

Centre Academy East Anglia

Church Road, Brettenham, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP7 7QR

Pupils: 50 of whom 20 are boarders and 8 flexi boarders

Ages 4 – 19. Inter-denom. Fees: Day £16,000 - £35,000 pa. Independent.

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Principal

Principal of the Centre Academy Schools: Since 2007, Dr Duncan Rollo BA MA PHD (sixties) born in Scotland, raised in the U.S.A. A professor of English in the States, he returned to the UK over 20 years ago. Awarded post-doctoral fellowship LSE: responsible for numerous articles on various aspects of education and author of three books on effective communication. Popular and admired by parents. His distinguished contribution to the field of S.E.N. is combined with an approachable and good humoured manner. Refreshingly honest and listens carefully to parents and pupils. Acts decisively over policy matters and his introduction and enthusiastic support for the US Diploma is, “making the weather,” in S.E.N.

Head Teacher

Since September 2010 Mrs Kim Salthouse BA Med: previously acting Head of the School. Formerly in charge of Learning Support at Framlingham College, Suffolk. Mrs Salthouse accepted an appointment at The Old Rectory, Brettenham (the former incarnation of Centre Academy) becoming Head once the school had amalgamated as part of the Centre Academy Schools. A quiet and sympathetic manner inspires confidence in both parents and pupils.

Academic Matters

The introduction of the American Diploma has transformed the outlook for the 16-19 year olds. Far from fizzling out, their education takes on a new lease on life. Pupils study a wider range of subjects than at A Level and are assessed continuously, not by exams. Many diploma graduates have gained university places. The school teaches broadly within the framework of the national curriculum and groups are taught by ability rather than age. Class sizes are small, generally between 5 and 8, the pupils receive close one-to-one attention and extra support or, ‘withdrawal’, is not necessary. The whole pupil approach means as much attention is paid to teaching coping strategies as it is to literacy and numeracy. This holds true right up to diploma level. The Sunshine Class, roughly equating to the Reception and Infant age group, focuses on literacy and numeracy with daily phonics handwriting and guided/individual reading times. Play is important but within a structured setting.

Games, Options, The Arts

The place of Drama and Music within the curriculum, taught by specialist teachers, encourages wide participation. Regular performances take place staged in the friendly church next door – ‘King Simba’, is much anticipated next term. Music is also encouraged via ensemble and group work with enthusiasts on all sides. “I switched at grade 5 from cello to the bass guitar”. Games are played on site; there is a decent football pitch – sized field and nearby Old Buckenham Hall School generously loans their extensive facilities. Plans are afoot for a new sports hall (or, as Dr Rollo refers to it, “gymnasium”). Swimming is at a local pool and all the usual team sports are offered with some competitive match play. Emphasis is on activities that develop physical skills – not just ball catching (a source of dread for many) and a positive attitude to fitness, cooperation and team work. After school activities reinforce these themes – choir, bands, computing, cookery, air fix modelling. Pupils can

keep bikes at school. The school has its own 'Fire Crew' plus six fire engines (some owned, others on permanent loan) ranging from a 1951 "Green Goddess", to modern escape ladder vehicles. The local fire service train pupils who put out real (controlled) fires.

Background and Atmosphere

Main building is the Old Rectory, beside the Church in an Agatha Christie – style village in rural Suffolk, complete with secret passage, carpeted hallways, classic FM playing in the school office, a library and a boot room. An extension for classrooms and dining room is supplemented with several mobiles in the garden. No Science lab as yet though plans are afoot. Old Coach House used as boys boarding house. Buildings and grounds including duck pond all well maintained. Brand new car park. Everyone knows everyone and older pupils willingly take responsibility for younger ones. Overheard at playtime, "Don't kick so hard at the goal; he is only 7". Relaxed good manners, doors routinely held open and unguarded smiles. Despite recent increases in numbers, Dr Rollo is determined to keep the school to its present size, "This is what works here".

Pastoral Care and Discipline

Emphasis is placed on teaching an acceptance of strengths and difficulties. "My daughter is transformed; her former anxieties have melted away". As classes are so small, pupils quickly grow in confidence, self-esteem and self-discipline. The well tried virtues of trust, fairness, respect and compassion are taught – "character training" in old money. Close links with home are paramount and both Dr Rollo and Mrs Salthouse are readily available. Excellent relationships among the staff themselves are also key to the atmosphere of trust and acceptance throughout the school.

Pupils and Parents

Pupils drawn largely from East Anglia, London and home counties. Almost half are weekly boarders. A variety of backgrounds though few from traditionally, "boarding", families.

Entrance

As the school is committed to keeping numbers to fifty, places are snapped up and there is a waiting list. Caters for a range of needs: dyslexia/ADD/dyspraxia and the milder autistic spectrum disorders. The Head is not enamoured with the commonly used labels, and prefers, "specific learning difficulties". The process of admission is a careful assessment of pupil's needs and whether C.A. can provide the necessary support. Many of the pupils here have struggled in the mainstream, but those with behavioural problems are not admitted.

Exit

Since the learning age was raised to 19, most pupils take the Diploma and leave for university or vocational course. A handful return to mainstream schools along the way. Every pupil following the Diploma has been accepted by the university or college of their choice including Edinburgh, London, and the Weber Douglas School of Dramatic Arts. No Diploma graduate has failed to be admitted to university.

Money Matters

Many families make sacrifices and around half of the pupils receive local authority funding.

Remarks

Deliberately small, this is a school with long standing experience and a clear strategy for educating pupils challenged by learning difficulties.