

BEDS

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THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

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GUIDE



Good Schools Guide Review

The Good Schools Guide is the recognised 'go to' guide for families in search of the right school for their children.

The Guide is an important reference for parents because it is the only publication that researches and publishes impartial and independent reports on schools, consulting with parents, pupils and staff.

The following is the review published by the Good Schools Guide resulting from their visit in February 2018.

Remarks

Bede's fosters individual strengths and helps individuals with weaknesses. As a parent said, 'You don't have to be good at everything...if they thrive at something it spills over into the rest of life'.





Simply put, they
believe him, and
think he believes
in them

Headmaster, Senior School

Since 2016, Peter Goodyer (Rhodes, BA, Keele, MBA), previously deputy then acting head at Colston's school, Bristol. First came to this country from his native South Africa as a teacher of History and Geography to a school in Leatherhead, and never went home. Dad was a vicar, and there is something of the pastor with flock about Mr Goodyer: he wants his pupils to make a difference in their community and the world, and understand what it means to give of themselves.

Pupils are very enthusiastic about him: 'easy to talk to'; 'knows us all'; 'down to earth'; 'his priority is our wellbeing...and the teachers' wellbeing...and the bus drivers and the cleaners...'. Pupils find Mr Goodyer 'accessible', in what he says and how he says it, and although some parents might miss the smooth charm of his predecessor's oratory, pupils prefer Mr Goodyer's straightforward approach. Simply put, they believe him, and think he believes in them.

Parents like Mr Goodyer too: 'Extremely friendly, always smiling, easy to talk to, good sense of humour. Good psychology – about finding the talent in your child and helping them to grow'.

**This is not a school
where they'll brush
you off with 'not on
the syllabus'**

Headmaster, Prep, Pre Prep and Nursery

Since 2013, Mr Giles Entwisle (BA, Loughborough). Previously deputy headship at Highfield, prior to which he was head of year, housemaster and head of MFL at Holmewood House, near Tunbridge Wells.

'All the parents love him', said one, 'he's fabulous'. Pupils love him too – 'really kind'; 'can talk to him and feel like you're having a conversation'; 'ask him anything, and he'll tell you'. This is not a school where they'll brush you off with 'not on the syllabus': if you're interested, it's relevant. Bede's prides itself on encouraging individuals in their passions whatever they may be, and this head is keen for a challenge. What could they do for an astronomer, your reviewer asked at random – the junior galactic challenge, to create a habitat for humans on Mars... 'Give me another one...' said the head with relish.





The setting of the senior school is certainly beautiful, with lovely views of the downs

The prep school has a stunning setting on the cliff tops of Eastbourne; few classrooms can have views to rival theirs

Background and atmosphere

‘Its location is a real plus...beautiful, surrounded by green...got a bit of a wow factor’, said a parent. The setting of the senior school is certainly beautiful, with lovely views of the downs. A first impression of the school is one of great size, with school buildings a mish mash of styles – some old and charming, some modern and splendid, and a few huts. The prep school has a stunning setting on the cliff tops of Eastbourne; few classrooms can have views to rival theirs.

Plenty of international students – ‘it’s exciting to hear the variety...makes you tolerant of everyone...you can be yourself in that’, said a pupil, and a similar variety of religions: Bede’s Prep had their first Muslim head girl last year.

School buses for each school cover a 35 mile radius, and you may well see their philosophy quotes darting past on their way in to Bede’s. There is some real effort to be true to these sayings – they’re not just sound bites to sell places. Pupils say ‘you don’t have to fit the mould’, and the appreciation of individuals is clear not just in their choice of activity, but also their choice of appearance, with no attachment to traditions empty of meaning: boys can have longer hair, providing it’s kept neat (though the head doesn’t particularly like ‘those top knots’); boys can put

their earrings in once they get back to the boarding houses in the evening, and with clear sighted ease, the head put uniform changes to the vote: girls voted to wear trousers, then chose the design, and a tie in house colours, loosely tied (in truth, slightly BA style). But, most importantly: the head asked the pupils, and they decided.

