



ABBOT'S LEA SCHOOL

Headteacher: Mrs Ania Hildrey, FCCT, B.Ed(Hons), M.Ed, NPQH, NPQEL



3 September 2026

Dear Families

Ref: Academic Year 2026-27

Welcome to all new students, and welcome back to those returning to Abbot's Lea School this week for the start of the new academic year!

I hope that you and your families have had a happy and restful summer. It has been wonderful to welcome our students back to school, and to see the school once again full of their energy, personalities and enthusiasm for learning.

I am writing at the beginning of the new academic year to share some important information and reminders about school life in 2026-27, including our strategic priorities, term dates, as well as expectations related to the students' attendance, transport protocols, school uniform, code of conduct and behaviour, our school's position on all mobile phones and other devices, and how we will communicate with you throughout the year.

For families who are new to Abbot's Lea School, I would also like to extend a particularly warm welcome. We look forward to getting to know you and your child and to working closely with you over the coming years.

As I begin the second decade of leading our wonderful school, I remain enormously privileged, proud and humble to hold this important position of responsibility and trust. I care deeply about our students, and our philosophy of education continues to place equal importance on:

- Academic excellence and progress
- Specialist therapeutic support
- Development of life skills

This philosophy is known as The ASD Model ©.

I work with truly amazing professionals, and all of us are here to help your child thrive. Our vision remains to be an International Centre of Excellence in Autism Education, Research and Professional Development, where every student and member of staff can be the best that they can be.

Leadership Team

During the 2026–27 academic year, our school is organised as follows.

Teaching and Learning

Our **Primary Department** is led by Mrs Cartwright, Assistant Headteacher, who oversees:

- Early Years and Key Stage One (EY/KS1)
- Key Stage Two (KS2)

Mrs Cartwright can be contacted via primary@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

Our **Secondary Department** is led by Mr Mason, Assistant Headteacher, who oversees:

- Key Stage Three (KS3)
- Key Stage Four (KS4)
- Key Stage Five (KS5)
- Supported Internships (SI)

Mr Mason can be contacted via secondary@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

Multidisciplinary Team

Our **Safeguarding Team** is led by Miss Sharpe, Safeguarding Manager.

The Safeguarding Team is available to support welfare matters throughout the year and can be contacted via safeguarding@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

Our **Therapies Team** is led by Miss Welch, Head of Therapies. Sadly, Miss Welch will be leaving ALS at the end of November this year and I will update you when oversight of this important function changes.

This team includes:

- Flexible Provision (FP)
- Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)
- Occupational Therapy (OT)
- Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)
- Any other therapeutic interventions approved for in-school delivery

The Therapies Team can be contacted via therapies@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

If you have any questions, compliments or concerns regarding teaching and learning, care, safeguarding or therapeutic support for your child, please contact my Deputy Headteacher and the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Mrs Tobin on: deputy@abbotsleaschool.co.uk, as she holds the overarching strategic responsibility for all student-related matters.

School Business Support

Our School Business Support operation is led by Mrs Myers, School Business Manager, who oversees our school's finance and all non-student related operations, including HR, administration, facilities, IT, data, and lettings. Mrs Myers can be contacted via sbm@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

If you are unsure who you should contact about something, please contact Reception in the first instance on reception@abbotsleaschool.co.uk or 0151 428 1161.

School Development Plan 2026–28

Our new School Development Plan 2026–28 sets out our strategic priorities for the next two academic years and provides the framework for our continued development and improvement as a school.

Our priorities reflect our ongoing ambition to provide the very best education, therapeutic support and preparation for adulthood for our students, while continuing to develop our staff, our systems and our wider school community. I encourage you to read the document in the link to help you understand what is likely to lay ahead of us as an organisation:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ALS-School-Development-Plan-2026-28.pdf>

We will continue to share updates about our progress against these priorities through our regular communications with families.

Term Dates

Our published term dates for 2026–27 and 2027–28 are available on our website:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/events/>

Please ensure that you familiarise yourself with the term dates and plan family holidays outside of school term time.

2026–27

- **Term 1:** Wednesday 2 September – Friday 23 October 2026
- **Term 2:** Monday 2 November – Friday 18 December 2026 (early finish at midday)
- **Term 3:** Monday 4 January – Friday 12 February 2027
- **Term 4:** Monday 22 February – Thursday 25 March 2027 (early finish at midday)
- **Term 5:** Monday 12 April – Friday 28 May 2027
- **Term 6:** Monday 7 June – Friday 16 July 2027 (early finish at midday)

Please note there is one more INSET day on Friday, 9 July 2027, when the school is closed to all students, to help staff prepare for our Transition Week (the last week of each school year).

