St Swithun's
WINCHESTER

A UNIQUE BLEND

A senior school offering day, weekly and full boarding for all girls aged 11–18.

“GIRLS DON’T DO ANYTHING BY HALVES AT ST SWITHUN’S. WE’RE BOLD, ENTHUSIASTIC, AND NEVER AFRAID TO TAKE ON A CHALLENGE.”

Current pupil





INTRODUCTION



Parents considering sending their children to an independent school in the UK are fortunate to have a wide choice of excellent schools. However, making a decision can prove challenging as all schools have, to judge by their marketing material, smiling pupils enjoying excellent teaching and facilities. Where St Swithun's differs is in our precise blend of the usual ingredients: in our ethos, our expectations and the atmosphere in which our pupils flourish.

In our prospectus we have selected our key characteristics to give you a sense of St Swithun's as experienced on a daily basis by pupils and staff. You will not therefore see the finer detail of school life, but you will understand what we stand for and what matters most to us.

Once you have finished reading the prospectus, I would be delighted to welcome you to visit us so that you can experience the reality of a St Swithun's education.

Jane Gandee

JANE GANDEE MA (CANTAB)
Headmistress

THE BEAUTY OF DIFFERENCE

Many parents ask what we are looking for in a pupil or what type of girl would flourish at St Swithun's. I find this a difficult question. In a school, or indeed any type of community, all members benefit from contact with a range of different individuals. Our aim is to teach all of the St Swithun's family to enjoy and respect a variety of viewpoints and characteristics, and to offer an environment in which girls can develop as individuals.

One of the things that I am proud to say about girls as they leave school at 18 is that they have charted their own path. Naturally that path must take into account others, but it must not be subject to convention in all its banality and predictability. St Swithun's encourages introverts, extroverts and those who combine both characteristics, those who enjoy sport, music or drama, heavy metal, debating or gardening, reading, philosophy or art or science. In short, I strongly believe that we all benefit when we learn to coexist with, and value and understand, a range of different viewpoints. The world becomes a dangerous, dull and intolerant place when too much value is placed on homogeneity.



"ST SWITHUN'S DOESN'T TRY TO DICTATE THE SORT OF PERSON YOU SHOULD BE, BUT AS SOON AS YOU'VE DECIDED WHAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN, THE TEACHERS REALLY GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE YOU IN THAT DIRECTION."

Current pupil



"FAILURE IS AN OPPORTUNITY AT ST SWITHUN'S. AN OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT YOUR MISTAKES AND TRY AGAIN – MAYBE RISKING ANOTHER FAILURE, BUT MAYBE FINDING SUCCESS. IT'S OK TO REALLY GO FOR THINGS AND, IF YOU FAIL, PEOPLE RESPECT YOU ANYWAY FOR GIVING IT A GO."

Current pupil



EVER TRIED. EVER FAILED. NO MATTER. TRY AGAIN. FAIL AGAIN. FAIL BETTER.

Samuel Beckett

As educationalists we believe in a growth mindset which, put simply, means that a child's ability is not fixed but can change. So we know that all girls can make progress in every area of school life provided they persevere and follow their teachers' advice. Too often I have seen both adults and children claim that they are simply 'no good' at something. Yet I have also seen extraordinary achievements from those who have been prepared to try, to fail and to try again in a different way. Our aim is for the girls to understand the value of perseverance and of listening carefully to feedback and responding positively to it – hard work alone is not enough for I have also witnessed some pupils expecting high grades because they have worked hard, only to find that their efforts have been misdirected.

It is our responsibility as a school to offer all girls the opportunity to try new things and to find them difficult. In the classroom we consider it a lost opportunity on our part if girls can get everything right at the first attempt. It is our responsibility to stretch and challenge, and to inculcate the understanding that simply repeating what you can already do is not only dull but runs contrary to everything St Swithun's stands for. The High Performance Learning programme brings all of the above into an evidence-based framework.



