

# Abingdon Prep News



**RECEPTION & Y1  
GO MINI-BEAST  
HUNTING**

# FROM THE HEAD

**Nicky Black reflects on her busy first term at Abingdon Prep.**

**A Term of Purpose: Be Kind, Work Hard, Get Involved**

As the children skip out of school at the end of term, I find myself reflecting on my first few months as Head of this remarkable school. Joining a new community is both daunting and exciting, and I have been delighted to find here a pupil body that truly embodies our three core aims: Be Kind, Work Hard, and Get Involved.

**Be Kind: The Foundation of Our Community**

Kindness is the glue of any successful school, and it has been wonderful to see it practiced so naturally here. Academic success means little if it isn't paired with character. This term, I've been struck by the quiet leadership of our senior section—the way they look out for the younger years on the playground and the genuine empathy shown during house pairings and house competitions. In a world that often prioritises the individual, seeing our pupils prioritise each other has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my first term.

**Work Hard: Embracing the Challenge**

“Work hard” doesn't just apply to the classroom; it's about the grit shown when a problem seems unsolvable or when a cross-country trail feels a few hundred metres too long. I have been immensely proud of the academic ambition on display, from chess tournaments, to scholarships, to overcoming challenges every day in the classroom.

We encourage the children to view mistakes not as failures, but as essential

in the learning process. Whether it was the focused silence of the library during Early Birds or the spirited rehearsals for the 'The Bee Musical', the dedication to “a job well done” is evident across the whole school.

**Get Involved: Finding Your Spark**

A prep school education is full of opportunity, but our pupils understand that they have to step up and take it! This term, the level of participation has been as great as ever.

**On the Pitch:** Every child in Years 3 - 8 has represented the school in competitive fixtures, learning the value of teamwork and sportsmanship, and our girls made Abingdon Prep history with their first netball fixture.

**In the Arts:** The Other Half clubs, from 'Make a Sock Monster' to STEAM, have been oversubscribed and buzzing with energy. 25 pupils had their pictures selected for display in the Ashmolean Museum as Young Art Oxford competition finalists.

**On the Stage:** From Platform Concerts to the Senior Section Spring Concert and 'Make a Noise Day', performing arts are thriving at APS with performance opportunities for all our musicians.

By saying 'yes' to new experiences, our pupils are discovering hidden talents and building the confidence that will carry them far beyond our gates.

Best wishes

Nicky



## Lunar New Year

To celebrate the Lunar New Year, a team of keen JEDIs helped to host a coffee morning for parents. Our young waiters showed excellent manners and it was a lovely opportunity for parents to come into school to speak with staff and children. They then watched the videos created by Abingdon School and Abingdon Prep pupils in Mandarin explaining the Great Race and how they like to celebrate at this time of year. It was a very happy occasion of talking and eating rice crackers, mandarins and fortune cookies.

## JEDI 'My Vision' training

Nathan and Devante from the MyVision Oxfordshire charity, which APS is supporting this year, ran a really useful and interesting session for our JEDI (Junior Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) group on how to guide a person with visual impairment. Working in pairs, the children guided their partner who was blindfolded through an obstacle course of chairs, cones, mats and benches. Teamwork and strong communication were essential to ensure they arrived safely at a chair.

Some of the JEDIs had prepared questions for Nathan and Devante to find out more about life with a visual impairment and will use that information to create awareness posters to display around school.



## ADHD assembly

Henry Muller, an OA, who had also worked at Abingdon Prep as a Gap Student a few years ago, returned to the school to give an inspirational talk about Neurodiversity, and ADHD in particular, in assembly. He believes that the second 'D' in ADHD should be for Difference, not Disorder - always finding the positive. He shared his own ADHD story and explained how brains work differently for those with ADHD, giving examples of role models such as Lewis Hamilton and Jamie Oliver. Most importantly, he gave some guidance for others in how to support those with the condition: communicate, show empathy, and be curious. Thank you, Henry.