2027–28

The published dates for the following academic year are also available now, so please take these into account when planning holidays and other family commitments.

Please plan family holidays outside school term time, as term time holidays will not be authorised.

Key Diary Dates

Each term (six times a year) we share with you our Key Diary Dates. This shows what's on at school each week (as much as we can plan and predict), and helps draw your attention to any planned trips, activities or events.

Term 1 document contains important events, activities and dates for the first term, so please refer to when needed:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Key-Diary-Dates-Term-1.pdf>

Please continue to check Arbor and the Friday's **Head's Weekly Newsletter** for any additional dates, changes or reminders during the term.

Attendance and Punctuality

At Abbot's Lea School, we believe that good attendance is vital for every student to reach their full potential.

Every day matters. Regular attendance supports learning, progress, therapeutic work, relationships, wellbeing and the development of life skills.

All students are expected to attend school every day unless there is a genuine reason why they cannot do so.

Our school day falls between 8:45am and 3:00pm, and students should arrive between 8:45am and 9:00am.

If your child is too unwell to attend, please notify the school office as early as possible on the first day of absence: reception@abbotsleaschool.co.uk or 0151 428 1161.

Our telephone lines are open from 8:00am.

If your child is absent and we have not received notification from you, we will contact you following morning registration. This is an important safeguarding and welfare procedure.

For extended absences, we also have a duty to make appropriate welfare checks and to ensure that we know that your child is safe and well.

If your child is experiencing difficulties with attendance, including school anxiety, school refusal or difficulties returning to school following an absence, please speak with your child's Class Teacher or Assistant Headteacher. We are here to work with you and your child to overcome barriers to attendance.

Term-time absence

Requests for leave during term time will only be considered where there are exceptional circumstances.

A family holiday is not considered an exceptional circumstance. Please note that term-time holidays will not be authorised.

Any request for exceptional leave must be made in advance and sent to: reception@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

Requests will be considered by me as Headteacher in accordance with our Attendance and Punctuality Policy and the relevant statutory requirements.

Transport Protocol

We operate a busy and highly controlled transport system on our school site. The beginning and end of the school day are our busiest and highest-risk periods, and our arrangements are designed first and foremost around student safety.

Safety first

During the transport operation, there is no automatic right of way for vehicles or pedestrians.

Please ensure that:

- all vehicles move very slowly;
- all vehicles follow clear instructions from the Transport Team;
- pedestrians use designated pathways and crossings and do not walk across the driveway;
- pedestrians wait for direction from the Transport Team before crossing areas used by vehicles;

- the entire school site, including inside private vehicles while on site, is a non-smoking and non-vaping environment.

Morning arrangements

The school gates open at 8:30am.

The Transport Team begins duty at 8:40am, and school staff begin welcoming students from 8:45am.

Students travelling independently should arrive between 8:45am and 9:00am.

For students arriving by private car, taxi or minibus:

- Please use the main driveway.
- Do not turn left into the staff car park.
- Students must remain in their vehicles until school staff are available to welcome them.
- Staff will come to vehicles to collect students.
- Please remain in your vehicle and be ready to move when directed by the Transport Team.
- Please follow all instructions regarding where to park and when to move.

Students arriving on foot with a responsible adult should report to the Main School entrance and wait on the benches by the entrance. The accompanying adult must remain with the student until school staff take over responsibility.

Afternoon arrangements

Students travelling independently will leave school after the final formal lesson finishes at 2:30pm.

For students being collected by cars, LA taxis or minibuses:

- The gates open at 2:30pm.
- The ALS Transport Team will direct you to park in a designated location. Please follow the team's instructions and be prepared to move your vehicle as directed. Please do not leave the vehicle – the staff will escort your child to you.
- Please proceed to the main driveway. Do not turn left into the staff parking area.
- The Transport Team will direct vehicles to designated parking areas and may ask vehicles to move as necessary.
- The Transport Team will record the relevant names and routes and notify class teams.
- Students being collected by families will be leaving class at 2:30pm and being brought to their family vehicle by the staff.
- Students travelling by taxi or minibus will be brought out from approximately 2:45pm.
- Drivers and Passenger Assistants should remain with their vehicles until students arrive.
- Please be patient. Some students have a considerable distance to travel from their learning location to the collection point.
- Once the student is safely in the vehicle and has their seatbelt secured, the Transport Team will direct the vehicle into the leaving traffic.
- Please follow all instructions and do not overtake other vehicles unless specifically instructed to do so.