SCHOLARSHIP

St Swithun's regularly features towards the top of the public exam league tables. However, this does not necessarily equate to scholarship. Public exam results are of course important as a passport to further study or to the work place. Nevertheless, they do not guarantee a scholarly approach to life. Our aim is to encourage and develop intellectual curiosity, the ability to analyse and the desire to make discoveries. We are a school which believes, for example, in the power of Radio 4 to stimulate debate and to entertain. Our assemblies feature varied topics, both secular and spiritual, designed to educate and, sometimes, enrage.

We expect pupils to question their teachers. We expect them to read, discuss and perhaps agree to differ.

Not all pupils immediately rise to the challenge, but we continue to prioritise and focus on the life of the mind beyond the narrow constraints of exam specifications. Indeed, in year 7 a week of discovery and experimentation has replaced traditional end of year exams. A further feature of school life is Stretch, our weekly academic extension programme during which girls can try a range of activities as they progress through the school. Younger girls have access, for example, to chess, forensic science, history of art, logical reasoning and presentation skills, while older girls might be involved in debating in mock trial, setting up their own business, exploring medical ethics, gaining exposure to a new language such as Arabic or investigating animal behaviour.



"INCREDIBLE EXAM RESULTS, UP IN THE DIZZYING THIN AIR AT THE TOP OF THE LEAGUE TABLES. HOW A RELATIVELY UNSELECTIVE SCHOOL LIKE THIS ONE MANAGES IT MUST DRIVE THE LONDON HOTHOUSES AROUND THE BEND."

Good Schools Guide



"IT HAS BEEN SUCH A COMFORT TO HAVE SUCH A BROAD SUPPORT NETWORK. IT IS INVALUABLE TO BE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHOM YOU FEEL HAVE SUCH A GENUINE INTEREST IN YOUR EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL WELLBEING."

Current pupil



WELLBEING

If I could have one wish it would be to imbue all teenagers with self-confidence. Self-confidence would cure, at a stroke, many modern ills such as concerns about body image or intellectual ability.

In reality, however, the majority of young people learn gradually to feel at ease with themselves precisely through the travails of adolescence. We seek to give the girls the tools to navigate these choppy waters. Thus we encourage them all to develop some sort of exercise routine, to eat healthily, to adopt study habits that reduce pressure, to celebrate their own personal bests rather than comparing themselves with others, to learn to laugh, to be good friends, to volunteer and regularly to commit random acts of kindness. We also encourage regular communal singing.

These are some of the most important ingredients for a happy and healthy life. The school also enjoys the services of a psychologist, counsellors, nursing sisters, a chaplain and many wise and kind staff. Furthermore, our bespoke Positive Education programme is delivered to students from year 7 across the age range, and teaches the attitudes and attributes of good physical and mental health.



DUTY

The concept of duty is not a fashionable one, but with rights come responsibilities. We are a school whose default setting is to believe the best of everyone and which has a reasonably relaxed approach to discipline. As educational professionals, we find that the girls rise to the challenge when it comes to good behaviour, and we also expect them to rise to the challenge when it comes to engaging with school in order to make St Swithun's the best that it can be.

A sense of duty means, for example, making suggestions for improvements rather than criticising, sharing with staff concerns about friends rather than hiding them, telling the truth however awkward, and volunteering to help out.

"A TIGHT COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTIVE GIRLS WITH A CULTURE OF 'GO FOR IT' RATHER THAN 'TOO COOL' TO JOIN IN."

Good Schools Guide




St Swithun's
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“OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS WE HAVE WITNESSED OUR DAUGHTER GROW INTO A REMARKABLE YOUNG WOMAN. SOMEONE WHO IS KIND, CARING, PASSIONATE AND TENACIOUS AT DOING THE VERY BEST SHE CAN.”