## The Language Café

APS has launched a vibrant new Language Café, creating a welcoming space where pupils can explore and celebrate languages from around the world. Each week, students gather to share words, phrases, and cultural insights from their home languages or ones they are learning. From greetings in Spanish and French to conversations in Arabic, Mandarin, and more, the café encourages curiosity, confidence, and connection. It's not just about language learning—it's about building friendships and appreciating the diversity within our school community. The Language Café has quickly become a lively hub where pupils teach, learn, and discover new cultures together.



## Rook, Line and Sinker!

Chess mania has taken over the senior section at APS with record numbers of pupils joining the chess club during our 'Other Half' programme.

Congratulations go to the U13 team who have qualified for the national IAPS online chess championships to be played next term.

A special mention should go to Ricky, our year seven captain of chess, who won a warm up tournament earlier this year, finished fourth in the IAPS online individual competition and second in the IAPS over the board national finals.

# SCIENCE WEEK

Each spring, schools all over the UK celebrate Science Week, an annual event of STEM activities promoted by the British Science Association (BSA). At Abingdon Prep all year groups took part in fun activities and workshops, and many made posters and models following this year's theme of 'curiosity'.



Reception testing hankie materials

Year 8R and Pre-Prep teamed up to work together. Reception tested different materials to find the best hankies. Year 1 made foil and paper boats.



Year 1 Built Foil Boats

Year 2 used chromatography to uncover who stole the balloons. 8R thoroughly enjoyed working with the younger children.



Year 2 do chromatography

Boffin Becca came to do workshops on plasma, space and rockets for Years 3 to 5 and they all made slime!



Hands on the plasma ball



Year 6: We dare you to pop the CO<sub>2</sub> bubble

Year 6 were joined by NitroGen who taught them all about properties and uses of dry ice, entertaining them by allowing it to be used to blow giant bubbles. She demonstrated that dry ice will change the pH of water to acidic, a lovely colour change from green to yellow; they were also able to make slime.



We welcomed Charlotte and Justin from Oxford University's Earth Sciences Department to run earthquake workshops for Years 7 and 8. Pupils were delighted to create seismic waves by jumping in sync, measuring their quake on a Lego seismograph. They were then challenged to construct the most stable marshmallow and spaghetti towers tested on the shaker tables.



Slime!

## First Aid Skills



Year 7 learned some vital first aid skills with Debbie, our qualified School Nurse. The special equipment allowed pupils to safely administer back blows and abdominal thrusts to someone who is choking. Whilst we hope that this is not a situation they will face, they showed great confidence in the techniques practised and learnt.



Year 7 National Writing Competition Success

## World Book Day



The first Thursday in March is World Book Day, and Abingdon Prep celebrated as always with a colourful costumed assembly, during which some winners were picked from each year group from Reception to Year 6. Since Roger has left APS, the staff prize this year was open - Nick ably filled the gap dressed as the BFG, complete with bottle of 'froboscottle'! (More photos on the Pre-Prep pages.)



## AS PEER SUPPORT LEADS VISIT



Year 8 were joined by four Peer Support Leads from Abingdon School, three of whom were former APS pupils. They were given the opportunity to ask questions about life at the senior school, and gain an understanding of what is in store for them when they join the Third Year in September.



## A Greener Future at Cox's Field



During the final two weeks of term, the whole of APS donned their wellies and took part in an inspiring tree planting project on Cox's Field. As part of a national initiative, the Woodland Trust has been providing free trees to schools and communities, aiming to create a greener, healthier future for us all. Under the expert guidance of David and Iain, our pupils (and many staff!) carefully planted a variety of beautiful, assorted saplings to enhance the natural beauty of the field. The children were absolutely delighted to get stuck in, learning about the environment while leaving a lasting legacy for years to come. A huge thank you to the Grounds team and Richard Hagar for initiating this wonderful project!



## TRIPS

### YEAR 4 VISIT UFTON COURT

The Year 4 pupils enjoyed an exciting trip to Ufton Court, where they explored what everyday life was like for the Tudors. They learned about farming methods, Tudor crime and punishment, and swordplay skills! A great day out for all.



### Hazard Alley

Year 3 and 4 pupils swapped the classroom for the immersive streets of Hazard Alley. The trip provided a hands-on environment for the children to develop their risk assessment skills across various real world scenarios. From spotting fire hazards in a mock living room to navigating online safety and staying alert near roads and railways, the children practised how to stay safe in a controlled, fun setting. It was a day filled with energy, teamwork, and invaluable life lessons that they will remember.



