

# What The Good Schools Guide says

## Headmaster

Since 2005, Tim Manly (Oxford, LSE and Cambridge), married to Henny with four children. Abandoned a career in commerce to teach, first at Sevenoaks, then as deputy head at Oakham School before joining Hurst. The only head we've come across where pupils gave an audible 'aaaah...' when asked for their views: 'the best head'; 'respectful of us as pupils...makes the effort and knows all names'; 'not scary...you can have a conversation with him'. The head likes to keep teenagers busy and expectations of pupils are high, said another, who described the head as 'a man of boundless energy; always there, always visible... who is very engaging as an individual. [He] takes every opportunity to include parents in what the school is thinking and intending'.

Head of prep and pre-prep: Since 2013, Ian Pattison (chemistry, Southampton), married to Janina with one son at the prep. Joined Hurst as a chemistry teacher in 1997, and became a housemaster in 2006. This warm, enthusiastic head loves hockey and cycling up mountains; no surprise, then, that he wants his pupils to be ready to take on the world. 'Not a place for children who just want to turn up to do lessons and go home'. A head pupils can go and talk to about anything.

## Academic matters

'Pupils are well taught and achieve their academic potential', said a parent. '[It] does its core purpose brilliantly'. In 2019, 51 per cent A\*/A at A level, 84 per cent A\*/B. At GCSE, 83 per cent A\*-A/9-7. Sciences and maths are popular high performers.

No IB takers in the current cohort, but the door isn't closed to those keen to take the IB in future years. A good range of subjects available, including BTec in business and sport, though pupils felt media studies was a noticeable omission from the list. The head initiated dropping from four A levels to three, with all pupils doing the EPQ.

Results have gone up in the last four years: parents speculate that this is partly due to a more selective intake, partly due to a change of staff - 'it's a very quality staffroom now', say staff. Parents told us there has been a tightening up of academic standards: 'If pupils don't engage academically, there will be more and more supervision to ensure they do engage and get the grades they are capable of getting', said parent. Some 'disquiet at new rules', with a few parents expressing concern that Hurst might be edging into the territory of the local high flying competitor, but things have settled down, and parents are delighted by the new regime for Oxbridge (five places in 2018).

Hurst has a challenge grade system, which means that each child's performance is assessed according to the challenge set for them: tick is on target, +1 exceeding target, -1 falling short. There are no comparisons between pupils, and a parent commented that she likes the fact that a very academic child can get minus marks because they're not achieving their potential. There are frequent reviews under the challenge grade system, and teacher comments are 'thoughtful, personal and helpful' said a parent. It certainly works for pupils, with Hurst in the top 10 per cent nationally for value added. 'Academic performance is not the be all and end all', said a parent, but her child 'achieved more than she thought she would achieve'.

One hour lessons and a longer school day means there is a steady pace, said a parent, but expectations are in accordance with your abilities: 'you are recognised and supported as a person'. Parents describe great support from staff - 'happy and willing to work incredibly long hours', said one appreciatively; 'they make it easy to catch up if you fall behind,' said a pupil.

iPhones are allowed in the senior school: the school is strict about usage, and pupils generally keep them switched off when they're meant to be. Pupils in years 9-11 have MacBooks, and iPads are frequently used in the prep, which one parent said has made a 'huge difference [to her

son's] learning and confidence'.

Hurst is described by the head of prep as 'a genuine through school', and it works hard to ensure continuity between prep and senior school: a single deputy head academic covers both schools, and any change to the college curriculum will result in changes all the way down; for example, the introduction of Spanish GCSE means that this is now taught in years 7 and 8 of prep.

Year 8s take exams before leaving prep; it's not the CE, but there is a ritualistic formality about them, and all the frisson of results in envelopes. Pupils want to do well, though not through fear of failure: all progress to the college (the few whom it is felt would not thrive there are told in good time). The absence of CE frees up the curriculum - year 8s spend time doing a presentation and essay on a topic of their choice.

The learning support department provides mostly one-to-one support for pupils with mild learning difficulties. A parent described how their unconfident dyspraxic son turned into a different child at Hurst - 'he didn't feel a misfit anymore'. He was assessed straightaway, and the parent was asked how her child learned and what worked for him; her advice was forwarded to all her son's teachers and has been every year since.

