



ABINGDON

From the Head: Miss O.F.S. Lusk, B.Mus

6 September 2011

Dear Parents, Colleagues, Boys and Governors,

Welcome to the beginning of the new academic year. I hope that everyone has enjoyed the long summer break and is returning ready to meet the challenges and excitement of a new year at Abingdon.

We open with our largest school roll to date with 885 boys attending Abingdon this year. This includes 197 new boys with 30 in the sixth form. I particularly extend a very warm welcome to all our new boys. These early days will be a time of considerable adjustment for you and we will do everything possible to help you settle into Abingdon life. I much appreciated meeting new sixth form boarders and parents at lunch on Sunday and talking to first year parents after chapel on Monday. Our boarding houses are full for the first time in many years demonstrating that boarding continues to flourish at Abingdon.

I don't underestimate the enormous sacrifice many parents make to send their sons to Abingdon. It is a huge commitment, not least against a backdrop of global financial uncertainty, so it is very heartening indeed to find the School in such a healthy position. I hope that you believe as I do, that what we offer the boys here is worth the commitment families make. This really is a very special school with a wonderful atmosphere and I thank you for being part of that for another year.

Our examination results over the summer were excellent with record GCSE results. At A level the 151 boys returned 90% A* - B grades. The new A* grade at 24.6% is very encouraging. 49% of the boys gained 3 or more A or A* grades. One boy achieved 5 A*s and 9 got 4 A*s. All Oxbridge boys achieved their offers. At AS level the boys have already achieved a record A grade % which bodes very well indeed for their success at A level this year.

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At GCSE the boys achieved record results with the A* rate at 45.7% and A*/A at 81.2%. Two boys gained 12 A*s with 55 obtaining 7 or more A* grades. With an A*-B rate at 96.9% we have high expectations of this year group as they progress through the sixth form.

The move to iGCSEs has worked very well for us. New iGCSEs this year were English Literature (a new subject as well), French, German, Spanish, History and Geography. Alongside the established iGCSEs of Maths and Chemistry, we now have 8 subjects at iGCSE level. We are adding English (Language) this year and next year Physics, Biology and Dual Award Science will follow. These courses are regarded as more stretching for able pupils, but aren't yet recognised by the DfE in some league tables which will appear later this year but that is not of particular concern to us.

This leads me on neatly to our non-appearance in the A level tables published a fortnight ago. We simply didn't receive the appropriate emails requesting the statistics so didn't submit the information, although you may have noticed that we appeared in the GCSE tables, having got the process for submission underway. I must say that I found not being in these tables remarkably refreshing. With fifty independent schools now declining to submit their results to ISC for the August league tables, these statistics for exam results become increasingly meaningless. Like isn't compared with like, even if two schools could be compared when there are so many variables. It's also important, if you are looking at tables, to consider the size of the cohort and the degree of selection if there can be any hope of making any sort of comparison.

That said, we are proud to publish our results which can be seen in full on our website. We've done well this year and the boys are to be congratulated on their wonderful results which are thoroughly well deserved. My thanks are extended to all their teachers and to parents who provide such important support at home.

This term sees the new timetable in operation and I am looking forward to seeing how it all works out. We will be monitoring very carefully indeed how the School works over these early weeks but we are certain that, overall, the new structure will prove to be a positive move.

Although Saturday morning lessons have been discontinued, life will still be very busy here on Saturdays. Sport will be the main focus of the day and there will be many opportunities for families to support their sons as they participate in Saturday sport. There will also be many other events taking place as usual on Saturdays. May I flag up SATURDAY 1 OCTOBER which is our Open Day and full attendance at school in the morning is required. The bus service will run as usual on this day.

Along with 197 new boys, from 108 schools, we welcome several members of staff to Abingdon. It is my very great pleasure to introduce new colleagues.

Miss Hannah Allcock – English

Hannah comes to us following a two year appointment at Banbury School. She was educated at Manchester Metropolitan University (BA English) and at the University of Oxford (PGCE).

Mrs Deb Bennison – Psychology

Deborah joins Abingdon as Head of Psychology and will establish the department from scratch having spent nearly 20 years teaching at Didcot Girls' School. She will work part time and will also teach some Physics. She was educated at Humberside College of Further Education (BSc Applied Biology) and at the University of Bristol (PGCE).

Ms Kate Byrne – Art & Design

For the last year Kate has been at the Marlborough School, Woodstock and spent time with us too. Kate specialises in Ceramics and 3-D Art although she has teaching experience across the whole spectrum. After graduating from the Bath Academy of Art in the 1980s she set up her own business producing and selling a wide range of innovative ceramics to retailers and galleries worldwide. She completed a PGCE in 2009 with the Oxon Bucks Partnership.

