

A SCHOOL WHERE BOYS CAN BE BOYS

Liz Kavanagh spends an afternoon at Pilgrims' Pre-Prep

Small boys like adventures and messy play. What they generally do not like very much is sitting still for lengthy periods, or being quiet – or girls. Well, that's my experience anyway.

But at Pilgrims' Pre-Prep, boys are not expected to be anything other than boys, with hands-on learning and energetic play positively encouraged. And with no girls to worry about, being a boy here is refreshingly free of comparisons too.

Yes, they're expected to be well-mannered and to give of their best, but, equally, boys here can be exuberant and zoom around outside like aeroplanes and there are lots and lots of books about dinosaurs, knights and robots.

Head of Pre-Prep Lucy Brown, a mother of boys herself, explains: "Boys learn in a very different way to girls, particularly at an early age. At Pilgrims' we provide an education that is specifically targeted at them, whilst also treating them all as individuals."

At the purpose-built department, wellies and waterproofs are a must. Outside space is generous, with a designated garden, large playing fields and a chunk of the Dean's garden perfect for exploration and football.

Reception boys get taught to ride bikes in the summer term, and being a recognised Forest School means there's a big focus on the great outdoors, with nearly all science lessons taught outside.

"Classes are intentionally small, with a strong emphasis on learning



through play," Lucy says. "Lessons are cross-curricular, so studying transport, space or electricity may draw on elements of science, English and geography, for example. We also bring in specialists for music and sport."

After-school clubs include gymnastics, junk modelling and gardening, with choir club attended by every one of the Year 2s it is on offer to. "That's testimony to the way music is taught here," Lucy says. "The boys think it's cool to be in a choir and they all benefit from being taught to sing using good technique. One or two of them might go on to be a Chorister when they are older. Every boy in Year 2 has the opportunity to learn violin or cello, and recorder, too."

Boys in Pre-Prep are not required to sit the Pilgrims' entrance examination for the prep school. "Because we really know them so well, there's no need," Lucy says.

"We send them on as enthusiastic learners with questioning minds.

"Small classes, ongoing assessment and a really close relationship with parents ensure that everyone achieves. What matters most of all is that our boys enjoy their first years of learning and have lots of fun."

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