



Kingsmead School

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‘Practise to Perfect’

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for making the time to look into Kingsmead. I appreciate that one is supposed to ‘sell’ something by making one’s language concise and powerful, but if you are someone who prefers a short introduction then please indulge on how much it matters to me that this is a two-way process; I want to be as clear as possible as to what we are about and I want you to know you are making a good decision to apply.

We are capable of having fun too, so I recommend you organise to speak with me and/or visit the school so you get a sense of who we are as people. You will have to work with us after all!

What makes Kingsmead special?

We are a large, hugely oversubscribed school, with an exceptionally diverse intake in an area of London that faces ongoing challenges. We expect our children to defy stereotypical expectations and we were one of only **four** schools in England in 2019 (the last statistically worthwhile dataset) that achieved an **above average Progress 8 score** while also being:

- Ebacc entry above 75% (not gaming the system, not reducing the rigour and ambition)
- Large (more than 200 in Y11 and with a Sixth Form, so far more complex)
- Mixed (not a girls school, as P8 for girls was 0.49 higher than for boys nationally)
- Comprehensive (Not grammar, not faith based, both of which always score higher)
- In an area of above average deprivation (in the top 20% most deprived areas in England, which was a -0.14 disadvantage in 2016¹)

I am incredibly proud of that, as it represents a victory for high expectations and doing things the right way, not the easy way.

‘Kingsmead School is an ambitious environment for pupils. Leaders are keen to prepare pupils for their future lives. They have high expectations of pupils’ academic achievement. The school’s motto, ‘Practise to Perfect’, encourages all pupils to believe that they have the capacity to succeed if they are determined and work hard.’ OFSTED 2022

Where has the school come from?

To give you a flavour of where I am coming from, I was a free school meals child at secondary school who did really well while younger, remained ambitious, but did not have the graduate parents or the understanding of what was really needed to excel. I left school furious about that, and about being turned down for Oxbridge. I am no longer furious, but I am driven by a refusal to accept that schools cannot find the right ways to be incredibly ambitious for their children.

The Kingsmead of 2016 was packed full of great people and great children, but like so many schools had fallen prey to the early 2010s version of success: exam driven, narrow and driven by accountability rather than a wider philosophy or depth of ambition. I arrived after working in Hackney and then for ARK Schools, and having gone through the Ambition Institute ‘Future Leaders’ program. I view responsibility and professional progress as something that comes from ambition, developing expertise and having the highest possible impact. I also carry with me a rather challenging mix of a desire to be decent to people, while also to not be happy until something is demonstrably and genuinely excellent. I am allergic to shortcuts and have no interest in trying to look good.

In my time leading the school, we have:

- Redefined the school’s mission and values.
- Put the school’s finances on a sustainable footing.
- Shifted the culture of leadership to being insightful, reflective and long-term.
- Overhauled the behaviour policy to ensure high expectations, consistency and humanity.
- Expanded the Sixth Form curriculum to 26 A Level courses.

- Rewritten every subject curriculum in collaboration with Ambition Institute.
- Shifted to evidence-based approaches to teaching, informed by research.
- Changed assessment to focus on impact and adaptation rather than compliance.
- Massively expanded the breadth, depth and rigour of personal development and enrichment.
- Recruited and promoted colleagues who are highly capable, morally driven and aligned with the school's vision (with a high number of current Teach First and alumni at all levels in the school).
- Reduced redundant tasks and made workload efficient and collective.
- Created designated time across the week (within directed time) for collaborative planning in departments.

'Leaders are passionate about school improvement. School staff share the vision and values of leaders and governors.' OFSTED 2022

'Leaders have a transparent approach. The headteacher has shifted the culture to one of openness and collaboration. Teachers are confident they are valued and supported, and as a result are more able to meet students' needs.' Challenge Partners 2023

'Staff appreciate the investment the school has made in their professional development.' OFSTED 2022

'Early career teachers feel well supported in developing their teaching skills.' OFSTED 2022

'Leaders create an atmosphere of mutual trust for lasting results in improving the provision. At Kingsmead the impact of training is evident in classrooms'. Challenge Partners 2023

Where is the school going next?

