



This is not the time to bring with you the prejudices of when you were at school, 20 or possibly 30 years ago, when schools have changed beyond comprehension, but to start at the beginning and really look at your own child. No use sending them to a sporty school if their passion is music or art and this is not celebrated to the same level.

Senior schools offer so much and most heads would echo the advice of Ben Vessey, headmaster of senior, co-ed, Canford School in Dorset. 'When parents are considering a school for their child, remember the words of American actor Danny Kaye: "Life is a great big canvas, throw all the paint you can at it." What a pupil learns in one context can have a big impact on what they learn elsewhere – whether that be in the classroom, in the theatre, in the music school, on the games field, in the debating chamber or out on Dartmoor. So look for a broad range of opportunities, as used wisely this understanding can be life changing.'

To do this, it is essential to go to the open days, narrow down the choice and then draw up a list of, say, the three schools you felt matched your needs the best but requiring different levels of academic attainment. As Common Entrance approaches, your child's head will be able to advise on where your daughter or son would be happiest. It is a good idea to listen to them, they want the best for your child. They don't want failures and they have to write the all-important head's report. This is the foundation for the basis of understanding between prep school heads and senior schools' admissions tutors; it can swing a senior school into accepting a child who perhaps hasn't performed as well as expected. But the integrity of prep school heads is vital so don't imagine they will lie for you, any more than you should deceive yourself.



Canford believes extra-curriculars are of great importance