

# CHORISTER PARENTS' GUIDE

## Introduction

You will no doubt be excited about your son's new life and for many families this will be the start of a commitment that has, at its heart, a strong and vibrant boarding community. This guide is intended to help you understand our routines and practices. Further to this, parents of current Choristers are always happy to share their experience with new families and our dedicated staff are always willing to answer your questions, however trivial you may feel they are – that is why we are here!

All the School staff are involved in looking after the Choristers just as much as the day-boys, but those directly responsible for their welfare are the House Tutors, Matrons, the Housemaster, and the Headmaster. We are a small, close-knit community and we get to know the boys very well. Boys in any school environment may have worries or anxieties which they feel awkward about broaching with staff; in these cases we will liaise closely with you as parents. We endeavour to approach all situations with the greatest sensitivity and care by calling on a wealth of experience in the pastoral care of boarders.

Below we have identified some key areas of interest in terms of the routines of Chorister life and how parents and family members may support this.

## Communications

The Headmaster keeps in close touch with the Organist, Professor Steven Grahl (who is also a Governor of the School) and they are both very happy to talk to any parents about any matters to do with the Choir.

## Important telephone numbers

School office: (01865) 242561

Boarding House: (01865) 240698

Matron: 07926 611862

## Illness and unforeseen absence

During office hours (07.30 - 17.30), please contact the office as above; outside office hours, please contact the Boarding House, Housemaster or Matron who will then notify those concerned.

## Planned absences

Any foreseen absences or requests should be directed to the Headmaster through the School Office ([schooloffice@cccs.org.uk](mailto:schooloffice@cccs.org.uk)), copying in Professor Grahl's secretary Florence Maskell ([Florence.maskell@chch.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Florence.maskell@chch.ox.ac.uk)). The further ahead these requests can be communicated, the better for everyone, especially given that both the School and Professor Grahl need to be consulted. The response will then come back to you from the school office.

## Telephone calls

Boys are always able to phone home in the evenings; there is a phone box so that these conversations may be held in private. Boys sometimes get carried away and distracted from phoning home by the many activities in the Boarding House and parents may use the number above to get in touch with their boys in the evening. No news is often good news in the sense that a busy child seldom has the opportunity to dwell on issues of homesickness. House staff will however send regular updates and remind boys to call home.

## **The best times to call**

When phoning to speak to your son please be aware of their bedtimes. The boys' bedtimes are as follows and as a general observation the best time to phone is half an hour prior to these times.

Year 4 bedtime: 20:00.

Year 5 bedtime: 20:00.

Year 6 bedtime: 20:30.

Year 7 bedtime: 20:40.

Year 8 bedtime: 21:00.

## **Mobile Phones**

Only Years 7 and 8 boys are permitted to have their own mobile phone in the Boarding House. These devices must be 'low tech' (we recommend a simple Nokia or equivalent). Each evening the boys will have access to their mobiles following supper and they will be collected by the house staff before bed. Mobile phones are securely stored during the school day and overnight. Boys take personal responsibility for their phones and must understand that the privilege of having a phone may be revoked if they are not handed in at bedtime.

## **Tablets and other smart devices**

We allow such devices to be brought in for concert tours that may involve long distance travel or long periods of time between rehearsals; these devices may include Kindles, iPod, iPad or small games consoles. Otherwise such devices must not be brought into the Boarding House.

The boys are able to make full use of the school's I.T. facilities in which a limited number of age appropriate games are available. There is also the facility to Skype one's parents, and boys who do not see their parents regularly will have priority for this.

## **Letter writing**

Boys are encouraged to write letters to friends and family when they have the time to do so; we are happy to provide stationery and paper. House staff will happily post letters on behalf of the boys. Letter writing is a very useful way of helping boys to reflect upon the events at school and is very often a calming activity, particularly for boys who experience homesickness. The boys who choose to write letters home find it a very rewarding activity and all boys love receiving letters or parcels from home in return.

## **How parents can help new boys settle in**

It is an enormous help both to us and to the boys themselves if you can make sure they know how to do certain things for themselves. It gives the boys confidence in themselves and saves a lot of time, which is precious. We do of course help them with the following tasks, but it is very useful if they already know how to do some of these things before they come. Please would you show your son how to:

- **Wash** thoroughly under a shower (we do not have baths). Faces, ears, hands and knees are regularly inspected by the matrons but we do not actually stand over them in the showers, although we do recognise that some small boys do not like water.
- **Brush** their teeth thoroughly

- **Tie** their own tie
- **Clean** and polish their shoes using traditional shoe polish
- **Make** their own bed, including changing the duvet cover and pillow case (younger boys are assisted by house staff and older boys where necessary)

House staff will discreetly and sensitively support boys with their personal hygiene. Senior boys are encouraged to use deodorant, but please do not supply aerosols or sprays as these tend to set off the fire alarm.

