



Rossall

INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

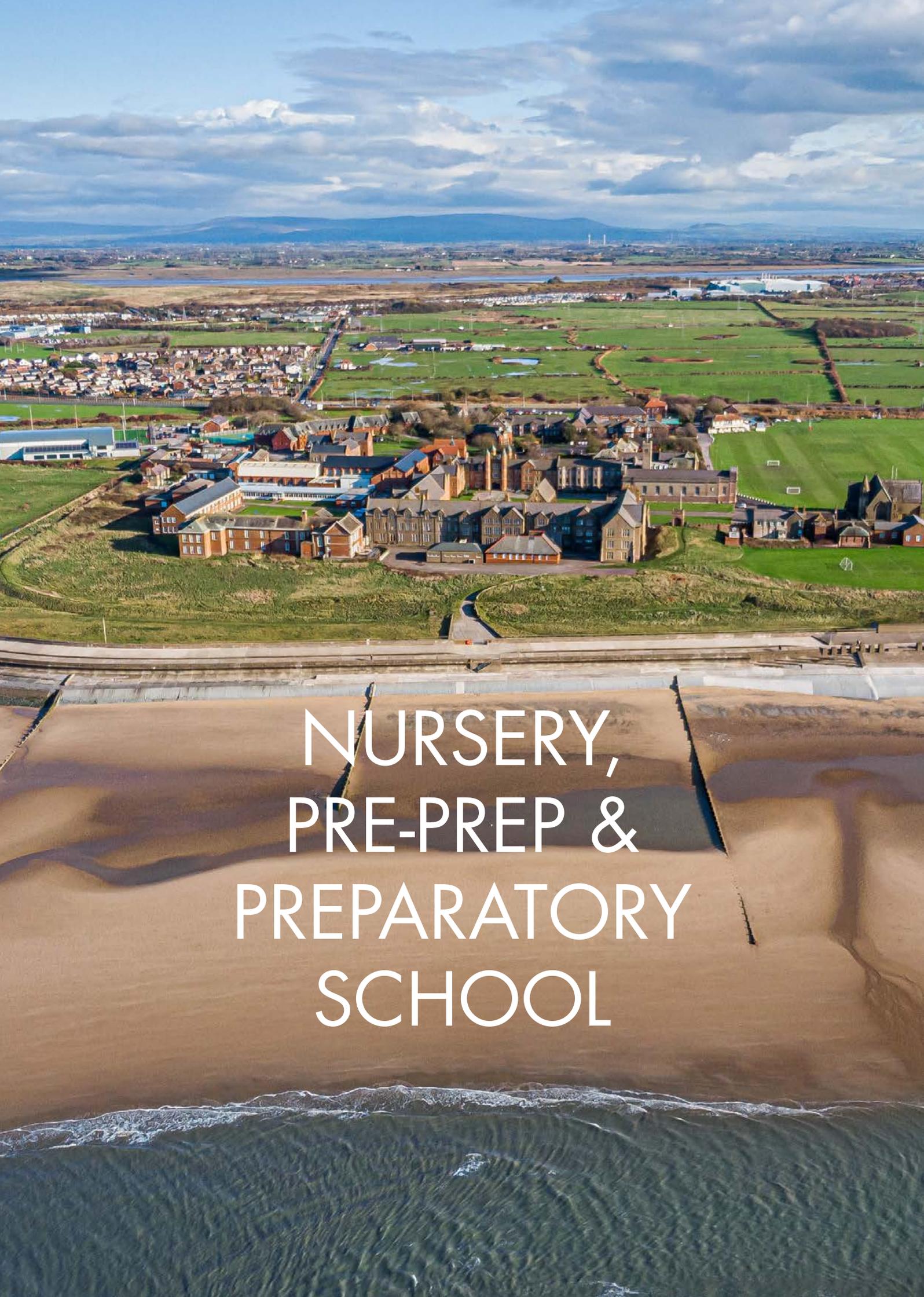
The Good Schools Guide

Rossall School review

2021

SHAPING LIVES
INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

An aerial photograph of a large school campus. The school buildings are constructed of brick and feature traditional architectural elements like gables and chimneys. The campus is surrounded by green fields and a large sports field. In the foreground, a wide, sandy beach stretches across the frame, with waves breaking on the shore. The sky is filled with scattered white clouds, and distant hills are visible on the horizon.

