



The child comes first at this lovely, family-orientated prep where everyone is celebrated for who they are

Our View

A quick minibus ride from the London suburbs, Feltonfleet has a serious lick of Surrey sheen. This prep has countryside charm in bucketloads, with acres of beautiful grounds, a treehouse classroom and woods for sleepouts. Pastoral care is top-notch – it’s a school where ‘your child is front and centre’, says head Shelley Lance. And when it comes to academics, the school never stops innovating – it’s currently creating an Intelligence Curriculum that will look at human intelligence, who we are and how we learn, with AI literacy integrated into it. Its proximity to London makes it a prime choice for capital dwellers so competition for places can be intense, especially for the on-site nursery.

Where

Equidistant between Cobham and Byfleet, the school sits just off the A3 in its own expansive oasis of green space. The whole campus is stunning, with the original school building – a large, red-brick Victorian beauty – gracefully taking centre stage. A modern glass walkway links it to a theatre on one side, and on the other are buildings housing the lower-year classrooms, the music department, D&T and science labs, art studio, sports hall and wellbeing room. Pre-prep has its own building, Calvi House, with its own outside space. Woods, fields, sports pitches, tennis courts and even two shooting ranges fit easily in the spacious grounds, and the huge treehouse classroom is fitted out with electricity.

Most pupils live in nearby Oxshott and Cobham or south-west London, and a comprehensive network of school bus routes caters for all. Waterloo is a 25-minute train ride away, and the school’s location just off the A3 means a driving commute is also easy.

Head

The warm and welcoming Mrs Lance is a real champion of pastoral care and a great believer in its fundamental importance. ‘My heart is in pastoral things,’ she tells us. ‘We

facilitate a safe place where passion underpins all we do, where pupils feel seen, heard, safe and secure. And then the magic happens.’ She joined the school in 2010 from Whitgift, becoming deputy head in 2013 and taking the headship over in 2018. A teaching head, she currently takes the Year 8s for philosophy and religion.

Admissions

There is no academic bar to clear, rather the school bases its offers on whether it believes it can provide the best environment for a child to thrive, be happy and achieve. All prospective pupils attend a taster day, where they’re buddied with a current pupil and experience a typical school day. Those joining in Year 3 and upwards sit assessments in literacy, numeracy, and verbal and non-verbal reasoning.

Academics and senior school destinations

Reception and Year 1 share Calvi House with the nursery. Maths and English are taught in the mornings, with child-led activities in the afternoon, but at this age play is prioritised (the school follows the Froebel philosophy of play being the foundation of learning). In fact, playtime isn’t timetabled – instead, it happens when the children need it to happen. There’s a great teacher-pupil ratio, with teaching assistants in each class and specialist teachers in French, sport, computing, music, woodwork and forest school. Classrooms are calm with a neutral decor, and the outside space has lots of real-world playthings, including old telephones, a microwave and real china crockery in the play café to teach

children that things do get broken if you don’t handle them carefully.

Year 2 has its own building adjacent to the Years 3 and 4 building, which used to be the head’s house. It feels very homely with wellies lined up outside the door. From Year 2 playtime is scheduled.

The school moved away from Common Entrance in 2018 to Pre-Senior Baccalaureate, and the emphasis at this age is on the process of learning, mastering English and maths, and developing critical thinking, agility and resilience. Years 3 and 4 study the international primary curriculum, with a theme per half term. On our visit, they were excited about the upcoming theme of chocolate, where they learn about the Aztecs and the journey from bean to chocolate bar, examine melting and boiling points in science, make chocolate boxes in D&T and go on a field trip to a chocolate company in Kent.

From Year 5 pupils are in the main school building and have specialist teachers for all subjects. The three sciences are taught separately in the labs with lots of practicals, which they video on iPads and then evaluate. Spanish is introduced in Year 5 and Latin is an option from Year 7. Pupils are set in English and maths from Year 3, and in languages and science from Year 7. There is also a scholarship group in Years 7 and 8.

Talk Education Review November 2024

When it comes to academics, the school never stops innovating.