For students being collected on foot, this collection is at 2:30pm and adults are asked to proceed to the Main School entrance and take a seat on the benches by the door.

A member of the Transport Team will take the name of your child and inform the class team, who will prepare your child for collection.

Please be patient while your child makes the journey from their learning location to the collection point.

All students must be off the school premises by 3:00pm.

School Uniform

All students are expected to attend school in full school uniform.

Our School Uniform Policy is available through our School Policies page:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/School-Uniform-Policy-2026.pdf>

I want to acknowledge that there have been problems with uniform availability, quality, supply and the customer experience. We are genuinely sorry for the difficulties and frustration that this has caused some families. We recognise that families have made considerable efforts to obtain the required uniform, and we appreciate your patience while we work through these issues.

We are actively working to resolve the problems and are reviewing the arrangements with the current supplier.

We will communicate with you again as soon as we have a clear plan of action, with further information about the arrangements going forward.

In the meantime, if you are experiencing a particular difficulty with uniform, please contact the school. We will always try to help.

We also continue to operate our free pre-loved uniform scheme.

Families who have good-quality uniform that is no longer required are warmly encouraged to donate it, and families needing items are welcome to contact Reception to see what is available.

Please contact reception@abbotsleaschool.co.uk or 0151 428 1161.

We recognise that some students with complex needs may require additional support to tolerate changes to clothing. If this applies to your child, please speak with their Assistant Headteacher so that an appropriate and supportive plan can be agreed.

Behaviour and Positive Behaviour Support

Our approach to behaviour is based on understanding communication, emotional regulation and support for individual needs.

We want every student to feel safe, understood and supported while also learning the expectations and boundaries that enable our school community to function successfully.

Our Positive Behaviour Support Policy sets out the principles and expectations underpinning our approach: <https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Positive-Behaviour-Support-Policy-and-Principles.pdf>

We encourage all families to familiarise themselves with the policy so that there is a shared understanding between home and school about how we support students and respond when difficulties arise.

Mobile Phones and Internet-Connected Devices

Our school operates a total ban on mobile phone and internet-connected devices.

Students are not permitted to use mobile phones or other internet-connected personal devices brought from home during the school day.

We strongly encourage students to come to school without any such devices.

The school will not be responsible for loss, damage or other problems arising from a child bringing such valuable to school.

Where a family considers that their child needs a phone or other internet-connected device for their journey to or from school, our expectation is that the device is surrendered to the class team upon arrival and managed in accordance with our Mobile Internet-Enabled Devices Protocol.

The protocol explains the arrangements in full, including what will happen if a student refuses to surrender a device.

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Mobile-internet-devices-protocol-2.pdf>

We appreciate that these expectations can sometimes be challenging, particularly given the important role technology plays in everyday life. However, our priority must always be the safety, safeguarding, wellbeing and learning of all our students.

School Policies

All our school policies are available on our website:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/documents/school-policies/>

We particularly encourage families to familiarise themselves with all of the policies relevant to their child's education, care and expectations.

If you cannot find a policy you are looking for, please contact the school office.

Complaints and Compliments

We always welcome feedback from families.

In the first instance, concerns are normally best raised with your child's Class Teacher or the relevant member of the Leadership Team, as they are often best placed to resolve matters quickly.

We also welcome compliments and positive feedback. It is always lovely to hear when something has gone particularly well.

If you need to make a formal complaint, please refer to our Complaints Policy, available here:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Complaints-Policy.pdf>

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need support in understanding the appropriate route for raising a concern.

You can contact me via headteacher@abbotsleaschool.co.uk or, for assistance in arranging contact, my PA Mrs Kelly via pa@abbotsleaschool.co.uk

Free School Meals

Please check whether your child is eligible for Free School Meals.

Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to Universal Free School Meals regardless of household income. However, families who receive a qualifying benefit are still encouraged to apply, as registering eligibility can help the school access additional funding through Pupil Premium.

Students in Years 3–13 may be eligible for Free School Meals if their family receives a qualifying benefit.

Full information about eligibility and how to apply is available here:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/are-you-entitled-to-free-school-meals/>

If you are unsure whether your child is eligible, please contact Reception and we will be happy to help.

School Payments

Our school payment arrangements are managed through Arbor.

Please ensure that you have access to your Arbor account and check it regularly for payment requests and other school information.

Further information about our payment system can be found in the Letters Home section of our website:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/parent-information/>

If you experience difficulty accessing Arbor or making a payment, please contact the school office.

Communication with Families

We have several ways of keeping you informed, and it is important to understand what each is used for.

Arbor – official school communication

Arbor is our main platform for official communications with families.

