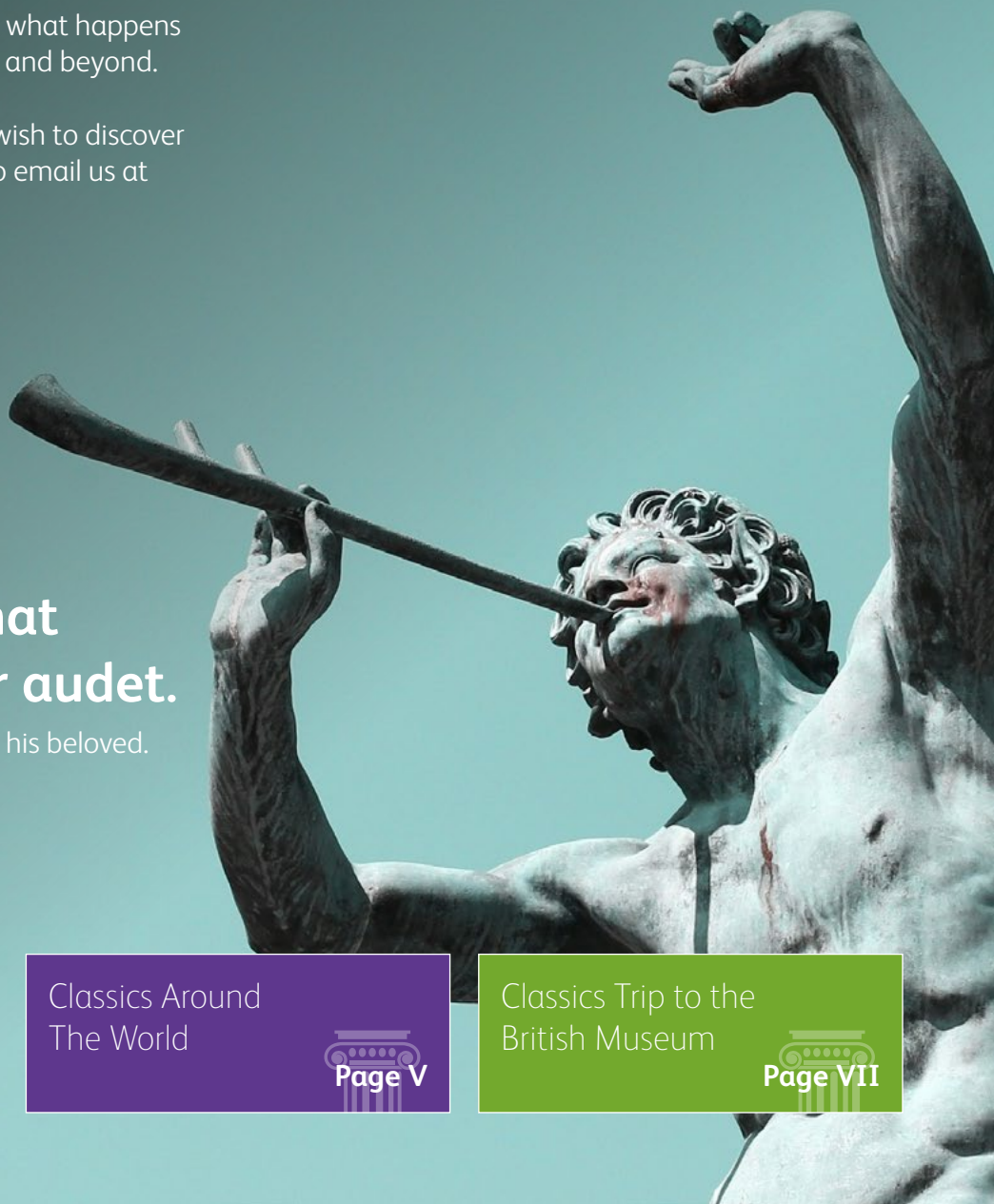
CLASSICS Matters

SPRING 2025

Welcome to the sixth issue of the Classics Department newsletter - CLASSICS Matters.

Here we aim to offer a snapshot of what happens each term in Classics at The Abbey and beyond.

Should you have any questions or wish to discover more about this subject, feel free to email us at loprestiva@theabbey.co.uk



Felix qui quod amat defendere fortiter audet.

Happy he who dares boldly defend his beloved.

(Ovid, Amores, 2, 5)

Lower IV Latin Trip to Bath

Yuuki and Charlotte, Lower IV

We had a trip on Wednesday to Bath. We were very excited to look at the baths and we were armed with cameras, tissues, raincoats and lots of food for the Roman Baths.

