



Enjoyable education: Pupils at Chafyn Grove School include trips to Cornwall, acting in school plays and writing stories among their first-year highlights

END-OF-YEAR REPORT

As the latest academic year draws to a close, pupils – and staff – share their secrets on successfully settling in their new surroundings...

FOR children up and down the country, the first year at a new school can be one of the most daunting prospects of their young lives.

From forging friendships and studying different subjects to settling in to strange surroundings, a host of challenges awaits each youngster as they continue their educational evolution.

But as big a step as a change in school may be – even for the adaptable offspring of Service parents – Britain’s boarding schools are past masters in providing the ideal environment for a stable transition.

SETTLING IN

A positive frame of mind allowed new pupil Charlotte to quickly find her feet at The Duke of York’s Royal Military School (DOYRMS) in Dover.

The year seven student admitted that while living in a dorm with girls with different interests and personalities was a challenge, it has ultimately helped her to thrive.

“We’re all different and coping with those differences

has been hard at times, but it has opened my mind to other people’s opinions and made me more of an understanding person,” she said.

“I think that the ups and downs of boarding life help you to move forwards and grow as a person, so the challenges that it brings are definitely worth it.

“I’ve enjoyed meeting new people from different places – it’s introduced me to a wider world of things and I’ve made loads of loyal Dukie friends.”

The value of close classmates and supportive staff is also appreciated by Zeynep and Marta, who are in years 11 and 12 at Shropshire’s Adcote School.

“The first months were quite hard because I tried to get used to the new environment and lifestyle,” explained Zeynep. “Then, thanks to my friends, family and teachers, I am really comfortable here.”

Marta added: “My first year here has been really fun – I’ve met a lot of very nice people, tried new activities and learnt a lot of good things.”

The need to form strong relationships is especially »

important for boarding pupils who are living away from family members, some for the very first time.

Ozo found herself in this boat, but the welcoming atmosphere at Reigate's prestigious Royal Alexandra and Albert School (RAAS) soon put her anxieties to rest.

She told us: "I've been enjoying my first year a lot. I think it's because I really like my boarding house.

"On my first day, I was nervous and afraid, but there were people to help me. Now, every time I walk into my house the smell makes me feel happy and safe. I love that I'm part of a bigger family.

"The best part of boarding is being with friends. There is always something to talk about, always someone to talk with and always someone who is fun and entertaining."

With year after year of children negotiating similar journeys into new schools, Cambridge's The Leys harnesses the experiences of older students for the benefit of those following in their footsteps.

The co-educational boarding and day school runs a big sister/little sister programme which pairs pupils from the same boarding house but who are in



"Millie has found it useful as it matches her with a sixth former who provides a supporting role."

– Charlotte, The Leys –

different year groups.

The system has worked well for Millie, a year nine pupil, and her "big sister" Charlotte, with the Dale House duo developing a close friendship.

Charlotte said: "Millie has found it useful as it matches her with a sixth former who provides a supporting role; someone with experience who can help with any small problem or is just there for a general chat.

"Millie and I have coffee dates at our school cafe, Bलगarne's, to talk about life at the school. At first we discussed how

she was settling into her new environment, but more importantly life – or gossip – in the year nine dorm!"

KEEPING BUSY

Charles, who is from a military family, managed his move to North Dorset's Port Regis School by throwing himself into the wealth of extra-curricular activities on offer.

Already at home thanks to being around some of the school's other Service children, the 11-year-old sampled sports including squash, cricket and fencing; took part in lectures

and debates; played musical instruments and even tried his hand at computer coding during a busy first year.

He said: "It has been really enjoyable – it is my first experience of boarding and it has been great fun.

"Settling in was the biggest challenge as it was my first time at boarding school and it was a big change from my previous schools."

The diversity of school life has allowed new pupils at Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools to swiftly settle in their new surroundings.

Issy (12), from Haberdashers' Monmouth School for Girls, explained: "I have really enjoyed it. There are a lot of clubs and we have so many opportunities to try new things.

"I like netball and swimming and all the lessons. I'd never done home economics before coming here."

Fellow student Leah (12) has filled her time with netball and art, while Monmouth School student Sam (11) has enjoyed the opportunity to play cricket in the evenings.

Sport and being in the great outdoors are also common themes at Farleigh School, near Andover. Year three boarders Jemima and Henry both >>



"It's been really good and lots of fun!"

– Jemima and Henry, Farleigh School –

admitted to loving playing in the nearby woods, with Jemima also learning the rules of hockey, rounders and netball.

Ellen, whose dad is serving in Germany, is another highly-active youngster. Her first year at Christ College Brecon has been filled with swimming, netball and rounders as well as additional opportunities laid on by the school.

"I like the activities we do as boarders and the excursions," she said. "My favourites were go-karting [and trips to] the trampoline park and leisure centre."

Forces-friendly Queen Victoria School, based in Dunblane, ensures pupils are never at a loose end by providing a stellar set of out-of-classroom activities.

One year seven pupil enthused about the "interesting and fun" nature of their introduction to life at the Scottish school, singling out highlights



"If you're a boarder, do all the activities you can. It's really fun and the best thing to do to make new friends and not exclude yourself."

– Ellen, Christ College Brecon –

including a trip to a laser game centre in Falkirk and the chance to try knitting, hockey, rugby and even bread making.

The same is true for students at Salisbury's Chafyn Grove,

who provided an equally diverse set of memorable moments from their first year at the school.

