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THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

JUNIOR BRANCH





The Good Schools Guide

The Good Schools Guide has reviewed UK schools for the last thirty years. The Guide does not take advertising from schools nor are there any fees or retainers paid. Therefore, it is able to be impartial. The authors visit all the schools they review and talk to pupils, educationalists, parents and staff. Their reviews are intended to be portraits of the school and not inventories of their assets or achievements. They are, however, subjective and there is no guarantee of factual accuracy.

The Good Schools Guide is independent, forthright, well-informed and unbiased, which gives it unique authority and has earned the trust of parents and educational organisations worldwide.



“WE LOVE THE
SOUL OF THIS
SCHOOL.”



The Headmaster



Since 2014, Lewis Hayward MA Oxon MA ed management (OU) PCGE, a classicist (late 40s). An interesting former life – he began his teaching life in EFL in i) Nairobi and ii) Saudi. Thence to the relative quiet of Holmewood House and Highfield preps' classics depts until he left for Highgate School in 2009, where he became deputy principal. Efficient, professional and articulate, Mr Hayward is a modern head. He is voluble about the mega plans for refurb and new build which will bring up to date this charming school on its compact site, but he is also a man who greets

every child by name and who knows not only the bricks and mortar but the concerns and qualities of his charges.

'Stretching without cramming' is his academic credo, and the parents we spoke to recognised this approach. *'He's slotted in very well,'* said one parent who's known the place for years. *'He doesn't just say the right things but he works hard and is very approachable.'* Another agreed, *'He wants to meet everyone's expectations.'* A third told us, *'He had big boots to fill but all his changes seem good.'*

A sportsman, he runs nine miles daily as part of his commute from south London. He's in school by 6.30am to avoid the crowds and have quiet time. Energetic, focussed, clever – a good appointment for this special prep.





Entrance

Sixty boys are selected at 7+ from the 210-odd applicants. Two part assessment - i) a series of concentration and listening exercises and ii) a formal exam including comprehension, maths and NVR. Newbies join those who come up from the school's own pre-prep (from which entry is not automatic - they sit the same exam) or other local preps eg Hampstead Hill, Golders Hill, Mulberry House.

NB sibling policy dictates that 'Having a sibling (current or former pupil) at the school does not confer automatic admission into the school. Siblings must go through the same process as all other applicants at their chosen point of entry. Siblings will not be admitted if we believe that they are unlikely to cope and thrive within the academic UCS environment or if we think that their admission in preference to another candidate would be unfair.'

Exit

Virtually all to the UCS senior school. Any who, by year 4, are not cutting it are supported with one-to-one, and those very few who clearly wouldn't thrive in the senior school are helped by the head to get in to gentler, more appropriate, schools elsewhere. Notable leavers include Sir Roger Bannister, Julian Lloyd Webber, Hugh Dennis, Ian Katz.



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Background & Atmosphere

In the heart of gorgeous Hampstead village, though you could live there for years and never know it was there. Purpose-built in 1928, the main house is functional rather than beautiful but still works well. Supplemented by a small science block and smaller arts block, the school covers pretty much all indoor needs on site plus a new outdoor terrace, and the sizeable rebuild and refurb – which clearly Mr Hayward is itching to start – will upgrade and modernise as needed.

Academic excellence is a given, and the children here are sponges who mop up everything intellectual, cultural, esoteric, thrown at them. Several long-serving and much loved staff give character, stability and stimulation. Recently, a UCS junior team reached the final of the Prep Schools' Science Quiz and they regularly star in the Primary Schools' Maths Challenge. Average class size 21. A few need EAL help and are supported by SENCo as are those with mild learning difficulties – all closely monitored.

Parents enthuse, but mostly about the quite extraordinary range of extracurricular activities on offer – we've not met anything quite like it at a cramped London prep before, and wonder how on earth they do it. Before-school activities include G&T clubs – open to all – in maths, English, coding, German, Mandarin etc. More at lunchtime and even more after school. *'More than I could have imagined,'* beamed one mum, *'almost too many. My son wants to do all that's on offer but he simply can't.'*

We watched several lessons and were struck by the diverse teaching methods employed by the much-praised staff. The French names for the parts of the body were being learned by groups of boys, sprawled on the floor, drawing jambes, poitrines, gorges etc. Boys in a drama class were wide-eyed and thoroughly engaged in an instant reaction game – no hanging back or bashfulness here. Self-discipline rather than rules, rule here – most classes were lively but controlled and we also saw several in which boys were silently reading, clearly lost in their own imaginary worlds.



Creativity & Learning

Arts thrive – stunning theatre work on proper plays – *The Dream* and *Private Peaceful* most recently. Everyone in top three years gets involved. Serious music – an orchestra, two choirs – each 50+ strong, big band and numerous smaller instrumental ensembles – and everyone takes part in the big annual concert. Virtually everyone scrapes or blows something – ‘*We get ‘em playing*,’ asserted impressive head of music. Very good art displays in corridors, though some few classrooms sporting boringly blank walls.

Art block houses studio and DT room – classes split between the two. We loved the Japanese ceramic pots which boys had made and were decorating in authentic style as we watched. Laser cutter, 3D printer etc and we were impressed by the torches being designed via CAD and then made in the subterranean DT workshop. Best was the super cookery kitchen. Year 6 boys cook a three course meal for staff and parents and it all smelled gorgeous. Good-sized labs in science block, inhabited by

enthusiastic boys plus a corn snake, tarantula, bearded dragon and some startling tropical fish. Good-sized library, well-used and sensible tracked reading scheme, punctuated by quizzes to monitor progress. Parents help with reading.

Although on site outside space is limited to little more than a rubberised playground (a small adventure trail is also planned), sports thrive. Outside table tennis and table football. School uses nearby fields plus sports facilities at the big brother school down the hill. Earlier complaints about few opportunities for those not in A or B teams seem to be being addressed now.

Lots of trips – field studies to Norfolk; west country rugby tour; ski trip to Italy; football trip to Spain; art trip to Nice, Amsterdam or Barcelona and a year 4 field studies trip to Normandy.



The UCS Community

Strong social network across this very diverse community. *'My son sees a lot of the other boys outside school.'* Inside school, too, communication thrives – *'Every class has a council rep who can express grievances and they really do listen to them. The kids feel understood.'* *'Older boys mentor the newbies so it's a bit like having an older brother in the school.'* *'They just don't tolerate bad behaviour.'* Parents stress the friendliness of the place: *'They were wonderfully supportive of me when we had difficulties and I was very emotional.'*

Consensus: *'It's a lovely, embracing and supportive school for boys from varying backgrounds, interests and personalities. My boys are all quite different but it was the right school for all of them.'*

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