

What The Good Schools Guide says

Head

Since 2018 Guy Emmett. Originally from Cheshire he was educated in Altrincham and Kings School, Macclesfield before studying history and politics, PGCE and MEd, all at Durham University. His first teaching post was at Rossall where he developed a love of the International Baccalaureate. This was followed by a stint at Millfield before being asked back to Rossall as head of history. From there to Ackworth as deputy head pastoral and head of boarding. He has coached sports in all his posts including rugby and hockey but his great passion from school onwards has been cricket. In many ways Scarborough College is a great fit for him. It has good academic credentials, it's a northern boarding school and the great outdoors is a critical element of the curriculum offer. He is quite clearly a powerhouse and a doer.

The school appears to have changed dramatically under his leadership with significant growth in numbers (including boarding), completely bucking the national trend of empty boarding houses and parents unable to afford fees. We were very curious as to how this is being achieved in a school without a significant foundation to fall back on. We concluded that the head's charisma, drive and genuine knowledge of staff and pupils, plus a very savvy use of IB and high-quality boarding to bring in international pupils especially at sixth form level, is the key. 'We invested in the right people first, then the building and the curriculum.'

He comes across as a very human head leader, keen to tell us the name of every pupil who passed his window and we saw several instances of very compassionate leadership of school staff.

The college's strapline is 'Yorkshire grit'. Head says, 'I don't want kids on their phones in their spare time, they should be supporting each other, being kind and caring, working in the community, embracing technology in the right way but developing grit and maturity by being outside and by doing.' Every year 7 is in the year 7 play, they are all in the choir and by year 9, 90 per cent are involved in D of E. The majority of pupils walk the Yorkshire three peaks over two days and all of the upper sixth complete at least some stages of the Lyke Wake walk. Mr Emmett told us, 'No classroom should be confined to four walls.'

Scarborough College is definitely a family affair for Mr Emmett, his wife is deputy head of geography and field work and both his children were in the prep school at the time of our visit. He is a keen cricketer and recently represented England in the over 40s category.

Entrance

Proudly non-selective up to sixth form, school requires two years' transcripts/reports from previous schools and all prospective pupils are interviewed by the head. Almost all prep school pupils move up to the senior school automatically, those few who do leave tend to do so because of a family move.

The entry requirement for sixth form is a modest five grade 5 or equivalent, including English, maths and one science. The IB is a key marketing tool for international students to join the Sixth Form. Students must achieve at least B2 in English in order to join.

Exit

In 2025 around 45 per cent of year 11 left, mostly to go to good (and free) local sixth form provision. It's a fairly high number, explained by the fact that Scarborough offers only the IB and no A levels. In 2025, 100 per cent to university, 38 per cent to Russell Group and 33 per cent to study abroad. No Oxbridge but a very creditable nine to medicine as well as one each to dentistry and veterinary science.

Latest results

In 2025, 32 per cent 7-9 at I/GCSE. IB average points score 33.2.

Teaching and learning

The college has pleasant, bright and airy classrooms in the main building, quite traditional but well equipped and a good learning environment. Spanish and French are taught from year 7 onwards with some native speakers amongst the staff. Mandarin is also available at IB. There are great modern science labs and separate sciences for all from year 7, up to and including GCSE. The head was particularly keen to commend the standard of science teaching to us. Library lovely but curiously completely empty when we visited. They use an on-line reading cloud to support and monitor pupils' reading. Lots of buzz in lessons including a year 7 descriptive writing lesson where pupils were using their school chrome books effectively alongside exercise books. Writing still has an important place in preparation for public examinations. There is an impressive brand new design technology area complete with all the technical kit you would expect and good take up at GCSE. IB English as an additional language is on offer for non UK students who need it.

According to independent value added analysis performance at GCSE is generally slightly better than pupils in similar schools, while at IB it is mostly in line with similar schools.

In the sixth form the programme of study is entirely International Baccalaureate, so it's an academic diet where students must take six subjects including a modern language, maths, native language (college can offer French, German, Spanish and Mandarin for native speakers) and a science plus a couple of free choices, as well as completing a personal study and the theory of knowledge course in order to gain the IB diploma. Scarborough also offers the IB Career Programme (IBCP) where some elements of IB are combined with a more vocational course, in this case BTEC sport.

