



KENT COLLEGE
CANTERBURY

**GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE**
SENIOR SCHOOL



EXCELLENT IN ALL ASPECTS
ISI INSPECTION 2022

WHAT THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE SAYS



Head

Since January 2022, Mark Turnbull, previously head of Giggleswick for eight years and before that, deputy head of Eastbourne College. Educated at Marlborough College, followed by a geography degree from Liverpool University and MA from University of London. Having grown up in Kent, Sevenoaks School was a natural first teaching post, where he progressed to head of boarding. He lives on-site with his wife, Ruth, and has three adult children.

Parents say he is 'focused', 'realistic' and 'ambitious.' They also like that he is 'consistent' and sets 'strong boundaries'. Pupils relieved if they haven't had to see too much of him but are on board with his ethos. 'To be fair, he has our respect,' said one. **His mission is to 'instil core values' and 'evidence that learning occurs in all areas'** - already having an effect, he reckons. He believes a school should look the part, which has prompted a major revamp of both buildings, projects, offices and uniform. It's this attention to detail, yet with a relaxed vibe - a tricky balancing act to pull off - which he does so well, say parents. So, his impeccably organised office and smart dress is trumped by his big smile and warm welcome.

This office, no longer hidden on the second floor, is at the heart of the school - its relocation a clear statement of his visibility. And it doesn't stop there, with classroom visits not to observe 'with clipboard in hand', but to participate - he recently enjoyed studying *Death of a Salesman* with pupils. It doesn't get any more hands-on than taking 'The Leap of Faith' (think stomach churning high trapeze stunt) on a residential, accepting the challenge of 'Now you do it, sir,' after cheering a nervous pupil on himself. He is also open minded: 'That looks expensive,' he recalls when first introduced to the school farm but, after initially being 'terrified' of putting the harness on calves ('Have you seen the size of them, they're huge!' he shrieks) - he 'got it' and the farm continues to thrive.

Boarders in his Saturday morning running club have been known to beg him to go a little slower. So, is running his thing? 'No, not particularly,' he laughs, 'and it's not for fitness but for...' and he points to his head.

Entrance

Around three-quarters of the junior school join in year 7, making up 50 per cent of the cohort, the rest from local state primaries and preps including St Faith's, Ash, Northbourne Park, Spring Grove and Lorenden Prep. Assessments in maths, English and NVR, plus interview (with the head, director of external relations or the registrar) and two recent school reports to ensure a 'good fit'. Around 35 join in sixth form, where candidates need five grade 6s at GCSE, including in subjects to be studied at A level. Generally waiting lists, but always worth asking about places in other year groups.

Exit

Just over 30 per cent depart post-GCSEs, many to local grammars, others to independents such as St Clare's, Oxford; some to International schools and a few into vocational training.

Almost all sixth formers to university, just under a half to Russell Group. UCL, Imperial, Durham, Newcastle, Manchester, Exeter, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol and Kent all popular. **Courses vary widely from biomedical sciences,**



nuclear engineering, law, psychology, film, architecture and economics. Two to Oxbridge in 2022, and two medics. International universities, such as Bocconi and Esada, gaining interest, as are sport scholarships to the US.

Latest results

In 2023, 45 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 37 per cent A*/A at A level (61 per cent A*-B). IB score average 36. In 2019 (the last pre-pandemic results), 36 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 43 per cent A*/A at A level (73 per cent A*-B). IB score average 37 in 2019.

Teaching and learning

'Pupils achieve despite ability', according to staff and parents, who say no pupil gets 'left behind'. Flexibility in the curriculum, setting the right pace, a push on co-curricular and the focus on clear pathways to careers early on, all attributed.

Setting from the off in English and maths, then from year 8 in science, languages and humanities, with classes of between 14-16 in years 7-11 and between four and 16 in the seminar style sixth form. GCSEs mainly trad, plus electronics, media studies and drama. While French, German or Spanish are compulsory, many pupils say they would have chosen a language anyway. Short RS course mandatory.

