

DOWNSIDE

SCHOOL

Statement of Boarding Principles and Practice

*Our task, then, is to establish a school of the Lord's service
- Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue*

Statement of Purpose

In partnership with families, led by the Gospel and guided by the Rule of St Benedict, the monks and staff of Downside aim to educate each of the young persons entrusted to their care so that they should achieve the highest academic and personal standards and develop all their gifts to become more fruitfully committed to Christ, his Church, and the service of others.

Aims

St Benedict says, 'Let none follow what seems good for himself, but rather what is good for another' (RSB, Chapter 72). The Downside Rule echoes this: 'The priority of a Gregorian is duty to others. He/She is obliged to act with courtesy and common sense for the good of the community. Any behaviour that causes discomfort, distress or danger does not conform to the Rule.' It is the aim at Downside that every pupil grow in love, knowledge and wisdom, and become a source of good for themselves and others. To this end, the School is so ordered that pupils experience opportunities for prayer, study, sport and recreation, and as many activities through which they can learn how to become fully human persons. To the same end, pupils are guided away from anything which may harm their development. It is intended that the School be the safe, happy, mutually supportive and creative environment that characterizes a successful Christian community.

Foundation

The Benedictine community of St Gregory the Great was founded at Douai, France, in 1606 by a group of English and Welsh monks who were in exile because of the penal laws in England against Catholics. The community received the protection of the Infanta **Isabella** Clara Eugenia of Spain and Portugal, the joint ruler of the Spanish Netherlands, and they were furnished with buildings by Philip de **Caverel**, Abbot of St Vedast's in Arras. By 1617 English Catholics were sending their boys across the Channel to be educated there. The School has been in existence since that time, with the monks engaged not only in teaching but also in scholarly work, writing and lecturing, and in priestly and pastoral work.

In the 17th century, the death penalty was inflicted on Catholic priests found in England. Many members of St Gregory's nonetheless came to England to exercise their priestly ministry, and six of them have been recognised as martyrs by the Church. Two of these, St John **Roberts** and St Ambrose **Barlow**, were canonized as saints in 1970. Another martyr who has yet to be canonized is Blessed Philip **Powell**, who was put to death in 1646. In 1681, St Oliver **Plunkett**, the Irish Archbishop of Armagh, was executed in London. Before his execution he was helped by an English Benedictine, Dom Maurus Corker, who later took care of his body. His relics are now housed in the principal shrine in Downside Abbey. St Oliver was canonized in 1975.

By the beginning of the 18th century the School was held in such high esteem in England that Queen Anne ordered the Duke of Marlborough to spare it when he stormed Douai in 1710. In the 1790s, however, French revolutionaries plundered the Abbey and School, but the monks and boys were allowed to escape to England in February 1795. After nineteen years at Acton Burnell in Shropshire, in the house of Sir Edward **Smythe**, a former pupil, the Abbey and School moved to Downside and the present buildings were begun. The School has therefore been on its present site since 1814. The cedar tree near the main entrance was planted in that year.

House structure

Plunkett House

This is the junior house for 1st and 2nd Form girls and boys, aged between 11 and 13. They live in separate buildings but within the grounds of the school and have their own pastoral and social life. Girls are resident in Ramsay House, with a resident House Mother, and the boys are resident in Ullathorne House, with the resident House Master. They use all the senior School's facilities, where appropriate, and are subject to the same rules. The House staff consists of the House Master, the Assistant House Mistress, the House Mother, and three House Tutors, who are members of the teaching staff.

Powell House

On joining the main School in the 3rd Form, at 13+, all boys enter Powell House, which has its own dormitories and living areas. Being in a single House enables all the boys in the year to get to know each other and live as a community. Within this structure the House staff are able to be dedicated to the boys' welfare and development at this critical stage. The House staff consists of the resident House Master, the Assistant House Master, the House Mother, and five House Tutors, all members of the teaching staff. The Tutor has a tutor group of about eight boys, and monitors their academic progress as well as assisting in House duties. The Tutors meet formally with their tutees at least twice a week.

Senior Boys' Houses: Barlow, Roberts and Smythe

The choice of Senior House is made by the Head Master at the time pupils join Powell House. Family tradition and parental wishes are, if at all possible, taken into account. Boys go into the Senior Houses in the Fourth Form. This gives them a sense of progression into a more adult environment. In the 4th Form, boy boarders sleep in the House dormitory, with their own personal space of bed and study area. For their 5th and 6th Form years they move into individual rooms. Day pupils have similar provision for the working day: this differs slightly according to House.

