

Meet our new Head



Mrs Lindsey Hughes comes to Channing with a wealth of leadership experience gained at two stellar girls' schools; Lady Eleanor Holles in South West London, where she was the sole Deputy Head for five years, and St Helen and St Katharine, Abingdon, where for four years she held the post of Director of Students with responsibility for pastoral care. She is an alumna of Cheltenham Ladies' College and Warwick University, where she read History. In her free moments, she enjoys maintaining a keen interest in politics and international relations, singing, film and theatre, watching sport (especially cricket!) and walking her dog with her son.

I am thrilled to be the new Headmistress of Channing. I knew of Channing's excellent reputation before I applied, and the ethos and Unitarian values of the School chime completely with my personal vision of education. I believe wholeheartedly that happy pupils learn best and am delighted to uphold the school's aim of girls enjoying success, achieved without undue pressure.

I was inspired to become a teacher by my A level History teachers. They brought the Tudors and the European Reformation to life, inspiring a life-long love of that period of History and a passion for the subject which completely derailed my previous plans to become a hugely successful entrepreneur! I love teaching History because I love telling stories; there's something really special about sharing with others the excitement of unfolding events and analysing the actions of the people involved.

I am a committed advocate of girls' education although I resisted joining an all-girls school for a long time, having not always enjoyed my own experience of a single sex education in the 1980s. I wish I hadn't waited! I think that an all-girls education gives young women opportunities to follow their interests and develop their personal style without ever needing to worry about stereotypes or judgement of their choices. They become bold, which is a marvellous attribute, and my hope is that Channing girls will leave at the end of their time in school ready to stand by their opinions, knowing that they will be well-argued and based in evidence. The Unitarian emphasis on free thinking and critical thinking is vital for this.

I believe that parents can support their daughters' education by engaging fully with the school and committing to the ethos which underpins life at Channing. When you choose Channing for your daughter, you're choosing a dedicated team of professionals who have, between them, decades of experience in raising girls and young women. At school we educate your daughter, in the widest possible sense, and our aim is to support you as parents as you navigate the years between 4 and 18. So much changes, and so fast: I hope you find it reassuring to know that you've got us here to assist you too! After all, our common endeavour is to ensure your daughter enjoys the success that she achieves at school and beyond. I believe that this always works best when we work together to encourage your daughter in making the best possible choices about her present actions and future possibilities.

I love the idea that you don't need to move school to get a 'new school' at Channing as each section of the school has its own distinctive feel. The journey from 4 to 18 at Channing provides a fabulous blend of adventure and opportunity at each stage of a pupil's school career, which is underpinned by the certainty that the school knows you and cares about you throughout. Ensuring a seamless transition from the Junior School to the Senior School is really important and something I want to preserve. I have every confidence that Miss Hamalis and her team can select at 4+ those girls who will flourish at Channing, and indeed our A level results and university destinations every year demonstrate that this is true. If for any reason it transpires that a girl is not making the progress we hoped for in the Junior School, we will speak to parents well in advance of the time at which they might need to find another senior school for their daughter at 11+.

My motto is 'be 10% braver!' When I first read Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's book, *Lean In*, I liked a lot of what she had to say but was struck by one particular section in which she talked about attempting to overcome her fear of failure. The question she asked herself was 'What would I do if I wasn't afraid?', using that challenge to spur herself on. I must admit that I found it a very unhelpful question! I know I could do anything I wanted if I wasn't afraid, and yet the reality is that we are all afraid of something at some point. At around the same time I came across an organisation called WomenEd, which supports women in educational leadership. One of their founders asked the question, 'What would you do if you were 10% braver?' - and that was just perfect. Being 10% braver means that I don't need to conquer my fear completely, only knock the edges off it. I have used that motto ever since, in assemblies, lessons and staff meetings, to encourage people to try new things, risk failure and embrace the resulting successes. It became a catchphrase at my previous school, and Channing students and staff will soon discover that I really do mean it!

My earlier career in PR and event management honed my organisational skills and my eye for detail, and gave me a taste of how satisfying it is to work alongside like-minded people who really enjoy what they do. I know that not everyone is as lucky as I am in that respect, and it's something I have endeavoured to develop in every team I have worked in since.

My own style of leadership is very personal, so you can expect a lot of embarrassing anecdotes in assemblies, for starters probably one about the trials and tribulations of attempting to complete Couch to 5K during lockdown - it has not gone entirely according to plan! You'll find me at lots of events and activities, popping my head round doors into lessons and - when social distancing allows - stopping to chat at break and lunch. Students and staff are always welcome to drop by to see me: if my door is open, then it's fine to come in. If not, you'll need to speak to my PA to arrange another time.

My initial vision for the School is that a Channing education will always mean an education for life. What we do here, both in and out of the classroom, is underpinned by Unitarian values of social justice, reason and critical thinking. Indeed the Channing Promise of kindness, respect and tolerance is the perfect moral compass for the 21st century. Under my leadership I see the school as being firmly focused on the future, through a well-delivered and exciting curriculum, innovative use of technology to ensure digital proficiency, and embedded in the local community through valued, two-way partnerships. I want Channing girls to leave grounded in the basics and open to a life of learning, which will be vital in the rapidly changing world of work. I see my role as ensuring Channing is offering the best education possible to the pupils in my care, enabling them to enjoy success now and in the future, however they define it - and achieving it without undue pressure.

And finally, I'd like everyone to have a chance to meet my dog Max. He is a great companion and loves meeting new people. With the park just across the road, he could enjoy some lovely lunchtime walks...