NURSERY,
PRE-PREP &
PREPARATORY
SCHOOL

What The Good Schools Guide says

ROSSALL PREPARATORY SCHOOL INCLUDING PRE-PREP AND NURSERY

Headmaster of Nursery, Pre-Prep and Prep School

Headmaster since September 2019, Matt Turner was previously head of Bury Grammar Boys Junior. He has also been deputy head of Cheadle Hulme Junior. Married to Gemma, with one son in the school, he is a keen rugby and football player and coach, and a lover of water sports but also has a passion for drama which he insists is a vital part of the curriculum, a view shared by the students we spoke to who told us the drama opportunities at Rossall are excellent. A charismatic leader with boundless energy, he is considered by parents and pupils to have breathed new life into the school and the curriculum. Also known for sharing a joint vision with the head of the Senior School and for being as concerned about mental health and wellbeing as he is about academic outcomes and extracurricular activities. Very visible around school. *'He is shaking things up, he is always there at morning drop off and has an open door policy,'* said one parent.



Entrance

Children come to a taster day and parents come in for a chat, but it's extremely rare for the school to tell parents they can't support their child's needs. References are called from previous schools. School is rapidly becoming oversubscribed particularly in the nursery where numbers have risen from just 15 in 2019 to 76 by 2021; the rise is largely attributed to excellent provision during Covid lockdowns. The Nursery takes children from three months. From April 2021 Rossall Junior School was re-branded as Rossall Prep and Pre-Prep.

Exit

Almost all Prep pupils progress to the Senior School (usually well over 90 per cent) with family relocation the main reason for not doing so. Everyone sits the entrance exam for the Seniors (maths, English and non-verbal reasoning), but for Prep School pupils it's just used as a baseline assessment and to assess for a possible scholarship.

Our View

In 2020 the school ditched the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) in favour of the more conventional British National Curriculum. But it has maintained a strong emphasis on research and independent learning, enhancing it with subject specific teaching. We saw lessons with a clear focus on handwriting, grammar and spelling. Parents with children who had already passed through the junior school welcome the move as far better preparation for the senior school. They see the increasing emphasis on academic standards as a great step forward. They particularly praise the benchmarking system which gives them a much better idea of how well their child is doing. Pupils also experience the Rossall Rotation where

they have a chance to study coding, baking, astronomy, farming, beach and forest studies.

SEN is supported at no extra cost. *'My son had been provided with an iPad and is making much better progress than in the past,'* one parent told us.

The Prep School buildings are an integral part of the impressive Rossall campus and the Prep pupils also get to share the top-quality facilities of the Senior School. The Nursery and Pre-Prep School was refurbished and enlarged to a high standard in 2020 and provides lovely spaces for learning, as well as a garden and woodland area where forest school takes place. Sports facilities include a multi-use games area, £4m sports centre with indoor sprinting track and golf and football academies and 25-metre indoor swimming pool. In addition, there's a nature conservation area, farm, theatre and a Space Science and Astronomy Centre. The School even has its own beach school, sharing a private beach with the senior school. *'I love that we can go to the beach for maths and draw perimeters in the sand,'* said a pupil.



The grand, historic chapel – which wouldn't look out of place in an Oxbridge quad – is also a significant part of school life, even for the youngest pupils, providing a fantastic venue for performances by the likes of the choirs and orchestra. Although it's Anglican, the chaplaincy aims to meet the needs of pupils of all faiths and of none. The pupils all eat together in the baronial dining hall where they select their food at the servery. Staff let them try anything they fancy before committing to a plateful. They still sit with teachers who keep an eye on them to make sure they're actually eating. Uniform in the Prep School is blazer for all, with a smart tracksuit for PE and games.

Specialist taught PE lessons from nursery upwards and for older ones, the school now runs elite football programmes for Senior girls and boys in association with Fleetwood Town Football Club. Many take LAMDA exams and quite a few are learning musical instruments, including clarinet, violin, drums, piano and flute. New impressive kitchen for food technology lessons and the Rossall Bake Off where dozens compete for the title of star baker. The wide range of after-school clubs are popular, with many pupils staying until after 5pm most evenings to take advantage of these activities as well as support with homework. There are science, chess and reading groups, as well as various art, theatre and music activities and a very wide range of sporty clubs including swimming, multi-sports and ultimate frisbee. Pre-Prep are not encouraged to stay late every day as they get tired, though full wrap around care is available.