We are aiming for a school that is genuinely transformative. It would be simplest to do that by buying into the hero model of leadership and a high-stakes, anxiety fuelled culture that steamrollers people. That is not desirable or sustainable. We also have too much faith in others (and too much of a desire to enjoy our work) to be able to carry it off. We believe that if you find the right people their own internal standards and ambition make that redundant. It is possible to work hard, care deeply about success and be a pretty great human being. What one can then focus on is developing the substance of what we all are doing through our school values of courage, nurture, collaboration and rigour.

After rebooting the entire school, going through COVID and now recruiting excellent new senior and middle leaders in the last two years, we are no longer trying to make sweeping changes. Having created the right conditions and structures, we are instead now focused on deepening the confidence and skill of leadership at all levels so that the principles we have established endure in the long-term and become entirely consistent across the school.

We will always continue to refine, but the next two years are going to be heavily focused on the main thing: staff development and the continued progress of teaching and learning. It would be nice to have a bit more fun than most teachers managed between 2020 and 2022 as well. We have brilliant people and it is our job to make them all remarkable at what they do.

'The renewed senior leadership team have a clear vision for the improvement of the school and have been implementing this in a systematic and reflective way. They know what is going on and are very clear about the strengths of the school and where it can become even better.' Challenge Partners 2023

'Middle leaders have a desire to adapt and progress their curriculum areas. They revisit change. They are ambitious for the students. One said, 'We are a very ambitious school'. Challenge Partners 2023

'Middle leaders know the school's priorities, including developing assessment for learning. They value the whole-school continuing professional development (CPD). Increased planning time has given them more time for departmental conversations. Middle leaders enjoy collaborating with one another, and some departments use part of the extra time for reading and research around their subjects'. Challenge Partners 2023

How will you be developed?

One of the documents included in the pack is an explanation of how we approach teacher development, but everyone we recruit has a strong sense of moral purpose and is highly reflective. It makes for an exciting community of professionals. This year we have set aside even more time for teachers to collaborate and work closely together to develop their curricula and their understanding of consistent, evidence-based approaches to ensuring children truly learn.

We are actively interested in your weaknesses as much as your strengths because we all have both. A big reason for taking the sting out of appraisal at Kingsmead was so that it could be about someone's development rather than be viewed as a stick to beat people with. That way we can have open conversations about where we are as professionals. We have connections with a wide range of schools and internal training programs. I am happy to bring use support and challenge from both inside and outside the school and I will want to tailor any development to your needs. Again, the motto 'Practise to Perfect' is there for a reason.

What next?

That is very much up to you. My answer would be *apply for this job!* To go back to where I started, this is a two-way process. There are further details of the school on our website, some *epically long* documentation that explains nearly everything on an intellectual level if you like that sort of thing. It includes:

- An overview of what we are trying to achieve with the Academic, Behaviour and Readiness curricula.
- An explanation of why our 2022 P8 statistics are inaccurately low due to statistical quirks.
- An explanation of our leadership approach.
- The expected behaviours and leadership skills we expect and develop.
- An outline of our approach to teacher and career development.
- Our teacher wellbeing statement
- A copy of our last external review from Challenge Partners.
- A copy of our last OFSTED report.

This is all there as food for thought, but is rather abstract and potentially overwhelming. It is not broken up by graphic design or expensive photography, so it may not be for everyone.

I actively encourage you to contact the school to arrange a conversation with me before applying and you are welcome to visit any time (within reason) during the school day and with the opportunity to talk to children and potential colleagues is my preferred version. We will be open with everyone and answer any questions you may have. We want you to be excited about the real version of the school, not an airbrushed or on paper version.

If you want to ask questions, or just get a sense of me and the school in person, then please do just ask.

You can arrange to speak with me via HR@Kingsmead.org

Best wishes,



David Medway
Headteacher

