

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: SATURDAY SCHOOL AND WEEKLY BOARDING

From September 2012 there will no longer be compulsory taught classes on Saturday mornings at Mill Hill and lessons will be timetabled from Monday to Friday. At the same time, the School will introduce a new weekly boarding option which will allow pupils to board from Monday to Friday, returning home to their families for the weekend. The School remains absolutely committed to full boarding. We know, however, from very extensive surveys, that many parents and pupils are keen to have the additional option of weekly boarding. We have produced these Questions and Answers to help parents, guardians and others better understand the reasons for, and benefits of, the changes. The first section deals with the ending of Saturday lessons and the second section with the introduction of weekly boarding.

SATURDAY SCHOOL

Q. Why is Mill Hill ending compulsory Saturday lessons?

A. In 2009, we undertook a survey of Senior School parents, and Saturday School was identified in a significant number of responses as being the least desirable element of the School's provision. It was partly with this in mind that the Court of Governors decided to commission a specialist market research company to undertake a much more exhaustive survey of parents, former parents, prep school Heads and other key stakeholder groups. The results of this survey, which involved telephone interviews with some 200 current and former Foundation parents, were unequivocal, with 80% of the day parents and over 50% of the boarding parents who were interviewed expressing a dislike, and, in some cases, a strong dislike, of compulsory Saturday lessons. The findings of this research, combined with various soundings taken among teachers and pupils, served to confirm my view and that of the Court that now was the time to move away from compulsory Saturday morning School.

Q. What will be the advantages for pupils of the move away from Saturday lessons?

A. The ending of Saturday lessons will, inevitably, mean there is more to be covered between Monday and Friday. However, when deciding to make the change, we were acutely mindful of just how tiring a six-day teaching week can be for busy teenagers, not to mention their parents. This was one of the main reasons why we agreed that the change would be highly desirable. We have also been very attentive to the comments made by many parents that Saturday morning lessons can have a negative effect upon family life. For some pupils, a move from compulsory Saturday morning School will allow them to continue their involvement in activities such as the Junior Royal Academy, drama classes, specialist sports coaching and other pursuits that currently lead to them having to miss classroom time.

Q. Why is the change being introduced from September 2012, and not earlier?

A. Although the Court of Governors, the Foundation Executives and the School's Senior Management Team are wholly convinced of the desirability of the change, we are equally determined to ensure that adequate time is available for planning and preparation. To

change in September 2011 would have left too little time to ensure an effective transition. To make the move in the middle of an academic year would present significant operational and organisational problems. By making the change from September 2012, we should allow ourselves sufficient time to ensure that the new arrangements work as well as possible when they are introduced.

We are making the announcement now in order that parents, pupils and others are aware of the main thrust of the changes. Understandably, some of the finer administrative details remain to be agreed and we shall let you know about these in due course.

Q. Will the total amount of teaching time be reduced?

A. The amount of teaching time will remain broadly the same across the school week, though distributed in a way that we think will bring many advantages for pupils. It is worth stressing that Saturday morning lessons account for a relatively small proportion of each week's total teaching time. Fewer than half the Saturdays in any one year see any teaching at all as they fall within holiday periods, whilst others are either entirely or partially lost to teaching as a result of events such as Foundation Day, Open Mornings and early departures for sports fixtures. Saturday lessons have not always necessarily been the most productive teaching time as many pupils have arrived tired after the exertions of the week.

We are currently working on the details of the new academic timetable. It is very likely that this will closely follow the model of the new timetable to be introduced in September 2011 which will involve longer lessons operating on a two-week timetable rotation. The decision to move to longer lessons was arrived at after considerable thought and discussion with members of the teaching staff. Among the factors influencing this decision were the recognition that longer lessons give pupils more time for focused study and teachers more time to develop their subjects. It will also enable us to extend recent initiatives such as the introduction of Assessment for Learning. Importantly, there will be fewer movements between classrooms, thus allowing the best possible use to be made of all the time available. In moving to longer lessons, Mill Hill will be adopting the practice of many other highly successful schools.

Q. Will the length of the terms change?

A. No, as we are aiming to accommodate the same amount of teaching in a five-day week as we currently do in six days. Many other independent schools with five-day teaching weeks operate with term lengths which are the same as ours (or, in some cases, slightly shorter). By making more efficient use of time during the new five-day teaching week, we are confident that we shall be able to achieve the same amount, academically and otherwise, as we do under the current six day timetable system.

Q. Will the timing of the School day, Monday to Friday, be changing?

A. In order to accommodate more teaching time from Monday to Friday, and to allow the weekday activity programme to operate effectively, it will be necessary for the timings of the School day to change somewhat, and it is likely that School days will finish a little later than they currently do. Further details will be announced to parents as soon as the arrangements have been finalised.

Q. Will the length of the lunch break change?

A. Currently, Mill Hill has an unusually long lunch break. It is likely that this will be somewhat shortened in order to ensure that the day is not excessively long. However, we will still aim to have a break of sufficient length to allow pupils and staff to have a proper break from lessons and to allow some time for lunchtime activities. Again, details will be announced as soon as the detailed planning work has been completed.

Q. What will be the impact upon games and other activities?

A. Mill Hill rightly prides itself upon the quality and range of its extra-curricular programme, and we are determined that this aspect of the School's provision will not be compromised by the new arrangements. We will ensure that there continues to be a full and rich programme of games, music, drama, CCF, Sports Leaders and other activities.