There's a strong family feel to the school which extends into the classroom. All the students we spoke to made reference to this and we noticed, when we were being shown round by senior students, that they interacted warmly with the pupils. There are firm structures and policies in place to ensure good discipline but you

get the sense that they're very seldom brought into force. Pastoral care in the Prep School is largely provided by class teachers, with whom pupils are closely bonded.

“The teachers just make it fun.”

The pupils love it here and achieve good results.

‘The teachers just make it fun,’ said one. A parent told us that her stock punishment threat was, *‘If you don’t do what I say then you won’t be allowed to sleepover at school’* – needless to say, it works a treat. The parents we met were highly satisfied, with mother telling us she only brought her child here for the nursery as she had a place ready in a state school but, once she was here, she just couldn’t bring herself to take her daughter away. The excellent staff retention rates speak of a happy community among the adults too.

Hats off to the school for the way it managed Covid, using Google Classroom helped interactive online learning throughout lockdowns, while the school’s excellent precautions and risk management strategy has also earned it quite a local reputation for being ahead of the game during the pandemic.



Boarders

The junior boarding house is homely and lived-in, with a common room, a large, well-equipped games room and bedrooms customised with pictures and decorations. Most rooms sleep two, three or four and there are no longer bunk beds. Houseparents say they see themselves as comforting, supportive stand-in parents not just authority figures. Boarders, around 30 per cent from overseas, have days out every Sunday and – temptingly for parents who struggle for babysitters – day pupils can have sleepovers in the boarding house (temporary boarding) any night of the week or weekend. Some pupils also opt for a regular night of boarding (flexi-boarding) when they can work in supervised prep, have their tea and take part in extracurricular activities. A popular option is to stay over on the Saturday night so that you can go on the Sunday outing.

“This is a school where it is very easy to fit in.”

Money Matters

Although scholarship and bursary funds are directed towards students in the Senior School, emergency bursary support and extended payment plans are often made available to Prep School parents who suffer financial hardship.

The Last Word

A sparky dynamic school with plenty of old-fashioned values and tradition, happy pupils and parents but also a new rigour that helps pupils reach their potential. The emphasis is very much on inclusion, and there are students from all backgrounds. As one member of staff put it, *‘This is a school where it is very easy to fit in.’*



SENIOR SCHOOL & SIXTH FORM



What The Good Schools Guide says

ROSSALL SENIOR SCHOOL INCLUDING SIXTH FORM

Headmaster

Since 2018, Jeremy Quartermain, previously Deputy Head (Academic) at Brentwood School. History degree from Cambridge and MPhil in medieval history from Trinity College Dublin, where he also tutored undergrads. Taught English overseas for a while then did a PGCE at the University of East Anglia. Was a history and classics teacher at Gresham's, where he was later promoted to become Head of Sixth Form. He is also a freelance educator for the Holocaust Educational Trust.



Parents describe him as *'charismatic'* and *'an excellent communicator'* with *'a passion for high quality education'*. His drive to move Rossall on underpins everything he says and he's clearly excelled at bringing staff and parents with him on his journey too – their buy-in is evident. He told us his vision is the product of his own personal experiences and belief in caring for children as much as his intellectual beliefs. Also a keen musician, he is dedicated to ensuring that Rossall's long standing reputation for sports is balanced with an equally strong commitment to the arts and especially music. The staff room has seen major changes since he arrived including a new Deputy Head, Head of the Prep School and Directors of Teaching and Learning and Sixth Form. One staff member told us, *'We came here because we wanted to work with Jeremy – children are at the heart of everything he believes in and does'*. The Headmaster told us, *'I am confident we have a common room of staff with the highest aspirations and this has helped lead the surge in results'*.

Married to Fiona, who hails from County Galway. She is Head of Learning Development at Rossall and has taught at both primary and secondary level. They have three young daughters all at the school.

Entrance



Entrance tests in English, maths and non-verbal reasoning. Interview with Head for all applicants, who also have to produce a handwritten personal statement of no more than two sides of A4. Rare for the school to say no, though – only really happens if they cannot meet the pupil's needs. School is the biggest it ever has been – a good job perhaps as its excellent provision of online learning during Covid lockdowns has led to a significant increase in applications from other local schools. Higher numbers (including of high achieving students) are coming in at Sixth Form too, which the Head puts down to the school's academic results. Five 5s at GCSE needed at this point, with some subjects requiring a 6 or 7.

