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- Sani Resort.







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Editor's letter

IT'S MY GREAT PLEASURE TO WELCOME you to the 2026 *Tatler Schools Guide*, your definitive source of information on the UK's top prep and public schools. Each year, my team of researchers and I visit schools in every corner of Britain, to chat to parents and pupils – also garnering the wisdom of some of the world's leading educationalists – so that we can bring you the ultimate insider reviews.

The wonderful thing about our independent education system is that it has schools to suit all types of students, be they creative, sporty, academic high-flyers or good all-rounders. And that's why it's so important we don't just consider them according to one attribute or another. Instead, we take a holistic approach, taking into account the Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision at each, their top-class teachers, their facilities and, of course, the diversity of their culture. While it may seem daunting to choose a school for your children, we hope to demystify the process and guide you to the right selection.

When I chat to headteachers, policy makers, parents and pupils, one topic always comes up: the effect of phones and social media on children's mental health. Rarely has an issue caused such anxiety – or conflicting opinions. Should the UK follow the lead of Denmark and Australia and introduce bans? Or should we accept that such tech is here to stay and help our young people navigate this tricky terrain with our love, guidance and firm boundaries? To dispel the myths and misunderstandings, I asked a leading researcher in the field to explore the subject for us. Dr Amy Orben's feature is not to be missed; her sage advice will allay any fears and truly explain what the science-backed research shows.

But there's more preying on adults' minds: teachers frequently tell me how worried parents seem about whether they're 'getting it right'. Thankfully, the eminent psychologist and author Dr Tara Porter has written for us on 'Good Enough' parenting, and gently reminds us to shed our perfectionism: being a consistent, loving presence in our children's lives is enough. Well, that and fresh air. All the experts agree that the more time youngsters spend outdoors the better, so I travelled to

Switzerland to see what its top-tier boarding schools could offer. Here, adventure — whether traversing glaciers or speeding down mountains — is on the daily curriculum; and for those wishing to dip their toes into the Swiss experience, all the places I visited run incredible summer camps. (Head to their websites for more details.)

Finally, a huge thank you to Eton College for hosting our annual fashion shoot. What a magnificent backdrop for the front cover! Until next year,



Education Editor





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ON THE COVER Photographed by PIOTR MOTYKA Styled by LYDIE HARRISON

Dress, Self-Portrait, Hat, Alison Tod Couture Milliner, Shoes, Bobb rooming: Amy Sachon. Producer: Lottie Rand at One Production.

With thanks to Eton College.

All information believed to be correct at the time of publication



Vocab cheat sheet

100%+ Bursary Full fee assistance plus extra costs All-Steinway schools All pianos on-site provided by Steinway

CCF Combined Cadet Force **CE** Common Entrance

DofE The Duke of Edinburgh's Award **DT** Design and Technology

EPQ Extended Project Qualification **Exeat** Designated weekends that can be spent at home

Flexi-boarding Day pupils can hoard on an occasional basis

Forest School A nature-based, play-focused education model in

which students learn outdoors Full boarding A pupil stays in school at weekends during term-time except for exeats

GCSE grading 9-7 is the equivalent to A*-A

GDST Girls' Day School Trust Green Flag Status Recognition of a well-managed green space **HMC** The Heads' Conference (previously the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference)

HPQ Higher Project Qualification IAPS The Independent Association of Prep Schools

IB International Baccalaureate ICT Information and Communication Technology

IGCSE International GCSE ISA Independent Schools Association

ISC Independent Schools Council

ISEB Independent Schools Examination Board

ISFA Independent Schools Football Association

ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

LAMDA London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art LSE London School of Economics MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology

NSEA National Schools' Equestrian Association PSB Pre-Senior Baccalaureate PSHE Personal, Social and

Health Education

Pre-U A diploma-type qualification that's an alternative to A-levels RADA Roval Academy of

Dramatic Art

SAT US universities admission test SEN Special Educational Needs

SENCO Special Educational Needs Coordinator SEND Special Educational Needs

or Disability STEAM Science, Technology,

Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics

STEM Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics UCAS Universities and Colleges Admissions Services

Value-added The increase in a pupil's skills and knowledge over their time at the school, measured by independent assessment

Bursarial percentages, and A-level, GCSE and IB results quoted refer

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THE SMART CHOICE?

The impact of social media and smartphones on children's mental health is one of the most daunting difficulties parents face today. But what does the evidence actually say? Is this technology dangerously addictive or a powerful learning tool? Well, it's all about balance, says Dr Amy Orben

AS ONE OF THE UK'S

leading researchers on the impact of social media and smartphones on children, I've learned to tread carefully at social events over the past decade. I tend to avoid mentioning my work – whether advising the UK government or leading national studies - because, if it does come up, I'm usually met by a wave of concerned questions that mean my evening off feels more like a day at work. In the last two years, these questions have increasingly been replaced by strong and polarised opinions about technology, often paired with an unfamiliarity for what the evidence actually looks like.

Take, for example, a wedding I attended last year. At one point, the host stopped by our table and casually mentioned to the couple opposite my area of expertise. I was then briefed by them in great detail about the virtues of keeping their own offspring - who had slipped down from the table after the main course - away from smartphones. I learnt that they went to a techfree school. Their father proudly explained that the eldest didn't use a calculator but something that sounded suspiciously like an abacus. And they told me their school had hosted a 'leading brain scientist' who had presented scans of children's brains – comparing those who used phones to those who did not - with the most

meagre-looking ones belonging to those most exposed to screens.

I've learned it's best to stay quiet in these situations. There's little point in explaining that such brainscanning studies simply don't exist. We don't know if screens shrivel brains, and we don't even have a good study showing they change them in any way beyond other types of experiences that young people have. Nor would it help to suggest that well-designed educational

technologies can be hugely beneficial, or that a tech-free school is not inherently a good or bad one.

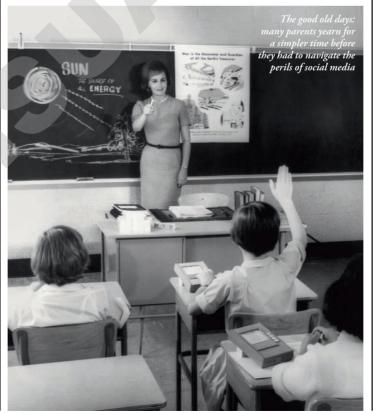
So I made my excuses and slipped off to the loo, hoping to escape their discourse. And downstairs, I found their three children huddled around a smartphone, playing what looked like a video game. They were laughing together and having much more fun than I was that evening. I had to actively resist the urge to mention it when I returned to the table.

Yet this moment illustrated so well the disconnect between the digital lives children actually lead and the attempts of some adults to shield them from screens at all costs.

So, what do we know about the impact of phones? Firstly, they are not like cigarettes or alcohol in that there is no clear dose-response relationship whereby a specific amount of use leads to very predictable outcomes. Screens are not biological compounds with active ingredients that have defined mechanistic impacts on the body: their effects depend on how they are used and who uses them.

These will most often not be dependent on time spent engaging with screens: 20 minutes checking potential recipes for a classroom show-and-tell will have a very different impact from 20 minutes looking at self-harm content. And this is precisely why the chief medical officers in the UK concluded in 2019 that they could not issue a universal time-based recommendation for children's digital device-use: there is no single 'healthy' amount that applies to all of them in all contexts. The effects will vary between them, and the same type of use can have different effects on the same child at different times.

We have all experienced this ourselves: a colleague posting on LinkedIn about their next impressive promotion can make us >



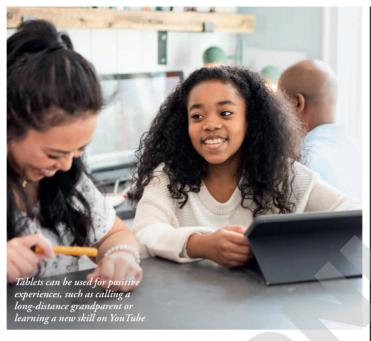
FIRST PERSON



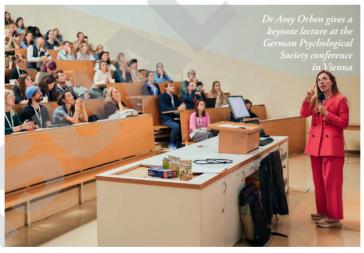
So, whether screens help or hinder childhood depends on how they're used - this is where parental choice comes in. A good rule of thumb is to consider what we and our parents already know about a healthy childhood: that it needs strong emotional bonds with caregivers, a secure environment, good amounts of sleep and exercise, healthy food and varied activities to explore. Well, these rules still hold in the digital world. And screens can promote or detract from these aims. For one child, that might mean using a tablet to video-call a grandparent living in another country to be read a bedtime story. For another, whose grandparents live nearby, that will mean putting the tablet away to prioritise inperson time together.

Likewise, a teenager using their phone to learn new skills on YouTube is likely engaging in beneficial screen time; yet I've engaged in long discussions with another Cambridge professor of developmental psychology in which we've tried to pin down why we would personally prefer a child to play the piano rather than the video game FIFA. On the face of it, both are repetitive activities that have been shown to increase dexterity and cognitive flexibility, that can be done communally and can - at a very high standard - lead to longterm professional success. We concluded that it was probably mostly cultural preconceptions, as well as a sense of the piano being a multisensory experience, that led us to prioritise the latter.

However, we must acknowledge the real risks of the online experience, and that it is ultimately designed for gain. Unlike much public infrastructure, it is privatised and commercialised; and many of our digital platforms encourage



Why is it that we would prefer a child to play the piano rather than FIFA, when both increase cognitive flexibility?



continued use, often in ways that are not beneficial for children – or adults. (This is increasingly the case in a world where tech oligarchies are shaping society to their benefit.) We ought not lean back and think uncritically about the impact of such technologies on all our lives.

Sleep disruption and reduced physical activity are common concerns, as highlighted by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's current recommendations on screen use, which not only confirm there is no one healthy amount of time but emphasise that sleep and mealtimes need to be safeguarded. And as algorithms become more sophisticated, we must also collectively advocate for safer digital spaces for children. (This is still far from guaranteed, despite the efforts of Baroness Kidron in the House of Lords, where for years the chair of the 5Rights Foundation has been arguing that technologies should be made 'safe by design'.)

At the same time, we must remember that young people now

live large parts of their lives online. Just as things sometimes go wrong in real life, things will go wrong in the virtual space. What's crucial is to ensure that young people feel safe enough to tell their caregivers about these experiences without fear of punishment. If a child worries they'll lose their phone when they disclose a problem, they're far less likely to seek help when they truly need it. Building trust is key, and this means showing a real interest in what young people do online; not just expressing concern, or falling into simplistic narratives.

