



KINGHAM HILL SCHOOL

The Good Schools Guide Review

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The logo for The Good Schools Guide, featuring the text 'THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE' in white, serif, all-caps font centered within a solid red square.

THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

The Good Schools Guide has reviewed 1,200 schools in the UK, including independent, state and SEN schools. Writers visit on normal school days and meet the headteacher, pupils, parents and teachers. Their reviews then cover everything from academic matters, sport and the arts to the atmosphere of the school, staff, discipline, fees, facilities and where pupils come from or go on to. Schools are selected on merit and cannot pay to be included.

What The Good Schools Guide says

Headmaster

Since 2008, Nick Seward BEng MA (early 50's). Educated at Millfield; degree in aerospace engineering from Imperial College and master's in theology from Durham. He brings a powerful combination of strong Christian values, really positive energy and a love of intellectual curiosity to the school. Born in Zambia, his formative years were spent in Papua New Guinea where his father managed the national football team.

After work with the homeless in Blackburn and London and four years as a curate, he joined Magdalen College School in Oxford, where his roles included Chaplain, house master and head of theology. At MCS he saw at first-hand how the right encouragement could lead to remarkable results and this culture of confidence-building is very much the hallmark of what Kingham does so well. His belief that reading is the single most important determinant of academic outcome is reflected in the school's £1.5m investment in a new library. As well as teaching economics and preaching both in school and at the local church, he has built up a successful scheme for mentoring pastoral assistants and has also introduced Kingham to his love of motorsports through the Kingham Hill Racing Club. Pupils love the opportunity to experience the thrill of motorsport and to compete at national level, all at the same time as being exposed to the fundamentals of engineering. An immensely popular and revered head, particularly amongst sixth formers at weekends when he runs the school's bar as a way of introducing them to responsible drinking.

He masterminded Kingham's development 'vision' which has delivered (ahead of schedule) new facilities including a £4m maths and science block and an impressive new £6.2m sports block. Plans are also in place to increase pupil numbers whilst remaining true to the charitable and inclusive Christian ethos of the school. Mrs Seward is also a key part of the school community; head of English, director of the school choir and mother to three sons and a daughter, she is frequently described by her husband as 'the brains of the outfit'.

Entrance

Non-selective, no formal entrance exams but prospective pupils sit the hour-long MidYIS test to provide a measure of 'typical' performance. School offers a huge range of opportunities to children of all abilities. Head meets with all families before joining. Taster days available. Just under 17 per cent international pupils, ESOL offered. German exchange group join for a term in Year 10. US High School Diploma available. About 40 US students join each year. Numbers higher than ever before so early registration advised.

Exit

Some 20 per cent of pupils depart after GCSE to pursue vocational courses or due to redeployment of military parents but most continue through to the sixth form. Three quarters of leavers go on to Russell Group universities. Warwick, Exeter, Loughborough, Bath, York, Imperial, UCL, LSE, Bristol, Nottingham, and Edinburgh are popular choices. One Oxbridge place in 2021. US students generally head home to universities in the States.

Latest results

In 2021, 61 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 80 per cent A*/A at A level (94 per cent A*-B). In 2019 (the last year when exams took place), 49 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 45 per cent A*/A at A level (or vocational equivalent).

Teaching and learning

For a non-selective school to be rated amongst the top five of schools in Oxfordshire for academic results and in the top three per cent of sixth form providers nationally is a huge achievement. 'A combination of small class sizes (average 15 pupils), individual attention and staff who have time to listen characterises the academic environment at Kingham'. Curiosity for learning is very much what the school strives to achieve and is at the heart of its ethos. Strong support structure creates confident pupils who enjoy learning and positivity abounds. One parent, heralding the transformation of his son since joining the school felt 'he would have been lost in the London day school system but is instead thriving and loving school'. Whiteboards and interactive learning all in place, but the emphasis is on traditional teaching and handwritten work rather than technology. Major investment in laboratory facilities in the new maths and science block reinforces commitment to STEM subjects. Setting in maths only. History, DT, animal management and engineering are popular amongst the 31 subjects currently taught with A levels, BTec and CTech offered to suit all abilities. Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong, pupils are often seen walking to lessons chatting happily to staff.

The Octagon Society is where the most academically curious meet to discuss ethical and philosophical issues and challenge their beliefs, it encapsulates the inclusivity of the school as pupils of all levels of academic ability are welcomed. Being curious is what matters here, reflecting the school's mission to broaden horizons. 'Everybody is encouraged to have a voice'. The international feel of the school, together with its US Middle States Association accreditation, adds a global dimension.

Learning support and SEN

CRESTED registered, Greens, the school's dedicated learning support department, offers 1:1 support (at an additional cost). Considered good value by parents. Around 16% of the pupils receive some form of additional learning support with careful monitoring of all pupils taking place. Support either in the form of drop-in sessions or dedicated lessons on a regular basis. Some just enjoy dropping in to chat to the staff and that is welcomed. Pupils interviewed spoke of the tools they have been given to deal with challenges that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. Confidence building and examples of huge improvements in learning outcomes reported. Head of department 'goes the extra mile' and always has time for pupils who need help.

The arts and extracurricular

It's not the broad extracurricular offering per se that is so noteworthy, but the engagement and enthusiasm that is remarkable. CCF (compulsory for form 3), art and drama facilities are brought to life by the energy and enthusiasm generated in the pupils by the school's dedicated staff. New heads of art and DT have reinvigorated these subjects and the latter is now one of the school's most popular subjects - pupils love designing with CAD technology. The former sports hall has been transformed into a 150-seat performing arts centre where the school's drama academy on Monday evenings allows those interested to become involved on or behind the stage. Animal management is also very popular, pupils enjoy learning to look after the stock on the school's own farm.