International applicants are assessed for English via an online interview – the ones we spoke to had excellent command of English and the School is clear that it will not encourage students to start courses where they will struggle to succeed. Those going into years 7 to 10 are put into mainstream classes with EAL support; Year 11s are put in a pre-sixth form stream to prepare for A Level or IB.

Exit

Around a third leave after GCSEs. Most Sixth Form pupils go on to university, over 60 per cent to Russell Group or other top 20 universities. Destinations include Imperial, King's College London, Oxford, Bristol, Warwick, Leeds, Manchester and Durham. Four medics in 2021, and two heading off to US universities on full scholarships. Sometimes a few to Oxbridge, though none in 2021.

Latest Results

In 2021, 55 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 61 per cent A*/A at A level (83 per cent A*-B). Average IB score 35. In 2019 (the last year when exams took place), 47 per cent 9-7 at GCSE.

Teaching and Learning



Parents appreciate the recent changes made to the curriculum especially the greater focus on pupils' academic attainment. Maths, sciences, English, technology and art do particularly well. Drama is a key part of curriculum. Languages are important, with the opportunity to learn two out of French, German and Spanish from Year 7 and all three offered at GCSE, IB and A Level. Classics has been re-introduced, Latin is available at A Level and a handful study ancient Greek. Students told us the absence of computing limits their choices at GCSE and A level – School says it's on the case. School has a resident astronomer and its own observatory which allows for the study of astronomy, including at GCSE. Roughly a third of sixth formers (mostly international) do the IB. BTEC in sport now available. Class sizes of 18-20 (occasionally 22) in Years 7-11 and 18 in the Sixth Form, though parents feel the increasing popularity of the school might put pressure on this.

Inclusion is the mantra on everyone's lips. Both staff and parents we spoke to feel the school is about much more than academia and that it doesn't focus resources and attention on high flyers at the expense of those in the middle or who are struggling. One mum was impressed that her children were not just *'being taught to conform'*.

Parents say sets are constantly under review and that tracking of students' performance has also improved, with sensible targets given. 'We just didn't know how well the kids were doing in the past, but that's all changed under the new head,' said one. Students – especially senior ones – also recognise that the school has changed and feel well supported to achieve a good balance between hard work and extracurricular. Staff are keen to support students to become independent learners and marking is now focused on constructive feedback not just simple correction – parents approve.

This is one of the most international schools in the UK. Students come from 42 different countries, and around 60 per cent of students sitting GCSE, A Level and IB exams have EAL. For those whose English isn't fluent (or near fluent), there's an intensive EAL support stream up – it's not separate as such, just about ensuring students get all the top-up help they need, with some students only receiving EAL support for a term or two. International students joining in Year 11 are invited on the Pre Sixth Form programme, within which there are two streams adapted to the level of English support required; these students prepare for a selection of IGCSE qualifications in a mix of main school and tailored lessons to prepare them for entry to Sixth Form. Parents love the internationalism and several commented that their children had maintained friendships with international pupils long after they had returned to their home country.

Parents were impressed by the way school immediately moved learning online during the first lockdown and felt that learning had not suffered significantly during Covid restrictions. iPads for all helped, they told us. As a result, the school was a finalist for two BIBA awards in 2021 – best Covid Response in Business and Education Establishment of the Year.



Learning Support and SEN

High quality SEN support headed up by the Headmaster's wife, who comes in for high praise from parents particularly for her knowledge of students' individual needs. Dyslexia, ADHD and ASD all catered for. In-class support and curriculum adjustments can be made. TAs and one-to-ones available at an extra cost. The school is honest with parents if it can't support a child. Therapeutic support for emotional health and wellbeing is provided through the school farm. We noticed the complete lack of stigma attached to additional needs here, which leads to students often coming to ask for support proactively. Sixth Form students also give support as part of their community service.

The Arts and Extracurricular

There is something for everyone at Rossall, with seemingly endless extracurricular opportunities, especially for arty and musical children and outdoorsy types. More unusual examples include film making, cryptography, psychology, jazz band, knitting, Warhammer and astrophysics – and this is just the tip of the iceberg. DofE and CCF are both popular. There is also a literary society, which meets regularly to discuss poetry, books and culture.