Balancing the risks and benefits of digital technology isn't easy, but it is necessary. The goal should be neither to shield children from all digital experiences nor to ignore the very real challenges that come with them. Instead, we must foster a thoughtful, evidence-based approach: one that acknowledges both the opportunities and the pitfalls of a digital childhood.

We have many other things in our lives that are dangerous to children, but we have developed systems to keep them safe and understand what good parenting looks like. Deep water can be deadly but, around our island nation, it's omnipresent. Over generations, we have developed a system of paddling pools, swimming lessons, lifeguards and parental rules and heuristics that means the risks are kept in check and managed. To keep our children safe, we don't forbid them from going in the sea; but nor do we just leave them to it, untrained and without the necessary safeguards.

Similarly, demonising technology won't do any more good than blind acceptance. What will help is recognising that, just like every other aspect of parenting, raising children in a digital world requires nuance, flexibility and – perhaps most important of all – a willingness to listen.

Dr Amy Orben leads the Digital Mental Health Group at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit at the University of Cambridge.

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London

ALLEYN'S SCHOOL ••

Townley Road SE22 8SU
Website alleyns.org.uk
Head Jane Lunnon, since 2021;
previously head of Wimbledon High
Pupils 1,450 day: 697 boys, 753
girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees £8,615
Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to
85% Alumni Author and Costa
Book Award-winner Caleb Nelson,
singer Jessie Ware, Canada
footballer Luc De Fougerolles

After the Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn (who performed in plays by Shakespeare and owned the Rose Theatre) had a vision on stage, he founded the 'College of God's Gift' to educate children in south London. And it's lived up to the name. Today, Alleyn's receives almost nine applications for every 11+ place; and it's easy to see why this storied co-ed is so popular among local families. Despite its

traditions, the school has of late been focusing on making itself fit for the future: the recently unveiled All Studios is a cutting-edge facility designed to reshape how students approach learning, computing and creativity, while the new Alleyn's Intelligence Quotient curriculum is as smart as it sounds and will help them develop both an ethical perspective and human skills alongside all the tech. The playing fields are popular; and since the introduction of female Saturday sports, the number of girls' fixtures has seen an impressive near-fivefold increase. Meanwhile, keen artists

exhibit their work around the premises and avail themselves of all the inspiration the city has to offer through regular trips to such galleries as the Tate and Hayward; avid gardeners grow produce on site; and future diplomats love the Model United Nations. In particular, Activities Week in June sounds a riot. (Every senior student takes a residential trip, heading anywhere from Devon to Derbyshire.) And on other occasions, skiing groups whoosh down the Italian slopes, while lucky food and nutrition students get a taste for their subject on a trip to Venice.

PUBLIC

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL IN LONDON ••

Waverley Place NW8 ONP Website asl.org

Head Matt Horvat, since 2023, previously head of The Overlake School in Redmond, Washington Pupils 1,441 day: 699 boys, 742 girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees £15,476 Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to 99% Alumni Oxford professor Amia Srinivasan, former NFL player Andrew Luck, sustainability advocate Sanjana Rishi

Asked about the quality of match teas here, one parent, confused about the terminology, replies: 'Sound delicious but I don't think we have them.' No, there are no dry cucumber sandwiches or fusty Latin mottos at this co-ed, which offers an American education in the heart of St John's Wood. Indeed, you are more likely to see a US president here - Truman, Reagan, Clinton and Obama all met students and parents here on visits to London - or a superstar such as Elton John, who gave a 1973 concert in the school gym (which was attended by a visiting 14-yearold Emma Thompson). The sports department boasts an impressive 130 teams - some of whom enter international competitions hosted by schools across France, Germany, Belgium and Austria - and the theatre, modelled on the National, provides a great stage for budding thesps, who can also take classes in acting for film and TV. All students start music at the age of four; and in eighth grade - our Year 9 specialise in one discipline for the year. The four-storey Community Arts building offers a gallery space, photography studio and darkroom, plus the latest technology for photo editing, graphic design, animation and video journalism. Those eligible children can study Advanced Placement classes, considered university level, which are recognised by many institutions abroad and increasingly in the UK. In fact, thanks to the increasing number of British families choosing the American School, plans are in the pipeline to expand.

CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL ●

Queen Victoria Street EC4V 3AL

Website cityoflondonschool.org.uk Head Alan Bird, since 2018; previously deputy head of Brighton College Pupils 1,074 day boys Ages 10–18 Term Fees £9,462 Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Novelist Kingsley Amis, actors Joe Alwyn and Daniel Radcliffe

Boys travel from all over London to receive the fabled CLS education, which - guided by the motto 'Kind. Aware. Ready' - combines academic rigour with exciting co-curriculars and a diverse student body, slapbang in the middle of London. It is hard not to be inspired by the surroundings, with Shakespeare's Globe, the Tate Modern and the London Eye just over the river, and the towering presence of St Paul's Cathedral behind. Approximately 15 per cent of the pupils receive financial support, and there's great attention paid to pastoral care. Boys see their form tutors twice a day, can practise mindfulness at lunchtime and have access to an assistance dog called Leon. Sporty pupils love the all-weather Astroturf pitches – there can't be too many of them in these parts – and the drama department often collaborates with CLS Girls, with whom other partnerships include four-week courses on topics from photography to the psychology of voting. Year 8s have recently been learning about AI, while City Ready, a series of lectures delivered by alumni, parents and industry professionals, has proved exceptionally illuminating. Held at Guildhall, the annual science conference is always a calendar highlight, and bright students have plenty of opportunities to flex their mental muscles at Olympiads in such subjects as maths and biology. Trips abroad are original (a case offered Oxbridge places.



CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL FOR GIRLS •

St Giles' Terrace EC2Y 8BB
Website clsg.org.uk
Head Jenny Brown, since 2019;
previously head of St Albans High
School for Girls Pupils 784 day
girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees
£10,082 Bursaries 12% of pupils,
up to 100% Alumni Presenter
Claudia Winkleman, president of
Magdalen College, Oxford Dinah
Rose KC, table tennis player

Tin-Tin Ho Diverse yet secure in its identity, City of London Girls manages to embrace contradictory impulses: academia with unpretentiousness; innovation with custom. Some 100 pupils are supported by bursaries, and there's a strong partnership with brother school City of London. Pupils enjoy joint enrichment sessions, be they Year 8s engaging in teambuilding challenges or Year 10s collaborating on a branding project; and Sixth-formers share seminarstyle classes on topics ranging from the ethics of science to archaeology. Recent 130th anniversary celebrations saw some 400 students take part in a groundbreaking conference that explored ideas for a better London, while a brand new Sixth Form Centre – boasting a library, lecture theatre and collaboration areas – has been opened in the former Museum of London building. In view of its urban location, you might not expect stunning sports facilities; but the girls play on Astroturf pitches, exercise in a sports hall, dance in a studio - and are often spotted running around the Barbican highwalk. Every summer, a performing arts festival is hosted in the open-air theatre, and outdoorsy types get their hands dirty in the urban farm. The curriculum is ambitious: there are plans in the pipeline for an AI conference, while 'alternative' GCSEs can be taken in such subjects as user experience and interface, to equip students with the tools necessary for a digital world. Unsurprisingly, results are always exceptionally impressive. Forty-six per cent of recent A-level papers were marked A*.

PUBLIC LONDON

DLD COLLEGE LONDON ••

Westminster Bridge Road SE1 7FX

Website dldcollege.co.uk Head James Kidd, since 2024; previously senior vice principal Pupils 377. Day: 88 boys, 63 girls; boarding: 92 boys, 134 girls Ages 13–19 **Term Fees** Day: £11,480; boarding: £23,360 Bursaries Variable, up to 100% Alumni Novelist Martin Amis, actress Phoebe Waller-Bridge, businessman Baron Lebedev

Housed in a contemporary building in Lambeth, DLD's catchphrase is 'London is our classroom'. Given its proximity to the capital's cultural heartlands, halfway between the South Bank and the West End, it's no surprise such luminaries as Phoebe Waller-Bridge and the late Sir Martin Amis went there. Nor that creative expression is actively encouraged, with budding artists showing their work in a yearly exhibition, and clubs for everything from Spanish dancing to knitting and horticulture. Under new principal James Kidd, the tone is far from conventional - rather, the boarding format has been energetically shaken-up - so there are no uniforms, teachers are called by their first names and, with lots of self-direction, the learning style straddles those of school and university. And though the sporting opportunities are limited by the location, there's an excellent on-site pool and gym, while netball, football and basketball matches are held in a nearby park. (An Urban Sports Programme is also in the pipeline, to allow Key Stages 3 and 4 to utilise more outdoor space.) DLD's largest intake is to Year 12, and with 50 per cent of the student body hailing from different parts of the world, the establishment is pointedly globalist - as evidenced by the huge array of flags in the atrium. 'International schooling means more interesting cultures around, more experience, friends from different countries, travel buddies, new approaches to studies, new visions and new horizons!' concludes one parent.

DULWICH COLLEGE •

Dulwich Common SE21 7LD Website dulwich.org.uk Head Rob Milne, since 2025, previously head of Emanuel School **Pupils** 1,667 boys: 1,527 day; 140 boarding Ages 7-18 Term Fees Day: £10,206; boarding: £21,422 Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, actor Chiwetel Ejiofor, artist Jeremy Deller Of this school, one student says: 'Dulwich not only saw my potential, they supported me on my journey to reach it.' This approach looks set to continue under new head Rob Milne, who will be steering a robust ship on the academic front. (Twenty-six recent leavers were offered Oxbridge places.) But life is just as dynamic outside the classroom – last year saw more than 150 guest speakers deliver lectures - while exceptionally sporting types benefit from being mentored in a high-performance programme. Let's not forget the school's net zero strategy: as well as an Eco Week, there are climate change prefects. And its Spirit of Partnership Garden, relocated here from the 2024 RHS Chelsea Flower Show, a glorious place to switch off. In creative endeavours, artists exhibit in the school gallery and lucky musicians have the opportunity to perform in such prestigious venues as the Cadogan Hall and Southwark Cathedral. Further afield, the children jet off on trips to Rome, Paris, Mallorca and more.

