

What The Good Schools Guide says

Head

Since 2015, Chris Barker. He grew up in an army family attending schools in Cambridge followed by a degree in politics and economics from Newcastle University. After this he took up a commission in the army including tours of Bosnia and Northern Ireland, reaching the rank of captain. This was followed by a career in recruitment working in London and Sydney. At the grand old age of 38 he re-trained as a teacher at York St John University and moved to Scarborough College where he has taught maths and sports for the last 16 years. Warm and engaging, Mr Barker has a deep commitment to the school and its pupils and works closely with the senior school to ensure that the two provide a seamless education. He is a self-confessed traditionalist and the school does everything you would expect from a solid, no nonsense prep. Since merging with the only other two prep schools in the town, Scarborough has seen an healthy increase in numbers.

The school has a strong record of outdoor and adventurous activities. Mr Barker himself is something of an action man, proudly displaying a picture of himself in a tank on his bookcase. The school's USP is based on promoting Yorkshire grit. In other words, resilience, independence and team work are the order of the day here. 'We want children who are adventurous and who can confidently interact with adults' the head says. Both his girls came through the prep and senior schools. In his spare time he enjoys playing padel tennis and walking on the North Yorkshire Moors.

Entrance

The Little Owls nursery takes pupils from the age of three and roughly half will move on to the prep school. A visit by the child and parents to Little Owls where they will meet the staff is all that is required to join.

The head is proud that the prep school (as with the senior school) is non-selective. All entrants are asked for reports from previous schools and are interviewed by the head. There's also a taster day. A pupil might not be admitted if it is felt behaviour might be better supported elsewhere.

Prep is one form entry with between 12 and 15 in years 1 to 3. Numbers increase by year 4 and are generally around the 20 mark.

Exit

Almost all will progress to the senior school. The very few who leave do so for family reasons.

Our view

Little Owls nursery curriculum is built around the EYFS framework delivered by the form teacher. This includes structured play with a grounding in the basics of literacy and numeracy. Music, PE, French and musical theatre are all delivered by specialist teachers. Senior school's Yorkshire grit starts life as Yorkshire pebbles in nursery, with a forest school and plenty of outdoor activities including surfing. Nursery is housed in the prep school building. Parents and pupils love it, 'She adored Little Owls, she really thrived and was completely ready for reception when the time came.'

Scarborough prep is a short step from the senior school which means both a seamless transition for pupils and easy sharing of facilities for sports, science, drama and design technology. It was purpose built in 2001 and provides a warm and inviting environment. Straightforward rather than flashy, there's lots of pupils' work on display and a calm, productive atmosphere. Small assembly hall doubles as a gym space. In years 1 and 2 pupils are taught by their class teacher. In year 3 specialist teaching is introduced in maths, science and ICT with specialism in all subjects from year 4 onwards. French is specialist taught throughout. Prep has its own science lab next door in the senior school science department. We saw a year 6 DT lesson being taught in a brand new room before moving on to watch year 3 using mind maps to begin a piece of creative writing. In the lessons we saw, pupils were very engaged and enthusiastic. In years 5 and 6 all pupils get a school Chromebook (cost covered in fees) which then moves with them if they continue into the senior school.

There is lots of music, art and drama going on. Prep school shows have included Oliver! and The Wind in the Willows, supported by a West End theatre producer who is brought in as a consultant. Music takes place in the senior school where there are lots of practice rooms and the opportunity to take additional lessons in any of 15 different instruments. There's a prep chamber choir and year 6 have the chance to play in the senior orchestras and ensembles.

Parents say pastoral care, 'Just gets better and better.' They love the parent hub on the website which keeps them up to date with what is going on, 'In a school with lots of sports fixtures this is so helpful'. 'School really fosters children's confidence and encourages them to be great communicators through speaking in assemblies and coming out of their comfort zone.' Parents also praised the school's ability to quickly identify issues and get all staff on board when additional support is needed. Vital when subject specialism begins so early in the school career. 'Communication is a real strong point, you usually get answers to emails straight away, they are so on the ball.' 'They really are getting it right. So many opportunities, a good level of challenge, great food and wrap around care.'

All pupils must take a school lunch which is included in fees; there's a great choice of food which is eaten in the classy senior school dining room. This is not universally popular - one of the few complaints from pupils was that they can't bring their own packed lunch. Pupils wear their very smart uniform with pride. They told us that poor behaviour and disruption in lessons are rare, this was echoed by parents who praised the school's firm but fair stand on discipline.

SEN is overseen by the senior school SENCO. With 22 per cent on the SEN register it's higher than the national average but this is mainly because school works hard to identify individual needs and put support in place. All of year 4 are screened for dyslexia. Additional SEN lessons available at a cost. Parents say, 'The right amount of support at the right time, it's appropriate and proactive without being over the top or holding the child back from becoming increasingly independent.' There is no lift but the SENCO is confident that suitable timetable adjustment could be made for ground floor teaching if needed.

Undoubtedly a very sporty school, as attested by a super keen group of prep school pupils. 'Why did you choose Scarborough College?' We asked. 'The sport, we can do so much here,' came the reply. Full contact rugby from year 4, hockey, netball and of course the school's great strength, cricket. All helped by the good sports facilities, hockey Astro, all-weather nets and tennis courts and a newly completed multi use games area, as well as the usual array of pitches and a very impressive athletics track recently donated by a parent. No pool (swimming lessons do take place off-site), but who needs one when you have a surf school on your doorstep. Yorkshire grit definitely needed to brave the waters of the North Sea, but these kids have it in spades. Pupils told us there are A and B teams to ensure everyone gets a chance to compete but we did wonder if a truly completely non sporty child could find their own tribe here.

Even in reception pupils come from as far as Bridlington, Driffield, Malton Pickering and Whitby, not insubstantial journeys but the school does run seven bus routes (cost not included in fees). Year 2 is the lowest age allowed on the buses, there is no chaperone but senior school pupils look after prep children. Reception, years 1 and 2 finish at 3.30 while the juniors finish at 4.15, something to be borne in mind when organising transport.

Plenty of trips and visits including bi-annual ski trip for years 5 and 6 alongside the younger senior school pupils. All the usual clubs and societies which meet every day after school except for Friday when the buses come a little earlier. Some parents commented that, for instance, reception children travelling on the buses have to do clubs even though this is not a requirement for them. Although one did say of a younger child, 'She would happily stay all day, there is so much to do.'

Money matters

No regular scholarships or bursaries in prep, although occasionally a discretionary award will be given to a pupil with specific sporting talent.

The last word

Yorkshire grit is a quality much prized and fostered at Scarborough College and it all starts in the prep. We would say this school is something of an oyster, a secure and nurturing place for pupils to grow as they begin their journey to become well-rounded pearls.