



A school abundant with joy,
nurturing compassionate,
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top notch senior schools and
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THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

Review of Farleigh School



The Good Schools Guide 2024

Headmaster

Since 2004, Father Simon Everson, previously the school's chaplain for five years. Educated at Caterham School. When veterinary aspirations derailed, he worked for a year as a mental health auxiliary nurse. Studied theology at Leeds Collegiate, followed by a three-year certificate in theology at Oxford. After 13 years as an Anglican curate and vicar in south London, he became chaplain at Hurstpierpoint College. 'Joy, colour, light, generosity and warmth' which he found in Sicilian friends – along with a visit to Westminster Cathedral - inspired his and his wife's conversion to Catholicism. He lives onsite with his wife (immersed in school life and wizard with cricket teas, we heard) and has two adult daughters.

Parents say he is the school's 'DNA' and that 'he isn't a showman', trusting the 'ethos of the school to shine naturally'. 'If you want the big sale, you're looking in the wrong place,' said one. Pupils are in 'awe' of him. We saw this first-hand - it's a brave head to share shortcomings but pupils were spellbound when he shared a story about a childhood event featuring a lack of virtue ('doing the right thing when no one is watching'). His spirited love of music (especially opera) and art benefits the school and his 'raw passion for life' is infectious. So too, a 'pulsing message to look away from ourselves' – keen to promote charity work.

'It's a privilege to be part of a child's education,' he told us from his homely study filled with art, religious icons, books, personal nik-naks and even a crystal ball! He says of the pupils, 'Like hot air balloons, after sometimes 10 years here, they fly away filled up.'



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Entrance

Academically non-selective. Pre-prep taster morning where learning support complete a phonics, reading, language and basic number recognition check. For entry in year 3, reading, writing, spelling and maths assessment, to understand the pupil's profile – no 'pass mark'. Entry in other years, depending on places. Priority given to Catholics, boarders and siblings.

Exit

Majority move from pre-prep to prep. A few occasionally leave at 11 for independent senior schools with year 7 entry. At 13 they transition to a range of schools: Marlborough, Radley, St Mary's Ascot, Winchester, Sherborne, Sherborne Girls, Eton, Bryanston, Godolphin, and Wellington, to name a few. Impressive number of scholarships – 22 in 2023.

Our View

Set in 70 acres of sweeping Hampshire parkland, the school appears like an oasis, the soft Clipsham stone of the main Georgian house the perfect backdrop to the children we saw busy in play and learning during the day.

Snuggled in a purpose-built hub, pre-prep is warm, engaging and industrious with everything a littlun could want (including The Nest, a sensitively designed ELSA room to support emotional literacy). We waded through glitter in reception from 'Make It!' (DT) to 'Number Wall' (active maths) to the Cottage of Dreams (home corner), gate-crashing a boys' frog party on the way. Emphasis on writing throughout – years 1 and 2 were crafting advent prayers and Christmas stories when we visited. Specialist teaching in French and Games from reception. Superb outside area – pupils (bubbly and relaxed, even in their smart uniforms) keen to tell us about planting their spring bulbs, plus the barn, for large construction play. Cosy all-in-ones at the ready too for all-weather Forest School.

Year 3s move into juniors, housed in classroom blocks around a quad and year 8's hub, Red Rice (with its own cinema!) From year 5, they move around for every subject where parents claim teaching is 'superb' 'they really know their stuff'. Setting in maths and spelling from year 3, English from year 4 plus science from year 6. Streaming from year 7 by way of scholars' classes. French is continued from pre-prep, with Latin or Spanish added from year 6. Heavy on science, taught in the first-rate labs (where we watched a scholar lesson on law of moments) or even outside (where year 6s demonstrated food chain energy transition with the help of holes in cups – super fun learning). We noticed a focus on debating – in geography, for example, a COP 28 discussion showcased

impressive global and politics knowledge, plus the excellent relationship between teachers and pupils. All use iPads. Pupils want more coding earlier (in the pipeline) but digital leaders are 'brilliant', we were told. Shoes off for the well-stocked library managed by the full-time librarian (and pastoral care aficionado) where creative initiatives promote reading eg the Millionaires' Lunch (competition to read a million words) – supported by the Accelerated Reading scheme.

Pupils say they enjoy the enrichment on curriculum from year 8 eg debates on how 9/11 impacted the relationship between the West and the Middle East, as well as Dragons' Den-type projects and financial awareness course, 'Save your Acorns', organised by parents.

SEN provision 'inclusive,' with 'no taboo' attached, say parents. A few pupils giggled that 'friends say we're lucky and are a bit envious!' Support for a range of conditions: ADHD, autism, dyslexia, minor hearing, visual & physical disabilities. On its own floor, the experienced SENDCo, leads a team of seven who provide free one-to-ones, with a particular focus on emotional literacy support, play and Lego therapy. Speech and language therapists and occupational therapists visit as required at additional cost. Gifted and talented also access this area, eg via code breaking sessions or debating club. Two EHCPs when we visited.

Exceptional sport, led by a new director who is described by parents as a 'powerhouse'. Inclusivity (again) key, so all ability levels get weekly input from senior sports teachers, often taking the lowest ability team. 'I'm not a sport nut but I love it here,' said one pupil. Core sports are rugby, hockey, netball, tennis, cricket, football and athletics, with lacrosse, archery, table tennis, golf and cross-country widening the offer. We enjoyed a year 6 gymnastics lesson, where boys and girls worked collaboratively on routines. The school is big on swimming - not just laps in the superb 22m pool (although house comp swim to Paris is just that) but lifesaving, synchronised swimming and water polo too. Bundles of success at county and national level – most recently in cricket (girls and boys) and hockey (girls). Parents reckon the provision for girls gives the school 'an edge over local competitors,' the boys clipping at their heels!

