

29 September 2026

Sent via email

Dear Parents of Academic Scholars,

It has been a busy and exciting start to the year for our Academic Scholars, so I wanted to give you a brief sense of what has already been happening, as well as how the wider Scholars Programme works and what pupils can expect over the year ahead.

We have already begun taking scholars beyond the classroom. Last week, a group travelled to York for two very different talks: theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli speaking on *On the Equality of All Things*, and Professor Garry Tew on *Movement as Medicine*. Earlier in the term, scholars also had the opportunity to attend a talk on quantum entanglement. Opportunities like these — lectures, competitions, performances, courses and other events — will continue to be identified throughout the year, across as wide a range of academic interests as possible. We have another exciting opportunity coming up on 11 October, when Oleksandra Matviichuk, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, will be coming to speak to students about her work in Ukraine. The event is also open to the wider public, should you wish to attend.

At school, the centre of the programme is our weekly Scholars' Lunch. This term, pupils have been placed, according to their preferences, into five different courses, each intended to take them well beyond the normal curriculum. The range is deliberately broad: scholars are currently exploring political thought from Plato onwards; natural law and the nature of law itself; nuclear energy and its scientific, environmental and political implications; representations of violence in art and literature; and Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, considering human dignity in the age of artificial intelligence.

The work is intended to be challenging. The purpose is not simply to acquire more knowledge, but to practise reading difficult material carefully, asking good questions, making connections across disciplines and discussing ideas with others.

Importantly, the pupils themselves have responsibility for making the programme work. They prepare material in advance and contribute to discussion, while taking turns in roles such as Lead Reader, who introduces the material and helps open the discussion, and Précis Writer, who produces a concise account of the group's discussion afterwards. Over time, I hope that the scholars increasingly see this as an intellectual community which they themselves help to create.

The Scholars Programme also sits within a wider structure of academic support and stretch. Our Y7–8 Academic Development Award pupils have an additional session with me on Wednesday afternoons, while at the top end of the school I work closely with pupils preparing for highly competitive university applications, particularly Oxbridge. At present, for example, we are finalising personal statements with this year's applicants, before moving on to admissions-test and interview preparation.

Alongside this, I am working with teachers and departments to identify where individual pupils have further capacity for academic stretch within their normal lessons. Being an Academic Scholar should therefore not simply mean attending a weekly programme: we want scholarship to be reflected in pupils' wider academic lives through curiosity, intellectual ambition, independent engagement and a willingness to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

There is much more planned for the year, and I will keep you informed of particularly significant opportunities as they arise. I hope, though, that this gives you a useful picture of both the breadth of what is already underway and what we are trying to build through the Academic Scholars Programme.

As always, if you have any questions or would like to know more about any part of the programme, do let me know.

All the best,

David Strange
Head of Academic Enrichment and Scholars' Coordinator