



The Good Schools Guide Review of Queen's College, London W1G 8BT September 2011

Our View

A happy, rounded school where girls are encouraged to be individuals in an informal, unstressful environment; where nurturing teachers bring out the best in them and help them to find their own paths; where they develop confidence and a desire to succeed. Where being yourself is respected and really matters.

Principal

Since 2009, Dr Frances Ramsey MA DPhil (Oxon) (forties). Completed doctorate in medieval history before starting teaching. Taught at Westminster School, where she was head of history and director of studies. Discovered the importance of the pastoral side when she became Master of the Queen's Scholars. Cerebral and professional, she is determined to lead the school onwards and upwards. Says it has the same feel and ethos as Westminster and parents and staff feel familiar. All the latter have full lives beyond day to day teaching, which she thinks is important. Very much likes the all girl set up - 'no distraction in the classroom'.

Initially some uncertainty amongst parents over the direction the new principal would take: 'The school has a certain quirkiness and it is important that this is not ironed out'. However prospective parents are impressed with 'the buzz of the school and the direction it is going in'. Mixed reactions from current parents to the introduction of uniform for years 7 to 9, mainly because they don't want general informality of the school to change. But, as Dr Ramsey is a firm believer in 'evolution not revolution', we don't feel they need to worry and the change has been enthusiastically welcomed by prospective parents. She misses having the time to teach but makes sure that she is as visible as possible, taking assembly twice a week, having coffee/tea meetings with the senior girls and congratulating younger ones who bring her their 'show principal' reward cards. Is also seen at all school performances. As she says, one of the most difficult things, when taking over, is getting to know all the parents of 300 girls, but she does interview all those of new applicants and the school maintains a continuous open door policy (parents tell us that they can go in and go anywhere any time they like), so she is not inaccessible. Married to an Oxford academic, with two young children in central London schools. We think that Queen's College is lucky to have her.

Academic Matters

Excellent results across the board, with a curriculum that covers a broad range of subjects and is as strong on the creative side as the academic. Parents say, 'Well structured, but girls don't feel it is rigid and therefore thrive on it'; 'Art is taken as seriously as maths.' Dr Ramsey has upped the academic ante, increasing the number of subjects taken as IGCSE and bringing in triple science for the top set. She says, despite the school not being super selective, the girls are all able and ambitious. Parents say the school 'embraces a girl's whole brain'; is 'sympathetic, understanding and supportive'. All agree that the school is not a hothouse, the atmosphere is relaxed, yet it manages to bring out the potential in all girls, academic or artistic. Teachers praised for their dedication and support. The deputy head, one of the good proportion of males on the staff, apparently 'always goes the extra mile and always listens to parents'. Appears to cater well for different types of children guiding them towards opportunities. No EFL tuition but will give support for EAL if necessary. Small classes in the sixth form (average eight) are, a parent said, 'the jewel in the crown'. A huge range of subjects available to be studied, including several languages. Maths, English literature, history and biology seem the most popular. Normal pass rate 100 per cent; in 2010 78 per cent were A*-B grades.

Popular, fully trained and experienced SENCo four days a week. Can cope with the milder end of the spectrum. All children assessed in year 7 and extra tuition given where necessary. Senior Mistress says head of English superb at finding any problems - in fact, all teachers good at spotting and communicating concerns: 'Nobody gets through the net'. Classroom assistants not needed as class sizes small (15-20 in years 7- 11) and varied. Parents kept fully in the picture - communication lines are good.

Games, Options, the Arts

As in many town schools, physical activity an ongoing problem, but one they do seem to have cracked here. Recently-appointed head of PE has completely re-organised the system and all girls have at least one sport type session four days a week. Could be gymnastics, in a beautifully re-furnished, fully equipped hall, ballet, seasonal games in Regent's Park, swimming or anything else that demands physical activity. In fact, when we were discussing the school uniform

issue, one parent suggested that they didn't really need to bother as 'my daughter seems to wear her sports kit most days!' Lots of matches played against other schools and the Duke of Edinburgh award is a popular option. Senior girls can go to the University of Westminster gym for exercise or pilates and yoga type classes. Very grown-up!

Wonderful pictures on display everywhere. Well equipped art room up in the eaves (north lit of course), showing coverage of all aspects of the subject. We were fascinated by a huge sculpture made of wire coat hangers. Talented head of art develops ability and encourages imagination, as is evidenced by their results. Music from beginner to grade 8. About fifty per cent learn an individual instrument or have voice tuition. Several concerts, formal and informal, and musical ensembles each year, as well as musical theatre productions and opera. Enthusiastic head of drama finds many different ways to stimulate and stretch her students. 2010 will see 'The Crucible' being performed in the round - an exciting first. This school is not scared of experiment or innovation.

Clubs abound and take place in the middle of the day as well as at the end. Each day is jam packed with activity. Senior girls even stay late on Fridays for self-defence sessions. No excuse for any girl ever to sit twiddling her thumbs. Plenty of outings making use of all London has to offer. Regular trips home and abroad, both educational and social. Lots of charitable involvement and fund raising activities.

Background and Atmosphere

Founded in 1848 and given a royal charter in 1853, a pioneer in education for women, this was the first institution in Great Britain to give academic qualifications to girls. Still on its original site in four elegant, well proportioned Georgian houses, internally it has often been altered through the years in order to provide the best modern education possible. Wouldn't those early Victorian students be amazed to see the state of the art glass computer room, 'the goldfish bowl', so cleverly integrated, science and language laboratories beyond their imaginations, the wonderful libraries and the great hall where modern lighting and sound equipment helps to enhance perhaps almost recognizable costume dramas? They would certainly enjoy the more relaxed atmosphere and the idea of learning through discovery rather than rote. Teachers that really care and want to help their pupils to learn and discover in an informal way. A happy atmosphere in the school today that gives girls confidence and helps them find their own way to go forward.

Two of the earliest students, Miss Buss and Miss Beale, went on to found the North London Collegiate School and Cheltenham Ladies College, respectively. Katherine Mansfield and Jacqueline du Pre also stand amongst the long list of distinguished old girls as well as, more recently, Daisy Goodwin and Imogen Lloyd Webber. A distinguished tradition and history in the making.

Pastoral Care and Discipline

Dr Ramsey has added a layer of pastoral staff giving, she believes, better co-ordination and consistency. Girls have a year tutor as well as a form tutor, so should always have someone to talk to if necessary and should not slip through the net if difficulties arise. Has also introduced midterm mini reports in every subject, 'a quick reality check', as she calls them, which should help highlight potential academic problems. Apparently the girls have responded well to this idea. Strong anti-bullying policy - would not hesitate to exclude an offender.

Pupils and Parents

The usual cosmopolitan London mix of nationalities and backgrounds. About ten per cent don't speak English at home.

Entrance

Mainly at 11+ via the North London consortium exam. Must also have reference from previous school and be interviewed by the principal or a senior member of staff. A good percentage from Queen's College Prep, about 30 per cent from local state primaries, the rest from other private preps. Another intake at 16+ subject to GCSE results and letters of recommendation from their previous schools. All prospective entrants at this level will be interviewed by the head of sixth form.

Exit

Mostly after A levels to top universities, to study everything from art and design to science subjects. A few each year to Oxbridge and the London colleges, the rest all over. Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham popular in the last couple of years.

Money Matters

Several means-tested bursaries available at 11+ and 16+, funded by the Old Queen's bursary trust fund. Academic, music and art scholarships, for up to twenty-five per cent of fees, for both internal and external candidates. Would hope always to be able to find a way of keeping a pupil in need.