



ABINGDON

From the Head: Miss OFS Lusk, B.Mus

12 June 2015

Dear Parents, Colleagues, Governors and Boys of Abingdon,

We are beginning to have a sense of the academic year coming to an end, but it's very much heads down, with exams and a solid work ethic all round being strong features of the month of June. The boys continue to be fully engaged in their Other Half activities, including those sitting exams, and this brings balance and enjoyment to their lives.

You may have noticed in the media that one independent school is considering dropping prep from their programme. I think that a closer reading of what was actually stated presents a less radical approach, but the ever-increasing awareness of a generation under an unprecedented level of stress is perhaps the real issue. Here lies what good schools are best able to do through the pastoral side of teaching and school life to help counteract anxiety and stress, and teach our boys how best to cope with the demands of growing up. I'm not at all convinced that dropping prep as such would have any real benefits (why not drop a subject or two, or even three? or a sport or maybe a concert or play) indeed, it could add to stress in the long run. Carefully prepared homework tasks should focus on consolidation, investigation, reading around a subject, amongst other dimensions. What is pointless, however, is homework which is repetitive, unrelated to what's going on in the classroom and used as a time filler for the slot called prep. I will be interested to see if prep per se is dropped in any of our schools and, if so, what the long term effect might be.

I welcome a new member to the School's Governing Body this month: Councillor Helen Pighills was elected recently as Mayor of Abingdon and will serve as a governor here during her year in office. I look forward to working with Councillor Pighills.

Over the last few months it has been heartening, and a reflection of Abingdon's reputation in the education sector, to be able to recruit talented new members of the teaching staff, both to fill posts where staff are leaving, but also to enable us to increase the overall staff numbers in order to maintain our class sizes.

I welcome two new colleagues to the School this month: Mrs Ellena Downes is our new Science Technician, and Miss Moira Doctor joins the Housekeeping

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department. We said farewell to Miss Elizabeth Robson from our Philanthropy department during the half term break.

My congratulations to Dr Rebecca Howe and Mr Andrew Howe on the birth of a son, James, recently.

Over the last year we have been working in partnership with Fitzharrys School in Abingdon with the aim of developing innovative practice and to share and broaden experience in order to improve teaching and learning. Last Tuesday staff involved in the project from both schools presented their work in a very enjoyable evening. We hope that this mutually beneficial partnership between the two schools can be developed and widened in the future.

There was extremely impressive work on display at both GCSE and A Level in the art and design exhibitions before half term. If you didn't have the chance to see for yourself then there are galleries on the website. The Junior Scholars' Concert also displayed some exciting emerging talent. We have much to look forward to as these boys move up the school and I am sure the Lower School Gala Concert on 24 June will whet the appetite. I am also very much looking forward to the grand finale of the musical year, the Summer Concert with senior bands and orchestras on Friday 26 June. I would like to congratulate second year James Magé who raised £300 in his third fundraising event for Sobell House, playing the piano at the Churchill Hospital.

Over half term boys enjoyed a DofE Bronze canoeing expedition in Kent on the River Medway and there was a very successful History department tour to Munich and Nuremberg. Last weekend the boarders had a lot of fun at the St Swithun's School Roller Disco and I am assured their enthusiasm and flair did Abingdon proud!

Members of the AFU had the pleasure of meeting a filmmaking giant, Peter Lord, during their visit at the end of May, to the Aardman Studios. The studios are responsible for such films as The Wrong Trousers, Chicken Run and Wallace and Gromit, and this was a rare opportunity indeed for those interested in film animation.

The National Schools' Regatta saw a lot of good racing from Abingdon crews amidst fierce competition. Many of the Vllls narrowly missed out on medals and the small boats were very successful. Max Thompson picked up his first Silver in Nationals and Tom Digby and Adam Teece won Silver in the Championship pairs. In the following Metropolitan Regatta the 1st Vlll were convincing winners of the Metropolitan Cup. You can see a lovely video of them training on the Thames last week.

The Rifle Club, has been in the news recently with excellent performances at the Oxfordshire Rifle Association Summer Meeting. James Hogge (4th Year) won the County Junior Championship and the A and B teams won the Symonds Bowl and Markland Cup respectively. The Club also has three boys that shoot for the English team. The boys very much enjoyed the recent exchange visit with the School Rifle Club from Stade in Germany.

In other sport news Sam Christie was part of the winning Oxfordshire County Tennis Team that are through to the National County Cup round.

It has been an immensely successful sporting year for the school. Our sporting ethos is “more opportunities for more pupils” and it is wonderful to see how this is being fulfilled. Our aim is to ensure that every boy can choose to take part in a sport they enjoy no matter what their ability and with over 20 sports on offer there really is something for everyone.

At this stage in the school year I would like to take the opportunity to applaud our sporting elite. We are in the enviable position of having 16 boys represent their country across ten different sports, including U18 England rugby and hockey captains, and a further nine boys have won titles at a national level. And we still have a few weeks to go! I know of very few other schools that can boast such achievements, especially amongst boys who also succeed academically and often in drama, art and music as well. My thanks to these boys for their dedication and hard work, and to the Sports Department for making such impressive standards possible.

This is the penultimate letter before the end of term. The remaining three weeks are filled with concerts, sport, celebrations, farewells, assemblies and of course our Leavers’ Day, Prize Giving and Ball on Saturday 27 June. I very much look forward to seeing you at the various events.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Felicity Lusk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'F'.

Felicity Lusk