EMANUEL SCHOOL ••

Battersea Rise SW11 1HS Website emanuel.org.uk Head Ravi Kothakota, since 2025; previously deputy head Pupils 1,110 day: 573 boys, 537 girls **Ages** 10–18 **Term Fees** £9,916 Bursaries 25% of pupils, up to 100% + Alumni Inventor of the World Wide Web Sir Tim Berners-Lee, animator Mark Baker, engineer

Mark Miodownik Emanuel's motto is Pour bien désirer (the so-called 'noble aim'), and the school prides itself on its altruistic ethos; its commitment to the neighbourhood demonstrated through an outreach programme that connects with 19 local primaries. Sport has always been strong - close links have been forged with the London Pulse netball and Harlequins rugby clubs - and a number of rowers have stroked their way into national teams. Arty types participate in workshops delivered by actual practitioners, and thespians are put to the test with a challenging Play in a Week project. (The faculty throw themselves into theatrics, too; great hilarity was caused by the deputy head taking the role of Tinkerbell for the Christmas pantomime.) Elsewhere, teachers deliver interactive presentations at weekly Expo events that allow pupils to relate their subjects to real-life contexts. Other plusses? A brand-new, lightfilled 4,300sqm refectory will double as an events space, and there are impressive specialist laboratories and computing rooms.



FRANCIS HOLLAND. REGENT'S PARK

Ivor Place NW1 6XR

Website fhs-nw1.org.uk **Head** Katharine Woodcock, since 2022; previously head of Sydenham High School Pupils 571 day girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees £10,338 Bursaries Variable, up to 100% Alumni Actress Amanda Donohoe, entrepreneur Grace Beverley, former Conservative MP Theresa Villiers 'Behind the scenes, she's involved with strategic work for the school at a high executive level,' says one parent about head Katharine Woodcock. 'But she is also on the ground, be that watching the rehearsal of a musical, cheering on a hockey team or trying a cake made in a home economics class.' Students concur: 'Her approach fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone feels heard and appreciated,' says one. This sense of community is underpinned by the thriving house structure and the packed schedule of events, from their very own Eurovision Song Contest to the mini-marathon in Regent's Park. The latter provides the location for a great deal of sporting activity – as do the facilities at Paddington Recreation Ground - and while pupils are known for competing in such pursuits as cross country, skiing and hockey, cricket has also grown in popularity. (So too has football, perhaps thanks to the training provided by Chelsea FC coaches.) In other news, the eco society has made a real impact and become crucial in the drive to become carbon neutral by 2030, while an inaugural TEDx event saw eight Lower-sixth students deliver some stirring speeches based on their dreams for the future. The Helen McCrory Studio Theatre provides a wonderful space for girls to tread the boards; those drawn to the technical workings of the stage can avail themselves of excellent AV equipment; and as part of an extensive schedule of works, pupils have been involved in drawing up plans for a new library that will foster collaboration and creativity.



LONDON PUBLIC

FRANCIS HOLLAND, SLOANE SQUARE •

Graham Terrace SW1W 8JF
Website fhs-sw1.org.uk
Head Alexandra Haydon, since
2024; previously deputy head
(academic) of Millfield Pupils 607
day girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees
£10,538 Bursaries Variable, up to
100% Alumni Filmmaker Emerald
Fennell, violinist Vanessa Mae,
actress Daisy Waterstone

'Our head is a strong and welcome addition,' says one student, who also loves how International Women's Day has been incorporated into Francis Holland's calendar. 'As a leading London school for girls, it is important that we find occasions to highlight and commemorate female role models.' Parents are equally enthusiastic, with one remarking that 'the sheer academic genius, strategic agility, forwardthinking, passion and drive of Alexandra Haydon echoes through the halls'. And beyond: the Promise Campaign aims to raise a £15 million endowment fund to double bursary provision by 2032, meaning that 50 recipients at any one time will be able to enjoy the education on offer. But this place is wellknown for its wide horizons: in collaboration with arts organisation Cape Farewell, it recently launched a Creative Perspectives on Climate Change Project, which sees the school host poignant works-on-loan by such famous artists as Dame Rachel Whiteread and Sir Antony Gormley. There is also a focus on preparing children for the future: not only do Year 7s benefit from careers lessons; they're also encouraged to be creative, analytical and resilient by means of the Young Enterprise £10 Challenge for which they research, design and bring a product to market in four weeks. Higher up the school, girls take vocational and cooking courses, and hone their presentation skills by developing TEDx Talks. Clearly, this is all having a positive impact: for example, in the past five years, Francis Holland has had a 100 per cent success rate in applications to medical and veterinary school.



Godolphin & Latymer's ambitious drama department transformed the theatre into the Italian Riviera for Twelfth Night

GODOLPHIN & LATYMER • Iffley Road W6 0PG

Website godolphinandlatymer.com **Head** Dr Frances Ramsey, since 2017; previously head of Queen's College Pupils 820 day girls Ages 11-18 Term Fees £11,698 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor, scientist Baroness Greenfield, Royal Academy of Engineering CEO Hayaatun Sillem More than eight applicants typically vie for each place at this famous west London girls' school, where a huge breadth of extracurriculars have their counterweight in academic excellence. Ninety-three per cent of recent GCSE results were graded 9-8; and with an impressive 82 per cent of A-levels coming in at A*-A, leavers are set up for further education at home and abroad, where US destinations include such big-hitters as Yale, Harvard, MIT and Penn. Equipping students with the skills to navigate the world in their twenties, the Futures programme sees Year 7 and 8 embark on MBAs - that's Mini Business

Activities - while Year 9s are challenged with an Enterprise Skills programme. A new Innovation and Leadership course looks further to the future, focusing on communication, problem-solving and the applications of AI. With the addition of an in-house internships programme - exposing the girls to real-life issues under the guidance of teachers and leading experts - it's unsurprising that these savvy students achieve their objectives. The student Sustainability Committee led the push for Eco-School accreditation; and while sport primarily focuses on participation, that's not to say it's uncompetitive. Both the U15 and U18 netball teams were recently crowned Middlesex Schools champions in their age brackets; and availing themselves of their riverside location, the rowers have made a habit of winning medals and breaking records. Dramatic types perform in the purpose-built Bishop Centre, which the ambitious drama department transformed into the Italian Riviera for a performance of Twelfth Night.

HAMPTON SCHOOL • Hanworth Road, Hampton,

Middlesex TW12 3HD
Website hamptonschool.org.uk
Head Kevin Knibbs, since 2013;
previously deputy head (pastoral)
Pupils 1,323 day boys (nine girls in
pre-prep) Ages 3–18 Term Fees
£9,972 Bursaries 9.6% of pupils,
up to 100%+ Alumni Queen
musician Sir Brian May, Google
executive Matt Brittin, rueby player

Louis Lynagh 'I cannot tell you how many times over the years we have thanked our lucky stars that we made the decision we did,' says one parent, who has sent multiple sons to Hampton. Being among the oldest independent schools in the country, its motto of 'Wisdom surpasses wealth' has certainly stood the test of time. This sentiment is threaded through a thriving community partnerships programme, in which Hamptonians assist in reading development and chess lessons at local primaries, and exam results are always very strong. Sixth-formers have been given the chance to roam outside the curriculum with the introduction of an electives programme that offers topics ranging from acting and directing to ancient Greek art - not forgetting design engineering, for which students build environmentally friendly kit cars for racing. Clubs are interesting and varied, and a new Illusion Lab, which challenges pupils to create optical illusions, is a big hit. A number of sportsmen have achieved national acclaim, with one football player recently making his Premier League debut while another boy, who came up through the rowing programme, is now an U19 world champion in the Junior Men's Eight. With five choirs and more than 20 ensembles, music is so much a high note that in 2024 the 50-strong a cappella choir scored five-star reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe. Most importantly, students love the 'relaxed and jovial' atmosphere in which they look out for each other: 'People don't just try to be the best they can, but try to help those around them

be the best they can.'

PUBLIC

HARROW SCHOOL •

5 High Street, Harrow on the Hill HA1 3HP

Website harrowschool.org.uk **Head** Alastair Land, since 2019; previously head of Repton Pupils 831 boarding boys Ages 13–18 Term Fees £21,245 Bursaries 17% of pupils, up to 90% Alumni Sir Winston Churchill, actor Benedict Cumberbatch, rugby union player Maro Itoje Founded in 1572 under a Royal Charter granted by Elizabeth I, Harrow has a world-renowned list of alumni - among them poets, prime ministers and actors - who are reverently dubbed here 'the giants of old'. And like them, their alma mater is a time-honoured colossus: on a hilltop overlooking west London, it's very much a traditional boys' boarding school that embraces its history. (Students wear distinctive straw boaters, carve their names into boards in their houses, throw themselves into communal singing and play an esoteric version of football.) Yet despite all of that, Harrow has cultivated a modern,

forward-looking mindset. There's a continuing roll-out of a tailored curriculum - aimed at equipping students with real-life skills - which revolves around cognitive, digital and social literacies; and this is holistically supplemented by an ongoing pastoral strategy, '21st-Century Boy', which concentrates on the qualities needed for a rapidly changing world. Luckily, all this future-proofing doesn't prevent the boys from seizing the moment. They throw themselves into sport with gusto and achieve strong results - the cricketers are on a winning streak and amassing all sorts of cups in the process – while the more niche sports such as polo, fencing and judo are also seeing significant success. The drama is distinguished, and there is a particularly rich focus on Shakespeare: Harrow's was the first company to perform a full-length play on the stage of the (then partially built) Globe Theatre in 1994. Thirtyone years later, the school staged A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.

IBSTOCK PLACE SCHOOL ••

Clarence Lane SW15 5PY Website ibstockplaceschool.co.uk Head Christopher Wolsey, since 2021; previously deputy head **Pupils** 1,048 day: 556 boys, 492 girls Ages 4-18 Term Fees £9,979 Bursaries Variable % of pupils, on application Alumni TV cook Nigella Lawson, novelist Iris Murdoch, actress Emily Blunt 'From personal experience – and it's the consensus among my peers – I believe that Christopher Wolsey is somebody who genuinely cares about the wellbeing and opinions of the students.' So says one satisfied parent of Ibstock's head. And Wolsey cares about the pupils' articulacy, too. Alongside forging positive relationships with his charges, he puts great emphasis on their oracy: the public-speaking team recently triumphed in a competition at Cambridge University; and through membership of the The Noisy Classroom organisation, the debaters can argue the toss with children from around the world. In

the same vein, drama is popular, while Ibstock's singers and musicians regularly perform for the local community. But life at this establishment isn't just about exercising the vocal cords. Right on its doorstep, Richmond Park offers ample space for running around; talented Sixth-formers can now join a Rugby Excellence Programme in partnership with Harlequins FC; and with rowing now established, a competitive team is in the works. The new Esports arena is match-fit for gamers; the school team has exploded onto the Esports Rocket League, already winning silverware; and did we mention that there's an incoming head of AI? However, if all this doesn't sound enticing enough, the roster of foreign adventures should clinch it. 'Over the next few years, my lucky son is hoping to go on a classics trip to Pompeii and a Tuscan art retreat, as well as language-study visits to Munich and Valencia, skiing in Switzerland and surfing in France,' reports one parent. And no, of course we're not jealous...



