



THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

2023 - 24
STAMFORD
SCHOOL



SNAPSHOT

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The newly updated classrooms are impressive with all mod cons including tables you can write on (legally!) 'I'm very impressed by the teachers,' said one parent. Major refurbishment means that there are modern facilities including updated classrooms, common rooms, quiet study areas and larger areas for supervised study as well as lecture theatres and more. Every child has a tablet. We did check that handwriting was still an option.



HEAD

Interim head is Mark Steed who expects to be in post for up to 18 months depending on the new incumbent's availability. This possibly gives him carte blanche to tread on toes if needed as he's made it very clear he is not just sitting it out as an interim head, 'the exact opposite in fact.' Good. Comes across as capable and competent. More academic rigour is being applied with plans to move the school forward. This includes a refreshed, for September 24, academic team. And the school will be fully co-ed from then as well so lots of plans afoot for finalising this including boarders' accommodation; he's got his work cut out and getting on with it.

ENTRANCE

About half come from Stamford Junior School with automatic entry. The rest from local private and state primaries within the town and further afield to about a 20 mile radius. These children sit an entrance exam. A small cohort join in year 9 from local preps.

Numbers for year 7 have been down for the last two years probably reflecting the political uncertainty and not helped by perhaps some reticence from parents who are waiting for everything to bed in.

More join in the Sixth Form, historically about 45. This number is beginning to rise now that the Sixth Form is a designated one on one site. More subject choices introduced too including; BTECs and the Cambridge National courses, 19 per cent of pupils do these.

Minimum grade requirements are needed, 6+ and higher for certain subjects. Some leeway allowed for the odd current pupil. External pupils mainly come from local states with a handful from independents plus the odd international student to board. School working hard to encourage more pupils to join sixth form with numbers rising, 51 for September 24. Be aware, school happy to say no to internal year 11 students. 'It's very rare but it does happen,' said the Head of Sixth Form.



EXIT

Up to 40 leave after year 11 mainly to the local college for more vocational courses, some to other independents.

Those that stay, the vast majority go on to university; three Oxbridge last year. Lots of support for UCAS but school accepting of those not wanting to go down this route; keen for pupil to keep their options open though. Open to apprenticeships.

Academic tracking has become – or is becoming – much more rigorous so teachers, and more importantly parents, are well aware of problems, transgressions and equally, achievements.



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Obviously, this has changed dramatically with the amalgamation of the two schools. Some parents disappointed that ‘some good teachers have left.’ (particularly from the boys’ school it would appear) But there are plenty more left. The odd parent we spoke to thought that ‘expectations were not as high as they could be’ from some teachers so will be delighted that Mr Steed has this on his radar. But all parents were happy with progress being made by their child and the pretty seamless way that the co-ed changes had happened. ‘We have been kept very well informed.’ The school has worked hard with this to make sure that there was as little disruption as possible, despite the speed it happened.

Considerable funds have been spent to upgrade parts of the old boys’ school. The newly updated classrooms are impressive with all mod cons including tables you can write on (legally!) and top-notch security, you can get out of a classroom but not in once a lesson is in progress. The rearranging of the school into different subject areas and

classrooms means that a lot of it was new to the boys too; clever planning. Science subjects are now split onto different floors but good to see that the aquarium survived the upgrade. Dissection club relished by some of our more ghoulish guides.

The academic day has changed too with double lessons only, lasting 75 minutes with a 15 minute break between each lesson to allow for movement around the school as it’s quite a large site. One of our guides wasn’t too impressed by this change ‘it’s hard to concentrate that long,’ and credit to them for piping up despite the marketing mole being present, but the others weren’t bothered. Interestingly, since our visit the school has listened to pupil feedback and lessons will be changed to five 60 minute lessons a day from September 24. We enjoyed our tour popping into many lessons on the way. Pupils happy to show us what they were doing and to demonstrate the new mod cons including those desks you can write on. Year 7 showed us their website design techniques.

Triple science is taken by most at GCSE with all taking at least one language unless there are SEND needs. Spanish or French are the main language choices, German on offer too. Latin and classics both available at GCSE. Academic tracking has become – or is becoming – much more rigorous so teachers, and more importantly parents, are well aware of problems, transgressions and equally, achievements. Every child has a tablet. We did check that handwriting was still an option.

