

The termly magazine from Dragon School

Dragon's Tales



Spring Term 2025





HEAD'S WELCOME

Dear Dragon Families,

The daffodils and blossom are out and the grounds staff are itching to convert our football pitches into cricket squares. We start the Spring Term in darkness but end it in sunshine, which is always a lovely time of year.

I have been reflecting on this term and there are many highlights. I have just returned from seeing the Year 2 play, where they sang their hearts out, reminding the audience of our environmental responsibilities. Earlier in the term I was struck by the Dragons' reaction to being asked by a visiting speaker (and Dragon parent) "Who wants to change the world?" A sea of hands shot up and I could not have been prouder. To think that we are fulfilling our aim to develop these free-thinking young people is so inspiring when world events can seem quite overwhelming.

Creativity lies at the heart of free thinking, whether that is on a sports pitch strategising on how to challenge the opposition, in a chess match, on the stage, through visual arts or in the daily debates in our classrooms. This term our Dragons have had opportunities to be creative in all of these areas and I hope this newsletter will give you a flavour of what we have been up to.

With best wishes,

Anna Giddons



SOCIAL IMPACT



This term has been bustling with activity and collaboration! Our pupils have joined children from over 13 other schools across the county for a range of exciting partnership events. These included a gamelan day, where students experienced the rich culture of Indonesian music and culture, an orchestral day led by the Dragon Music department and Oxford Philharmonic, and a musical drama workshop based on our Upper School production of 'Beauty and the Beast'.

We were proud to announce that, thanks to our combined efforts, the 2024 Dragon Sale raised over £129,000, which will support over 100 charities nationally and internationally. Additionally, over 30 children from Reception to A Block presented to the Dragon Sale trustees to secure further funds for charities that they support personally. Our recent Red Nose Day also raised over £1500 for Comic Relief.

At the Pre-Prep, 13 new pupil Changemakers were appointed, and have already made an impact by conducting a green survey of the site. The Pre-Prep also welcomed their Charity of the Year, Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground, for an assembly to hear the various ways their upcoming fundraising activities will support this wonderful local initiative.

Finally, we were delighted to publish the Dragon's first Social Impact Report, giving our wider community an insight into the vibrant range of charitable and partnership activities that take place across the school year. With your continued support, we look forward to growing and expanding our programme further, giving our pupils and other children locally, nationally and internationally opportunities to reach for the sun.

SPRING TERM AT THE PRE-PREP

What a term; it has had everything including penguins, snakes, a (planned!) visit from the fire service, the Year 3 Art Exhibition, World Book Day celebrations, and the House Event challenging our Dragons to be free-thinking and creative inventors. Class assemblies have showcased the confidence of the children when performing and the wonderful Year 2 performance of 'Look Up!' was the icing on the cake in the final week. Learning has certainly been fun this term and I hope all the Pre-Prep community enjoys a well-earned break.

Annie McNeile, Head of the Pre-Prep



Reception. Reception started Muddy Dragons forest school this term, where they have been enjoying climbing trees, cooking pancakes on the fire, building dens and searching for wildlife. They also joined House Bun Breaks this term too, building relationships with older children within the school and working hard to earn House points. In our topic 'On the Move' the children learnt about all different types of transport and even enjoyed a visit from a rocket scientist who told them all about space and planets. In our 'Amazing Animals' topic the children enjoyed visits from real-life penguins, spiders, owls, meerkats, iguanas and tree frogs! I'm sure you have been able to sample some of the delicious treats the children having been making with Ma Michelle, including spring rolls for the Lunar New Year. Early coding and programming floor robots was a big hit, as was learning about the process of simple block coding to create a game on the iPad.

Year 1. This term Year 1 have been learning about the Great Fire of London and have enjoyed a variety of activities that have taken them back in time. Our workshop from Those History People was an absolute highlight with activities such as weaving, metal-mould making, bread making and leather working saw all the children immersing themselves in the topic.

