Old Grovian Association AGM
School Update
November 2026

A Year of Resilience, Ambition and Community

The 2025–26 academic year has been another extraordinarily busy and rewarding one at Woodhouse Grove, played out against a national landscape that remains incredibly challenging for independent education.

The introduction of VAT on school fees, the removal of business rates relief, increased employment costs, persistent inflation and wider economic uncertainty have combined to place considerable pressure on schools and, more importantly, on the families who choose them. Across the country, pupil numbers have fluctuated, schools have closed or merged and the sector has entered a period of significant structural adjustment.

Against this unsettled backdrop, Woodhouse Grove has continued to demonstrate considerable resilience and stability. Recruitment has held up comparatively well, while Brontë House has continued to perform particularly strongly despite the demographic pressures affecting primary-age pupil numbers across our region.

None of this is cause for complacency. Families rightly expect outstanding teaching, exceptional pastoral care, extensive opportunities and genuine value from the education they choose for their children. Careful financial planning and a sustained focus on operational efficiency therefore remain essential if we are to protect the breadth and quality of a Grove education.

Yet perhaps the most important lesson of recent years is that, in uncertain times, clarity of identity becomes more important rather than less. Good schools know who they are and what they stand for. At Woodhouse Grove, our ***Grovian Values*** continue to provide that compass.

Our purpose remains resolute: to provide an excellent all-round education with a strong academic core and to nurture young people of intellect, character, compassion and resilience. Academic achievement matters enormously, but education at The Grove has never been confined to examination results. Sport, music, drama, service, leadership, Chapel life, outdoor education and the countless other experiences available to our pupils all help shape the confident, grounded and generous young people we hope will leave us.

Academic Life and Preparing for the Future

Academic ambition has remained at the heart of School life throughout the year. Pupils have continued to challenge themselves both within and beyond the curriculum, with strong participation in national academic competitions and enrichment opportunities.

Our mathematicians again performed impressively in the UKMT competitions. Four pupils represented The Grove in the Team Maths Challenge, while pupils in Years 9 to 11 collected an excellent range of Bronze, Silver and Gold certificates in the Intermediate Maths Challenge, with three progressing to the prestigious Kangaroo follow-on round. Sixteen A-level historians also travelled to Munich during February half term, bringing their studies of twentieth-century Germany vividly to life.

We continue to place considerable importance not simply on helping pupils secure their next destination, but on preparing them for life beyond school: encouraging independence, curiosity, adaptability and the confidence to embrace opportunities when they arise.

That message was captured particularly powerfully at Prize Day by our Guest of Honour, Old Grovian and sports broadcaster, Becky Ives. Reflecting on her journey from Woodhouse Grove to presenting some of the world's biggest sporting events, Becky spoke candidly about the setbacks and rejections she had encountered along the way. Her message to pupils was one of resilience, curiosity and courage: success rarely follows a straight path and uncertainty can often create unexpected opportunity.

Life Beyond the Classroom

As ever, one of the great strengths of Woodhouse Grove has been the extraordinary breadth of opportunity available to our pupils.

Sport enjoyed another highly successful year. In football, our U15 Girls reached the semi-finals of the ISFA Shield, while the U15 Boys reached the semi-finals of the ISFA Bowl. Most notably, our U13 Boys reached the ISFA Bowl Final, eventually finishing as runners-up following a dramatic penalty shootout – the furthest a Grove football team has ever progressed in a national competition.

Netball also enjoyed considerable success. The 1st Team won the Senior Stonyhurst Tournament, while our U13As were undefeated champions at the St Peter's Festival.

There was further success on the rugby field. The 1st VII retained the Scarborough Trophy, reached the North of England Cup semi-final and won the Ampleforth 7s for the second consecutive year, before also triumphing at the Dame Allan's tournament. Across the age groups there were numerous further Cup and Plate successes. Four Grovians competed in the National Cross-Country Championships, while sixteen represented the School in the Leeds Schools' competition.

Performing Arts has similarly continued to flourish. The Autumn Term production of *We Will Rock You Young@Part*, featuring the music of Queen, was an outstanding celebration of the talent, ambition and creativity of our pupils. The Spring Term brought *Battle of the Bands* and a hugely successful "Play in a Day", while the summer saw younger pupils take to the McCarthy Theatre stage in *Collected Grimm Tales*.

All of these achievements sit alongside the less easily measured but equally important experiences that make up daily Grove life: concerts, trips and expeditions, Duke of Edinburgh, inter-House competitions, clubs and societies, residential experiences and the myriad opportunities through which young people discover interests and talents they did not necessarily know they possessed.

Boarding and the Wider Grove Community

Our Boarding community has continued to evolve. During the year we welcomed our first Immersion group from Wuxi and launched our new *Study Play Stay* flexi-boarding option, providing greater flexibility for families while allowing more pupils to experience the distinctive benefits of boarding life.

