



EDUCATION CORNER PODCAST WITH THE HEAD

# Mrs. Anna Paul

FROM SOUTH HAMPSTEAD HIGH SCHOOL GDST, LONDON

In this episode of the Education Corner Podcast, we spoke to Mrs. Anna Paul, Head at South Hampstead High School GDST, London. As the school celebrates its 150th anniversary, Anna reflects on the pioneering women who shaped its history, their legacy in shaping the school's ethos of empowering young women and projects underway as they plan for the future.

Anna began her career in education as an English teacher, progressing to Senior Deputy roles before joining South Hampstead High School in 2023. Over the course of her career, she discovered a passion specifically for supporting girls' education. She shared: "I found a really profound love of working with girls, motivating them to be the best they can and a deep commitment to humane and authentic leadership."

In celebration of South Hampstead High School's 150th anniversary this year, Anna reflected on its founding leaders and the lasting impact of their vision for girls' education. She stated: "I have a lot to say about the role of female leaders in society. I'd start by celebrating the women who founded our school, those trailblazing heads who were so courageous in setting up South Hampstead. They were incredibly brave in the way they foregrounded education for young women." The pioneering founders established an ethos centred on courage, equality and opportunity; values that continue to shape the school today. Anna explained:



"The suffragist movement was broadly represented on the staff here at South Hampstead. One of our girls, Ellen Farrer, was one of the first women to qualify as a doctor in this country. This history of women standing up for women's rights, and empowering themselves through education, has really continued throughout the school's journey."

Anna also highlighted how this long-standing commitment to equality has fostered a wider culture of compassion and community at South Hampstead High School. She told us: "South Hampstead has a long history of supporting refugees who

were victims of conflict during the Second World War; this goes right up to today in supporting Ukrainian refugees." She added: "We're very proud of that legacy of women supporting each other, standing up for each other and I think it really feeds into school life in so many different ways. It permeates what we do." This philosophy is directly reflected in the work of present-day students. In the last year alone, Anna accompanied two pupils to speak at the House of Lords about the benefits of an all-girls' education, while the former Head Girl interviewed feminist writer Laura Bates on gender equality. Anna remarked: "One of the things we've been reflecting on in our anniversary is how the core of the school has remained so true to its founding values."



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As part of the anniversary celebrations, South Hampstead High School invested in the development of two new wellbeing initiatives, designed to place community at the heart of school life. Anna shared: "One of the things we've done is completely transform our roof terrace at the top of our school. That outdoor space has become an incredible place for the girls to gather." Described as an "immersive outdoor space," the renovated rooftop will serve both as a communal and educational setting, with trees and an interactive screen for outdoor lessons. She continued: "We can also do things like yoga and Pilates and creative writing sessions outside with the girls. It's already become a real hub of the school, which is wonderful to see."

Alongside the renovated rooftop, the school has installed a new wellbeing space, providing students with a dedicated room for exercise, complete with a range of new equipment. Anna explained: "We have a new gym with a ballet barre, cardio machines, weights and a fantastic space where the girls can exercise and embrace the importance of that, which we're really keen to advocate here at South Hampstead. It's been wonderful to have those two additions to the building and see so many of our girls be able to take advantage of them."



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The new spaces were developed collaboratively with students, demonstrating a commitment to empowering girls and ensuring their voices are heard. Anna explained: "We consulted the girls about what they wanted in these projects, from our little tinies in Reception all the way up to our oldest girls. It's a real testament to how we want to celebrate our anniversary through our girls' voices."

Other smaller projects, such as an archive display exhibiting old school uniforms and magazines, have also been created to mark the anniversary, offering a glimpse into South Hampstead High School's evolution throughout its history. Anniversary festivities will culminate at the Royal Festival Hall in July. Anna elaborated: "We've commissioned a piece of music which we plan to launch at our finale event for our anniversary. We're going to bring the whole school together, right down from our youngest students up to our oldest girls and their parents. It will be an incredible occasion."

The school is also a part of the Girls' Day School Trust, which Anna believes not only binds the school to a higher moral objective, but also provides girls





with the opportunity to access an expansive network of support beyond the school walls. She told us: *“Being bound by the ethical principle of giving as many girls as possible the opportunity to access fabulous education is an incredibly important moral purpose.”* Anna added: *“The GDST describes itself as a family of schools and I think that sense of being a family unifies the group.”*

Anna emphasised that the influence and opportunities offered by the GDST materialises beyond graduation. She clarifies: *“The GDST is there for the girls for life. If you join a GDST school, you join an incredibly large community of alumnae, at least 100,000, if not more. The sort of opportunities that gives the girls - a chance to hear from former students, to hear from other GDST women - is so incredibly powerful.”* Furthermore, Anna firmly believes in the power of girls’ schools, detailing: *“I believe so strongly that an all-girls’ education is the best possible preparation for adult life for women.”* She added: *“What is incredible about an all-girls’ environment is it allows you to be free of gender stereotypes in all kinds of ways. They learn to use their voice with pride.”* This is

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reflected in the school’s Debate Hub and a new oracy qualification for Years 10 and 11, one of the only examples of its kind in the UK. As Anna shared: *“It teaches girls that using their voice effectively and powerfully is something that will serve them beneficially throughout their entire lives.”*

Careers education begins in reception, while the ‘Academic 27’ project sees the school *“working with a range of employers to really understand the skills they see as highly valuable, both now and for the future.”* After celebrating the best GCSE and A-Level results in the school’s history, Anna plans to build upon this success, including developing a South Hampstead qualification in AI skills. As she concluded: *“It just feels like an amazing chapter in the school’s history and I’m really proud to lead the school at such a moment.”*



*We would like to thank Mrs. Anna Paul, Head at South Hampstead High School GDST, for giving up her time to speak with us.*



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