

St Christopher School

St Christopher School was founded in 1915 by a group of people heavily influenced by the Theosophist Society. Their main purpose at that time was to impress upon all "the cardinal Theosophical truth that the essence of all religions is the same". Times, of course, have changed but the idea of tolerance of others remains central to the School's philosophy.

St Christopher is an independent, co-educational, day/boarding school of approximately 540 pupils and 60 full-time members of the teaching staff. There is a Montessori Nursery which admits pupils from the age of 2. The Junior School has pupils aged from 4-11 and, contains the usual classes according to age found in most Junior and Preparatory Schools. The Senior School runs from Year 7 to Year 13 (the Upper Sixth). There are around 165 pupils in the Junior School and about 375 in the Senior School.

There are two boarding houses; one for Sixth Form pupils (Arunside) and one for younger pupils (Arundale). There are about 50 boarders in the School. Most boarders are, in effect, weekly boarders, although some are full boarders and there is a small but diverse group of international boarders.

At Junior School levels, pupils follow a distinctive curriculum which, while heavily influenced by the National Curriculum, allows departure from it. For example, the SAT tests at the end of Key Stage 2 are not done.

In the Senior School, pupils work for GCSE, normally nine subjects are taken in Year 11, and A Level. The School has always had a relatively wide ability range but the A*-C rate last year was 92% with 97% of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades. The pass rate at A Level was 87.5%. There are around 80 pupils in the Sixth Form.

The School has had a Learning Support Department for many years. It has developed expertise in assisting pupils with specific learning needs such as dyslexia and dyspraxia. A few pupils have more significant needs, suffering from conditions like Asperger's Syndrome.

St Christopher School is distinctive in its relative informality. There is no uniform and everyone is known by his/her first name. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and the absence of formality is designed to promote collegiality and collaboration. From its early years, the School has had a "democratic" system of government in that through a Council and a Whole School Meeting pupils are encouraged to offer views about how some aspects of the School should be managed. (The Head has a veto, although it is very rarely used.) The system originated when the School was a much smaller community and has recently been reviewed by the School.

The great majority of leavers go on to university with a growing number taking gap years to further their experience.

Members of staff are encouraged to organise and contribute to areas of School life which lie outside their academic commitments. Over the years there has been considerable strength in Art, Music and Drama. The Art and Craft, Design and Technology Centres are well-equipped. A variety of sports is encouraged. Facilities for sport include a good-sized Sports Hall, an indoor swimming pool and attractive and well-maintained playing fields. The main aim in sport is to encourage pupils to participate. A wide programme of extra-curricular activities is organised. ICT facilities are good and ICT is increasingly significant in many teachers' lessons.

(continued overleaf)

Development of the site has gone on apace in recent years. Since 2000 we have:

- opened a major extension to the Junior School, including a Drama Studio
- erected a new English and ICT building
- refurbishment of the Science Laboratories
- re-sited the School's main offices, providing new staff room accommodation
- opened a Sixth Form boarding house (Arunside)
- relocated the many Tutors' offices to one place: the Individual Needs Department
- relocated our Montessori Nursery to larger premises (Arunwood); and
- we are currently exploring many other exciting and large developments for the School.

The School has a strong commitment to community service, both in a local and international context. There is a long-time link with projects in Rajasthan, India, and a developing connection with a project that we founded in Kosovo. Increasing numbers of pupils are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. A wide ranging programme of international and local visits is also an important feature of the School. We are delighted to have been accredited in October 2006 with the International Schools Award by the DfES through the British Council. Our links with the more local community are also very strong with us contributing to, and benefitting from, a broad range of services and organisations.

We have also, for two years running, received the 'Green Flag Award' from International Eco-Schools and Foundation for Environmental Education. We are very pleased to have such a strong and enthusiastic environmental focus at St Chris.

For a long time the School had a reputation as a "progressive" institution. Many of the features that made it progressive and truly radical are now standard practice in most schools. From the start, St Christopher School was co-educational. It believed in a broad academic curriculum and the provision of a wide-range of extra-curricular activities. It encouraged an international outlook. It promoted close relationships with parents. Pupils were to be involved in the government of the School and competition was to be absent as an incentive to learning. A strong emphasis was placed on healthy living and the School's diet remains vegetarian. For many years, from 1925 to 1980, the School was run by members of the Harris family who were Quakers. This has had an impact on the School in terms of the requirement for a period of silence at most school meetings, in the practice of full and often fairly frank debate, and in the desire to see some good ("something of God" in Quaker terminology) in everyone. There is also a requirement that everyone should be treated with kindness and respect.

It is an exciting and challenging time as St Christopher re-asserts its priorities and differences for the twenty-first century. A very strong focus on teaching and learning is being applied and it is hoped that the School will establish itself as a leader in progressive education in this sense in addition to what it is already known for.

Richard Palmer
Head

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