



ABINGDON

From the Curriculum Director: Mr Oliver Lomax

1<sup>st</sup> March 2017

## TO THE PARENTS OF ALL SECOND YEAR BOYS

Dear Parents,

### PREFERENCE FOR THIRD YEAR SUBJECTS for September 2017

The purpose of this letter is to explain the curriculum which your son will be following in his third year at the school. This curriculum contains both compulsory and optional subjects. On the basis of the information in this letter and discussions with your son, you need to choose your son's preferences for two optional subjects.

All Second Year parents will be emailed with a link to an online form. Please complete this online form by **Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March**. The online form provides room for you to comment if you wish. The Parents' Evening on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March will provide an opportunity for you to discuss your son's preferences with his teachers.

If you need advice on your son's choices, please discuss them with his tutor or housemaster, or contact me at the school, or consult your son's teachers at the parents' evening on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March. Whilst I hope that each second year pupil will work out his choice seriously at this stage, changes of mind after the examinations in the summer term will be sympathetically considered, provided that parents communicate **directly** with me.

The third year, which your son is about to enter, is important as a foundation year in terms both of GCSE courses and of wider issues. The curriculum is designed so that the pupils follow a broad range of subjects. At the start of the fourth year, there are further choices to be made, which reduce the number of subjects to be followed to GCSE examinations.

Boys generally continue with their main language of either French or German into the third year. Additionally they have the opportunity to learn another foreign language: Mandarin Chinese, French, German or Spanish. In order to help you ascertain your son's potential in languages such as Latin, Greek, Mandarin Chinese, German, Spanish and French, his language teachers prepare 'linguistic grades'. **The grades for your son are enclosed with this mailing.** We are keen to encourage pupils to study languages. If a boy cannot cope with a second language, this will become obvious before the end of the third year and the boy may alter course. Our experience, however, has been that virtually everyone makes the grade and with sound results.

You may feel that it is rather early for you to commit yourselves over your son's preferences. We would, however, appreciate this early indication of the subjects that your son wants to study in order to arrange our staffing for next year, and to estimate how many sets we shall need in each subject. If you change your mind about the optional subjects at some point between Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March and September, please let me know of the change of plan. Equally, on our side, I should mention that we have to reserve the right to abandon an optional subject if the numbers choosing it are so low as to make it uneconomic, and that sometimes we have to tell parents that we cannot provide unusual subject combinations. Such cases are rare, but that is why we call these 'preferences' rather than 'choices'. What will be offered must, inevitably, be determined by the overall demand.

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I must stress, however, that there are various ways in which the curriculum can be modified to suit individual boys, provided that I am informed early enough about the potential problems. One characteristic of Abingdon is that the choice pattern is far more flexible, and tailored to individual pupils, than in many similar schools. It is quite possible for boys, for instance, to choose both classical languages, should they so wish.

To allow you to plot your son's route through to GCSE, even at this stage, the notes on the following pages indicate how this round of choices might affect the range of GCSE subjects that your son can study in the fourth and fifth years.

The 'Middle School Curriculum September 2017' document may be downloaded via a link from the Abingdon curriculum page (<http://www.abingdon.org.uk/curriculum>). Included in the document is detail on each Middle School subject. A summary is given below.

When your son reaches the Abingdon fourth year in the autumn of 2017, English, Mathematics, the sciences, a modern foreign language (French, German or Spanish) and Physical Education will all be compulsory. In addition, however, he will be able to choose three or four subjects to GCSE from a wide range, including Religious Studies, Geography, History, Art, Design Technology, a second modern language if he began it in the third year (Mandarin Chinese, French, German or Spanish), Latin, Ancient History, Ancient Greek, Electronics, Music and Drama. These subjects can be pursued in many combinations.

Our pupils do **not** take the Key Stage three tests at the end of the third year.

In general, we hope that you will appreciate that our whole middle school curriculum is designed to encourage breadth and versatility as well as to provide a suitably rigorous foundation for more advanced work.

## PATTERN OF SUBJECTS IN THE THIRD YEAR

This is the pattern of subjects proposed for the 2017/18 timetable. Lessons are typically 55 minutes in duration. Boys are taught in the same groups for English, History, Geography and Religious Studies. There are also eight sets for Science, where boys are taught in the same groups for Biology, Chemistry and Physics. Boys are allocated sets based on ability in Mathematics, Science and in French after one term. There are two option blocks.

<b>Compulsory subjects</b>		lessons per fortnight
	English	5
	Mathematics	5
	Biology, Chemistry, Physics (rotated through the year)	6
	Main language (French for most, German for some from lower school)	4
	History	4
	Geography	4
	Religious studies	4
	Art	2
	Design Technology	2
	Computing	1
	Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education	1
	Physical education	2
<b>Optional subjects:</b> Two to be chosen from:		4 for each
	Latin	
	Greek	
	Ancient History	
	Second languages started from scratch: German, French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese	
	Drama	
	Music	

We must reserve the right to abandon a subject if very few pupils opt for it. Similarly we may need to limit the number of boys who may join a course, due to constraints of staffing or facilities.

### NOTES ON OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

A pupil may follow optional subjects in the third year with the intention of altering them for GCSE if they are not ideal. However, the GCSE courses in optional Mandarin Chinese, German, Greek, Latin, Spanish and French begin in the third year. At the end of the third year your son could elect to give up any of these subjects, but he will be unable at that stage to start any of them from scratch. The other optional subjects offered this year – Ancient History, Music, and Drama - can be entered in the fourth year by those who did not pursue them in the third year. In the case of some subjects, however, boys who have not already demonstrated some talent in these areas will be discouraged.

