



EPSOM
COLLEGE

Good Schools Guide Review

“

A high-achieving, big-hearted and increasingly sought-after school at the top of its game. Pupils are fun, thoughtful and very good company. ‘So many schools say they are all-rounders but this place really is,’ said a parent. ‘I wouldn’t send my child anywhere else.’

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THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

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THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

The Good Schools Guide is the UK's number one school guide, helping parents in every aspect of choosing the best education for their children.

Trusted by parents for 35 years, our guides include impartial and candid school reviews as well as in-depth articles on education-related issues. Our reviews are available in print, online to subscribers or through The Good Schools Guide's expert consultants.

Uniquely, each school is selected on merit alone. No one can buy their way into The Good Schools Guide's good books. And from famous names to local treasures, our writers visit every single school, interview the head, speak to pupils and parents, analyse academic performance and challenge the marketing hype. Result? The fearsomely frank and funny reviews for which we are famous.

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The Good Schools Guide is independent, forthright, well-informed and unbiased, which gives it unique authority and has earned the trust of parents and educational organisations worldwide.



The Head

“Under his leadership, Epsom is a school that’s ‘comfortable in its own skin’ and achieving excellent results. His approach is clearly working. The school is full, no mean feat these days, and achieved its best results to date in 2025.”

What The Good Schools Guide Says

Since 2024, Mark Lascelles, previously head at Dauntsey’s for 12 years and before that lower master and acting head at The King’s School, Canterbury. Educated at the Dragon, Shrewsbury School and Durham University, where he read geography ‘and played a lot of sport’. He stayed on at Durham for his PGCE, doing teaching practice in the state sector in South Tyneside. After considering a career in banking he switched direction when his former housemaster asked him to coach sport for two terms at Shrewsbury. He ended up staying for 17 years, teaching geography, taking charge of football, cricket and fives and becoming a housemaster.

‘I was unbelievably happy at Dauntsey’s but the opportunity to lead Epsom was too tempting to pass up,’ he says. ‘People can stay too long in a job and I just knew that this was the right time.’ He took the helm after Sir Anthony Seldon’s year-long stewardship following the tragic death of former head Emma Pattison. Parents told us that he was exactly the right man for the job and praised his empathy and sensitivity. Under his leadership, Epsom is a school that’s ‘comfortable in its own skin’

and achieving excellent results. ‘It’s an exciting place, very driven and with great staff – but we can’t rest on our laurels,’ he says. While he never wants to lose the school’s drive and ambition he admits he’d like ‘to soften the culture slightly’ rather than it being ‘push, push, push’.

He’s made his mark in a short space of time, cutting the size of the senior leadership team and making sure that it is gender-balanced, shortening the school day by 30 minutes, emphasising his commitment to Saturday school and keeping his door open. He’s a very visible head (pupils corroborated this) and prefers to be out of his office as much as possible. He goes to every concert, every play and as many matches as he can manage. ‘I’m a very old-fashioned head,’ he says. ‘I’m not retreating upstairs to be a chief executive. I want to be on the ground here.’ His approach is clearly working. The school is full, no mean feat these days, and achieved its best results to date in 2025. He’s a firm believer in ‘trusting your instincts’ and reassuringly tells prospective parents that when they find the right school for their children they’ll just know. ‘It’s a gut reaction,’ he says.



Despite the school's size he makes a huge effort to learn pupils' names, poring over an app at the start of every year. 'He's a breath of fresh air,' said one of them. 'He's very charismatic and funny. We all really respect him.' Parents are right behind him too. 'He's doing a very good job holding steady a ship that was already in good shape,' said one. Another told us: 'He's very normal and down to earth. If you ask him a straight question he gives you a straight answer. The kids like him.' He seems to take most things in his stride – on the day we met he'd flown in at dawn from the launch of Epsom College Tokyo and was straight back to work.

He and his wife Amber, a former national level canoeist who is head of geography at nearby Sutton High School GDST, have three daughters, the younger two at Epsom and the eldest studying Spanish and German at the University of Exeter. They have a house in Cornwall and spend the summer there. In his spare time (not that there is much of that in term-time) he plays padel and ferries his daughters to hockey matches. A dedicated sportsman himself, he enjoys watching sport and umpiring and plans to do some cricket coaching at Epsom soon. Earlier on in his career he played cricket for the Middlesex under-19 team and football for Crook Town in the north east and also for the English universities team.



