

# Inspiring pupils to succeed



Full boarding is more than an educational model. It is a life-enriching experience that inspires and enables pupils to thrive. It is an engine of social mobility, equipping young people with adaptability, resilience and purpose. **LEO WINKLEY**, Headmaster of Shrewsbury School, reports.

**CHARLES Darwin**, a former Shrewsbury pupil, famously wrote: "A man [or woman] who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life." As a schoolboy, Darwin struggled with Latin and preferred dipping for newts to classroom routines. His doodling in an atlas in our library hints at a restless, free-range mind constrained by the rigid classical education of his day.

I like to think Darwin would relish contemporary Shrewsbury, especially as a boarder. Why? Because boarding offers the fullest expression of whole person education. It provides time, the greatest gift, to learn, grow and thrive. Today's boarding culture is inclusive,

caring and deeply invested in pupils' success. It promotes what I call 'survival of the kindest', combining academic challenge with pastoral depth and co-curricular richness in a caring and inclusive community.

#### FULFILLED LIVES

In a fast-paced, AI-driven world, preparing young people for fulfilled lives matters more than ever. Boarding schools are uniquely placed to be both pro-tech and pro-human: managing digital access, instilling values and educating for life beyond exams. Staff choose boarding as a vocation. Teachers are mentors, coaches and guides, living examples of how to be human. This 'professional love'

creates a safe, trusting environment, where pupils can take risks and grow. Boarding develops social maturity and emotional intelligence. Living in close quarters teaches cooperation, conflict resolution and empathy. Pupils learn when to assert and when to yield, how to navigate differences and how to contribute to collective well-being. These skills underpin success at university, in careers and in life. Alongside this, lifelong friendships are forged through shared experiences, meals, sports, rehearsals and late-night conversations.

Shrewsbury is a member of the 500 club. We have over 600 full boarders in school on a Saturday night, which means a seven-day culture of learning. Idleness is



counter-cultural; participation is the norm. Structured study, access to teachers beyond lessons and teamwork with peers accelerate academic and personal growth. Pupils learn time management, goal-setting and independence within a nurturing framework. Consistent routines and fewer distractions allow deep focus, leading not only to strong grades but creating a genuine love of learning.

#### BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Boarding schools are still the global old standard of whole-person education. With evenings and weekends available, pupils immerse themselves in music, drama, sport, debating and adventurous pursuits. These experiences build confidence, leadership, creativity and resilience. Boarding can work for every personality, from the quiet thinker to the exuberant extrovert because contemporary boarding means being part of a caring, non-hierarchical extended family.

Pastoral care is woven into daily life. Housemasters, tutors and support staff are always present, guiding and encouraging. Academic support is equally strong, with teachers accessible outside lessons for

homework, (or what we call 'Top Schools' at Shrewsbury), help and enrichment. Boarding schools celebrate effort and progress across a technicolour spectrum of achievement – academic, artistic, athletic and altruistic.

Our communities are diverse and global, fostering cultural understanding and a borderless mindset. Boarding schools encourage pupils to think beyond themselves, emphasising service, sustainability and leadership.

Independence is another transformative outcome: pupils learn to manage schedules, make decisions and advocate for themselves. By the time they leave, boarders are well-prepared for life after school – and adulthood.

#### CHARACTER AND CONFIDENCE

These accelerator benefits endure long after school. Former boarders speak of deep friendships, formative experiences and personal growth. Strong alumni networks provide mentorship and opportunity. Pupils leave not just with qualifications but with the character and confidence to fully navigate life's journey.

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Boarders tend to achieve their goals with hearts and minds, not elbows.

Darwin's five years on *The Beagle* were a voyage of intellectual discovery, much like the five-year journey of senior school boarding. It is about whole person flourishing: *Floreat*, as we say at Shrewsbury. We see this growth every day before our eyes. Just imagine what Darwin might have achieved if he'd been a boarder!

Leo has been Headmaster of Shrewsbury School since 2018. He was Chair of the Boarding Schools Association in 2017 when Headmaster of St Peter's School in York. Leo grew up in a boarding school where his father was a Housemaster. He attended Cranleigh School as a boarder and has worked in boarding schools for 32 years.