School invests heavily in post-16 teaching. They offer nearly the full range of IB subjects, all taught by specialists and no joint teaching across years 12 and 13. Small classes mean lots of individual attention and the wide mix of nationalities enhances the learning experience.

With so many international boarders the general ability profile of the sixth form makes the school look more selective post-16 and this seems to be borne out by the strong IB results. That said, pupils with relatively low GCSE attainment are guided into the right courses (IBCP) and the data suggests this is successful for them.

Sixth form

About 60 per cent of pupils continue into the sixth form and are joined by around 50 new students (mostly international boarders). There's a great sixth form study centre at the heart of the school and sixth formers (complete with gowns) play a key role as prefects. They mostly use their own laptops but for those who don't have them school chrome books are available. We saw IB business and psychology lessons where students were engaged and reflecting on their own learning, no passivity in classrooms here.

The students we spoke to love the college. The high level of sport on offer coupled with scholarships, the IB and opportunities to board were the key reasons why they choose to stay or in many cases join the sixth form. 'The best thing is the family atmosphere, the year 8s know me, the teachers all know me, I'm involved in everything.' One recently arrived international student took great trouble to seek us out on his own and tell us that as a student, 'I feel 100 per cent included and an important member of this community.' We were interested to note some students had joined (specifically for the sport on scholarships) from other schools with strong sporting reputations.

Learning support and SEN

The SENCO brings a wealth of state sector experience to the role which covers the prep school as well as supporting great continuity for pupils. Around 17 per cent of pupils are on the SEN register (no EHCPs at the time of our visit). While this could seem higher than average it reflects the fact that the college screens all of year 4 for dyslexia and all of year 7 for cognition to identify any memory or thinking issues pupils may have. Consequently, school understands the capabilities of its pupils well and uses this knowledge to support and adapt learning. There are three senior teaching assistants so some withdrawal or one to one support is possible. However, there are lots of learning conversations with staff about effective differentiation which, combined with small classes sizes, means pupils can be well known and supported in class by their teachers. Although there is no lift we were told that all specialist rooms can be accessed from the ground floor.

The arts and extracurricular

Music has its own well-equipped specialist facilities, with over 100 peripatetic music lessons each week in up to 20 different instruments. There are also specialist workshops from the likes of Jeff Rich (former Status Quo drummer). Plenty of opportunities to perform both in and out of school with lunch time concerts, house competitions and bands, the music tour to

Brussels and participation in the Eskdale festival. Great art teaching spaces with lots of high quality work on display. We saw year 9s completely absorbed in their work and a sixth former told us, 'You wouldn't believe the number of top grades they get in art.' All of year 7 participate in their play and there are productions throughout the school of shows such as Legally Blonde, Six, and Animal Farm. The assembly hall has raked seating and provides a good venue for drama although school has ambitious plans for a new theatre in the near future. Around 100 pupils take LAMDA exams each year.

Plenty of extracurricular activities, some of which are led by pupils and set up because they have been asked for. These include music theory and composition clinics, sustainability club, puzzles and games, pickle ball, coding and robotics, pilates and stocks and shares as well as surfing, of course. Good programme of outings and trips, both home and abroad, including ski trips to France and Italy, a Barcelona trip and activity weeks in the UK.

Sport

Time and again pupils and parents cited sport as the key factor in choosing Scarborough College. However, the college is about so much more than this and we didn't get the impression of a place where only the sporty can fit in. That said, there is a great deal going on here and the college's reputation is growing. One parent told us, 'Several of the schools well known for sport are having to sit up and take notice of the quality that is coming out of Scarborough.' Although the school doesn't have a massive site there some high-quality facilities including an all-weather hockey pitch, tennis courts and cricket nets, a multi-use games area and a spectacular professional standard running track (the gift of a parent). No swimming pool and the sports hall has definitely seen better days, but ambitious plans are afoot for increased playing areas and a new sports hall.

Cricket is something of a god here. There is a cricket centre of excellence and boys and girls can apply for cricket, rugby and hockey scholarships. 'I'm here because the cricket is so good,' one girl told us and many day pupils travel for the best part of four hours a day because of the college's growing national reputation for the sport. Pupils were quick to explain that it's not just sport for the elite, 'There's plenty of B teams so everyone gets a go at fixtures if they want.'

