

LIVE, LOVE, LEARN

Brambletye School in West Sussex won an award in recognition of the student experience it provides to its international pupils. Headmaster **WILL BROOKS** tells us more...

Brambletye is a preparatory (or junior) school providing an exceptional all-round education for boys and girls aged three to 13. The impressive school buildings are set in a 140-acre estate in the heart of the Sussex countryside, just 20 minutes from Gatwick and 30 miles from central London. The school is a busy and exciting home of learning with an exceptional team of staff dedicated to giving the children the best possible educational experience.

Award-winning excellence
In October, Brambletye won Independent School of the Year for International Student Experience given by the Independent Schools of the Year 2021 Awards. The accolade recognised Brambletye's "outstanding focus on celebrating, sharing and respecting the cultures and traditions from around the world fostering greater experiences, understanding and learning for all pupils". Brambletye is proud to be a global village. Our reputation travels the world by word of mouth, and there are currently children from more than 20 countries studying at the school. Diversity is celebrated and children learn about each other's differences, practising tolerance, empathy ►



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and respect. Cultural traditions and days of national importance from Diwali to Chinese New Year are celebrated with feasts and fanfare.

A home from home

The boarders live in the large but cosy main house and the dormitories overlook the Ashdown Forest (home to Winnie the Pooh), with stunning views over the Weir Wood Reservoir, where there's a sailing activity in the summer. With the help of staff and friends, children settle quickly and they're soon fully immersed into school life. New pupils are allocated a "shadow", a pupil in their class who will help them to find their way around and explain the routines. Shadows introduce new pupils to their friends and children say that they never feel like the new pupil for very long.

School days here are busy, so children don't have much time to pine for home. Once lessons are over for the day and the boarders have eaten supper, there's a long list of pursuits for them to explore and enjoy. Clubs such as fencing, cheerleading, carpentry, drama and taekwondo are on offer, or there's time for music practice, extra study sessions, or just some downtime with friends. A team of experienced boarding staff and residential teachers, who understand the children's needs, go the extra mile to support them to integrate and settle in. In the junior dormitories, they enjoy Lego championships and story nights, choosing tales from their own cultures to share with their dorm mates. The senior pupils enjoy time in the common rooms playing table football, cards and ping pong or making face masks, sewing and chatting. The children may be far from home, but here they become part of one big school family and their courage to travel overseas to study in a second language is celebrated by staff and children alike.

Weekends at Brambletye are designed to enable the children to enjoy and broaden their cultural and social experiences. Outings and a detailed on-site activity programme are arranged every weekend.

The pandemic

British schools have been guided in their response to the pandemic by the UK government. There continue to be a number of measures in place, including regular Covid-19 testing, enhanced cleaning regimes, good hygiene and ventilation in occupied spaces to ensure that the school communities remain safe and functioning. Brambletye has increased

its focus on staff and pupils' wellbeing. The medical centre is based in the heart of the school, and children are comfortable to pop in for a visit, whatever their needs. The centre's staff have mental health training and there's an experienced school counsellor on hand. Wellbeing courses have been run online throughout the year for staff, pupils and parents and all families have a subscription to a wellbeing hub with access to resources, webinars and a Q&A platform.

The need to adapt over the last few months has enabled Brambletye to develop new online tools benefitting international families in particular. Prospective parents may take a virtual tour of the school before registering their child or booking a visit in person. Parent teacher meetings have moved online enabling international parents to attend themselves instead of sending an agent or guardian in their place.

CARING & SHARING

Pastoral care programmes nurture students in and out of the classroom

Pastoral care is the provision a school makes to ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of its pupils. All schools provide it, but each will have its own approach; Brambletye takes a proactive approach to pastoral care. Each child has a tutor who they meet with each morning to discuss the week ahead and any challenges or successes they wish to share. This tutor is the go-to person for the child's parents and will keep them informed of their progress and development. A graduated response system with various levels of support provides pupils, parents and staff with a clear structure to refer to if needed. Pastoral staff include teachers, matrons, boarding staff, school nurses, mental health specialists, a school counsellor and an independent listener.

The children also take on pastoral roles, with the older children playing with and looking out for the younger ones. They're recognised for their efforts through a number of positions of responsibility across the school, such as boarding representatives, school prefects and house officer.

Work hard, play hard and be kind

Brambletye pupils are asked to live by three values: Work hard, play hard and be kind. Children are encouraged and guided by staff to stretch themselves academically and creatively and the opportunities for them to play outside, play sport and get involved with the school's extracurricular programme are plentiful. The children appreciate that kindness creates a happy environment for everyone to live, work and play in, but it also reflects the school's charitable endeavours to raise money and help people less fortunate than ourselves. Not only are the children successful in winning places and scholarships to top schools – the values they learn help them to develop the soft skills which companies say are the desirable qualities in future employees: resilience, confidence, social and emotional intelligence, creativity.

Children leave Brambletye as confident, creative, caring and happy individuals who are kind to each other and well equipped to embark on the next exciting step of their life journeys at new schools. ☺