



Annemount coronation celebrations (left: 2023, right 1953)

Geraldine Maidment's secret school

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

Geraldine Maidment was a South Hampstead High School girl who went to UCL to study History of Art and German. She loved travelling and always visited the local schools because of a deep interest in education and early childhood. On graduating she worked for Sotheby's

but realised that she preferred people to objects so she trained as a teacher and worked at Basset House School, a coeducational prep school in North Kensington, and then at St John's Wood Prep School before setting up the Hilltop Nursery in Hampstead in 1987. In 1994 she took ownership of Annemount School. Often referred to as 'a secret', the school was

founded in 1936 by Elsie Jamaiker who remained head of the school until her death in the autumn of 1993. It is 'a secret' because being in the Suburb, it is not allowed to put a sign up, that is seen from the street – although there is a small sign by the front door which gives the contact details of the school.

When Geraldine took over Annemount School she wanted to

preserve many of the values that had been established by her predecessor which were kindness and courtesy and consideration and curiosity.

Geraldine believes that in the early years both language and personal emotional skills are the priority for successful learning and development. Teachers have very high expectations of the children's use of language. Every morning children are greeted with "Good morning, how are you?" and should reply "Very well thank you, how are you?" The children are expected to do their own thinking and organising. Listening is a life skill but so is the ability to plan – which the school calls 'executive function skills' – deciding what is your goal is and what you need to do to reach it.

She also felt strongly that at the end of the school day children should be able to go home and play instead of being ferried about to other lessons. So she organised a lot of specialist committed peripatetic teachers to teach dance, chess, music etc. Geraldine is very passionate about the importance of learning a musical instrument at an early age with the result that a surprising number of her pupils play the violin. Aki Blendis, a former pupil, was one of the finalists of BBC's young musician of the year 2022 and he will be performing in the Last Night of the Proms at St Jude's on Sunday 2 July. Aki is also a keen footballer, possibly because Annemount School has three football coaches



and organises the Independent School's Association Under 7s football tournament.

It also has a school council and one of its members, then a six-year-old child, Clara Chapman from the Suburb suggested a food bank drive and since then every first Friday of the month the children help at the local food bank. The annual fete which will be held on the 10 June and to which everybody is invited will help raise funds for the local food bank.

The school has a Director of Fun who makes sure that everything the school does is fun and child-centred and that everybody is on the side of the child, so that children who attend the school 'are safe, loved and learning'.

Geraldine's school remains 'a secret' because not only does it not have a large school sign but it also does not advertise, instead it relies on word of mouth and recommendations by the schools that Annemount School sends its pupils to. The 2022 report by the Independent Schools Inspectorate concluded that: 'The quality of the pupils' academic, personal development and other achievements is excellent' – a fitting tribute to Geraldine's achievement.

For further secret information visit annemount.co.uk.



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