

What The Good Schools Guide has to say, March 2024 ...



THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

Parents say she is 'amazing' and 'sets the right tone'. They are impressed by her daily gate duty where she knows not just the name of every child, but something about each of them too. Pupils simply describe her as 'incredible'.

Married to Ed, assistant head, futures and progression at Epsom College. Their son attends Feltonfleet. A keen walker, hiker and runner, this is a head who never stands still.

Entrance

First come, first served, non-selective and popular - names down at birth advised. Two-form entry has opened up availability, but lengthy wrap-around provision (6.30am - 6.30pm) means competition for places is fierce as ever. Further external places available for year 3 entry, when the school is gently selective via maths and English assessment plus interview. Occasional places crop up elsewhere, especially in year 7 following the inevitable post 11+ departures. School seeks pupils willing to get stuck into Feltonfleet life with academic 'potential rather than prior attainment'.

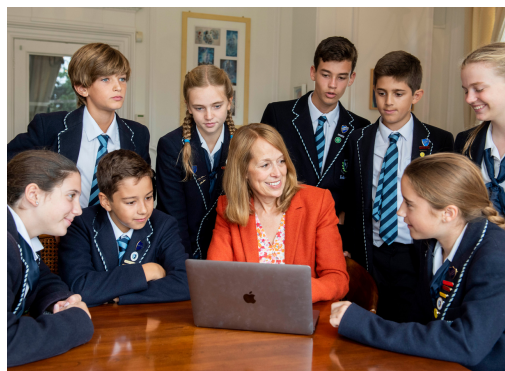
Exit

Increasing numbers staying on to year 8. Most to St John's, Leatherhead recently, the rest to Epsom College, Claremont Fan Court, Reed's, Brighton College, Charterhouse, Notre Dame and Wellington College. Hurst, Seaford College, Worth, Woldingham, Whitgift, City of London Freeman's, RGS Guildford and St Edward's (Teddies), Oxford also sometimes feature. Parents say guidance for onward destinations is 'aspirational as well as realistic'. The parent of a pupil with an offer from a top public school told us, 'Never in a month of Sundays would we have expected or considered that, but Mrs Lance gave us the right guidance all the way, from the initial suggestion to advice on bursaries.' In 2023, 15 scholarships.

Definitely not a hot-house according to parents who say academics are not pushed, instead the teaching 'feeds their curiosity'. Lessons crafted with a mastery approach culminating in the Prep School Baccalaureate. As a result, academic outcomes are up and onward destinations increasingly impressive.

Our view

'We're so immersed in the educational experience, we simply don't notice it,' claim our 'on-message' year 7 tour guides when we mention the steady din of traffic hurtling along the A3 where the school backs on to. This is typical of all the children we meet at Feltonfleet. Pristine in smart blue felt blazers, polite and precocious (in a positive way), it's fair to say these pupils appear practically perfect - as does the environment, also highly polished and professional. There are scented candles (the best smelling school we've visited), a corporate style reception desk and classrooms adorned with hanging baskets and potted plants. Yet there's no doubt this is a child-centric place. Long winding corridors, dotted with eye-catching artwork, lead to large, bright classrooms teeming with evidence of industrious learning, all cloaked in creativity.



Headmistress

Since 2018, Shelley Lance. Joined school in 2010 as a passionate RE teacher before unintentionally climbing the ranks to headship. Theology degree from King's College London; began teaching career in the senior sector, first at Alleyn's, then Whitgift, where she was head of lower school and responsible for the school's pastoral care provision. Warm, authentic and engaging.

Positively buzzing from already delivering a whole school assembly when we met her at 8.30am, then straight off to teach RE to year 8 after our meeting, we felt she was well within her rights to describe herself as 'very out there'. Has shifted from keeping her hand in with the younger year groups to leading lessons at top of the school to 'connect with the issues and tap into the temperature of that year group', she explained from her expansive study overlooking the grounds.

