. The atmosphere was one of celebration and growth.

The evening not only highlighted the talent in our KS3 cohort, but also offered a glimpse of the promise they hold for the future of Performing Arts at DESS. Congratulations to every student who took part.

Level 2 MUSPRA: End-of-Year Showcase

On Wednesday 4 June, our Level 2 MUSPRA students closed out their first year with a vibrant showcase that reflected both progress and personality. Friends, family and staff gathered to watch a dynamic set of performances that celebrated the students' growth in skill, style and stage presence.



The programme ranged from solo piano pieces to indie rock ensemble sets, each chosen and developed by the students themselves. The diversity of the work stood out, showing not just technical development but also a strong sense of identity and artistic voice.

Collaboration was central. Whether in a harmonised duet or a full-band performance, students supported one another and brought the best out of each other on stage.

The applause said it all. This was a proud and well-earned moment for everyone involved, and a clear indication of the commitment these young musicians have brought to their work all year.

Performing Arts in Paris: A Disneyland Experience to Remember

This term, Key Stage 3 Performing Arts students travelled to Disneyland Paris for a four-day residential that combined professional training with cultural exploration.

Students took part in Musical Theatre workshops led by Disney professionals, working on an original piece themed around "The Elements." Through acting, singing and movement, they learned how to express emotion and tell a story with clarity and confidence.

The highlight came when students performed on the Disneyland stage, delivering their piece in front of an international audience. Their energy and creativity were unmistakable, and the experience left a lasting impression on performers and spectators alike.

Beyond the stage, students stayed at the Disney Castle Hotel and explored the best of Paris. Cultural highlights included Notre-Dame Cathedral, a river cruise on the Seine, and stops at the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe and Champs-Élysées.

It was a trip filled with laughter, learning and lasting memories, and one that will no doubt inspire our young performers for years to come.



Supporting Each Other The Psychology Peer Mentor Programme

This year, we launched the Psychology Peer Mentor Programme, a new initiative designed to support GCSE Psychology students by pairing them with A-Level mentors. We noticed some GCSE students struggling early on and wanted to act quickly to prevent them falling further behind. We believed personalised support could make a real difference.



The programme offers one-to-one tutoring, focusing not just on psychology content but also on revision strategies, organisation, confidence and motivation. A-Level students volunteer as mentors, building their CVs and developing leadership and teaching skills that strengthen their university applications.

After pairing students thoughtfully based on personality and compatibility, we gave responsibility to the mentors. They arranged initial meet-and-greet emails and organised weekly lunchtime sessions in the psychology classrooms. This independence has been key to the programme's success.

Each week, pairs met consistently, and it has been inspiring to witness the enthusiasm from both mentors and mentees. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

One A-Level mentor said: "I learned to organise myself better and manage my time to tutor alongside a full A-Level timetable."



Another shared: "Mentoring a GCSE student helped me strengthen my understanding of core psychology concepts by explaining them in simpler terms. It improved my communication skills and taught me how to adapt to different learning styles. I became more confident guiding others and developed greater patience and empathy. The experience reinforced my passion for psychology and showed me how rewarding teaching can be."

Looking ahead, we hope to expand the programme further. Next year, we plan to start earlier in the term to support students as soon as they begin to struggle. There's also potential to run it as an after-school activity, giving more flexibility and time.

It has been a rewarding experience for everyone involved. We look forward to seeing how the Psychology Peer Mentor Programme continues to grow.



Spelling Bee, Crepes and Quesadillas

Year 7 Spelling Bee: A Showcase of Skill and Sportsmanship



Our annual Year 7 Spelling Bee took place recently, highlighting the impressive linguistic skills of twelve talented finalists. Each student had one minute to spell as many words as possible, tackling the challenge with confidence and focus.

The atmosphere was lively as students stepped up to the stage, clearly well-prepared and ready to perform under pressure. Despite the competitive edge, there was a strong sense of camaraderie throughout, with students cheering one another on and celebrating each attempt.



Top performers in both the French and Spanish categories received vouchers in recognition of their achievement. Congratulations to all the finalists for their composure, skill and sportsmanship.

Events like this remind us of the joy of language learning and the power of a well-placed word. We look forward to seeing even more linguistic flair next year.

Year 9 French: Crêpes and Collaboration

In French this term, Year 9 students took on a culinary challenge inspired by their topic on food. Using French-language recipes, each group set out to make, decorate and present their own crêpes.

This wasn't just a cooking task. Students had to apply reading comprehension skills, interpret instructions, and communicate clearly as a team. The results were as creative as they were delicious.



