

View on

Leicester Grammar School Trust

Head

Since 2001, Christopher King (late 50s). Read Geography at Durham, returning to do a masters 18 years later. Started work at Wessex Water Authority as a planner. Very ambitious, realised would not get far in water so turned to teaching. Rose through the ranks via Rendcomb College and Kimbolton and was head at Leicester within 12 years. Will be chair of the HMC in 2015, unusual post for head of a relatively new school. A dedicated and popular head, he can be found on the touchline at most fixtures and is always present at parents' evenings and concerts. Teaches year 7s on rotation and knows all the children by name. 'I wouldn't want the school to be any bigger as I know every child and write reports for each one. That could change if numbers increased and it would spoil the school.' An all round sportsman, rugby and cricket feature highly on his CV, but musical too. Recently climbed Mt Kilimanjaro with his three adult sons.

'Friendly and approachable with a very high presence around the school' is one parent's description. Another mentioned he was 'slightly crumpled but very welcoming.' Can't say we agree, very well turned out the day we were there. Most parents hadn't had many dealings with him but all spoke highly of him and had great respect for him. A parent who had closer contact described him as 'going the extra mile to make sure my children were happy and settled.'

An ambitious man with big ambitions for his school. When appointed, LGS was located in the city centre. 'We had outgrown the premises and had no sports facilities, so a decision had to be made. Did I make the school more exclusive academically or do something more radical? In 2002 I proposed to the board that we move the whole school to an out of town site. It took four years to find the site, get permission and raise funds, but we started building on a 75 acre site in February 2007 and moved in for the beginning of term in September 2008. It costs us £33 million and was officially opened by the Queen and Prince Phillip.' And he's not standing still. Another £4 million expansion under way to provide more labs, better sixth form facilities and a larger headmaster's office. 'I wanted to create a school that is not only the best academically but thrives in sports, music and drama as well.' Until recently, the fastest growing independent school in the country.

Academic Matters

This lot are high achievers. In 2014, 77 per cent A*/A at GCSE and 60 per cent A/A* at A level, 84 per cent A*-B. Most pupils take 10 or more GCSEs. Chemistry is compulsory - most do all three sciences - as is one language. French, German, Spanish, Latin or Greek are the choices. DT well supported. Caterham provides a kit car to build each year. Last year's was driven round the grounds by the head. Twenty-four subjects offered in sixth form, mainly traditional academic ones, no 'soft' ones. Maths, further maths and the sciences are what this school is about. 'The children are stretched but not to breaking point,' said one parent. Another parent wasn't quite so happy: 'I would like to see the foot slightly less on the accelerator. They are driven very hard.' Another parent said, 'The school doesn't seem to be very flexible when it comes to changing sets, up rather than down.' 'Teaching is good, excellent in many subjects and support is there. But I do worry slightly that the child in the middle, neither flying or

struggling, might get overlooked,' commented one parent.

The average class size is 18 up to GCSE, eight in the sixth form. Average age of staff is mid-40s with 41 per cent of them having been at the school for more than 10 years. Double figures are old pupils.

The lessons we observed showed bright, engaged pupils, very keen to join in. Year 7 maths obviously inspired by their teacher, lots of arm raising and enthusiasm. Year 8 DT getting on with it, with very chatty, welcoming year 12s working hard on their own next door. Happy year 8s and teacher having fun cooking. Year 10s analysing Wilfred Owen poetry and keen to share the experience. The prep class sang to us in French. Sixth form classes varied from one-on-one in German to three studying philosophy. More in economics and labs. We liked the greenhouse just outside one of the labs, used for seedlings and cuttings during biology experiments. All focused. For such an academic hothouse there's a very relaxed, happy feel to the place.

Learning support available. One child with a statement of educational need. Thirty-two with cognitive/literacy need, seven with physical needs and nine pupils with EAL, all fully supported. 'My child is dyslexic and was given extra English lessons rather than studying for a second language', says one parent. 'It was very well managed with no fuss and he achieved an A and A* in his GCSE which shocked and delighted us.'

Games, Options, the Arts

Sport becoming more of a focus and gaining momentum. Ex-internationals now on the staff and superb facilities on offer. Boys and girls playing at county level in hockey and cricket; netball, athletics, badminton, squash and golf too. Internationals in fencing, volleyball, orienteering, sailing and swimming. Others playing rugby for the county or for a local premierships academy. Overseas team tours in most sports. More than one team represented in most sports. 'The sports facilities are fantastic but I don't think they make the most of them, there only seems to be emphasis put on one rugby team per year, so it's a pity for the less able but equally keen players,' said one mother. The girls showing us around didn't agree, stating that 'there were lots of teams and practices.' Every parent commented on the 'fantastic facilities' that include numerous pitches, grass and Astroturf, lovely airy swimming pool, huge gym and a dance studio with mirrored walls. Oh, the joys of being in new premises.

Music and art very strong, particularly in the lower years. 'I specifically chose the school because of their strong music department,' said one mother. 'And if you play an instrument it's compulsory to be in some sort of band or group, which I think is excellent. It means that for a LGS pupil it is the norm. My daughter has made many friends, and in different age groups, as they are put in bands according to their ability.' 'Delighted to see boys in the choirs,' said another mother. Interesting that the music department is below the maths one. 'We get to hear lots of practising and notice improvement during the week', one sixth former told us. There are 28 bands, orchestras, choirs and groups that meet to rehearse weekly. Lots of opportunities to perform with monthly, termly and annual events. Also a music tour.

House singing and karaoke hotly contested, as is house drama. Yearly drama productions, rehearsals ongoing for school play The Exam. Last year it was Sweet Charity.