Forms 1 and 2 learn a musical instrument for free and often then join the school orchestra or one of the ensembles. Singing is part of the chapel service three times a week with a gospel choir and music tech also available.

One parent marvelled that her son could be so excited by CCF drills, and several parents wonder if there is 'something in the water at Kingham' that promotes such fun and enjoyment from previously unengaged children. Pupils throw themselves into the many activities on offer because they are enjoying themselves without worrying about the need to be 'cool'.

Sport

One hour of sport/activities per day timetabled, with all pupils encouraged to be active and take part, making full use of the school's glorious site. Rugby, football and cricket, hockey and tennis as well as athletics, netball and rounders, badminton and cross-country on offer. Regular fixtures with local schools on match afternoons. The impressive new sports hall houses a climbing wall, squash court, four-court hall with fitness suites and a viewing pavilion onto the Astro and tennis courts. A 25m swimming pool and additional gym are on offer and available for parents to use. For those not so keen on team sports, mountain biking, fencing, riding, golf and clay pigeon shooting are to be enjoyed, not to mention the real one off, the school's karting team. The headmaster's enthusiasm for motorsports has resulted in active participation in the national karting championships and two national champions for the school. There's definitely something for everyone to enjoy here.

Boarders

About half of Kingham's pupils board, with 50 per cent weekly boarders; occasional boarding is also possible. Seven dedicated single sex boys' and girls' houses on campus. No Saturday school so a varied programme of activities and trips is scheduled to ensure weekends are busy and fun for the relatively small number of full boarders. Pupils speak enthusiastically of visits to the local trampoline centre, Alton Towers and of team building days when everyone in the boarding house (maximum 33 pupils) gets to know each other. The boarding houses are clean and fit for purpose, with a big emphasis on promoting a family feel that is 'fun, friendly, homely and happy'. Staffed by two resident house parents and three tutors per house; recent university graduates also help out. Boarders are allocated housekeeping tasks and expected to keep their rooms cleaned, providing excellent training for life after school. Sixth formers enjoy separate boarding accommodation and the weekend bar.

Ethos and heritage

Situated in 100 acres of beautiful Cotswold countryside, 80-minutes by train from London and 10 minutes from Daylesford House, former home of Kingham Hill's founder, Christian philanthropist Charles Edward Baring Young. He founded the school in 1886 to provide orphaned and destitute boys with a family home and an education. With plenty of room for the school community to thrive, there is space and time to live life at a healthy pace. Parents are invited to make use of the school's facilities and take an active part in the life of the school. Christian ethos aims to promote qualities of character, kindness and empathy through its guiding principles of responsibility, humility, resilience and integrity but the religious message is used more to frame a code of behaviour rather than as indoctrination in any way. The school's charitable mission involves the support of its bursary programme and giving to many other causes.

Pastoral care, inclusivity and discipline

Pastoral care is at the heart of everything that Kingham does. Parents are astonished at the achievements of their children and attribute them to the small numbers and individual attention pupils receive from excellent caring staff. When questioned about discipline, parents and pupils alike felt that the school deals appropriately with issues and problems and that behaviour is generally kind, compassionate and inclusive. The international diversity as well as the mixing of ages breeds a happy community. Many talk positively of Kingham's protective bubble while recognising that learning to deal with the less benign aspects of the outside world is necessary. Many parents referred to the head of sixth form's exceptional understanding, empathy and ability to offer advice about making subject and university course choices as well as decisions relating to future careers. The school celebrates diversity, embracing the many cultures its pupils as well as the diverse talents and challenges of its pupils. Everybody is welcomed into the Kingham family.

Pupils and parents

About 15 per cent of the school's British pupils have parents in the Forces or the Foreign Office. In the words of one local estate agent 'the school is on the up' as it is 'discovered' by families moving out of London in search of the rural idyll. Parents seemed to us to be less competitive and results driven, genuinely seeking a holistic education. Interestingly however, the school's less pushy approach is paying dividends in terms of academic performance. Alumni or 'Hillians' as they are known, are great ambassadors for the school and actively engaged - on the day of our visit a former navy and commercial pilot was having lunch with a 16-year-old boy with dreams of becoming an airline pilot who was already learning to fly. A plan was being enthusiastically but realistically hatched. The Hillian waxed lyrical about the school as do current parents, those we spoke to who had visited many schools in the area had opted for Kingham 'because it gets the important things very right'. Pupils of all abilities are accepting of each other, kind and full of positivity. The international contingent is from all over the world with 20 nationalities represented, 10 per cent are American students, mostly from families with embassy or government connections. Happy and engaged children make for happy parents.

Money matters

The school's strong Christian ethos and charitable mission is reflected in the 15 per cent of revenue which is allocated to concessions and school bursaries. Means-tested bursaries (up to 50 per cent) and 100 per cent sixth form scholarships available for able pupils.

Scholarships of up to 25 per cent of fees for academic, art, performing arts and sport and at sixth form, one 50 per cent organ scholarship and three 75 per cent academic scholarships. The governing body of experienced professionals and senior management team are impressively strategic and have delivered ahead of schedule on the school's ambitious development plan without recourse to debt. Importantly, parents report channels of communication with management are open and transparent. Trustees oversee the Kingham Hill Trust, a grant making organisation set up by the school's founder.

The last word

A growing number of families moving out of London are discovering this very special school which has quietly been quietly evolving over the last decade under its talented leadership. Not only does it offer ample space and facilities, but more importantly it is run by a headmaster who understands that inspiring confidence and curiosity can change lives. Proximity to the likes of Daylesford Organic and Soho House may be fortuitous but is unlikely to disrupt what is down to earth and special about the school. Thriving, happy, resilient pupils and happy parents.



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