

Added-value education

While the majority of teaching takes place in the classroom, an increasing amount of lessons are being learned outside of it thanks to an exciting array of extra-curricular activities. We explore why desk-bound days of schooling are a thing of the past...

FOR schools up and down the country, empowering pupils to excel in exams sits at the heart of their mission.

But alongside the drive for good grades sits a parallel responsibility to provide an enriching programme of extra-curricular activities.

The recognition of the value of lessons learned outside the classroom

has heralded the introduction of an enviable array of opportunities for children from Service families.

Those with an interest in sport can try their hands at everything from rugby and swimming to horse riding and sailing, while pupils less interested in physical activity can take their pick from craft clubs, debating societies and cookery and fashion groups.

The variety ensures there is an activity for everyone – something Simon Barber, headteacher of Ludgrove School, believes is vital to providing a truly enriching education.

“We believe that extra-curricular activities are fundamental to a child’s development,” he explained. “It is outside of the classroom that children learn and build the skills to

give them confidence and develop their characters.”

Katie Walker, deputy head of Salisbury’s Chafyn Grove School, agrees. “Extra-curricular activities are massively important to a child’s education,” she said.

“They give the chance to try new sports, gain confidence and develop skills for life, whether in the arts, sport or for the world

of work.”

The benefits extra-curricular activities bring to the educational mix are well-respected at Dunblane’s Queen Victoria School.

“We place a premium on [them],” said headteacher Donald Shaw.

“They provide every student with a high level of ‘value-added’ learning whilst also giving them a break from academic work.”





“Extra-curricular activities enable a child to build their resilience, their self-confidence and a sense of who they are and what they do.”



KEY TO THE CURRICULUM

Providing an enriching schedule of out-of-classroom offerings is so intrinsic at Surrey's Royal Alexandra and Albert School (RAAS) that the activities are referred to as co- rather than extra-curricular and sit alongside the taught curriculum.

Anne Vaughan, head of co-curricular, explained: “They form part of pupils’ everyday learning experience.”

Christ College Brecon headteacher Emma Taylor agreed and labelled the activities as fundamental to the education of the “whole person”.

She told us: “Knowledge and skills gained in the classroom are at the core of education, but they are far from being the whole story if we are to ensure young people are really equipped for life after school.”

The whole-person ethos is also found at Shaftesbury's St Mary's School. Headmistress Mary Arnal regards extra-curricular activities as providing the “building blocks” of rounded pupils.

“Building confidence, a strong mind and body and providing creative outlets for our girls is important from the moment they arrive, no matter their age,” she added.

The approach is shared by Monmouth School for Girls. Nyree Clayton, the assistant head of co-curricular education, said: “It is

important that pupils who want to work hard at their studies understand the value of activities that allow them to leave behind the classroom and free their minds.”

EDUCATING ALL-ROUNDERS

Mastering a new hobby or refining a particular sporting skill may be the immediate benefits of participating in extra-curricular activities, but the potential positives run much deeper.

For Mark Lascelles, headmaster of Dauntsey's, additional clubs allow pupils to build their characters. The school operates a bespoke “adventure education” programme designed specifically to inspire participants into pushing their own boundaries.

“What is learnt outside the classroom can have a profound effect on a child's self-confidence, ability to think around a problem and willingness to persist when things aren't straightforward,” he said.

“It's all part of building resilience for life – understanding risk and not shying away from it is an important life skill.”

In Kent, pupils at the Forces-friendly Duke of York's Royal Military School get to choose the clubs that interest them most, allowing them to build their personalities as they go.

“Extra-curricular activities are important to help develop a well-rounded individual,”

said director of sport Shane Cloete.

“The programme affords each pupil the opportunity to explore new activities and gives them the chance to shine and develop in their own way, thus helping to enrich the full holistic approach to education.”

With obvious recognition within education of the value of developing young people's personalities, Tania Davidson of Tidworth's Wellington Academy is an advocate of the character-forming experiences provided outside of academic settings. She said: “A rich and well-balanced extra-curricular programme allows children to grow and progress in a wide range of areas that are not necessarily represented within a classroom context.