LONDON PUBLIC

JAMES ALLEN'S GIRLS' SCHOOL •

144 East Dulwich Grove SE22 8TE

Website jags.org.uk
Head Alex Hutchinson, since 2020;
previously head of Woldingham
School Pupils 1,212 day girls
Ages 4–18 Term Fees £9,784
Bursaries 17% of pupils, up to
100%+ Alumni Actress Sally
Hawkins, author Anita Brookner,
BBC chief economics correspondent
Dharshini David

As London's oldest independent girls' school, JAGS believes diversity lies at the heart of its success, and it's proud of an extensive bursary scheme that supports nearly one in five of its intake. Exam grades are consistently impressive; and after a downsizing from 11 to 10 GCSEs per pupil, to allow more time for enrichment, 2024 saw the school's best-ever GCSE results. with 92 per cent scoring 9-7 in all subjects. Meanwhile, A-level students conduct university-style research; linguists have the option to study Japanese and Russian; and Years 7 to 10 are enrolled in such Curriculum-Plus-curated courses as metacognition and public speaking mastery. (Those who achieve the latter have plenty of time to appear in dramatic productions, often held in collaboration with fellow south London institution Dulwich College, in a brilliant theatre that can be configured traditionally or in the round.) Older girls are encouraged to set up clubs for their juniors, and there's an absolute panoply to choose from: if skating at the Streatham Ice and Leisure Centre doesn't appeal, there's always beach volleyball, dance, Zumba, yoga and - of course - the Alien Invasion society. And happily, there is a sizeable green-fingered contingent to be found tending the plants and re-wilded ponds, as well as the large self-composting system. A significant proportion of leavers head to Oxbridge annually, but degree apprenticeships have proved popular in recent years, too, with pupils joining the likes of IBM, PwC and the Civil Service.



KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL, WIMBLEDON

Wimbledon Common SW19 4TT Website kcs.org.uk Head Dr Anne Cotton, since 2022;

previously head at Portsmouth
Grammar School **Pupils** 1,507 day:
1,371 boys, 136 girls **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees** £11,404 **Bursaries** 6%
of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni**Poet Dante Gabriel Rosetti, footballer
Andrew Watson, physician Dr Chris
Van Tulleken

King's College dedicates an hour and a half every day to an extensive clubs programme; so if you pop your head round a classroom door at lunchtime, you might find a teenage boy waxing lyrical about private equity in the finance club, or penning a play under the auspices of the new writing society. Then there's the Curiosity programme, which seeks to instill (you guessed it) curiosity in students through workshops on anything from Plato to podcasting. Elsewhere, a Learning Enrichment hub dedicated to supporting neurodiversity and individual needs recently opened its doors; and also

being put to good use is the Futures hub, a space to explore careers, innovation and entrepreneurship, which also serves as the HO of the new King's Business School where, during the holidays, courses foster entrepreneurship among pupils from King's and its partner schools. Meanwhile, the King's Arts festival sees the whole school community come together in a five-day celebration of the transformative power of the creative pursuits. (Theresa May has spoken at the now-annual event, as have various Nobel Prize winners and globally renowned musicians.) Little wonder the drama here is so impressive, with a recent production of Billy Elliot winning Best Musical at the prestigious National School Theatre Awards and plays regularly taken to the Edinburgh Fringe. GCSEs were impressive, with 99 per cent graded 9-7; and having acquired a site nearby, plans are now in the pipeline to create a world-class educational facility for the junior school, meaning the excellence of an education here really will span all ages.

LATYMER UPPER SCHOOL ••

King Street W6 9LR
Website latymer-upper.org
Head Susan Wijeratna, since 2023;
previously lower master at Eton
College Pupils 1,427 day: 723
boys, 704 girls Ages 7–18 Term
Fees £10,365 Bursaries 25% of
pupils, up to 100% Alumni Actors
Alan Rickman and Hugh Grant,
singer Arlo Parks

'I love how Latymer instils the value of giving back to the community from a young age,' says one parent, going on to commend the 'cosy, warm, buzzy and open environment that produces knowledgeable, vibrant and confident kids'. It's diverse, too: while there's a range of outreach activities with 88 local partner schools, organisations and charities, a decade-long Inspiring Minds campaign has led to an impressive one-in-four students here being eligible for support from means-tested bursaries. And innovative: following an extensive period of research and consultation, GCSEs in traditional subjects - all bar maths and English language have been replaced by Latymer's own assessed courses, which are taught in conjunction with a shorter, interdisciplinary curriculum. (And perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of this model is how it allows students to be judged more holistically, by the likes of vivas and group-work tasks as well as traditional exams.) Outside the classroom, rowing on the Thames always goes swimmingly; and there will be increasing opportunities to run around in the fresh air, thanks to the launch nearby of the cuttingedge Chiswick Sports Ground. The 200-seat professional theatre and the Black Box drama studio witness such performances as a feminist interpretation of The Taming of the Shrew; and musicians play everywhere from the Cadogan Hall to Southwark Cathedral. Students leave Latymer with an all-round education - and great results. Recently, 42 per cent of A-levels were graded A*, and one in six leavers received offers from Oxbridge.

An Alleyn's education

Everyone thrives at this historic south London day school, where children are encouraged to 'find their thing'



DURINGTHE RENAISSANCE, SCHOLARS

favoured a new, fully rounded approach to education. So it's no surprise that Alleyn's – a co-education independent day school founded in that era in 1619 – uses a similar method today. After all, its namesake founder, the actor and philanthropist Edward Alleyn, was known as much for his powerful monologue in *Doctor Faustus* as he was for championing the transformative powers of a good education.

Four hundred years later, Alleyn's has a holistic approach to learning, welcoming boys and girls aged between 4-18 to its picturesque south London campus. Scholarships (available from 11+ and 16+) offer kind, capable and curious children from all backgrounds the chance to reach their potential. Alleyn's encourages pupils to discover what makes them tick – whether that's science, sports, the arts or something else – and helps them to succeed at it. This rich co-curricular life ensures that children leave school as confident, happy individuals, ready to contribute to society and take control of their own future.

In 2024, 96 per cent received university offers from their first- or second-choice institutions, while 24 were offered places at Oxbridge



A historic school with a forward-thinking approach, Alleyn's also understands the importance of ensuring its pupils can grapple with the ethical and moral implications of new technology. That's why it has created its own pioneering curriculum, dubbed AiQ (Alleyn's Intelligence Quotient), which is designed to help pupils learn how to navigate and shape new digital innovations such as AI. From reception through to graduation, children learn how to be responsible with new ideas, and why that's important for our future.

While the belief at Alleyn's is that education excellence is reflected in more than just exam results, the results the school achieves speak for themselves. In 2024, 96 per cent of graduates received university offers from their first- or second-choice institutions, while 24 were offered places at Oxbridge. Rather than drilling into students the importance of written tests, it is the focus on a rich academic life that gives them the confidence to succeed – which they do. Past students include notable politicians, scientists, authors, cricket players, composers, actors, interior designers and more.

From top left: science in action; Year 7 matriculation; football at Alleyn's

Why not see for yourself how an Alleyn's education can help your child 'find their thing' by attending an Open Event in September. For children aged 11+, there is an Open Afternoon on Wednesday, 17 September; 11+ and 16+ can attend an Open Morning on Saturday, 27 September; while 16+ only are invited to an Open Evening on Tuesday, 23 September. There is also a Junior School Open Day on Saturday, 20 September.

LONDON PUBLIC



North London Collegiate School's satirical Sixth-form play was entitled Murder on the Oxbridge Express

MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL ●

Sandy Lodge Lane, Northwood HA6 2HT

Website mtsn.org.uk
Head Simon Everson, since 2013;
previously head of The Skinners'
School Pupils 960 day boys Ages
11–18 Term Fees £10,649
Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Actors Boris Karloff
and Riz Ahmed, former politician
Reginald Maudling

Merchant Taylors' prides itself on artfully combining a lot of juxtapositions – and to great effect. It's situated in the countryside but borders the capital. It embraces tradition yet prizes innovation. It seeks to foster individuality while upholding standards of excellence and an outstanding academic reputation; indeed, 21 of the recent A-level cohort achieved straight A*s, while Oxbridge offers are

regularly made. Still, plenty of time is spent outside the classroom, in the 285-acre grounds dotted with lakes for sailing and windsurfing, playing fields, an athletics track and a new indoor cricket facility. (The latter has gone down a storm: allowing players year-round practice, it's also the base for Middlesex County Cricket Club's indoor training and regularly hosts international touring sides.) And talking of competitive games, they're rooted in an ethical vision here: the first ever head Richard Mulcaster came up with the idea that 'footballe' matches should have referees; and the boys are still taught to be good sports, not simply good at sport. Drama productions are often held in collaboration with St Helen's, a neighbouring girls' school - a recent production of West Side Story pulled in all the students in some capacity - while the music department is

nurturing a growing number of organists, who even took a trip to see examples of their instrument in Holland. Amid this busy schedule, there's still plenty of time for clubs spanning a broad range, from film to horse riding and podcasting.

