

2024 Ransome Prize Recipient Alice Phillips



Alice Phillips is a proud founding member of ICGS and long-standing member of the Girls' Schools Association in the UK. A lifelong advocate of girls' education and the importance of unlocking all the potential in every student, she has spent all of her 40-year professional life to date in girls' schools.

As Headmistress of St. Catherine's, Bramley, (near Guildford, in the county of Surrey just South West of London, UK) she has for 24 years been custodian of the traditional values of the School – a Church of England Foundation with a strong focus on inclusion and compassion – while adopting all the exciting initiatives of recent decades: Thinking Skills (2004), Growth Mindset (2007), Technology (iPads 2013, Google Classroom 2014), Digital Learning (2016 and fully ready to come to the rescue during Covid) and

AI etc (ongoing!), to ensure a bold and forward-facing academic provision. This is underpinned by a strong house system and pastoral care that will go the extra mile and much more for its girls to ensure they all benefit from the established values and the new initiatives.

Alice takes pride in providing girls ages 4 to 18 with a sense of belonging from which comes confidence to explore their skills and talents and push their academic and extra-curricular boundaries, all in a safe space where they grow up believing and demonstrating there is nothing that a woman cannot do. They are prepared for a world that is not yet gender equal, but are crucially ready to play their part in helping achieve this aspiration.

This culture allows teaching colleagues to foster the acquisition of self-belief which leads to achievement – whatever that may look like for each individual – and then to success, both in School, in Higher Education or training, and in life beyond. Having first-hand knowledge of the journeys of so many generations of alumnae, now embarked on or well into their careers, means that Alice is never short of speakers for careers events, end-of-term lectures or for Speech Days,

ensuring that inspiration and a sense of *'I could do that'* is the baton passed on from one St. Cat's generation to another.

Founding the St. Catherine's Association in 2004 from the former Old Girls' Association, Alice established a global community for all alumnae, parents, former parents, staff, former staff, governors, former governors, and local friends of the School, free of charge and ready to create a network for life around current students and alumnae.

Aware of the privileged nature of the independent school education a St. Catherine's girl receives, Alice has also devoted time to encouraging initiatives that raise the girls' eyes beyond their immediate horizons. An exchange programme with St. Catherine's, Melbourne, and close relationship with St. Catherine's, Virginia, ensure an exchange of cultures and educational styles. In addition, fundraising initiatives driven by the girls work to address the needs of others, both locally and further afield. From 2005 until 2021, the school enjoyed a long-standing partnership with Afghan Connection, a charity founded by St Catherine's alumna, Dr Sarah Fane OBE, focused on bringing education to as many girls in Afghanistan as possible and enjoying significant success in that aim. Since the charity closed down because of security issues in the country, the UK girls have engaged in supporting Dr Fane's new initiative, running 30-minute weekly 1 to 1 English language coaching lessons with 15 Syrian refugees studying at the Alsama Institute in Bourj el-Barjneh, Lebanon. The life lesson is achieved that setbacks don't negate past achievements and you should never give up trying to give help where it is needed most.

The School boasts not one, but three Sixth Form fundraising boards which senior girls clamour to join, raising significant funds for many good causes. Through these, they learn how to run complex, major events – the annual fashion show or the Father/Daughter Dinners are examples. In addition, the Business Entrepreneurs Scheme usually runs more than three companies of senior students who learn the rules of business and boardroom structures but instead of working for shareholders and returning dividends, they instead raise their own capital and plough the proceeds back into charities of their choosing. Most recently a 'Top Trumps' game featuring cards for 30 members of staff, all carefully negotiated to amuse but not offend, was a great hit and the promotional film starred Ali P (sic) as ready to join in the fun of school life, too. Many girls carry the skills they learn from all these experiences, and the rewards they enjoy from taking part and making a difference, into work on university or local community fundraising efforts on an even bigger scale. For some this has also led to careers in the fundraising/pro bono sectors.

Alice takes pride in the networks that have sustained her personally career-long and the many colleagues to whom she can turn for information or to whom she can offer mentoring, too. This would above all include the Class of 2000 group of GSA heads, her closest buddies in Headship. Alice has a wealth of experience in the independent school system in the UK, from first teaching days in the English Department - and rising to lead it - at the Royal Masonic Girls' School in Rickmansworth, to Deputy Headship at Tormead School, Guildford, before moving just down the road to St. Catherine's on 1st April 2000.

A proud member of the Girls' Schools Association in the UK for all of her leadership career, Alice has assumed a number of key positions, in particular as Chair of the South Central Region and Chair of the Professional Development Committee, in which role she was involved in the planning of NCGS's first Global Forum for educators of girls in partnership with other global girls' schools' leaders. She has been an Officer and Member of Council of GSA, and was privileged to be elected to serve as President in 2014, where a major highlight was welcoming Malala Yousafzai as keynote speaker at her conference in London to address a packed room of girls' schools leaders. Subsequently Alice also served as Vice Chairman of the Independent Schools Council from 2015-2018 and is now very proud to be a founder member of ICGS and part of its bold global reach and aspirations for girls' education.

Providing opportunities for professional development, and recruiting and developing talented teachers has been a focus of Alice's career and she is proud that over 45 graduates have trained and qualified at St. Catherine's since she joined, many going on to internal or external promotion as subject leaders and then into senior leadership. She is particularly pleased to boast seeing a first – of many, she hopes – move into GSA headship in the past year. Alice's belief is that teachers hold the keys to humanity's future and their role – often undertaken in quiet, modest, unsung and subtle ways – should never be overlooked or undervalued. Consequently, she has a readiness to speak truth to power and focuses on lobbying via her now extensive professional networks in order to make politicians pay attention.

Finally, and closer to home, Alice is extremely proud that her daughter, Joanna, is a former student of St. Catherine's from age 4-18 – a so-called 'Lifer' – and now works in the outreach department of the Philharmonic Orchestra in London, illustrating that the St. Cat's blend of academic and extra-curricular activity - a Medieval History degree from St Andrew's and an MA in Arts Management from Cardiff and a passion for music-making in Joanna's case – can together lead you to the first stages of a great career.