



ABINGDON

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

Friday 13 February 2015

Dear Parents, Colleagues, Governors and Boys of Abingdon,

There was one week during this half term when the Second Master, David Dawswell, said that he'd never seen such a long weekly information sheet. This lets staff know what's happening in school, and is always very full and a good record of what's going on each day, but this was a record. It certainly has been a busy time.

We have made important changes to our sixth form curriculum in response to the national A level reforms. These affect everyone moving into the Sixth Form from September 2015 so please do take time to look at the details on the website. The reforms are a tremendous opportunity, summarised by Graeme May, Deputy Head Academic, as "a triumph of education over exams".

We say farewell to three members of staff this month. Mrs Carol Webb has been Matron in Waste Court for the last 13 years and has provided dedicated support for the many boys under her care in that time. The boys held a leaving party for Carol at which they wished her a happy retirement. Also leaving us at half term is Ms Alexia Severis, School Counsellor. Alexia has been with us for 2 years, and in that time she has developed the counselling service we have been able to provide for boys and staff. We wish her and her daughter well as they move to the south-west of England. Mr Matt Feates has been part of our IT department for 3 years. We wish him well in his new position as Technical Support Analyst at Sophos.

We congratulate Ed and Susanne Swanwick on the birth of their son Rex Neil Michael.

What entertainment! – Les Misérables, incredible. The superlatives came in thick and fast following opening night and I have yet to see a better school production. Having watched the show on Thursday I was lucky enough to secure another ticket for the Friday. What talent and what a team, cast, crew and orchestra. My congratulations to all on a stunning production and many thanks to Ben Phillips (Director) and John Cotton (Musical Director) for their tremendous work.

I have great pleasure in announcing that, made possible by a donation from former OA Martin Iredale and family, we have commissioned a very striking sculpture to span the three storeys of the new Science Centre. Hugely impressive, standing 10m tall, this artwork promises to make quite an impact. Illustrating Biology, Physics and

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Chemistry with a section corresponding to each floor it really will be stunning. Our thanks go to sculptor Matthew Lane Sanderson whose inspiration will make this a legacy for Abingdon School for many years to come.

I very much look forward to the exciting opportunities that the new Science Centre will bring. One such is the Abingdon Science Partnership, an organisation based at and supported by Abingdon School, which aims to widen access to and broaden participation in science for everybody across all stages of education. The partnership recently held its second GCSE masterclass, synthesising and analysing aspirin. Pupils from Fitzharrys, Larkmead, Headington, St Helen's and Abingdon took part.

Our physicists have had a busy few weeks with 12 third year boys competing in the Big Physics Quiz at Birmingham University and the Physics Society also welcoming Dr Max Michaelis who gave a fascinating talk on the Halitron. Lower sixth physicists have embarked on an ambitious project to launch a balloon to the very edge of space and to capture data from its travels. Both this project and the appointment of a Writer-in-Residence have been made possible through donations to the Annual Fund for which I am enormously grateful. The Annual Fund is a tremendous asset, providing opportunities outside of departmental budgets and enabling boys to explore areas that otherwise could not be funded.

Also this term, Abingdon boys have taken part in the Schools Challenge (general knowledge quiz), the Young Enterprise teams picked up three awards in the Cowley Trade Fair and, in the qualifying round of the Oxford Union Schools Debating Competition, all five boys secured places in the final. Third year students thoroughly enjoyed their "cross-curricular" day where they were 'off-timetable' and asked to explore a theme in an activity of their choice. There were eight disciplines including Drama, DT, Art and Music and the boys produced results that were humorous, engaging, challenging, thoughtful and vibrant.

Football and hockey reach half term with pleasing performances. Recent highlights include a win against Hampton for the 1st XI footballers; very impressive as the opposition had lost only one out of their last 31 fixtures. They continue in fine form with wins against Cokethorpe and Reading Blue Coat. Hockey teams contested some tough matches against local rivals Radley and Bloxham.

On and in the water, the rowers and sailors have been braving the cold with a tough sailing fixture against Radley and tremendous performances in the first rowing fixture at Wycliffe and in the British Indoor Rowing Championships. The swimmers finished third overall in the Warwick 100s with an excellent swim from the U14 squad.

The Badminton Club defeated Oratory and the cross-country team ran well at the Vale of the White Horse cross-country and Wellington Relays, with the A team winning the latter by an impressive 16 seconds. The boys also ran at the Oxfordshire Cross Country Championships where the senior team secured their 9th consecutive victory. Our golfers were also pleased with their performance against

Hampton with a good win for Charlie Normanton and Seb Hickman. In rugby, Theo Brophy Clews became the youngest ever first team player to score for London Irish and in hockey, Will Carter Keall played at Wembley in the Hockey 5s.

The impressive sum of over £39,000, raised by the sponsored walk, was given to the three nominated charities and it was particularly pleasing to see Nicu Bocaneala from Agape, the Moldovan charity the School has supported since 2000, at school to receive the cheque. He was enormously appreciative of this special partnership and my thanks to Adam Jenkins for his tireless work. My thanks also to the 20 OAs and the Careers Department and OA Club for organising a very successful careers evening for 65 sixth form students. It was very enjoyable and informative.

As an organist myself I particularly appreciate the encouragement given our young organists and that they are able to perform at the annual organ recital. This year it featured two very talented musicians playing Bach. I am very glad that we retain James Anderson-Besant for another year and I wish Joe Barber many congratulations on his organ scholarship to Balliol, Oxford where he has a place to read Classics. The music scholars' concert also saw 14 of our senior musicians give impressive solos on a range of instruments. Many congratulations to James Magé who was awarded a distinction and third place at the Oxford Music Festival.

The CCF enjoyed a successful Contingent Dinner, and well done to the cadets who took part in the annual Air Squadron Trophy Competition where they progressed to the national final on 15 March.

Congratulations also to lower sixth former Michael Man who has had a photograph commended by the judges in the *Changing World* photographic exhibition. It will be exhibited at The Menier Gallery in March. There were over 1,600 entries.

Looking forward to the next half term I would like to draw your attention to a very interesting evening with Professor Frank Close on Wednesday 4 March when he will reveal the secrets behind the disappearance of Cold War scientist Pontecorvo whose son was here at Abingdon. Professor Close is a tremendous speaker and it promises to be very entertaining. Admission is free and all are welcome.

This week and over half term we have boys participating in the Bielefeld German exchange, sixth formers visiting Paris, boys gliding, sailing and rowing. Business Studies and Economics students will have a very interesting trip to Frankfurt. I also hope the Lower School thoroughly enjoy their disco tonight with the girls of St Helen's. I am so very grateful those days are over!

I wish everyone an enjoyable and restful half term.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Celestia Dusk'.

Felicity Lusk