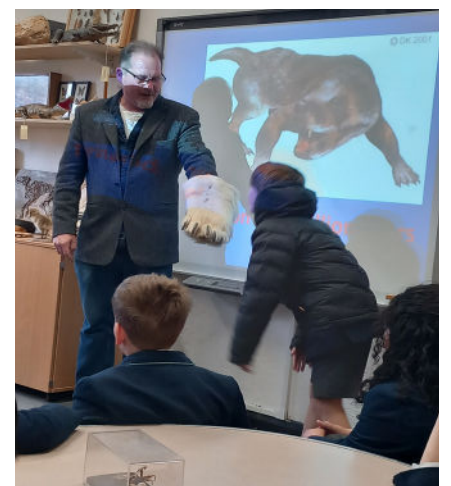
### Worldwise Quiz

In early March, six Year 7 pupils joined in with a Geography Quiz hosted by Magdalen College School. Eight different rounds, covered many Geography topics, with quickfire and picture rounds, and some questions giving longer response times. One of the more controversial questions asked whether there were more chickens or rats in the world? Overall it was a very successful outing, with one team winning the 'more or less round' and lots of Geography knowledge shared. *Paddy, Year 7*



### YEAR 5 AT THE PITT RIVERS & NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

Year 5 spent a busy day at the Oxford museums, combining history and science workshops. Pupils examined Mayan civilisation first, handling historic artefacts. After lunch, evolution was the theme in the Evolve, Adapt, Survive workshop, with examples including a polar bear paw. A super day of fun learning.



SPRING DT HIGHLIGHTS



Year 3 - Seaside Mirrors & Funky Photos



Year 4 - Siege Towers, Hammer Hearts & Breadmaking



Year 5 - Puglies & Goals



Year 6 - Chocolate project



Year 7 - Clocks



Year 8 - Light boxes



Year 2 (left) did lots of Easter arts and crafts with Sherrey. They drew daffodils in pastels, painted bunny baskets, and they made Italian Easter bread rolls. 'Buona Pasqua' Year 2!



ART HISTORY TALK

Art Historian Lizzie Rowe visited the art room to deliver another of her fantastic Art History lessons to Year 8. The theme was 'Disaster: when is it art?' The Year 8 artists measured lengths of Jackson Pollock's paintings, discussed Ai WeiWei's photography and had quite a few differing opinions on Cornelia Parker's 'Exploded shed'!

YOUNG ART OXFORD

25 pupils from Years 2 - 8 will have their work exhibited in the Ashmolean Museum the week of 15th-16th May



## ENGLISH AND DRAMA



This year's senior section sonnet recital maintained the high standards of previous editions. All the participants performed with credit, including two Year 6 pupils, Arran and Timothy, who represented their year group for the first time. The overall event was won by Alex, in Year 8, with Clarence from Year 7 and Tristan from Year 8 gaining special mentions from Chloe, our guest judge from the senior school. However, everyone taking part made it into a truly collective occasion worthy of the continuing appeal of Shakespeare's illuminating poetry.

**BEE ASSEMBLY** Anticipating the Bee Musical, Nick, who keeps bees, led an assembly about them, their importance and the art of beekeeping.

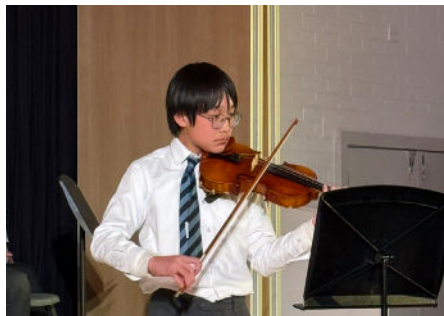


There was a real 'buzz' around the school as Years 3 and 4 prepared for their performance of 'The Bee Musical', a story to highlight the importance of Bees to our environment. The children all performed brilliantly to the school and to their parents, with some exceptional singing and acting.



