

DOWNSIDE SCHOOL



HEAD - CANDIDATE INFORMATION



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WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

Thank you for your interest in the Headship at Downside School.

For me as a pupil, and for members of my family, Downside was instrumental in forming me and my faith, and I am proud now to be the Chair of Governors as the School evolves to meet the challenges of today's world, whilst remaining firmly rooted in our Catholic, Benedictine ethos.

Downside's story began in Douai, France, in the early 1600s. The School moved to its current site in 1814, and since then it has seen a good deal of change, growth and development. What hasn't changed, and never will, is our strong ethos based on Benedictine Values. In a turbulent and ever-changing world, they give our pupils, staff and community strong roots from which to grow. They permeate every aspect of School life and make Downside a very special place indeed.

Following the departure of the monastic order from the site in 2022, the School now has an opportunity to purchase the freehold of its beautiful buildings and extensive grounds and playing fields. This is the start of a new and exciting chapter in our history, enabling us to unlock the significant potential of the site, generate investment, and ensure that Downside continues to thrive. Our new Head will lead the School into this exciting future, working closely with the Governing Body, Bursar, and the whole School community to continue our mission to be a bright light in education and to inspire service in our world. If you feel that person may be you, we look forward to hearing from you.

In Christ and St Benedict

John Ludlow, Chair of Governors



HISTORY OF DOWNSIDE SCHOOL

In 1606, the Benedictine community of St Gregory the Great was founded at Douai, France, by a group of English and Welsh monks in exile. Eight years later, they opened Downside. By the beginning of the 18th century, it 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 Priory and School, but the monks and boys were allowed to escape to England in February 1795.

The School site moved to its current site at Stratton-on-the-Fosse in April 1814. A cedar tree was planted at the entrance to the grounds and still stands there today. Initially, the whole School was accommodated in what is now known as the Old House. The first stage of development was the Old Chapel, opened in 1823. In 1878, the building of the Basilica of St Gregory began. One of England's finest Gothic churches, it still serves as the School's main place of worship for Sunday Mass, weekly hymn practice and other services and community events.

During the First World War, over 500 Downside boys served in the Armed Forces and 109 of them lost their lives. Their average age was 25, and more than a fifth gained some honour or distinction. All their names are inscribed on the School's War Memorial, which was unveiled in 1922. 106 Downside boys were killed during the Second World War and are also commemorated on the War Memorial, and their photographs line the walls outside the Science Laboratories. We are very proud of our long-standing links with the Military.

In recent decades, Downside has seen many exciting and positive changes. The School became co-educational in 2005 and now has a split of 45% girls and 55% boys. The first lay Head was appointed in 2014, and the School became a Trust in its own right in 2020, separating legally and financially from Downside Abbey.



ETHOS & VALUES

OUR VISION

Downside's vision, as a Catholic and Benedictine school with Christ at its centre, is to be a bright light in education and to inspire service in our world.

OUR AIMS

- Guide pupils and staff to encounter Christ through experience of Benedictine community of faith
- Be uncompromising in the pursuit of academic excellence
- Foster a culture of unselfish love, integrity, humility and leadership through service
- Develop the character and confidence of young people through sport and co-curricular opportunities
- Develop the School's community facilities and resources through strategic stewardship

OUR VALUES

Downside, as a leading Catholic school maintains an ethos that is just as strong today as it was when the School was founded.

By working with families in a partnership built on trust, we provide the young people in our School with the strongest possible foundation for their education. Through belonging to a community in which each individual feels valued and included, pupils grow in confidence and are encouraged to develop their unique gifts, motivated by the joy of learning.

We are highly ambitious for our pupils and encourage them to seek out and welcome challenges. They consistently achieve beyond their expectations, and failure is not seen as something to fear. In fact, in a community where failure does not bring judgement and blame, it provides a valuable opportunity for humble reflection and can even be the crucial springboard for growth and development which leads ultimately to success.



ETHOS & VALUES

This is no hollow promise, but the genuine experience of our pupils as they are supported by teachers and staff who inspire and motivate them and are alive to their needs as individuals, whether in pursuing academic studies, or as they develop their sporting, musical and artistic talents, or grow as leaders through serving others.

The School's distinctive culture is built on its Catholic and Benedictine roots and supports the exploration of faith and spiritual growth within an inclusive and welcoming community. We embrace diversity and encourage imagination, creativity and open-mindedness. We believe that each individual is uniquely gifted and that every person has their own essential part to play. Our community is diminished if any one of us does not play our unique and distinct part or give of ourselves fully — like an orchestra, with each member playing their instrument, whilst listening and being in tune with others around them.



