



THE DOWNS
PREPARATORY SCHOOL
BRISTOL

Thursday 19 March 2026

Dear Parents,

The Downs Preparatory School has always placed the development of its pupils at the centre of every decision. With that in mind, I am writing on behalf of the Governors to share an important and exciting development in the future of the school.

We are delighted to announce that The Downs has founded a new schools group, Pembroke Education, with Clifton High School.

Pembroke Education has been created to further strengthen both schools while preserving what makes each of them distinctive. Both will retain their full independence, leadership, ethos and character. The creation of the group is not to standardise either school, but to provide long-term stability, investment and shared expertise in a landscape where financial strength and resilience are paramount.

Each school brings their own distinctive strengths. The Downs offers families choice at 13+, combining a traditional preparatory education with character development, academic rigour and outdoor learning. Clifton High provides an all-through education in the heart of Bristol, guiding pupils from Reception to excellent A Level outcomes.

As part of the partnership, pupils at The Downs will also have automatic Year 9 places available at Clifton High should they wish to take them. However, I would like to emphasise that our 13+ approach remains unchanged. Known for our strong academic provision and scholarship success, as well as deeply committed relationships with surrounding schools, the decision about where a pupil moves on after The Downs will always remain an individual one.

For The Downs, this partnership will also create new and exciting opportunities for pupils. Early developments already being explored include improvements to sports facilities on our grounds. Future proposals include new outdoor cricket facilities, full-sized netball courts and in the fullness of time, a full-size astro pitch. Joint sporting events are also planned from next term, with pupils from both schools coming together for a biathlon, athletics event and cricket tournament.

Alongside this, as part of Mrs Isaachsen's 2030 School Vision, we will introduce a new outdoor education curriculum: The Pembroke Award. From Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 8, pupils will take part in a structured programme developing practical outdoor skills through bushcraft, adventure and nature-based learning, making even greater use of our 60-acre classroom. Further details will be shared in the Summer Term.



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Pembroke Education will be guided by two highly experienced leaders. Our own Headteacher, Mrs Debbie Isaachsen, will continue to lead The Downs, whilst taking on a senior leadership role of Deputy Head of Pembroke Education. Debbie brings extensive experience across Early Years and preparatory education, and under her leadership, The Downs has strengthened its academic ambition while remaining resolutely child centred. She will work alongside Mr Will Phelan, Head of Clifton High School, who will take on the role of Head of Pembroke Education. He will provide leadership across the group, bringing considerable experience and strategic insight.

Further information about Pembroke Education and its leadership team can be found at www.pembrokeeducation.com.

We recognise that this announcement may raise questions. FAQ sections are available on both The Downs and Pembroke Education websites. If you have additional questions after reading these, please contact Mr Jon Barclay, Bursar and Clerk to the Governors, at jbarclay@thedowns.avon.sch.uk.

Mrs Isaachsen will be available at morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up over the coming days should you wish to speak with her. Mr Phelan will also be visiting The Downs, including at parent pick-up tomorrow, Friday 20 March. In addition, he will attend an afternoon tea for parents hosted by Mrs Isaachsen on Thursday 26 March; details will be circulated shortly.

While you may discuss this with your children tonight, we will also be sharing this news with pupils in Year 4-8 in a special assembly tomorrow morning.

This marks an historic and exciting new chapter for The Downs. Through Pembroke Education we will protect our independence as one of the leading preparatory schools in the country, while strengthening the opportunities available to our pupils.

Finally, thank you for your continued support of The Downs Preparatory School.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Jason Collard
Chair of Governors