Unfortunately, we were not able to do the tour of the Roman Baths because the power had gone out. It was incredibly unlucky as the Roman Baths never close apart from Christmas and New Year's Day! Nevertheless, we still enjoyed our experience with our friends, while we did fun activities.

First, we had our classroom session that included us answering the following question 'To what degree do you agree that Roman Bath was a special town?'. We answered this using 2000 year old artefacts that we were able to touch.

Next, we ate our packed lunches and had a break. In the afternoon, we did activities in the discovery centre such as finding particular architectural stones and scanning them using iPads, building and constructing Roman arches and columns using wooden blocks, and excavating different replicas of things that they found in the actual Roman Baths inside a pile of sand.

Then we finished off the day with a delicious ice cream that we enjoyed with some live music.

Making illustrated maps of The Underworld

Lower IV worked in groups to produce maps of the Underworld. They read two different sources and then decided how to use them to produce colourful maps. Once they had finished the task they reflected on three questions.

Here are some of their responses.

1) What did you enjoy about making your maps?

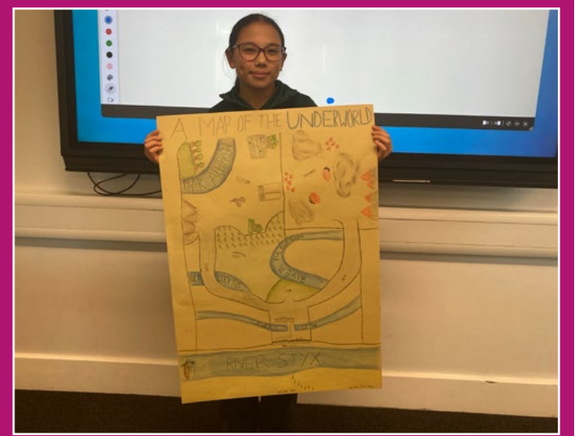
- I enjoyed drawing and colouring, also working with my classmates.
- I enjoyed planning where everything was to draw it in the end.
- I enjoyed learning about the Underworld, putting labels to things and working as a team together.
- I really enjoyed being able to visualize what the underworld looked like. It was really fun to do something creative.
- I enjoyed drawing and colouring the rivers in the underworld.

2) What did you learn about using sources?

- I learnt how to collect information and how to read and study it more quickly.
- I found out that although some sources might have different ways of showing their information they both helped me a lot to understand how the underworld was laid out. I noticed that one of them was more factual, whilst the other one was more detailed and descriptive, more like a story being told.
- I learnt that some sources might not be as accurate as others but they will still have interesting bits of information that you can add. I also learnt that to make sure you gather accurate information, you should see if the different sources mention that bit of information and what they say about it and if it all matches up.

3) What did you learn about the Underworld?

- I learnt that there was a good and bad side of the underworld.
- I personally thought that the underworld was just a little pool or something small, but now, I found out that the underworld was a whole kingdom.
- I learned that the underworld has 5 rivers,Styx = hateful, Phlegethon = flaming, Cocytus = mourning, Lethe = forgetfulness and Acheron = woe
- I learned that the underworld has a place called Elysium, where the good people go after their death; Tartarus, a dungeon of torment and suffering for the wicked; Mourning fields, where the people go when they had experience grief and suffering after death and limbo, where the people go when they are awaiting Charon.
- I learnt that limbo was the name of the place where you get judged for your actions in your life.



Gratin Success

Alas, what is to follow is not a recipe for a creamy potato dish, but rather a report on the Classics department's latest success: combining Classical Greek and Latin GCSEs into one exciting opportunity. Over the past two years, I have been the Abbey's first Gratin candidate - to be clear, I received two separate GCSEs on results day, one for Greek and one for Latin, as I wrote completely separate exams for each subject. Gratin simply means that, due to limited lesson time, I completed each language with half the teaching time usually assigned to a GCSE course (that is, only one double lesson per language per week).

Fitting two subjects into the space of one made it possible for me to complete eleven GCSEs in one year (the standard at The Abbey is ten), enabling me not only to pursue my passion for languages, but to also keep more options open for other subjects, hence widening the breadth of my GCSE studies, which has ultimately allowed me to make more informed decisions about my A-Level options. As for Gratin itself, the Greek and Latin GCSE courses complement each other perfectly, as the exams for each subject are identical in structure (50% language which focuses on grammar and vocabulary, and 25% for each of two set texts).