SPIRITUAL LIFE

Downside is a Catholic and Benedictine School. We welcome pupils of all faiths and none to reflect on their spirituality and to develop their life of faith. The Chaplaincy is at the centre of the School's life, working closely with the Head, the House Masters and Mistresses for the good of all — pupils and staff. In its work, the Chaplaincy keeps very much in mind the School's vision.

The School aims to guide pupils and staff to encounter Christ by experiencing a Benedictine culture underlined by the Benedictine values:

Welcome and hospitality are key elements in a school where pupils 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 emphasised 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.



SPIRITUAL LIFE

Downside emphasises 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.



LOCATION



Downside School is situated in glorious English countryside in rural Somerset. Downside is just 25 minutes' drive from Bath, Bristol Airport is 40 minutes' drive, and London Heathrow is 2.5 hours away. The campus encompasses a performing arts centre, extensive playing fields and sports facilities, boarding Houses and teaching spaces, obviating the need for any transport between facilities.

ACADEMIC

Downside School is academically ambitious. Deeply embedded in our philosophy of learning, as well as in the Benedictine tradition, is the idea of transformation.

The purpose of education is to transform us into our best possible selves. As a non-selective school, we recognise that what matters most is the magnitude of that transformation, rather than headline data in league tables. When formation is right, outcomes follow. We are rightly proud of the fact that our pupils regularly exceed the grades at GCSE and A level indicated by baseline testing.

Academic achievements are reached through a process of self-fulfilment, wherein the individual is strengthened and balanced, rather than limited by the pressure of objective attainment for its own sake. By ensuring that their talents are identified and nurtured, Downside pupils truly do find themselves on the path to a 'life fully-lived', enjoying rewards, both academically and holistically, that defy the norm.



PASTORAL CARE

Downside is proud of the outstanding level of pastoral care it provides for pupil's health and well-being. Our School is well-known for its strong sense of community and for the supportive relationships between year groups and staff. The Houses sit at the heart of this and provide the best possible support for both boarding and day pupils, allowing them to develop true Christian values.

Pastoral care at Downside provides support for, and commitment to, the social, emotional, physical and moral well-being of all members of our community.

We also offer extensive healthcare provision and our outstanding catering is supplied by our award-winning catering team.



LIFE AS A BOARDER

School life revolves around the five Houses. These communities are at the heart of the School and are where lasting friendships are made and memories forged.

The Houses are managed by House Masters and House Mistresses and their assistants. House staff are available for support throughout the day, and all pupils have a tutor who meets them daily. Day pupils are fully integrated into Houses, and may choose to stay over for two or three nights a week. Junior boys and girls initially all join Smythe or Isabella House respectively so they can bond together. As Seniors, some move to other Houses (Barlow and Roberts for boys; Caverel for girls), whilst others remain in Smythe or Isabella. We believe this approach provides a good balance between the models of “horizontal” and “vertical” boarding.



LIFE AS A DAY PUPIL

Day pupils are fully integrated and live side by side as members of one of our boarding Houses. This ensures they have equal opportunity to share space to socialise and develop friendships, have access to changing facilities, and a place to call home during the day.

There is a full programme of evening and weekend activities on offer. Day pupils are always welcome to join any or all of the events, and many stay on in the evenings to take part activities such as music concerts, plays, clubs and House socials. We offer wraparound care from 8am-9pm.

Our School day fits the working day with everything on one beautiful rural campus, giving families significant flexibility at no extra cost and the improved quality of home life.

There is an extensive daily minibus service running from Bath, Frome, Castle Cary, the Chew Calley and villages in between.



CO-CURRICULAR

Co-curricular activities, clubs and societies at Downside provide vital experiences and opportunities, introducing pupils to life a variety of life skills and friends in other Houses and year groups. All pupils participate in the co-curricular programme, which runs throughout the week and at weekends, and there is also a particular focus on service activities on Wednesday afternoon. There are over 70 options to choose from, ranging from adventure and sport to creative arts.

WEEKENDS

Weekends are busy and purposeful at Downside. Pupils are engaged in a wide variety of activity options: clubs, games, sporting fixtures, socials, trips out, performing arts events and Sunday Mass.