Maths set from year 7, science and English in year 8. Options for GCSE seem to have been brought forward so now run over three years rather than two. Lots of support for those that need it with drop in sessions and lunch time clinics. Pupils were happy to talk about help they were offered if needed. There seems to be a mutual respect between teacher and pupil. Parents mentioned this ‘they know my child,’ and we picked up on it. ‘I’m very impressed by the teachers,’ said one parent and all intimated much the same thing.

Sixth form now housed on the St Martin’s site which was the High School. This relocation seems to have worked well. Pupils no longer have to move across town from one location to another making for a more cohesive cohort which must be an improvement socially, pastorally, and academically. We suspect that some shopkeepers in the

town miss this migration though. Teachers now come to them rather than the other way round. Major refurbishment means that there are modern facilities including updated classrooms, common room, quiet study areas and larger areas for supervised study as well as lecture theatres and more. Mention must go to the coffee shop open all hours. The perfect environment to bridge the gap between school and university. Students were making the most of a rare sunny day sprawled out on the lawn enjoying lunch break al fresco when we visited. Lunch was good, catering has been improved and there was a pleasant buzz in the dining hall.

At the moment year 11 girls are still being taught on this site to ease the transition which makes sense. All year 11s stayed where they were to avoid too much disruption. We got the impression that parent pressure might have come into force here as well.

Lots of academic support for sixth form including a weekly 1:1 tutor session for every student which encompasses pastoral support as well. Pupils seemed relaxed and comfortable, with each other, their surroundings and teachers. This makes sense as they are no longer rushing across town to make lesson times. But that doesn’t detract from their obvious focus and ambition. They have their eye on the prize here.

LEARNING SUPPORT AND SEN

381 pupils have some sort of SEN support which seems quite high out of a cohort of 1217. Very experienced learning and development team respected by parents. We spotted a few LDAs within the classroom offering discreet ‘live time’ support. Weekly support sessions for those that need it, for subjects and also for ‘independent learning aid.’



THE ARTS AND EXTRA CURRICULAR

As expected lots and lots of extra curricular options ‘they have so much choice and so many opportunities,’ said by every parent we spoke to. 430 after school clubs we were told by the diligent marketing boff who tracked our tour. And not just sports clubs; Jenga and WW1 history were two we quite fancied and there were many, many more. Lunch break has been extended to allow for these clubs.

Music and drama a big part of the school. 400 children learn an instrument and plenty of ensembles, choirs, bands, orchestras et al. Drama too. We popped our head into a ‘black room’ a drama studio, were shown all the music rehearsal rooms and smaller auditoriums for more intimate productions. Whole school productions are well supported and enjoyed. Sherlock Holmes was the most recent for year 7-9. Presence of military families at the school reflected in the strength of the CCF. D of E also well supported. Plenty of school trips including residential.

Welland Boarding House



BOARDING

Stamford is a day school with boarders and is marketed as such. 'The day pupil is not seen as a second class citizen,' says the interim head. Boarders mainly from within an hour from the school but with a high number of military families too. 144 full time boarders, 20 per cent of these are international students. Working families dip in and out of boarding with flexi and weekly boarding popular.

Boarders have been rearranged around the school to encompass the amalgamation. Younger girls now with the boys on the St Paul's site and sixth form boys here too. Year 11-13 girls remain at the St Martin's site. Boarding houses up to date, bright, clean and tidy. Plenty of weekend trips including to the aquapark at Rutland water, cycling there too, Alton Towers and trips to Nottingham Forest; it helps that the chairman of the governors is also the chairman of the club.

Supervised prep sessions and compulsory communal time too 'we don't let them just hide away in their room,' said a wise house mistress.

SPORT

Stamford is unashamedly a rugby school, and a successful one at that. But that does not mean that other sports are overlooked. Hockey and cricket for all, tennis too, netball for the girls. Girls' football successful. The non sporty are encouraged to have a go and there seems to be the chance for them to do so. There had been previous rumblings about 'always the same sporting stars being picked.' But we didn't pick up on that this time; good. The less academic but sporty sixth former attracted by the BTECs on offer. Loads of after school practice sessions and clubs.

