

LIFE LESSONS

Boarding school is the best way to prepare pupils for the modern world, says **Ben Vessey**,
Headmaster of Canford School

"In 1976 my boarding house had no central heating. There was a coal fire in every room; boys were given enough coal to burn for an hour each evening. In the morning the room was icy, so we would burn a newspaper to create enough heat for a few delicious seconds to get changed. Rooms often caught fire."

Modern boarding is thankfully somewhat different from the recollections of journalist Jonathan Noakes. Alongside an increasing need to engage with a rapidly changing and ever more global society, such schools have been required to move with the times. They have responded to educational reforms, to tighter inspectorates, and also to the expectations of modern parents and their children. There is much less certainty about pupil futures too. Choosing a boarding school environment offers a child the opportunity to develop the crucial skills of resilience, tolerance and ambition to face

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the many challenges along the way with both confidence and a sense of purpose.

Today's workforce is a meritocracy, and global in outlook. Gone are the days of the 'old boy network' reliance on slipping through a corporate side door. Pupils need to be career chameleons and will have any number of different jobs in a variety of sectors both at home and abroad in their working lives. "Children in boarding schools win out in the graduate labour market," says William Richard, general secretary of the HMC. "They do well all round, and are self-confident, resilient, and networked." This



ABOVE
Canford pupils

sentiment is echoed by Kevin Roberts, the CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi worldwide, who claims that boarding makes the rounded and flexible people today's marketplace demands – with many of the skills over and above academic achievement, the cornerstones of success.

This is not to say that academic achievement is not important. Exam results are crucial tickets to the next stage of education and at Canford we encourage our pupils to aim high. Our academic successes are, we believe, the outcome of a purposeful, challenging but supported and inspirational full boarding school environment. Longer school days afford

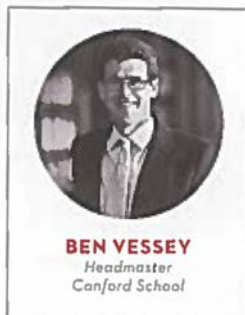
the opportunity of a blend of classroom and dynamic co-curricular offerings designed to test and develop the mind, and which promote a focus on teamwork and independence in equal measure.

We need to equip pupils with the life skills to face up to failure, to engage in honest reflection about those experiences, and to have the self-assurance to bounce back. A boarding school environment, where you are working and living together with your peers, sharing both the highs and lows of daily life, produces an empathy towards different characters and personalities, tolerance and a sense of mutual support. As Victoria Goldman and Catherine Hausman wrote in the *New York Times*, "Mr Chips has undergone a millennial thaw."

As educators, we must ensure that our pupils leave us with a sense of social responsibility. The Independent Schools Council recently published a partnerships update showcasing numerous schools – day and boarding – who are contributing to their community. At Canford, every sixth former has the time within the school week to get involved in some form of community action. Last year,

they devoted as many as 8,888 hours to it. The effect that these experiences have on pupils is in many cases profound.

Life for young people growing up in the 21st century is challenging, and boarding schools have adapted radically to meet the ever-changing pressures and embrace new opportunities. 🍷



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