## Games, options, the arts

One parent said what she liked best about Hurst was 'the sheer level of opportunity and encouragement. Everyone has a go and gives everything they've got. Whether you're good at something or not doesn't matter - everyone will support you. That's what you're paying for...'

The wide range of co-curricular activities here includes dissection, mechanics, environmental conservation, CCF and DofE (silver for all). 'They encourage anything which enthuses the kids', said a mum, describing how her chamber music loving daughter was encouraged to create a group.

Music is a popular pastime, though numbers taking A level are few, and every taste is catered for; there's a huge non-audition choir of 160, and a selective one too. A lively outreach programme sees Hurst musicians entertaining the local community: the Big Band playing for village pensioners at Cake at the College, and the brass group playing festive music for the WI in the village. Updated facilities mean there's now even more space including additional music classroom and music lesson rooms.

There are a great number of dramatic performances every term, from Cabaret to Titus Andronicus and Lord of the Flies (by the prep), now in the new theatre. 'It's better to do lots, than one Barbican level performance a year', says the head, and this means that performers include both the experienced and novice at this school which champions 'give it a go', regardless of ability.

A rugby school in the main, with just a couple of teams giving a nod to football. Netball is strong for girls, and both girls and boys play hockey and cricket. '...[there are] isolated moments when rugby comes first, netball second...but girls' sport has come on tremendously and does extremely well', said a parent. A school with an inclusive sports ethic: a parent said her son is in a D team, but still enjoys matches every other weekend. 'You can't tell which team they're in on the basis of enthusiasm', says the head of prep.

A flexible approach to sixth form games - you can do what you want three times a week, and games haters can do yoga instead. Even lower down in the school, there is a humane quality to games here - a parent told us how her son, rugby hater, joined Hurst prep, and was immediately allowed to do kayaking, rock climbing and orienteering instead.

Art is displayed throughout the school, in beautifully mounted neat and tidy style. Standards are high, and facilities have recently expanded to include a printing press and textiles room, in which pupils used wax and sewing to produce a mixed media hanging exploring man's impact on the

environment. Only a handful take A level, but GCSE is more popular, with most pupils achieving high grades.

## Boarders

A strong house system here with separate houses for day pupils and boarders. A parent described their child's house as 'a refuge, not just a place to leave books': there are homely common rooms, cosy bedrooms with bunkbeds or studies for day pupils, and kitchens ('for cookie baking', said a parent).

'Care is extremely good', said a parent, who added that on the odd occasion her daughters had had problems with girls they roomed with, the housemistress had listened, and switched the girls' rooms.

Pupils are together with 10 or so others in their year group, and form a really strong bond: their 'own clan', said a parent. 'It's the main way you make friends', said a pupil, and they evidently enjoy much lively inter-house competition, including house water polo.

St John's is the sixth form boarding house, and popular with parents and pupils alike. 'St John's is brilliant', said a parent, 'a good step up towards university...but still well monitored and controlled'. Individual rooms at St John's mean pupils can sleep during the day if they want to; the head is evidently not speaking lightly when he says 'it's a busy place, pacy - pupils need some stamina'. School no longer offers full boarding in the sixth.

Currently no prep school boarding, but plans to introduce this soon for years 7 and 8.

## Background and atmosphere

Parents choose Hurst because they feel it provides something more than an academic education: 'We want [them] to do well academically but not as an expression of everything else... we want them to be brought on as people...'; 'we wanted the children to be themselves'. Seen, then, as a holistic educational experience by parents, it is no surprise to hear the head say, 'I don't want to win everything, it's not healthy...'. Learning here comes from many different angles, and the school is loyal to its pupils - 'Anyone who is in the school can stay. We will back them. We always take siblings if we can...'

School buildings of grand old Sussex flint walls, draughty cloisters surround a courtyard, and Grimm's fairytale windows. Gorgeous grounds - 140 acres of them, but they are not the main pull for pupils. 'I fell in love with Hurst', said a pupil. 'It was the atmosphere, everyone was involved'. Pupils have friends across the year groups, a sixth former proudly telling us 'younger pupils are often disregarded in other schools, but not here; younger pupils can have leading parts in plays'.

Prep buildings sit alongside the college, surrounded by play areas, including a wooden adventure climbing course, and woodland school for outdoor education.