Bede’s prep and senior are increasingly one school, the heads busy building strategies to ensure smooth academic and co curricular progression through the schools. Service is a mantra Mr Goodyer returns to again and again, and he’s determined to make it school wide – ‘year one can be collecting for the food bank and the sixth form can volunteer there’.



There are some extremely academically bright pupils here, but they're not all like that, and Bede's wouldn't want it so

The best mainstream independent school in Sussex for value added; evidence of the strong culture of growth mindset here for the pupils

Academic matters

A pupil who left Bede's returned a term later — 'the difference was in the teaching — at the other school things were just presented, with no engagement...[here] they care'. Both pupils and parents praise the dedication of teachers, one describing chatting to her German teacher during the holidays over My Bede's (a sort of firefly); another saying her son emailed a teacher at 11.45, and he answered at midnight.

'Bede's has a reputation as not terribly academic, but from what we've seen, he's not held back at all', said a parent. Results are good, sometimes exceptional (maths is a consistently strong subject), and a parent says that both the prep and senior school have become more academic, 'but not scarily so'. In 2017, 43% A*-A at GCSE, 80% A*-B. At A level, 53% A*-A. There are some extremely academically bright pupils here, but they're not all like that, and Bede's wouldn't want it so. The best mainstream independent school in Sussex for value added; evidence of the strong culture of growth mindset here for the pupils.

A good range of subjects on offer, and seven BTECS, including animal management. No feeling that they are a second class option — a pupil who wanted to study marine biology at university, but struggled with A levels, got to the same place by doing a double BTEC in animal management. As the head says, 'BTECs can get you where you want to go'.

Class sizes 15-20, eight or nine classes per year, with pupils from the prep making up a third of the first year.

The first year creative carousel is very popular, and, says the head, very important — 'once a child understands by what it is they are fulfilled, motivation will follow...You don't have to be successful to be happy — you need to be fulfilled'. Carousel subjects range from graphic design to

sculpture. First years also take 21st century studies, which teaches important skills like personal finance, psychology (taught by the head) and cooking — 'my child can make a Mexican breakfast and an omelette', said a parent.

The Bede's diploma is for sixth form pupils, and includes the EPQ; a lecture series, much approved of by parents — 'from Oxbridge to the New York School of Dance'; leadership and teamwork competencies; and community service, options ranging from Meow Mondays at the Cats Protection League to assisting at a local primary school. A junior version of the diploma is in the pipe line.

Learning Enhancement is much praised by parents for its 'really really good support...he was not achieving in other schools'; another, that his bright dyslexic daughter has done better academically here than in her academic prep. Individual, small group and in class support available. Parents report good liaison between LE and class teachers.

At the prep, an overhaul of maths has effected learning and results, and is starting to influence other subjects, as the effectiveness of the new method becomes evident: before studying in the abstract, a subject is examined from every angle and thoroughly embedded — no racing from topic to topic to tick the boxes of rapid progress. 'Maths lessons are now noisy', said the head; in fact one was quiet, but the next was, indeed, noisy — 'that's better...' , said the head.

Co-curricular is extraordinary, said a parent

Sports facilities which could serve a small town — 'second to none', said a parent, and the sports coaching is outstanding, say parents and pupils

Art and DT are superb here

Games, options and the arts

Co-curricular is extraordinary', said a parent. Activities take place three times a week, chosen from a vast range, from the BEden project (creating a sustainable, organic healing garden using recycling and free cycling), making a homebrew in winemaking (sixth formers only) and UK space design. Pupils say that strong community groups which span ages develop in different activity areas, and that trying new things is one of the best things about the school; but those who want something calm and low key are also catered for: in reading for pleasure, pupils sit peacefully in the library with thermoses of tea and coffee and a plate of digestives — no feeling that this is a choice for second class citizens. In animal management, pupils look after a range of zoo animals, and help with the dormouse breeding programme to increase numbers in the wild. One activity must be something physical, but determined games haters could choose walking, along the sea front or across the downs.

