

# Big Is Beautiful - For The Individual

Thorpe St Andrew School and Sixth Form, through a combination of its success and substantial growth within the area, has become one of Norfolk's largest schools. Large schools are organised and run in a different way to small schools.

Firstly, there is a tendency to think large schools are more difficult to settle into. Our transfer programme which runs throughout the year attempts to address this. We have shown that those who actively participate in this programme generally settle quickly into the routines of secondary school and their worries are soon forgotten.

Secondly, we recognise that there exists the fear of not being known in the school. That is why we have the pastoral structure of vertical houses, each with a Head of House (and a Head of Sixth Form) whose job it is to know every student in their care. Equally, the Form Tutor has a key role to play and with only four or five changes of student each year, due to Year 11 moving into the Sixth Form and being replaced by new Year 7s, this is not a major task. Our form and teaching classes are no bigger than those in the smallest high schools.

Indeed, addressing this second concern is the priority aim of our school. We have actively adopted a policy of Personalised Learning for All. Our task is to ensure that each student is taught in a class and in a manner that is appropriate to their own needs.

The range of opportunities and experiences that a big school can offer gives greater flexibility, far in excess of that of a smaller school. Take for example the range of subjects on offer at Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form level. Our curriculum choice here is second to none with ever increasing flexibility and progression of courses throughout the age range (with no enforced change at age 16). This has to be an advantage when you are talking about really knowing an individual and providing the support and guidance they need. A big school can also benefit from the number of teachers it employs in each subject area, ensuring that specialists deliver the teaching to the good of all students. Class sizes are no bigger than in any other school and, in many cases they are smaller. Equally, we divide each year group into two mirror halves for teaching, this means for example, two top sets exist, giving more opportunities for all.

When it comes to extra curricular and extension opportunities the advantages of a big school are clear. You are bound to find others with the same interests as yourself and, if there is not a club or activity you want, there are many examples of these being started by students of the school. Again, our size has a significant impact here with our Student Leadership Programme, where older students support and encourage the younger ones to the benefit of both groups. As a Sports College we have teams in most sporting areas. This scale of activity is not just limited to sport; it ranges from public speaking to Art and Science Clubs with many other options in between.

Finally, as a big school, we can also employ an extended range of professionals to give support to students and their parents. These posts at Thorpe St Andrew School and Sixth Form range from a full time Student and Family Counsellor and a Primary Liaison and Admissions Co-ordinator (who is contactable as she does not have a class to teach) through to a full time Student Welfare Officer and an Examination Officer.

In 2014, Ofsted said *'The school provides a very positive environment for learning which successfully supports the excellent academic and personal development of students.'* Clearly, they believe our support system works.

Ian Clayton  
Principal