Feltonfleet
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

WHERE INDIVIDUALS REALLY MATTER

Around 40 per cent of pupils head off to boarding school. Epsom, Charterhouse and Brighton College are popular destinations, while St John's and Reeds are regular day options. Most pupils stay till Year 8, which Mrs Lance believes is optimum, as it gives pupils 'two more years to discover who they are and stand a bit taller'. This year, children won a record number of scholarships – an impressive 37, including 11 academic ones.

Sport is a big part of school life here, and the teaching is second to none with former and current international players on the staff.

Co-curricular

Sport is a big part of school life here, and the teaching is second to none with former and current international players on the staff. Boys play rugby and football; girls play netball and football. Both play hockey and cricket and do athletics. Standards are high but the attitude is inclusive – everyone gets a game. An indoor swimming pool serves the whole school and there are also two shooting ranges.

Everyone also gets involved in drama, with each year apart from Year 6 putting on an annual show. The school theatre is a good size and fitted out with a lighting rig and sound. A dance studio doubles as backstage space. All pre-prep pupils do dance in PE, and the school is a Royal Academy of Dance exam centre.

We popped our heads into the music department's Mem Hall where the school orchestra was practising. It was impressive stuff, with a great array of instruments, bassoons and harps included. The school teaches the Kodály approach, which develops musicianship through singing with

less emphasis on technical demands. This makes instrument lessons more accessible for everyone and, as a result, music thrives here, with lots of groups, some led by pupils, and a choir for each section of the school.

The art studio occupies its own large, single-storey building and is well equipped with printing presses, a kiln, painting easels and more. We were impressed by the Year 3 Monet watercolours and Year 7 Pop Art burgers. D&T is popular too and is equally well kitted out, with a laser cutter, 3D printer, scroll saws and sewing machines. Many pupils head there for open-workshop periods.

Lots of clubs are on offer, both at lunch and after school. There are invited sports and music clubs for gifted pupils as well as the keen, plus clubs that range from D&T, shooting, podcasting and strategic boardgames to choir and orchestra.

As well as weekly library lessons, every year group from Year 4 has book club – pupils and parents read a book and then discuss it in the library over hot chocolate and croissants. Pupils who read a million words can join the Millionaires' Club, celebrated with millionaire's shortbread.

School trips are amazing: cricket tour to Barbados, skiing trip to Austria, surfing in Spain...

Boarding

The top floor of the main school building is given over to boarders, with 50 beds in boys' and girls' dorms of five to seven pupils. Flexi boarding is available, as well as ad hoc sleepovers. The boarders are called Feltonfleet Knights, with the head of boarding (a Year 8 pupil) ceremoniously knighted with a sword at the beginning of the autumn term. Evenings are filled with fun activities including sport, cooking, chess and films.

School Community

Pastoral care is at the heart of the school. 'It defines us,' says Mrs Lance. 'We talk all the time about what it means to see a child fully.' Every lesson starts with a mindful moment, led by pupils in the higher years. There is a pastoral team and a wellbeing centre where the school counsellor runs drop-in sessions for pupils, as well as appointments for pupils and parents. Weekly whole-staff welfare meetings are a chance to pinpoint any pupil who might have specific needs; staff know they have a professional responsibility to check in with all of the children. 'From this is built a culture of what care looks like,' says Mrs Lance. Older pupils take on leadership roles, from subject prefects who help out in departments to head boy and girl and deputies. They apply for the positions, preparing a video for their bid. There are four houses, with house points awarded to positively reinforce behaviour, and lots of inter-house events. Parents get involved and are very loyal.

And finally....

The child comes first at this lovely, family-orientated prep where everyone is celebrated for who they are. Pupils we met were clamouring to tell us how much they love their school, proudly showing off badges they'd earned and recounting happy memories of trips, plays and sports matches. It seems Feltonfleet has cracked the formula for creating a perfect school – but from what we've seen, we can pretty much guarantee that it will never rest on its laurels.

Its proximity to London makes it a prime choice for capital dwellers so competition for places can be intense, especially for the on-site nursery.



www.feltonfleet.co.uk

COBHAM SURREY KT11 1DR

WHERE INDIVIDUALS REALLY MATTER