Whole-school and group messages, important notices and communications requiring your attention will normally be sent through Arbor.

Please therefore make sure that your Arbor account and contact details remain up to date.

Class teams

Your child's Class Teacher and class team remain your main day-to-day point of contact regarding your child's education and experience.

Class teams are teaching and supporting students throughout the day, so please allow reasonable time for responses.

If your enquiry is urgent, please contact Reception.

Evidence for Learning

Evidence for Learning (EfL) is our platform for sharing your child's learning and progress with you.

The **My School Day** tag will be used at the end of each school day to provide families with a summary of the day's activities for the whole class. Where there is a particularly noteworthy individual moment or achievement, individual updates may also be shared.

EfL is intended to bring information about students' learning and progress together in one place and to ensure that the whole class team contributes to the communication of your child's educational experience.

If you have difficulty accessing or using Evidence for Learning, please contact Reception or your child's Class Teacher and we will assist.

Head's Weekly Newsletter

Each Friday, I publish the Head's Weekly Newsletter, which is our regular whole-school update.

It contains important information, school news, celebrations of our students' achievements, class updates and reminders about forthcoming events.

I strongly encourage every family to read it each week.

Letters Home

We maintain an online archive of letters sent to families.

Every non-confidential letter we send to families is stored in the relevant section of our website, allowing you to refer back to information whenever you need it.

Letters Home:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/parent-information/>

The website contains a dedicated 2026–27 Letters Home section.

Website and social media

Our website also contains regularly updated information about school life, including term dates, events, policies and other important information.

You can find the main family information at:

<https://www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk/families/>

We have an active Facebook page: @AbbotsLeaSchool and X page under the same name.

FAB! – Friends of Abbot's Lea School

We are fortunate to have a supportive parent community through FAB! – Friends of Abbot's Lea School.

We warmly encourage families to become involved in the life of the school and to use the FAB! parent-to-parent community to meet other families, share experiences and offer mutual support. A FAB! Chat WhatsApp group is available for this purpose.

Please note that FAB! Chat is an informal, unsecured, parent-to-parent support network. It is not an official school communication channel.

Important information from school will always be communicated through our official channels, principally Arbor, and should not be relied upon if it appears only in a parent WhatsApp group.

FAB! Chat QR code:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/E1VTkN0lr92E6X7e30mgdO>



We hope this informal parent-to-parent space will help families connect with one another and provide mutual support, particularly for families who are new to Abbot's Lea.

Working Together

We know that communication between school and home is particularly important for our students and families.

We want to continue to develop an open, respectful and constructive partnership with you. Please remember that our shared aim is always the same: to help your child learn, develop, feel safe, build relationships and prepare for as fulfilling and independent a life as possible. Thank you in advance for your continued support, patience and cooperation.

I have every confidence that 2026–27 will be another brilliant year for all our students.

I look forward to working with you and to celebrating the many achievements of our students throughout the year.

With warmest wishes,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'A Hildrey'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mrs A Hildrey
Headteacher



Term Dates 2026-27

Term 1

- **INSET 1, Tuesday, 1 September 2026 — school closed to all students**
- Students return: Wednesday, 2 September 2026
- Term ends: Friday, 23 October 2026, at 3pm
- **October Break: Monday, 26 October 2026 to Friday, 30 October 2026**

Term 2

- Term starts: Monday, 2 November 2026
- Term ends: Friday, 18 December 2026, at 1pm
- **Christmas break: Monday, 21 December 2026 to Friday, 1 January 2027**

Term 3

- Term starts: Monday, 4 January 2027
- Term ends: Friday, 12 February 2027 at 3pm
- **February Break: Monday, 15 February 2027 to Friday, 19 February 2027**

Term 4

- Term starts: Monday, 22 February 2027
- Term ends: Thursday, 25 March 2027, at 1pm
- **Easter break: Friday, 26 March 2027 to Friday, 9 April 2027**

Term 5

- Term starts: Monday, 12 April 2027
- **May Bank Holiday: Monday, 3 May 2027**
- Term ends: Friday, 28 May 2027 at 3pm
- **May Break: Monday, 31 May 2027 to Friday, 4 June 2027**

Term 6

- Term starts: Monday, 7 June 2027
- All School Leavers' Last Day: Friday, 25 June 2027, finishing at 1pm
- **INSET 2: Friday, 9 July 2027 – school closed to all students**
- Transition Week: Monday, 12 July 2027 – Friday, 16 July 2027, 1pm finish
- Term ends: Friday, 16 July 2027, 1pm
- **Notional INSET Days 3, 4, 5: 19, 20, 21 July 2027 – school closed to all students**