



Open Day: 9th May 2015

Memories of a superb day

Saturday 9th May saw our Open Day where, over two sessions, morning and afternoon, there was a wonderful opportunity for us to meet prospective parents and for our visitors to see around the school, enjoy refreshments in the café, meet pupils and teachers and discover all we have to offer. Many of our pupils were on hand to assist with the activities, including acting as tour guides, where they did a superb job welcoming parents and children and taking them on a voyage of discovery around the school and grounds. Staff and pupils had prepared subject areas for visitors to explore with exciting activities abounding! After touring the school our guests gathered in the Chapel to be welcomed by Mrs Raffray, the Headteacher, see a film about the school and hear some short talks by members of staff.

The highlight of this session was this speech written and delivered by our incoming Head Girl, Billie Morrison, a summary of St Augustine's Priory and all that we are about:

'Good Day everybody,

Hello, my name is Billie and I have recently been elected as Head Girl for my final year here at St Augustine's Priory. I hope you have enjoyed your tours and have enjoyed seeing the creative and unique learning environment and familial community that is our school.

Parents, I could relay facts and statistics, quote the prospectus, try earnestly to persuade you that this is the place for your daughter to grow up in. However, from my own experience as a nervous 11 year old girl, I understand the vital importance of girls feeling comfortable and certain that this is the school they want to attend. Therefore, I hope you don't mind but I am going to address the girls here.

Hello all. It's really lovely to have so many of you here.

Choosing a new school is scary. I'm sure you've all thought some of the following. What if everyone is smarter than me? What if the work is too hard? What if I don't get into the netball team or the orchestra? What if I don't make any friends? I remember feeling like that. It feels like the whole world is getting so big, so quickly and you don't know if you're ready for it yet. To be honest, on the brink of leaving for university, I still feel like that myself at times. But I am here to reassure you, you will make friends. The work will sometimes be hard but you can do it. You will get into the netball team.

No matter what school you go to, you will grow into beautiful, intelligent, strong women but at this school you will grow with a team of supportive, passionate teachers, a group of close friends, a support network amongst all year groups and, most importantly, you will have fun. That's what I think is most important anyway. That feeling of getting up in the morning and not thinking, "I have double Maths, French, History, Geography and Science. AAAAAH, it's so

boring!! WHYYYY???" When I get up in the mornings I look forward to seeing my friends and my teachers and learning new things in an environment that I feel comfortable in.

When I was sitting where you are, I was really excited by this school. Excited by the prospect of "real science" with lab coats and test tubes and explosions! Excited by the beautiful grounds, the field, orchards and the meadow. Excited by the prospect of school trips around the world that you may have seen on your tours! I decided on that afternoon that this was the place for me. And six years later I have broken 14 test tubes, burnt the arm off a real lab coat, run around that field more times than I can count; I have seen the Northern Lights in Iceland, amphitheatres in Greece, performed in cathedrals in Malta and rolled down mountains in Wales. I love this school and, as I enter my last year, I am really very sad as I don't want my time here to end.

Recently, a Year 13 student asked me if I was the girl who used to sit alone on the bench under the Music Room window with my nose in a book. I was struck by how far I had come and how much I had grown over six years. The introverted girl who would spend most of her breaks in the library is a distant memory and I am certain the amazing care and familial community of St Augustine's has really helped in my emotional and personal development.

Growing up, I was lucky enough to live close to the Science Museum and I will never tire of jumping the meridian line in Greenwich. There was clearly an interest in science before I had even acknowledged it. After unearthing a profound love of physics, I have enjoyed visiting the Royal Institute to attend lectures and am still hanging out (when I get the chance) at the Science Museum! This adoration of the subject was nurtured by the passionate teachers of St Augustine's and the fact that I am about to sit an extra Astronomy GCSE is down to their personal interests, passion and encouragement. When I was looking around schools my mum and I were often discouraged by the fact that the Food Tech departments were given pride of place above the science labs. St Augustine's was the only school that seemed genuinely excited about girls becoming scientists. I can, by the way, make a mean carrot cake but I couldn't have learnt about Quantum Physics at home.

Hello again parents.

I am really proud to be taking up the role of Head Girl in September. The competition for this role was fierce as so many of my peers feel passionately about this school and want to give back to the community that has supported and cared for us over the last six years and longer. In fact, one of my closest friends and now Deputy Head Girl said that she has "not blood, but St Augustine's tartan running through my veins".

I keep referencing the pastoral care at this school which, alongside the amazing teachers, is what I feel sets the school apart. As the sibling of a brother with a serious heart condition, this emotional support has really meant a lot to me, especially during Year 7 when my brother had a very serious operation. I recently discovered that my Form Mistress had consistently been in daily contact with my family and I realised that, although I was unaware at the time, I was in caring hands whilst at school during this difficult period.

Because of the closely knit nature of this school, the small class sizes and year groups with mentors and Form Tutors, all my teachers know me inside out. They know whether I am having a bad day just by the way I walk into the classroom. Staff here are always available with a listening ear, or maybe just taking five minutes out of their timetable to go through that piece of Maths or Russian homework you are struggling with. And every girl I've known at this school feels the same way.

The cohesion between year groups is most apparent when the whole school comes together for events such as Charities Week where the students try to raise as much money as possible for charity with various talent shows, cake sales and dressing up days. The bond between the Seniors, Juniors and Preps is a wonderful example of the school's ethos, "Freedom to Flourish". Free from the increasing demands of social media on young people, at St Augustine's we are given the opportunity to play, and my year group are often running around in the field with the younger years – most recently a massive game of bulldog with Year 6. We are given space to grow at our own pace. The older girls

consciously look out for the younger ones, whether as class councillor, a Big Sister or whilst chatting with a lonely Year 7 (something I tend to do often as Year 7s frequently seem to wander around, looking a little bewildered for the first couple of months – well, I know I did!).

I studied 11 subjects at GCSE level, including a Music GCSE taught outside the timetable. We were allowed to choose four of our GCSEs alongside the compulsory core subjects and, as you probably have gathered, my bias was towards the sciences. However the choices were vast from Russian to Classical Studies to Astronomy. You will have seen for yourself the breadth of subjects available and many of my year group achieved above average results last year with most getting over 6 A or A*s and two girls getting 10 A*s each.

Now, I consider myself lucky to have had the privilege of growing up at St Augustine's Priory, in this academically stimulating and loving environment of which I can say I have loved every minute.'

Thank you to Billie, all the pupils and staff and our visitors for making our Open Day such a special event!