A trip to Cornwall's Eden Project went down well with day students from year five, while one year four girl enjoyed having a role in the school play and being selected for the swimming gala. A gymnastics club, the school's adventure playground, the opportunity to write stories and being around caring staff were also among the appreciated extras.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Being in alien surroundings is just one of the issues facing pupils embarking on education at a new school.

Ellen, from Christ College Brecon, pointed to homesickness as a "big challenge", but the combination of being used to her military dad being away a lot and keeping busy with school life has helped her to overcome it.

She added: "I like having a set place – there's lots to do in the house and I have really good friends who are really nice to me."

Homesickness was also a short-lived issue for Sam from Monmouth School. He

explained: "The welcome was good and it helped me a lot. There's always something going on and I really enjoy it. It's like a home-from-home."

Living alongside others proved to be a bit of a culture shock for Charlotte, from The Leys, who put extra effort into trying not to be too dominant in group situations.

She said: "Everyone should be equal in order to work efficiently together."

"It takes a while to understand this and get used to everyone's different ways of thinking, but when you do, I can assure you that you are inseparable as a year group."

Anxiety over making new friends is a common preoccupation for many children, but Henry from Farleigh School assures anyone new to a boarding school that "it doesn't take long" to form close bonds with classmates.

In the classroom, Adcote School's Marta said that an initial adjustment to new styles of teaching is now paying dividends.

She said: "The way subjects are taught is completely different to what I was used to – but it's better!"

Ensuring she was well prepared for her academic endeavours was key to Royal Alexandra and Albert School student Ozo's enjoyment of her opening year.

"When I first started, I wasn't as organised as I should have been," she told us. "I had to learn to write down my prep and keep on top of everything I needed to."

SUPER STAFF

Starting at a new school can be just as nervous a prospect for staff as it can for pupils, but husband-and-wife team Regan and Gail Schreiber found they fitted right in when they became head of boarding and house parent at Hazlegrove School in Somerset.

Describing their opening year as "exhilarating", Regan

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“As teachers, we have witnessed a degree of professionalism, creativity, accountability and dedication that is awe-inspiring.”

– Regan Schreiber, head of boarding, Hazlegrove –

said he and Gail have been re-energised and had their love for teaching rekindled by the happy, flourishing pupils under their care.

He added: “As teachers, we have witnessed a degree of professionalism, creativity, accountability and dedication that is awe-inspiring.

“During our time here, we have felt valued and part of an amazing family of like-minded staff. Children, parents and staff all need people who are deeply committed to their roles and who are constantly reminded that all we do is for the children’s well-being.”

EXPERT ADVICE

From nervous newcomers to seasoned students, each of the children we spoke to highlighted the admirable adaptability of youth.

But having been through the rigours of the first year at a new school, what advice would they pass on to those that follow?

A pupil at Queen Victoria School recommended forming close friendships to help out through good times and bad, with Ozo, from RAAS, also praising the power of people.

She said: “Don’t be afraid – people are nice! When I got lost during my first days, people were happy to help and show me where I needed to go.”

The close-knit community at Haberdashers’ Monmouth Schools sits at the heart of the advice offered by Leah and Issy.

Leah said students should “be excited about coming here because it’s like one giant family,” with Issy adding: “We would both choose to come here again if we had the choice.”

Ellen from Christ College Brecon suggests taking advantage of the incredible opportunities on offer.

She explained: “If you’re a boarder, do all the activities you can. I realised that it’s really fun

and the best thing to do to make new friends and not exclude yourself.”

Charlotte, from DOYRMS, agreed: “There are countless opportunities open to you, so go for anything that appeals – you never know, you might find you’re really good at something you never thought about before.

“Take every chance thrown your way – I promise you won’t regret a single one.”

Staying “open minded” is praised as a strategy for success by Marta from Adcote School, who urged: “Enjoy every moment – take the opportunity to broaden your horizons and try new things.”

And Port Regis pupil Charles said that fellow first-timers shouldn’t fret about settling in: “Be confident,” he said. “Relax and don’t get stressed about anything as there are great teachers and staff at Port Regis to help you all the way.”

Whatever concerns potential pupils might have prior to starting at their new school, Charlotte, from The Leys, concluded that children should follow the wisdom of her “little sister” Millie.

She said: “Her advice is simply to be yourself. It’s great to do this from the outset, as getting to know your peers, teachers and members of house staff is so useful.” ■



“Don’t be afraid – people are nice!”

– Ozo, Royal Alexandra and Albert School –

SCHOOLS DIRECTORY

ADCOTE SCHOOL

Little Ness, Shropshire
adcoteschool.org.uk

CHAFYN GROVE

Salisbury, Wiltshire
chafyngrove.co.uk

CHRIST COLLEGE BRECON

Brecon, Wales
christcollegebrecon.com

THE DUKE OF YORK’S ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

Dover, Kent
doyrms.com

FARLEIGH SCHOOL

Andover, Wiltshire
farleighschool.com

HABERDASHERS’ MONMOUTH SCHOOLS

Monmouth, Wales
habs-monmouth.org

HAZLEGROVE

Hazlegrove, Somerset
hazlegrove.co.uk

THE LEYS

Cambridge
theleys.net

THE PARK SCHOOL

Yeovil, Somerset
parkschool.com

PORT REGIS SCHOOL

Shaftesbury, Dorset
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QUEEN VICTORIA SCHOOL

Dunblane, Scotland
qvs.org.uk

ROYAL ALEXANDRA AND ALBERT SCHOOL

Reigate, Surrey
raa-school.co.uk

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