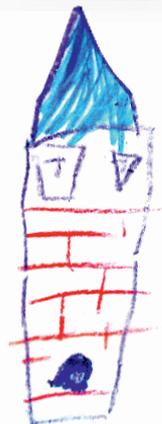


GAME CHANGERS

Absolutely everything you need to know about the very best nurseries in the UK, from when to apply to what to wear at pick-up. By Larushka Ivan-Zadeh, with Celia Thursfield



When you pack your hospital bag, you need stuff for you, to neutralise the medievalness of what is about to happen. Rabbit-sized clothes for the impending babe. And a file. Containing local nursery-school application forms, filled out except for date of birth and name, paper-clipped to stamped addressed envelopes and ready to post. You will already have toured local nurseries, you see. Do this and all will be well. Because nursery school is the beginning. And beginnings can be beautiful.





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The 'Roche Approach' is based on kindness and respect, and you can virtually warm your hands on its homely glow. Keswick House in Putney is the larger and more popular of the two Roche nurseries (the other's attached to the Roche prep in Wandsworth). Not that you'd spot it from the road, because there's no sign. Clue: look out for the neat navy pinafores/cords and bright-red cardies. 'We have always enjoyed keeping a low profile,' Roche tells us. Hunt it down and you'll find a late-Victorian detached house fit to bursting with exciting-looking toys: staff are encouraged to make their own equipment. Powerhouse head Gabriella Emery offers a customised version of Montessori, with a judicious mix of structure (smart uniforms, classes divided by age) and free-flow – on Fresh Air Fridays, the whole school piles into the massive garden with its nature trails, log cabin, slides, mud kitchen and olive trees. A reception place at the Roche prep is automatic, though many of this super-bright bunch go on to Wimbledon or Putney High (girls), Squirrels or Thomas's (boys) or Merlin (both).



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