## SENIOR SECTION AND ENSEMBLES CONCERT

This term's concert season came to a fantastic conclusion with the Senior Section and Ensembles concert. As always, a joyous celebration of talent and hard work presented by children from Year 3 to Year 8. Congratulations to the soloists George, Brian, Zac, Damon and Daniel, and well done to everyone who took part.



## CHARITIES

The children have been busy this term with two house charity events. Griffin's cake sale raised £295 for the Sumatran Orangutan Society. Phoenix's tuck shop raised £351 for Oxfordshire Animal Society. Adding in totals from the silver coin trail for MyVision Oxfordshire, the Easter Eggstravaganza and the amazing generosity of parents and family in our retiring collections after the Bee Musical and Spring Concerts saw the totals raised for charity this term to well over £1,500! Thank you.



## NASIO TRUST

A huge thank you to all the children and their families who contributed to our collection of school stationery, toothbrushes and toothpaste. These have been collected by the Abingdon-based charity The Nasio Trust and will be taken out to Kenya to support their valuable work.

### Phoenix Tuck Shop





## Pre-Prep Trips

Reception and Year 1 went to Sutton Courtenay Environmental Education Centre on a Mini-Beast Safari, looking at different habitats for them in the woods, grass and pond.

Year 2 visited Crocodiles of the World, learning all about these toothy predators and other creatures there, which all remained safely behind the glass!



## WORLD BOOK DAY



Reception and Year 1 - ready to hunt for minibugs



## GRANDPARENTS AND SPECIAL FRIENDS' VISIT

In March, grandparents and special friends were treated to a homemade three-course meal and goodies served by the children in Pre-Prep. They also enjoyed playing board games together. A heartfelt thank you to all who came and made the afternoon so memorable.





**STORY MUSEUM WORKSHOPS**

The Story Museum from Oxford came to us to give fun workshops for all of Pre-Prep and Year 3.



**CHINESE NEW YEAR**

Reception enjoyed celebrating the Chinese Year of the Fire Horse, joined by the mother of one of our children.

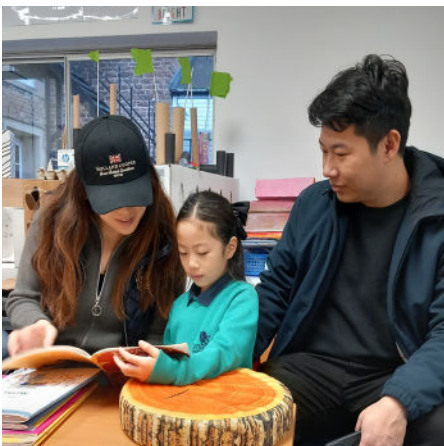
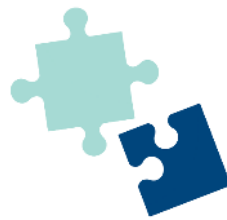


**Paul Klee art inspiration**

Year 1 took inspiration from one of the great 20th century painters for their colourful cityscapes.



**Workshares**



**HAPPY EASTER!**

The Pre-Prep children had a wonderful time celebrating Easter with a range of fun and creative arts and crafts activities including designing and making Easter hats. The highlight was an exciting Easter egg hunt, where the children searched for matching eggs. They were also delighted to meet the Easter Bunny, who rewarded their efforts with a delicious chocolate egg.





First Netball Fixture



IAPS Hockey



Y6 Touch Team Victory



## SPRING SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

This term has been packed with energy, enthusiasm, and impressive sporting achievements across the school. From thrilling rugby fixtures to exciting opportunities in hockey, netball, cross country and swimming, pupils of all ages have shown determination, teamwork, and a real love of sport.

**Rugby and hockey** have taken centre stage for many and have undoubtedly been a highlight, with some fantastic matches played throughout the term. Particular praise must go to our Year 4 and Year 5 teams, whose promising performances have been a joy to watch. Their growing confidence, skill development, and commitment on the pitch suggest a very bright future ahead.

The term concluded in style with our Year 8 pupils taking part in the prestigious Rosslyn Park 7s tournament. Joining forces with Abingdon School, the team demonstrated resilience, sportsmanship, and excellent teamwork against strong opposition. It was a memorable experience and a fitting way to round off a successful rugby season.