## **CLASSICS**

Classical languages are valuable subjects to study in the Middle School, since they are held in high regard as superb intellectual disciplines. Many of those who study Classics in the Sixth Form go on to read other subjects – law, theology, politics, sciences – at university, for all of which the Classics make excellent preparation. Many choose to study Classics at Oxford, Cambridge or elsewhere, finding themselves subsequently in demand from employers in many fields (law and finance, for example) who recognise and value the range of skills possessed by Classicists.

Two Classical languages are offered in the Middle School, as well as Ancient History

### **Latin**

A GCSE in Latin is a useful and respected qualification that complements a wide range of subjects, be they arts or sciences. The Middle School Latin course is demanding but progressive, requiring clarity of thought and an understanding of how languages operate. Latin is an inflected language (its meaning is conveyed by variations in word endings), and thus those who take their modern languages seriously often find Latin immensely helpful.

Latin is taught using the new course written by Henry Cullen and John Taylor. This prepares pupils well for the GCSE course, since it concentrates on the relevant language skills, while we introduce pupils to an appreciation of Latin literature through reading a range of poetry and prose texts using our own materials. The emphasis at GCSE and A level is on reading and appreciating original literature, and the Third Year course aims to prepare pupils for this. The literature is studied in its historical context, with emphasis on Roman cultural and social material.

### **Greek**

Much of what has been said about Latin applies equally to Greek, except that Greek, as the rarer qualification, is even more respected than Latin. Greek, the language of some of the greatest literature ever written (including the New Testament), is of profound importance in appreciating modern philosophy and literature. Many words are similar to those of Latin, and have found their way into English, but the most obvious point of divergence is that Classical Greek uses a different alphabet.

We find that pupils rapidly get to grips with the new alphabet, and that this does not prove a major stumbling block. We use the JACT Greek textbook. We supplement this with our own material where necessary, particularly, on the culture and society of ancient Greece, which we consider important for the pupils to learn alongside the language. Pupils are welcome to choose Greek for the third year to see whether they like it; there is no compulsion to carry it on into the Fourth Year, but even a year of Greek can enrich the rest of your life.

### **Ancient History**

For those who wish to study the ancient world without the further linguistic study required by Latin or Greek, we offer a course of study in Ancient History, which we feel makes for a challenging and exciting programme, with many interesting topics to study.

There are usually about forty pupils a year who pursue such a course in the Third Year, and they will study foundation topics devised by the department. After a general introduction to the ancient world, they will study ancient entertainment (looking at the Greek Olympics, and in Rome chariot-racing and gladiatorial shows), and Greek and Roman politics (focusing on Athenian democracy and the Roman republican system run by the senate). We will also study Hadrian's Wall, with the opportunity to visit this on a trip in the summer term, before writing up a project about it

## **MODERN LANGUAGES**

Starter courses in MANDARIN CHINESE, GERMAN, SPANISH and FRENCH.

In the third year, we encourage boys to extend their linguistic skills by opting for a second and possibly third modern language. They can choose one or two languages from Mandarin Chinese, French, German and Spanish. All boys in the second year will already have received some exposure to the option languages on offer, to help them in their choice. No previous knowledge is assumed and all can lead to GCSE at the end of the fifth year. This pattern of learning a second language in three years has been followed for several years and results have always been good. Experience shows that learning a second language is supported by the skills already acquired through learning the first.

We attach great importance to ensuring that the boys learn to communicate in the language, as well as encouraging them to understand its grammatical structure. We aim to make the learning process fun by using a vast range of games, interactive white board activities, videos, music etc. Each course also offers insights into the culture of the countries where it is spoken.

A large number of boys continue with their option language in the fourth and fifth years and many continue successfully to A level and beyond. However, opting for additional languages now does not commit a boy to a GCSE course. At the end of one year he will have been given a glimpse of another culture and language, which he may well wish to return to in later life.

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## **MUSIC**

This course is designed to provide opportunities for boys to study music in greater depth, both from a theoretical and a practical standpoint. All boys who take this option will be practising musicians of a minimum grade 3 standard on one instrument. The GCSE course will begin in the fourth year, but the third year course will provide useful background experience.

The course will include listening to a wide range of music and subsequent discussion, some useful work on music theory, and a grounding in compositional techniques, together with a practical performing element in the classroom, particularly in ensemble work. Good GCSE candidates will not be disadvantaged by entering the subject in the fourth year.

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## **DRAMA**

Boys intending to study drama at GCSE level are strongly advised to opt for the subject in the third year where the core skills, techniques and content of the subject are introduced. We follow Edexcel's GCSE Drama course (Edexcel 1DR0). Specific drama and theatre skills are taught, often under the direction of visiting theatre professionals such as actors, directors and designers. Skills taught include effective use of voice and movement; acting; improvisation; research; interpretation of plays and understanding of stage design and use of lighting and sound equipment. Students learn how to devise a piece of theatre from a range of stimuli and to work together to create short presentations for an audience of their peers. At all stages, students learn to evaluate their own and each others' work, and to assess their skill levels more objectively in written work. The course involves one or more visits to live theatre productions. These usually entail trips to local theatres in Oxford / Newbury but can also include trips to London. As Abingdon now hosts NT Live and RSC screenings in the Amey Theatre, these may be preferred on occasion as a more cost effective option. All these encounters with live theatre usually take place during the evening.

A fundamental requirement of drama is a willingness to take part in practical and group work, which demands co-operation, tolerance and a readiness to share in the expression and shaping of ideas. The work involves being up on your feet and performing to others in class, so it will not suit those with retiring or sedentary natures. At the same time, drama can play a part in developing the confidence, creativity, collaboration, communication and presentation skills that are an asset in all modern working environments.

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Yours faithfully,

**Mr Oliver Lomax – Curriculum Director**

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