Many pupils are attracted by the choice of sport — others by not having to play it. The main sports are hockey, cricket and football because both sexes can and do play, in mixed and single sex teams. One family was attracted to Bede's by the tennis academy, which is excellent. (Not a school for rugby devotees, but rugby 7s available for those who like a taste.) Sports facilities which could serve a small town — 'second to none', said a parent, and the sports coaching is outstanding, say parents and pupils. BTEC sport is popular.

Pupils at the prep have a cliff top walk to reach their playing fields — a walk many remember with great affection years later, but many sports are now played up at the senior school. They do, though, have their own swimming pool on site: you open a door expecting another classroom, and there's a swimming pool, as sudden as if it were conjured.

Art and DT are superb here, one of the most popular subjects in the school, from fine art, to weird and wonderful photography, to furniture that would not look out of place in Heals. Pupils consistently attain top grades in art and photography, and serious art lovers will receive the encouragement and help to take their studies further — 24 of A level students went on to study art at college or university in 2017.

Drama is another strength popular — 'productions are fantastic — if you close your eyes...on a par with x factor', said a parent. The theatre on site is small, but the school use Devonshire Park Theatre in Eastbourne for big productions, such as the recent Oliver, described by a parent as 'simply fabulous. Evidence of fantastic teaching and mentoring...Such team work and commitment demonstrated... a fab showcase for the drama, music and dance departments'.

Not many take music as an examination subject, but there are plenty of choirs, orchestras and bands, and for those keen to dance, Bede's is home to the Legat dance school — the head boy of the prep dances every day.



Good communication from tutor and housemaster’, said a parent who lives abroad. They really look after my son... he’s very secure in the boarding environment

Boarding

‘A real atmosphere of family...brotherhood’, said a pupil. In large boarding houses of around 80, pupils are organised into family groups of 10, spanning the year groups, who look out for each other. It works, one pupil saying, ‘I’ve got really good friends who are older than me’. A parent commented that the houses are run in a very inclusive way, with all sorts of events to bring them together; there is certainly a vigorous house system, with fierce competition ranging from cross country (most run, but one pupil strolls, reading a book) to pumpkin carving.

The boarding community is 300 strong (40% of pupils), weekly and full time only (for the same cost – pupils can choose whether to stay weekends). Day pupils can join in boarding activities at weekends if they book in advance, and there’s always plenty going on, from target rifle shooting to south downs photography, with Sundays for lie ins and shopping trips.

Boarding houses range from converted houses, to modern and purpose built. The girls’ house decorated in pink and bunting, the boys’ with flags of all the different nationalities in the house. The houses we saw were in excellent condition – a pupil said some of the others are a bit tired, but good in essentials, with a new boarding house being built for 2019.

Younger pupils are 4-5 in a room, lower and upper sixth 2/1. Kitchens with toast and fruit freely available. Kids have to hand in tech at 9.30, recently tightened up to ensure compliance, and wifi is turned off at night. Sixth formers can keep phones.

Day boarders also belong to boarding houses, with a place there to stay and study at school in the evening – ‘quiet and comfortable’ said parent. ‘more support, a belonging feeling...’.

‘Good communication from tutor and housemaster’, said a parent who lives abroad. ‘They really look after my son... he’s very secure in the boarding environment’. ‘If there’s a problem they respond quickly’, said a parent whose daughter was unwell because she played sport without eating enough breakfast – ‘I got an email straight away, and my daughter was told she must eat’. If parents have a concern, they need to be proactive – ‘you need to be a partner, don’t sit back’, said a parent.

Such a variety of views about food it is difficult to believe they are talking about the same meals. Delicious on the day of our visit, with a good range of choice. Breakfast is ‘the best meal of the day’, said a boarder – full English is available, plus fruit, cereals, and homemade yogurt and bread. There is the usual boarding take away pizza community, and boarders are keen supporters of the village shop, but the pupils’ food committee talk directly to caterers, and suggestions are implemented.

