

The Good Schools Guide Review of Emanuel School, London, SW11 1HS

Our View

An amazing campus to find in an urban area close to Clapham Junction. For parents who can scrape the fees together, in a borough sadly lacking in good secondary schools, it is ideal. For sporty, arty, musical children, the opportunities to expand their talents and their horizons are all here.

Headmaster

Since 2004 Mr Mark Hanley-Browne MA (late forties). Educated St George's College, Weybridge, BA in natural sciences at Oxford then PGCE at Cambridge. Previously, taught at Sevenoaks for five years, assistant master at Charterhouse for nine years and deputy head (pastoral) at Highgate for seven years. Enthusiastic and ambitious, has led the school forward and academically upward, making some 'dramatic changes' along the way. Particularly proud of two new computer suites named after old boy, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, creator of the World Wide Web.

Is 100 per cent pro the A level system and has no intention of introducing the IB. 'Specialising at 17/18, is the right timing, four subjects is enough. After all, they will have to specialise even more at university. And we do quite a lot of the extras the IB offers, more self-motivated research and involvement in charities and community support.' Believes that all children should be doers and really want to participate, 'the child who is quite good at everything but not excellent at something' would not really fit. All prospective pupils interviewed which he believes is the most important part of the entry procedure; woe betide anyone lacking a focal interest, no matter how bright he/she may be. Parental views seem to vary. Some say he is 'a bit aloof', others say 'affable', 'approachable' and 'often seen about the place'. Married to Rachael, who works for an American business school. They live locally.

Academic Matters

Seems to be steadily pulling its socks back up again. Results now higher at A level than they were five years ago, with 84 per cent gaining A, B or C grades. 39 per cent gained A* or A at GCSE. Head 'not in the least interested in league tables' and has withdrawn from them. He feels that he is giving his pupils a far broader, all-round education than exam results alone can possibly show.

Parents certainly happy with the experience their children are getting, 'the teaching quality is good' and the staff 'dedicated and supportive', particularly the heads of year. Although they also spoke about some finding it difficult to keep control over classes. The head says 'getting good staff has been my top priority'. Pupils feel that, on the whole, teachers are 'brilliant and inspiring' and that there have been several new ones in the last few years, who are 'great'. The majority of children in the first year (6) come from local primary schools and parents feel are probably disadvantaged where maths and French are concerned. But they seem to catch up quickly enough.

Certainly the facilities are all here. Science labs, language labs, design technology labs, computer rooms, they are all spankily up-to-date. We saw children working with wood and metal, experimenting with science, heads down solving mathematical problems; they all looked happy, positive and intent, with relaxed looking teachers keeping them absorbed. Classrooms are well equipped with the latest technological aids.

An active, imaginative learning support department has its own room with computers and other important aids, alongside a team of specialists who also have their own area of teaching, so are also fully involved in school life. Open door policy when possible but chaplain always around to act as counsellor as well. Pupils are assessed and continuously monitored with constant parental consultation. As far as practical, try to keep one-to-one sessions out of lesson time. Head doesn't really like children being withdrawn from classes. Also run a homework club after school for those who need help. Between 12 and 15 per cent have mild learning difficulties.

Games, Options, the Arts

Fantastic sport, music, art and drama. This is where the school really wins hands down. Rugby, netball, rowing and cricket their major sports. Compete at all levels both at home and abroad. Girls 1st netball team unbeaten in 2009 and in cricket the 1st X1 won 60 per cent of their matches. Overall, rugby teams won 55 per cent and both girls' and boys' rowing squads provided stiff competition in annual regattas. On-site games fields, access via a private gate to the facilities on Wandsworth Common plus 14 further acres of sports ground at Blagdons, near Raynes Park; own fantastic sports hall which includes a climbing wall, exercise rooms, ergometers, as well as a

PE classroom; large swimming pool which pupils say is 'great' but changing facilities 'pretty scruffy'. Believe this is one of the head's next update plans. Huge boat house at Barnes housing 45 boats. No wonder so many Emanuel pupils win sporting awards at all levels, from local to international and some even go on to represent the country in their chosen field. Girls as well as boys. All do pretty well in, what they deem, minor sports as well, athletics, swimming, fives, rounders, dance and tennis.

Music and drama very strong. Several orchestras, bands and choirs. Something for everyone. Pupils we talked to particularly keen on number and variety of bands. Children sing in the National Youth Choir and play in the National Youth Orchestra. Plenty of chances to learn individual instruments, we were told 250 music lessons given weekly. Eight grade 8 passes in 2009. Concerts and recitations regular events, even put on Bach's St John's Passion in 2010. Very excited, when we were there, about current production of Oliver. Plenty of parts for everyone. Pupils said drama department 'very brave', presumably for putting on ambitious productions. Certainly they have the facilities. We would probably say that to put on Tom Stoppard's Arcadia was pretty brave. But they did and it was a great success. Another of the head's projects is to widen the theatre.

