

07.03.22

***The Bigger Picture:  
Why Education Is About More Than Just  
Academic Success***

There's no doubt that this is a generation under a lot of pressure with young people facing a very different future to the ones we faced ourselves. Add in a global pandemic, a growing mental health crisis, the situation in Ukraine and the threat of climate change and it's clear we need a different approach.

So how do we, as parents and educators, best prepare our children for this new world? It's a question that occupies a lot of our time at EHS and means that we take our responsibility as 'parentis in loco' extremely seriously. Clare Macro, Headmistress at Edgbaston High School for Girls, explains the school's approach.

Education at EHS is defined in its very broadest sense. Acquisition of knowledge and academic achievement are, of course, essential but they are only part of the picture. Our expertise lies in developing the 'whole person': providing a safe environment where girls can flex their emotional, physical and intellectual muscles and where student well-being is valued alongside academic success and intellectual curiosity.

In recent times, it's an approach that has gained significant traction with the importance of social and emotional skills rising up education policy agendas and dominating conversations around the purpose of education. So much so in fact that the OECD (an organisation known for its PISA league tables ranking global education systems) last year conducted its first survey into the social and emotional development of young people. The survey, ***Beyond Academic Learning***<sup>1</sup>, showed a clear correlation between fostering emotional and social well-being in young people and improved academic performance:

***"Students with the same social status, gender, and cognitive abilities who have better social and emotional skills are more likely to obtain better grades".***

The report also concludes that effective pastoral support and opportunities to connect and interact socially in schools lead to significantly better outcomes for young people both academically and emotionally.

At EHS, we are known for the enormous value we place on our pastoral provision and co-curricular offer. We've long understood the virtuous circle that is created when young people's social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs are met. Academically, girls are challenged and inspired through their regular timetable lessons and homework programme

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2021), *Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en>.

but there are a number of other ways they can further their studies or pursue particular areas of interest. As well as peer and teacher-led tutoring sessions, there are regular, informal drop-in sessions for extra help or troubleshooting around specific subjects. All our subject specialist teachers operate an 'open door' policy and a mindful assessment programme ensures that girls are securing their learning without imposing unnecessary stress.

Pastorally, girls and staff both play an active role. As well as well-established pastoral staff responsibilities, mentoring and buddying systems, we have two Sixth Form Heads of Pastoral Mentoring who oversee a team of student Wellbeing Champions. Made up of girls from across the school, the champions work at 'grass roots' level, raising awareness, listening to peer feedback, ensuring girls know where to go for help and hosting drop-in sessions on issues such as exam stress, friendship and personal safety. Having this whole-school approach means there is always someone to talk to if approaching a member of staff feels overwhelming.

Girls are also strongly encouraged to make the most of over 50 different clubs and co-curricular opportunities on offer. As well as a chance to make new friends and have fun, these activities unearth new talents and teach team building, communication and perseverance. We have regular sports and choir trips, and clubs for everything from art, cricket, gardening and dance, to self-defence, netball, debating, public speaking and our Young Enterprise and Duke of Edinburgh Award Schemes. Regular school productions also provide opportunities to perform or learn technical skills from audio-visual, sound and lighting to costume design, make-up and stage management.

It's a busy school - but a lively one!

Ask most parents what they hope for their children and the majority will place happiness towards the top of the list. But happiness cannot be achieved through academic success alone. A host of other factors come into play - from social relationships and attitudes to physical and mental health, our sense of self and whether we feel valued, supported and motivated. At EHS, we believe that when young people are inspired intellectually, emotionally and physically they will thrive. But it is the combination of all these things, working hand-in-hand, that are key to nurturing rounded young adults ready to enjoy life and succeed in an ever-changing world.