“Epsom looks for well-rounded pupils who are academically able and have several strings to their bow. Increasingly sought after, the school recruits from more than 40 preps and state primaries.”

Entrance

Epsom looks for well-rounded pupils who are academically able and have several strings to their bow. Increasingly sought-after in recent years, the school recruits from more than 40 preps and state primaries, including Danes Hill, Prospect House, Rokeby, Feltonfleet, Aberdour and Shrewsbury House. Around 30 per cent come from state primaries.

At 11+ (day only), between 110 and 120 pupils join. At 13+ (day and boarding), there's an intake of 70 to 80. Entry at 11+ and 13+ is via ISEB tests in maths, English, VR and NVR in year 6. Applicants also attend an engagement day at the school, taking part

in a range of academic activities – everything from STEM to debating. ‘Essentially, we’re working out which pupils will be a good fit with the college and with each other,’ says the school. There’s occasionally space for late applications but the school advises parents to visit in year 5 and apply in year 6. ‘We dive into our waiting list on occasion so it’s always worth talking to us,’ say staff.

Increasing competition for the sixth form, when 40 join from other schools. Applicants need a grade 6.5 average across all GCSEs, with at least 7s in their chosen A level subjects (at least 8s in maths, sciences and modern foreign languages).

Exit

Very few leave after GCSEs – anything between none and 10, usually due to relocation or finances. The school feels it has a moral obligation to take pupils all the way through and works hard to find ‘a pathway that works for everyone’. At 18 the vast majority head to university, 70 per cent to

the Russell Group. Durham, UCL, Bath, Exeter and Nottingham popular. Four to Oxbridge and six medics/vets/dentists in 2025; fewer than usual went overseas but US destinations included Harvard, Northeastern, Oregon (with a golf scholarship) and Georgetown.

Latest Results

In 2025, 86 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 62 per cent A*/A at A level (91 per cent A*-B).

“When we popped into classes we were struck by the pupils’ focus – everyone was keen to talk about what they were doing. ‘They’ve created an atmosphere where children want to work and get good results,’ said a parent.”

Teaching and Learning

Twenty-four subjects on offer at A level, as well as business and sport BTECs. Maths and economics are the most popular choices, with art, computer science, languages, maths, further maths and photography the star performers recently. More than a quarter of sixth formers do an EPQ. Most pupils take 10 GCSEs – results in the sciences, languages, history, geography, PE, drama and DT notably good. Year 7s do a carousel of French, Spanish and German then continue with two languages till they make their GCSE choices. Most take a language at GCSE but tiny numbers were taking A level languages when we visited – four doing Spanish, four French and two German, admittedly a nationwide trend.

The school is consistently good when it comes to value added (it’s in the top three per cent in the country). Subtle testing every three weeks but the head wonders whether there’s a tendency for the school to over-test. When we popped into classes we were struck by the pupils’ focus (they were just coming up to their three-weekly assessments – ‘low stakes tests to help them establish their study habits,’ says the deputy head academic). Everyone was keen to talk about what they were doing – geographers learning about infectious diseases, politics students studying the US Supreme Court and lower school drama pupils embarking on a project to design and make their own puppets, then devise their own show. ‘They’ve created an atmosphere where children want to work and get good results,’ said a parent.

The purpose-built lower school is the ideal stepping stone between primary or prep school and ‘big school’. ‘It really helps the transition,’ said a pupil, while a parent told us: ‘It’s a less overwhelming environment for a new 11-year-old.’ Year 7 and 8s do most lessons in their own space but head to senior school classrooms, studios and labs for science and languages. Class sizes of up to 24 until GCSE and 10 to 14 at A level, though sometimes smaller. Setting for maths from year 8 and the sciences from year 10 (the majority take triple science at GCSE). Subject specialists run clinics at lunchtimes or after school – open door hours where students can drop in and ask for help. There’s also a student tutoring programme, where younger pupils can get help from older peers.