Back in class the children stepped into the shoes of Samuel Pepys to write a diary entry, writing in the first person to explain what they could see happening in London. They then took the tune of 'London's Burning' to create their own poetry. Alongside this, the children have been making their own animated stories, learning how to paint a picture, type a story, add animated movements and sound, change backgrounds and change font style and size. In Maths we have been drawing on previous skills and relating this to numbers to 50, understanding tens and ones, counting in tens and partitioning numbers.

Year 2. This term the Year 2s have been busy absorbing themselves in Clean Up. They have been studying the book by Nathan Byron. Alongside this they have been studying across the curriculum with

a central theme of looking after the environment. In Art we have created beautiful turtle prints using recycled bubble wrap and looking at the beauty of Brighton's burnt-down pier. In Science we have focused our learning about the identification and classification of marine animals, and how ecosystems like coral reefs work in harmony together. Later in the term we turned our minds to recycling and what we can do to look after our planet.

The highlight of the whole term was performing and acting in the play 'Clean Up' so beautifully. They performed a story about Rocket, a little girl, who is a champion for the environment with her friends, campaigning to stop the littering on the beautiful island of Jamaica. It was written especially for the year group and they did not disappoint. They performed the play with such Dragon Courage and should be very proud of their performance. The singing and coming together as a year group was really magical.

Year 3. The Spring Term began with an exciting opportunity for Year 3: to get to know the Prep Drama teachers a little better in their 'Beauty and the Beast' workshop. They had a fun-filled morning of activities, followed by a visit later in the term to see the Upper School Dragons bring the story to life onstage. Over the following weeks, the children wowed the teachers and parents with their own confidence onstage, as they presented their class assemblies to the school, fostering curiosity and creativity with their stories and presentations. They enjoyed a trip to Oxford's Museum of Natural History to explore animal skeletons, and an assembly from Joy and her family on their incredible voyage to climb Mount Fuji. As part of their transition activities to prepare for their move to the Prep School next year, the E Block teachers came up to spend the morning with the children in their Year 3 classrooms, and each class also visited the Prep for lunch in the dining room and enjoyed a tour of the Prep library. The term concluded with a stunning display of the children's artwork in the Pre-Prep gym for their Charity Art Exhibition to raise funds for the Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground.



SPRING TERM AT THE PREP



E Block. E Block have had a wonderful, action-packed term. In addition to over 20 different sporting fixtures that have taken place, they have represented their forms in the year group swim relays and cross-country. On the stage they wowed us with their music ability in the Spring Concert and entertained us with their presence and confidence during the E Block Drama Showcase where each form produced an alternative retelling of famous traditional stories. A real highlight was the visit from Jungle Jonathan, who brought with him different animals including a snake and tarantula. The children were able to handle the animals and learn about their habitats, anatomy and behaviour, bringing their science learning to life.

Middle School. Middle School has been awash with sporting activities, swim relays, cross-country, their first real tennis tournament v. The Oratory School and Gamelan Day with All Saint's

School. They performed beautifully in the Middle School Concert, and the Variety Show was a huge success. C Block put on their brilliant classical plays, and D Block enjoyed an immersive opera day. Jonathan's Jungle Roadshow brought in a variety of different animals for the D Block children to handle and to learn about their habitats. The French trip was great fun, with plenty of memories made. The children also enjoyed World Book Day, with a visit from author Penny Boxall, and the school book fair.

Future school admissions processes have been well under way with over 75% of C Block attending interviews and taster days. Offers have been sent out by many schools, with others due to be announced soon. The journey continues for some this year with interviews next term too and others will take the Common Entrance next year. Good luck to all and well done!



Upper School. A short term in weeks but no less full of events and successes. Upper School children's energy and commitment started from the word go and within the first few weeks we had the performances of the amazing musical 'Beauty and the Beast', involving over 60 Upper School children either onstage or behind the scenes.

