

# SCHOOL REPORT

*Autumn Term 2016*

## IDENTITY PARADE

*The schools lining up  
to tackle gender issues*

*Why music matters at  
Christ's Hospital*

## TALENT SPOTTERS

*UNUSUAL WAYS TO BRING OUT  
THE BEST IN PUPILS*

**WHAT BREXIT  
MEANS FOR THE  
PRIVATE SECTOR  
TESTING YOUNG  
CHILDREN: RIGHT  
OR WRONG?**

**FROM BOARDING TO DAY SCHOOLS, NEW EXPERT ADVICE FOR LONDON PARENTS**



## Four more Heads explain what makes their school stand out from the rest



### SINCLAIR HOUSE SCHOOL

59 Fulham High Street SW6 3JJ  
020 7736 9182  
sinclairhouseschool.co.uk

#### CARLOTTA O'SULLIVAN, HEADTEACHER

How long have you been at the school for now and what's been the

#### biggest change in your time there?

I joined Sinclair House in 2000 as a Montessori Directress and became Principal in 2004 when we were a Pre-Prep. We have seen huge growth and changes within the School since then with the development of new premises for our Prep School (Reception to Year 8) in 2013, and recently a rooftop garden and new 5,000 square foot covered playground.

#### On a day to day basis, what are you proudest of?

The quality of our personalised educational offering, the incredible effort and attention that the staff put into teaching, and the integrity and empathy that I see daily across our pupil community. I'm also very proud of how we have integrated creativity and skill-building into the foundations of the curriculum.

#### What do you expect to see from your pupils?

I expect Sinclair House School pupils to embody the ethos, spirit and values of the school; kindness and politeness are integral to our school culture.



### MAPLE WALK SCHOOL

62 Crownhill Road NW10 4EB  
020 8963 3890  
maplewalkschool.co.uk

#### SARAH GILLAM, HEADTEACHER

How long have you been at the school for now and what's been the

#### biggest change in that time?

I have now been at Maple Walk for four years and thoroughly enjoyed every minute. I think embedding processes has been a major focus since I joined. We have focused staff meetings to ensure the progress of all pupils and regularly reflect on practice to consider its impact on progress.

#### On a day-to-day basis, what are you proudest of?

I am incredibly proud that within a creative dynamic school we are producing children who are confident and articulate with a good work ethic.

#### What do you expect to see from your pupils?

I expect to see the pupils have a real sense of respect: for themselves and others. If they have this, they will achieve personal success.

#### Tell us something we may not know about your school?

It's hard to believe, but we excel at sports - particularly cross-country, which for a school in an urban environment is a pretty amazing achievement.

### THE POINTER SCHOOL

19 Strathean Road SE3 7TH  
020 8293 1331  
pointers-school.co.uk

#### ROBERT HIGGINS HEADMASTER

Why did you want to become Head at The Pointer School?

As a young teacher it was always my desire to lead a school that would not only provide an environment of real warmth, encouragement and enquiry, but also to provide this within a Christian framework.

#### What one thing are your proudest of?

The on-going promotion of the Christian faith, the dynamic and talented staff who teach with such passion and commitment, and our extra-curricular offering.

#### When pupils leave, what will they be?

Well-rounded individuals: self-confident, not self-centred, 'broadly' educated, balanced and optimistic in outlook.

#### What's the one thing that makes you stand out?

The fact there are many aspects of The Pointer School that make us 'different'! Not least is the general provision of 'organic only' produce. Two kitchens provide a two course hot meal (cooked on site). Furthermore, there is the very exciting provision of 33 extra-curricular clubs ranging from Lego and chess to archery and horse riding.



### HORNSBY HOUSE SCHOOL

Hearnville Roas SW12 8RS  
020 8673 7573  
hornsbyhouse.org.uk

#### EDWARD REES HEADMASTER

Why did you want to become Head of Hornsby House School?

It was a school which I had always admired because it shared a similar educational ethos to my own. Hornsby House is a down-to-earth, inclusive school providing a wealth of different opportunities.

#### What one thing are you proudest of?

Preserving Hornsby House's reputation as a happy, caring and nurturing prep school. We have continued to provide a broad and rigorous curriculum and co-curriculum, whilst gradually introducing a number of new, exciting initiatives. Core values, Spanish, girls' cricket and the Hornsby House Certificate, to support the children's personal development, are changes that have been very well-received.