At sixth form, about a quarter do the IB - jolly good results for 'a tough programme,' met with approval by international parents. The rest

choose three or four A levels from the usual menu, with electronics also available - and thumbs up for the recent re-introduction of computer science and politics. Business studies, economics, geography, further maths and English are the most popular A levels. Greater buy-in for music and art is on the school's wishlist. EPQ is encouraged, even expected - with opting out of it requiring a good reason. Cambridge Technical Diploma (vocational qualification equivalent to an A level) increasingly popular among those with different learning styles - available in business, sport, media and physical activity.

Lots of 'heads down' revision when we visited in pre-exam season. We could almost hear the cogs turn in lower sixth maths, where pupils were solving kinematic calculations - studious independent vibe, most using computers. A year 10 media studies class were all deep into research on iPads.

Older classrooms fresh from re-vamp over the holidays, with new 'teaching walls' and old wooden workbenches replaced by modern clobber - 'it was about time,' our guides agreed. Good classroom displays, no more so than in geography - easy to see why it's the most popular subject.

New sixth form centre with trendy lighting, hip workspaces and sofas to flop on after, perhaps, a

game of pool. A fabulous hub that balances studies with all the other important stuff like next steps (and grabbing a snack or latte). One pupil told us how she'd been encouraged to consider an engineering pathway - now a serious career option that she wouldn't have thought of herself.

Learning support and SEN

Full-time SENCo is supported by two higher level teaching assistants and four classroom assistants - all specialise in dyslexia.

Approximately six per cent receive support (well below national average), mostly for dyslexia and ADHD. No EHCPs. The department feels like a haven, tucked away on the second floor of the quad. Well resourced, bright and positive - one room stacked with books from 'All Dogs Have ADHD' to the Barrington Stoke Dyslexia friendly versions of classics, the other with games. Pupil voice used to inform recent INSET training on ADHD, led from a pupil's perspective - 'an eye-opener' and 'blowing away some myths,' we were told. Parents praise the 'gentle' and 'subtle' approach of the team, including 'simply giving the children time to think'. They are also grateful that effects from traumatic experiences in previous settings had been turned around: 'They don't put a child on the spot if they lack confidence.'

Between 60-70 pupils receive EAL support next door in the International Study Centre, a cosy and welcoming classroom. It's a flexible set-up where needs are assessed regularly so that an integrated life at KC can be enjoyed. English assessment and interview for admission (can be online).

The arts and extracurricular

The Great Hall, a splendid 600-seat theatre, is a venue used not just for school events but for the annual Canterbury Festival too. Recent productions, including High School Musical and 39 Steps, were both huge hits and we enjoyed seeing the drama studio in action with an intense, emotionally intelligent rehearsal for a scene from Jerusalem by A level students. No jazz hands here! Even in musical theatre club,



the focus is on quality not showboating. Things get a bit more light-hearted with the great drama challenge, which brings in the junior school too - all entries via video clips. The annual variety show is also popular - 'Very KC' we're told, with its circus skills, drumming and speed Rubik's cube among the talents showcased.

Music

Solid music offering, with some of the more serious musicians winning choral scholarships to Oxbridge. Full orchestra with a gutsy repertoire, including the likes of Crown Imperial March; also a junior band, jazz band, folk group and rock group. The eight practice rooms are well used and stay open late for boarders. Heavy on the classics - the 'building blocks' for music - 'If they don't get exposed to it here, they may never have the opportunity,' says director of music. Pupils say, 'Classical music isn't for everyone,' and would like to see 'unconventional musicians' get their day in the sun - but all agree 'they work so hard'. Rutter's Mass of the Children in full rehearsal mode on our visit for the spring concert. More 'informal' termly teatime concerts

open to all. The summer operetta tour took on the West Country last year, with sold out venues (who doesn't like a slice of Gilbert and Sullivan?!)

There's a renewed buzz around the art department with photography and print rooms coming soon. On our visit, the scholars' collaborative piece was waiting to be unveiled at the Farm Open Day. Pupils' art work sometimes auctioned off, parents normally the highest bidders!

Co-curricular

The bar's been raised on the co-curricular (compulsory at least twice per week).