Staff CPD is important – teachers are encouraged to observe colleagues and share best practice. A member of staff is helping to train students about AI, eg when it is appropriate to use it and when it isn’t, while the head of middle school (years 9 to 11) runs a digital life hacks course, teaching pupils how to ask questions in the right way and get useful answers. High praise for head of careers for his support with university choices and careers options. He sends out a regular email, packed with details of talks, seminars, podcasts, articles and MOOCs, and students can book slots to discuss their futures with him. ‘He’s a legend,’ said an appreciative year 13. ‘There’s so much help available.’





“The parent of a sixth form joiner told us that the transition to Epsom in year 12 was easy. ‘Unlike other environments, particularly the single sex schools around us, which are very outcomes and exams focused, it feels like a more rounded environment,’ she said. ‘It’s very academically rigorous but there isn’t that hothouse pressure.’”

Sixth Form

Sixth formers study in their rooms, the library or The Mermaid, a striking new building with a 190-seater lecture theatre, seminar rooms, discussion pods, study area, café (sixth formers can eat lunch there) and gallery. Head boy and head girl chosen each term in year 13, plus a raft of prefects – easy to spot in a crowd because they all wear jaunty striped waistcoats. Sixth formers get a few new privileges; they wear business suits, are allowed mobile phones (but not during the school day) and day pupils can drive to school once they have passed their tests. The parent of a sixth form joiner told us that the transition to Epsom in year 12 was easy. ‘Unlike other environments, particularly the single sex schools around us, which are very outcomes and exams focused, it feels like a more rounded environment,’ she said. ‘It’s very academically rigorous but there isn’t that hothouse pressure.’



Learning Support and SEN

Learning needs are at the milder end – mainly dyslexia and ADHD but also mild ASD, hearing impairment and visual impairment. At the time of our visit 23 per cent of pupils had identified learning needs. The head of academic support and three dyslexia specialists see between 75 and 80 pupils for weekly one-to-one support, offering help with essay writing, revision skills, study habits and how to improve working memory. Two teaching assistants support pupils in class. ‘It’s very student led,’ says the head of academic support. ‘We never say “this is what you’re going to be doing today”. They tell

us what they want to be doing, which works very well.’ SEMH needs are looked after by the pastoral care team. The academic support department is in the heart of the school and well resourced, with six designated classrooms. Pupils who can manage the full curriculum see the team at lunchtime, during activities or after school but those needing more support can drop a non-core subject and have one academic support lesson a week plus two supervised study periods (with the agreement of their housemaster or housemistress and deputy head academic).

“‘There’s an abundance of opportunities here,’ a sixth former told us. ‘There’s so much to do.’ Music, drama and art have a far stronger presence than in years gone by. On the day of our visit pupils were preparing for a jazz concert, staged in the style of a French jazz café.”

The Arts and Extracurricular

‘There’s an abundance of opportunities here,’ a sixth former told us. ‘There’s so much to do.’ Music, drama and art have a far stronger presence than in years gone by. Twenty-five per cent of pupils have instrumental lessons in school (up to 20 per cent have lessons out of school) and there’s class music for years 7 to 9. On the day of our visit pupils were preparing for a jazz concert, staged in the style of a French jazz café. Lots of choirs, orchestras, ensembles and bands covering all genres and a host of events throughout the year. The eagerly anticipated choral competition attracts an audience of 2,000, with houses competing in unison, part-song and solo categories. ‘There are always one or two soloists who make me cry,’ a member of the music department confided. Pupils stage four big drama productions a year – everything from *Les Misérables* to *The Comedy of Errors*. ‘I was very shy in year 7 but drama really builds your confidence here,’ said a sixth former.

Art is stunning, housed in its own building, with five light, airy studios and a bust of artist John Piper, an Epsom alumnus, in the entrance. When we visited, each house was working on a Remembrance project, creating a piece of art to commemorate the Epsom boys who lost their lives during the First World War. The four members of the art department are all practising artists. Up to 38 pupils take art GCSE each year, while around 15 do A level, some heading to universities like Bath, Manchester and the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL.

Clubs and activities aplenty – more than 150 at the last count – including DofE, CCF (one of the oldest and biggest in the country), Model United Nations and STEM Club, which competes in the annual UK Rocketry competition. Pupils are encouraged to take on leadership roles from year 10, working alongside younger pupils and leading the plethora of academic societies. We met one boy who had launched his own podcast with a friend, interviewing high profile names like Vince Cable, Iain Dale and Anthony Scaramucci. Impressive stuff.