**Representing the School** - This term has seen pupils challenge themselves at the very forefront of prep school sport through participation in IAPS and county tournaments as well as national-level competition. Representing the school in hockey,

cross country and swimming, pupils embraced the opportunity to test their abilities against some of the strongest opposition in the country.

A particular highlight was the national cross country final, where pupils showed exceptional perseverance and commitment on the challenging and hilly Malvern College course, embodying the spirit of striving for excellence.

These experiences have been invaluable in pushing pupils beyond their comfort zones, encouraging growth, confidence, and ambition, inspiring pupils to continue aim high and embrace the opportunity to improve.

**Netball** - A particularly exciting milestone was the inaugural netball fixture for girls. This was a real highlight for both pupils and staff, marking an important step in expanding sporting opportunities within the school. The match was played in great spirit and has set the stage for many more fixtures to come.

**Science Week** - Tennis club took on a scientific twist during Science Week. Pupils had the chance to test out accelerometers, measuring how fast they could serve the ball. This hands-on activity was not only great fun but also provided a fascinating insight into the link between sport and science.



We were lucky that the weather held for our closely fought annual House Cross Country Competition.

It was lovely to see pupils from all year groups trying their best whilst supporting and encouraging each other around the course.

Well done to all involved and congratulations to the winners of each age category.

### House Winners:

#### Pre-Prep

Reception	Griffin
Year 1	Griffin
Year 2	Griffin

#### Junior Section

Year 3	Dragon
Year 4	Griffin
Year 5	Dragon

#### Senior Section

Year 6	Unicorn
Year 7	Unicorn
Year 8	Unicorn

### Overall Placings

<b>1st</b>	<b>Griffin</b>
( 2nd	Dragon
( 2nd	Unicorn
( 2nd	Phoenix

## HOUSE CROSS COUNTRY



### Individual 1st Place:

- Year 8 - Will
- Year 7 - Paddy
- Year 6 - Toby
- Year 5 - Joey
- Year 4 - Sam T
- Year 3 - Magnus
- Year 2 - Harry
- Year 1 - Oliver
- Reception - Rory



## ABINGDON SCHOOL 55th ROAD RELAY

Blessed by bright, sunny weather, students and staff from the First Year to the Sixth Form turned out in force to compete for their Houses and cheer on their peers in this annual tradition, which had a fantastic sense of competitive fun throughout.



## Physics Lecture

Students were invited to a lecture by Dr Sonka Reimers, a Physics teacher at Abingdon, to hear her talk about her PhD research topic Antiferromagnetic Spintronics. Students from Fourth Year to Upper Sixth learned about the applications of magnetism in data storage and were keen to ask questions during the Q&A session at the end.



## Something Wicked

To complement their IGCSE English Literature Shakespeare study, Fourth Year pupils experienced an immersive live performance of the Scottish play. Pupil volunteers took to the stage to perform speaking roles, serve as extras in the banquet scene and participate in a live combat workshop!