NORTH LONDON COLLEGIATE SCHOOL

Canons Drive, Edgware HA8 7RJ Website nlcs.org.uk

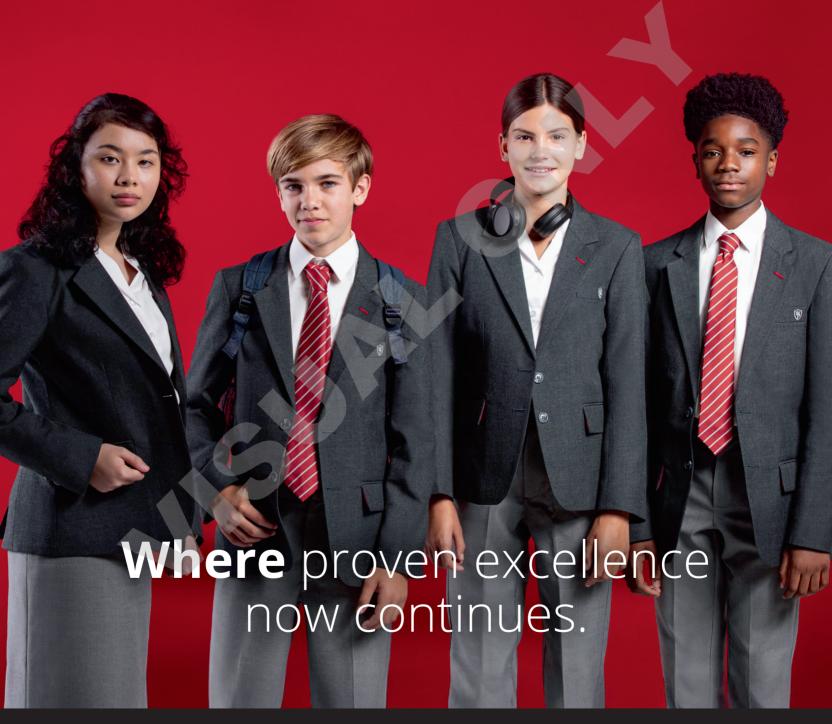
Head Vicky Bingham, since 2023; previously head of South Hampstead High School **Pupils** 1,101 day girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees** £9,917

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Vogue editor-in-chief Dame Anna Wintour, psychotherapist Susie Orbach, journalist Dame Esther Rantzen

'There is so much I love about NLCS that narrowing it down to just one thing is almost impossible!' says one student. But she pinpoints the vast range of extracurriculars as a particular plus: 'One lunchtime, I can find myself helping to build the set for our play and the next attending trials for a Model United Nations conference.' The range of activities really is impressive: the chess and VEX Robotics teams have won significant national competitions. A raft of innovative changes has made the place even more dynamic. Student leadership opportunities have been expanded by the introduction of house captains; a new Sixth-form reading room has gone down a treat; and the outdoor provision now includes cricket nets and a teepee classroom. The girls excel in their A-level and IB results, scoring an average 41 points in the latter. All that and a sense of humour: the recent satirical Sixth-form play was entitled Murder on the Oxbridge Express.







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PUBLIC

PUTNEY HIGH SCHOOL •

Putney Hill SW15 6BH

Website putneyhigh.gdst.net Head Jo Sharrock, since 2023; previously head of Shrewsbury High School Pupils 1,065 day girls Ages 4-18 Term Fees £9,659 Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Journalist Sophie Raworth, lawyer Sandie Okoro, costume designer Jenny Beavan Putney High has long been famed for its excellent academic results, but the class of 2024 went one better and broke the school records. Three-quarters of A-levels were awarded A*-A; 19 students of almost 100 achieved three or more A*s; and the science results were the strongest ever, while 14 per cent of all examinees took up places at Oxbridge. With the girls going on to various other top-tier universities in the UK and beyond - where they study everything from maths, medicine and neuroscience to global development, furniture design and liberal arts - who could deny either their diversity or the opportunities afforded to them? As a recent visitor put it, the girls here 'discover new passions all the time', and learning stretches far beyond the standard curriculum. With more than 150 clubs, there are outlets for every possible enthusiasm - be it the pure pleasure of gardening, Scrabble and corset making, or deepening their knowledge with STEM innovation, motor sports and entrepreneurship. Highachievers on all fronts, more than half of Putney's pupils learn a musical instrument (rarer options include the accordion, organ and harp); and many excel in such sports as cricket, netball, tennis and lacrosse, with rowing being particularly strong - spot pupils in the Henley Royal Regatta. But busy and driven as they may be, they still have plenty of time for good oldfashioned fun. Putney Does Strictly and the staff Christmas panto are the hottest tickets of the year, and just as hilarious and entertaining as they sound, while trips to New York, Finland and Iceland are also much-loved highlights.

QUEEN'S COLLEGE •

Harley Street W1G 8BT

Website qcl.org.uk

Emma Freud

Head Richard Tillett, since 2017; previously senior deputy head of Harrogate Ladies' College Pupils 636 day girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees £10,602 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Women's rights campaigner Sophia Jex-Blake, writer Katherine Mansfield, broadcaster

Behind its white-pillared, Harley Street façade, Queen's College is a quietly assured place, balancing academic ambition with a nurturing and down-to-earth atmosphere. Thus, a current mother tells us of the immediate warmth she felt, 'the moment I walked through the door', but also remarks - as one would expect of the first school in the country to offer academic qualifications to girls - that its students are encouraged to 'walk to the beat of their own drum'. Credit, then, to dynamic head Richard Tillett ('all-in', plus 'one word: amazing'), who is very much present, whether playing the French horn and cello in the orchestra or acknowledging his own shortcomings in the annual Failure Week, a light-hearted corrective to the culture of perfection with which so many teens struggle. Speaking of which, Queen's College firmly believes 'resilience is crucial' in today's fast-paced world; and with this in mind, its 'Resilient Ready' initiative was launched in 2024 to support students as they navigate the pressures they encounter in life, both inside and outside the classroom. Meanwhile, the clubs are imaginative and plentiful - 90 in total, including manga (Japanese comics) and boxing - and sport is championed, with plenty of fixtures to keep active pupils busy. As for the art department, the children make the most of their location by regularly visiting the capital's most famous galleries - not to mention private collectors - and viewing the best of female artists' work. Though

grounded, the girls here fly: confi-

dent in their own skins and fully

prepared for pastures new.



The annual Failure Week at Queen's College is a light-hearted corrective to the culture of perfection with which teens struggle

ST PAUL'S GIRLS'
SCHOOL •

Brook Green W6 7BS

Website spgs.org

Head Liz Hewer, since 2025, previously head of St George's, Ascot Pupils 840 day girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees £10,531 Bursaries 11% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Former chair of UK Vaccine Taskforce Dame Kate Bingham, Olympic rowing cox Zoe de Toledo, theatre director Blanche McIntyre

'The food is absolutely amazing,' said few students of their schools, ever. Except, apparently, those at St Paul's Girls', who have four dishes a day to choose from. Indeed, choice is the name of the game here, and not just on the culinary front: the pupils don't wear uniforms, and the importance of self-discovery, curiosity and creativity is cherished. As for the curriculum, all age groups are offered computer science and creative technology, and a new centre for Design and Innovation fosters engagement with technology in all subjects. Other news? Drama is super-ambitious – there are more than 20 productions a year - and aided by a series of masterclasses that see industry practitioners share their insights into such callings as writing, art direction and casting. Though sport is very much for all, the lacrosse teams are remarkable for their grit and perseverance. And talented musicians perform in venues across London. Among the popular clubs led by students is one dedicated to entrepreneurship and social justice. (It was founded by a Year 10 girl who started her own business aged nine, to fund herself through university.) A number of children are involved in supporting an American non-profit, doing mentoring and research-based tasks to help underprivileged youth reach their full potential. Naturally, the academics here are sky-high: at A-level, 62 per cent were graded A*; and for the 12th consecutive year, more than 90 per cent of GCSEs were 9-8. Little wonder that 44 recent leavers headed to Oxbridge. For all their hard work, though, one parent insists that 'Paulinas are not deprived of fun'.

LONDON



Colourful six-foot-tall penguin sculptures dotted around South Hampstead High School have become feminist icons

ST PAUL'S SCHOOL •

Lonsdale Road SW13 9JT Website stpaulsschool.org.uk **Head** Sally-Anne Huang, since 2020; previously head of James Allen's Girls' School Pupils 1,017: 936 day; 54 boarding **Ages** 7–18 Term Fees Day: £11,949; boarding: £17,981 Bursaries 9% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actor Rory Kinnear, politician George Osborne, neuroscientist Sir Menelaos Pangalos The high master here – actually, a woman, the first in its 516-year history – is a staunch supporter of single-sex education, pointing out that her school has been honing that expertise for centuries. Since her arrival here in 2020, Sally-Anne Huang - described by parents as 'dedicated, hardworking and a good listener' - has not only held a curriculum review, resulting in the boys taking 10 GCSEs rather than 11, but she's re-crafted the timetable so there are longer (but fewer) lessons every day; and in between that, she has revamped pastoral care and undertaken a £2.7 million regeneration of the

school's boathouse. The latter is well-deserved by the rowing team, who regularly race to victory in such competitions as the National Schools and Henley Royal Regattas, and even the Head of the Charles Regatta in Boston. Meanwhile, the football squad enjoys tours to such far-flung destinations as Los Angeles; the rugby players are piloting new rules aimed at making the game safer; theatre productions are often performed with St Paul's Girls; and musicians are given opportunities to play in such professional venues as the Dean Street Pizza Express (known for its jazz nights) and Chelsea's 606 Club. The school prides itself on providing a liberal education to bright, curious boys and its architecture seems to embody that: modern and light-filled with breakout rooms and a double-height library, it creates a mature and intellectual atmosphere that is reminiscent of a university. Little wonder that, of recent leavers who didn't take a gap year, 50 per cent headed straight to institutions ranked in the world's top 20.

SOUTH HAMPSTEAD HIGH SCHOOL •

Maresfield Gardens NW3 5SS
Website shhs.gdst.net
Head Anna Paul, since 2023;
previously deputy head (pastoral) of
Godolphin & Latymer Pupils 965
day girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees
£9,457 Bursaries 7% of pupils, up
to 100%+ Alumni Actresses Dame
Angela Lansbury and Helena
Bonham Carter, BBC Europe
editor Katya Adler
The colourful sin foot rell panagin

The colourful, six-foot-tall penguin sculptures dotted around this school - originally conceived to highlight global warming - have also become feminist icons on campus; because these birds are one of the few species in which the males do their fair share of infant-rearing. This message of female equality is promulgated by head Anna Paul, described by her charges as 'amazing', with one adding: 'She's made a genuine effort to get to know and connect with all the girls, even running her own feminist book club.' The upshot is that innovation and intellectual curiosity run deep here, aided by a new coder-in-residence programme, which is igniting pupils' interest in technology; as well as a roof terrace that's being transformed into a flexible space to accommodate outdoor lessons and yoga and pilates; and the first 'student learning community', which brings together Year 10 and Lowersixth to collaborate with senior leadership on enhancing the effectiveness of their strategies. (Not that learning strategies aren't already effective: in 2024, more than 75 per cent of A-level results were A*-A.) Success is ubiquitous outside the classroom, too. The slalom squad were crowned GB schools' champions in 2024, a music scholar was a finalist in the BBC Young Musician of the Year and, very impressively, a Sixth-former was elected by local children as Camden's Youth MP. Luckily, there's a sense of fun alongside all this. A new end-of-year event, South Hampstead Wrapped, brings together the whole school in a joyful festival of performance, speeches and prize-giving.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE SCHOOL ••

Hampstead NW3 6XH Website ucs.org.uk **Head** Mark Beard, since 2013; previously deputy head of Brighton College **Pupils** 1,306 day: 1,189 boys, 117 girls Ages 4-18 Term Fees £10,971 Bursaries 4.6% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Athlete Sir Roger Bannister, Nobel Prize winning mathematical physicist Sir Roger Penrose, mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington In 1830, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham founded a school that, preparing pupils for University College London, aimed to do things differently: UCS would not bar access on the grounds of religion nor inflict corporal punishment, and it would have a modern curriculum. Today the institution remains committed to the same values of innovation, tolerance and inclusion. In the senior school, about 60 students receive fee assistance through bursaries, while a well-established partnership offers support to four state schools and more than 15 primaries. A number of initiatives are being developed under the banner of 'character education'; among them, a Lower School diploma – providing a sixweek course of lectures on topics outside the standard curriculum and a Young Leaders Award, which sees pupils create community projects. There's also a wide spread of physical pursuits on offer, as showcased by the recent Women in Sport Week spotlighting such activities as bouldering and basketball. Ahead of the school's 200th birthday celebrations in 2030, funds are being raised for a Wellbeing hub, which would provide access to counselling, wellness advice and quiet areas, as well as an enhanced performing arts space. The latter will surely be welcomed by UCS's accomplished musicians, who play a variety of genres. (With some 20 rock bands to cater for, the pop provision has expanded of late.) At A-level, 73 pupils recently scored straight A*-A, while 23 leavers secured places at Oxbridge.