“The school’s rugby, hockey, cricket and squash teams have all won national titles in recent years. Facilities are top-notch... Many of the academic staff coach sport too – an economics teacher used to play professional cricket for South Africa.”



Sport



Huge focus on sport, but Epsom's multiple successes are worn remarkably lightly. Lots of silverware on display and the school's rugby, hockey, cricket and squash teams have all won national titles in recent years. Facilities are top notch, including a 25m pool, 33 tennis courts, 15 rugby and football pitches, six cricket squares, two Astroturfs, two sports halls, two climbing walls, a golf driving range, a vast fitness studio and an athletics track.

More than 20 sports on offer and on any given Saturday Epsom puts out 72 teams across the year groups, enabling around 96 per cent of pupils to represent the school. The focus isn't solely on the first teams either – 'Playing in the third under-18 cricket team was some of the best fun I've ever had,' one boy told us. Years 7 to 11 have two games sessions a week but they can play more sport during activities. Sport is compulsory in the sixth form but less sporty types can choose options like gym, dance, spin classes and rock climbing if they prefer. Many of the academic staff coach sport too – an economics teacher used to play professional cricket for South Africa.



“Thirteen single-sex houses in total – eight day and five boarding, all a few minutes’ walk from lessons and all with their own housemasters or housemistresses, deputies, matrons and tutors. Houses are divided into vertical families or clans, encouraging year groups to mix with each other. ‘It’s nice to bond with the younger years,’ a sixth former told us. Matrons keep a weather eye on everyone, stepping in to chat when pupils need a sympathetic ear. ‘The house wouldn’t function without her,’ said an appreciative boarder.”

Boarders

No boarding in years 7 and 8 but a quarter of pupils board in years 9 to 13. Of the 307 boarders at the time of our visit a third were full boarders, two-thirds weekly. A third of boarders are international pupils from countries like the US, Hong Kong, China, Nigeria, Russia, Bulgaria, Belgium and France. Thirteen single-sex houses in total – eight day and five boarding, all a few minutes’ walk from lessons and all with their own housemasters or housemistresses, deputies, matrons and tutors. No flexi boarding.

We visited Wilson, a girls’ boarding house with a bright, stylish kitchen, common room and wholesome rooms – four to a room in the younger years, two to a room in year 12 and lucky year 13s get their own rooms. Lots of diffusers so the place smelled delightful. Holman, the boys’ house we saw, is equipped with squashy leather sofas, pool tables, a PS4 and table football in the vast common room. Boarding houses are divided into vertical families

or clans, encouraging year groups to mix with each other. ‘It’s nice to bond with the younger years,’ a sixth former told us.

Plenty to do at weekends for full boarders although one said the weeks are so full-on that he welcomes time to relax. Weekend activities range from trips to Thorpe Park, Westfield and the London sights to movie nights, bowling and cooking huge quantities of pasta. ‘You can never feed a growing boy too much,’ laughed a boarder. The school uses an app called Reach, enabling pupils wishing to go into town to submit requests to their parents and housemaster or housemistress, which then have to be approved. ‘It means the school knows where you are at all times,’ said one pupil. House matrons keep a weather eye on everyone, stepping in to chat when pupils need a sympathetic ear. ‘The house wouldn’t function without her,’ said an appreciative boarder.



“The school campus is stunning – 72 acres of well-tended, lush parkland a mile or so from the centre of Epsom.

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‘You’re in the countryside but inside the M25.’”

Ethos and Heritage

Founded in 1851 by Dr John Propert, who wanted to establish a school to help bereaved medical families. It started life as The Royal Medical Benevolent College (it was opened by Prince Albert, with Queen Victoria as patron) but changed its name to Epsom College in 1910. The school was boys only for the first 120 years but went co-ed in the sixth form in 1976, then admitted girls throughout in 1996. These days it's 48:52 boys/girls in years 7 and 8 and 54:46 boys/girls in years 9 to 13.