TRIPS

Pupils benefit from a variety of trips throughout the year, including academic trips to Cornwall, London, Bristol or Rome; outdoor learning; Downside Adventure holidays, which include skiing in the Italian Alps, visits to Morocco, participation in the Ten Tors challenge, visits to Skern Lodge in Devon and Cheddar Reservoir, and retreats to a variety of locations including Buckfast Abbey and the Ammerdown Centre.

SPORT & GAMES

Our aim is to ensure that every pupil finds a sport or physical activity they can enjoy, excel at, and learn the values of being part of a team.

The main sports for boys are rugby, hockey, cricket, tennis and athletics. The main sports for girls are hockey, netball, tennis and athletics. An element of personalisation concerning sport options increases as pupils progress through the School, and many pupils are participate in badminton, basketball, cross-country, football, golf, rugby 7s, swimming, table-tennis and volleyball, with fixtures throughout the year, as well as plenty of clubs and activities in the evenings and weekends.



THE ROLE

The Head of Downside is accountable to the Governing Body for the strategic leadership and management of the school and all its associated works. Guided by the Catholic faith and Benedictine tradition, the Head provides spiritual, educational and pastoral leadership that nurtures intellectual growth, spiritual formation and personal development.

The successful candidate will ensure the effective and smooth running of the school, promoting academic excellence, exceptional pastoral and welfare provision, outstanding boarding standards and holistic pupil development. We seek a practising Catholic and inspiring leader who is committed to upholding and strengthening the School's Benedictine ethos, values and traditions, working in partnership with the Governing Body to share and deliver the School's long term strategic vision.

The Head of Downside School is responsible for ensuring the aims, agreed with the Board of Governors, continue to be fulfilled, and that the School thrives in recruiting and educating children. To this end, they will nurture, motivate, develop and support a highly capable staff; lead and maintain the vibrant and caring Benedictine ethos; and promote the School with all stakeholders. Thinking strategically, the Head will ensure that the School innovates and develops in a consultative and inclusive manner.

You will,

- Be supported by a dedicated and engaged Governing Body whose members are aligned to the School's values and fully committed to helping you thrive in your role.
- Have the opportunity to shape the next exciting phase of the School as it purchases and develops its site, and grows the Downside brand worldwide.
- Work with a diligent and committed staff team who are working towards the same aims and goals.
- Have access to coaching and mentoring to support your continued personal and professional growth.



KEY REQUIREMENTS

CATHOLIC & BENEDICTINE LEADERSHIP

- Uphold and actively promote the Catholic identity and Benedictine values of the School, ensuring they permeate all aspects of school life.
- Foster a culture grounded in prayer, service, humility, community and respect, consistent with the Rule of St Benedict.
- Support pupils and staff in their spiritual journey, enabling a deeper understanding of faith, moral responsibility and service to others.
- Work with Governors to preserve the School's religious character and mission.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Provide strategic oversight of the academic, co-curricular and pastoral programmes to ensure excellence in teaching, learning and pupil formation.
- Oversee curriculum design and delivery across all age groups, promoting innovation while remaining consistent with Catholic educational principles.
- Encourage a culture of aspiration, achievement and continuous improvement.
- Ensure a balanced and holistic education that integrates academic rigour with enrichment in the arts, sport, spirituality and personal development.
- Regularly assess and adjust the School's strategic direction and plans in light of emerging educational, political, and economic developments, ensuring readiness to respond effectively to both opportunities and challenges.
- Shape and deliver a bold, values-led vision and business plan, collaborating closely with the Governing Body to ensure Downside remains true to its mission while building on its existing strengths.

PASTORAL CARE & PUPIL WELLBEING

- Ensure a caring, safe and inclusive environment that prioritises the wellbeing and character development of pupils.
- Lead the pastoral team to ensure effective systems that support the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of pupils.
- Promote a culture of respect, kindness and community in line with the Benedictine ethos of welcome and hospitality.



KEY REQUIREMENTS

LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

- Work closely with Bursar to ensure the business model is developed and maintained.
- Lead the day-to-day operations of the School, ensuring efficient, collaborative and high-quality delivery across all areas.
- Support and challenge the Leadership Team to ensure effective leadership and high-quality management across all areas of the organisation.
- Promote and uphold high-quality teaching and learning, maintaining a strong focus on classroom excellence and improving pupil outcomes.
- Recruit and support staff through highquality professional learning that fosters growth and development.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Act as a visible and approachable leader within the school community, building positive relationships with pupils, families and staff.
- Maintain strong working relationships with Governors and the wider Benedictine network.
- Represent the School at liturgical, community and public events, modelling the School's values and mission.
- Communicate clearly and regularly with parents, based on partnerships and trust.