Lots of artwork on display, particularly in the art wing and it's good. Many of the teachers successfully sell their own work, other work by local artists brought in and displayed. A pity interest drops off in the sixth form, but those that carry on get very small tutor groups.

Background and Atmosphere

Founded in 1981 and originally located on the old grammar school site in the city centre. It opened with 94 pupils, but no sixth form. Ten years later it had 500 and a sixth form. There is also a junior school that opened in the early 90s on a separate site. Now both are together on the 75 acres at Great Glen. Long driveway conceals the school from the road. Large signs and flying flags announces its presence. All buildings are new, but can't be described as architecturally appealing, in our view. Functional rather than aesthetic. It feels like a mixture of a hospital and an airport, when you drive in. A one way system with parents seemingly dropping off on the move; no one stops. Very efficient but slightly soulless. But what can you expect from such modern premises? The first thing you see when you walk through the sliding front doors is the large library. It's an academic school and they are drawing your attention to it. Inside is light and airy, lovely wide corridors so no overcrowding. Laid out simply and effectively. Still feels a bit like an airport though, but not unpleasant.

All very high tech. Fingerprint recognition is used for entry to the library and for lunch. 'Once my son saw that he was desperate to come.'

Pastoral Care and Discipline

Discipline not mentioned by any parent, which was interesting. Behaviour obviously not an issue. 'It's a kind school,' said one parent. 'The staff keep a close eye on the pupils and seem to know if something is wrong.' Another parent told us, 'I chose the school because they accept that not every child is sporty. They don't force them, but allow them to find their own niche. They are very much about including rather than excluding, and are very accepting of the quirky.' Another parent was more blunt: 'The geek or nerd will probably be safer there than anywhere else. They are very accepting of the oddball and eccentric and just seem to absorb them.'

All parents we spoke to were happy with the school. 'Child focused' and 'children not frightened of the teachers'. 'Easy to get in touch with the school and emails answered promptly'. Lots of comments about problems being 'nipped in the bud' and 'dealt with quickly'. One parent did think the school had 'been caught on the back foot when it came to internet bullying, but quickly got itself up to speed and were keen to learn where they needed to step in'.

Student support run by the sixth formers, ably assisted by the school nurse. This is a counselling course that over 40 of the sixth formers take, with a class a week for eight weeks. They then use these skills for mentoring the younger years. The nurse also offers pastoral support. 'I was stressing about my AS levels last year and she was lovely and really calmed me down and helped me plan my time properly,' one of our guides told us.

Some parents felt rather isolated from the school, physically rather than emotionally. The vast site with its one way system and well planned traffic control doesn't encourage stopping for a chat. 'Because the school is away from the town centre it's not as social, for children or parents. They all seem to come home straight from school rather than socialise. A good thing in many ways, but not always', said one mother. There is a coffee shop on site that sixth formers can walk across to during the day, only to be used by staff, visitors and sixth formers during school hours. Apparently built at the request of the year 11s who were very miffed to be moving out of the town centre – where were they going to go on a 'date?' We suspect some parents are delighted with the move.

Pupils and Parents

Pupils come from a wide area, but mainly from the city and environs. Pupils reflect the demography of Leicestershire, with 25 per cent of from Asian backgrounds. This percentage is slowly increasing. Parents forward-thinking, not bothered by tradition and mainly from professional backgrounds. Many connected to the hospitals and university in the city. 'We have parents with high aspirations for themselves and their children,' said the head. 'The mix works. We adhere to the principals of Christianity

but faith, race and gender aren't important. Everyone mixes well and parents are happy with the moral stance of the school.' The children we met were all very welcoming, friendly and engaging, more than happy to chat. 'Well rounded individuals, confident but not arrogant, such a good reflection on the school,' said a parent. 'I chose the school because it is forward looking, modern and multi-cultural, which reflects our society.'

Every parent we spoke to would happily recommend the school. 'I have three children at the school who are all very different. But all are happy and fit in well, which says a lot. If they're happy, I'm happy.'

Harry Ellis, England Rugby International and British Lion is an old boy now returned as a teacher.

Entrance

Entry at year 7 based on an entrance exam covering maths, English and verbal reasoning. Some candidates interviewed. Over half come from Leicester Grammar Junior School. There is no automatic transfer; all sit the entrance exam. Another 20 or so come from the prep class that is a year 6 group taught within the senior school. These children come from local primaries and gain automatic entry to the senior school as they have already sat an entrance exam. The remaining children mainly come from surrounding state primaries.

Entry to the sixth form requires minimum two As at GCSE in chosen A level subjects and at least four B grades. All external candidates are interviewed. Some 20 or so join the sixth form each year, mainly from state comprehensives. Very occasionally one will come from nearby boarding schools.

Exit

Very few leave after GCSEs, and this is decreasing. If they leave it's to the local sixth form college.

Vast majority of pupils head to a Russell Group university. Almost 20 per cent each year study medicine or medical courses; engineering and physics also popular. Four to Oxbridge in 2014. Gap years becoming more common.

Money Matters

Discount offered for more than one child, 5 per cent for two, 7.5 per cent for three and 10 per cent for four. Means-tested bursaries available as well as academic, sporting, music and art scholarships.

Our View

The new kid on the block is making its mark. Has more of a feel of a state city grammar than a private school. But forward-thinking parents who aren't interested in tradition, status and history are flocking to it. LGS offers very competitive fees, produces excellent results and the facilities are tremendous. Your child can complete all of their schooling here, as long as they make the grade. We think the competition will be sitting up and taking notice, and so they should be.