



## HEAD

Since 2023, John Towers. Grew up in Manchester and went to Saint Ambrose College in Cheshire (independent grammar). He tells us, 'Education was a driving force in my early life.' Studied History at Bangor University, PGCE in primary education at Nottingham and a master's from UCL.

He started teaching at Christ Church School, Chelsea (state primary) before becoming SENCo and then moved to Saint Thomas School (North Kensington) as head of maths. When a deputy headship came up at the North Kensington Barby School (state) he took on the challenge and the school performed so well he was offered a headship at Bevington School. *'It was one of the lowest performing schools in the country and I was employed to make rapid change.'* The school went from failing to 'outstanding' (Ofsted) in 18 months. He laughs, *'I was golden boy.'*

Qualified to coach 'rookie head teachers' and as a school improvement advisor, he worked with the Department for Education 'city challenge' and then spent four years with the 'Reach to Teach' charity, building over 100 pop-up schools in remote parts of rural India, before returning to headship in the UK again at Homefield Preparatory School in Sutton, leading it to its first ISI 'excellent' rating.

He believes in **academic rigour, high standards and target setting. These are underpinned by a strong pastoral offer, managing behaviour and establishing teams within which everybody's capacity to improve is 'recognised and promoted'.** *'You have to have a laser beam on every single child being important'* he tells us.

**Encouraged by the charitable ethos of Barrow Hills, one of Bridewell Royal Hospital's charitable foundation schools, Mr Towers saw an opportunity to lead a school in making the most of its remarkable setting.** *'I wanted a prep where I could know everyone,'* he tells us *'... and I wanted the trees.'* Coming here is about *'helping staff work together ambitiously'* and fostering *'child-orientated teachers that will invest in the bigger picture'*.

Now into his second year, parents describe him as *'forward-thinking... focused on the children.'* *'He's operational and organised'* with a *'nurturing spirit'*.

As well as running mountain biking, public speaking and mindfulness clubs, he teaches PSHCE to year 5 and regularly covers lessons. He lives on site with his partner, Stef, has two children of university age and is a trustee at the Royal Society of the Arts, where he volunteers on the board.





## ENTRANCE

Entrance to all years is non-selective. Children can start in nursery from the day they turn 2, following a taster session to check developmental readiness. There's a waiting list for places, with numbers capped at 15.

In year 3, school becomes two-form entry. Applications considered on an individual basis. **One parent, whose children arrived outside of normal entry points, told us his children 'settled in quickly.'**

## EXIT

Pupils can leave in year 6 or stay for upper prep, with most heading for local co-educational schools. Around 25 per cent take up assured places at partner school, King Edward's in Witley, others go to Cranleigh, Charterhouse, Churcher's College and Seaford. St. Catherine's School, Bramley and Prior's Field are popular all-girls destinations. Twenty-one scholarships in 2024.



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## OUR VIEW

We started our visit in the chapel, where years 3 and up were in assembly. A large, bright space, decorated with children's artwork, this was once the finest room of 'Great Roke House', a grand, domestic home built in 1910. Weekly year group assemblies are in addition to those involving the whole school, and on Fridays, the 'awards and achievement' assemblies are open to parents. **Like everyone else, we walked away smiling and inspired.**

**When we popped into the nursery, we saw children playing both in and outdoors, in line with the 'free flow' ethos.** Nearby, kindergarten had been pressing dinosaurs into dough to make fossils. Embedded routines like registering themselves and signing out snacks give even the youngest children a sense of responsibility in their classroom. **Specialist instruction in PE, music, French, forest school and drama.**

**From a chair near the bay window in the reception classroom, we watched happy children,** clustered on the carpet, concentrating on their word-sounds and writing on whiteboards. Different learning centres offered incredible choice, and fairytale character paintings pegged-up were **confident, colourful and expressive.**

When we joined year 1, they were 'doing the wiggle bear' (a dance-based movement break) at the end of a maths lesson. **Teachers aim for a warm and pastorally supportive ethos, instilling kind, caring values and ensuring that 'no one slips through the net'.** No streaming in pre-prep but '*no need*', they say, as all classes have a full-time TA. A topic-based, cross curricular approach includes history, geography, English and science. Reception to year 2 use the science labs at least once per half term and specialist IT and art teaching is added to their timetable.