Q. Will pupils be expected to come into School for sports matches on Saturdays?

A. Any pupil selected to represent the School will be required to come into School at the appointed time on a Saturday. This time will vary depending upon whether the fixture is at home or away. With the ending of compulsory Saturday lessons, it may well be that some fixtures are arranged on Saturday mornings (which will allow us to make better use of facilities such as the artificial surface).

Q. What will happen to Foundation Day?

A. Foundation Day is the annual celebration of the year's achievements and normally takes place on the last Saturday in September. This date works very well from the point of view of the majority of parents, guests and recent leavers, many of whom return to the School to collect prizes and other awards. We shall, therefore, be keeping Foundation Day as it has been in the past, and all pupils will be expected to come into School on that day. Parents, grandparents and other family members will, of course, continue to be very welcome.

Q. Will anything else be happening on Saturday mornings?

A. Although day pupils and weekly boarders will not, as a matter of course, be required to come into School on Saturday mornings (other than on Foundation Day, or where there are morning sports fixtures or major School events for which particular pupils are required), we are planning to run a programme of Saturday morning activities. The details are still being considered, but it is likely that at various points in the year, this programme will include preparation classes for those intending to apply for Oxford or Cambridge, universities in the United States and for the most highly competitive courses such as those in medicine and veterinary science. We are also likely to run organised visits to university open days on Saturdays. In addition, we are investigating the possibility of running extension classes in various subjects as well as non-academic activities such as courses in lifeguarding.

For those day pupils who wish to come into School to study on a Saturday morning, we shall ensure that the library and ICT facilities are available. We also hope to make available the swimming pool, fitness suite and sports hall.

Q. What will happen to full boarders at the weekend?

A. We will introduce a structured programme of study for full boarders, further details of which will be provided over the coming months. This will be in addition to the existing

programme of boarders' weekend activities. It is our intention to expand the weekend opportunities available to full boarders and those weekly boarders who choose to stay in School on a Saturday and/or Sunday. In formulating the programme, we will be careful to take into account the academic and social needs of boarders, and will be seeking their input through the Boarders' Council and more informal discussions within the boarding houses.

Will the fees change?

It is not expected that fees will change. There will be a new fee level introduced for weekly boarding, which will be set at an appropriate point between the full boarding and day fees. The Court of Governors remains mindful of the need to ensure that fees are kept to the minimum level necessary to provide an outstanding educational experience.

Q. When will further information be available?

A. Over the coming months, we will be working hard to finalise the details of the changes. This is a very exciting development for the School, but also one which will inevitably require a good deal of careful planning. We are keen to confirm the fine details as soon as possible, but also want to ensure that we have taken the time to think things through carefully in order to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements in September 2012.

WEEKLY BOARDING

Q. Why is the School introducing weekly boarding?

A. We have become increasingly aware of the attractions that weekly boarding holds for many pupils and parents. Weekly boarding offers the chance for boys and girls to stay at School for four nights a week (Monday to Thursday, inclusive), and to enjoy being with their friends in the boarding house, engage in boarders' activities and work on their prep under the supervision of the House staff. The ending of compulsory Saturday lessons presents an exciting opportunity for the School to introduce a weekly boarding option that allows pupils to be in School during the week and then to enjoy the weekend with their families.

Q. Does the School remain committed to the provision of full boarding?

A. The School remains fully committed to full boarding. Boarding has always been a central component of Mill Hill and our full boarders make a very distinctive contribution to the life of the School. It is hoped that the addition of weekly boarding will make boarding an attractive option for a large number of current and future Mill Hill pupils and their families. Over the coming years, our aim is to expand the number of boarders we have at the School and to increase still further the vibrancy of the School's boarding community.

Q. How will weekly boarding work?

A. Weekly boarders will be expected to be in School in time for Monday morning registration. They will then operate in exactly the same way as full boarders during the week, but will then be allowed to return home for the weekend after they have completed their Friday afternoon commitments. Weekly boarders will not be expected to take part in the Saturday morning boarding programme, although they will be very welcome to do so if they wish. They will be expected to attend for Saturday sports fixtures if they are selected to play for a School team.

Q. Where will weekly boarders live?

A. Weekly boarders will live with the full boarders in each of the School's three boarding houses and will enjoy the same standard of accommodation as is currently provided for full boarders.

Q. Will weekly boarders be able to stay in School for additional nights?

A. Yes. Weekly boarders who wish to remain in School on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday night will be able so to do, subject to parents giving their son or daughter's housemaster or housemistress at least 24 hours advance notice of this. They will then follow the full-boarders' programme during that time. For each additional night's accommodation, an additional charge will be made.

Q. How much will weekly boarding cost?

A. The 2012-2013 fee for weekly boarding will be considered by the Court of Governors in the coming months. It will be set at an appropriate point between the day and boarding fee. An additional charge will also be made for each Friday, Saturday or Sunday night that weekly boarders stay in School.

Q. Will the School be offering flexi-boarding?

A. We have no immediate plans to introduce flexi-boarding (which would allow day pupils to spend the occasional night in boarding houses), but this is an option which we will certainly keep under active review.

Dr Dominic Lockett,
Headmaster,
May 2011