Mr John Cotton - Music

John joins Abingdon as the Assistant Director of Music. He has worked for the last three and a half years as Head of Music and Performing Arts at Wychwood School. John has a BA Theology from Magdalen College, Oxford, a Postgraduate Vocal Diploma from Trinity College of Music and a PGCE from the University of Gloucester (2009). As a countertenor he has performed at the highest level at top international venues with the Gabrieli Consort and the Choir of Christ Church Oxford, as well as with his own group and the Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford.

Mr Nick Fieldhouse – Economics and Business Studies

For the last four years Nick has worked at Torquay Boys' Grammar School where he started as a Teacher of Economics and Business Studies. In 2009, he was promoted to the position of Head of Business, Economics and Enterprise. He was educated at the University of Manchester where he read Economic History and Economics and also completed his PGCE.

Mr Simon James – Physics

Since 2007 Simon has taught Physics at Bedford School. He completed his Master of Physics at Jesus College, University of Oxford.

Miss Tamara Katic – Physics

Tamara studied Physics at Oriel College, University of Oxford and recently completed her PGCE.

Mr Oliver Lomax – Physics

Oliver has been teaching Physics at Downe House in Berkshire for the last four years. He studied Physics at Lincoln College, University of Oxford.

Mrs Eleanor Kaye - Maths

Eleanor joins Abingdon as CCF Contingent Commander and Teacher of Mathematics. She comes to Abingdon from Batley Grammar School where she was the Officer in Charge of the Army section of the CCF. Eleanor studied Mathematics at the University of Leeds.

Mrs Cath Muller – Maths

We welcome back Cath who has been teaching in the Maths department since February 2011. She joins us in September for a period of one year. She was educated at the University of West England and the University of Bath.

Miss Rena Papadopoulos – English

Rena completed a PGCE in English, Drama and Media at The Institute of Education, University of London. She has a BA in English and Philosophy from the University of Sydney and an MA in English Literature from Royal Holloway, University of London. She has taught at the Private American School in Paphos.

Mr Alex Tate – History

Alex joins Abingdon as the new Crescent House Housemaster and as a Teacher of History. At Dulwich College he held the position of Head of Politics, a position he was promoted into having originally been appointed as a Teacher of History. Alex completed his MA in Modern History at St. Edmund Hall, University of Oxford and holds a Certificate of Professional Development from the Boarding School Association.

Dr Joel Taylor – Maths

Joel qualified as a Bachelor of Engineering and Bachelor of Laws at Monash University, Melbourne and has recently completed a PhD in Chemical Engineering at Cambridge University. He has been teaching Maths at Winchester College for the past year.

Mrs Ruth Tufnell – Art & Design

Ruth joins Abingdon as a part time Teacher of Art & Design. Ruth has a BA in Fine Art from Loughborough College of Art and Design and has been a practising artist since 1996. She completed a PGCE in Secondary Art and Design at Masters Level at Oxford Brookes University.

We welcome our Language Assistants who will be here for one year:

Mr Sven Steinbach – German Assistant

Miss Marion Libert – French Assistant

Miss Laetitia Bezain – French Assistant

Miss Noelia Aldon Rodriguez – Spanish Assistant

Miss Emily Wang – Chinese Assistant

and Sports Assistants:

Mr Daniel Bond and Mr Tom Donnelly

On the Admin side we welcome:

Mrs Joanne Nutchey – Healthcare Assistant

Mrs Leanne Brown – Purchase Ledger Clerk

Mrs Corrina Lamb – Common Room Secretary

Mrs Helen Lamb – Bursar's PA

Mr Martin Mead – Design and Technology Technician

Mrs Tamsin Millington-Drake – Housematron of Crescent House

Mrs Caroline Pimm – Cleaning Staff Supervisor

To the Music School we welcome:

Mr Matthew Cooke – French Horn Teacher

I hope that everyone joining us will be happy here and very quickly feel comfortable and able to make a full contribution.

Congratulations are extended to the former Sarah Carey who married over the summer and is now Mrs Gibbard, and to the Revd. and Mrs Paul Gooding on the birth of their son. We welcome back Mrs Penrose, Head of Mathematics, and Mr Stinton, Director of Music, after their recent sabbaticals.

Many of you will be aware that the boys and their teachers could be found out and about, often to far flung places, over the summer. These included the following expeditions:

The Senior Rugby Tour to South Africa was the main focus of the summer for 41 boys and Mr Coke, Mr Hall, Mr Wickes, Mr Middleton and Mr Barker. There was the memorable trip to Robben Island, experiencing the ever changeable climate, witnessing the amazing work of the Goedgedacht farm trust, going on safari, walking with elephants and of course the rugby. On the pitch, the 1st XV returned unbeaten, playing four games and scoring 133 points and only conceding 20. The outstanding performance was the final game against a resolute and physical Westering High School in Port Elizabeth. Off the field, Abingdon boys threw themselves fully into the work on the farm and helping those less fortunate in the surrounding communities.