Senior Girls' Houses: Caverel and Isabella

Girls enter Caverel or Isabella Houses at 13+ and remain throughout their senior School career. In the 3rd, 4th and 5th Forms, girls share bedrooms; 6th Formers have single study bedrooms. Timings and procedures are the same as in the boys' houses, except in matters which involve girls exclusively.

Each House has its own spirit, character and traditions. They are not greatly different, and are subject to overall School rules and discipline. Pupils have friends across the Houses but compete in games, music and drama. Each House has a House Master/Mistress, Assistant House Master/Mistress, a team of Tutors and a House Mother. The Chaplaincy Team, under the Co-ordinating Chaplain, assists House Masters/Mistresses in providing for the spiritual needs of the pupils.

Each House has its own kitchen and day room. Pupils are obliged to be in their Houses after prep for Assembly and night prayers. Lights are turned out in the dormitories at 22.00. Fifth Form pupils must be in their rooms with lights out by 22.15. Lower Sixth Form pupils must be in their Houses by 22.00, with lights out by 22.45; Upper Sixth Formers in house by 10.30 and their lights out by 23.00.

The School's day pupils are included as members of the boarding houses, and can occasionally board where there is room to do so.

The Houses are the focus of social life in the evenings, but there are also mixed social areas where boys and girls can socialise at appropriate times.

Pastoral care

House Masters and Mistresses (HsMs), and their Assistants (AHsMs), are particularly considered to share in the Head Master's responsibility *in loco parentis*. They are especially involved in the care, guidance and support of all pupils, boarding and day. Further support is given by the pupil's Tutor, in academic and general pastoral matters. In addition, all senior staff, teaching staff, House Mothers, chaplains and nurses are ready to give whatever help they can to all pupils. Senior pupils who are made prefects or monitors are also considered to be an important part of the pastoral care of younger pupils, and are given induction and continuing training to this end. The School's PSHE and Citizenship programme gives education and guidance on alcohol, smoking, drugs, e-safety, anti-bullying and sex and relationships. Boarders have the opportunity for input into School practice and policy, through House Councils and the School Student Council. These forums are also means by which ideas on the health care and the catering can be conveyed to senior staff.

Health care

The School's Health Centre is staffed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week during term time. Medical records are kept on pupils, heights and weights are regularly monitored, and options for healthy living are promoted, both in the Health Centre and in the School's PSHE and Citizenship programme.

Catering

Meals are provided centrally, and healthy eating is promoted. Breakfast, lunch, tea and supper is provided throughout the week, except in that brunch replaces lunch on Sunday. Attendance at all meals is required of all pupils, and monitored

appropriately. Once a week, the normal cafeteria system is replaced by a more formal meal in House groups. The senior Houses have regular house dinners for Sixth Formers. The theatre café is open each evening after prep, so that pupils can buy snacks. Occasional suppers are arranged in Houses by senior pupils and HsMs.

Spiritual life

A team of three chaplains lead the spiritual life of the Houses and School. Pupils attend Sunday Mass, and Masses on Holy Days and Feast Days, and there are House Masses and Services of Reconciliation each term. Prayers are said twice a day at assembly in the Houses, and boarders have the option of attending daily Mass (Monday to Saturday) at 7.40am. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available on Sundays before Mass, and at any time on request. Pupils are prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation, which is celebrated annually. Each year group has an annual retreat, sometimes organised in House groups.

Facilities

Downside has extensive grounds and playing fields, a gym, sports hall, swimming pool, IT suites, squash courts, tennis courts, and music practice rooms, most of which are available during free time in the evenings and at weekends. In addition to organised games, the CCF, community service and the wide range of other activities (sporting, cultural, and intellectual) make up the wide and diverse activities programme.

Weekends

Being a full-boarding school, Downside is committed to a full programme of activities and events at weekends. On Saturday afternoons there are games fixtures, and in the evenings there are regular year group events, such as formal dinners, dances and discos, cinema trips, and the houses' informal pizza parties. On Sunday afternoons, there is a regular bus to Bath, and trips to nearby attractions, such as Splashdown, paintballing and Bristol for Bath rugby matches. On Sunday evening there is a School film.

Sixth Form

Sixth Formers are encouraged to lead their Houses and the School in all ways that make for healthy development. Pupils in the Sixth Form have their own mixed social room, and the Sixth Form bar is open on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Sixth Formers have the opportunity to exercise pupil leadership, as monitors or prefects, and in the running of events and activities. Unlike in other year groups, Sixth Formers may request a particular member of staff as their tutor.

Policy reviewed August 2011 and confirmed as the current Policy

Dom Leo Maidlow Davis