

HEAD TO HEAD

One to one with Pilgrims' Headmaster Tom Burden

YOU SAY IN YOUR MISSION STATEMENT FOR PILGRIMS' THAT YOU STRIVE TO CREATE AN EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL FOR BOYS. HOW IS THAT ACHIEVED?

I want boys to look back on their school days and think, "Wow! That was amazing. I really enjoyed it. I achieved so much. I have a ton of memories and lots of friends. I really like the person I have become." We are boys-only by choice. I have no doubt that boys are best taught in a way that specifically suits them. It is much easier to break down stereotypes and enable boys to engage with subjects and activities that in some schools would be considered 'for girls'. We want Pilgrims' boys to excel across the board.

HOW DO YOU REALISE POTENTIAL IN YOUR BOYS?

A school has to work hard to identify particular talent. It has to work even harder to inspire boys to develop that talent. There are a thousand things we then have to do to realise potential, but it boils down to having great staff teaching – and inspiring – ambitious boys.

WHY IS VALUING DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUCCESS IMPORTANT RATHER THAN HOTOUSING BOYS SOLELY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

No one wants to be a machine. No one wants to be friends with or employ a machine! Machines don't inspire or lead. Academic success is a wonderful thing but it is only part of the picture: education is about so much more than being able to write a good essay. Character is the most important quality.

HOW DOES PILGRIMS' ENCOURAGE ITS BOYS' PERSONALITY TO SHINE OUT?

We have no more important job than to help boys develop their personality. Long after dates and equations and vocabulary have been forgotten, character is still with us. At Pilgrims' we say that kindness is the most important quality. We trust our boys and want them to be independent, but not the sort of independence that sets them apart from their community: Pilgrims' boys are contributors and helpers. I want them all to be interesting – and kind.



HEADMASTER TOM BURDEN

WHY IS MUSIC SO IMPORTANT AT PILGRIMS'?

Pilgrims', founded in 1931, grew out of the Choir School of Winchester Cathedral, and in 1966 the Quiristers of Winchester College joined us. Having two world-famous choirs means that music is hard-wired into the school. The exciting thing is that all the boys access Pilgrims' music just as easily as the choristers. It's great to see a musician dashing off to a rehearsal with knees still muddy from sport. That's right at the heart of what makes Pilgrims' special.

WHAT TRADITIONS AT PILGRIMS' DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

As with many old schools, Pilgrims' has many traditions and some unusual lingo. The very last event the boys attend at Pilgrims' is a Vin d'Honneur – a sad parting of the ways, and in many ways the event I least look forward to. But it does remind me of how boys have progressed since we first met, perhaps as many as nine years earlier. It is a reminder of a job well done, and that is fulfilling.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT PILGRIMS'?

It is wonderful that Pilgrims' is hard to pin down: it is known for being academic and musical, but that is certainly not all. Sport is strong, and drama, and art, and... and... It is a place fizzing with activity. Boys aren't one dimensional. Pilgrims' is a place where every boy can flourish.

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