

Landmark year for Stonyhurst Pre-Prep

In the illustrious history of Stonyhurst, 2024 marks a remarkable 20 years of successful Pre-Prep education at the award-winning Hodder House.



STONYHURST



Stonyhurst St Mary's Hall has been providing a reputable education for over 200 years with the youngest pupils situated in Hodder Place. Before Hodder House was constructed, the youngest pupils were based in the prep school, however, in 2004, the old gymnasium underwent a transformation to become a modern facility with dedicated classrooms and outdoor play areas. Named in homage to the nearby river and the original Stonyhurst estate, Hodder House maintained its connection to St Mary's Hall but began to operate as an independent entity. It opened its doors to children under five for the first time, providing education for them throughout nursery and Key Stage 1, concluding at the age of seven.

Winning a National Building Award was just the start of success for Hodder House, which saw its inaugural cohort double for its second intake to almost 80, with changes throughout the following two decades always having the development of the children in mind.

A major refurbishment in summer 2023 created a number of large, bright and open-plan classrooms, with a new playroom and a designated art area, alongside the development of the Junior Curators Programme which has now been running for over a decade. This pioneering initiative offers pre-prep children exclusive access to the 100,000 artefacts and historical books within the College

Museum and Historic Collections, all facilitated through regular visits where they learn about and can handle a range of fascinating objects from history, such as dinosaur fossils and shark teeth.

Sarah Gibson, head of Pre-Prep since 2015, explains: "In education nothing stands still, and for our younger pupils we find that they enjoy a variety of activities within a broad curriculum, so a well-rounded, engaging environment where they're listened to and heard is essential. Even though Hodder House aims to gently introduce a school routine and teach core skills, we want the children to develop a lifelong love of learning, so it has to be fun. Children are far more engaged if they have initiated the activity."

"Class sizes are also intentionally small in each of the five years at our pre-prep," says Sarah, "which ensures each pupil gets the individual attention they need to develop and instil confidence, especially when specialist music and dance teachers are introduced to Pre-Prep in Years 1 and 2. All the children become so knowledgeable because they have so many facilities on-site as well. The trips to the Museum really inspire pupils and we are always looking to inspire even the youngest children."

Throughout the changes, however, many aspects and traditions have remained the same, with all year groups mixing during playtimes, school trips and educational visits, as well as pre-prep children taking part in whole school assemblies where they have opportunities to interact with older pupils and become aware of the international dimension to the school. A Playtime Pals initiative also sees older children act as role models for the younger year groups.

"Social skills are just as important as academic development," says Fr Chris Cann, headmaster of St Mary's Hall. "This is very targeted, personalised learning, especially because children come here from around the world and, as one of the oldest, continually operating Jesuit schools in the world, there are shared values we can all live and learn by, wherever we are from."

These values include curiosity, eloquence, compassion, generosity and creativity, and are woven into all aspects of Stonyhurst from pre-prep to the college and sixth form, which are all on the same 1,000-acre campus, enabling a seamless transition throughout a child's educational journey. "We like to think of the journey as a golden thread running through pupils' lives," adds Fr Chris. "We are a

constant for them and when they leave us, they can reflect on what a fantastic journey it has been."

Nancy Latimer (OS23) is one former pupil who can speak first-hand about such a journey, having joined Hodder House aged three and progressed all the way through the school to Sixth Form before graduating in 2023. Reflecting on her experiences, she says: "My time there definitely prepared me to move up through the prep school and College because we would frequently visit the Prep School and the College, so once it was finally my turn I was already familiar with the environment and had a lot less to be worried about as I already knew my way around.

"Before leaving sixth form I went back to visit some of my old teachers at Hodder House and was shocked to see how much it had changed and grown since my time there. I remembered it being much smaller than it is now due to the new extension, and the whole place seemed more modernised in general, both inside with a computer and technology room, and the outside play area.

It was really good to see how the play facilities had evolved as the years had gone by.

"I think the positivity of the teachers and the support that I received during my early years at Stonyhurst definitely helped prepare me for my future studies. I am so grateful of my time at both Hodder House and St Mary's Hall because, like my peers, I was always encouraged to find where my strengths are not just in education, but in other areas, whether that's sports, drama or music."

This is all part of the Stonyhurst ethos to create well-rounded individuals who are the best that they can be, and the pre-prep is no different.

Hodder House welcomes any child at any stage of their education, and is part of the EEF scheme giving nursery school pupils, aged three to five, 15 free hours.

Fr Cann concludes: "We are a busy, dynamic school, offering value for money through an extended day that includes all meals and trips, and provide a rich educational environment and a universal welcome."

Find out more at stonyhurst.ac.uk/pre-prep

