

## The Good School Guide

### **Snapshot**

*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 of life. Pupils study a wider range of subjects than at A level and are assessed continuously, not by exams. Many diploma graduates...*

### **Head**

*Since 2010, Mrs Kim Salthouse BA MEd, previously acting head. 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.*

*Principal and administrative director, Dr Duncan Rollo BA MA PHD (60s) A professor of English in the States, he returned to the UK over 20 years ago. Popular and admired by parents. His distinguished contribution to the field of SEN 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 SEN.*

*Both head and principal do some teaching, thus staying in touch with the students and their own teaching practice. This hands on and empathetic approach appreciated by parents who put it down in part to the fact that both head and principal have children with learning differences 'so really know how it feels'.*

### **Academic Matters**

*The introduction of the American High School Diploma has transformed the outlook for the 16-19 year olds. Far from fizzling out, their education takes on a new lease of life. Pupils study a wider range of subjects than at A level and are assessed continuously rather than by examination. All diploma graduates gain university places. The school teaches broadly within the framework of the national curriculum and groups are taught by ability rather than age. As class sizes are small, generally between five and eight, the pupils receive 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 pre-prep section, roughly 4-7 year olds, focuses on literacy and numeracy with daily phonics, handwriting and guided/individual reading times. Students move into their ability level class with flexibility to move up when ready - exemplifying the highly individualised approach the school has to accommodating each child. 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. Music is also encouraged via ensemble and group work with enthusiasts on all sides; 'I switched at grade 5 from the 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 its extensive facilities. 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 teamwork. After-school activities reinforce these themes – choir,*

*bands, computing, cookery, Airfix modelling. Pupils can keep bikes at school. The school has its own fire crew plus EIGHTx 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.*

### **Boarding**

*The 50 per cent of students who board for at least part of the week are very happy in the clean and spacious boarding houses and feel safe. Certainly the respect shown during the school day is carried through to the two boarding houses (junior and senior) and there is a good deal of support between staff and between older and younger students. The boarding is seen as a chance to enhance life skills with household tasks. Pupils are involved in boarding decisions wherever possible - menu suggestions, decorating choices, ideas for outings etc. Boarding is only possible during the weeks and not at weekends, which make it unsuitable for pupils whose parents are abroad and means the school will not take unaccompanied international pupils.*

### **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, well-being 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-trying 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 - more than one pupil moved nearby especially to be near this school. Almost half are weekly boarders. A variety of backgrounds though few from traditionally boarding families. A programme for post-18 students to work in child management has been successful as a way of getting training and work experience for ex-pupils of Centre Academy London and East Anglia.*

### **Entrance**

*As the school is committed to keeping numbers to 50, 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 a pupils' needs and whether the school 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 American High School Diploma and leave for university or vocational courses. 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, Oxford Brookes and the Royal Agricultural School in Cirencester.*

### **Money Matters**

*Previously the school was filled entirely with privately paying pupils, but now over half are funded by local councils, in part thanks to the work of one governor whose job it is to support appeals to councils for funding, and in part thanks to a growing reputation and awareness that public funding may be possible.*

### **Therapy and Staffing**

*The therapies at East Anglia are considered a strength of the school. They are not charged as an extra to parents - rare indeed, and according to the school's calculations worth some £1,500 per child each year. There are three days' worth of speech and language therapists, who are well qualified and extremely experienced. There is an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist who are in school full time for two days each per week. There is a yoga teacher, so that all students have at least one session of yoga each week for relaxation, calming and flexibility. It helps 'to reduce the anxiety that many students feel'.*

### **Remarks**

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

### **SEN Statement**

*Centre Academy East Anglia is a specialist school addressing Dyslexia, AD/HD, and other learning challenges children aged 4 to 19. Pupils receive an intensive programme of support, affording them skills and strategies to help them return to mainstream education or to continue on to further education. We provide a secure, comfortable family environment with excellent boarding facilities and a wide range of activities including the school fire brigade.*

*Classes are small and set by ability not year group. English and maths are taught in groups of no more than seven and all teachers of English and maths have qualifications in teaching pupils with dyslexia. An emphasis is placed on literacy and numeracy skills and all pupils have individual or paired tutorial in English and/or maths. Additional lessons include history, geography, Spanish, science, music, art, drama, DT and PSHE. Each child has a daily tutorial period with their English teacher, following a multi-sensory programme for SpLD children. The children receive support for organisational difficulties - in and out of the classroom. We place great emphasis on raising self-esteem and confidence of pupils. Our rural location provides ample room for many different sports and activities, all of which help our pupils develop physical skills and positive attitudes to health and fitness as well as teaching them co-operation and teamwork.*