



# THE SUNDAY TIMES

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ENGLAND'S INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL OF THE YEAR 2019  
BRIGHTON COLLEGE





“Brighton College is one of the great modern success stories of British independent education.”

**Brighton College**  
England's Independent School of the Year

“Brighton College is on a remarkable journey.”

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The Sunday Times visited and here are some of the things they had to say.

“Entering Brighton College's sleek reception area with its white marble desk and tasteful lighting, visitors would be forgiven for thinking they were checking in for a seaside mini-break at a boutique hotel. But make no mistake: its luxuriant soft furnishings are a velvet glove to the iron fist of the school's educational strength. Brighton





“Kindness is the currency at Brighton College.”

College is leading the new guard of elite British independent schooling.

In a remarkable journey from the league table middle ground, the school has risen from 136th place in 2005 to seventh this year, its joint highest position. Pupils at this academic big hitter achieved 98.7% A\*-B grades in their A-levels this summer. GCSE results were outstanding too: 90.4% returned A\*-A or 9-7 grades. These stellar exam performances are produced in a co-educational setting, with 40% of pupils boarding weekly or full-time – more than ever before.

Brighton College wins our Sunday Times Independent School of the Year award for the second time. It last held the title in 2011 and this year is the top school with a mixed gender intake.

On its six-acre campus near the seafront in Kemptown, the school's flint and brick Victorian Gothic revival buildings are complemented by the ongoing addition of purpose-built facilities designed by world-class architects.

Under the leadership of Richard Cairns since 2006, the dramatic upturn in academic standards

“The Cairns touch is not far off legendary in independent school circles.”





“The combination of achievement and distinctiveness in a great setting make a place at Brighton College one of the most sought after in the country.”

has been accompanied by pioneering policies that have set a progressive tone.

Cairns came to the school from Magdalen College School in Oxford, where he was deputy head. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that both have been named Sunday Times Independent School of the Year twice during his tenure.

The Cairns touch is not far off legendary in independent school circles. When he arrived at Brighton College, he tackled teaching standards head on. “I hate the thought of a child getting their timetable and thinking, ‘Oh God, I’ve got Mr Jones for

geography,’” he comments, his soft speaking voice forcing his audience to sit up and listen.

“I really focused on trying to recruit super new teachers. I’m not saying we didn’t have some very good ones already; we did – but like all schools there was a significant group of average performance.”

Casting his net wider than the readership of TES, Oxford graduate Cairns recruited with advertisements in Oxford and Cambridge pubs aimed at third-year undergraduates and postgraduates. “Do you want to teach? Do you fancy living in Brighton? No need to do a PGCE,



“Social conscience is a defining feature of Brighton College.”

“A dramatic upturn in academic standards has taken place.”

we’ll train you,” read the adverts, which also dangled a tempting starting salary.

“We recruited a lot of staff that way, trained them up ourselves with reduced timetables, and it’s worked brilliantly.”

Pupils agree. Upper fifth-former Patrick Mayhew, 16, describes his teachers as “young and approachable but not matey. They are empathetic and inspiring”. Mayhew is one of a number of pupils who turned down offers from Eton to come to the college. Top results, first-rate facilities, weekly boarding and co-education provide a compelling alternative to traditional full-boarding single-sex schools in remote locations.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge favour co-education. Their elder son, Prince George, is a pupil at Thomas’s Battersea, one of the largest London feeder prep schools for Brighton College – supporting rumours that he may join the school at 13.

Entry is “not as selective as the London schools”, Cairns maintains, and the school is not as oversubscribed as people may assume. Places occasionally crop up outside the main points of entry at 11-plus and 13-plus. Day fees start at £5,600 a term in year 7 to £8,180 in the sixth form. Weekly boarding starts at £11,130 a term and those living in full-time pay up to £13,190.

Cairns says he would never again work in a boys’ school. “Most parents want their children to be prepared for the world, and frankly single-sex doesn’t do that. You wouldn’t segregate your own children at home, so why do you segregate them in school?” he asks. Sexist banter (“which isn’t banter at all, it’s just pure sexism”) gets no oxygen at Brighton College, where confidence, kindness and curiosity are championed.

“I love that sometimes when we have discussions about sexism the boys say, ‘Why is it that my parents would be disappointed







in me if I became a nurse or a primary teacher, and not you?' There is that inverse sexism, and girls need to hear that, too," he says.

Cairns sees "no evidence" supporting the argument that girls do better in single-sex schools. "And so what are you left with? You're left with girls who then struggle with sexism later when they see it in the workplace, and on the boys' school side you've got boys who think sexism is normal. Neither are good for society."

Social conscience is a defining feature of Brighton College, a founder of the London Academy of Excellence in Newham, which

educates youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the ambition to go to a leading university. The school's social entrepreneurship initiative gives the children £10 to invest in a money-making scheme for charity.

"They don't just make cakes and sell them, they promote and advocate the charity as part of the fundraising," explains Leah Hamblett, the deputy headmistress. Every year, on Make a Difference Day, all teachers and pupils help with community enterprises such as beach cleaning or working with the homeless.

**"Weekly boarding and co-education provide a compelling alternative to traditional full-boarding single-sex schools in remote locations."**





“Boarding and day houses are furnished to a level of comfort and style *far beyond the norm.*”

For a number of years, Syrian refugees have been taught English and citizenship by Brighton College teachers and pupils, who also look after their children while they are in class. Two who studied at the school on scholarships have gone on to university. One, Sulaiman Wihba, 20, gained a place at Oxford University this year.

Sport, drama, and music benefit from specialist teaching and coaching, as well as enviable facilities. The music school's modern and airy auditorium looks out on to the Jubilee sports ground, where the England rugby team sometimes trains.

Dance is strong for both girls and boys. Cairns has encouraged boys to join in. He says: “In the school as a whole there are 94 boys dancing, around 20 in the sixth form. It made me realise, coming here, the colour you can get in a co-ed school that you can't in a boys' school.” Entrants queue up to take part in the school's annual Strictly Come Dancing contest.

A large polythene bubble houses the temporary sports hall, while a new £55m sports and science centre is under construction. Due for completion soon, the flagship building will contain a 25-metre

“A school where confidence, kindness and curiosity are championed.”



“With first-rate teaching and a sense of social responsibility, Brighton College is forging a new path among independent schools.”

swimming pool, a strength and conditioning suite and a double-height sports hall, alongside 18 university-standard laboratories, six breakout learning spaces and a cinema-style auditorium. The roof will have a botanical garden and a running track.

Boarding and day houses are furnished to a level of comfort and style far beyond the norm. Hanging from the double-height ceiling of the Simon Smith building café are giant mirror balls and Tom Dixon copper light shades.

Making sure pupils know they are “very lucky to be here” is a motivating factor for Cairns. “If you think about education, it’s not about a set of results. OK, that’s one thing we do, our children get good results, they go to a good university. I wouldn’t do this job if that’s what it was about. We do this job because I think we create among the children we have here a strong social sense. There isn’t the sense of entitlement that you get in many schools.”

“Top results, first-class facilities.”







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