



# Abberley Hall

## SCHOOL

Dear Parents,

### **Improvements and New Initiatives for 2021**

I hope you are well and looking forward to Half Term after what has been an extremely busy and incredibly positive start to the year. Thank you for making Tessa and I feel so welcome and for being so positive and understanding during a challenging start to our time 'at the helm'. I feel enormously privileged to be leading a school full of such delightful children and to be part of such a loyal and supportive community.

Thank you to those who joined Carey Leonard and I on Zoom earlier today to hear about some of our plans for Abberley Hall as we move into an exciting new chapter. For those who were unable to join us, I will attempt to outline my key points. You may also like to see a recording of the meeting by clicking [here](#)

### **Partnership with Malvern**

There was nervousness from some that our partnership with Malvern College may detract from the uniqueness and charm of Abberley Hall. Our school has a long and distinguished history and it will continue to stand proudly with its own unique character, to make its own decisions and to operate as an independent charity. As we all know, small rural prep schools away from London, operating in isolation, are under increasing strain. Our partnership with Malvern brings us great strength. Many 'behind the scenes' necessities of running a prep school, such as marketing, HR, accountancy, compliance and estates management, have been centralised and we are able to benefit from increased expertise in these areas. Malvern has invested heavily in our school and this has provided stability at a time when many independent schools are struggling to remain open. A perfect example of this investment is the recently refurbished Astro, improved IT infrastructure and developments in the boarding house. Our pupils are benefiting increasingly from sports coaches, outdoor education leaders and heads of academic departments coming in to offer their expertise. We have always sent children to Malvern College because of our geographical proximity and because our ethos and theirs have always been aligned. We will continue to send our pupils to Malvern but, again, they will go on to the right school for them and this will mean sending them to a wide range of senior schools.

### **Boarding and Day Pupils**

Boarding is a great strength of the school and we will continue to be known as an excellent school for boarders. However, the prep school market has changed considerably over the past decade and full boarding at prep school age has been in steady decline throughout the country. We must ensure that we appeal to a wide market in order to retain the pupil numbers that we need to exist as a successful school and so we are making our boarding provision more flexible. We will continue to welcome full boarders and to ensure their experience is second to none, but we will also welcome weekly boarders and part-time boarders. In fact, we will welcome children to board for any number of nights a week that they choose.

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Whilst boarding will continue to be an important part of what we offer, we welcome day children wholeheartedly and will do everything we can to ensure the school is set up to cater for the logistical needs of busy local families who do not want their children to board. Day children will, for example, continue to be able to benefit from our wraparound care. They can go home at 5pm if they wish or they can stay for independent learning, tea and activities. Most importantly of all, we will generate an atmosphere where day children and boarders will benefit from the wonders of an Abberley education and all will be valued equally.

## **School Buses**

Numerous parents have commented that they would like us to provide a school bus service and so this is what we will do. We have three school mini-buses and we plan to establish routes this academic year. It is likely that a bus will go west towards Ludlow, another east towards Kidderminster and another south towards Worcester. Malvern College will also be running a bus route from Malvern to Abberley.

## **Saturdays**

Saturday lessons are an established part of life at Abberley but times are changing fast and they are unpopular with many for some of the following reasons:

- On average there are 34 Saturdays per academic year, but only about 20 can be used for teaching as a result of exeats, half-terms, ends of terms and other school events.
- Children who have subjects on a Saturday miss out on these lessons which, not surprisingly, has a negative impact on our ability to prepare them for exams.
- Current and prospective parents are increasingly expressing a strong desire for us to abandon compulsory Saturday school to allow them more time with their children. Increasing work pressures mean that time spent together as a family at the weekend is precious.
- Many children are now traveling further to school and having to do this for 6 days a week is tiring for our younger children.

## **Saturday Enrichment Programme**

Saturdays will continue to form an important part of the school week and we will strongly urge children, particularly our older children, to join us, but attendance will become optional. Those who do attend will enjoy an exceptional enrichment programme containing the following elements:

- Performing – Music, Drama and Performing Arts
- Intellectual enrichment – debating, philosophy, chess, Science Club, scholarship preparation and revision workshops...
- Creating – Art and Crafts
- Adventure – The Abberley Challenge - an outdoor education awards programme
- Sport – sports training and enrichment for all abilities

Covid permitting, parents will be invited to drop off and then enjoy coffee, a bite to eat and a chance to catch up with one another whilst children head off to begin their enrichment activities. The programme will run throughout the morning and sporting fixtures will be held, as in the past, on Saturday afternoons for those concerned. A detailed programme will be made available to parents, which will set out clearly all the options available so that you can plan ahead and sign up for your chosen options.



Lessons that were taught on Saturdays will still be delivered but will take place during the week. This will be achieved through streamlining the school day and making sure that our timetable runs more efficiently.

Full boarders will continue to enjoy a full programme throughout the weekend and we will continue to welcome part-time boarders and day children to board on weekends if and when they wish to do so.

### **A modern curriculum**

Parents and senior schools agree that children should not be 'drilled' to perform well in exams at the expense of happiness and breadth of education. We will ensure that our pupils continue to excel in exams whilst also developing skills and qualities such as leadership, creativity, confidence, curiosity and character. These are the sorts of qualities that senior schools are looking for and that our children will need to live happy and successful lives in our fast-changing world. Our Saturday Enrichment Programme will help us develop these skills and qualities as well as ensuring that our pupils enjoy a magical childhood in the unique and inspiring setting that is Abberley Hall.

### **Affordability**

We are conscious that parents make huge sacrifices to be able to afford an Abberley Hall education. We pride ourselves on offering an excellent education and one that provides more than is offered by many of our local competitors. However, after 'benchmarking' what we charge against similar prep schools throughout the country, we feel that our fees need to be reduced in some areas. Fees for our Pre-Prep and Year 3 are competitive but fees from Years 4 to 8 are high. They will be reduced significantly this academic year for all current and new parents in order to ensure that we are not only offering the best prep school education possible but that we are delivering this at a competitive price. Details of the new fees for all day children and boarders will be made public later this term.

I am fully committed to ensuring that the school's rounded educational offering is continually improved to the benefit of our children and I am tremendously excited about what these carefully considered changes will bring to our school. You can rest assured that there will be no dilution of the excellence your children currently enjoy. I truly believe that these changes will enhance the quality of education at Abberley Hall and I am confident that we will continue to go from strength to strength.

Finally, I wish you all a restful and thoroughly well-deserved Half Term break. My Newsletter will follow before long.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely



Jonnie Besley  
Headmaster