**We found lower prep (year 3 and up) in Thomas Moore House, where the written work on display was of a very high standard.** Parents say they chose the school because of '*how happy the kids looked,*' and how '*confident they were talking to adults*'. Lessons are frequently delivered in the forest school - '*We take a lot of maths outdoors,*' one teacher tells us, '*Discussion and collaboration increase significantly beyond the walls of the classroom... that's when we find a child's spark.*'

**Parents say that teachers find fun ways to 'stretch and extend' pupils.** In English, year 4 were studying the features of a diary, wearing luggage tags around their necks, like evacuee children. Supportive checklists, visual aids and even a bit of hot-seating. Almost all pupils joined in with discussions. '*Academically, we're very pleased,*' say parents. '*We trust the teachers.*'

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‘There’s a real distinction between pre-prep and prep,’ said one mother, but they also ‘maintain a whole-school feel’. This cohesion is well supported by the arts, where work is often collaborative. The nativity runs from nursery to year 2, and years 3 and 4, and 5 and 6 perform their annual plays together. Recent year 7 and 8 productions have included *The Lord of the Flies* and *Les Misérables*.

We visited half of year 6 in Latin (12 pupils, including 3 girls), where arms stretched urgently upwards as children begged to contribute. **Teaching was well-structured to support learning in a fun, interactive way and we were impressed** to come away having learned some Latin ourselves.

The music department work in equal partnership with King Edward’s School, Witley, and peripatetic instructors (many of whom come from London) deliver around 235 music lessons a week. Nightingales choir is for lower prep, Larks for upper prep and Bridewell Choir (the chapel choir) joins with King Edward’s senior choir to perform in cathedrals including Arundel, Bristol, Cirencester Church and even Saint Mark’s Basilica in Venice (extra cost associated). ‘If there’s talent, we’ll find it,’ says the head of music.



In sport as well as music, the partnership with King Edward’s brings advantages in terms of resources. They have two games lessons a week and one PE, including swimming either at King Edward’s, or in their own 20-metre pool. There’s a particular focus on hockey (less rugby). In weekly matches, years 5 and 6 team up, as do years 7 and 8.

Girls in years 7 and 8 can play in King Edward’s teams owing to their smaller numbers, including in Saturday matches. ‘What they do with small numbers is unbelievable,’ said one father. **The sporting ethos is praised by parents who summed it up as, ‘Focus, determination, gracious in victory and gracious in defeat.’**

In year 8 science, the teacher was dissecting a lung. Every hand shot up when he asked a question, and when the first responder (‘I’m not sure, but I’ll give it a go...’) got it wrong, nobody batted an eyelid. ‘Upper prep is transformational,’ said one mother, ‘There’s a different maturity, different responsibility, different interactions with staff.’ Other parents described learning as ‘an organic process, not pushy. Somehow, they’re streaks ahead, but you’re not aware of it happening.’ ‘There aren’t any invisible children, they’re all showcased’.

## OUR VIEW CONTINUED...

The director of teaching and learning and the SENCo work together to join the dots between pastoral and academics. The approach is one of in-class support, **'Inclusion done properly.'** They also facilitate small break-out groups and love team teaching.

**'They couldn't do any better'** says one parent, and another that, 'They notice if your child is struggling'. 'High five to the English department and the extra tuition that goes on,' said one father. 'They've given my son confidence... stuck him under their wing.' Children receiving support 'don't feel different' he said, **'It's a testament to the culture.'** Another parent said, school had *'topped [her son] up every chance they could' and made him feel 'like a different kid... a kid who wants to go to school'*. When we visited, pupils were supported with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ASC, ADHD, and sensory processing. Unfortunately, no wheelchair access.

