

THE BIG PICTURE

Moving on from the relative haven of KS2 can be a daunting prospect for pupils and parents alike – especially when ‘big school’ is literally larger than most. **Ann Fearon** explains how she and her staff make sure no one gets lost in the crowd...

SCHOOL PROFILE
LOCATION:
Crawley
PUPILS:
1798 (11-18)

Hazelwick is a big school; twice the size of the national average, with around 1900 students. It opened as a Secondary Modern in 1953 – a new school in a new town on a new site. In 2011, it became an academy and the same year I was appointed as its first ever female headteacher.

Hazelwick has an enviable landscaped campus that spans 18 acres. The buildings are light and airy and have been recently refurbished to a very high standard. Our classrooms house the latest equipment and the facilities are generally state-of-the-art. To put the school in context, the proportion of minority ethnic students is above average, as is the number of students who leave or join us at times other than the start of the school year. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average and the number of students supported by school action plus is above it. More than a quarter of our students have English as an additional language.

Size matters

Hazelwick is an 11 to 18 school and when you look at us on paper, we do appear to be a massive establishment. And indeed, size is important to us; it enables Hazelwick to offer a wide range of subjects, to a large and diverse student body in spacious surroundings. But I'm aware that the sheer scale of what we do can make some parents, and others, anxious about coming here.

However, it doesn't feel like a large school. For example, the movement between the classes is really smooth, and calm – visitors often find it difficult to believe nearly 2000 students are milling about the place. From the outset we are clear about our expectations in a nurturing and positive environment – for a school this size to work so successfully, we must have clarity and collective responsibility across the whole staff.

Assemblies at Hazelwick are amazing; the behaviour of students is superb – we always emphasise and restate expectations, and our young people have a strong sense of appropriateness and occasion. They stand up whenever there is a visitor to their classroom, and are unfailingly helpful and courteous to visitors around the school.

Moving on up

Transition is key for us, and being a big school means very careful long-term planning. Working closely with our local primary schools is very important; with the teachers as well as the pupils. Children generally know us quite well before they start with us. Many come up here for their sports days and we run specialist gifted and talented lessons in maths and music for pupils in years 5 and 6.

Each year our intake is 300 Year 7s, and we take great care



when placing these new arrivals in their tutor groups. We work with the primaries so that we understand the friendship groups that already exist, and we profile the students to help ensure that the right children are matched with the right tutors. Rather than have a single induction day, we hold five different ones to ensure small groups and enable us to offer individual attention to students.

It's not just students who require this level of attention; it's our parents, too. We have a full-time learning mentor who works with the primary schools, their pupils and the pupils' parents; there's a parents' evening before the children even start with us, and another at the end of September.

A place for everyone

With 300 Year 7s you have to have a lot of tutor groups – we have 11. So although not tiny, our tutor groups are in fact smaller than average. We have a very robust Year system, which gives our students a really strong sense of community. This is



important to us and we have invested heavily in our pastoral system, which is integral to the Hazelwick community.

During the first week of term, our 6th formers play a vital role, helping the Year 7s to settle in. They escort the children to their classes, and they meet them at the end of lessons to take them to the next one, or on to break or lunch. This is reassuring to the Year 7s, as it eliminates the risk of them getting lost and it also introduces them to a positive role model. The 6th formers benefit too from their week of leading and being responsible for these younger students. We also schedule an earlier extended lunch for the Year 7s, to allow them extra time to become familiar with the way the canteen works.

We work hard to ensure that no child gets 'lost' or left behind. We run a 'Munch Bunch' lunch club, which is there for the more vulnerable students and has been developed to encourage friendship groups and develop self-confidence in a nurturing environment. Actually, we have lots of clubs – and we work hard to ensure that we offer something for everyone: sports, board games, computing, reading, music etc. These are all structured so that students can

practise their social skills in a safe environment.

We have a fixed, specialised team looking after Year 7, then after that Year Heads move up with the year group (Y8-Y11). This enables our staff to get to know the students and their families really well and this is acknowledged in the wider community. We are planning to introduce a House system for the first time this year; this will further strengthen the Hazelwick community and provide yet more opportunities for student leadership and responsibility. In short, we do everything we can to ensure that this is a safe, happy, high-quality environment for our students and we make sure that parents know that, too. We are very proud of the fact that within our large and diverse community our students are known, feel individually supported and have a strong sense of pride in their school. A successful school is a mixture of many things, but the one question that I continually ask myself and challenge my staff to keep asking themselves is, 'would this be good enough for *my* child?'



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANN FEARON IS HEAD TEACHER AT HAZELWICK SCHOOL IN CRAWLEY. BORN AND EDUCATED IN LIVERPOOL, SHE HAS TAUGHT FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS IN A VARIETY OF STATE SCHOOLS. SHE LIVES IN SURREY WITH HER HUSBAND AND THREE SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN. IN THE LITTLE SPARE TIME THAT SHE HAS, SHE ENJOYS TIME WITH HER FAMILY AND FRIENDS, PURSUING HER LOVE OF SPORT AND INDULGING HER PASSION FOR THE THEATRE.

STAFF ROOM

For a school the size of ours to remain safe, nurturing and academically successful, we have to ensure that we employ the best staff and that we continue to invest in them. We have 240 members of staff. There are two Heads of Year for each Year Group; we have a full time, non-teaching Pastoral Administrator in each year group, and a Head of each key stage. This is in addition to the learning mentor who works with the primary schools, the children and their families. We also employ our own educational welfare officer and two school counsellors. We have a coherent Inset programme that is focused on the SIP and staff members' individual needs, so it evolves throughout the year – it's a responsive plan, and it needs to be. We participate in local TeachMeets and recently hosted our own, sharing best practice with eight different secondary schools across four different Local Authorities.

We subsidise the cost of an MA (Education) with local universities and we take trainees (PGCE & graduate) from Brighton, Chichester and Sussex universities. We run in-house bespoke training programmes and twilight training for staff at all levels, including targeted sessions for new staff members and NQTs. We have also invested heavily in staff facilities: as well as the main staff rooms, we have created additional departmental staffrooms and every member of staff has the choice of a laptop or an iPad. Our staff know that Hazelwick is a great place to teach – to risk and experiment and develop their pedagogy.