The sweeping changes she introduced upon taking up role - a complete rebrand, major expansion of the pre-prep, replacing compartmentalised learning with a thematic approach and introducing the Prep School Baccalaureate (PSB) in place of CE - are all now embedded and 'bearing as much fruit as possible within the constraints of the senior school system'. Forward looking, she is excited by AI in education and will be rolling out a three-year strategy to harness and embrace it at Feltonfleet. 'We're not talking robot teachers, that's bonkers, but it can do some of the heavy lifting,' she said, adding that augmented and virtual reality mean 'school and classroom designs can be radically overhauled'. 'It's a fascinating time to be in education.'

Her team describe her as 'collaborative', 'always professional' and 'open to everything'. 'She runs a tight ship,' we also heard, and that she 'has strong systems and structures in place that mean this school is actually a very relaxing place to work'.



Feltonfleet
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

WHERE INDIVIDUALS REALLY MATTER



Definitely not a hot house, according to parents who say academics are not pushed, rather that the teaching 'feeds curiosity'. Lessons are crafted with a 'mastery approach', culminating in the PSB. As a result, academic outcomes are up and onward destinations increasingly impressive. Specialist teaching for French, PE, swimming and music from nursery and by year 5, all subjects are taught by specialists. Setting for English and maths from year 3 and in science and languages (French, Spanish and Latin) from year 7. School not afraid of larger class sizes, though won't go over 20

Lessons are orderly and pupils tell us, 'Our teachers are really good at their jobs, they make it fun'. We saw newspaper style reports from year 4s following a visit to a chocolate factory, and what better way for year 7s to recall the water cycle than yelling out the different stages while climbing the school treehouse and whizzing down its slide? Parents enjoy spin-off lessons too, with a group recently attending an adult-only science practical where fractional distillation was applied to the separation of wine.

The noisiest library we've visited - bustling with children when we passed by at break time on a sunny, dry day. Some were playing board games, others card and chess. Some were even reading.

School can cope with mild additional learning needs and prides itself on carefully identifying where support is required and putting it in place quickly. The four-strong learning enrichment department use an integration model with in-lesson support in some lower sets in English and maths lessons. Team is based in a welcoming, well-resourced and dedicated section of the school, with a private room for one-to-ones where required. Speech and language therapists provide support to develop speech and communication difficulties and two peripatetic dyslexia experts are also on hand (for an additional charge). Provision for parents too via a neurodiverse support group which is proving popular.

Art is superb. Long standing and sole art teacher, clearly committed to his subject and his charges, inspires with an open-door policy to the dedicated art studio. When we visited at break time, a scholarship group were engrossed in their creations. DT room has all the bells and whistles to allow children to work from paper to metal. We passed a lesson where pupils were seeking inspiration through ChatGPT to design 'burgerbox monsters'.

Performing arts led by an enthusiastic team who are a real hoot. Their genuine camaraderie clearly rubs off onto pupils - three-quarters learn an instrument and more than half are in one of the school's five choirs. Apparently not a dry eye in

the house at the annual carol concert for grandparents. Parents sing the praises of inspiringly ardent long-standing director of music. Lessons are such fun that one pupil reportedly told ISI inspectors that they just played games in music. Specialist teachers deliver over 300 individual lessons a week. Drama popular too, with parents describing performances as 'super' and 'professional'. Slick 400-seat theatre has advanced sound and light systems, adjoining a dance studio. In Year 4 students are invited to auditions for the London Children's Ballet. There's also an annual jig around the maypole.

Broad co-curricular offering, though only two enrichment sessions a week are included in fees. Pupils can do as many 'paid additional clubs' as their parents have the budget for. Regular school trips, from local days out to Brooklands Museum and Hampton Court to far-flung residential to Barbados for cricket and annual Austrian ski trip.