## **Activities**

Throughout the week a wide range of activities are available in the Boarding House. These include table football, pool, computer games (in the IT room), board games, table tennis, basketball and football. Weather permitting Choristers go over to Christ Church Meadows or individual year groups will venture into Oxford as a treat on Monday nights; this may include ice-cream at George and Denver, supper out or a cinema trip.

Throughout the year we make the most of local amenities such as the St Giles' Fair, bowling, laser quest and choir picnics.

Monday evening: Planned activities

Wednesday evening: Tuck night

Saturday: Choir tea – parent-led; Movie night and extended bedtime.

Sunday: Choir tea – parent-led.

## **Waiting Probationers**

When your son is selected as a Chorister, he will spend his first year as a Probationer which means that he will not be required for services and rehearsals at weekends and will be free to go home from 16:10 on Fridays, returning to School on Sunday evening in time for supper at 19:00 or the following morning by 07:20.

## **Visiting**

When visiting the Boarding House please announce your presence to the person on duty or to the Matron and please refrain from going into the common room or upstairs to the dormitories except to help with packing and unpacking at the beginning and end of terms. Usually the best place to congregate is in the ground floor hallway, adjacent to the dining room entrance.

Bringing your son back to school might be a difficult time for both of you but by far the best way of dealing with it is to be as positive as you can and not to prolong your farewells. If you live near enough you may like to attend Evensong during the week and you may wish to come back to the Boarding House to say a quick 'hello' to your son before he goes into the dining room for supper.

## **Parking**

As Chorister parents you may park in the yard when visiting your son after services, but please remember that it is the boys' only playground and it would be much appreciated if you do not leave your car for any longer than necessary. If you are visiting Oxford during the holidays, you may always park in the

playground. To gain access to the playground you will need to obtain a fob from the Bursar, for which you will be asked to pay a one-off £25 fee.

## **IN/OUT Weekends**

For full choristers, weekends during term are designated 'IN weekends' or 'OUT weekends'. On an IN weekend, the boys will stay in school after Evensong on Friday and attend a rehearsal followed by Music School the following day. On an OUT weekend, boys all go home on Friday evening after evensong.

Once your son is a full chorister, he may go out with you (or other adults approved by you), on **IN Weekends** between lunchtime (on Saturday from 12 noon, on Sunday from 1pm) and the afternoon rehearsal. Please help us to keep track of your weekend arrangements by letting us know, by signing IN/OUT and/or emailing arrangements. This is most important for the boys' safety.

On **OUT Weekends**, the boys all go home after Evensong on Friday night and return the following afternoon (timings are as follows). Sunday arrangements are the same as for IN weekends.

### **IN weekends:**

Saturday:                                      Back 16:15                                      Bell 16:30

Sunday:    Back 16:30                                      Bell 16:45

### **OUT weekends:**

Friday:    Pick up 18.45 (Boarding House)

Saturday:    Back 15:45    Bell 16:05

Sunday:    Back 16:30    Bell 16:45

## **Pocket Money**

It is very useful for the boys to have £5-10 pocket money per term at school, even if they go home every weekend. Boys staying in at the weekends may take out money so that they can go shopping with the Matron or Master on duty. The amount spent is recorded in an account book and the balance given back at the end of term. Boys must not lend money to each other.

## **Clothing, uniform and personal property**

The boys' uniform and clothing is overseen by the Matrons. Most clothing and bedding is stored in the Linen Room but the boys will be provided with boxes in which they may keep a small selection of home cloths in their dormitory. All clothing items, including individual socks, underwear, towels, ties etc. must have a sewn in name label or the items will be sent home. We understand that sewing in name labels is a laborious and time-consuming task but it will potentially save a great deal of time and money if items are clearly named.

All boys have a lockable space within the dorms and a personal area that they may feel free to decorate with photos, posters or other keepsakes from home. Most boys bring in a small selection of toys, magazines and teddy bears but we strongly discourage expensive items as we cannot ensure their safety.

## **Concert Shoes (form 5 – 8)**

You will notice on the uniform list that Choristers need to have two pairs of black shoes – one for school and one for concerts. This is not necessary for waiting probationers until they start singing in concerts with the Choir so, for them, one pair of black shoes will be sufficient. Please make sure that all black

school shoes are polished leather and not suede or nubuck. It would be an enormous help to us if you could show your son how to clean his shoes using traditional shoe polish!

## **Food**

Naturally we try to provide appetising, plentiful and nourishing meals for the boys and menus are available on the website (parent portal). We can cater for special diets if there is a genuine medical reason, but generally speaking, the boys are encouraged to eat everything they are offered. Please do not supply them with extra food, drinks or sweets as this really is unnecessary. You may, of course, provide birthday cakes for your son to share with his friends – either in class or after supper in the boarding house.