Eleven Abingdon oarsmen represented Great Britain over the summer and returned with eight gold medals, three silver medals and one bronze medal from the three different events. The most significant of these were John Carter and Jamie Copus winning silver medals at the Junior World Championships in the Junior Mens Eight.

Nine lower sixth formers, accompanied by Mr Jenkins and Mrs McRae, travelled to Moldova in Eastern Europe for the ninth annual Moldova project trip. After spending four days in the village of Ialoveni staying with Moldovan families and organising games and activities for children at the local community centre, the group travelled to Lacu Rosu in Romania to run a summer camp for a group of 24 young Moldovans. The team organised sports and games, art activities, and did plenty of English teaching, as well as enjoying walks in the stunning scenery of the Carpathian Mountains. The final evening saw "Lacu Rosu's Got Talent" in which the Moldovan and English groups put on a varied display of singing, dancing and comedy sketches. The boys acted as excellent ambassadors for Abingdon, making a real difference to the Moldovan children they worked with, while also perhaps changing their ideas about what really matters in life.

Three RAF cadets completed their gliding scholarships this summer, flying solo in a Grob motor glider at Dalton Barracks, Abingdon. All three took part in a week-long course in August, gaining their Silver wings after about 10 hours of instruction. Congratulations are extended to Cadet Cpl

Harry Wilder (who also successfully completed the Air Cadet Leadership Course this summer), Cadet Alexander Whitworth and Cadet Ben Thompson.

Mr Brenchley and Mr McGill along with 14 boys undertook a 25-day expedition to Turkey. The itinerary was varied with activities ranging from white water rafting to visiting vast underground cities. The bulk of the trip was spent in the Aladagar mountain range, working on refurbishing a village school and completing a 6 day trek to a 3723m summit. On the trek they encountered nomadic families, scree slope descents, near misses with falling rocks, but everyone completed the ascent on Day 4. The trek culminated in a camp fire and sing along, to which were invited two other groups camping in the local vicinity. The French and Belgian guests were a little hesitant to sing along, so it was left to the Abingdon boys to entertain the large group that had assembled.

Sailing in Greece with Mr Bickerton, the boys spent the week exploring the islands and bays to the west of Athens. The DofE sailing expedition saw the boys sailing from Plymouth to Fowey. They spent the first night on a visitors' pontoon. The next day the weather was unfavourable so they modified the route and sailed to the Yealm spending the night in the peace of a Devon estuary. They also explored the Tamar and Plymouth Sound spending the final night at anchor in Cawsand Bay with many French/Breton yachts.

The final sailing event was the RS500 worlds at Portland at the Olympic venue. The boys experienced a very wide variety of conditions doing best in the strong winds. The RS class is good at arranging social events and the boys are the RS human table football champions beating all comers including the Italian team.

Other activities included 11 boys getting to the top of Kilimanjaro with Mr Forth. What an achievement! My thanks to all colleagues who make these experiences possible for the boys over the holidays.

Much work has been done over the summer at Abingdon to upgrade our facilities and to make an already pleasant environment even more attractive. Of particular note is the refurbished Westridge Room which includes more congenial study facilities for the sixth formers. There seem to be lots of new loos and shower rooms too as well as much redecoration and new furniture. The grounds are looking particularly wonderful even at the end of the summer. So many individuals work quietly away in the background helping keep the School looking welcoming, clean and attractive. May I thank the army of people who've worked tirelessly over the summer on a multitude of small projects.

My own summer was particularly wonderful this year. As I cycled through Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, I was reminded of the qualities which make a good teacher. Being naturally

competitive and just a bit driven I found, to my chagrin, that I often dipped back to the end of the group I was cycling with despite good starts and a great deal of determination. A companion, also a teacher, cycled up alongside me and said she'd noticed I was doing two to every one of her rotations, might it be an idea to try a different combination of gears? The effect transformed my progress and my efforts were quickly rewarded. She then invited me to go back to how I'd been doing it, just to remind myself of what I'd been doing and to reinforce the new technique. She later encouraged me to experiment with this new skill and I found myself coping with mud and potholes with a new confidence knowing which combination of gears best coped with the terrain.

A good teacher will help the pupil recognise the problem, pass on the knowledge to be acquired in a clear and patient way, will ensure that the pupil understands and then encourage the pupil to greater independence by allowing them to experiment. I recognised immediately that here was a terrific teacher but also that we never stop learning.

I know that we are fortunate at Abingdon to have many, many excellent teachers who are marked out by a set of qualities which give the boys a truly first rate educational experience. I wish everyone teaching and learning at Abingdon a year of rich and positive experiences.

I very much look forward to seeing a great deal of you at Abingdon in whatever capacity you are part of the Abingdon family. Of one thing I am certain, everyone connected to Abingdon is committed to providing the best possible education for the boys. Have a great year!

With all good wishes

Felicity Lusk