Basketball, rowing, archery, flip dance, plus all the usual core sports clubs and others like eco club, green team (young farmers), Manga book club, young silversmiths, board games and Italian mafia etc. Pupils say it's nice to see teachers 'be themselves'. **'Fantastic,' said one boarder about the activities on offer - 'you can try something you might be rubbish at with no pressure.'** DofE popular - pupils, fresh from an eventful trial gold expedition, were full of gossip and tall tales. A business enterprise group, meanwhile, were out 'wheeling and dealing', selling their up-cycled denim items.

School trips aplenty, including sport and music tours. This year the choir are looking forward to a Budapest tour and hockey to Holland, then South Africa. Geography trip to Iceland - 'amazing,' say pupils, thrilled at their souvenir stash of hardened lava. Ski trip to Austria on the cards.

International Week promotes cultures with dancing, singing and paella tasting. Local culture jaunts organised, eg afternoon tea in Canterbury.

Sport

The talented sportsperson is well catered for here and, with 150 sport scholars bowling and striking their way through the school, it's hardly surprising that it attracts top coaches.

But parents say this is not at the expense of sport for all, with C and D teams still thriving. Some serious connections with county and beyond in cricket and hockey. Basketball, badminton, football and tennis are taking off, especially popular with the international community. Once a week sport for sixth form can include yoga, darts, archery or horse riding - 'hard not to get involved,' said one pupil.



The floodlit central Astro sees constant action. Two cricket grounds, three tennis courts, two netball courts and large off-site field for rugby and athletics. Plans to upgrade the sports hall (including two lane cricket bowling alleys and cardio suite).

Boarders

There's a thriving boarding culture, with five houses on the main campus – each with its own story, although long gone are the days of house-one-upmanship, we're told. Exciting plans for an offsite co-ed sixth form house to prepare for life beyond KC.

The boys' houses are functional but comfortable - not a string of bunting in sight but clearly loads of fun. Guilford, a sturdy 1960s pad, has arguably one of the best common rooms in the school. Houseparents 'think of everything' and 'understand us', we were told – right down to providing double screens with jumbo sofas in FIFA tournaments and bringing out a portable pizza oven for the weekly pizza making. In Wesley, the largest girls' house, it's easy to imagine pupils hanging round the kitchen island, baking and drinking mango smoothies (a recent favourite), having a natter and offloading - with the odd kitchen disco thrown in, we were told. National flags, potted plants, inspirational memes and enormous organisation flowcharts bring the personal touch to shared and single rooms. All shepherded by a houseparent 'with many berets' – even brave enough to be heading out with all 51 to the local Mexican that evening. **One parent felt her daughter was 'accepted and not judged' that 'the girls didn't look her up and down like at other schools'.**

All have a common room kitted out with everything the host with the most would need.

Along with all the evening activities, there are compulsory Sunday trips for years 7-10, eg paintballing or surfing at Joss Bay. Houseparents set up the occasional impromptu activity too, like dropping by the golf driving range with pupils. Sixth form can hit the town on a Saturday evening with a 10pm curfew, while others can pop down in the afternoon. **Parents say**

communication excellent and that it's 'such a relief the school shares the same values.'

School counsellor's extended hours appreciated.

Ethos and heritage

The Methodist founder would approve of the weekly national flags nailed to KC's mast (41 nationalities at last count): global thinking and the agility to change tack in the changing climate, with the Methodist compass a guide.

Set on top of the hill by the university and within walking distance of the city, its campus has evolved since 1885 - there's so much more than the view from the road. An interesting and well-maintained blend of old and new red-brick buildings responding to the growing needs of the school, with three key focal points: the Great Hall, the traditional quad and the central Astro.

With its 'French grey' panelling and long oak wooden tables and benches, the traditional dining room is buzzy, if a bit booming. Pupils say new catering 'feels less like school food now' but 'still a way to go' to pleasing everyone. Parents appreciate their efforts, even if children 'moan at the absence of some puddings'. We enjoyed Friday fish and chips, with mushy peas and tartare sauce - complete with lemon wedges. Pupils 'top up' at the 1885 tuck shop - everything from fruit to paninis on offer at breaktime or lunch. Run by 'legends who make my day,' a pupil gushed.