There have been "spotlight moments" with Children's Mental Health Week (Know Yourself, Grow Yourself), International Women's Day, World Book Day, Red Nose Day, Neurodiversity Week – all these things the children have engaged with either in lessons, assemblies, or their free time. We have had a number of workshops and visiting

speakers, including Dominic Sandbrook speaking to the Upper School, the Rock and Pop Workshop at Stowe, Musical Theatre Day at Downe House and stage-fighting workshops for B Block.

Boarding numbers are thriving in Upper School with our senior Houses full of boarders, enjoying fun and friendship, a highlight being a visit to Twickenham to see England beat Wales!

Academically, the children have been focused and diligent, particularly during moments of assessments, mock exams and when going to their future school to take scholarships.

BOARDING DRAGONS

The boarders have had a stunning term with many notable highlights. The collaboration between Houses has seen a range of varied events, activities and celebrations. From talent shows, to garden games, pancake flipping, and Lunar New Year celebrations, the children have had a wonderful time!

The weekend activity programme has been much enjoyed by all. The private viewing at the Curzon cinema, a trip to Ninja Warriors at Milton Keynes, zorbing on the Dragon Fields, the visit to Whipsnade Zoo and the Upper School expedition to Twickenham to see England play Italy in the Six Nations were all hugely successful. These trips have been chosen by the boarders through the Boarding Council, where dorms discussions and pupil voice remain key elements of our boarding provision.

The Houses have been working on establishing their House values and identities based on Courage, Kindness and Respect. Many of the senior boarders have loved having the opportunity to help out in the Junior Houses, setting up games and playing with the younger children. This sense of community and leadership is a great strength of boarding at the Dragon. Dragon Boarders are free-thinking, independent and confident young people enjoying their home-away-from-home experience.



DRAGON QUEST



Our fourth year of Quest finished off with a bang this term in some glorious sunshine. We made full use of the increase in temperature with paddleboarding and canoeing on the river, sailing over at Farmoor, and plenty of outdoor sessions such as spikeball, lacrosse and Aussie Rules. Quest is always up with the times, so we had a Taylor-Swift-themed Dragon Eras group and harnessed the current passion for table tennis with Dragon Whiff-Whaff. We look forward to making use of the new performing arts building, but already our West End Dragons are producing some high-quality performances. Some exciting new Quests await us in September, as well as old favourites.



ARTISTIC DRAGONS



This term, Dragon pupils have explored a diverse range of artistic themes, techniques and materials, developing their creative skills and artistic expression.

A Block focused on the human figure, producing a series of portraits using pencil, pen and pastels. Each lesson, pupils took turns sitting as a model while their peers sketched them, resulting in a collection of observational drawings. Inspired by Degas, they experimented with futuristic interpretations of portraiture, incorporating dynamic lines and expressive mark-making.

B Block explored the theme of books, creating concertina cards and scrapbook-style artworks filled with found objects, textures, and expressive mark-making techniques. They also completed a delicate series of watercolour birds, capturing fine details and subtle colour variations.

C Block delved into still life, working with oil pastels to depict vases of flowers and fruit. They also created intricate graphite pencil studies of floral arrangements,

developing shading and form. Additionally, they designed their own willow pattern artworks, drawing inspiration from traditional artworks.

D Block investigated the theme of water, experimenting with watercolours, pastels and masking fluid to create atmospheric underwater scenes. Through layering and blending techniques, they explored how to depict reflections, movement and the transparency of water.

E Block focused on texture, producing miniature weavings inspired by skies and fields, carefully selecting colours to reflect the landscapes they observed. They also created vibrant, three-dimensional sunflower collages, using a mix of textured materials to bring their compositions to life.

Across all year groups, our Dragons have demonstrated creativity, experimentation and skill development, producing a fantastic range of work that showcases their growing confidence as artists.

MUSICAL DRAGONS



The Music Department got off to a flying start this term with its termly Gamelan Outreach Day, which over the year involves three local schools, 160 children as well as 90 Dragons. The very next week we were treated to 'A Bard's Tale', a concert by the international guitarist and OD, Manus Noble. Our winners of Battle of the Bands this year were taken on a trip to Stowe to spend a day in their recording studio, polishing their work and making a quality recording of their winning performances. The half term was brought to a close with a fantastic evening of chamber music which was also our first proper recital in the purpose-built Sadler Hall. With refreshments in the garden room, it really did make it a special evening attended by three Directors of Music from senior schools.

