

Heads up for the 11+

By Tim Cannell, Headmaster
Parsons Green Prep

After 12 years as headmaster of a day and boarding school for children aged 3-13 on the south coast, moving to Parsons Green Prep School (a day school for children aged 5-11) did not seem the most obvious move for a head to make. I was fascinated to see if the many apocryphal stories of London school life were true. Not least the intense pressure for places at 11+, an entry system that makes young children sit multiple exams. Some of these take place before schools return in January, meaning a long wait for results, and so the process goes on.

I am afraid that it is true. While many of the schools outside London use a common 11+ and 13+ system, this has not yet transferred to London. However, over the last few months it does appear that a new approach may be taken, which should be applauded, and in the coming years I wait to see if this reduces pressure on our young children.

It seems a rite of passage for many pupils to have significant coaching outside of school. This is something I don't advocate as children need to be children and we should not rob them of their childhood and the opportunity to build those precious memories that we take with us and which shape us for the rest of our lives.



On the plus side, concentrating on the core subjects for the 11+ allows for a much more innovative approach to learning through teaching of the humanities in a cross-curricular approach. This makes important links across science, maths and engineering through a practical-based STEM programme, with time to engage children in debate and help them understand that some questions do not have a single answer, encouraging critical and innovative thinking.

I was also pleasantly surprised at the quality of outdoor space Parsons Green Prep has, which is enhanced further by the use of Hurlingham Park a very short walk away and swimming at Fulham Pools. Children receive lots of exercise and learn a wide variety of

sporting skills. All of which is supplemented by a Personal Development Programme, including residential trips from Year 3 upwards.

Overall, the quality of education despite the pressures of 11+ is broad, balanced and offers real depth. If, as a sector, we can streamline the entry process for senior schools further, I believe we are delivering the very best in education. Our aim at PGP is to keep that balance between offering a rigorous and challenging curriculum and our children enjoying and having positive memories of their childhood.

1 Fulham Park Rd, Fulham, London SW6 4LJ
020 7610 8085 www.parsonsgreenprep.co.uk