

RADLEY

9 December 2025

Dear Parents and Guardians,

You may or may not be a reader of the Sunday Times and if you are, you may be like my wife and never look at the sports pages. Even if you are a sports fan, you might have very sensibly avoided it this last week because you would not want to be reminded of the latest Ashes debacle or the fact that Arsenal lost. So you might for a whole host of reasons have missed the article on Radley written by their chief rugby correspondent Stephen Jones. He asked to come to look at a Saturday of school rugby from the top game down to the lowest team, from the mighty Bigside to the teams that play touch. 22 of them playing against a variety of opposition from four rival schools. As a journalist passionate about the grass roots of the game, he wanted to know how it felt.

We had a good day in terms of results. But that was not the point. The article was about much more than an impressive XV at the top end (though the captain got his moment in the journalistic spotlight); it was about the collective impact of so many boys enjoying the game. Several themes emerged from what he wrote: the hard work in putting together the fixture list and trying to ensure suitably competitive matches; the organising of training schedules for each team to be ready to play; the paramount importance of safety in a sport that embraces risk, with the support and expertise of the Health Centre; the numbers participating: over 450 boys have represented the College over the term. And he highlighted the partnership work we do as we seek to help a school without a rugby programme to develop one. I had a wonderful letter from the Head of that partner school this week saying how transformative it had been for some of his boys. A simple summary in typical Warden style: our programme was praised for high levels of performance, professionalism, participation, and partnership. It was a heart-warming article.

Of course, it could have been written about any aspect of what we do. In the end of term assembly this morning, I highlighted the breadth of academic opportunities we have at the College – lectures, competitions, visits, trips, debates, presentations, extensions. All done in the same way. In music and drama: the same. I draw attention to a few of the successes and headlines below but I can never cover everything and it must always be remembered that there is so much more than the headlines anyway. I probably do not say it enough but it is important that we remember the things that often go unnoticed: the training session as well as the match, the lighting and backstage crew as well as the actors, the individual practice that leads to the musical performance, the reading and research that goes in before the debate and, perhaps most significantly, the day-to-day preparation of lessons that provide the platform for academic learning. The ‘hard yards’ that really make the place.

I am constantly reminded of the work people put in to achieve that. I asked the boys this morning to pause for a moment to realise it, recognise it and be grateful. As I did so, I drew attention not only to the academic dons but to all the operational staff: there are hundreds of them and they give their all to and for the College. I also took the opportunity to thank the interim Bursar, Nick Shryane, for his work with us over the term and welcomed the new Bursar, Jonathan Bochenski, who has been with us just over a month now. In so doing, I asked him to pass on our thanks to the wider staff team for all that they do; I am sure you will join with me in that sentiment.

It has of course, been a busy term with the launch of Radley Schools Group. I have been delighted with the way in which this has been received by the seven other schools themselves, by our own staff, boys and parents, and by the wider sector. Our positive message seems to be landing: we want to celebrate and support the very best of charitable education and this venture has that in mind, stepping in to the prep school space to add value and develop a wider voice and influence to back what we believe in. Unlike many other mergers, this is not about an admissions ‘pipeline’, or a planned change to Radley’s

structural approach nor is it a defensive move but rather a wholehearted belief in the real purpose of what we do. 2026 will see lots of other schools do similar things, we suspect; I hope for the sake of the sector that the motivations are the same.

Rarely does one open the newspapers without reading news that challenges what we do: directly as another school is forced to close or indirectly as the latest economic or political headwinds manifest themselves. The times are tough – and we are grateful for your support and sacrifice for the College - but I would encourage us all to be optimistic too... we are putting time and energy into education that produces young men of outstanding character and quality and we are now committed to doing the same for boys and girls in our seven prep schools.

Here at the College, it has been the usual busy few weeks as Christmas approaches. Typically, the Music Department has been ambitious. The three standard Carol Services were preceded the previous Sunday by a new thing: an Advent performance of the Messiah, including the whole school singing various elements. I am not entirely sure that we all followed exactly where we should be but it was great fun – and the key two bar rest towards the end was fortunately preserved. The boy soloists did a fantastic job and it was lovely to see so many involved from the local community and the staff as well: an uplifting moment in the life of the Chapel. The Sunday Carol Service was followed by the annual Christmas Concert and we were as ever entertained by a wonderful variety of music from the pipes to jazz to percussion ensemble to musical theatre numbers to Christmas tunes from the 'Pops' Orchestra as well as a reprise of the F Social winning Part Song performance. A packed theatre was very appreciative.