Sports facilities are excellent on both sites. The Wothorpe sports centre for pupils at St Martin's was built within the last two years offering plenty of pitches and a new pavilion and the sports centre at St Paul's site completed in 2012 housing a pool and everything else you could think of and dominating the skyline. 'The facilities are brilliant and we really enjoy coming to watch,' said quite a few parents.



ETHOS AND HERITAGE

Rounded and grounded is the school's ethos and we would agree with them. This attitude reflects the town of Stamford which has been voted more than once the best place to live by The Sunday Times but keeps its feet firmly on the ground. And so does the school, possibly because historically it was also the local grammar school. It has some very big hitting close neighbours but wisely doesn't try to compete (apart from on the rugby field). 'We offer value for money and parents know it,' says Mr Steed.

Stamford School has been in the town since 1532 and is very much the heart of this beautiful Georgian town. Until recently it operated a diamond structure; co-ed in junior, single from 11-16 and then mixed again in the Sixth Form. This all changed with the announcement that it was going co-ed in 2023 (announced in 2022). The plaster really was ripped off as it happened very quickly. Parents mostly have accepted this and gone with the flow and credit to the school for achieving this. Not just a purely ideological decision but obviously a pragmatic business one too which you can't argue with. 'It was inevitable really,' was the take from most parents. Surprisingly word on the street is that it is the parents of the older boys who were most averse. Many parents of the girls were pleased 'they have the better facilities up there.' Another parent said 'it was a sign of the times and made sense.'

PASTORAL CARE, INCLUSIVITY AND DISCIPLINE

Pastoral care appears to have been improved and every parent we spoke to extolled it. 'They have improved the well-being side of the school significantly,' said one parent. And they have, Phoenix rooms are now on all sites offering a safe place for pupils. They can check in here for support if needed or can go here for some peace and quiet and time out. Pupils are trained, peer on peer, to be mentors for the Phoenix project. 'They are all over it,' said another parent, 'mental health, being kind, diversity. There's lots of support and they are very open.' Parents spoke about PSHE lessons covering internet security, drugs, sexuality, 'you name it, they've thought of it.' We didn't hear of any bullying or unpleasantness per se but the school openly say 'no head can deny it exists.'

They've worked hard with the amalgamation of the two schools with lots of 'getting to know you' days for the pupils. The marketing bods would have you believe that all has gone smoothly and in the main it would appear to have. But for some of the pupils, boys and girls, the transition can't have been that easy. Cohesion is still not quite there, but it is early days. With the sixth form being on a separate site it is hard for the head boy

and girl to have much of a profile on the St Paul's site. The school are aware of this though and as we said, it's early days.

Discipline did rear its head with parents. Nothing major but a couple of parents mentioned behaviour, 'they need to be sharper and sort the rascals out.' One parent commented that there didn't seem to be a great distinction between a minor infringement and a more major one suggesting over reaction on some misdemeanours and not enough on others. And phone discipline did rear its head. 'If they're not allowed to use them, for goodness sake enforce it.' Since our conversation with parents and our visit the school has introduced a phone free policy which will start in September 24. And they really mean it as they are going to use the Yondr system. Each pupil will have a secure pouch assigned to them which they must place their phone in at the beginning of the day. It is locked in until the end of the school day. Excellent, let's hope it works and credit to the school for implementing such a system.

PUPILS AND PARENTS

Many pupils are second, third generation or more to attend the school. And there are numerous relations there as well. This reflects the nature of the area. Farming families, local professionals and business owners, military personnel and what appears to be quite unique to Stamford, everyone seems to come back. This is reflected in the high number of London, or further afield, who have a connection with the school and come back to live locally and educate their children. First time buyers in the mix as well and it works. There are no pretensions with the pupils either. Rounded and grounded as they say and strong friendships fostered here that last a lifetime. A nice bunch but not parochial, outward looking rather than inward.





THE LAST WORD

It's been all change here with the amalgamation of the schools and becoming co-ed. And the speed at which it has been done has left some breathless including staff, 15 per cent of whom have moved on. And the loss of not one but two heads 'could be seen as careless' to misquote Oscar Wilde. But the dust is settling and the 'Stamford Spires' of the school are still going strong and heading in the right direction. And all credit for this must go to those heads who have now moved on as parents say, 'they were honest, kept us in the loop and said there would be teething problems along the way.' They've overcome them.

STAMFORD SCHOOL

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