PUBLIC LONDON

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL ••

Dean's Yard SW1P 3PB

Website westminster.org.uk Head Dr Gary Savage, since 2020; previously head of Alleyn's School Pupils 773. Day: 538 boys, 72 girls; boarding: 102 boys, 61 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £16,650; boarding: £21,992 Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Polymath Robert Hooke, new chief of MI6 Blaise Metreweli, singer Mika With views of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, history is round every corner at Westminster – to the extent that parts of the school are designated Unesco World Heritage Sites. And yet, alongside celebrating its storied past, the establishment is very much focused on preparing its pupils for the future. (According to parents, it 'nourishes young people who are curious about complexity' and provides 'exceptional academics combined with a liberal, humanistic worldview'.) And year on year, students amass a constellation of top results: 89 per cent of recent A-level grades came in at A*-A, 90 pupils won places at Oxbridge and a further 22 headed on to further study at Imperial. But life here isn't all books and revision. There's an impressive suite of facilities for sport - known as 'Station' - including indoor cricket nets and fencing pistes - and a boat club in Putney. Musicians hit perfect pitch at the annual Barbican concert, the Sixth-form theatre festival provides plenty of opportunities for thespians, and now there's a drive to expand Westminster's offering to others. Thus, Harris Westminster Sixth Form pupils can join A-level courses in such subjects as Greek and Latin; and the Westminster Platform academic enrichment programme is aimed at supporting pupils from state schools. However, the biggest expansion on the cards marks one of the most seismic changes in Westminster's centuriesold story: from 2026, it will admit girls at the 11+ entry point; and by 2030, both the school and its prep will be fully co-educational.

WHITGIFT •

Haling Park CR2 6YT

Website whitgift.co.uk Head Toby Seth, from 2025, previously head of Pocklington School **Pupils** 1,450 boys: 1,350 day; 100 boarding Ages 10-18 Term Fees Day: £10,800, boarding: £19,770 Bursaries 50% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Cricketer Jamie Smith, singer IB Gill, actor Kit Connor

Whitgift is known in these parts for its peafowl, every magnificent one of which is a direct descendant of a pair gifted to the school in 1936; and another proud tradition is its financial support for families who need it. Not only does the school run a bursary programme and its own charity, but the Headmaster's Award – now at the disposal of incoming principal Toby Seth covers full fees, uniforms, laptops, trips and exam charges. Commitment to outreach is woven into this place: its Community Summer School sees local Year 5 students enjoy sessions in English, maths,

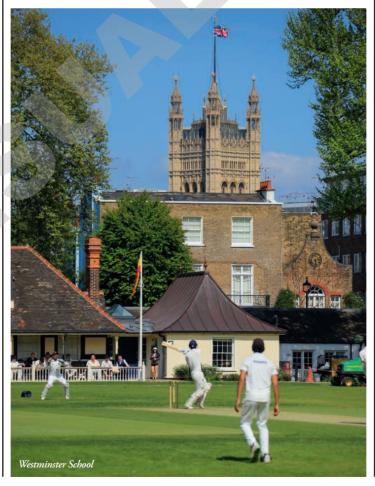
science and philosophy, languages, history and enrichment; and nine primaries in the area borrow its teaching assistants. Music is massive, with an abundance of groups and ensembles; and drama is such a big deal that the recent, immersive performance of It's a Wonderful Life saw a high-street set constructed in the middle of the school, with the audience seated among the buildings as the story unfolded around them. Whitgift's impressive sporting achievements almost require their own article: from rugby to football and squash, its teams are constantly competing in national finals – with one recently victorious in the first ever nationwide schools' padel tournament. Outdoor education encourages independence, resilience and leadership through adventure: mountain biking in the Surrey Hills, playing water sports in Greece, and swishing down ski slopes in Italy. Finally, a thriving Homestay programme offers reciprocal language exchanges in France, Spain, Germany, Taiwan and Japan.



Head Fionnuala Kennedy, since 2020; previously senior deputy head Pupils 1,073 day girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees £9,619 Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Iournalists Samira Ahmed and Afua Hirsch, actress

Margaret Rutherford

'The girls are at the heart of the school, and everything here is about making them rounded, engaged, thoughtful and caring individuals,' explains one parent. 'There's an enormous offering of co-curricular activities, and children are encouraged to try everything and to find their passions.' Respect, then, to longtime head Fionnuala Kennedy, who has overseen a clutch of renovations and innovations aimed at supporting the pupils as they discover these enthusiasms. The Senior Library and Sixth-form study room are now stunning spaces, for example; and the spaceage STEAM Tower boasts such facilities as laser-cutting 3D printers. In the field of learning, the syllabus has downsized from 10 to nine GCSEs, which gives Year 10s time to take a non-examined and staff-designed course in politics, philosophy and economics. And as part of its outreach mission, there is a partnership programme with local schools that offers a carousel of coding, maths, English and science to pupils. (Wimbledon High also fundraises for care packages and presents to be sent to HMP Downview women's prison.) Elsewhere, a dynamic student leadership conference has not only seen the girls set its agenda but interview the likes of Baroness Warsi, while its sporting types are delighted with both the new Astroturf and the strength and conditioning suite. There's so much to do here, and it's all powered by the ties that bind: 'I love the sisterhood I share with my peers,' says one pupil, 'and how we strive to push each other to be the best versions of ourselves.' □





Rise and shine

A peek behind Wetherby's red door made famous by schoolboys Princes William and Harry

IF IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE

Royal Family, it's good enough for us. It was once known for educating young royals when the late Diana, Princess of Wales and the then Prince of Wales decided to break with convention and send their sons, Prince William and Prince Harry, to the prestigious boys school in Notting Hill. Seventy-five years after it first opened its doors, Wetherby School is a dynamic, forward-thinking pre-prep shaping the next generation. With a focus on creating a nurturing atmosphere where boys can thrive, not to mention a reputation for future academic excellence, it is an obvious choice for parents eager to secure the best possible early education for their sons.

Founded in 1951, the school is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year with a series of events. First and foremost Wetherby is looking

Pupils can now go seamlessly from nursery through to sixth form within the prestigious Wetherby schools





to the future, expanding locations so that it can cater to even more families, providing the same first-class education to all, making it a top choice for discerning parents in the capital today just as it was when it first opened.

This September will see the opening of a brand new Wetherby Pembridge Senior in Kensington Olympia, a co-ed senior school, which means pupils can now go seamlessly from nursery through to sixth form within the prestigious Wetherby schools, via Wetherby Pembridge Minors (co-ed nursery), Wetherby School (pre-prep), Wetherby Prep (boys aged 7-13) and Wetherby Senior (boys 11-18). All are housed in impressive buildings in west London locations close to each other. Its sister school, Pembridge Hall in Notting Hill, caters to girls for pre-prep and prep, meaning siblings can be part of the same scholarly journey and, ultimately, alumni network. With notable past students including not only royalty, but also Olympic athletes, BAFTA winners, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, politicians, artists and even West End stars, it's a club you will definitely want your children to be a part of.

When choosing a school, front of mind is your children's future, with the hope that they can not only become well-rounded individuals, but also go on to achieve academic excellence. These schools luckily provide both through a holistic approach to education, giving pupils the best possible start. Individual personalised



support, expert teaching and an innovative curriculum all result in impeccable academic outcomes, with top 7+ and 8+ results, not to mention places at elite prep and senior schools (including scholarships), and some exceptional 11+, 13+, GCSE and A-level scores.

There are plenty of extracurriculars to enrich students' lives at Wetherby – something that is more important than ever these days. Expect 15 acres of premium sports grounds and world-class academic and arts facilities spread across all the sites. Boys may choose to try out music and martial arts, hone their team spirit on the cricket pitch, or master skills that will prove vital in their later careers such as coding and debating. There's even a forest school for the littlest pupils. Top marks all round.

PUBLIC

ARDINGLY COLLEGE ••



South East

ABINGDON SCHOOL •

Park Road, Abingdon OX14 1DE
Website abingdon.org.uk
Head Michael Windsor, since
2016; previously head of Reading
Blue Coat School Pupils 1,270
boys: 1,120 day, 150 boarding
Ages 4–18 Term Fees Day:
£9,225; boarding: £18,810
Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to
100% of day fees Alumni Actor
Tom Hollander, former Olympic
rower Oliver Cook, former private
secretary to King Charles and Queen
Camilla Sir Clive Alderton
Selective Abingdon is truly a school

of two halves. Take its head boy

policy: a pair are appointed annually and serve together all year, demonstrating how leadership can accommodate complementary personalities and skills. Then there's the curriculum, an important part of which is 'The Other Half', which allows students to develop themselves outside the groves of academe and offers everything from a Model United Nations to clubs for chess and music. (The latter is a highlight here, with a new department head initiating jazz and cabaret.) And the annual rock concert is always a blast; particularly when head Mike Windsor – a

guitarist himself – joins the school band. Elsewhere, outreach is also part of Abingdon's duality, particularly through its OX14 partnership, sharing facilities and events with local state and independent institutions. But topping all this comes an important announcement: from September 2026, the school will become co-ed, accepting girls into Year 7 and Sixth Form, followed by Year 9 in 2028. Windsor maintains it will be 'business as usual', with the two groups integrated seamlessly. And feedback from parents has been positive, with many saying they chose Abingdon despite its boys-only status, not because of it. As for the new girls' uniforms? Well, according to our researcher, available samples for would-be entrants look 'smart and sensible, and subtly incorporate the distinctive Abingdon fuchsia-pink'.

