



The Bedales Difference

Bedales comprises three co-educational boarding and day schools located in 120 acres of South Downs National Park in Hampshire: Bedales Pre-prep, Dunannie for Nursery – 8 years; Bedales Prep, Dunhurst for 8–13 years and Bedales Senior for 13–18 years.



In search of a better education

Learning to live in a changing world

Bedales was founded by John Badley in 1893 as a humane alternative to the authoritarian regimes typical of late-Victorian public schools.

The school became fully co-educational in 1898, against the prevailing trend. This breadth of vision and willingness to buck convention continues undiminished, as we shape our work to meet the challenges of the day.

The world young people enter at 18 can be turbulent, complex and demanding. We work together to ensure that every student leaves us having discovered their own talents, passions and identities, with a powerful sense of responsibility to others. Life at Bedales is lived both for its own sake – pupils enjoy coming to school – and in anticipation of that to come.

We remain progressively liberal in our approach, not for the sake of being different, but because we believe it is important for a properly rounded and relevant education.

1893

John Badley, aged 28, opens Bedales in Lindfield, Sussex, emphasising breadth (“head, hand, heart”) and intellectual and personal qualities.

Anticipating adult life

A climate of openness and respect

At Bedales, there is no uniform, and staff and pupils address each other by first names – just two features of a culture that values the individual, with mutual respect its cornerstone.

If there is no good reason to constrain pupils in their choices, then we don't. In fact, we involve them in forging the framework within which the community lives, learns and grows.

Bedales gives young people the confidence and space to play with ideas, with the individual's obligations to others an essential part of this contract.

1897

The 'Work of Each for Weal of All' library bookplate with the bee and rose is created, and used on the prospectus.

1898

The first girls are admitted to Bedales.

Building relationships

Shared identity, skills for life

Respect is not something to be assumed because of status, but something that everyone deserves by being part of the school community.

At the end of the school day, Dunannie children shake hands with their teachers. This continues through the Prep and Senior schools after assemblies or talks when all pupils shake hands with all staff. This isn't about formality; rather, it reaffirms our relationships with each other and the school. And, of course, a familiarity with such social conventions has a great currency in the world beyond the school gates.

Pupils quickly develop strong bonds and working relationships with their teachers and peers, working together to create the community and ethos of the school. These relationships last a lifetime, witnessed when our alumni – Old Bedalians – re-connect with such enthusiasm and affection with their former teachers and school friends.

1900

Bedales moves to Steep, Petersfield.

1902

Preparatory School starts at Hillcroft in Steep.

A progressive, liberal education

A progressive education offers a broad curriculum, and rejects mechanistic learning in favour of a focus on the needs and capabilities of the individual pupil. Such an approach values informality, and activities and settings that extend beyond the classroom.

In tandem, a liberal education exposes pupils to a broad range of intellectual skills and content, and prioritises critical thinking and problem-solving over content acquisition. The idea is to provide the knowledge and critical faculty required by a free person participating fully in society.

Academic excellence and creativity

We became dissatisfied with GCSEs, believing they had become narrow, dull and unfit for purpose.

Instead, we developed our own ambitious qualification programme – Bedales Assessed Courses (BACs) – to complement a core IGCSE programme of Maths, English, Sciences and Modern Languages. Designed by Bedales teachers, externally moderated and recognised by universities, BACs give students a say over what books they study, mainly involve coursework as opposed to exams, and focus on outdoors, Arts and Humanities subjects.

Our approach encourages inquiry, creative thinking and independent learning – vital requirements for further education and beyond. We start developing these skills early with our youngest children as they progress through our Prep and Pre-prep schools. Our pupils can enjoy – and be inspired by – a much more expansive curriculum as we are not stifled by the Common Entrance syllabus, which we feel is ineffective in educating young people.

1919

Montessori classroom is introduced at Dunhurst, and school receives a visit from Maria Montessori herself.

1943

Public recognition of Bedales music came when the BBC broadcast a school programme “to the whole Empire”.

Independent thinkers

Freedom breeds insight

A liberal education prioritises the individual and free expression. That doesn't mean 'anything goes', but it does encourage pupils to explore, contribute, consider alternative views, listen to others, and develop their own thinking and reasoning.

We believe that hard rules breed only obedience and disobedience, whilst freedom breeds insight – especially important in a world that is becoming less deferential and hierarchical, and with a greater emphasis on interaction and collaboration.

1953

Dunannie opens in October, with Sophy Tatchell as Head.

1966

The inaugural Science Eckersley lecture, in memory of Thomas and Peter Eckersley, takes place.

Educating the whole person

Fulfilled people, active citizens

We encourage our pupils to understand not only their subjects, but humanity and their place in the world, from as many different perspectives and experiences as possible.

A Bedales education is shaped by the individual. Our job is to help our pupils to work out where they want to go, and then to get there. When they leave us, we want them to feel comfortable in their own skins, to know their own minds, and to have found their voices. We also want them to have a sophisticated sense of the situations and needs of others, and the moral purpose and skills to act upon it.

1985

The well-established tradition of Whole School Efforts begins, with the creation of the pond by the Sotherington Barn.

2006

Bedales Assessed Courses are introduced as a more interesting and challenging alternative to GCSEs.

“The Bedales ethos is independent learning within an inter-dependent community. It’s about developing your personal skills, talents and love of a subject, and using that to find your place within the community and contributing towards it.”

Old Bedalian



bedales.org.uk