“It enables a child to build their resilience, their self-confidence and a sense of who they are and what they do.”

Queen Victoria School's packed schedule of extra-curricular activities is designed not only to build future character, but to help pupils make the most of the present.

“Employers love to see that you've chosen to improve your learning and add to your skills whilst at school,” he said.

“Even before you leave, though, doing a hobby you really enjoy will help take your mind off the stresses and strains of a busy life. Hobbies are good for the soul!”

DIRECTORY

From football and swimming to cookery and drama, today's pupils enjoy an enviable choice of extra-curricular activities. We asked schools to name their five most popular clubs...

CHAFYN GROVE

Where:
Salisbury, Wilts

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Football
2. Drama
3. Art
4. Bushcraft
5. Lego engineering

Online: chafyngrove.co.uk

DAUNTSEY'S

Where:
West Lavington, Wilts

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Devizes-to-Westminster canoe race
2. Tall ship sailing
3. Music
4. Dance
5. Drama

Online: dauntseys.org

Children growing up with military parents may be more awake to adventure than most, so providing them with exciting opportunities is a fundamental part of Hazlegrove School's offering.

Assistant head of boarding Regan Schreiber said: "Extra-curricular activities teach children a variety of important life skills, such as tolerance, acceptance and patience. But in a world that is becoming more and more sanitised, the activities should challenge children and grow in them a spirit of adventure, a degree of risk-taking and confidence.

"Children will then embrace challenges and thrive in situations that test them, not shy away from the extraordinary."

Helping young people discover and develop their identities is a key consideration at Ludgrove, with Simon Barber pointing out the future benefits.

"It is through their extra-curricular activities that children develop their characters and personal identity," he said.

"With so many youngsters achieving such brilliant grades at A-Level and university, it is what makes someone an interesting individual that is increasingly important."

RAAS' Anne Vaughan points to the fact that extra-curricular activities can have just as profound an effect inside the classroom

as out of it.

"Studies have shown that activities help children develop important life skills," she explained. "Even more significantly, they give children the opportunity to recharge.

"This has an impact on their overall behaviour and well-being, which in turn helps them to focus on their academic studies."

TANTALISING TIMETABLES

As impressive as the commitment to extra-curricular education is, almost more remarkable is the way in which schools squeeze the extra activities into an already-packed teaching schedule.

Chafyn Grove fits music ensembles ranging from the ukulele to the flute into lunchtime or before-school practices, while pupils in the preparatory school get to try one of 20 activities every Monday and Thursday between 3:30 and 4:40.

Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools operates its co-curricular programme before, during and after the school day, with boarders' activities running until 9.30pm and at weekends.

Thursday afternoons are set aside for activities at Ludgrove School – where tutors monitor each child's progress to ensure they make the most of the opportunities

available to them – while St Mary's School schedules an extended lunch break and facilitates evening and weekend sessions for boarding and day pupils.

A school day finishing at 3pm allows students at Wellington Academy to truly engage with the extra-curricular activities, while Dauntsey's School schedules two long breaks into each day to also runs a weekly "Moonrakers" club for all third form pupils.

Mark Lascelles explained: "They spend an afternoon a week on outdoor activities – they might be kayaking, learning self-defence, mountain climbing or cooking outdoors.

"Whatever activity is involved, they are learning teamwork and stretching themselves mentally and physically."

As well as enjoying activities in the evening, youngsters at the Duke of York's Royal Military School have the extra-curricular programme integrated into their academic timetable.

And Emma Taylor of Christ College Brecon looks at the timetable juggling act as a matter of simple mathematics.

"If we spend eight hours on academic work per day and eight hours sleeping, there are still another eight for all the sport, music, drama and outward bound and Service activities we also value," she said.



