



## Downside Abbey and School

Downside is an independent Catholic boarding school containing around 400 students between the ages of 11 and 18. The School is under the care of the English Benedictine Community of Saint Gregory the Great.

The Benedictine community of St Gregory the Great was founded at Douai in 1606 by a group of English and Welsh monks who had been exiled to France because of the penal laws in England against Catholics. 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 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 duties, and six of them have been recognised as martyrs by the church. Two of these, St John Roberts and St Ambrose Barlow, were canonised as saints in 1970. Another martyr who has yet to be canonised is Blessed Philip Powell, who was put to death in 1646.

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 1790's the Abbey and School were plundered by the French revolutionaries, but the monks and boys were allowed to escape to England in February 1795. After sixteen 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.

Downside became a fully co-educational school, admitting boys and girls in all years, in 2005. Downside School is housed in magnificent buildings set in a 500 acre estate at the foot of the Mendip Hills, twelve miles south of the city of Bath. The Old House – formerly known as Mount Pleasant – dates from the 18th century; Isabella House was completed in 2007. The Abbey Church, partly designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, lies at the heart of the School.

There is a large lay staff at Downside, who share fully the academic and pastoral care of the students. There is a strong academic record, with almost all Sixth Formers going to university. There are many extra-curricular activities available. Both Music and Drama are strongly encouraged and there is a flourishing CCF with Army and Navy sections. The School is also successful on the games field and is keen to attract teachers who, in addition to their academic pursuits, can coach rugby, cricket, hockey or one of the other sports available.

The Chaplaincy team, which comprises members of the monastic community, a Lay Chaplain and the Manquehue community, cares for the spiritual needs of the School. They lead the Pupils in prayer, retreats, house masses and reconciliation services. Every full-time member of staff is assigned as a tutor to one of the houses, and usually has about 10 to 12 pupils under their care.

The salaries of members of staff are set by the Chief Executive and Head Master on the Downside scale, which is reviewed annually. Supplementary payments are made for certain duties. Some appointments include the offer of accommodation in the School or close to it.

Downside is situated on the Mendip Hills in one of the most beautiful areas of England, within 40 minutes of Bristol, 30 minutes of Bath and 15 minutes of Wells.

One of the notable aspects of our school is its love of scholarship, combined with a lively sense of tradition. While the school educates young people to thrive in the 21st Century, it also values individuality and character, as young people are guided to live together positively within the school community while achieving excellence academically, culturally, in sport and in the wider curriculum.

Downside offers a Christ-centred education through which pupils can discover their true selves. As part of that project, staff act as role-models to the young people in our community, doing all they can to embody the values of the institution, living according to Christian values and working positively for the benefit of all. St Benedict refers to 'ora et labora', prayer and work; we aim at Downside to embody spiritual values in all that we do.

We maintain an ethos that is just as strong today as it was when the School was founded in 1606. The core aspects of Benedictine Education are

### **Core Benedictine Values**

- Welcome and hospitality
- Listening
- Reverence
- Humility
- Teaching and learning
- Personal discipline
- Concern for the individual
- Building communion
- Stewardship of gifts

These **eight aspects** provide a valuable perspective on the key qualities of a Benedictine education.

- Welcome** and hospitality are key elements in a school where pupils work and staff work together to form a kind, mutually supportive community, based on the core principle of Christian love.

- Careful, active **listening** is an essential part of positive human relationships, and this is emphasized at Downside, as young people are guided in how to live together within their houses and within the school community as a whole.
- Reverence**, as an intrinsic part of regular school worship, and as part of respect for each person's individual human dignity, is a hallmark of life at Downside as a Benedictine school; it is part of the worship and love of God in Christ. This divine and human love, draws the School into a communion whose members grow together in the love of truth and of one another.
- Humility** enables people to live truly, communicating honestly with each other and God, enabling this love to develop.
- Teaching and learning** are central because of the need for our pupils to be skilled and educated people in a competitive world but also because our higher purpose is to grow in the knowledge of truth, which leads to God.
- Personal discipline** is something essential for the well-being of the individual and the community. It means that we are not enslaved to the world's distractions but free to pursue higher ambitions, such as service and the pursuit of knowledge.
- Downside emphasizes the importance of living within a nurturing spiritual community; **concern for the individual** enables groups of individuals to live and grow together in a manner that fosters human flourishing.
- Harmonious community life is the consequence of **building communion**; while there will always be some difficulties within communities, a spiritual purpose means that communion between people and with God is made possible.
- There are many gifts in human life, if people are prepared to receive them. Through the Holy Spirit, the world is made full of beauty and wisdom; **the stewardship of gifts**, from the natural environment to human abilities, means that the whole world can benefit.

Working at Downside is a truly rewarding experience.

In keeping with our Benedictine ethos, Downside is a welcoming, caring community where each person is considered to be a valued member. We encourage our staff to work within the following personal core values.

### **Personal Core Values**

- Integrity
- Humility
- Discretion
- Loyalty
- Honesty
- Mutual respect & support
- Dignity
- Fairness
- Courage

- Trustworthiness/trusting
- Commitment/Contribution
- Accountability
- Approachability

Downside School's vision – as a leading Catholic School – is to be a bright light in the world of education, illuminating the lives of young people and inspiring service in the world through experience of Benedictine culture. It enables pupils and staff to develop their own identity through experience of a community with Christ as its centre.