The second half of term has been equally busy with some 70

ABRSM exams taking place, the Dragon Piano Festival first round during our curriculum music lessons, as well as our extensive Spring Concert programme. In addition to the usual belters, like our Spring Concert and our year group offerings, we had a very successful Strings Concert in the Sadler Hall, which has now become a termly staple. We also had our annual collaboration with the Oxford Philharmonic, this time focusing on stringed instruments, with six local primary schools bringing in their musicians to work with ours. D Block worked with the Oxford Opera Company to put on an abridged version of 'Hansel and Gretel' for their parents in only a day. All of this and then a fantastic choir tour to Paris to top it all off. Singing on the main stage in Disneyland Paris will be something our choristers will remember for the rest of their lives!

DRAGONS ON STAGE

The big-ticket event of the term, and one of the Dragon Drama highlights of the year, was the Upper School Musical 'Beauty and the Beast'. The show included a cast of 60, a production team of 30, an orchestra of 10, and was attended by over 1,100 people (some of the younger audience members even came dressed in Beauty and the Beast costumes). The style of the show was less Disney fairytale and more gothic realism, with the key feature of the set being 'Beast's Castle'. Some outstanding individual performances were enjoyed, as well as excellent ensemble work. Congratulations to all involved.

Alongside 'Beauty and the Beast', the Drama and Music departments ran two workshops:

Firstly, we welcomed Windale Primary School for a day's workshop on 'Beauty and the Beast', much of which was delivered by cast members of the show. Secondly, we delivered a workshop to Year 3 who were great fun and enthusiastic throughout the day. They then attended the matinee performance later in the term, which was thoroughly enjoyed.

Later in the term some pupils in D-B Block travelled to Downe House to enjoy a marvellous day of musical theatre based on the songs of Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The Middle School Variety Show was an absolute triumph once again and it was great to see such a "pupil-led" event. There are some very able theatrical and musical performers in D and C Block, that's for sure!

In the penultimate week of term, there was the E Block Drama Showcase – a new event to the school calendar. The showcase delivered a number of adapted classic fairy tales with great humour and characterisation, which pupils enjoyed performing in the Lynam Hall.

Lastly, preparations and auditions for next term's Middle School production of 'The Kid Who Fell Back Into A Story' took place at the end of term. This sequel to the 2022 story is hotly anticipated by audiences, and the cast and crew can't wait to bring it to the Dragon Stage.



SPORTY DRAGONS

This term, 82 hockey, netball and football teams played in 457 fixtures (this is an increase of 40% on last year). In addition, there were fixtures and competitions in cross-country, swimming, real tennis and indoor rowing. Our U11A boys were IAPS Regional hockey plate winners, and our U9A & B netball teams had unbeaten seasons. Our 1st team were 4th place in the IAPS Regional netball, and our 3rd and 5th teams were St Hugh's Tournament winners. Our U12A boys also had an unbeaten season in football, and our U9B girls' football team were St Hugh's Tournament winners, and U11 girls' football were Chandlings and Teddies Tournament winners. In cross-country our U13 boys were East Regional runners-up, the girls were East Regional winners, and both teams were National finalists. We once again hosted the IAPS Regional Qualifiers for swimming, where we had seven visiting schools and 41 of our Dragons competing. The children achieved 22 1st place finishes. We also hosted the ESSA Qualifiers with five visiting schools and 30 swimmers in C and D Blocks. We had a clean sweep of victories in the medley and freestyle relays for both boys and girls. Our 1st Team for girls' cricket were Oxfordshire Indoor Cricket Tournament winners and have qualified for the Regional Finals. With such great success this term, we have also seen 16 sport scholarships and awards dispensed to date. Well done to all for demonstrating true Dragon spirit both on and off the fields.