SAFEGUARDING & COMPLIANCE

- Foster a culture of excellence in safeguarding, ensuring that good practice is embedded consistently across all departments and levels of leadership.
- Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, helping to build a culture where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, and valued.
- Oversee Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), Catholic School Inspectorate (CIS) and other relevant regulatory bodies.



PERSON SPECIFICATION

The Head will be a committed, practising Catholic, ready to embody and model the Benedictine values and Catholic ethos of Downside and to provide spiritual leadership to the school community.

In addition, the Head will have:

QUALIFICATIONS

- A good honours degree as a minimum requirement.
- Evidence of professional development and career progression.

KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

- First-class strategic thinker with the capacity to provide clear leadership.
- A demonstrable capacity for educational innovation and a broad knowledge of the rapidly changing education sector, both nationally and internationally.
- Outstanding interpersonal skills and high levels of emotional intelligence, with a proven ability to operate effectively in a complex environment.
- A demonstrable commitment to – and knowledge of – pupil welfare and safeguarding.
- An understanding of the commercial imperatives and opportunities in the leadership and management of schools.
- An informed knowledge of the Catholic Church in the modern world and a demonstrable ability to articulate the mission of the Church in education.
- Proven ability in strategic development and whole school improvement.

EXPERIENCE

- A strong track record of highly successful, senior leadership experience in education.
- Academic credibility demonstrated through both experience and qualifications.
- Track record of raising academic standards.
- Experience of overseeing curriculum design and QA.



PERSON SPECIFICATION

- Commitment to holistic education.
- Commitment to pupil wellbeing. Strong understanding of safeguarding with experience of leading pastoral systems.
- Understanding of boarding standards and responsibilities.
- Proven experience of leading and developing high performing teams with a clear commitment to the continuing professional development of colleagues.
- Ability to manage complex operations. Strong financial/resource management and experience of compliance with regulatory bodies.

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES & QUALITIES

- An excellent communicator, with the ability to build relationships across the community.
- A visible and collaborative leader with the energy and vision to inspire the School community.
- Confidence, personal authority and sensitivity.
- High levels of personal integrity, sound judgement, resilience and mental agility.
- Service-led leadership.

DESIRABLE

- Post Graduate/Masters Level Qualification.
- Understanding in Benedictine/monastic settings; Active involvement in a Catholic community.
- Boarding Schools leadership experience.
- Experience of introducing innovative pedagogical approaches.
- Experience with external agencies on safeguarding or wellbeing.
- Direct leadership or management in boarding.
- Experience in estate development or capital projects.
- Experience representing a school in wider networks.
- Experience mentoring emerging leaders.



BENEFITS

A competitive salary will be offered, alongside an attractive package of benefits, which include:

- **Pension** – Downside operates a Pension scheme with Aviva, with employer contributions equivalent to 16.48% of basic salary
- **Family accommodation on site**
- **School fee remission**
- **Continuing Professional Development**



HOW TO APPLY

Completed application forms, with a covering letter, should be returned by email to **headship@downside.co.uk**

Please be advised should you wish to include a copy of your CV it should not be in place of the application form. Applications will only be considered if accompanied by a fully completed form.

All applications will be acknowledged by email. If you have not received acknowledgement that your application has been received within two working days of sending it, please contact us either by email (HR@downside.co.uk) or by calling 01761 235105

If you have any questions in advance of submitting your application, please email headship@downside.co.uk

The Privacy notice and Recruitment, Selection and Disclosure Policy and Procedure are available on the Downside School website: www.downside.co.uk/about-us/employment-opportunities/

Following this notice, any inclusion of your Sensitive Personal Data will be understood by us as your express consent to process this information going forward. Please also remember to not mention anyone's information or details (e.g. referees) who have not previously agreed to their inclusion.

The closing date for applications: **Midday, Monday 28 September 2026**

Shortlisted candidates will be invited for a tour of the school prior to the interview date.

Proposed interview dates are **14 and 15 October 2026** with candidates being invited by **6 October 2026**.

We anticipate a start date of September 2027

Please be aware that safer recruitment checks will be made at all stages of the recruitment process.

DOWNSIDE SCHOOL

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