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SCHOOLS GUIDE 2015/16

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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO EDUCATING YOUR CHILD IN SOUTH WEST LONDON

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SCHOOL PROFILE

Celebrating the child

With longevity on its side, The White House Prep School does what it does best, **preparing children for big school**



Dan Cummings

Grafton and Telford Park tennis clubs were the unlikely beginnings of what is now the well-established White House Prep School in Clapham, rated outstanding in all areas by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

Thirty years on, The White House Prep School no longer waves the little ones goodbye aged five. Today, it operates a day nursery, kindergarten and prep school, mostly from a large white house on Thornton Avenue.

But the one constant is principal Mary McCahery, founder of the kindergarten all those years ago. Today, she teaches history to Years 3-6. While two of her daughters run the Woodentops nurseries, Dan Cummings was brought in two years ago as head of The White House. He also teaches ICT to Years 2-6: "It keeps my finger on the pulse," he says.

Children leave here for the top independent schools, often with scholarships. The main destinations are Alleyn's, Dulwich College, Emanuel, JAGS, Putney High School, Streatham & Clapham High, Royal Russell, The Hall, Trinity and Whitgift. They also go into

top sets in Dunraven, Graveney and Wilson's grammar.

Cummings knows exactly why the school is so popular with parents. "Our pastoral care is wonderful – we value each and every one of our children. A happy, safe and secure child is ready to learn," he believes.

"We're unique in our size," adds McCahery. "With 16 to a class and one form entry, we have a nurturing environment and are very inclusive. It means that everyone's in the choir!

Warming to the topic, McCahery says, "We have time for every pupil, and greet them with a handshake in the morning and another when we say goodbye at the end of the day. The secondary schools they go to say we bring up nice children that are not arrogant."

When it comes to private education, Cummings recommends starting the journey early, "so we can plan the trajectory of the child. We have an early conversation,

in Year 4, so we know what we're delivering in Years 5 and 6," he explains.

Even before that, much preparation is done to ready pupils for prep school. McCahery holds an afternoon tea and Christmas drinks for feeder nurseries "to find out what the children are like", Class lists are given out to encourage play dates and children meet the Head of Foundation Year as a group.

"The best practice is sharing information," she says. "It's no good it sitting in silos." ■

"Our pastoral care is wonderful – we value each and every one of our children. A happy, safe and secure child is ready to learn"



SCHOOL PROFILE

POWER HOUSE PREP

“I started the school for my children because I wanted the best for them; now my grandchildren come here and I want the best for them too,” explains Mary McCahery, Principal and founder of **The White House**



Mary’s vision permeates every aspect of this small, independent prep school and nursery, but don’t be under the illusion it’s remained where it was when she opened the doors 30 years ago – with recent investment in ICT, including a new suite, and a cutting-edge science curriculum (years 5 and 6 recently made their DNA into necklaces), The White House is a power house on the local private education scene.

“We see our size as a positive attribute,” says Headmaster Dan Cummings. “Standards are high and our children benefit from the individual attention they receive due to our adult to pupil ratio.” Dan’s son in year 6 knows all the children well, even those in the day nursery. “While big schools can be intimidating, ours has a supportive, enjoyable and fun atmosphere which leads to an exciting, dynamic environment enriched with outdoor learning.”

“STANDARDS ARE HIGH BECAUSE OUR CHILDREN BENEFIT FROM THE INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION THEY RECEIVE”

Whether they’re from the affiliated Woodentops day nursery, the kindergarten for three- and four-year-olds, or fresh in aged five for reception, every child learns The White House work ethic and ethos from day one. There is a gradual process of having high expectations and keeping that trajectory of progress on track throughout

their education. “We focus on continued curriculum development to remain at the forefront of teaching and academic excellence,” Dan continues. “There is no glass ceiling – we give every child the opportunity to keep growing and excelling. Their development is not capped – we help them discover the things that interest them and ignite their passion for learning. This helps develop their inner confidence in preparation for ‘big school’.”

All this takes place in an exceptionally nurturing environment. “This is a living, breathing family school,” says Mary’s daughter Sarah, who is Principal of the Woodentops Abbeville day nursery (her daughter Cora also attends The White House). “We have excellent relationships with our families and help them to settle in quickly.” Parents and children alike are encouraged to get to know their peers and to meet the parent association reps, who help organise play dates and social engagements with other parents.

Every element of the school is celebrated equally – music, drama, sport and more – so all pupils can shine, and the rites of passage along the way help young minds to become confident and honest, retaining innocence and avoiding arrogance. “From the day they wear the uniform to becoming part of a house, graduating to real desks and pens, becoming prefects, having bigger roles in plays and finishing with a trip abroad, every child completes a journey here,” reflects Mary. “Our job is to draw them in with everything that inspires them about school life and then deliver the results.” With leavers going on to the top London day schools, such as JAGS, Dulwich College, Alleyn’s, Graveney, Whitgift and Putney High – many on scholarships – Mary and her team have created a unique school whose size is its secret weapon. “A small school doesn’t have to have fewer opportunities,” she smiles. “Here, children get to be children.” ■