There are a small numbers of prep boarders, in a family house over the road from the prep school. Lovely warm house parents and Molly the dog, of bounding bouncing love, a garden big enough for football, and blankets to snuggle down under to watch tele. Rooms allocated sensitively, the quiet girls who like their sleep separate from their noisier peers.





They make the kids feel good about themselves

Pupils are really happy, so they don't need to misbehave

Very supportive, know the children really well

Pastoral care, wellbeing and discipline

[They] make the kids feel good about themselves. . . [with] emotional support as well as academic support', said a parent, another saying she has noticed a real difference in her child since going to Bede's – body image, clothes and make up matter less, and her daughter told her to 'embrace who you are – don't worry about how you look'.

Another parent told us they chose Bede's in the hope their introverted son would gain social skills; he's now 'coming out of his shell, more confident, speaking up. . .'. 'Bede's is the right place', she went on, 'it identifies the weakness of a child, and finds ways of taking them out of their comfort zone', (her sports loving son is encouraged to organise competitions).

A pupil transferring from another school said she couldn't believe how well behaved everyone was, and pupils agreed it might not suit someone with really challenging behaviour – 'but lots of chances are given', said one earnestly. Misbehaviour is not generally a problem here: 'Pupils are really happy, so they don't need to misbehave', suggested one.

There is less bullying than at many schools due to diversity and increased tolerance, thought one pupil – 'from year 9 you have to accept difference'. The online Whisper programme allows pupils to anonymously report concerns; pupils are encouraged to blow the whistle, and have done in an incidence of sexting, which was dealt with thoroughly.

Mental health is 'quite forensically managed' said the head, with an online system of recording anything of concern, from behaviour which is slightly out of character upwards, with regular reviews. A parent told us that when

her daughter had anxiety problems, the head of house was 'straight on to it', and she praised the good relationships with tutors – 'very supportive, know the children really well'. There are two school counsellors, and a mental health nurse.

Pupils also mention getting support from the Chaplain, and from attendance at chapel – a message, or moral or a reflective piece of music. 'We try and touch on all religions', said the head.

At prep school, all staff are being trained in first aid mental health. The head says anxiety is sometimes a problem for pupils coming in from hot house schools – pupils can be school phobic and need to be reintegrated into school. For pupils feeling pressured the school counsellor runs 'chill and chat' drop in sessions at break time.

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Pupils and parents

Social all sorts. 'Not typical public school... as you imagine them to be', said a parent. 'Bede's has more variety... it has the diversity that a modern school needs'. A couple of parents commented that this not a school with 'snob appeal' and truly this is not a school with a glossy cover to please a particular type of parent. It is a positive choice for children, not just a fall back option for those who don't make it elsewhere.

'Caters for all sorts', said a parent of three very different children who previously attended three very different schools in Surrey, but were and are all happily accommodated at Bede's.

Entry

Not academically selective. Entry to prep by interview and screening for SEN. Those applying to senior school must attend the Bede's experience day: MIDYIS test, discussion and problem solving tasks with prefects, then choice of activity. The head seeks diversity and balance — a year group will not consist solely of the loudest voices with best academic scores.

Exit

A small number leave the prep to return home overseas, or to attend a more traditional academic school such as Brighton College. The rest progress to the senior school.

Some leave after GCSE for sixth form college. After sixth form, students head out in every direction: a good number to Russell Group, two to Oxbridge in 2017, three to study medicine. Other destinations include university in the USA; the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland; the Rambert Dance Company, and Bristol Old Vic.







Bede's Senior School
Upper Dicker
East Sussex BN27 3QH

T 01323 843252
school.office@bedes.org
bedes.org

Bede's Preparatory School
Duke's Drive, Eastbourne
East Sussex BN20 7XL

T 01323 734222
F 01323 746438
bedes.org