



Above: Children can discover their talents in a pre-prep environment
Below: The enriching extracurricular programmes allow kids to befriend peers with similar interests and hobbies

THE VERY BEST START

With excellent facilities, smaller classes, outstanding teachers and specialised learning, pre-prep is a great introduction to education, writes **NAOMI BARTHOLOMEW**, Head of St Catherine’s Bramley

As headteachers we often work hard to share with parents what is unique and special about our schools. Many prep schools are very fortunate to have excellent facilities, plenty of space, smaller class sizes, outstanding teachers and plenty of specialisms among the staff. This means that teachers can relay their passion and expertise in subject areas such as PE, music, art, computing and modern foreign languages. In turn, children are inspired to achieve and given excellent learning opportunities from day one.

As we emerge from a very challenging time due to the pandemic, parents are certainly taking stock and considering what it is that they want for their children as they choose their future schools. Many are now considering an investment in independent education and looking for a place at a pre-prep or prep school, recognising the enrichment that comes from a varied educational and extracurricular programme where pupils can explore their hobbies and foster friendships with peers who have similar interests, where small classes mean that every child is well known and where resources enable dynamic provision both in school and online.

Every phase of a child’s education is also about building character, resilience and a core set of values as well as skills. School websites and prospectuses will promise much in this regard. But how do we really measure the true value of a prep school education? With a list of impressive destinations, scholarships and awards to excellent senior schools? Through what children then go on to achieve? With lists of achievements gained along the way?

I would argue that the true value of a pre-prep education is an investment in an exceptional start to school life where children are given the space and time to be individuals, where they form lasting friendships and work very closely with their teachers. Starting school life in an environment which allows each child to discover their own unique talents and potential is proven to provide all children with very strong foundations on which to build.

At each step there are dedicated staff who know both you as parents and your child well. Teachers and teaching assistants will be ready to celebrate achievements, instil self-belief and build the confidence needed

to meet challenges with an open heart and mind.
Here are St Catherine’s we pride ourselves on providing our girls with the strongest of foundations for their future learning in the formative pre-prep years. Miss Jefford, Head of Pre-Prep, will always comment on the benefit that she sees from day one of small class sizes where each child is nurtured as an individual: “we see the girls forming relationships, learning about themselves and blossoming into confident and motivated learners.”
At the age of seven, girls transfer seamlessly into year three ready to embrace all the rich experiences of the prep school curriculum. We know that we have succeeded when we see our girls leaving the school aged 11 happy and motivated to learn, ready for the challenges ahead and with a sense instilled that girls can do anything they set their minds to. We’re also fortunate in that we’re truly independent and can set our

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own goals for the children. Nowadays, I often hear from parents looking to move their children away from excellent state primary schools due to the undue pressure of testing at year two and year six.
Pre-prep and prep schools are able to go above and beyond the curriculum to foster each child’s individual interests and strengths. The list of what is on offer both in school and remotely is extensive and such enrichment brings the best out of every child and provides them with opportunities to learn beyond the classroom and to truly be themselves.
Every experience in a vibrant pre-prep or prep school enables children to build a large bank of happy memories which inform and shape their education in the broadest possible sense. ☺