

STAFF PROFILE

ALASTAIR REYNOLDS, HEAD OF CHEMISTRY

Alastair joined Downe House in September 2005 as an NQT, after graduating from Loughborough University with a B.Sc in Chemistry and Sports Science and completing a PGCE. He completed his Secondary School education at Wellington College, Berkshire.

I recall my first impressions of Downe House as having a friendly and homely atmosphere and, as a result, found it relatively easy to settle in. I enjoyed welcome support from both the Head of Department and Director of Studies at that time. This support was significant at a time when there was so much to take in from the variety of School life and a radically different agenda from the PGCE.

I have found the girls very keen, interesting and demanding at the same time, and expecting a great deal from their teachers. I also see a strong desire to impress and learn and achieve high marks/grades. There is an ethos of not wanting to let the teaching staff down, or themselves. This profile of the girls has influenced my approach in the classroom to be one of some formality. I like to set a high standard and establish a strong presence in the classroom. The girls are self motivated but teachers also need to adopt good method in order to channel and coach.

My advice to new teachers, on first arriving at Downe House, would be to have a bias for asking questions. Be as organised as possible, planning the whole year ahead. Log important academic dates in the diary and work out deadlines well in advance. The first year is challenging. There is a need to build up relationships with new girls and define clear boundaries and standards from the beginning. At the same time you must get comfortable with your own individual style.

I believe that different styles of teaching are a good thing for the girls. Their interest in diverse subjects will be better maintained by teaching which reflects the natural style and personality of the teacher. I also believe that we as individual teachers can always learn from one another and I would encourage new Teachers to seek advice and opinion often as well as observing how others teach. I am a strong believer in not becoming over confident and one needs to keep looking for perfection and motivation to maintain the highest level of consistency.

Respecting deadlines and planning meticulously are key aspects of a professional approach to the fundamental need for excellent organisation. In my current role as Head of department I try to practise these principles. I teach 28 periods a week and my time is split 50:50 between teaching and running the Department. We share resources within the department, observe each other in lessons and give constant feedback and support to ensure we continue to develop as individuals as well as a department.

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