## **Cathedral Routine**

You will naturally want to attend services your son is taking part in so that you can tell him how much you enjoyed the singing. Seats cannot be reserved for the normal daily Evensong, but the vergers are always very helpful, and you may like to meet up with other parents before going in so that you can sit together. Probationers who are not yet singing sit between the organ and the choir, and chorister parents usually sit in this area too.

On Saturday and Sunday afternoons the Cathedral Priory Room is usually available to you for making tea etc. which you will find very useful especially in the Winter months, and provides an opportunity for you to get to know some of the other families. The key may be collected from Matron at School. You will be asked to help with the Choir tea rota which involves serving refreshments to the boys and men between the practice and Evensong – again in the Priory Room.

You will hear more about Cathedral Routines from Professor Grahl in due course. All Cathedral Choristers have piano and singing lessons, paid for by the Dean and Chapter. In addition, all of them learn a second instrument. These lessons are organised by the School's Director of Music and must be given by a member of the School's Peripatetic Music Staff. The School has charge of all boys' musical education, and this is a condition of acceptance of a place in the School.

## **Tickets for concerts and services**

There are a number of events for which a ticket will be required, some of which will be complimentary to chorister parents (Carol Services and certain other occasions through the Cathedral Office). Please remember that it is a public Cathedral and also a College Chapel and sometimes you will not have priority – occasionally, it is a case of 'first come, first served' and then we are all in the same boat.

You will have the opportunity to attend the Advent Carol Service (with a reserved seat when possible) which is one of the special events of the Cathedral Year. You will also be offered tickets for one of the Christmas Carol Services. Christmas Day services are not reserved or ticketed, but are, unsurprisingly, very well-attended. There are other special events throughout the year, and you will be given details of these as they approach, but you may find it helpful to have a skeleton diary for reference:

Tickets for commercial events, such as the Music at Oxford Christmas concerts, and the annual performance at St John's Smith Square in London require tickets to be purchased, and the Chorister parents normally arrange group bookings for these.

## **Christmas and Easter**

When Choristers are singing in the Choir full-time, Choristers spend some time at school just before Christmas and Easter in order to fulfil their Choir duties. We try to make this as enjoyable as possible as it is out of term time and a range of treat and activities will be arranged; these may include theatre or cinema trips, visiting a theme park, bowling and laser quest (among others). At Christmas we supply a

House Advent Calendar, and boys may also have individual ones, but we do ask you not to give them the kind with chocolates in them. We also provide Christmas stockings for those staying until Christmas Day and Easter Eggs for Easter Day.

### **Michaelmas Term**

Start of term Chorister Parent Meeting with the Headmaster, Professor Grahl and the Housemaster

Half Term Parents' Meeting (as above) on return.

Advent Carol Service

Christmas Carol Services/Concerts – the may include St John's Smith Square (London), Music at

Oxford Concerts and Le Manoir Carol Service

Chorister Party with parents on Christmas Eve

Christmas Day Services

### **Hilary Term**

Start of term Chorister Parent Meeting

Half Term Parents' Meeting

A performance of one of the Passions

Easter Services

### **Trinity Term**

Start of term Chorister Parent Meeting

Choir Photograph

Half Term Parents' Meeting

Prize Giving

Choir Cricket Match

There are of course plenty of other school events in which your son will be taking part, but they will appear on the School Calendar with reminders in the weekly School Newsletter. Your support is particularly welcome at sports fixtures and at events organised by the School Parents' Association. The PA works very hard to raise funds for extra equipment the school may need and from which all the children benefit.

### **Parental Endorsement**

We are delighted to welcome your son as a Chorister. To support you in your decision, here are some encouraging words from a former Chorister parent:

*"It is a great privilege to have your son chosen to be a Chorister at Christ Church but the life of a Chorister parent is not an easy one – there will be many wonderful times, but also times of difficulty. Remember help is always at hand. Giving your son to someone else to look after at the tender age of 7 or 8 is probably the hardest thing you'll*

ever have to do. Initially you will have very mixed feelings, pride that your son is going to be a Chorister but perhaps some guilt that you are sending him away from home. As the days pass you may even feel a sense of loss, a kind of grief that catches you at the most unexpected moments. These are all very natural feelings and everyone experiences them. They do pass. As weeks turn into months you will know if you have made the right decision for him. You will adjust to the new routine, just as he will. Be patient, it takes time for everybody to adjust. Don't suffer in silence – talk to the staff at the school as this will reassure you that your son is happy and settling in. Whatever you find yourself worrying about, share it with somebody. You may find yourself worrying about all kinds of things. Will he clean his teeth properly? Who will make sure his hair is dry before he goes to bed? Will he eat enough? The answer to all these questions is of course the Matrons, who are there to look after your son in the same way that you would. If your concern is to do with his time in school speak to his Form Master. The staff are easily approachable and willing to help”.

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