

FROM THE HEADTEACHERS STUDY...

NEIL WALKER

Westfield School

What was your background prior to joining Westfield School?

I have taught science in schools for nearly thirty years, for the last twenty in girls' schools. Before Westfield, I was Senior Deputy Head in a girls' school in Buckinghamshire and before that I spent 15 years in Croydon and Surrey.

I love the outdoors, I spend a lot of my spare time camping and walking. Within schools, I have run many Duke of Edinburgh expeditions and I enjoy seeing the transformative effect these experiences can have on a young person's life.

What do you feel have been your major achievements at the school?

After just four terms I think that my work is only starting to have an impact.

Redevelopment, building for our future:

Most visibly we have planned, designed and started to build a new suite of science laboratories. Once these open in the summer, we will be refurbishing some older classrooms to create a wonderful Art and Technology suite with new Maths classrooms next to the new development to create a fully integrated STEAM (Science, Technology, Art, and Maths) centre.

After this, our current labs will be gutted and refitted as a purpose-built Junior facility to bring all parts of the school closer together.

Increasing our delivery of 'teaching that makes a difference'

We have increased the focus on evidence based learning and teaching, we are already seeing a positive impact of this approach on the workloads of staff and girls while achieving better outcomes.

Our Girls, Our Community

Over the last year we have tightened our focus on preparing our girls for future employment by having over 30 external companies coming in to share careers advice. We have increased the number of local primary schools attending our outreach days as well.

I believe that these changes are being noticed as we have increased numbers of visitors and applicants to Westfield.

Can you explain what Round Square means for those who don't know?

Round Square is an international group of schools who share a similar philosophy. This is based around six concepts: Internationalism, Democracy, the Environment, Adventure, Leadership and Service. We ensure that our activities and our offering enable all girls to experience these six areas and learn to be leaders for the future with an international outlook. It is a big expectation but we are very proud that our alumna really embody these six IDEALS.

In practical terms, it means that our girls from KS2 upwards go on a variety of experiences. These range from residential trips, international conferences and volunteering activities.

Can you highlight some key student accomplishments over the past 12 months?

Success takes many forms, some make great headlines while others are more individual and personal. Academically, we celebrated 100% of our girls achieving 5 or more GCSEs grades 9-4 and well over half of our A-level

results being A*-B grades but all our girls did extremely well for them giving wonderful value-added scores.

We also have sporting stars with girls in national development or age group squads in sailing, gymnastics and golf plus many representing their county in sports as varied as bowls, squash, hockey and football.

Building new business skills and leaders of the future

We are building a strong local reputation for entrepreneurship with our Young Enterprise teams being some of the most successful in the region. This year's company, SEAcclaimed, has really captured the zeitgeist with its concentration on re-using plastics from the sea to create its products.

What positive changes have you seen in education generally, and what changes would you like to see going forward?

I have seen a real improvement in the overall standard of education nationally. There have always been some very good schools but now almost all schools are achieving better results for their pupils. Teaching has become a much more reflective, evidence driven profession and this is giving so many more pupils the opportunity of a great start in life.

Unfortunately, there is often an over-reliance on data, tests and inspections, too many schools teach to the test and our children are now the most examined in Europe. With so many cut-backs, many schools cannot afford to give a broad and balanced education to their pupils. I believe that the freedoms that independent schools enjoy allow more opportunities for pupils to experience learning for learning's sake and to gain a much broader spectrum of opportunities.

With the increase in pressure of the education system I welcome a greater emphasis on the needs of the child. There is a much higher awareness of the importance of positive mental health and developing strategies for prevention of issues.

How much emphasis do you place on extra-curricular activities?

As a non-selective school we pride ourselves on developing individuals. Everyone is good at something and, at Westfield, we provide many opportunities to discover what that something is.

Clearly, we support our academic girls who go off to study medicine or engineering but we also celebrate the girls who are incredibly creative and follow their passions in art studios or the theatre/film and the girls who are the entrepreneurs for the future and are running their own businesses while at school or intend to in the future. We encourage a wide range of physical activities so everyone can find something active they enjoy and we insist that all girls attend a range of extra-curricular activities through the week as we believe in developing a well-rounded character.

Where do you see yourself and the school in five years' time?

In five years' time I expect that Westfield will have continued on its current trajectory of managed growth. I believe that our reputation will be such that we will be the first choice locally for girls who want a broad education to go alongside academic success.

We will maintain our key delineator of individual attention bringing out the best in all our girls meaning that we can achieve greater success for everyone.



Neil Walker