



Profile

In conversation with Jill Drummond

Born: 1978 – Edinburgh, Scotland

Married: 2001 to David

Children; Nathan, 23 and Finlay, 19

Schools and Universities attended:

The Mary Erskine School and The University of Edinburgh

First job: Sales assistant in the family newsagent

First job in Independent

Education: PE teacher at Clifton Hall School following 8 years in a local authority school

Appointed to current job:
August 2025

Favourite piece of music:
Champagne Supernova – Oasis

Favourite food: I particularly love Thai cuisine and enjoy sampling a variety of dishes!

Favourite drink: A cappuccino first thing in the morning (and a cold glass of rosé wine in the sunshine!)

Favourite holiday: The hustle and bustle of the theme parks of Orlando or a quiet sun-drenched relaxation in Spain!

Favourite leisure pastime: As soon as I stopped playing hockey I began coaching. Since retiring from that, I enjoy watching football with my family and friends

Favourite TV programme: Round the World – I love watching the teams navigate cultures that they are unfamiliar with. This has opened my mind to travelling to some less travelled destinations in the future!

Epitaph: Laughter is timeless, imagination has no age and dreams are forever!

Q Clifton Hall started life as a boys-only boarding school in 1930, then became co-ed day and boarding, and then scrapped boarding in 1996. Thirty years on, can you envisage boarding ever entering the equation again?

A Although I have been here for the last 18 years, we are now utilising every last nook and cranny of the building so I cannot see how we could ever have a boarding facility at Clifton Hall in the future. The school has been on quite a journey already in terms of its evolution and becoming a 3-18 school took significant foresight. I am in favour of a one Campus school and to reintroduce boarding would mean developing residential options off-site.

Q You follow the Scottish Curricula Guidelines and prepare pupils for Scottish qualifications. If headlines in Scottish papers are to be believed there is widespread disquiet on both fronts. Why have you stuck with them?

A It is important to recognise that the Scottish Curriculum is currently undergoing a period of significant development and reform. This evolution is both necessary and timely, as the needs of young people, wider society, and the future workforce continue to change.

Clifton Hall is a well-established and traditional learning environment, and as a Scottish school situated in the nation's capital, it is both appropriate and purposeful that we continue to follow the National Curriculum. The Scottish Curriculum is widely respected and internationally recognised, and while it remains a strong framework, the modernisation already underway is both welcome and essential. I look forward with optimism to seeing how these developments will further enhance the educational experiences and outcomes for our young people in the years ahead.

Q You have said that relationships with teaching staff and friends are the single most important thing to young people. What, in your experience, have been the most effective ways to foster those meaningful relationships?

A It is widely understood that some of the most meaningful opportunities for building friendships take place beyond the classroom. The school's approach of providing a 30 minute morning break and a one hour lunch break allows pupils ample time to eat, relax, and socialise, which is highly beneficial to their wellbeing and relationships. An array of lunchtime clubs and activities also provide opportunity for engagement.

In addition, a wide range of sporting activities further enhances opportunities for social interaction, alongside day trips and residential experiences, including Outdoor Education. Together, these create a rich variety of contexts in which pupils can connect with one another.

Within a small school environment, these opportunities are not limited to specific year groups or existing friendship circles. This allows new relationships to develop naturally and organically. Rather than attempting to engineer social connections, it is the exposure to different people and shared experiences that most effectively supports meaningful and lasting friendships.

Q After graduating you went straight into teaching at a maintained school before moving into independent education. Was this always your intended career path? Who or what inspired you into the profession?

A Growing up, I explored a number of possible career paths – some more realistic than others! As an early teenager, I was quite taken with the idea of becoming cabin crew. The appeal of travelling the world, seeing new places, and not being tied to an office desk was hard to resist. While that career didn't quite take off (pun intended), my love of travel certainly hasn't diminished.

As I moved through my senior years at secondary school and leaned into my passion for sport, my focus shifted towards Physiotherapy or teaching Physical Education. Teaching ultimately won out – and I can safely say I've never looked back. My own PE teachers played a huge role in that decision; they were professionals I respected immensely and whose impact stayed with me long after I left school.

Jill Drummond has been head at Clifton Hall School, Edinburgh since August 2025. She started at the school in 2008 as a PE teacher, and most recently served as Pastoral Care and Guidance Coordinator.