Houses - Marlowe, Augustine, Becket and Chaucer – bring a sense of community, each with a new 'cool' common room (no phones allowed). House drama a school calendar highlight – latest theme was labyrinth. 'My idea seemed awesome at the time, but the judge (the local panto writer) disagreed!' giggled one student.

Uniform change from blah to huzzah met with approval - gender-neutral, snazzy and stylish (think robust tweed jackets, fresh blue shirts and quirky coral and red horizontal striped ties, although it's the KC enamel pin that really sets them apart). Sixth form wear navy suits - shame you can't inject more individualism, felt some.

Alumni include England cricketer Alexa Stonehouse; GB and Olympic hockey player Grace Balsdon; GB hockey player Lizzie Neal; Kent and England cricketer Thomas Evans; Coldplay bass player Guy Berryman; composer and conductor Raymond Yiu; composer Angus So; singer/songwriter Mimi Webb; architect Ptolemy Dean; artist Tacita Dean; president of Emirate Airlines Tim Clark.

Pastoral care, inclusivity and discipline

The chaplain is a visible and appreciated presence. Weekly whole-school chapel brings the school together – including all faiths and none. On our visit, the Easter story was the vehicle for discussing eg stress of exams, mixed emotions and vulnerability - all pupils deep in thought. A group of pupils were at the mosque to celebrate Eid.

Pupils speak fondly of the school counsellor - 'Bless her, she's so lovely,' they enthuse. Pupils can take on leadership roles for wellbeing and pastoral care, where 'you can really make a difference,' they say. Safe Space display, in prime position in the pupil's foyer, deals with issues like consent. This is extended to a physical and online safe space (can be anonymous, pupils say). LGBTQ+ community meet regularly, proud of introducing the 'KC' rainbow enamel pin.

Outreach work seen as important to wellbeing.

The eco team's initiative to plant 300 trees 'made everyone feel good', say pupils - so too does swooping down to the junior school once a week for activities like making marmite feeding balls for birds. Some pupils help out at a local primary school. Further afield, there are ambitious plans for the EDUkid trip to Peru to help resource a school in the Amazon.

The farm brings further pastoral benefits.

We heard stories of pupils finding refuge during exam season, boarders enjoying horse riding, young farmers building experience and knowledge and a sense of accomplishment when showing an animal at the Kent County Show, returning covered in rosettes. 'If it wasn't for the farm, I just don't know how I'd feel,'

admitted one pupil, 'It's my thing, it means everything to me.'

Discipline

Pupils clear on the rules and say staff are 'sensible' and 'compromise' where appropriate.

They appreciate that staff 'choose their battles' and know individuals. They 'talk things through, not going nuclear,' said a parent. Clear on non-negotiables though. 'I'm sure the pupils would say I'm strict,' the head says - and certainly his blanket ban of mobile phones was met with groans from pupils (but cheers from parents). He's happy to take that hit, confident that it's in their best interests.

Pupils and parents

Pupils are good humoured - not a whiff of arrogance. There's a gung-ho approach - they throw themselves into the school community with gusto. Good ethnic diversity and the school is proud of its connections across the globe

- it's this, combined with some more local pupils, that smooths integration and the community feel, we hear time and again. **Good minibus network** services a large area. Sure, there's a bit of money swilling about, but so too families making sacrifices. **Friends of KC** help organise all the usual events such as the Bollywood evening, wine and wisdom and fireworks. And then there's the summer slam, organised by the boarding community for all.

Money matters

Means-tested bursaries, with up to 50 per cent off fees (currently 52 students). Scholarships in music, art, sport, drama and academic in years 7, 9 and 12 (DT in years 9 and 12), with 15-30 per cent fee remittance (and a few up to 50 per cent on a combination of scholarships).

The last word

'Walk humbly in this world,' advises the head - and whether you're striking 6s for Kent, singing in the cathedral as a chorister or planning your expedition to Peru for EDUkid, these pupils are walking straight into a world they are well-equipped and excited about. Get all that right, and the rest seems to follow here.



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