



START RIGHT

NAOMI BARTHOLOMEW, Head of St Catherine's Prep, Bramley, says that the real benefit of a pre-prep education is that it builds a strong foundation for later years to come

The decision to invest in independent education for your child from Reception (aged four) is one that needs careful planning and thought. At the forefront for most parents is, what is the true value of this expensive choice?

The Independent Schools Council (ISC), which is the umbrella organisation for many independent schools, recently released research which suggests that pupils who have been educated in the independent sector from the age of four years old have the equivalent of two additional years of schooling by the time they leave aged 18.

At the heart of learning, particularly for our youngest pupils, is the teacher. It is obvious

that children learn best when they feel that they are valued and belong, when they are supported and challenged and when they have inspiring teachers in front of them. Pre-prep and prep schools are able to recruit and retain superb teachers who invariably stay longer given the rewarding opportunities they have to create unique learning opportunities for their pupils.

THE RAPPORT BETWEEN STAFF AND CHILDREN

Teachers in pre-prep departments are able to build a strong and meaningful rapport with their pupils. This is often due to slightly smaller class sizes where children are known and understood as individuals. It is also due to a little more time in the school day which allows for getting to know pupils outside of the classroom and on varied contexts both in the classroom, out on the playing

field, at break times and lunch. Most teaching staff are well-used to overseeing pupils throughout the day, and specialist teachers are able to identify sparks of talent and nurture this over subsequent years as they tend to teach across age groups. At St Catherine's, we have specialists in PE, music, ballet, ICT, drama and art and DT. Such teachers may indeed teach in their area of expertise over the course of seven years. During that time, they will see how each child progresses and grows, and nurture talent along the way. Such teachers are very well-placed to provide exceptional pastoral care alongside form or class teachers.

Parents are vital partners in the educational journey of each pupil and, as such, are welcomed into many events within pre-prep. Whether they will be sharing their own expertise in order to inspire pupils, assisting possibly with school trips or events or cheering on at matches and tournaments, many parents find themselves very much part of the school community.

FACILITIES THAT INSPIRE AND ENABLE

Some pre-prep schools are standalone schools, some are departments within larger prep schools. They can vary from town houses to vast stately homes with

acres of land. Regardless of size, there is considerable thought, effort and investment put in to ensure that the environment is an inspiring one that enables learning of the highest quality. I would always list facilities as less important than the people in front of the children caring and supporting them every step of the way, but nonetheless, attractive, and, dare I say it, quirky environments can attract the very best staff and make a significant difference to the learning experiences of the pupils.

LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Pre-preps also provide extensive opportunities outside of the classrooms. Play and outdoor learning is often in superb surroundings where children can truly explore and build their own resilience, curiosity and cement friendships through meaningful play. At St Catherine's, as in many prep schools, our extracurricular programme is extensive and fully included in school fees – choirs, orchestra, swimming, dance, chess, debating, art and drama, to name but a few. Such opportunities enable children to build their confidence and own sense of identity as they become more familiar with their personal strengths and interests.





Children get to play in superb surroundings

SOME PRE-PREPS ARE STANDALONE SCHOOLS, SOME ARE DEPARTMENTS WITHIN LARGER PREP SCHOOLS. *They can vary from town houses to vast statey homes with acres of land.* REGARDLESS OF SIZE, THE ENVIRONMENT IS INSPIRING

Friendships are made that last a lifetime