A new Performing Arts Studio was completed in 2018 and the new Director of Music is a former West End director.

There is a strong choral tradition, closely bound in with the life of the historic chapel. Students play different types of music in various performances and concerts throughout the year – one we spoke to had performed in Berlin, Paris and Westminster Abbey. They can learn instruments at school with visiting tutors for an extra fee. When we visited, 12 new Steinway pianos were due to arrive, including a concert grand, making it an All-Steinway School with tuition available for those with a particular talent. The first such student was recruited when we were there – he had beaten 120 entrants



in Rossall's International Piano Competition. Students and staff speak enthusiastically about the dramatic opportunities here and the chance to act in productions or be involved in stage and costume design is open to all ages. The school puts on two plays a year in one of two well-equipped performance spaces. The Drama Department also has links with a local theatre school and casting agency, which has enabled some pupils to appear in national radio and television productions. The displays in the Art Department are exceptional. Keen artists are allowed to use the well-stocked workshops and studios every day after school. Each year in the Lent term Rossall devotes a week solely to art, music and drama and parents told us that even the highest performing sports players are never discouraged from getting involved in the school play or any other creative endeavour.



Sport

This is a very sporty school for both girls and boys. Ian Botham sent his son Liam here and many alumni have gone on to play rugby, hockey or cricket professionally. Several current students are playing football at club and national level. More than a dozen pupils, male and female, currently play hockey for Lancashire. There are countless sports options beyond the more obvious team games: pupils can also play basketball, squash or badminton, or lift weights, climb, dance or shoot, and there are golf and football academies. The Football Programme recruits boys and girls from both home and abroad and is linked to Fleetwood Town Football Club. Three girls currently play for Manchester City. The Director of Football has recently been recruited to manage the England under 16 team. The Golf Academy is ranked number one for senior golf by the Independent Schools' Golf Association. It boasts an indoor golf centre with putting range, golf nets and a simulator to allow students to improve their shots – despite encouragement we didn't try it out.

Facilities are among the best we've seen; almost all sports offered are catered for onsite. Includes an extensive range of top quality pitches, playing fields, squash courts and the like. There's a 25-metre indoor swimming pool and in 2019 a new £4m sports centre was opened. Six badminton courts, an indoor sprint track and indoor long and high jump pits also feature.

Rossall Sport is steeped in tradition. RossHockey is a unique game, a hockey-rugby hybrid played only on the school's private beach. School regularly competes in rugby fives tournaments at prestigious public schools as well as hosting its own national Rossall Fives tournament each October.



Boarders

Pupils can board for weekdays only or the whole time. If day pupils want to temporarily board, which they often do, then they stay in spare beds within their own house.

Temporary boarding allows day pupils to stay at the school for a night or longer for pretty much any reason. They typically temporarily board on a Friday night if they have to be at school early the next morning for a match or on a Saturday night if they want to tag along

on the boarding house's Sunday outing. Some also choose to flexi-board, a more regular option, the same night each week with supervised prep, extra-curricular activities and tea provided as part of the package.

Although there are no Saturday classes, this is a busy day for sports practice and fixtures. On Sundays boarders can, at no extra cost, go on an outing to eg bowling, crazy golf, Alton Towers, Manchester Christmas markets. Just under 25 percent of boarders are international and these will be met at and delivered back to Manchester Airport by a representative of the school at the start and end of term. Pupils also have the option to stay in school during the holidays for a fee.

The boarding houses, including the junior house for 7-13 year olds, are homely and more cosy than typical university halls of residence. Any pupil can use them to relax and socialise during lunchtimes. Some are more up to date than others but the school has used Covid to begin an extensive round of refurbishing the houses on a five year cycle. Rooms are mostly singles, and are spacious and comfortable. Common rooms, kitchens and other social spaces are plentiful. Consequently there's lots of scope for different age groups and both local and international pupils to mix. Each pupil has a desk in their room and the freedom to put up pictures and customise their living space. Each house has a pair of live-in houseparents who are either teachers or support staff. The ones we met were warm and affectionate, their love of the job reflected in the way the children spoke about them. *'They look out for you and you can talk to them about anything'*.

"They look out for you and you can talk to them about anything."