School is just a stone's throw from the beach which means pupils get plenty of opportunity to engage with real, as well as metaphorical, Yorkshire grit in the very popular surf academy. In fact most teachers we spotted on duty at lunch time seemed to be sporting dry robes and we suspect the head must have a surf board lurking somewhere in his study.

Boarders

Boarding here is a real success story. With an increase from just four to over 50 UK boarders in the last five years Scarborough is bucking the national trend. This generates income which helps to keep day fees competitive and consequently supports the overall growth of the school. Over 60 per cent of boarders are international with no one country dominating, although Germans are the biggest national group.

The boarding houses are beautiful. Four gorgeous arts and crafts family villas within a short walk of school, all very well decorated and maintained, they are a real home from home. All meals are taken in the main school dining hall and there are kitchens in the houses with plenty of snacks and opportunities to cook meals there as well. Pupils are allowed two take-aways a week.

No grim dorms here, three or four pupils in en-suite rooms, with a few singles available for sixth formers, games rooms, gardens, summer houses and lovely common rooms. This was amongst the most comfortable and homely boarding we have seen and it's pretty much full. So much so that school is currently planning a fifth house solely to meet the demand for flexi boarding.

Many of the houseparents are teaching staff or hold additional roles within school such as librarian and head of marketing, they run a very extensive programme of weekend activities which adds to the popularity of boarding.

Year 10 upwards can go into Scarborough in groups of two or more while younger pupils must be accompanied by a responsible year 11.

Pupils love boarding, 'There's so much to do at weekends and it's sometimes hard to miss home.' Parents told us, 'We really didn't anticipate how well school would nurture our boys both academically and in boarding. There's such good role modelling from the house parents, and they involve us in just the right ways.'

Ethos and heritage

Founded as a boys boarding school in 1896 the college has survived three evacuations (two world wars and a fire). Girls were admitted in 1972. The junior school was opened on site in 2000 following a merger with a local prep school with a second prep school merger in 2012 leaving the College as the sole independent school in the town and surrounding area. There is an illustrious array of alumnae including: actors Charles Laughton, Ian Carmichael and James Norton, cricketers Simon Dennis, David Byas, Jack Carney, and Matthew Firbank, science fiction author Phillip Mann and British equestrian rider Charlotte Cundall.

Pastoral care, inclusivity and discipline

From the head down this is a school where we saw a lot of evidence that every child is known and cared for personally. In fact from some of the conversations we had it seemed that there is a similar level of personally tailored care for staff. Form tutors and heads of year are supplemented by a full-time school counsellor and three nurses.

Pupils told us that behaviour is generally good with little in the way of serious bullying. There is the opportunity to report concerns anonymously if needed through 'safe speak' on the chrome books. There is an equality, diversity and inclusion group and black history month was being celebrated as we visited. Despite the large international contingent we didn't feel that the college is especially ethnically diverse, although there is a strong sense that everyone is included. 'It's totally ok to be different here,' pupils told us.

Lunches are included in fees and there is no opting out, 'We all eat together the head told us.' Pupils said they would like the opportunity to bring a packed lunch. All diets are catered for and there is a sixth form cafe which doubles as an informal study area. There are lockers for some year groups and bag stores for others.

Pupils and parents

As well as the international cohort and Scarborough based children, others travel from far and wide from North and East Yorkshire to reach the college, often by-passing other prestigious schools to get here. Extensive bus network serves towns such as Driffield, Malton and Whitby. Parents are a diverse group, many international of course but lots from more local farming and professional backgrounds as well. Interestingly, at the time of our visit there were 46 pupils (nearly 8 per cent) with parents working in the school, quite a vote of confidence. Parents were uniformly positive. They told us, 'Our kids have been nurtured to be curious and to give everything a go.'

Money matters

Ten means-tested Scarborough scholarships available each year for local pupils in the following categories: academic, all-rounder, performing arts and sports, plus two for pupils continuing from year 11 to sixth form.

The last word

Scarborough College is something of a hidden (now emerging) gem. It offers a good academic education, very strong pastoral care and cracking sporting and extracurricular opportunities which really seem to be open to everyone, regardless of ability. Add in the individuality of a broad and relatively inclusive IB programme, super boarding and the opportunity to throw yourself into the North Sea on a daily basis, there's a great deal to like here. Lots of Yorkshire grit creating something of an educational pearl.