But why take on such a challenge? Greek and Latin grammar is the best aid you can have for learning their modern counterparts: understanding sometimes complex grammatical concepts is essential for all Germanic and Romance languages. A firm grasp of grammar is helpful not only for learning German, which still uses the nominative, accusative, dative and genitive cases (these can be demonstrated in English but do not affect the form, i.e. spelling, of nouns or adjectives, meaning most English first language speakers are unaware of their existence) but for French and Spanish, too, which both use the subjunctive mood (a structure which is difficult to illustrate in English, but is commonly used in the Classics).

Furthermore, Gratin allows you to delve into both Greek and Roman perspectives through the set texts, so is invaluable to anyone hoping to study history, philosophy or classical civilisation (an amalgamation of the two focusing on the ancient word) later on. In Latin I learnt about Roman military history and battle strategy by reading the works of Caesar, Cicero and Tacitus (think Bouddica), while in Greek I was introduced to Socrates' philosophy by Plato and enjoyed humorous stories about different communities from Herodotus. Please note that the set texts change every few years, so do check the OCR website or ask the Classics department if you are curious as to what ancient texts you may have the chance to discover.

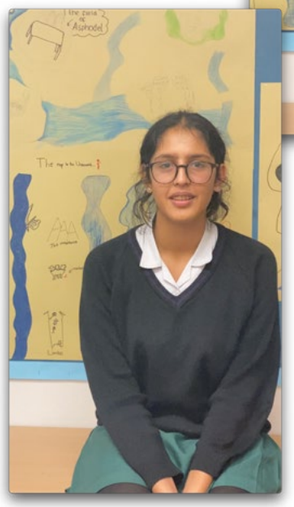
My Gratin success of grade 9 in Latin as well as grade 9 in Greek would not have been possible without the constant support and dedication of the Classics department. Class sizes are very small (I was the only student in my Latin and Greek classes), making lessons intense, productive and focused on the specific needs of each student, allowing work to be completed in record time and to ensure that any uncertainties are quickly resolved. In addition to 1-on-1 support during lessons, a variety of trips enables an even deeper appreciation of the new cultures that you are engaging with, such as theatre trips to see Ancient Greek plays, e.g. the Bacchae in London, and even a joint Classics-food technology trip to the Bay of Naples.

Gratin is nonetheless a challenging undertaking, especially when considering revision for three exams per language, but with enough commitment and good time-management it is certainly achievable. Do let the Classics department know if you are interested - they will gladly provide resources and advice to find out if Gratin could be the right choice for you, too.

Maria, former Upper V Latin and Greek student

We love Classics because...

Lower V Latin and Greek students have shared their enthusiasm for these fascinating subjects just a term into their GCSE journey. From uncovering the roots of English words in Latin to exploring the epic tales of Homer in Greek, they are captivated by the richness of the ancient world. They love the challenge of translating texts and the excitement of discovering how ancient languages and cultures continue to shape our modern world. Their passion and curiosity are inspiring as they delve deeper into these timeless subjects!



Scan the QR code to view the videos

CLASSICS AROUND THE WORLD

4 things ancient Greeks and Romans got right about mental health.

From The Conversation.com

1. The Importance of Mental State

The ancients recognized that mental health is crucial to overall well-being. In the "Epidemics," an ancient Greek medical text, it is noted that habits of thought, along with lifestyle factors like clothing, housing, and physical activity, play a significant role in health. The tragic tale of Homer, who was said to have died after wasting away from depression, exemplifies this understanding. The text emphasises, "*ἡ ἕξις περὶ τὰς φροντίδας*" (our habits regarding thoughts) as essential to health.

2. Mental Health's Impact on Physical Well-being

Galen of Pergamum, a prominent physician, observed that mental disturbances often lead to physical illnesses. For instance, he documented cases where grief and anxiety caused severe physical conditions, such as "febris cerebralis" (brain fever). One patient, who suffered financial loss, fell into a delirium, illustrating how deeply mental anguish can affect physical health: "qui graviter irascuntur, turbantur, anguntur, ad minima quidem aegrotant, et aegrotationes difficile superant" (those who become seriously angry, troubled, or distressed fall ill from even the slightest cause and struggle to recover).