Current parent



CARITAS

One of the three words above the school's front door is 'caritas' meaning both charity and more broadly a love for our fellows. It is simple enough to love our friends and family, but rather more of a challenge to care for all those with whom we have contact. I expect everyone at St Swithun's to respect others and to be prepared to understand their point of view. We are the type of school in which, as we walk down the corridor, we look up and greet everyone regardless of their age or role in the school.

Service is important to us and we have a primary schools partnership and community service programme open to students from years 9–13. Most girls complete their bronze Duke of Edinburgh awards and a significant number continue to silver and gold. In addition, we expect older pupils to organise activities for younger girls.

Each year we choose three, often local, charities to support in addition to our bursary programme. We also respond to emergencies such as natural disasters or crises caused by war or disease. It is very important to me that the pupils understand that life outside St Swithun's can be precarious, and that their actions, however small, can have an impact on others.



FEEL THE FEAR AND DO IT ANYWAY.

Susan Jeffers

We believe that confronting our fears is an important part of developing the characteristics that will enable us to make a success of our lives. We know that young people can lack confidence so we teach them to put their concerns in perspective by asking themselves: 'what's the worst thing that could happen?'

At the most basic level, we expect girls not to worry about what their peers might think, but to ask and answer questions in class, to take part in concerts, plays, public speaking events and assemblies regardless of how terrifying they find the experience.

We encourage girls to adopt the 'as if' principle – lift your chin, look the world in the eye and behave as if you are confident.





"I HAVE NEVER SEEN MY DAUGHTER TAKE SUCH RISKS ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY AND PHYSICALLY."

Current parent

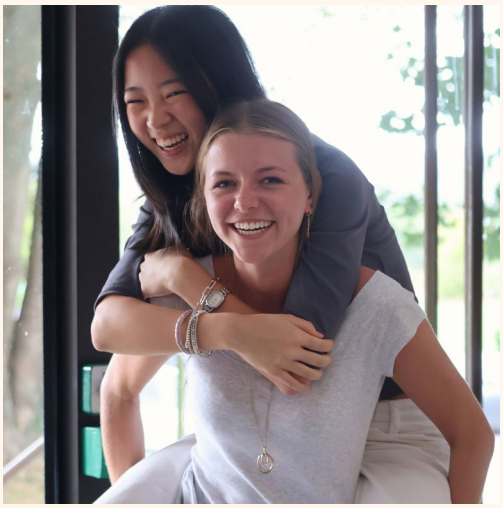

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SENSE OF HUMOUR

We believe in taking education seriously, but also in education delivered with a lightness of touch. We encourage everyone at St Swithun's to laugh at themselves and to delight in spreading joy. Girls do not have to be stand-up comedians, although that would be a treat, but they should look for the humour in everyday situations and to lighten others' burdens through well-chosen words and actions. We understand the power of communal or shared laughter and often look for humour in our regular assembly.

"BEFORE COMING TO ST SWITHUN'S, I NEVER REALLY KNEW HOW MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE LAUGHTER COULD MAKE."

Current pupil



WORKING TOGETHER

Life at St Swithun's is at its most enjoyable and our education most effective when parents, girls and school work together. Sometimes teenagers don't particularly want to work with anyone, least of all parents or school. That is when communication and trust are most important. We sometimes make mistakes, but we always have the best interests of the girls at heart. Young people, indeed adults as well, sometimes misremember or misrepresent, which is why we believe that open communication is essential.

Where parents and school work together we create an immensely powerful force for good. And we have seen many young people emerge like butterflies, virtually unrecognisable, after periods of anger, inattention or sloth. When you entrust your daughter to our care, please have confidence in us and talk to us. That is the best way to ensure a successful, wide-ranging education.





"THANK YOU ST SWITHUN'S FOR TAKING THE TIME AND FOR BELIEVING IN OUR DAUGHTER. ST SWITHUN'S HAS BECOME A SECOND HOME FOR US."

Current parent


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