Ethos and Heritage

Founded in 1844 by St Vincent Beechey as a sister school to Marlborough College, which had been founded the previous year. It was the first school in the UK to have CCF, which received the Queen's colours in 2010. The campus is expansive and grassy, the buildings red-brick, grand and turreted; beyond them stretches a thin strip of pale yellow beach before the misty sea. The school says it's the only one with its own private beach, gifted by Queen Victoria. Even on a grey, it is picturesque and peaceful. The newer areas of the school are the most impressive, with some of the older teaching spaces a little tired but watch this space as there are ambitious plans in place.

The fact that it's a boarding school, and a very international one, is integral to Rossall life. There is a seamless integration between day and boarding, UK and international students. Even if they're not staying for a sleepover, this is a school where older pupils in particular just don't want to go home. They can stay late for

prep (with teachers on hand to help) and have their tea at school. For day pupils who stay late there are prep clinics with one-to-one support, plus the option to stay for tea.

Big on tradition. Every year during Christmas Dinner in the imposing, oak-panelled dining hall, the pupils sing The 12 Days of Christmas, each house taking a different verse. No-one tells them to do it, the pupils explain, 'it just sort of happens, spontaneously'. It gets quite competitive, each house singing more boisterously than the last. One pupil said this sums up what's special about Rossall. We found no hint of social snobbery, we simply saw young people having a lovely time. There is great encouragement to be who you are and everyone we spoke to said that any student could find their niche here.

Alumni include Booker-Prize-winning novelist JG Farrell; Father Thomas RD Byles, the Catholic priest who refused to leave the Titanic so that he could help other passengers; eminent figures in the world of sport, music and industry; and a few bastions of the Establishment: a governor of a couple of colonies; a private secretary to Queen Victoria; and the magnificently named Sir Walton Clopton Wingfield, who patented the game of lawn tennis.



Pastoral Care, Inclusivity and Discipline

Several parents identified the quality of pastoral care as the single thing they most appreciated about Rossall. One parent was full of praise for the care and individual attention shown during a recent family bereavement not just to the pupil but also to the rest of the family. Mental health and wellbeing are prioritised, with a staff member dedicated to these areas. *'I don't know how our child would have managed without her during Covid,'* said a parent.

Religion is part of school life – there's a Church of England School Chaplain and the whole school attends chapel every Friday. The chapel is a beautiful building, for which students feel a great deal of affection for. Students said the religious aspect is inclusive, not just of other religions but atheism too. One student was deeply moved when describing his experiences of singing in the chapel in both the school choirs.

Discipline is firm, with serious breaches of rules dealt with case-by-case. Pupils we spoke to couldn't think of any instances of bullying and spoke with real conviction about how caring an environment this is; parents told us any bullying is dealt with appropriately. Everyone feels the school is accepting of difference, perhaps not least because of the international diversity.

Pupils and Parents

"I've grown up here, it's been so much more than developing my academic ability, I'm really nearly ready for the world."

Quite a few alumni of Rossall. Lots of state educated too. Some get help with fees from grandparents or from the school's own means-tested bursary scheme. Pupils are grounded, polite and universally positive about the school. Well presented too – uniform, blazers and tie for all, kilts or trousers for girls, all impeccable. We saw no arrogance and a remarkable sense from all of them that the school is a family. One day pupil, since the age of three, had chosen to board for the sixth form – *'I've grown up here, it's been so much more than developing my academic ability, I'm really nearly ready for the world,'* she told us. Another international student said, *'No-one feels more Rossallian than anyone else. It welcomes you in'.*

“No-one feels more Rossallian than anyone else. It welcomes you in.”

We met students who hadn't been home for many months during the pandemic when the school stayed open for boarding. They were full of praise for the teaching and boarding staff and the fact that no infections passed on within school. All commented on how all the school had supported them.

Money matters

The school has been in very good financial health for a number of years. About 25 percent of pupils in the senior school receive significant means-tested bursaries (a 50 percent reduction of fees or more, with 100% bursaries for local sixth form students). There are also scholarships available for high performers in sport, music, drama or academia.

The last word

A warm, welcoming and happy school that embraces the diversity of its community in an unselfconscious and genuine way. The buildings are grand and imposing from afar but once inside you can't help but be bowled over by the enthusiasm, purposefulness and inclusivity.







www.rossall.org.uk

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