Art studios amazing. Recent project on 'passions and obsessions' produced fascinating results. Enthusiastic teacher with equally eager pupils. Head is a great art fan and views the school as a showcase. Certainly everywhere we went pictures hung on walls. Apparently, lots more also stacked in storage rooms. Some really wild and wonderful. Says he commissions pictures from students every year. Lots of trips, home and abroad, to expand their horizons. Singing in Venice a recent highlight.

Background and Atmosphere

Originally richly endowed by the Dacre legacy in 1594, there's a courtyard in the middle of the main building dedicated to three Queen Elizabeths. The first on the throne at their foundation; the second who planted the central tree, Queen Elizabeth, later the Queen Mother, in 1951; the third, her daughter who made a royal visit in 1994. Surrounded by glass this is typical of the traditional/modern mix in this school. Old buildings house modern facilities and new buildings grow up out of old ground. The library, which could be said to be the hub of the school, is a good illustration. With silent areas behind glass and a circular staircase leading up to an archive room full of school history, it is a great place for pupils to gather for meetings, research or quiet study. A good learning resource centre. Librarian relaxed and welcoming, pupils often stay to do homework there; which would explain why one parent said her daughter never seems to bring much home. Its renovation one of the head's decided successes.

Main building originally a Crimean war orphanage, taken over by Emanuel in 1883. Although, internally, it has been through many changes, the Chapel, on the first floor, remains and assemblies held there daily. This is still a Christian school bearing Christian values and commitment to the community outside as well as within. Pupils are polite, open and, according to those we talked to, have good relationships with their teachers. Also spoke positively about their headmaster. Year 9s talked about team building, peer mentoring and the way older years interact well with the younger ones. School council seems to help this, as does the house system. They say school seems to recognize what each child is good at, really promote it and thus create confidence. Out of the mouths of babes. Must be good. Whole place feels happy, friendly and welcoming. Parents say school good at making sure course work is done on time otherwise 'big trouble'. Girl/boy ratio now about 40/60 per cent which, given the large number of single sex girls schools in the area, is how it is likely to stay.

Split of school day seems to work well with two classes before a short break, then two more before half an hour's assembly and two more before lunch at 1.15. Excellent food, say pupils, good choice, but queuing system not good if you are late. Lovely to have tables outside in summer. Sixth form thrilled with their new common room and café (only open at certain times and not for lunch), very grown-up. Whole sixth form area with all its own facilities is brill. Parents say very friendly and lots of activities and involvement for them as well.

Pastoral Care and Discipline

Tutor system combined with house system and easy access to head of year ensures that any problems that arise should be spotted and dealt with quickly. We asked pupils where they would go if they needed to talk to someone sympathetic and they agreed that that it would probably be the head of year first and then the chaplain. Chaplain also has sixth form team to help him when necessary. Christian ethos is important and responsibility for others would seem to be endemic. Big emphasis on being part of community and charitability. Natural interaction and mutual respect between teachers, pupils and year groups does appear to be working.

All pupils carry conduct cards recording homework timetables, commendations and misconduct records – five commendations and you get a chocolate, but get a misconduct signature and you have to start again. Beware of getting five misconduct records, Saturday morning detention looms.

Separate, comprehensive policies on bullying addressed to parents, teachers and pupils. This is something

almost bound to occur, in some form or other, in a school full of alpha boys and girls. The majority of parents we talked to were not worried and felt that school handled problems well. However some think there should be zero tolerance and, at the moment, don't feel this is happening. Most praise the pastoral care whole heartedly but a few doubts remain over the handling of difficult or sensitive cases.

Pupils and Parents

Mainly local, 85 per cent from within three mile radius. Typical South London mix. Many working to make sure their children get a good education.

Ex-pupils include Michael Aspel, Andi Peters, Michel Roux, Issey Cannon (recent member of under 21 England women's cricket team) and Peter Hain.

Entrance

Competitive at 10+, 11+, 13+ and 16+. Must get 55 per cent in entrance test and show special aptitude somewhere. Good command of English, both written and spoken, essential. Priority for siblings as long as performance report from previous school OK. Popularity has surged, recently 500 applicants for 85 places at 11+ and 700 overall. Interview mandatory. Must have special interest but need not be academic. They are looking beyond pure academia.

Exit

A few at 16, if they don't make the grade or would rather go elsewhere, but most stay for A levels. One or two a year to Oxbridge and about 78 per cent going to Russell Group and other good unis. Nottingham, the various London colleges and Bristol most popular recent choices.

Money Matters

Lots of bursaries, not only academic but also music, sport, art and drama. Varying degrees of financial support. Strong bursary fund, constantly growing aiming for self-perpetuation. Big fund-raising drive with ex-parents. Governor of the school, James Wates, created special fund; six children benefit from his bursaries at the moment.