Year 7 and 8 help with sports, year 1 PE, act as wet break monitors and peer mentors. As parents see it, they move up the school *'picking their responsibilities and developing confidence.'* Year 8 can be captains in gardening, first aid, chess, maths, common rooms, prep... 'If you asked for it, you could probably get it,' one pupil told us.

**One boy, who'd moved from another school, said 'People tell me I've changed so much, because [I'm] more confident here, and friends with everyone.'** Another agreed, **'Everyone's really friendly.'** Comparatively few girls in upper prep (an issue experienced by most local preps) but those that stay have no regrets.

**Children feel 'supported, safe and secure,' say parents.** Staff tell us that pastoral support, mental health and wellbeing is 'coming on to a new level'. There's a school counsellor and more than one ELSA (emotional literacy support assistant). 'The Happy Hangout' is a pastoral space for breaktimes. It's also somewhere to meet up with year 8 mentors, who are praised by parents of younger pupils.

When it comes to discipline, pupils say, 'There's always a fair reason' for consequences. 'You can get a yellow for talking, an orange if it gets worse, and three oranges a week, well... and red...' they didn't dare say. And we didn't need to discuss 'red plus', because apparently, nobody's that naughty.



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It was a ‘smart move’ for the head to make after school clubs free, say parents. **The outstanding assortment now offered by staff includes ‘squiggly calligraphy’, debating, maths, running, netball, music theory and design technology.** ‘They want to sign up for all of them!’ said one mother, whose daughter attends ‘French speaking club’. Gardening club is particularly popular with children who like structured activities at break and lunch times.

New parents describe ‘**a very welcoming experience**’, with other families reaching out to help them get organised. Everyone raves about ‘Summer Proms’, and events are well attended. One father told us, ‘**Everyone’s working to send their kids to that school... hard-working, normal people in normal jobs.**’ A mother agreed, ‘We’re not glamorous.’ ‘There are plenty of Range Rovers,’ said a father, ‘...but a lot of bangers too’.

The Parent Society fundraisers recently bought a new lighting system for the school hall, and their ‘Friday morning bacon sandwich stall’, was mentioned enthusiastically by practically everyone we spoke to.

## MONEY MATTERS

Fees on a par with local competitors but there’s a considerable effort to ensure ‘value added’ where possible. Free after-school clubs mean children can stay until 5.30 every day at no extra cost and learning support is offered without additional charge.

## THE LAST WORD

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A small school with beautiful grounds, Barrow Hills has **the environment, learning culture and pastoral care balanced perfectly to nurture success.**

Particularly big on taking responsibility, children develop resilience and confidence. **We met happy children who loved their teachers and were proud of their school.’**

# WE ARE PREPARED FOR GREATER THINGS

## VISIT BARROW HILLS

The best way to experience what life is like at Barrow Hills is to see it first-hand.

We encourage every prospective parent and pupil to arrange a visit to our school where you will be welcomed with a personal, tailor-made visit which will take into account your daughter or son's interests and give you an excellent feel for all our school has to offer.

We warmly invite you to visit us to explore and experience how special a place Barrow Hills is for learning and growing – truly an education without limits.

## PERSONAL TOURS & OPEN MORNINGS

Usually lasting around 90-minutes your visit will include a meeting with our Head, Mr John Towers, alongside opportunities to see vibrant school community in action and a chance to meet and talk with the children as they take you on a tour of our excellent facilities.

Visit our website to book an **appointment** or feel free to contact our admissions team.

Open morning events run throughout the year and can be book by visiting our **website** or by contacting our Admissions team to book your place.

## CONTACT OUR TEAM

If you have any questions, our admissions team would de delighted to hear from you.

Email via [admissions@barrowhills.org](mailto:admissions@barrowhills.org) or by calling us directly on +44 (0)1428 683639.