#### What makes you stand out?

We are an educational charity with non-selective entry at Reception, yet strive for academic and co-curricular excellence. At our most recent inspection the Independent Schools Inspectorate judged Hornsby House pupils' overall achievement as 'excellent' and found that 'pupils achieve high academic standards within a wide and creative curriculum'.





# Put to the test

Assessment of young children is a hot potato right now, but a balanced approach can make everything a whole lot clearer

*Words* CARLOTTA O'SULLIVAN

Assessment has remained a key topic in education for a number of years now, and it continues to be a

controversial area of debate. Multiple issues have surfaced around how schools should structure informal/formal testing and examinations, as well as the frequency of assessment, the importance assigned to results, and, importantly, the age at which we begin testing children. Discussions around 'over-testing' are particularly pertinent in the competitive London independent sector, with the increasing demand for places at top secondary schools and the much-publicised process of entrance examinations at the 11+ and 13+ stage.

To some extent, the debate around assessment mirrors much of the argument on the appropriate balance of the curriculum and the inherent conceptual split across knowledge and skills-based learning. Those who emphasise the importance of ensuring core knowledge acquisition tend to be more supportive of regular formal testing and exams to measure pupils' grasp of critical curriculum features, as well as their ability to apply this in different contexts. On the other side sit the proponents of skills-based learning that centres around fostering independence, pupil collaboration, active-learning and critical thinking. Naturally, this approach to learning lends itself to a more flexible and varied approach to assessment.

Of course, beyond this constructivist vs traditionalist argument within the daily context of school life, this dichotomy seems overtly reductionist. Independent schools have the autonomy to create a broad and balanced curriculum that combines both knowledge and skills, balancing a rich information-base of practical and conceptual content within a learning environment that nurtures the essential skills of communication, creativity, problem-solving, critical analysis, collaboration and individuality. On the assessment side, a system of internal pupil appraisal and evaluation has critical diagnostic value for teaching practice (to identify where pupils may have weaknesses and knowledge gaps), but also provides essential formative learning opportunities, for teachers to support pupils' improvement, and monitor.





Sinclair House School work hard to create a love of learning

Recording progressive development in understanding and skills is an essential part of day-to-day teaching. How schools communicate the meaning of these results, support children, and work with students going forward mediates any emotional consequences of increased testing and affects children's resilience.

The reality is that prep schools now exist within an intensely competitive system of external entrance examinations, testing and pre-testing for the secondary stage, and a key feature of preparatory education is to support children for these. Formal assessment is an unassailable feature of modern education, and regular testing is a critical part of this, but there is scope to control the way in which this is approached within school life. Children need to be prepared not just academically, but also emotionally and psychologically to face testing at an earlier age and adapt to the potential stress of examination conditions. Preparatory schools have a responsibility to look beyond pure knowledge transmission and ensure that

we nurture behaviours and values to equip children to step out into a challenging, ever-changing world with adaptability, resilience and persistence, as well as a sense of ethical awareness, integrity and empathy. In the context of this, less tangible skills and character-based learning that is harder to assess by formal testing becomes even more important; schools need to develop children's independence and confidence, build on their innate curiosity, fuel their imagination and critical thinking and encourage their problem-solving abilities.

At Sinclair House School, our focus is on providing a learning environment in which each individual is supported to achieve their unique potential academically, but also on ensuring that they leave as confident independent learners who have self-knowledge as well as core knowledge. Equipping children for the next step of their educational

journey does not have to entail a narrowing of the curriculum in 'teaching to the test', spoon-feeding exam knowledge and over-rehearsing interview transcripts. Knowledge and intelligence are important - but achievement in today's society requires that children have the capacity to apply these in new and challenging contexts. Now, more than ever, it is also imperative that schools are premised on an underlying system of pastoral care that fosters the social skills, emotional resilience and associated psychological resources in pupils to allow them to work through difficult scenarios in a competitive world, without fear of failure.

In the midst of education debates on assessment, testing and increasing pressure on young children it is also important to remember that the preparatory years encapsulate a journey that spans from age four to the

key early transitions into adolescence. Although schools have a responsibility towards academic achievement, this must not be to the detriment of children's creativity, happiness, and overall development.

*There's a competitive system of external entrance exams*

**Carlotta O'Sullivan is Head of Sinclair House School. Visit [sinclairhouseschool.co.uk](http://sinclairhouseschool.co.uk) or call 020 7736 9182**