Drama on curriculum until year 5, with pupils exploring abridged versions of Shakespeare, among other things - then it's extracurricular only with whole-year shows in years 6 & 8. Plenty of buzz around performance opportunities – the recent year 8 production, Footloose, considered 'like a West End show' where we saw no expense or effort spared, showcasing mature and confident performers. Drama ambassadors in years 6, 7 and 8. Pleas for house drama – watch this space.

'Music is outstanding,' say parents, 'I don't know how they do it.' Excellent facilities include 12 practice rooms, a rock room (for percussion), recording studio and two



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classrooms. Parents also praise the staff commitment. Masses of ensembles, with 22 rehearsals per week for the four choirs, three jazz groups, two guitar, three rock and one concert band. The names tickled us - Pick Perfect, Highly Strung, Vinyl Tap. Annual summer concert is 'Glastonbury meets Glyndebourne', we heard, with Battle of the Bands a highlight too. Themed house singing hotly contested. Around 80 per cent learn an instrument with 22 per teachers. It's not just the talented pupils who are celebrated, we were assured - indeed, parents say they really go to town for the informal concerts for beginners and less accomplished. On curriculum throughout with an exciting programme eg year 8's hooks and riffs to The Eurythmics 'Sweet Dreams'. We were impressed by Year 4's graphic score compositions.

Faces light up at the mention of art, and it really is everywhere - everything from a ceramic totem to groovy Union Jack mural. The large art studio wouldn't be out of place in a senior school, with impressive work in progress for scholarship portfolios when we visited. Year 5s were beavering away on animal paintings - maturely standing back and examining work before plunging back in. Startlingly life-like ostrich head sketches (of all abilities) caught our eye too - 'Break it down into parts and anyone can do it,' assured the teacher. DT popular, we saw creative and precise candlestick making in action.

Pupils report a good balance of sport, music and drama clubs, along with more niche offerings like bushcraft, yoga and cookery - the latter having become a victim of its own success as it's now full. Good take-up for trips, no more so than the annual ski trip to Serre Chevalier.

Parents say pastoral care is 'at the heart' of the school. Current families are paired with newbies, known as shepherd families, and there are two trained therapeutic active listening assistants (TALA) plus emotional literacy programmes. Weekly PSHE with engaging displays eg healthy lifestyle posters about the school.

Pupils are charming, considerate and articulate but mainly just children - perhaps less polished and streetwise than at other schools, in the best possible way. Just jolly good sorts who appreciate a good cord trouser (they love their uniform!). Food genuinely impressive - must be the first school we've visited with an olive and feta festive tree. Also, a next level salad bar, whose eager queues suggest is doing the trick. We enjoyed fish and chips, with homemade tartare sauce. Boarders' breakfasts are as enticing - smoothies in trendy jars a fave.

Parents are friendly, full of humour and fun - with more Volvos than Range Rovers kicking up the gravel driveway. 'The Farleigh network is phenomenal,' we heard - drinks parties aplenty, plus charity events such as the summer ball. Hockey and netball parent groups train on a Saturday morning (with impressive numbers). Families include

military, local farmers and many professionals and business owners. Most live within a 20-minute radius, many working in London and quick to sign up to the wraparound care (7.30am–7pm) or flexi-boarding. Roughly 50 per cent non-Catholic – from all and no faiths. We heard that other faiths feel really included. Children attend a service once a week in the lovely bright chapel, Catholic symbols are around the school and prayer is a part of daily life.

Boarders

Full, weekly and flexi options from year 3, and there's a good mix of all three among the half who board. In year 8 the vast majority board – 'It's just what you do,' pupils reckon, 'Everyone looks forward to it, it's so much fun!'. Flexibility appreciated by parents, accommodating ad-hoc weekend stays or sleepovers – 'What's there not to like about den building and going to flip-out?' one raved. The annual Boarding Bash gives day pupils a taste of boarding life, and is surely the school's best marketing tool.

Juniors enjoy magnificent views from the main house in large, bright and homely dorms (up to six beds). Could be a scene from anyone's home – hockey sticks piled in the corner, tennis rackets at the ready. Evening routines important: prep in the library after a snack, music practice, then downtime eg playing in Fortress Farleigh and making smores, plus eight chosen activities running through the week. All look forward to Wednesday tuck lockers. Senior houses have 'funky' washrooms and more privacy (comfortable single or double rooms). 'No Tech Thursdays' are a hit (yes, really), with seniors enjoying good old-fashioned hanging out instead. After Saturday school, sport then a variety of weekend activities for the roughly 50 happy campers – eg bowling, theatre trips, barbecue parties, dodgeball, cooking comps, Farleigh X Factor or cosy takeaway nights in.

Money Matters

Means-tested bursaries for existing parents finding themselves in financial hardship, plus at least two 100% bursaries a year awarded to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Last Word

A school abundant with joy, nurturing compassionate, reflective and hardworking children, well prepared for top notch senior schools and a meaningful life beyond. No place for brashness or arrogance, but for have-a-go pupils. 'Take it all!' as one put it, with true community spirit.





FARLEIGH