## MODEL UNITED NATIONS WINNERS

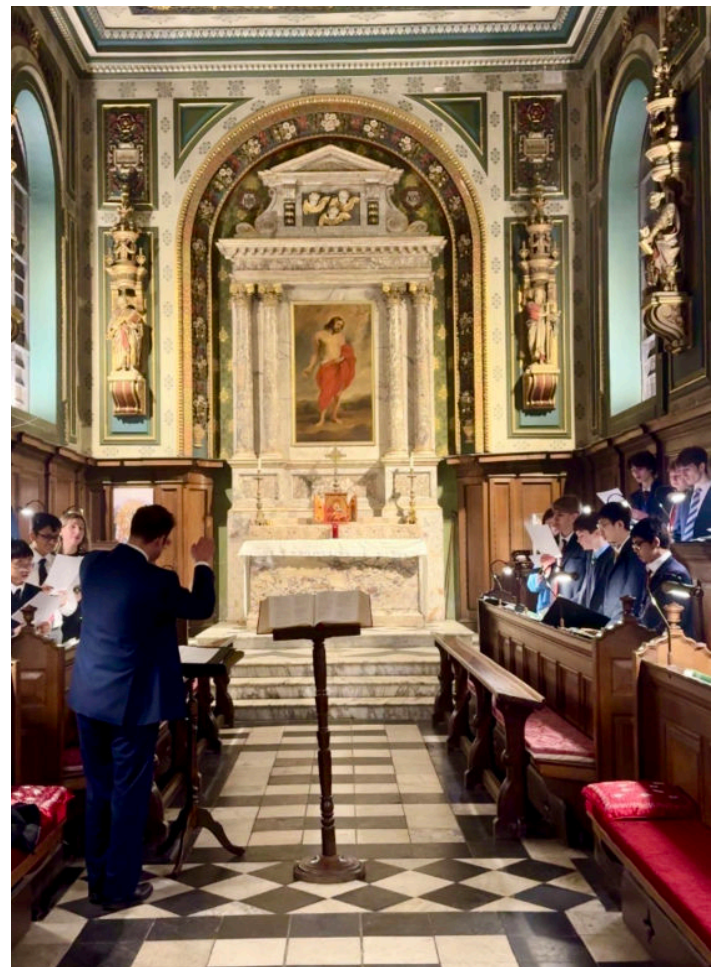
After half-term, 28 Abingdon students attended the Model United Nations conference at MCS Oxford. For many, this was their first experience of a conference, making the weekend's results even more impressive. Representing the nations of the USA, Japan, Burkina Faso and the UAE, students faced a challenging atmosphere. Delegates

had to navigate proceedings with heightened sensitivity and diplomacy, given the real-world events which had unfolded on 28 February. Despite the pressure, Abingdon swept the board, securing five individual winner awards; three highly commended awards; and the overall delegation award for Japan. Congratulations to all who took part.



## PEMBROKE COLLEGE EVENSONG

On 9 February, the Chamber Choir sang a service of evensong in the beautiful and intimate chapel of Pembroke College, Oxford. The music sung was by Johannes Eccard, Orlando Gibbons, and Henry Purcell, and the choir rose remarkably well to the challenge of performing complicated polyphony, much of the time without any organ accompaniment. It was a well attended event and a privilege for the choir to perform at this Oxford college which shares so many historic associations with our school.



# Raising teenagers in the age of Social Media

At Abingdon, student Peer Support Leads (PSLs) work closely with younger pupils to understand the challenges they face both in school and beyond it. One topic that consistently comes up is social media and technology. In this article, Ed - one of our Upper Sixth PSLs - provides his perspective on how social media affects teenagers and how parents can support healthy technology use.

For many young people today, social media is not simply entertainment — it is a central part of their social lives, identity, and friendships. However, like any powerful tool, it presents both opportunities and risks.

**Understanding the teenage brain:** Adolescence is a period of rapid brain development. The brain's emotional and reward systems develop earlier than the areas responsible for long-term decision making. As a result, teenagers are often more sensitive to rewards and more likely to act impulsively. Social media platforms are designed to tap into this psychology. Notifications, likes, and comments activate dopamine pathways associated with pleasure and habit formation. Psychiatrist Anna Lembke describes smartphones as providing “digital dopamine 24/7 for a wired generation”. For teenagers whose brains are still developing, this can make social media particularly engaging and sometimes difficult to regulate.

**The reality of teen screen time:** Technology is deeply integrated into teenagers' daily lives. For many, digital communication has partly replaced traditional social interaction. Messaging apps, online gaming, and social media now play a major role in maintaining friendships. This raises an important question for parents: how can technology support young people rather than control them? Practical tips are: no phones upstairs and no phones at mealtimes; gaming only on weekends, not during the week. If most families are doing this, then it is easier for it to become the culture in a school community.

**The risks of social media:** While technology can connect people, it also introduces challenges that previous generations did not face. Cyberbullying can be persistent and difficult to escape, as it follows young people home through their devices and may feel more anonymous than face-to-face bullying. Privacy and grooming are also concerns. Teenagers may not fully understand how easily personal information can spread online or how strangers can access them through digital

platforms. Comparison and self-esteem are another issue. Social media often presents a highly curated version of life. Constant exposure to idealised images of others' achievements, appearance, or lifestyles can negatively affect confidence and mental wellbeing. Finally, online actions can contribute to a lasting digital footprint. Photos, messages, or comments may remain accessible long after they are posted, sometimes with serious consequences.

