

PUPIL PERSPECTIVE

Bedales Prep School, Dunhurst, Hampshire

When Colin Baty wanted to understand school life as experienced by his pupils, he simply became one of them!

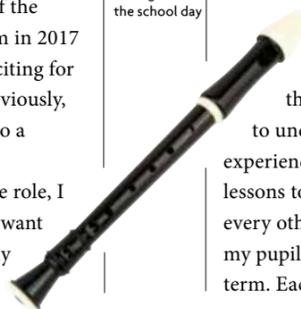
To learn that I was to be the next Head of Bedales Prep School, Dunhurst, for the beginning of the autumn term in 2017 was very exciting for me. I had taught at Dunhurst previously, and I knew that I was returning to a special responsibility.

When I was interviewed for the role, I discovered that the school didn't want a Head who was content to simply occupy their office, and that

Right, from classwork to music lessons, pupils at Bedales are kept busy throughout the school day

was more than fine by me. I like to be part of what is going on, and to encourage an expectation among staff and pupils that I will be present and curious about what they are doing.

One of my first priorities was to acquaint myself with the culture of the school, and to try to understand the school day as experienced by our children – from the lessons to the break times, and indeed every other detail. So, I decided to shadow my pupils every Monday for a whole half term. Each week I would join a different



Right, children who attend Dunhurst get study periods to complete independent work



year group and be one of the pupils, attending all their classes, enjoying break times and everything else that they did.

A caring community

I came away with various impressions. The first was that the demands on the children are significant, and they get a lot out of it. At the end of each day I was completely exhausted. On any particular day, I might find myself hurrying from classwork, to PE, to outdoor work, to drama or music.

I also found that our pupils are incredibly kind, thoughtful and accommodating. Nothing was too much trouble for them when it came to making sure that I knew where I was going next. I am not entirely surprised, of course; at Bedales we invest a great deal in the idea that we are a community and that we look out for each other. Nonetheless, I can think of other educational contexts in which the sudden appearance of the Head in the classroom would have met with a different response!

Next, I was struck by how incredibly receptive our pupils are to learning, and how able and willing they are to concentrate. And what an extraordinary learning environment I found in our classes at Dunhurst. I have seen enough “chalk and talk” to last me a lifetime, but there was very little of that here.

Rather, the lessons are varied and fun, and the ways in which our teachers involve pupils is exemplary. I like to think that I'm a good teacher, but I came away from my pupil-shadowing experience in no doubt that I have plenty to learn from members of our staff. I also picked up plenty from my fellow pupils, who were generous in sharing their brilliant ideas.

Right, pupils learn a number of disciplines. Above right, new Head of Bedales Prep, Dunhurst, Colin Baty



Changes for the better

Although I knew the children and was more than familiar with the curriculum, prior to my shadowing exercise, I was a stranger when it came to the minute-by-minute experience of being at school.

I am pleased to report that any newcomer can expect to be very well looked after by both school and pupils.

But we can always do more, and we're currently in the process of implementing a few tweaks.

One is around the transitions between classes – we need to make it easier for our pupils to switch from one to another, and I am struck that I would never have



identified this as a priority had I not spent time wrestling with the challenges myself.

I'm delighted that the school that I lead is one that I would like to have attended as a child. The experience has been as instructive as it has been fun, and I'm going to do it again. Now that I think about it, I'd rather like to do it every day! ♥

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Left, pupils participate in overnight camping at Dunhurst