Once I was teaching, my role models naturally became colleagues and leaders who inspired me to look beyond the classroom and consider how I could support young people more broadly. This led me into the Guidance role, where my skill set developed significantly and my understanding of leadership deepened. That experience, alongside the influence of many inspiring professionals along the way, eventually guided me towards headship.

As educators, we regularly encourage young people to take risks, trust themselves, and change direction if something isn't quite right. On this occasion, I took my own advice – and here I am. It turns out that stepping outside your comfort zone can be very good practice.

It is always a challenge to assume the role of head, but perhaps particularly so when an internal appointment and relationships with former colleagues change. What are your top tips for making this transition effectively?

Working in a school where staff remain for long periods of time allows strong, trusting relationships to develop. Those relationships continue to be a real strength of our community, even if the dynamic has naturally shifted as roles evolve. I value these connections deeply and see them as central to the positive culture of the school.

My approach to leadership is grounded in the same values we encourage in our pupils: Be Kind and Work Hard. These principles have guided my own professional journey and continue to inform how I support and work alongside colleagues.

In my early experience as Head, I have learned the importance of leading with courage, confidence, and conviction – while always remaining approachable, supportive, and mindful of the collective expertise and commitment of the staff team.

A large percentage of your working life has been spent at Clifton Hall. Do you consider it beneficial to your role as head to have stayed in one establishment? Would you advise other staff with ambitions to headship to follow your example or to widen their experience?

This is a very personal question, and the experience will naturally differ from one Head to another. For me, having such a strong belief in the school's ethos, model, and approach meant there was only one community in which I wanted to pursue this opportunity.

One of the greatest strengths I brought into the role was my deep knowledge of the school community. The positive, respectful relationships built up over many years provided a strong foundation and were invaluable in supporting my transition into headship. Having a thorough understanding of the environment, its people, and its culture has been an enormous advantage.

Stepping into leadership in a completely new setting undoubtedly brings its own rewards, but also significant challenges. My experience demonstrates that there is real value in looking within your own community, trusting the relationships you have built, and recognising the transferable skills you already possess. For those considering leadership, confidence in your knowledge, your values, and your people can be a powerful starting point.

Clifton Hall offers a range of extra-curricular activities including those around sport and residential trips. You have said that schools should provide opportunity and create avenues for further exploration with clubs and local groups. Since taking up post what steps have you taken towards this and what outcomes have you witnessed?

This reflects an approach to young people's development that I have long believed in and consistently championed throughout my career – one that has remained unchanged in taking on this role. Every school offers different pathways and opportunities, and ours is a place where enthusiasm for sport and wider activities can be nurtured, explored, and enjoyed, even if excellence is not always the ultimate goal.

For many pupils, the opportunity to build skills, develop confidence, enjoy participation, and experience competition is exactly what they

need at this stage of their journey. For those aspiring to perform or compete at the highest levels, it is equally important to recognise the value of opportunities beyond the school environment. These experiences complement one another rather than compete.

Importantly, engagement in activities beyond the classroom and the school day helps broaden social circles and supports pupils' overall wellbeing. When young people face challenges in school, having alternative spaces where they feel confident and connected can be incredibly powerful – and the same is true in reverse. This balance is particularly valuable when pupils live across a wide geographical area, where informal socialising beyond the school day is not always possible.

Ultimately, providing young people with access to varied experiences allows them to grow as individuals, build resilience, and develop a sense of belonging across different communities – an outcome that sits at the heart of meaningful education.

You have said that educational setting is crucial, especially in relation to class sizes, pastoral support and community belonging. Clifton Hall has fewer than 500 pupils. With the current financial challenges facing the sector how are you maintaining the balance between setting and staying financially viable as an all-through school?

Being an all-through school allows for educational continuity. We share specialist staff and facilities across phases, to benefit the widest possible range of pupils. This supports the development of strong relationships; a fundamental of success. Most importantly, whilst the sector faces headwinds, our focus remains on the value of the output. By maintaining small class sizes, we ensure the academic outcomes and character development that parents prioritise, making the choice of our school a sustainable and attractive long-term investment for families. Ultimately, we are optimising our unique all-through structure to protect the small-group environment that defines us, without academic selection in an environment that meets the needs of the young people in our care.

