

University
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THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

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PRE-PREP





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 Headmistress



Since 2015, Zoe Dunn BEd PhD NPHQ (late 30s), an Eng lit specialist with an impressive pedigree and all in this neck of the woods. After four years at The Hall, down the road, Dr Dunn went to The Royal School – up the hill, and now taken over by North Bridge House Senior – first as deputy head and latterly as head of its junior school.

After a sabbatical term on a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship, she founded and then led a local faith free school – The Rimon Jewish Free Primary School – down

the far side of the hill for four terms. A brief maternity leave over, she took up the post here. She sparkles and charms. Clearly super-bright, she is also simply super and you want to find her children to benefit from her enthusiasm and energy. Herself a mother of a toddler (when we visited), she lives locally and engages her charges in lots of local affairs eg charities and arts activities.

Keen on outdoor learning and forest school – ‘so good for team-building’ – she has also revived the house system. Parents are happy: *‘She’s very strong. All her changes are positive... She understands the parent body... She couldn’t be more supportive when there are problems... She’s pretty powerful but she’s so approachable she somehow takes people with her.’*

One of three good recent appointments for this family of schools.





Entrance

Register (boys only for 4+ entry) up to a year before starting reception. Siblings get no preference - *'We have to maintain the academic standard of the school'*. Occasional 5+ and 6+ places.

Exit

Though entry not automatic, most boys go on to the UCS Junior Branch, as the name-change to UCS Pre-Prep suggests. Some to eg St Paul's Juniors, Westminster Under. Girls to South Hampstead, City Girls, Channing. Both kinds to Belmont, The ASL, The Academy, Highgate, Heathside.

**“LOTS TO
STIMULATE AND
LOTS TO ABSORB
AND ALL THE
LITTLIES HERE
WERE CLEARLY
ABSORBED IN
DIVERSE WAYS.”**



“A SURPRISINGLY
ROOMY LITTLE
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Background & Atmosphere

Tucked away down College Crescent, you wouldn't know it was there, but the anonymous entrance conceals a surprisingly roomy little pre-prep and a bit of a gem. Now overlooked by the imposing brick and glass grandeur that is the newly reinvented and rebuilt South Hampstead High School, UCS Pre-Prep comes as a surprise. But, if you are keen on a 4–18 trajectory through one of London's best schools, this is where you can start.

Once a co-ed pre-prep including nursery (whose previous domain is now an arts and science block), it has phased out 3 year olds and is phasing out girls. Class names all follow the bird theme (school was previously called the Phoenix) and are named Hummingbird, Barn Owl, Puffin etc.

Good use of a whole range of teaching and learning media throughout, including interactive whiteboards – often as 'input' at the start of a class to set in motion whatever learning activity is planned. Also iPads and netbooks, but Dr Dunn stresses the importance of traditional skills too.

Learning support given in small groups or one-to-one for EAL (25 per cent of the children speak a language other than English at home, though only 10 per cent need support), SEND and as a booster for those showing gifted/ talented tendencies.



Creativity & Outdoor Learning

Some 35 per cent of these tinies play an instrument (having lessons in school from 4 years old), and all children participate in the twice annual performances, such as Aladdin, which take place in the large theatre auditorium at UCS senior branch - very exciting for all. Specialist art teacher produces wonderfully imaginative work in these creative buds. And art room has a wall that can be endlessly painted and repainted - such a good idea. Selection of so few from so many clearly works.

Outside space is very limited but enthusiastically used, with playhouse and tunnel slide over safe surface flooring. School also has allotments and use of nearby fields and a surprisingly large gym at the top of the building. Also makes use of facilities - sporting and others - at big brother schools.



ROALD DAHL DAY



The UCS Community

Families live in the NWs, some Ns and the odd W postcode. Sixteen home languages spoken at the time of our visit and all cultures celebrated when appropriate. School is linked to one in the high Himalayas and a teacher goes out each year carrying artwork from UCS Pre-Prep and brings back similar from a very different place.

Parents seem universally happy despite hiccups like The Great Hot Lunch Controversy - resolved democratically, we gather (children bring their own lunches). Unstinting praise for the teachers: *'we're so lucky... phenomenal... amazing...'* Summed up by one parent: *'There was never a day when my children didn't want to go to school.'*

“IF YOU ARE KEEN ON A TRAJECTORY THROUGH ONE OF LONDON’S BEST SCHOOLS, THIS IS WHERE YOU START.”



UCS Pre-Prep
36 College Crescent
Hampstead
London
NW3 5LF

T. 020 7722 4433
E. pre-prep@ucs.org.uk
 [@UCSHampstead](https://twitter.com/UCSHampstead)
ucs.org.uk

