

Meet the Head

Mark Mortimer

Bryanston pupils have the freedom to develop as individuals in an understanding environment.

What's your earliest school memory?

Until I was 11, I was at Hadley Wood Primary School and so all my earliest school memories are from there. Phil Tufnell was in the year above and he was a bit of a tearaway! I remember arguing with the headmaster about the lack of competitive sport (this was the 1970s), the dreadful food (I've never been able to eat semolina or liver since) and hitting the dizzy heights of playing the part of a sheep in *Aesop's Fables*.

Where did you go to secondary school?

After Keble Prep School, I was a boarder at Mill Hill School in north London and then spent one year as a boarder at St James' School, Maryland, USA on an English-Speaking Union scholarship. I loved school and I loved boarding. Looking back, however, 1980s boarding was pretty rudimentary.

What did your school reports say?

That I was whole-hearted and had potential but didn't always work hard enough; focused far too much on sport, was easily distracted and could do better. Sounds familiar.

Who were your childhood heroes and why?

ABBA! I had their posters all over my wall and was in love with Agnetha. From the

dynamic Swedish quartet, I moved onto David Bowie and I remain a huge fan of his music. Cricket was my sporting passion when I was young, so it was the Middlesex cricket team of that era (which really doesn't sound very exciting). The first Test match I saw was England play the mighty West Indies of that time, with Greenidge, Richards, Marshall, Holding et al. They were magnificent.

Did you always want to teach?

No, it never even crossed my mind until I was 31. After reading history at university, I went to Sandhurst and then spent eight years as an infantry officer, before becoming a management consultant. I did not enjoy that.

It was only then that I considered teaching as a career and it seemed a good fit. I've never looked back and am hugely lucky to have had two careers that I loved and that were right for me at that particular time in my life. There are huge similarities between leading a school and being an army officer.

What is unique about your school?

Like any outstanding school, Bryanston has high expectations, high standards and expects much of its pupils. In that sense, they are being channelled while they are here; however, the corridor down which they are travelling is wider than at the more orthodox,

traditional schools. We do not force them down a narrow passage of conformity. Of course, there are still clear boundaries, but there is also room to travel down the left-hand side, the right-hand side or even zigzag along it.

This greater freedom allows pupils to focus on who they are and who they want to be, rather than on what they want to do. This approach is underpinned by our unique tutoring system. Each child has the same tutor for all five years and he or she is selected according to the interests and character of the child; all tutorial work is carried out one-to-one.

You are education secretary for a day; what changes would you make?

1. I'd instigate a review of GCSEs with the aim of replacing them with a creative curriculum based on an inter-disciplinary, problem-solving approach.
2. I'd try to persuade politicians of all parties to sit down and talk (and listen) to headteachers from both state and independent schools, in order to actually realise and understand how much meaningful, collaborative cross-sector partnership work is actually happening. Listening to politicians using education as a political football and failing to give any impression that they appreciate the reality on the ground is deeply frustrating and irritating.

What are your hobbies?

I read a lot, mainly about history, military history, sport and leadership – as well as a daily newspaper. I also love the ballet and go as often as I can; here at Bryanston, we are now licensed to livestream performances from the Royal Opera House into our theatre, so that helps. I also spend a lot of time either riding (indoors on Zwift or around Dorset), running or swimming. Lastly, I play the ukulele – extremely inconsistently (badly). We have three young children and they take up a lot of my free time.

Which books are by your bedside?

I usually have several on the go at any one time. Right now, they are Max Hastings' history of the Vietnam War, Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* and Mark Nicholas' *A Beautiful Game: my love affair with cricket*. I highly recommend the book I have just finished: *Appeasing Hitler* by Old Bryanstonian Tim Bouverie. A superb piece of work. WL

Mark joined Bryanston in September last year after more than five years at Warminster