More broadly, our connection with the wider Grove community remains enormously important. It was particularly pleasing to welcome a number of Old Grovians back to School during *National Careers Week*, providing current pupils with first-hand insights into an impressively diverse range of careers and industries.

Those connections between generations are hugely valuable. Old Grovians provide our pupils with role models, mentors, professional connections and, perhaps most importantly, tangible evidence of the extraordinary variety of career paths that can begin at Woodhouse Grove.

Charity, Service and the Grovian Values

Service to others remains central to our understanding of what a Grove education should provide.

This year's charitable activity was led with tremendous energy by our Sixth Form Charity Prefects, supported by Mrs Nulty and Rev Drost. Our pupils supported organisations including Bradford North Foodbank, Candlelighters, Toilet Twinning, Martin House Children's Hospice and Simon on the Streets.

The Toilet Twinning initiative funded 25 toilets and safe-water facilities around the world, while the House system was again used to give pupils a voice in choosing an additional charity to support. These initiatives matter not simply because of the money raised, but because they encourage young people to understand their responsibilities to communities beyond their own.

Being ***Kind and Generous*** are not intended simply to be words displayed around the School. At their best, our charitable and community activities provide young people with practical opportunities to live those values.

The 1812 Society and Our First Giving Week

One of the most significant developments of the year – and one of particular relevance to the Old Grovian community – has been the growth of our Development activity.

In December, we formally launched the ***1812 Society***, named, of course, after the year in which Woodhouse Grove was founded. Its purpose is simple but important: to help open the doors of the School to future generations of Grovians by providing transformational, means-tested, bursaries so that talent and potential, rather than financial circumstance, can determine opportunity.

The response from parents and Old Grovians was enormously encouraging and provided the foundations for another important first: Woodhouse Grove's inaugural *Giving Week*, held at the end of June and beginning of July.

Giving Week was deliberately about more than fundraising. It was a celebration of community and brought together parents, pupils, Old Grovians, Governors, former parents, staff and friends of the School. From the distinctly competitive tug-of-war to the elegance of the *1812 Soirée* and Summer Concert, it provided numerous opportunities for members of the wider Grove family to come together.

That is a tremendous start, but perhaps more important is what *Giving Week* represents. Philanthropy has always played a part in the history of Woodhouse Grove. Many generations have benefited from the generosity and foresight of those who came before them. As affordability becomes an increasingly significant challenge for independent education, bursaries will become ever more important if the School is to remain accessible to talented young people from a broad range of backgrounds.

Strengthening our relationship with Old Grovians and friends of the School is therefore not simply about fundraising. It is about creating a stronger community around Woodhouse Grove: one that celebrates our shared history while accepting some responsibility for its future.

My sincere thanks go to Eve Corry, our Head of Development & Alumni Relations, whose enthusiasm, energy and leadership have been instrumental in establishing both the *1812 Society* and *Giving Week*, and to every Old Grovian who has supported these initiatives.

Looking Ahead

The environment in which Woodhouse Grove operates will undoubtedly continue to change. We cannot insulate ourselves from demographic change, economic pressures or the challenges confronting independent education more broadly.

What we can control is how we respond: our task is not simply to weather change, but to use it to sharpen our distinctiveness and strengthen the School. That means continuing to innovate while remaining true to those things that have made Woodhouse Grove special for more than two centuries.

During the year we began refining our admissions journey for September 2027 entry. Our new *SHINE Awards* will provide prospective pupils with an opportunity to demonstrate their talents and interests from the outset, while a new *Grove on Show* open day and subsequent*, Grove in Action* event and *Candidate Day* will provide families with a more personalised and engaging introduction to the School. The principle underpinning these changes is reassuringly familiar: recognising potential, celebrating excellence and giving young people the opportunity to flourish.

That balance between tradition and evolution feels particularly important. Woodhouse Grove has never stood still. The School that today's Old Grovians remember was itself shaped by generations who adapted and developed it while preserving its essential character.

The same responsibility now falls to us: the policies surrounding independent education may change; economic pressures may intensify; the educational landscape will undoubtedly continue to evolve. But the essence of a Grove education remains remarkably constant: curiosity sparked in classrooms, courage developed on sports fields, creativity brought to life on stage, friendships forged, service given and character shaped.

If we remain adaptable, ambitious and true to our values, I have every confidence that Woodhouse Grove will continue to thrive and flourish – and that future generations will be every bit as proud to say ***I am Grovian*** as those who have gone before them.

Thank you, as ever, to the Old Grovian community for your continued interest in, affection for and support of the School.

James Lockwood MA (86–92, St16–)
Headmaster