Continued >

Profile

In conversation with Jill Drummond (continued)

Q The school has recently opened a new Woodland Trail in its grounds. It is available for all pupils through from Nursery to Seniors. What impact have you seen this have since opening?

A Our spectacular surroundings are a defining feature of the school and a key source of inspiration for learning. With access to more than 35 acres of woodland, we are fortunate to have a natural environment that is not only visually stunning but also provides a rich and meaningful context for outdoor learning. These surroundings create a unique backdrop where curiosity, wellbeing, and engagement can flourish.

This environment was the inspiration behind the creation of the Woodland Trail. Designed to enhance creativity and deepen understanding, the trail thoughtfully blends nature with technology, making it both accessible and appealing to all learners. Alongside informative posts, QR codes

invite pupils to explore further, encouraging independent enquiry and sparking individual interests.

Although still in its infancy, crucially, the Woodland Trail is not static. It is designed to evolve over time, allowing learning opportunities to be adapted and expanded as pupils' needs and interests develop. This flexibility enables significant differentiation, ensuring that learners at all stages can benefit from the experience while making the most of our remarkable surroundings.

Q Clifton Hall promotes an "accessible approach" to pastoral care. Are there other approaches? What makes this one the right one for your students?

A In a busy school environment, especially during lessons, accessing the right support at the right time can be challenging. Our open door approach ensures that a member of staff is always available when pupils need support.

As a small community, staff know pupils well, and pupils are encouraged to seek help from the person they feel most comfortable with, not simply the person who is available. This allows for timely, effective support and early intervention, reinforcing the message that no concern is too small.

Q Outside of work what do you like to do to relax and wind down? You are a Hibs supporter but maybe that's not so relaxing!

A You are absolutely right – being a Hibs supporter is rarely a relaxing experience! Still, it's all part of the passion. When I'm looking to unwind, I'm most often found out walking the dog in the evenings or at the weekend, making the most of some fresh air and a bit of headspace. Above all, I really value spending quality time with my family and close friends, which is where I find the greatest enjoyment and balance.

Vanbrugh 300



Kimbolton Castle, located in the grounds of Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, is one of six historic properties that will be showcased in Vanbrugh 300 in 2026 – a nationwide celebration marking the tercentenary of Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect behind some of Britain's most iconic buildings.

Vanbrugh 300 will feature activities, exhibitions, events and lectures throughout the year at six of Vanbrugh's most significant masterpieces, including: Kimbolton Castle; Castle Howard, Yorkshire; Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire; Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland; Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire; and Stowe House, Buckinghamshire.

As part of the anniversary, more than 100 state primary school

Pictured: Kimbolton Castle

classes (KS1 and KS2) from across the UK are being invited to take part in a free national school's programme learning about Vanbrugh's work. Primary school teachers can book a free school visit to their nearest Vanbrugh-designed heritage site – including Kimbolton Castle – and access teacher CPD and curriculum-linked classroom resources that give pupils the chance to explore history, heritage, and architecture.

Headteacher at Kimbolton School, Will Chuter, said: "It's an honour for Kimbolton Castle to be part of the national Vanbrugh 300 celebrations. This initiative will not only showcase the castle's significance, but will also welcome schools and communities from across the region to engage with our shared heritage."



Commemorating a school architect

Pupils at York House, Hertfordshire, have been commemorating the 300-year anniversary of the passing of Charles Finch, the original architect of their school building. The main Grade II listed building that now houses York House School, was built in 1712 by Finch on the site of a former dwelling which is thought to have dated back to Tudor times.

Head of History at York House School, Dr Matthew Glencross, commented: "With it being 300 years since the passing of Charles Finch, I began to wonder what he would make of the school and the changes we have made to the site. I tasked our pupils to write a letter to Finch telling him about their

Pictured: Historic image of York House

school and to imagine the former uses of the rooms in which they now study."

The pupils came up with a raft of ideas including the fact that while the front door is rarely used today as an entrance, the entrance hall itself, as the main foyer, is still the first thing that a visitor sees when they arrive.

"Many school traditions were also mentioned in the letters as the site has had its fair share of pupil and staff rumours over the years, the most notorious being the history room ghost. The room, situated on the first floor used to be a bedroom with a walk-in closet but now only exists as a small annex in the corner," said Dr Glencross.