



## **Knightsbridge Village Interview**

### **Helen Stavert - Head of Parsons Green Prep School**

*Parsons Green Prep School is a happy, vibrant school at the heart of the Fulham community, refreshingly unpressured especially in the early years. We interviewed headmistress Helen Stavert for the mothers of Knightsbridge Village.*

**1. How has Parsons Green Prep School (PGP) changed under your leadership over the years? Please tell us about any innovative practices you have introduced or would like to implement in the future.**

I was the deputy head at Parsons Green Prep and I am in my third year as head so have been able to see the school grow and develop over the years. When I started as head I introduced STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) into our curriculum. We teach this in a fun and dynamic way, with a view to inspiring and encouraging pupils to develop their enthusiasm and skills in these areas. STEM at PGP is promoted in a variety of ways, which includes STEM workshops, themed days and after-school clubs. We are huge advocates for chess, which complements our STEM program and also encourages competitive play and sportsmanship. Our success in STEM has been recognised by the ISA (Independent Schools Association) as we won their 2016 award for outstanding STEM provision.

Sport is a passion of mine and over the past couple of years I have worked closely with the sports department to add additional sports and extra-curricular sporting activities to our curriculum. Specialist tennis teachers provide tennis lessons all year round, to every child in Year 3 to Year 6. We have also formed a strong link with Chelsea football club's Foundation and their coaches lead football lessons and take oversubscribed after-school clubs. We are currently liaising with the Chelsea Foundation to hold a football tournament with them and we are excited to be the first independent school to do this.

**2. Admission to PGP is by "pre entry checks". Please clarify what qualities you look for when assessing children for entry into reception. Are there any additional attributes you would expect at 7+?**

We don't believe in testing children at three and four years of age so we visit the nurseries, speak to the heads and spend time with the key workers, looking at the children's progress records. But most of all we spend time chatting with the children. Children requiring entry from Year 1 upwards register and enclose their latest school report and a school reference. After registration, they are invited for a two-hour

assessment where they will join in with class activities and leave after play time. We are looking for children who can keep up academically as well as enjoy all that PGP can offer.

**4. Are there any fundamental differences in approach for educating children in a co-ed school compared with single sex? Which would you personally choose for your own children?**

Naturally boys and girls have different interests so the fundamental difference with educating children in a co-ed school compared with a single sex school are the topics that are chosen to complement the curriculum. At Parsons Green Prep, we ensure that our topics are engaging for both boys and girls. Our creative curriculum topic, Chocolate, is my favourite. Not only do the children design, taste and make their own chocolate bars in design technology, but they also learn about the Aztecs in history, Fairtrade in Geography and focus on the novel Charlie and the Chocolate Factory in literacy, which engrosses all our children.

Personally I would choose a co-ed school to educate my own children so that they could develop social skills to mix naturally with the opposite sex as this is a skill that would be needed later on in life, particularly in the workforce.

**5. How comprehensive is your reporting to parents? Do you for example disclose pupils' performance rankings relative to their peers?**

We use two modern assessment systems, Target Tracker and PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools), which enable us to monitor our pupils minutely. Target Tracker gives clear and objective indications of each child's progress through the school.

Based on these assessment systems, parents receive reports each term and there is the opportunity for parents to attend a meeting with the class teacher too. Parents receive information on the academic ability of their child within the class and at a national level.

**6. How would you rank the following 3 development areas in order of priority at PGP – sporting ability/academic excellence/artistic acumen?**

We believe that, although we are an academic school, the following three areas should not be put in order of priority as they are all as important as each other.

**7. What is your view on private tutoring for 11+ examinations?**

At Parsons Green Prep we work closely with our parents discussing which would be the right school for their child so there should not be a need for tutoring for the 11+ examinations. Our preparation is excellent and we try to find the right school where they can thrive, be challenged and most of all be happy.

**8. There is debate amongst parents and commentators on the relative merits and disadvantages of independent schools having longer holidays than state schools. What is your personal view?**

The school day at an independent school is longer than state schools with earlier mornings and a later finish. There are also a range of extracurricular activities that take place outside of curriculum hours, resulting in a longer day. Even though independent schools have longer holidays compared with state schools, they have roughly the same number of teaching hours. Whether in a child is in a state or an independent school, it is important that children have time off to play and be children at home.

**9. How do you appraise the performance and effectiveness of teachers at PGP and is there a feedback mechanism from parents?**

We have a robust recruitment system with an aim to employ inspirational teaching. We are a very strong team and new members of staff have an individual mentor. All staff have formal appraisals once a year, observations and lesson drop-ins are normal practice and observing peers is encouraged. Each staff member has a continuous professional development plan that is carefully monitored and this links with performance targets. We have parent rep meetings once a term and every year parents and pupils receive a questionnaire about the school and their answers are shared with all staff members at the school. I have an open door policy so parents can give me feedback on staff at any time.

**10. How much opportunity do you get to spend time in the classroom teaching?**

For the last two years I have been teaching Year 6. This year I am not teaching a specific class but I have timetabled taking classes when staff are on training days or trips so I am able to teach throughout the school, which is lovely.

**11. When your pupils leave at the end of 11+ or 13+ what are the core skills they would have developed during their years at PGP.**

Our children leave PGP at the end of 11+ and they leave us with skills that enable them to meet the demands in an ever-changing world. As we are a non-selective school and nurture independent talents and interests, our children leave PGP with a sense of achievement, ready to develop this further at their next school.

**12. Finally please specify a USP (unique selling point) that you believe distinguishes PGP from other prep schools.**

With our small classes, outdoor space and dedicated teachers who know every single child, we are a village-type prep school in London.

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs Stavert for taking time out of her busy schedule to participate in Headtalk. Nana Coles*

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