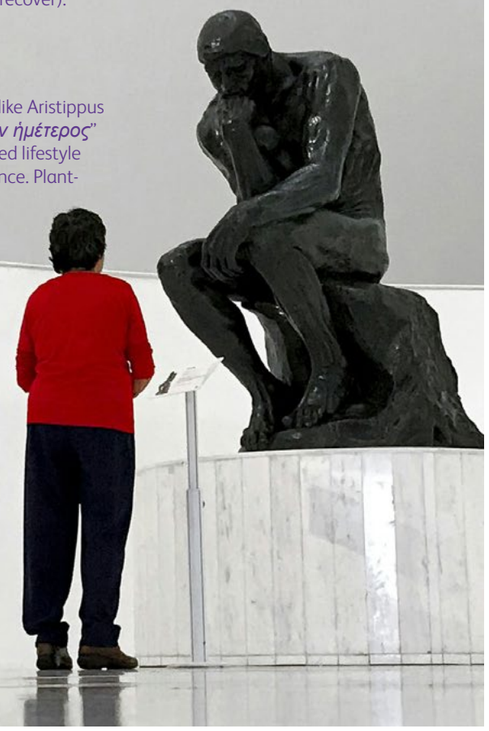
3. Preventing and Treating Mental Illness

The ancients had diverse approaches to mental health care. Philosophers like Aristippus advised focusing on the present moment: "*μόνον ὁ παρών χρόνος ἐστίν ἡμέτερος*" (only the present time is ours). Physicians, on the other hand, recommended lifestyle changes, such as exercise, diet, and even travelling, to restore mental balance. Plant-based remedies, like hellebore for paranoia, were also used, though with caution due to their potential toxicity.

4. The Effort Needed for Mental Health

Ancient thinkers believed that maintaining mental health required continuous effort. Caelius Aurelianus advised patients suffering from depression to engage in activities that brought joy, such as attending comedies. He emphasised that no single activity was sufficient; rather, a comprehensive change in lifestyle and thinking was necessary to achieve mental well-being: "non cibus, non potus, non balnea, non ambulatio, non alia huiusmodi sunt curantia, sed curatio falsa opinione depellenda" (it is not food, drink, baths, walking, or other such things that cure, but removing the false belief that has taken over the mind).

The insights of the Greeks and Romans remind us that while our methods and medicines may differ today, the challenges of mental health and the efforts required to maintain it are universal and timeless.



Classics Trip to the British Museum

On a chilly Wednesday morning in December, Classics students from across the Senior School set out to explore the British Museum.

Sixth Form Classical Civilisation and Greek students went in search of Greek artefacts from their syllabus. The Parthenon Frieze was a huge hit and a great opportunity to bring the Greek religion topic to life. All the students discovered a love of Greek vases they didn't know they had. Upper VI found this trip a great springboard for revision before the upcoming mocks.

Ada and Emilia describe the many topics covered by Upper IV on their interactive I-pad session and exploration through the museum:

Today we went to the British museum. We began our day by heading over to the Roman history gallery, where we learnt about; the Roman emperors, the Vestal Virgins, the freedmen, the trade and economy of the Romans. We also saw and observed murals and intricate statues. After that, we gathered to have lunch and then continued our journey of learning. We headed towards the exhibit of Roman vases, and even more statues. We found many depictions of famous heroes, and their tales. As we continued, we headed towards the Egyptian history and mythology exhibit. There we learned about the process of mummification, and many of the gods the Egyptians worshipped, including Ra, Anubis, Osiris and Horus. After completing our worksheet, we headed back towards our beloved Abbey to finish our learning journey.

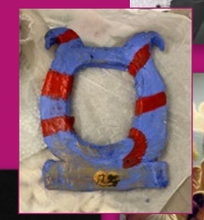
Ada and Emilia Upper IV

Another year, another myth, another Ovid Competition!

Upper III students were delighted to take part in this extra-curricular competition where they had to respond creatively to the myth of Orpheus, a talented musician married to Eurydice, who tragically dies from a snakebite on their wedding day; heartbroken, Orpheus journeys to the underworld to plead with Hades to bring her back, who agrees, on the condition that Orpheus not look back at Eurydice until they reach the surface; but overcome with doubt, Orpheus turns too soon, losing Eurydice forever to the underworld.

Here are some of the works created by our fantastic Upper III students, the best of which will be selected to run in the national Ovid Competition, organised by Cambridge Schools Classics Project. Prizes and winners will be announced in late March, stay tuned!

Scan the QR code for more



Classics Seminars

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So far they have attended seminars delivered by Ms Lopresti on the topics of Alexander the Great, mystery cults and Elusinian mysteries, and finally on the Akkadian Empire and cuneiform with a special focus on the Hammurabi Code.