I mention the theatre in that context because, of course, it was the last major musical performance that we will have there as the new Music School is now close to completion. I want to thank the music department and all boys involved for their flexibility and patience through the process; what they have achieved despite the challenge is remarkable. And, around them, the theatre has been used for excellent drama too: the superb Haddon Cup (well done to K) and the College production of *Quiz*, a retelling of the 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' quiz show scandal. I am always impressed with the way in which so many get involved in such productions; I think I am right to say there were 40 on stage and 13 helping behind the scenes.

There are so many academic things to mention: visiting speakers, Olympiad successes, thinking suppers, podium finishes in the Cranmer competition (for reading extracts from the Book of Common Prayer), a French play, cultural exchanges, the Politics trip. Robotics, ESU public speaking successes, internal debates . . . the list goes on. I was particularly pleased with the engagement boys showed (in both agreement and disagreement) with the visit of Professor Nigel Biggar, speaking on the controversial subject of reparations (or not) for slavery. Boys asking good questions and thinking about the issues with conversations lasting long after the event itself; that is true educational excellence. Perhaps my academic highlight, though, was the Oxbridge presentation evening where all applicants had the chance to present for a few minutes on a topic of their choice and then field questions from peers and staff. It was a very good evening of intellectual stimulation for all involved.

We are increasingly recognised at a national level for our work in Partnerships with a recent award from *The Week* Magazine a highlight. I thought I would share some statistics: 26 boys have supported local charities and community projects, including Abingdon Court Care Home, Barnardo's, Radley Village, Oxfordshire Youth, and Tap/Proof Social; 8 boys worked at Countryside Centre to support partnership programmes; 123 boys have worked in schools, delivering phonics, primary and GCSE maths, GCSE languages, and primary PE sessions; 45 boys have delivered weekly phonics at Radley primary school; 8 boys have played music each week in local care homes; 4 boys joined Mr Noone taking the Radley Animals into local schools; on a weekly basis K Social boys have visited Thomas Reade Primary School and L Social St Swithun's to support reading; 66 Radley musicians took part in Music Flood week, with 44 leading aspirational assemblies; we also welcomed the Broadway Academy rugby team, working alongside 18 of our Removes. And the boys have raised over £23k for a range of charities over the term.

The rugby season as a whole has been excellent, with 143 of 190 games won. Many of those games were played a team 'up' and that has worked well in terms of creating effective fixtures for some of the lower teams: never an easy thing to do. Well done to those teams who might have been unbeaten had they always played at their level; five teams were unbeaten in any

case - Midgets 1 & 2 and JC 1-3. The JC1 are still in the national plate competition (quarter-final) and Bigside bowed out of the National Cup after an excellent run at the same stage. The VIII travelled to Boston for the Head of the Charles race and did remarkably, moving from 85th place at the start to 8th by the end. That bodes well for the 2026 season ahead. There have also been notable individual achievements in sailing, golf, rugby, polo and cricket.

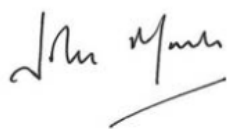
The term finished with all the normal festive cheer which at Radley, of course, includes the Steeplechase. G Social retained their iron grip on the overall trophy, for which congratulations, but I wanted to highlight the individual race in the seniors where Aaron Li (G) narrowly pipped Will Dunlop (K) to the line, the first time the latter has been beaten in the race in his five years at the College. Congratulations to both. A remarkably modest young man, Aaron is an academic scholar who is an excellent musician as well. Balance and breadth. I sat in the concert on Sunday watching another of our best mathematicians loving playing his saxophone in the big band. It made me think. I love specialist success and it often requires real focused dedication to achieve; I love balance and breadth as well.

There is a wider point too. As a former parent pointed out when writing to me recently reflecting on ten years at the school with three boys through the system, it is often the success in areas that are understated or success at a lower rather than an elite level that really matter. The hesitant first performance on stage; the hard-fought-for B grade at A level; that ability to speak in public that would never have been possible a few years ago; the promotion to play for the 'D' side rather than the 'E' team. Those achievements are what really matter and they happen all the time.

So, as we look at that Sunday Times article and the wonderful vista of Radley rugby fields, let us make sure that our focus goes to the far pitches as well. As we celebrate academic excellence and wish Oxbridge candidates all the best with their interviews, we remember the boy that turned that 'concern' into an 'excellent' in a subject he finds difficult. As we hear the soloists in the Messiah, let's remember the boy who persevered with the choir even though he found it difficult. Let's remember the boy who had a few lines and had never been in a play before.

At that level, both in this and every term, there are myriad achievements. Well done to each and every boy for each and every one of them.

Diana and I wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Moule', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

John Moule
Warden