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Picture credits (clockwise from top left): Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools; Duke of York's Royal Military School; Dauntsey's; St Mary's Shaftesbury; Royal Alexandra and Albert School

THE DUKE OF YORK'S ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

Where:
Dover, Kent

Top five extra-curricular activities:
1. Trampolining
2. Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
3. Photography
4. Climbing
5. Drama

Online: doyrms.com

CHRIST COLLEGE

Where:
Brecon, Wales

Top five extra-curricular activities:
1. Sports, especially rugby, football and netball
2. Combined Cadet Force
3. Music, including choirs
4. Drama
5. Debating

Online: christcollegebrecon.com

HABERDASHERS' MONMOUTH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

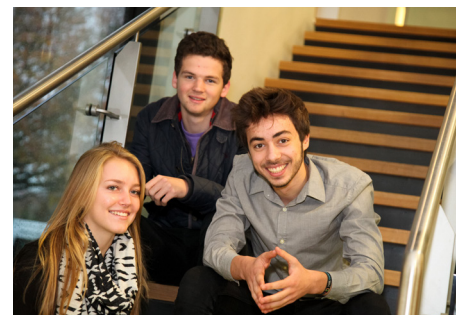
Where:
Monmouth, Wales

Top five extra-curricular activities:
1. Sports
2. Dance
3. Choirs
4. Cookery
5. Ceramics

Online: habs-monmouth.org



“Being at a boarding school, students don’t have to be encouraged to do hobbies – they do them because it’s a great idea to keep busy, especially when you first start.”



“And a bit of time to eat!”

PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

With busy academic lives to navigate, pupils might be forgiven for wanting to spend their free time relaxing rather than taking on extra activities.

But the appeal of trying something new is enough to coax even the most hesitant child into engaging with extra-curricular activity.

RAAS’ Anne Vaughan explained that her school sends the co-curricular programme to all parents at the beginning of every term to whet pupils’ appetites.

“This allows parents time to sit down and go through the activities with their child and select the ones that interest them.”

Ensuring youngsters are given a steady stream of fresh challenges is key to the approach at Hazlegrove School.

Regan Schreiber said that form tutors and houseparents work hard to ensure all children enjoy and are committed to their chosen activities.

He added: “Each term brings with it a whole new range of exciting activities and clubs – at least nine each day.

“There is a wide range of activities, with a good balance of outdoor/indoor and physical/less physical on offer, such as art, drama, chess, outdoor education, cooking

and flight simulators.”

Those in years seven and eight at Duke of Yorks Royal Military School are asked to pick at least three activities to take part in each week, with senior students selecting a minimum of two from a diverse line-up spanning everything from textiles and choirs to photography and languages.

Variety is also the spice of life at Dauntsey’s School, where pupils pick two clubs per week ranging from debating and chess to cheerleading and street dance.

House mistress Ann Jackson said: “Work and extra-curricular activities are integral parts of everyday life.

“House staff and tutors encourage and support pupils to ensure that they keep on top of their academic work, but also make the most of any opportunities on offer.”

Christ College Brecon expects all of its pupils to take part in sport three-to-four times each week and operates non-sporting options such as drama and house singing. Children are encouraged to engage with the process through the award of school colours for excellence in any area.

With so many exciting opportunities available, it is no surprise that Queen Victoria School does not have to try too hard to entice pupils to participate in activities outside of the classroom.

“Being at a boarding school, students don’t have to be encouraged to do hobbies,” said Donald Shaw. “They do them because it’s a great idea to keep busy, especially when you first start. Keeping busy helps stave off homesickness and helps you get a good sleep at night.”

Haberdashers’ Monmouth School for Girls borrows the freshers’ fayre format found at many universities to promote its own co-curricular programme.

Nyree Clayton explained: “Tutors and heads of year communicate an expectation that all pupils should take advantage of the activities on offer.

“Screens around school advertise activities and display a co-curricular timetable. Clubs and societies are celebrated in assemblies and in the half-termly publication *Highlights*.

The outstanding facilities on offer at many schools grant pupils access to a huge range of activities that can be out of the reach of other establishments.

Mary Arnal, of St Mary’s School, explained: “We emphasise availability, especially for older girls. The campus-like nature of our estate means girls can take part in leisure swims, work out in the state-of-the-art fitness suite or use 55 acres of gorgeous countryside for walking or running.”