Choosing a winner in each class proved tricky, with plenty of impressive crêpes on display. A big thank you to the Food and Nutrition department for opening up their kitchen and helping create a rich, cross-curricular experience that brought language to life.

Year 9 Spanish: Cooking Up Culture with Quesadillas

This term, Year 9 students explored Mexican culture through a hands-on cooking session that brought language learning into the kitchen. Working in teams, students followed Spanish-language recipes to prepare quesadillas, building both vocabulary and confidence as they went. The energy in the kitchen was high as students navigated ingredients and instructions in Spanish, putting new terms into practice in a meaningful, memorable way. The session ended with a friendly competition, where each class awarded prizes for taste and presentation.

It was a lively, laughter-filled lesson that blended food, culture and language in a way that students won't soon forget.

A Thoughtful Goodbye to the Class of 2025

In early May, the College gathered to say goodbye to our Year 13 students. It was warm, it was moving, and it felt just right. The farewell marked the end of a unique journey, one that may have lasted just 65 weeks, but was packed with moments that mattered.

We believe a good send-off starts early. Back in November, before the weight of exams and university decisions, students gathered on the edge of the desert for a sunrise they would not forget. Led by Mr McMurren, the Senior Sunrise walk to the top of the tallest dune near the College gave everyone a chance to pause, look ahead, and mark the start of their final year.

By April, the mood had shifted. Excitement took over with the launch of Prom. The Great Gatsby theme was revealed with typical DESS flair, along with the venue: the Westin Ballroom. There were cheers, a few gasps, and outfit planning that began within minutes.



As the final weeks approached, traditions came thick and fast. 'Grab Your Gown' day saw students collecting caps, gowns and sashes, each item a quiet signal that the end was near. The Class of 2025 Yearbook arrived soon after, created by the student editorial team with thought and care. For those who started at DESS Oud Metha, there was a surprise: their Year 6 application letters reprinted alongside reflections from the start of Year 12. The reactions spoke for themselves.



The much-anticipated Morning of Sport almost didn't happen. A KHDA heat advisory called time on outdoor events. Within hours, the Sixth Form team pivoted. Mr Mills and co turned the day into a full-scale indoor games festival, complete with balloons, banter, and a very different kind of scoreboard.

Then came the evening to remember: Senior Sunset at Sunset Beach. Year 13 students arrived in white, surrounded by friends, teachers, and a skyline that had watched them grow. A spontaneous rounders match broke out. Staff and students ran the bases together, laughter echoing long after the sun dipped behind the towers.



Graduation Day brought it all together. Music, speeches, corridor goodbyes, and that final walk through the College to a wall of applause. It felt less like a finish line and more like a turning point.

And Prom? It delivered. Limos. Awards. A magician moving from table to table. A 360° photo booth that never stopped spinning. A dance floor that stayed full until the very last song.



So how do you finish a goodbye like that?

You don't. You carry it with you.

Class of 2025, you left something behind. And we will remember.

House Day 2025

Welcoming Our Newest DESS College Students

"In just one day, strangers became teammates - and teammates started becoming friends."

As the final week of the school year got underway, DESS College opened its doors to the incoming Year 7 cohort for House Day 2025; an important first step in their journey, and one designed to turn nerves into excitement, and new names into familiar faces.

With students joining from over 30 different primary schools across Dubai - and more set to arrive from overseas in September, this was a day focused on connection. And from the first welcome to the final cheer, that spirit was everywhere.



It all began with the House Sorting Ceremonies, held in the Theatre and Sixth Form Auditorium, where students discovered which of the four College Houses they would join: Coast, Desert, Earth or Sky. In classic DESS fashion, the ceremonies were loud, lively and full of colour, complete with cheering, House chants and a few nods to a certain sorting hat.

Then came the team challenges. Each House took on a different activity, designed to stretch skills and spark collaboration:

- Desert House built the tallest Spaghetti Tower they could, bringing together creativity and calm under pressure.
- Earth House raced through a high-speed Time Trial, leaning on trust and fast thinking.
- Sky House tackled the Sky Sync Showdown, ending with performances that mixed poetry, rap and well-earned laughs.
- Coast House turned rhythm into teamwork with a culture-through-dance challenge that lit up the room.

By the time the final House assembly came around, something had clearly shifted. Groups that had only just met were already cheering one another on, swapping stories and finding their feet.

The final scoreboard read:

1st - Coast
2nd - Desert
3rd - Sky
4th - Earth

But the real takeaway wasn't the order of finish. It was the tone that had been set. At DESS College, House life is more than a structure, it's where community starts to grow.

To every new Year 7 student: this was your beginning. And we can already see that you are going to make it something special.





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