Four to five hours of games lessons a week between years 3 and 8. Recent emphasis on bringing girls sports in line with boys after parental grumbles. Staffing has been expanded in girls' games department, and Saturday morning fixtures for girls has grown. School still bursting with pride after the U13 girls finished third at recent hockey IAPS nationals - 'massive for us,' the head of sport said, explaining how the entire school timetable shifted a few years ago to put girls' sport front and central. Strong in cricket. Boys' teams scooped four out of five county trophies in the year before our visit, and school rightfully proud they were a pioneer of girls' cricket. Pupils on the humble side of competitive. Sports facilities are impressive including floodlit all-weather Astro pitch, hard surface tennis courts, two MUGAs, climbing wall (scribbled signatures at varying heights depicting scaling successes), 15m indoor swimming pool and vast multi-use indoor sports hall. School is recognised as a Centre of Excellence for shooting with rifle ranges for both air-rifle and .22 shooting.

Pastoral provision is strong, perhaps stemming from the boarding provision, which whilst largely experienced on a flexi-basis, is popular across the year groups. Purpose-built wellbeing centre is refreshingly free of inspirational wall art, though a little bland in décor. Mindfulness embedded into the curriculum. School counsellor available for drop-in sessions or one-to-ones with pupils and parents, plus two nurses. Pupils are delighted with the recent re-brand of the house system that now sees badgers, foxes, otters and (somewhat leftfield from the others) tigers, fostering regular (friendly) rivalry through house spelling, sports and even Rubik's cube competitions. As a result, year groups mix naturally, and older children take the younger ones under their wings.

School's motto, 'where individuals really matter', may be ubiquitous in the sector, but it bears out here. Pupils tell us they feel 'known' and 'seen'. Nothing distinctive about the school values either (kindness, respect, honesty and responsibility) yet we feel they don't just sit on the marketing materials here. Looks of bewilderment at any mention of bad behaviour. Pupils claim unkindness is simply not tolerated. Pupils, staff and parents alike all repeatedly refer to the 'Feltonfleet community' with a true sense of belonging and pride. We were hard-pressed to get a bad word about the school from anybody!

Campus is vast, comprising 25 green acres encircled by a woodland border. The striking mid-19th century Gothic main prep building stands proudly at the heart of a horseshoe of buildings of varying charms. Play areas are diverse and well-equipped. Self-contained pre-prep, Calvi House, has its own hall for assemblies, lunches and sport, plus fabulous outdoor learning zones including forest school and mud kitchen which our guides pointed out can only be enjoyed in PE kit because 'we don't want to get our uniforms dirty'. Calvi is currently located across from main site via a small road, however the ongoing major A3 upgrades (which head admits have caused more than a few stressful school runs) mean Feltonfleet has now secured ownership of the slip road and will be 're-imagining the landscape to bring the school community together'.

Attracts mainly local families, with increasing numbers from southwest London suburbs. Parents describe it as friendly, without the 'footballers' wives vibes' that certain other Surrey schools may give off. 'There's no Ferraris in the car park,' said one.

Boarders

Flexi boarding the most popular but weekly and daily options are offered (the latter from year 3), so pupils can experience the full boarding day without the sleepover. Trial nights for years 3 and 4. Pupils and parents universally happy with the offering and see it as further cementing the community feel of the school.

Newly refurbished family area sits between the boys' and the girls' dorms and features massive flat screen TV complete with Netflix and leather sofas. Up to three sturdy, handcrafted (by local carpenter 25 years ago) wooden bunks in each room, potted plants and bunting in girls' dorms and posters of footballers in the boys. Transient population means rooms are basic but big, bright and clean. Boarders are expected to strip and remake their own beds before breakfast at 7.30am. In return, they get 'the run of the facilities' and can enjoy anything from karaoke to cupcake decorating, dodgeball to spray paint art before a strict 9pm bedtime. Head of boarding is big in character, brimming with enthusiasm and displays genuine care for his charges; he is universally adored across the school.

Money matters

School keen to extend its diversity by way of bursary offering (small number up to 100 per cent available).

The last word

Feltonfleet's motto 'where individuals really matter' fails to encapsulate what is really special about this Surrey prep and that is its community. This is a happy, welcoming school where all is spic and span, including the pupils. With so much on offer and results rising, that A3 might just get a little busier.

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