



ABINGDON

From Deputy Head, Academic: Graeme May

18 September 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians

## **Changes to the minimum GCSE requirement for Sixth Form entry**

### ***Rationale for a GCSE Bar***

Abingdon has operated a minimum GCSE requirement for Sixth Form entry for many years and we use this 'bar' as a way of indicating which boys are likely to feel comfortable and settle and of course to thrive in our Sixth Form. When we accept a boy for entry into Abingdon at 1st, 3rd or 4th year, it is with the expectation that they will develop across their time with us and be entirely suitable for Sixth Form. However, making this judgement at such an early stage is not a precise science and each year a very few boys do not make the progress that we might have hoped; hence we use the 'pause' between GCSE and Sixth Form to make a reassessment. We do of course track boys carefully over their time with us and communicate with parents and boys during the Middle School if we feel they may not be likely to meet that minimum GCSE standard. We also offer lots of support and intervention for this group of boys.

When boys do not pass the bar, it is likely that they will not be invited back to join Abingdon's Sixth Form. This is because, although boys are fully supported in our Sixth Form, we tackle the A Level/pre-U material in a fast-paced and demanding way, expecting boys to show a high level of self-motivation and discipline coupled with strong ability. This approach does not tend to suit boys who have found reaching our GCSE bar a challenge, even after receiving additional teaching and support.

Abingdon's minimum GCSE entry requirement for 6th form entry has stood at 3As and 4Bs for some time, though we have also always recommended that boys have a minimum of an A grade in the subjects they intend to take for A Level.

### ***Changes to the UK public exams system***

The UK exam system (including most iGCSEs) is moving from letter grades to number grades for GCSE and, for boys in our current 4th year and below, most of their GCSE exams will be graded in numbers. This new grading system has been established with a Grade 7 being equivalent to the former A grade, Grade 4 as equivalent to the bottom of the former C grade (also now described as a 'standard pass') and Grade 5 as a high C/low B (also now described as a 'strong pass'). Thus a Grade 6 represents a high/medium B equivalent.

This national change has led us to think about our 6th form entry requirement (which cannot work as it stands) and to make adjustments.

### ***How Abingdon's minimum requirements will work***

**Current 5th year.** Boys in the current 5th year, who will have a mix of numbers and letters in their GCSE results, will be largely unaffected. Grade 7s will be treated as As and Grade 6s will be treated as Bs. Thus, boys will require a minimum of 3 grades at 7 or A and 4 grades at 6 or B for 6th form entry. It remains our strong recommendation that boys should see a GCSE 7 or A as a minimum for beginning an A Level course in that subject, but there is room for negotiation on this if a boy has a 6 or B and wishes to continue with that subject. If a boy falls short of the 6th form entry requirement by dint of having a high Grade 5 (which we will know from his marks) then we will count that as a B too.

**Current 4th year and below.** Boys in the current 4th year and below will have a slightly different system. They will require an overall average of a 6 (with a B grade = 6 for any subject still using letter grades) and a minimum of a 7 to begin A Level courses in that subject (with an 8 in Maths required for those wishing to start with Further Maths A Level). The use of an average does not represent an increase in the requirement for 6th form; if anything using an average is fairer for those boys who do not complete the standard 10 GCSEs and had less 'room' to get the 3A, 4B needed under the previous system.

With a GCSE A\*/A percentage consistently in the 80s, it should be remembered that the vast majority of Abingdonians sail comfortably over the bar and we do not expect that to change. The required average of a 6 will present few, if any, with a problem especially as a less than '6' performance in one subject can be compensated for by a '7+' achievement in another.

Some examples:

- A boy with four 7s, three 6s, two 5s and one 4 (the equivalent of 4As, 3Bs and 3Cs - including one low C) would have an average of 6 and thus pass that requirement and also have the four 7s needed to begin A Level courses in those subjects.
- A boy with three 7s, four 6s and three 5s (equivalent of 3As, 4Bs and 3Cs) would have the necessary average of 6 but might need to have a conversation about which A Levels he would do.
- If a boy falls short of the 7 needed to begin a particular A Level (or 8 for Further Maths), we will be willing to be flexible if there is sufficient evidence that he is likely to thrive in that subject (e.g. he may have a high 6 / B grade and/or have been expected to do better based on his work over the previous two years). We will reserve the right not to allow a boy to start on a particular course if he has not achieved the necessary grade.

For subjects that do not have a GCSE equivalent in Abingdon's curriculum, we would look for strength in subjects with similar skills to judge if a boy is likely to prosper in it. For example, in Economics it is useful to have mathematical and essay writing skills. In Psychology, strengths in maths and science are helpful indicators but so too is an ability to produce coherent extended writing. For Politics, aptitudes for History and English probably offer the best guides. Philosophy needs the kind of thinking and writing that one sees in Religious

Studies and other humanities subjects but also benefits from the rigour of the mathematically gifted.

***Our commitment***

We recognise that this alteration to the bar arrangements, though necessary owing to the national change, should not inadvertently result in an increase in our minimum requirement for boys who are already in the middle of GCSE courses. Therefore, we will ensure that boys currently in 4th and 5th year who would have been otherwise 'safe' under the previous system are not disadvantaged by the new one.

Yours sincerely

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