

# Back to school

September calls for a new academic year and for Parsons Green Prep, this means some exciting changes. **Bethan Rees** meets headteacher Mrs Helen Stavert to find out what the school's been up to over the summer break



Mrs Helen Stavert, photography by Sarel Jansen

As the leaves begin to turn a rusty hue and the fun frolicking of the summer holidays comes to a close, Parsons Green Prep, an academic, independent, co-ed school for four to 11-year-olds, flings open its doors after eight weeks. Welcoming a flock of new four-year-olds and present pupils looking forward to the next challenges they'll face in their new year groups, additionally while the gates have been closed and the playground a lot more quiet than usual there have been some exciting developments, starting with the playground itself which has had a total makeover.

I meet Mrs Helen Stavert, headteacher at Parsons Green Prep and she talks me through the recent transformation and the thinking behind it. "We didn't really want to build on the school as we've got a lovely space here," Helen explains, and she's right; the school occupies a fantastic

location in heart of SW6. Parsons Green Prep is within the confines of grand encircling walls providing privacy for the school and is set in a traditional house-style building which gives it a real homely and welcoming feel. Although a lot of sport is played at Hurlingham Park, Bishop's Park and South Park, the school has worked perfectly within its means and the outside space now looks better than ever.

"We have divided the playground into different areas because we've got so much space. This includes two mini tennis courts and pitches for football and netball. There are a number of separate areas including a separate reception year playground," Helen describes. Additionally, the playground won't just be filled with children running around, as there is now also more of a quiet area with chess and games, where those who don't wish to join in the energetic lunchtimes can sit and play in peace. The separate reception



Mrs Helen Stavert, photography by Sarel Jansen

year playground includes an activity area for the youngest pupils to play in.

As Juliet asks in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: what's in a name? Parsons Green Prep has not always been known as such; it recently changed its name from Eridge House as it had been for 14 years, named after the building in which it resides. But what was the rationale behind this? "It's all about who we are, what we are and where we are. Also, a lot of people found it quite difficult to pronounce Eridge House," Helen laughs.

On top of the continuation of teaching through a creative curriculum, Parsons Green Prep has also introduced a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programme. "These are all really important subjects for future careers, so it was a real passion of mine to initiate this. It's crucial to do this in our own unique way at primary school," Helen enlightens me. In order to embed the programme into the curriculum, the Apple Mac suite has been updated and from year three upwards each child is given a tablet which can be used around the school. It's a very modern approach to learning and a great way of enhancing their learning through technology. Chess is huge in this school; from year three upwards children come in early every morning to play chess and this runs alongside STEM extremely well, along with STEM ambassador visits to the school including a scientist who designed and built a satellite.

With the name comes the inevitable logo change, which also coincides with the uniform. "The new additions include a very smart blazer and an updated sports kit, so that when our children are out and about they look smart, whether at sports fixtures, on school trips or for the year six children at interview," Helen tells me. Other additions to the uniform include, for Parsons Green Prep girls, the introduction of floral print skirts for the older pupils, while the younger girls will still wear the floral dress.

Helen became headteacher in September 2014 and was deputy head for two years before that. She also currently teaches

a year six class. "We are a school of 200 children so having a small class is very manageable. My passion is teaching an excellent curriculum and motivating my teachers to deliver exciting up-to-date and interesting lessons," Helen explains. How does she think the school has progressed since her new role? "We have introduced more senior teachers in the top end of the school as it has really expanded this year. This is also partly why our nursery has now closed due to the school filling up at the top but also as our major intake is into reception year for which we now have more registrations than we have ever had previously. We are well ahead of the curve at primary level in putting STEM at the heart of our curriculum and we have always got our children into the right school for them, which includes good London day schools and boarding schools," she begins. "Also, we have two assessment systems called Target Tracker and PIPS so that we can see which pupils are doing really well as well as those who might need a little extra support, and it highlights our gifted and talented children."

"The most rewarding part of my job is seeing all the children come through the front door with smiles on their faces; they're just really happy children," says Helen. And I'm sure the children's smiles will be extra gleaming when they see the brand new playground for them to enjoy. ■

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