

December 2014

## Frensham Heights

### Liberal Ethos

It is vital that all of those associated with the School, students, parents, staff and Governors, have a shared understanding of the Frensham Heights Liberal Ethos, so that this same philosophy/Ethos can inspire all that we do. As the school continues to face the challenges of the future, (educational, social and economic) I feel it is having a shared philosophic and historic understanding of the Liberal Ethos that gives us solidity and purpose.

Explicit in the School Prospectus and in the strategic planning Endstate is the belief in maintaining and developing our Ethos – so that it influences our educational provision, the way we manage children day to day; and so that it gives us the support to continue to innovate and take some risks in the delivery of a distinctive educational experience. Whilst the Endstate gives us direction in its overall strategy, and the management plans will give us clear steps to take along the way, the philosophical and historic beliefs of the school give us the clarity of purpose to take these other elements forward. This Ethos is entirely in keeping with the legal requirement and Governors' active promotion of the fundamental British values of: democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty; and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

**Heritage:** The Founders of Frensham were fundamentally progressive, with a theosophical base to their work and the latest Montessori methods employed in the classroom. In 1925 Beatrice Ensor and Isobel King established many of the basic foundations of the School's ethos. The following is an extract from the World Education Forum, a body they helped to establish:

“(Ensor’s) only stipulation was cooperation and solidarity based on ‘a generosity of spirit’. According to Ensor, and with regards to education, this meant a change from competitive to co-operative spirit, participation of children in the control of the school community, respect for training and development of individuality and curricula based on the processes of learning as well as on its outcomes. It is impossible not to notice how close these principles are to qualities needed for sustainable and equitable development.”

From this extract it is easy to see the footprint of Ensor and King in much of what we hold to as the Frensham Ethos. The Founders thought the basic liberal principles should be:

1. Every child has a right to be themselves and to grow into the kind of person that they have it within themselves to become.
2. No child can reach full maturity without learning to live fully and happily with their fellows.

By emphasising the right to grow, to discover them self and to reach maturity by learning to live in a community as a positive contributor, the Founders were setting out in simple clarity the same values and educational aims that we must maintain today.

**Respect:** It was Paul Roberts who then defined these beliefs into a working, practical and, for its time, radical educational programme. He placed great value on the importance of relationships, on respecting the rights of all members of the community; but also on having a secure and managed environment for growth. Paul gave the guidance that all members of the school – adults and students alike – had to seek to become: “Mature, Free, Courageous and Happy” -- key to this is developing self awareness, and then by giving respect to all other members of the community.

*“the most potent influence in the growth of the child is the attitude of the grown-ups who surround them towards their environment. If the child is to grow to full maturity they must be surrounded by adults who are themselves mature, free, courageous and happy.” (Paul Roberts 1940)*

**Equality and Tolerance:** The social challenges and world economic issues, which we still face day to day, reinforce the need for Frensham to stand up for Equality and Tolerance. We must ensure that children grow up sensitive to the needs and dignity of others regardless of colour, nationality, religious belief or race. The Frensham children need to grow up as active members of society, as people who will, in their time, aim to make positive contributions to whatever community they live in.

We still want children to grow up aware of their environment, responsive to beauty, open to ideas and willing to show kindness to those who are not as lucky as they. I have no doubt that we all agree with these points; that we all want this for the children in our care. Perhaps more challenging is *how* do we support the young as they face irrational fears, prejudice, ignorance, guilt, falsehoods of fashion or materialism? The young are challenged by low self-esteem, unhappiness, pressures to conform; it is here that we must do our hardest work in “liberating” them so that they truly grow into free, independent, mature and emotionally equipped young adults.

**Self-Discipline:** I would stress, that whilst we must be true to the Liberal Ethos and above all else believe in and trust the young, we are not libertine: Frensham will always have a strong sense of values, purpose, attainment and must reinforce the need for pride in all we do. This is what sets us apart from the progressive movement; we do have a set of ‘boundaries’ within which the children can and will grow up safer and more confident.

**Cooperation:** As a member of this school I am asking you to do more than teach your subject, to be ambitious in your learning or supportive of the community as a parent; I am asking you to question your own prejudices, your own fears, to show your humanity to those in your care, so that they can see that you have secure, liberal and mature beliefs and values from which they can learn. This has to be reflected in all of our work and relationships, across the various parts of this community: teachers, students, support staff and parents.

I am asking all of us at Frensham to remain in pursuit of an education that is an embodiment of the Liberal Ethos, a school with purpose beyond simplistic ‘schooling’ towards examination success (whilst recognising the importance of this element of today’s system) and towards education in working with others, seeing the best in all, developing self respect and showing equal respect to all.

Our challenge as the members of Frensham today is to believe in the Liberal Ethos, to put it into action, even when the demands for schooling seem to dominate, and to try to live with those same values in every facet of our jobs. The danger, for us all, is that we become preoccupied with the daily routines or problems and perhaps do not take enough time to value each other, to believe in children and to acknowledge that we are all human. However, we must still seek to create the environment envisaged by Paul Roberts as we seek to create the right balance of liberty and responsibility, freedom and maturity, purpose and fun, schooling and education.

I invite you to read my statement on the Ethos with a generosity of spirit, because the atmosphere and culture of this school is ethereal, is wonderful, and yet it is made up of each and every one of us as a collective.

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