The school campus is stunning – 72 acres of well-tended, lush parkland a mile or so from the centre of Epsom. ‘My kids are so happy here,’ a parent told us. ‘You’re in the countryside but inside the M25.’ Most buildings were completed between the 1850s and 1920s, with modern extensions and a beautiful grade 2 listed chapel in the centre. Senior school assemblies



in the chapel on Wednesdays and Saturdays and lower school assembly on Fridays. Everyone we spoke to waxed lyrical about the school's sense of community and family atmosphere. ‘It's not a posh school,’ said one. ‘There's a huge variety of backgrounds. Some kids turn up in flash trainers on mufti days but it's not encouraged.’ ‘When you drive in it looks very grand but it really isn't,’ a prefect told us. Pupils are encouraged to help out in the local community and give more than 8,500 hours of service to those in need every year, volunteering in primary schools, tending gardens for the elderly and working at a local foodbank.





“Well-structured pastoral care so pupils know exactly who to turn to. ‘We make sure that nobody is missed,’ says the deputy head pastoral. A parent whose child experienced a problem outside school said, ‘The way they handled it was something I’ll always be grateful for.’”

Pastoral Care, Inclusivity and Discipline

Well-structured pastoral care so pupils know exactly who to turn to – housemasters and housemistresses, heads of year, heads of section (lower school, middle school and sixth form), matrons, tutors, the chaplain and the pastoral team. Form tutors see pupils daily, monitoring their wellbeing as well as their academic progress. ‘We make sure that nobody is missed,’ says the deputy head pastoral. A parent whose child experienced a problem outside school said, ‘The way they handled it was something I’ll always be grateful for.’ Help is also on hand at the medical centre, staffed 24/7 during term-time. Two externally trained counsellors offer confidential support.

Personal and social development (PSD) lessons for all, covering age-appropriate issues – everything from mindfulness to digital safety. The school day is long – but not as long as it used to be. It’s recently been shortened by 30 minutes and now finishes at 5.30pm. ‘They pack a lot in so I’d say the school suits all-rounders with energy,’ said a parent. Most pupils we spoke to didn’t mind Saturday school – ‘it means the week isn’t as frenetic as some London schools and we get time for activities,’ said a sixth former.

Each house has an EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) rep to ensure that the voice of every pupil is heard and acted on. The school holds a variety of activities to mark Pride Month each year, with curated book displays in the library, discussion prompts and wristbands, glitter tattoos and ribbons sold in support of Just Like Us, a UK charity that supports LGBTQ+ young people.



The chaplain, who also teaches philosophy and religion, is an integral part of the school, a larger-than-life figure who helped to guide the community following Emma Pattison’s death in 2023. ‘It was the only time that I went down the aisle [in chapel] not being able to look people in the eye because I knew I would break down,’ he says. ‘What was so lovely was how the community supported each other. I had so many youngsters saying to me “Are you all right? You’re looking out for us and we are looking out for you.”’ His words were backed up by a sixth former. ‘There is no handbook for coping with something like that but the school handled it impeccably,’ he said.

“So many schools say they are all-rounders but this place really is,’ said a parent. ‘I wouldn’t send my child anywhere else.’”

Pupils and Parents

Increasingly popular with south London families, with bus routes from as far afield as Barnes, Clapham Common, Putney and Richmond to the north plus Guildford, Horley and Oxted to the south. ‘We review the buses every year and where there is demand we put on a bus,’ says the Director of Admissions. There’s also a shuttle bus to and from Epsom station.

Notable alumni include film star Stewart Granger, artists John Piper and Graham Sutherland, historian Suzannah Lipscomb and broadcasters Mark Mardell and Jeremy Vine as well as countless doctors.

Money Matters

Annual bursary spend of £2m, with around 76 families benefiting each year. More than half of these receive support of 75 per cent of fees (some up to 100 per cent). Scholarships for academic, sports, music and the performing arts available at 11+, 13+

and 16+, plus a new fine art scholarship for sixth formers. A sister school opened in Kuala Lumpur in 2014 and a second will open in Tokyo in 2027, with profits ploughed back into widening access at the UK school.

The Last Word

A high-achieving, big-hearted and increasingly sought-after school at the top of its game. Pupils are fun, thoughtful and very good company.
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COLLEGE ROAD, EPSOM, SURREY, KT17 4JQ 01372 821000
ADMISSION ENQUIRIES: 01372 821234 ADMISSIONS@EPSOMCOLLEGE.ORG.UK
EPSOMCOLLEGE.ORG.UK