



Hereford Cathedral Junior School

The Good Schools Guide Review of Hereford Cathedral Junior School, Hereford, HR1 2NW

Our View

Like the senior school, a mixture of old and new. Three schools in one - a nursery, pre-prep and junior school. Also like the senior school, the junior school is almost in the shadow of Hereford Cathedral, and shares very similar links. It is a charming place, with a very embedded sense of nurture and encouragement.

The junior and senior school combined offer what they hope will be a one stop solution for Herefordshire parents, for children from 3 to 18. As the school also offers a breakfast club from 8am and after-school care until 5.30pm (and has a policy of never shutting, whatever the weather) there is much to attract parents who need a few additional hours around the edges of the day. The catchment area runs all around the county and into Wales, with school buses from Bromyard, Ludlow, Ross-on-Wye and Presteigne (all supervised, and shared with the senior school).

The principal junior school building - a mixture of medieval and Georgian splendours - has more than its fair share of panelled walls and ornately plastered ceilings, although it also has the feel of a slightly overgrown country house in which a school happens to have landed. Brightened by lots and lots of children's work on the walls and attractive displays.

In complete contrast, the purpose built Moat, tucked into what would have been a terrace in the old school garden, houses the pre-prep. This really is a great environment for children to learn in. It is airy and child friendly, with small classrooms for an intimate learning space and good areas for play, lots of natural light too. The reception class has its own little garden to play in - well-resourced but not overcrowded.

The art room, complete with kiln, is well kitted out and full of exuberant work - willow structures and ceramics as well as the usual paintings and drawings. There is also a small but well put together DT room

where the slightly older children begin learning about resistant materials. The creative arts are plainly very important here - a lovely feature is the Olympic Wall in the main garden - a tiled mural which incorporates designs by every child in the school, reflecting on the themes of 2012, co-ordinated by local artist Clare Woods (whose works were commissioned for display in the Olympic Park).

There are separate gardens for different age groups to play in - one for the reception class, one for years 1 and 2, and one for the older children, as well as a lovely wild garden with a pond, lots of homes for masonry bees and ladybirds, wild flowers and so on. The children in year 5 are responsible for the gardening and there is a pond club too.

The nursery has high staff ratios (we saw a group of 15 being looked after by four staff). In the pre-prep and junior classes, groups tend to be no larger than 13 or 14. Setting for maths and English in year 6. The school 'doesn't do' a gifted and talented programme as the head feels it is counterproductive to label children as either in or out of such a category, says 'it's all about hard work' and emphasizes the importance of respecting the different learning pathways and intellectual growth spurts of different children. There is instead a detailed programme for what the school refers to as high achievers.

No children with EAL when we visited. Learning support is available and carefully tailored. There are two learning development specialists working across the year groups so that any learning support issues can be identified early. A specialist SEN teacher assists those in years 5/6 who require support.

French and music from reception upwards, and all pupils are also involved in drama and performance - starting with poetry recital and working up to debating, improvisation and puppetry by years 4/5.

Lots of extracurricular options - about half the children take instrumental lessons in the senior school music block in the adjacent building - as well as pottery, ballet, first aid and various other clubs.

Sport, teamwork and having a go are considered very important parts of the school experience, with regular matches against schools from Shropshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Wales. Hockey, netball and rounders for girls; rugby, football and cricket for boys. The children have use of the senior school playing fields and sports hall - and, unusually, says the head, get a completely fair share.

The children, from the nursery class eagerly talking about their book choices in the school library, to the reception children, busy with puzzles and problem solving, to year 4s enthusiastically reciting poetry, are the best possible advertisement for the school. Each child we spent time with was friendly, relaxed, happy and engaged. Bouncing about full of things to talk about. You can pretty much hear their little brains fizzing. A delightful place to start exploring life's possibilities.

Head

Since 2008, Mr Tim Wheeler, MA PGCE. A classicist by training, who then studied for his PGCE and MA in education. Started off teaching at Norwich School, and focused originally on older children, as senior school housemaster. Then head of classics at Bilton Grange in Warwickshire before moving here.

Charismatic, direct, unstuffy and clearly loves what he does. Passionate about teaching children to believe that it's effort, not inherent gift that makes them successful, and keeps telling them, 'I'm still learning'. 'I want them to believe they can all be anything - comfortable enough with themselves to really have a go.'

Insists on specialist teachers for art, science, maths, drama. Teaches drama to year 3 and RE to year 6 and knows each child by name.

A keen runner, he finds it useful thinking time - and the children have recently designed the Little Princess costume for his next charity run. Also very much taken with drama and music (bass guitar). The children clearly think he's the bees knees and buzz around him full of stories and questions. He says he's after 'respect

not awe' and seems to have won it.

Off in July 2014 to head Stockport Grammar Junior School.

Entrance

Not selective in its lower years and accepts children into the nursery from age 3. There is also an intake in reception and at age 7, although entrance is possible at other ages, subject to space and suitability. As children get older there are interviews and entrance tests and a requirement for reports from their current school. Substantial scholarships are available for boys who join the school as cathedral choristers (from age 7).

Exit

The vast majority of pupils go on to the senior school on the head's recommendation and without taking the entrance exam. Those whom it is felt would not thrive there are generally counselled in year 2 or 3 to consider alternatives, so there should be no nasty surprises in year 6, and the head says it is rare for the school not to be able to get a child up to the right level by then.



Hereford Cathedral Junior School
28 Castle Street, Hereford HR1 2NW

01432 363511 enquiry@herefordcs.com www.herefordcs.com