Chapel - 'the still place' - was named as a favourite place of many (dining hall, with its delicious food, and the rugby pitch also figuring). 'Chapel', said a pupil, 'is where we consolidate the week. The whole schools gathers'. The head gives a thought for the week, pupils are recollected - there is no feeling of piety at this school, but weekly chapel evidently plays its part in drawing the community together.

Uniform: smart navy for boys, and a lovely tartan skirt for girls (though ending at a troubling mid-calf length). Once pupils reach year 7, they get college blazers - quite a milestone. Sixth form must wear suits, can choose the colour and must look smart - 'to match the work ethic', said a pupil gravely.

## Pastoral care, well-being and discipline

The head is well aware of the whitewater nature of adolescence - 'it's all about the speed of turnaround after a dip', and whilst this school works hard to try and keep children from vulnerable situations, there are good support networks in place to support pupils: houseparents, tutors, staff and school counsellors. 'It really is a fantastic community', said a parent. '[A] strong culture, and out of this, children support each other. Problems are addressed and dealt with swiftly'.

A parent described the effective support given to her child, whose friend suffered serious trauma: counsellors provided 'what she needed'. They are very aware that some pupils might suffer from anxiety, said another, and are 'right on' in their support of pupils. Counsellors give advice and talks to pupils on mental health issues, and although one parent felt that there is not enough work done with pupils about knotty life issues such as consent, others felt this was dealt with adequately.

Tutors are the first ports of call for pupils with difficulties in prep, but they are happy to extend support to whatever is necessary, including family therapy or a life coach.

House guardians (pupils) regularly meet to discuss anyone who might be in distress, at both the prep and senior school. Bullying is discussed a lot - 'the school have a firm grip on it...and my son is ripe for it...' said a parent. Pupils were very clear that incidences of bullying could result in suspension or expulsion: not harming others or self is evidently a mantra they have absorbed.

There's careful education about what constitutes bullying and how to form positive relationships with each other (boys, in particular, sometimes don't even realise they've upset someone, says the head) and creating an environment where children feel they can talk about problems. The head has, and will, suspend or expel pupils for being unpleasant to others.

The head, said a parent, is 'almost Victorian' in his laying down of the rules: the Big 12. Parents say everyone knows what they are, and the disciplinary consequences of breaching them. 'It's strict', said a parent, 'which is a good thing...'

Rowdy pupils will have a bumpy ride here. 'Not a school for second chances', said another, 'though punishment is about trying to educate and improve'. 'What you do at the weekend does matter', say pupils. 'Particularly if there might be photographic evidence', one added feelingly.

## Pupils and parents

Hurst feels like a local school in its intake, said a parent who likes this, and the typical Hurst family consists of the upper middle class white professionals who live in the area. School buses serve the local area, Chichester and London.

A parent told us this is not a school for those who want to fly under the radar and just get to the end of their school days: 'the thing you do at this school is engage - it can be anything, there are endless opportunities'.

Day-to-day communication is good, confirm parents, and the views of parents on teaching and pastoral care are sought regularly.

It's a long school day with a 6 o'clock finish, which can be tricky for parents collecting day pupils - 'we moved to be close to the school', said one. Prep school day finishes at 4.20pm, but with after-school care (included in fees), can run until 6.00pm to match the college day.

## Entrance

Not aggressively selective, but recruits better than average. Those joining from outside take ISEB pre-test in year 6 for year 9 entry and need to get over 55 per cent in maths, science and English, 50 per cent in other subjects at CE. Hurst prep year 8s make up less than half of year 9: there is a big intake from outside at this stage which 'avoids stagnation', says the head of prep.

At prep, most pupils join in reception, year 3 and year 7 (which, like year 9, is oversubscribed).

## Exit

Most depart to Russell Group universities; Edinburgh, Bath, Birmingham and Exeter are popular choices. Nine to Oxbridge in 2019, and eight medics.

A handful leaves the prep school for other local senior schools.

## Money matters

Academic bursaries from 11+.

## Our view

Parents are clear why they chose Hurst: '[It has the] right balance... the right direction, the right balance of pastoral and academic. Our four very different children have thrived there. [There's] lots going on and it's very inclusive'. 'It's a good time to have kids here', said another. 'It's hitting a high - and Tim Manly is inspiring for kids'.