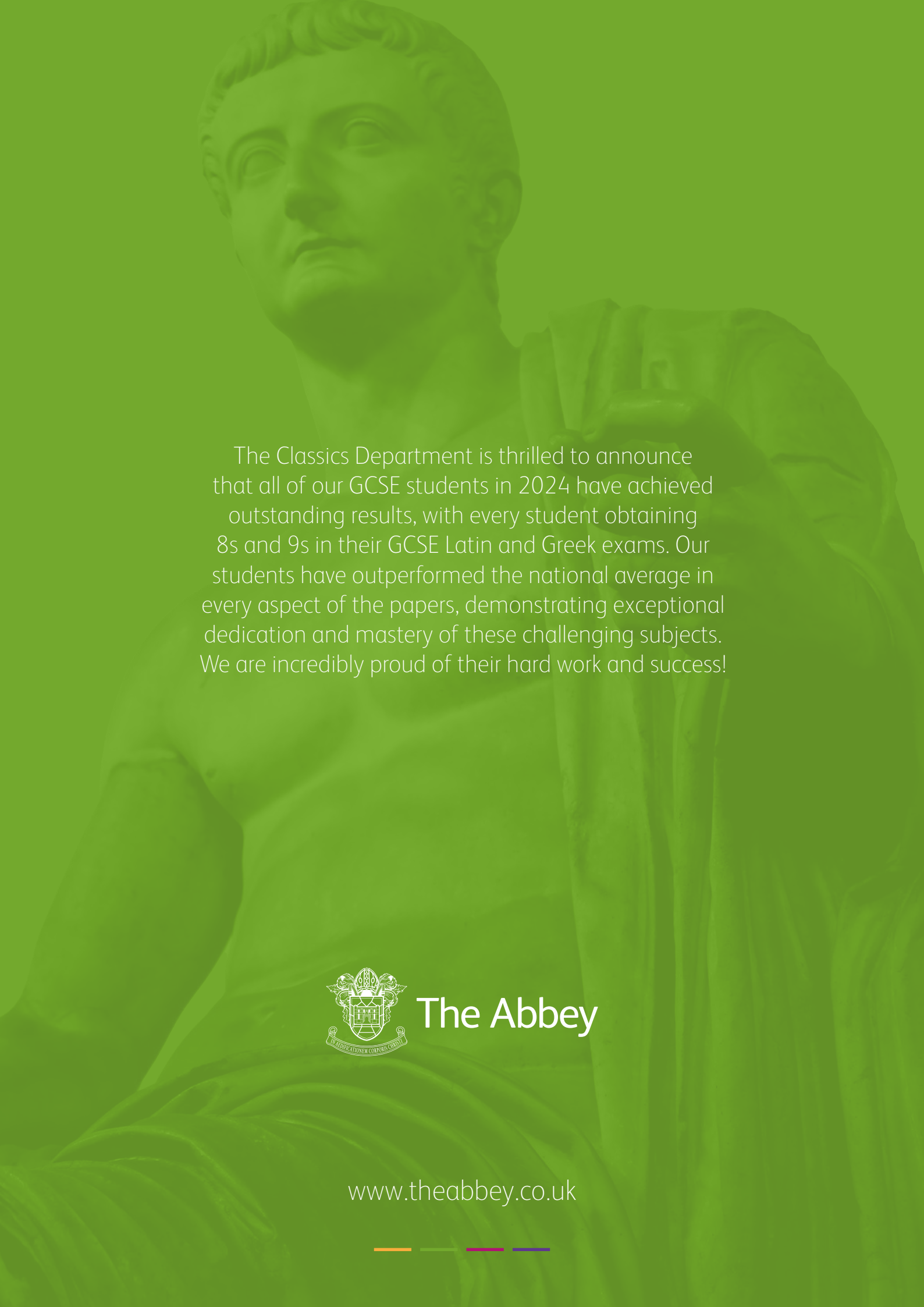
Next term, the students themselves will take the lead and amaze us with their mini lectures!

Here's a couple of glimpses into what we do.

On Wednesday we were lucky enough to have our second Classics seminar, where we discuss classical topics outside the curriculum to better prepare us for our future Classics and Archaeology university degrees. This session was about the Eleusinian mysteries, an ancient mystery cult centred around the worship of Persephone and Demeter. We looked at the little surviving information we have left, including the Ninnion tablet, to deduce what could have happened within these cults.

We saw that rituals mimicking the suffering of Demeter were a key part of the initiation ceremony and that initiates had to experience a metaphorical death in order to understand the importance of life, something that likely persists in certain cults today. This helped us apply concepts from the ancient world to the modern day, which is what classics is all about!

Bea & Francesca, Upper VI Greek students



The Classics Department is thrilled to announce that all of our GCSE students in 2024 have achieved outstanding results, with every student obtaining 8s and 9s in their GCSE Latin and Greek exams. Our students have outperformed the national average in every aspect of the papers, demonstrating exceptional dedication and mastery of these challenging subjects. We are incredibly proud of their hard work and success!

The Abbey

www.theabbey.co.uk