**Algorithms and the attention economy:** Social media platforms are designed to maximise the time users spend on their apps. Algorithms analyse behaviour and continuously present content likely to keep users engaged. For teenagers, this can lead to extended scrolling or gaming without realising how much time has passed. The result may include reduced sleep, distraction from schoolwork, and difficulty concentrating.

**The positive side of technology:** Despite these concerns, technology is not inherently harmful. When used well, it offers valuable opportunities. Young people can access educational resources, develop new skills, express creativity, and maintain friendships and communities. The goal should therefore not be to eliminate technology but to develop healthy digital habits.

**Practical tips for parents:** Research suggests guided engagement is more effective than strict prohibition. Creating boundaries, modelling healthy behaviour, focusing on what children do online (not just how long they spend there), and having open conversations can be helpful.

**A shared responsibility:** Technology is now an integral part of modern life. The challenge is not removing it, but learning to navigate it responsibly. Parents, schools, and students all have a role in building digital resilience so it becomes a tool for connection, not a source of harm.

## FAREWELLS

### Linda Gaskell

It is with great sadness but immense gratitude that we bid farewell to Linda Gaskell after thirteen years of loyal service at APS. During this time, Linda has worn a multitude of hats and introduced countless new initiatives with the common goal of wanting to provide the very best education for the children within her care.

Starting as the Reception teacher and EYFS lead, Linda was soon appointed Head of Pre-Prep and then took on the role of Designated Safeguarding Lead. Looking around the school now, it is clear to see the impact of Linda's influence in so many areas of school life. Providing pupils in Pre-Prep with the very best physical environment, Linda developed the main playground, the Reception outdoor classroom and play area, Forest School areas, the use of the mound at the front of the school and the courtyard. Wherever there was a space, Linda saw a learning and development opportunity for pupils and led each project with characteristic energy and drive.



She developed the curriculum in Early Years and across Pre-Prep to broaden the range of pupil experiences through the enrichment programme, trips and visits. The courtyard would be awash with scarecrows or pumpkins and the hall full of grandparents enjoying multi-generational games while



visits from the Troll in the Three Billy Goats Gruff helped to bring the curriculum to life.

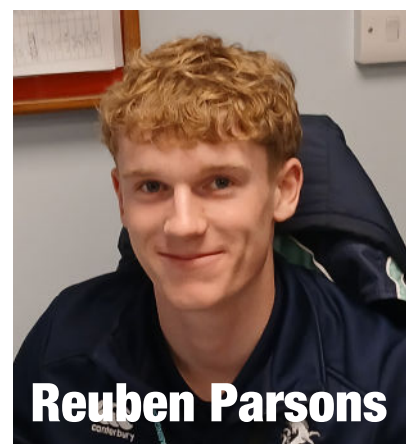
As a safeguarding lead, Linda's knowledge was exceptional and, over the years, she embedded a strong culture of safeguarding across the school, supporting pupils, parents and staff when needed. Always available as a listening ear, her wise advice, calm approach and kindness were evident to all.

Linda's positive impact on so many pupils and families over the years is undoubted and her contributions to the Leadership Team of the school are fully appreciated. As she steps away from APS to focus on health and family, we thank her greatly for her varied and very full contributions to the school and recognise her as someone who worked hard, got involved and, above all, showed great kindness.



### Barney Church

We said goodbye to Barney Church just after half-term as he was about to embark on his travels to South America. Barney joined us from Abingdon School as a Gappie in September 2025 and he was a great addition to the staff room. We are grateful for all his hard work in all areas of the school and we wish him well on his travels.



### Reuben Parsons

Our thanks also go to Reuben who returns to complete his studies, after filling the 'gap' after half term.

### Fern Skidmore

Fern joined Year 3 in September and instantly stood out with her calm and warm manner with the children. She has been a real asset to the school, showing kindness and full commitment to all the pupils in her class. While we are sorry to see her leave so soon, we are delighted for her as she and her husband Josh prepare to welcome a baby boy. We wish Fern all the very best for her future and this exciting new chapter of motherhood.



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