Haywards Heath RH176SQ Website ardingly.com Head Ben Figgis, since 2014; previously deputy head of Oakham Pupils 1,053. Day: 416 boys, 316 girls; boarding: 164 boys, 157 girls **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £11,460; boarding: £17,547 Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Private Eye editor Ian Hislop, former diplomat Sir David Manning, Chelsea footballer Shim Mheuka In 2024, Ardingly was the UK's first such establishment to be recognised for the 'significant strength' of its boarding provision - the highest accolade in this category from the new Independent Schools Inspectorate – and now comments this was because of its outstanding pastoral care. Parents agree: one mentions how 'our girls felt they could approach several teachers when they had academic or other issues'. But there are plenty of further strengths, too. The performing arts, for example: a production of Les Misérables – accompanied by the school orchestra - received rave reviews from all who saw it. Or water sports, for which exclusive rights to the adjoining Ardingly Reservoir have been acquired (meaning the considerable rowing and sailing provision will only grow). Still, success is not limited to the extracurricular here. From Year 9, no tutor group exceeds 10 pupils, and the intentionally small class sizes contribute to academic excellence. Last year, the International Baccalaureate Diploma cohort achieved an impressive average of 38.9, keeping the school in the country's top 10 for IB results; and the World Ready programme continues to prepare children for later life. Meanwhile, both a partnership with Microsoft and an AI 'tool kit' aim to deepen the students' understanding of modern technology through pilot projects, which are intended for roll-out to other schools. And smaller but equally significant factors - such as the student-nominated weekly Pelican Awards – sustain the promotion of acts of kindness.

BEDALES SCHOOL ••

Church Road, Steep,
Petersfield GU32 2DG
Website bedales.org.uk
Head Will Goldsmith, since 2021;
previously director of teaching and
learning at Latymer Upper School
Pupils 769. Day: 214 boys, 211
girls; boarding: 154 boys, 190 girls
Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day:
£14,219; boarding: £18,357
Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni The Earl of
Snowdon, actors Minnie Driver
and Daniel Day-Lewis
Bedales was founded in 1893 to
offer an alternative to the strict
regimes governing most publi

Bedales was founded in 1893 to offer an alternative to the strict regimes governing most public schools. From the start, it has made happiness, individuality and partnership its priorities; hence the important tradition of handshaking between pupils and teachers. Sport here is very much for all; the creatives relish the opportunity to express themselves in the award-winning timber-framed Olivier Theatre; artists are encouraged to explore disciplines that range from

ceramics and fashion to product design; and those who prefer the great outdoors muck in to run a working farm, where the lambing season is a highlight. Meanwhile, music is a big deal here: the wholeschool concert features everyone from pre-preppers to seniors, while the school Rock Show sees the children performing covers and original songs over three nights. In other news, Clare Kirkham is the prep's incoming head, and Japanese can now be studied, thus increasing from 15 to 16 the offered number of Bedales Assessed Courses, the school's bespoke, UCAS-recognised alternative to GCSEs. As for 'giving back': every year the Bedales community comes together for Badley Day, when they support a chosen cause through a range of challenges that foster teamwork and test endurance; and young people who are supported by the Rural Refugee Network's Youth Discovery Project spend time at the school, taking part in sports and Christmas baking activities, for example.



BEDFORD SCHOOL •

De Parys Avenue, Bedford MK40 2TU

Website bedfordschool.org.uk

Head James Hodgson, since

2014; previously senior deputy head of Magdalen College School Pupils 1,068 boys: 836 day, 232 boarding Ages 7-18 Term Fees Day: £10,016; boarding: £17,244 Bursaries 12% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Olympian Jack Beresford, co-creator of the NHS Sir George Godber, former England cricketer Sir Alastair Cook Asked to describe its ambitions for Bedfordians, the school gives a succinct reply: 'That they be good men.' This ethos is evident in its thriving community partnerships programme and standout Enrichment Day, when hundreds of less privileged locals come for a carousel of activities, ranging from Shakespeare workshops to sessions on Chinese culture. Then there are its regular house fundraising events. (In 2024, the school was honoured with a Movember lifetime achievement award; and Sixth-formers have thus far raised some £150,000 for the men's health charity.) Unsurprisingly, given the establishment's well-known sporting prowess, the facilities here are great; alongside the new rowing performance centre, there are partnerships with Northamptonshire County Cricket Club and Northampton Saints. Elsewhere, talks from visiting businesspeople encourage entrepreneurship; and Start Up! awards go to boys who conceive of businesses that could make a positive difference in just five days. Meanwhile, a new academic enrichment programme, Floreat, provides opportunities to foster intellectual curiosity and prepares boys for university applications, with alumni returning to talk about their experiences of higher education. This programme gives pupils the opportunity to research and design their own supercurriculum courses; in one instance, a particularly impressive student devised a project to investigate the potential of stem-cell technology in regenerative medicine.

BENENDEN SCHOOL •

Cranbrook, Kent TN17 4AA
Website benenden.school
Head Rachel Bailey, since 2024;
previously head of Royal Masonic
School for Girls Pupils 550 girls:
50 day, 500 boarding Ages 11–18
Term Fees Day: £14,165;
boarding: £19,738 Bursaries 7%
of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni
Humanitarian Sue Ryder, The
Princess Royal, Baroness
Manningham-Buller

'The previous headmistress was a tough act to follow,' reports one parent. 'But so far, so brilliant.' Not least because the new incumbent Rachel Bailey, a vocal advocate for single-sex education, is committed to the fact that Benenden is - and always has been - first and foremost a girls' school. Not that this precludes an all-round education, as was evidenced by the roster of events thrown to mark the institution's 2023-24 centenary. (These included a conference on Women and Wellness at which Davina McCall spoke, and an extraordinary performance of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat at the London Coliseum: the first ever school performance on the West End's biggest stage.) Academics are strong – 93 per cent of recent A-level results were A*-B - and the students are involved in a variety of games, with football growing in popularity and the cricketers sharing a coach with the Brazilian national women's team. In other news, upgrades and changes to the sports facilities and boarding houses are ongoing; so Year 7s and 8s are set to combine into one Lower School House, strengthening interyear friendships; while Sixth-former requests have been listened to, meaning a new house known as The Outlook will provide a more university-style living experience. Creative life here is dynamic, with nearly 500 music lessons taken every week, while the thriving theatre department is overseen by a new director of drama. The art department is embracing technology, exploring the likes of 3D packaging and interactive installations.

SOUTH EAST PUBLIC

BERKHAMSTED SCHOOLS GROUP ••

Overton House, 131 High Street, Berkhamsted HP4 2BB

Website berkhamsted.com **Head** Richard Backhouse, since 2016; previously principal of Monkton Combe Pupils 2,157. Day: 1,033 boys, 1,030 girls; boarding: 58 boys, 36 girls Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,380; boarding: £17,156 Bursaries 2% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Sailor Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, DJ Roman Kemp, golfer Alice Hewson Berkhamsted, a sizeable schools group, offers its pupils the best of many worlds. A 'diamond structure' means the children enjoy the benefits of single-sex education in Years 7 to 11, returning to a full coeducational environment for Sixth Form. The latter shines particularly bright: the teenagers are availing themselves of a brand-new, allmod-cons building inspired by the Harkness model. The classrooms designed in the style of boardrooms to encourage discussion also encompass a Future Zone, where budding entrepreneurs can develop their own business ideas. The very fabric of this edifice is forward-facing, with air-source heat pumps and solar panels both providing power and setting a blueprint for future works, and reflects the school's embrace of modern technology. (It has recently introduced a supercurricular AI course that teaches Year 12 students about the challenges and opportunities of this rapidly evolving resource.) But Berkhamsted gives equal attention to good oldfashioned values, too. 'My favourite thing is the community,' says one Year 8 girl. 'Through clubs, I'm friends with Year 7s and Year 13s.' Regular workshops help to foster inter-year relationships that include team-building sessions for Year 9s run by Year 12 Wellbeing Ambassadors, and Sixth-formerled oracy groups for the younger years. Berkhamsted is clearly a popular destination, with three applications per place for both the senior and Sixth-form schools.

BRADFIELD COLLEGE ••

Bradfield, Berkshire RG7 6AU
Website bradfieldcollege.org.uk
Head Dr Christopher Stevens,
since 2015; previously second master
of Marlborough College Pupils
834. Day: 87 boys, 47 girls;
boarding: 393 boys, 307 girls
Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day:
£15,512; boarding: £19,390
Bursaries 12% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Photographer and
social activist Misan Harriman,
England cricketer Gus Atkinson,
actress Claudia Harrison
Bradfield has helped me grow, not

just as a student but as a person,' one pupil says. Spread across a beautiful enclave of red-brick buildings, this co-ed offers weekly and full boarding; and in a system that lays the foundations for friendships and cohesion, all pupils start in the mixed Faulkners, before dispersing to other houses when they reach Year 10. Since 2023, Year 9 students have followed the redeveloped Faulkner's Curriculum, which sets tasks for problem-solving and specialise in their preferre plines; and a growing for sustainability has sparked a of impressive initiatives, them the annual Golden Equation (which challenges have contest). As for the future, I Christopher Stevens is leaving a decade-long tenure, to be a by Jeremy Quartermain, which sets

critical thinking. Thanks to the faculty's search for exciting alternatives to GCSEs, pupils can now also follow bespoke school-directed courses in music and classical Greek. And the recent unveiling of the St Andrew's Study Centre - a converted church providing modern study spaces - has proved a huge hit. Elsewhere, musical talent was recently displayed at a moving Michaelmas term rendition of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite; creative types have benefitted from the separation of the art and design departments, allowing pupils to specialise in their preferred disciplines; and a growing focus on sustainability has sparked a number of impressive initiatives, among them the annual Golden Egg competition (which challenges houses to reduce energy use, water and waste and includes a vegetable patch contest). As for the future, head Dr Christopher Stevens is leaving after a decade-long tenure, to be replaced by Jeremy Quartermain, who joins

Bradfield College's Golden Egg competition challenges houses to reduce energy use — and includes a vegetable patch contest



BRIGHTON COLLEGE ••

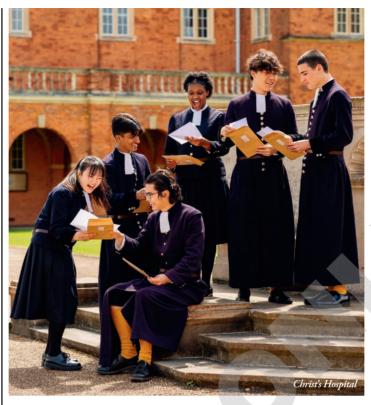
Eastern Road, Brighton RN2 0AL

Website brightoncollege.org.uk
Head Richard Cairns, since 2006;
previously deputy head of Magdalen
College School Pupils 1,785. Day:
710 boys, 664 girls; boarding: 213
boys, 198 girls Ages 3–18 Term
Fees Day: £12,467; boarding:
£22,125 Bursaries 46% of pupils,
up to 100%+ Alumni Economic
historian Lord Skidelsky, England
rugby player Marcus Smith,
cricketer Clare Connor

You'll hear a phrase repeated all over this school: 'Kindness is the currency.' According to one student, 'However often we question the line's suitability (can we pay at the café with kindness?), the beauty of the culture here lies in the effortlessness with which it is repeated.' Pupils look after locals' needs through a raft of charities, and attend to their own wellbeing with seminars on the benefits of cold water therapy, medically led sessions on sleep science and weekly swims in the sea. Taking advantage of its special position between the South Downs and the Channel, the school has decided to introduce a natural history course to the Year 8 curriculum. But there have been far more momentous changes: the institution has recently taken over Handcross Park Prep School near Crawley - relabelled Brighton College Prep Handcross - and now offers its own brand of education there to children aged two to 13, while plans are afoot to replace Brighton College's existing prep with a brand-new one and convert the premises into two boarding houses. Elsewhere, the Richard Cairns Building – opened last year and named after the pioneering principal who has done so much to power his charges up the exam league tables - offers world-class teaching, performing and social spaces, as well as study areas that can only boost the school's already considerable academic reputation: in 2025, it posted record-breaking results - and the highest number of Oxbridge offers in its history.

