

FROM THE HEADMASTER'S DESK

Every boy can find their niche at Pilgrims' says headmaster Tom Burden

The Autumn term is a busy time for schools, and I was delighted to meet prospective parents and their sons at our recent open day. It was fun, but I couldn't help but feel that open days and 'How To Visit A School' guides that pepper the media can be as confusing as they are helpful.

One guide suggests parents should ask, "Is the school taking a whole-child approach or is it more focused on academic achievement?" This is where the advice starts to go wrong, at least when applied to Pilgrims', and no doubt to other schools too. We don't see success and enjoyment in the classroom and flourishing outside the classroom as opposites. There's an energy running through Pilgrims' that isn't confined to any one part of it.

Another guide says, "Quiz those hand-picked pupils who show you around." Hand-picked? Not at our open day. The boys who walked visitors up from the river or in from The Close were different boys to the ones who gave tours of their classrooms, who were different again to those who ran games for visiting boys.

There's no second-class Pilgrim. That is because we don't aspire to one 'perfect' Pilgrim.

Musical – great! Non-musical – great! Sporty – fantastic! Non-sporty – fantastic! Here there is not the restrictive hierarchy that in some schools starts with the captain of the 1st XI, with boys in rank order gradually falling further off that ideal. We want every boy to find their niche – and we're big enough, at nearly 270 boys, to nourish all sorts of different strengths.

At Pilgrims', kindness and decency really matter. Individuals matter. Of course, boys who join the school include those who are clever, musical, or sporty or who have some other area of expertise. It would be absurd for me to say otherwise.

But most of all we want boys who are contributors: boys who make things happen. Every boy has only one chance for schooling, one chance to establish lifelong memories, and we want them to make the most of it.

They shouldn't think schooling was OK; they should look back and think, "Those were great years!"



Schools are judged on how well we can fulfil potential, develop character, create a can-do attitude and encourage the resilience to take risks.

Parents came to our open day not because of our facilities, our history, or our beautiful location.

They came to discover not only what their son would do at Pilgrims', but what he would be.

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