



From: Simon James, Head of Sixth Form

7 September 2023

An introduction to Sixth Form Life

Having now completed the first few (rather warm) days of school, I wanted to write to just say how impressed I have been with our L6th and how excited I am to be working with them. It is great to see them knuckling down to work in the Beech Court and there is a real buzz around the place.

I thought that I would also take this opportunity to just outline what you might expect over the coming weeks and months - what's new and what will be familiar. I will also cover many of these topics on **Thursday 28 September** at our Joint Meet the Tutor Evening, which I hope many of you will be able to attend (details in a separate notice). A recording of that address will be made available for those that can't attend.

We have tried to design life in the Abingdon Sixth form as one of transition, between being a school pupil and university student or employee. We aim to do that by supporting and scaffolding what's going on whilst encouraging independence, and gradually letting go of the reins. This will echo, I should imagine, your experiences as parents too over the new two years.

The tutor will remain the most important point of contact for you over the next two years, anything which concerns you or you'd like guidance with, don't hesitate to make contact in the first instance. There is, as I have said, the opportunity to come in and meet them on Thursday 28 September.

The House system remains a very strong part of life and clearly you have another key pastoral figure in the Head of House (Housemaster) with whom many have built up a 3 year relationship. The House remains a point of continuity and a "home" within the school. I hope that our 6th formers retain that sense of identity and will look to take a leading role as a senior pupil within their House.

The students also have the 6th Form team at their disposal, most of whom have their offices in Beech Court. Often we support pupils with their plans for the future and we have expertise when it comes to things like university applications, careers guidance, gap years. The team is as follows:

Mr Simon James – Head of Sixth Form

Mr Richard Taylor – Assistant Head of Sixth Form (Progression inc. Oxbridge)

Mrs Jen Hoddinott – Assistant Head of Sixth Form (Universities)

Abingdon School, Park Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 1DE

Tel: 01235 521563 Fax: 01235 849079

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Mr Michael Triff – Head of Career Guidance & co-ordinator of non-UK university applications

Mr James Ambrose – University Applications Assistant

Mr Ben Whitworth – i/c medical, veterinary & dentistry applications

Mr Knowland - i/c Law applications

The Other Half will remain broadly familiar, certainly we have the same expectations that a student will do a minimum of two sporting activities per week and an activity on a Wednesday afternoon. We continue to expect pupils to be available for fixtures on a Saturday, and would ask that any Leave of Absence is requested in writing via the Head's office copying in Mr Donnelly giving a week's notice.

Other Half offering expands at Sixth Form, with something approaching 50 different options for a Wednesday afternoon alone. We will certainly be encouraging breadth and would really appreciate it if this is a message which you can encourage at home. That broader education is something that we value highly for a whole host of reasons, not simply to add super curricular strings to their bow for personal statements and CVs.

You can expect roughly the same pattern of reports as in previous years, roughly one per half term, these will take the form of either a short or long report. Parents' evening is on **Wednesday 29 November** (with an overflow evening on **Thursday 30 November**). This evening can help inform conversations about potentially dropping a subject at Christmas time (though dropping this early, or at all, is by no means a requirement).

We continue to teach PSHCE in a what is called a Mindsets programme which happens on a Wednesday afternoon in tutor time, but we also have a half-termly 6th form lecture covering a whole host of topics such as Teenagers and Motoring Law; Gambling and Addiction; Sexual Health and STIs; Making the move to University.

I'd like to also draw your attention to the fact that the wellbeing section of firefly has a comprehensive set of pages offering guidance and advice across a whole host of topics, and that the [@Ab_Wellbeing](#) twitter handle (or X-handle) will be posting regular updates about mental health and wellbeing on X (formerly twitter).

From an academic perspective, sometimes not having a lesson is new, and we help the L6th manage this. They will have about 6 or 7 supervised study sessions across a fortnight, plus some other time which can be used to study too. We supervise that in Beech Court, providing dedicated time in a quiet and relaxed environment to get quality work done during the day. If and when they drop a subject, they get additional study periods which aren't supervised, and then in the U6th there's no compulsion to register in those periods (though certainly there's an expectation of using them productively). This is an example of us gradually taking away the scaffolding.

We recommend that students should be doing about 4 hours of independent work per subject per week outside of the classroom. Most students will have 2 teachers per subject, so 2 hours per week, per teacher. If they are doing significantly less than that, then a conversation needs to be had. I think they should also talk to us (probably via their tutor) if they are doing significantly more than that too, perhaps they are doing things inefficiently.

Depending on the subject, another difference might be slightly or significantly longer deadlines and more substantial pieces of work, especially in certain disciplines. So more planning and forethought is needed, and this is a message that we will continue to share with them.

We very much hope that even more than in the middle-school, there's a two-way dialogue between them and their teachers. The sense that we are working alongside them, and guiding them is something that many 6th Formers report. They should no longer look at

homework as something to get done to avoid getting in trouble. They should be looking to learn from every experience, and be seeking feedback and advice.

The first major set of internal assessments are the 'November Tests', these are on **Monday 13 - Wednesday 15 November** and the timetable will be suspended during that period. These are a useful marker as to how students are getting on and whether everything has been embedded as we'd hope. We treat them fairly seriously, so it is worth having one eye on whether preparation is taking place for these in the weeks leading up to them.

In broad terms we try to gauge progress internally in a reasonably formal way on a fairly regular basis. We have another round of tests around March and then, most importantly, the Summer exams at the start of June.

After the first few months have passed, students are quickly going to start thinking about what comes after school. This is one major difference from middle-school and a big part of what we offer on the super-curricular front. We have structured, detailed and comprehensive university entrance and careers guidance programmes. These are very strong strands for us and things that we are very proud of. We put all of those services under one banner which we call *After Abingdon*.

University might not be the right step for all of our students, which is completely fine, guidance is available. Our career guidance is led by Michael Triff. He is more than happy to have students make an appointment with him for bespoke advice, on top of the whole-year group provision. On this note I would like to advertise our **OA Club 6th Form Careers Evening on Thursday 17 November**, as just one example of what is being offered in this area. It's an excellent evening, with bespoke elements and we would like all L6th to attend this. Information will follow in the weekly mailing.

I am mindful that some parents will have been through the UCAS process with an older sibling, but many won't have done so. Please do not worry. As well as myself, I have a dedicated team of colleagues who work specifically on university entrance. Tutors are of course important here too in getting to know their tutees and in putting together a holistic reference with input from subject specialists. We offer a series of *After Abingdon* events to help with that. The first of these comes in early February next year, once students have had a term to get their heads around being A-Level students.

Last year in May we had in excess of 40 destinations represented at our Future's Fair, and we intend to offer this event again this year. There will also be a UCAS 360 degree evening in the Summer term, which will provide the chance to drill down into university plans in a more detailed way with tutors and subject specialists.

We can advise and assist in applications to overseas universities, too, and Michael Triff takes the lead here. If students are remotely interested, we will be putting on an evening on **Monday 4 December** imaginatively called North American Universities Advice Evening. Again, information to follow in the weekly mailing.

Lastly, my message to students on the first day back was that we are looking to them to be role models. I hope very much that they will take the opportunity to take on leadership positions and give something back to the school over the coming two years.

I think the start of the L6th is exciting and challenging in equal measure. In my experience, most students have been ready for the step up for quite a few months already, but we are here to support them if the road is bumpy at any point. I look forward to meeting many of you on Thursday 28 September.

With my best wishes,

Simon James (Head of Sixth Form)
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