HAZLEGROVE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Where:
Sparkford, Somerset

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Cooking
2. Sport, including kayaking and horse riding
3. Music and drama
4. Creative crafts including knitting and sewing
5. Outdoor activities such as den building in the woods

Online: hazlegrove.co.uk

LUDGROVE SCHOOL

Where:
Wokingham, Berkshire

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Outdoor skills
2. Mountain biking
3. Carpentry
4. Tennis
5. Cross-country running

Online: ludgrove.net

THE ROYAL ALEXANDRA AND ALBERT SCHOOL

Where:
Reigate, Surrey

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Swimming
2. Football
3. Cookery
4. Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme
5. Trampolining

Online: raa-school.co.uk

IMPORTANT ADDITION

Parents searching for the best school for their children rightly place an emphasis on the quality of the academic education.

But the recognition of the value of well-rounded schooling means that what goes on outside of the classroom is increasingly as important as the lessons within.

RAAS' Anne Vaughan said: "Schools are about more than their academic provision. From fencing and scuba diving to horse riding and kayaking, we have so many sports that one is bound to grab your child's attention."

Emma Taylor, of Christ College Brecon, backed the idea that education is about much more than exams.

"While academic results are the key to the door of university, they are not all there is to education," she said. "Our goal is to develop healthy, happy, purposeful, interesting and ambitious young people and these aims are supported by a wide range of activities that develop pupils' interests."

"I strongly recommend that parents think, when choosing a school, not only about interests that their child might already have, but about the exciting possibility of discovering new talents and interests."

While extra-curricular activities are a key part of most schools' make-ups, the

additional resources afforded to fee-paying establishments means there may be greater opportunities on the table.

"It is likely that the range of extras that fee-paying schools can offer will enrich a child's life," said Katie Walker of Chafyn Grove. "Schools such as ours look for staff who have skills and enthusiasm beyond their subject specialism. These teachers can fire the interest of children in crafts, minority sports or the performing arts."

Mark Lascelles urges parents to place equal importance on their child's interests when picking a school.

"At Dauntsey's, extra-curricular activities are not 'extra,'" he said. "I always tell my pupils to have a sense of adventure and try something new. Every day I see the consequences, both in our school community and in classrooms where pupils have a deeper understanding of how they function, greater self-esteem and a renewed energy and confidence in their abilities."

CRAFTING CHARACTERS

Of all its positive traits, it is the character-building benefits of a rounded extra-curricular programme that Ludgrove's Simon Barber believes should play a key part in parents' thinking.

"All schools should be teaching well

academically and achieving good results," he said. "However, it is the individual that matters and a school has a responsibility to each child to find and develop skills and interest out of the classroom to help the individual shine amongst others."

Haberdashers' Nyree Clayton pointed to the "personalised and individual" experience that pupils get from a good co-curricular provision, while St Mary's Mary Arnal suggested that parents should consider more than end-of-term grades for proof of the value of their child's education.

She explained: "It's essential to look beyond a results-driven approach to discover how a school will nurture – and help your child discover – their own talents."

"Understanding yourself is just as important as understanding an academic curriculum and having 'transferable' and 'soft' skills is essential for a successful and happy life beyond the school walls."

Duke of York's Royal Military School's Shane Cloete concluded: "It is vitally important for a child's development and well-being."

"When looking at the holistic approach to education, a well-structured, enthusiastic extra-curricular programme should be key to a parent's decision – especially in the boarding environment." ■



"I recommend that parents think not only about interests that their child might already have, but about the exciting possibility of discovering new talents and interests."



QUEEN VICTORIA SCHOOL

Where:
Dunblane, Scotland

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Archery
2. Piping, drumming and dancing
3. Rugby
4. Arts and crafts
5. MAD charity fundraising group

Online: doyrms.com

ST MARY'S SCHOOL

Where:
Shaftesbury, Dorset

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Dance
2. Open-water scuba diving
3. Debating
4. Enterprise
5. Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme

Online: stmarys.eu

THE WELLINGTON ACADEMY

Where:
Tidworth, Wiltshire

Top five extra-curricular activities:

1. Combined Cadet Force
2. Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
3. Christmas show
4. Music
5. Language clubs

Online: thewellingtonacademy.org.uk

Picture credits (clockwise from top left): Royal Alexandra and Albert School; Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools; Chafyn Grove; Duke of York's Royal Military School; Ludgrove School