



ABINGDON

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

Friday 23 January 2015

Dear Parents, Colleagues, Governors and Boys of Abingdon,

I may be being optimistic but it seems to be noticeably lighter in the mornings and at the end of the day – agreed it takes some imagination but ever the optimist. For myself, and my fellow Antipodeans, this is a tricky time of year when friends and family back home do insist on getting in touch with a weather update. Best ignored I have decided. Anyway our term is well underway and the January blues are nowhere to be seen at Abingdon.

The Science Centre is now over half way through the construction programme and is on track for the start of the new academic year. Our main contractor, Kingerlee, is making and installing all the windows and, at the same time, starting to fit out the interior. There is still a great deal to be done and we're very grateful to everyone involved for their hard work and dedication. You can follow the progress of the construction on the website. We are delighted to announce that following an auspicious number of 63 applications, we have appointed the sculptor, Matthew Lane Sanderson (<http://www.sanderson-sculpture.com>) to design and build the centrepiece for the new Science Centre. We hope to be able to share with you the plans for the piece later this term. The School is very grateful for the donation from Martin Iredale (OA 1956) and family that has helped to make this wonderful project possible.

I am pleased to welcome a number of new colleagues this term. Mr John Davies joins us from Shiplake College as Director of Teaching and Learning; Mrs Kathryn Macaulay joins us from The Abbey School, Reading, as ICT Director. Mr Daniel Mason is a teacher in the Physics department, and Ms Georgina Redman is a temporary teacher of Classics. Mrs Wendy Hole joins the library team as part-time Library Assistant, and Mrs Karen Henderson is Attendance Secretary and Secretary to the Deputy Head (Pastoral). I wish these new colleagues well as they take up their new posts this term.

We said farewell to a number of colleagues at the end of last term. Mrs Lesley Bosley joined the school in 1997 as the receptionist at Mercers' Court. She undertook various roles in her time at the school including Common Room Secretary, Secretary to the Senior Academic Staff, and latterly as Attendance Secretary. I wish Lesley a very happy retirement. A number of other colleagues have moved on to pastures new: Mr George Draganov (Chemistry), Mr Nathan

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Bulfield, Mr James Breslin and Ms Natasha Llewellyn (all Sports Centre staff), and Mr Steve Gibbens (Porter). I wish them all well.

My congratulations to Mr and Mrs Hugh Price on the birth of a daughter during the holidays.

The New Year concert always comes very early in the term and it's a credit to the Music department to perform after very limited rehearsals. It is a real pleasure to see so many boys involved with music at the school and to appreciate the diversity of Abingdon's music-making. The programme included First and Second Orchestra, Lower School, Brass and of course Big Band and the inaugural performance of the Gospel Choir. The latter delighted the audience and we very much look forward to hearing more of this latest edition to our music ensembles.

Over the holidays, we had our first exchange with the Lycee Jean XXIII in Metz. Lower sixth formers from Abingdon and St Helen's enjoyed lessons, getting to know host families and sightseeing, including a day in Strasbourg. We hope this is just the beginning of a long partnership between the schools. Last weekend boys taking the Gold DofE were camping on the Ridgeway; the tough conditions will be good preparation for the Lake District and Scotland later in the year. Last week we also welcomed 300 students, staff and authors to School for the Oxfordshire Book Awards ceremony which is always a lovely event and inspiring for young readers.

We have had the privilege of some very interesting speakers already this term. Professor John Cottingham gave an Edmund Society lecture to sixth form philosophers and younger boys interested in studying the subject. "God and the Soul in Descartes" was the title and not surprisingly "I think and therefore I am" was a key component. The Professor was impressed by the quality of the questions from the boys. Henry Olunga, the first black cricketer to play for Zimbabwe, also visited the school. Henry had to leave Zimbabwe because of his opposition to Mugabe. This multi-talented man, who is also a trained opera singer, was an inspiration. I was delighted to show him a bat that he and the rest of the Zimbabwean team had signed back in the 1990s and which had made its way to my son. We also welcomed Mr Pedro Arroyo, a Spanish journalist who gave an informative lecture on the Spanish Civil War and Professor David Miles from the Monetary Policy Committee at the Bank of England who spoke to our sixth form economists.

I would like to thank all those who give their time to come to Abingdon to speak to the boys; this external input is a vital part of any education. I would also like to thank the OAs who are providing opportunities for lower sixth-formers to gain very valuable experience in their work places this summer as part of our internship programme. Their co-operation is very much appreciated.

The hockey players and footballers have started the term well. The hockey teams won eight matches against Wellington, scoring 44 goals, and played well against St Edward's and Pangbourne. I was particularly pleased to hear that the 17 boys who competed in the 'Goes Hockey Cup 2015' in Barcelona over the holidays not only

achieved third place but also the 'Fair Play Award' for conduct on and off the pitch. The 1st XI footballers gained their second win of the term against Haileybury having previously defeated Our Lady's but lost to a strong side from Haberdashers' Aske's last weekend.

The cross-country team picked up the trophy for the "first school outside of Kent" at the Knole run – I am not sure of the significance of being outside Kent, are they either particularly good or bad runners inside Kent? The team narrowly missed third place overall which is very impressive in a field of 400 runners. Our younger athletes also show promise with Alexander Pennington winning the U13 boys' race at the Oxfordshire Cross-Country Championships and Freddie Cunningham coming in third. Not surprisingly both boys led the field home in their inter-tutor group cross-country competition at the beginning of term. In other sports news the fencers took on and defeated Wellington.

Despite the weather, it is encouraging to see the growing number of clubs and individuals using Tilsley Park. We're delighted to have recruited a new facilities manager, Noel Hatherall, and we welcome him and the other new team members. Together with Abingdon School staff they are working hard to develop the site. We are exploring different options for improving the sporting and social offering and we look forward to making Tilsley Park a centre of excellence for sport and recreation.

The Chess Club faced some tough opposition in the National Schools' Championships losing to the National Champions Reading last week. In the School's own individual knock-out tournament congratulations go to the winners of the Sixth Form, Middle School and Lower School competitions, Rafi'i al-Akiti, Jeff Abraham and Joe Lamond.

John Cheung and Aim Wonghirundacha are delighted with the news that their debut film *Blindside* has been selected for the prestigious BFI Future Film Festival at London's BFI Southbank. The film also made it to the last four in an unusual online competition where the public voted for the best films. We wish Aim and John every success at BFI.

There are some very talented OAs who have chosen to go into the arts. Established names such as Toby Jones, Tom Hollander and David Mitchell are followed by an impressive number of former pupils who are gaining a reputation on the stage, screen and in broadcasting – do take a look at an update from our Drama department. Hot on their heels are some very talented boys who are currently performing in the Chekov short stories this week and in *Les Miserables* at the beginning of February. Both are joint productions with St Helen's and should be an absolute treat. This week I had a large contingent of the cast from *As You Like It* to receive Head's Praise together with one of our students for truly outstanding academic achievement. Very well done to them all.

Yours sincerely

Felicity Lusk

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