CATERHAM SCHOOL ••

Harestone Valley Road, Caterham, Surrey CR3 6YA Website caterhamschool.co.uk **Head** Ceri Jones, since 2015; previously second master of Tonbridge School Pupils 1,290. Day: 571 boys, 551 girls; boarding: 103 boys, 65 girls Ages 4-18 Term Fees Day: £9,210; boarding: £15,950 Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Actor Chuk Iwuji, professor of respiratory and critical care medicine Nick Hart, rocket engineer Alia Ardon As well as the usual tests, the admissions process at Caterham includes such off-beat challenges as an escape room. But once accepted, pupils will no longer seek to flee: there's so much fun to be had. While the new sports centre's opening was marked by a training day with Olympic gold medallist Dame Kelly Holmes, there are so many more extracurriculars to enjoy. Eco-consciousness is all around, with first years pursuing a term-long project to improve the food's green credentials, while beekeepers sell honey in branded jars. Mountain bikers whip through the woodlands while automaniacs design, build and race their own Goblin cars. And everyone loves the girls-versus-boys dance-off at the annual talent show. As for parents, they believe Caterham's greatest strength is 'encouraging in the children a love of learning', effected not only through the EDGE digital and innovation curriculum - which concentrates on problem-solving, teamwork, entrepreneurship and leadership – but also through the embrace of artificial intelligence. The school created a pioneering AI teaching and learning bot to work from Reception to Upper-sixth (lending the technology to others up and down the country); and next up is the development of a teacher-support system that will cover everything from report writing to marking. Last year's leavers secured 26 places at US universities, including Princeton and Columbia, and scored a 92 per cent application-to-interview ratio at Oxford - along with a raft of offers.



CHARTERHOUSE ••

Godalming, Surrey GU7 2DX Website charterhouse.org.uk Head Dr Alex Peterken, since 2018; previously head of Cheltenham College Pupils 1,005. Day: 66 boys, 39 girls; boarding: 543 boys, 357 girls Ages 13-18 Term Fees Day: £15,591; boarding: £20,016 Bursaries 7.2% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Former prime minister Lord Liverpool, composer Rachel Portman, former chancellor of the exchequer Jeremy Hunt Quizzed on their favourite aspect of life at Charterhouse, one student answered: 'The appreciation of effort, which makes you feel more open to try new things and feel more comfortable in a school environment. That's what Charterhouse wants to engender in its pupils: open-mindedness and drive.' There's certainly a plethora of activities to try. Carthusians can get behind the decks at DJ-ing club, thrash out differences of opinion in politics society meetings and perfect their Tulloch turns while taking part in Scottish dance. The impressive Atomic magazine is a brilliant space for them to share their empirical observations, with subjects ranging from chemical engineering to the science behind a broken heart. And Artifex, the pupil-led cultural festival - which always opens with a highly competitive inter-house go-karting derby - continues to grow in both scale and ambition. The refurbishment of the Ben Travers Theatre has been welcomed by dramatic types; musicians perform across a range of genres, and 2024's atmospheric Prom in the Park concert saw one particularly talented soloist perform Rachmaninoff's complex Piano Concerto No 2. The Future U programme aims to set pupils up for later life with sessions in areas such as finance, resilience and social entrepreneurship. And with strong A-level and IB results, leavers tend to head to the likes of Durham, UCL and King's.

Caterham's new sports centre opening was marked by a training day with Olympic gold medallist Dame Kelly Holmes

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL ●● Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0LI

Website christs-hospital.org.uk **Head** Matthew Judd, since 2025; previously head of Leighton Park School Pupils 900. Day: 30 boys, 30 girls; boarding: 420 boys, 420 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,212; boarding: £15,695 Bursaries 75% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, England rugby player Joe Launchbury, actor Roger Allam Calling yourself 'A school like no other' is a bold claim. But with six applicants for every place, Christ's Hospital's boast is not without basis. A number of unique traditions and quirks animate life here. For example, four days a week, the famous school band gathers up their oboes, tubas, drums and more, and marches all 900 students to lunch through the quad. Then there's the uniform – barely altered from Tudor times – which pairs voluminous belted blue coats with vellow socks, breeches and white neck bands. At least they're provided to pupils free of charge: a reminder of the founding principles of this institution, which started life nearly 500 years ago with a mission to educate and nourish children from many social backgrounds. (Today, £23 million per annum is spent on bursaries.) The school also works hard to share its grounds and facilities with the locals through a range of events, such as lunchtime concerts and historical tours, while every week the Community Action programme sends 200 pupils into local schools, charity shops and residential homes. Elsewhere, the drama department encourages students to get involved on and off stage, fees for music lessons are means-tested in the same way as bursaries, and sport is strong: little wonder when you take into account the 21 grass pitches and 10 cricket squares, as well as the sparkling new athletics complex and four padel courts. And did we mention the outdoor Get Active exercise trail, the first of its kind in the country?

SOUTH EAST PUBLIC

CRANLEIGH ••

Horseshoe Lane, Cranleigh, Surrey GU68QQ Website cranleigh.org Head Samantha Price, since 2024; previously head of Benenden **Pupils** 683. Day: 110 boys, 77 girls; boarding: 298 boys, 211 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £15,600; boarding: £19,130 Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Historian Lord Roberts of Belgravia, actress Julia Ormond, England cricketer Ollie Pope Samantha Price, the first female head in Cranleigh's 160-year history, looks to the World Economic Forum for inspiration on such topics as collaboration, resilience and problem-solving. But that's all of a piece with her ambitions for the school, both in terms of physical and intellectual growth. Alongside the imminent opening of the new Sixth Form Centre, the school intends to build two new boarding houses and more performing arts spaces. Meanwhile, the Lower Sixth has begun a new entrepreneurship programme; an increased number of parent meetings in key exam years has been introduced; and a new head of futures is helping shape dreams about university and careers. In recent years, top sports-players and equestrians have answered England's call, but games are very much for everyone, with 29 teams fielded every week. Clubs see keen gardeners managing a vegetable plot and an orchard, while yoga and mindfulness sessions were part of 2025's pastoral care offering. For the theatrically minded, there are opportunities to take part in house plays and films alongside a thriving theatre tech society, while 70 concerts of all styles are held every year. The new director of art oversees the school's printmaking and 3D studios, and there are frequent trips to London galleries. A dazzling offering of trips transports classicists to Pompeii, business students to Munich and intrepid divers to the Maldives. 'I genuinely get a feeling of excitement the night before term starts,' confesses one pupil of Cranleigh's busy and buzzy energy.

CULFORD SCHOOL ••

Culford, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP28 6TX

Website culford.co.uk Head Claire Bentley, since 2023; previously interim head Pupils 896. Day: 352 boys, 333 girls; boarding: 118 boys, 93 girls **Ages** 1–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,260; boarding: £16,265 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Snoop founder Dame Jayne-Anne Gadhia, tennis player Henry Patten, rugby player Tommy Freeman It's well worth inspecting Culford just for the architecture. This golden-stoned former stately home in 480 acres of Suffolk parkland has a rich history and once even hosted

a shooting party for Edward VII.

(Installed especially for his 1907

visit, the King's Loo remains intact

today!) Nonetheless, this school looks

to the future, as evidenced by its

new laboratories and Sixth-form

common room. Acting on feedback

from parents, a new academic and

programme has been created by the school, designed to give pupils more time and flexibility to explore their wider interests without sacrificing their cerebral pursuits. The popular gardening club allows them to grow vegetables to take home and the DT club has erected a bug hotel to support the garden ecosystem. Opportunities abound for pupils to become involved in anything from drone flying to crochet, let alone producing a podcast that interprets the Culford community from the students' perspective. Sports sessions are integrated into the daily timetable; so, for example, children can reinvigorate themselves after a long lesson with a game of tennis. Talking of tennis, championship-standard facilities are revelled in by the academy here which unsurprisingly shape brilliant players - while its counterpart in golf boasts an outdoor driving range and an indoor 'studio'.

broad co-curricular enrichment

Installed especially for Edward VII's visit in 1907, the King's Loo remains intact at Culford School today



D'OVERBROECK'S ••

Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7PL
Website doverbroecks.com
Head Patrick Horne, since 2022;
previously principal at The British
International School Abu Dhabi
Pupils 700. Day: 235 boys,
151 girls; boarding: 133 boys,
176 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees
Day: £11,795; boarding: £22,890
Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 25%
Alumni Actors Rupert Friend and
Phia Saban, former secretary of state

for defence Ben Wallace

D'Overbroeck's started life in the 1970s as a Sixth-form college with an ethos as striking as its name. Now encompassing both senior and international schools, it prides itself on a very personal approach to education; and this is symbolised by the students and staff being on first-name terms. 'The informal style combined with small classes allows for strong relationships to build between peers and teachers, which means you genuinely enjoy going to school,' says one pupil. And another chimes in: 'The thing I love most is honestly how happy everyone seems to be.' Sport is very much for everyone, with ample opportunities for competitive excellence balanced by individual fitness pursuits. When it comes to creativity, the drama department recently staged a production of A Midsummer Night's Dream that reimagined Athens as a youth correctional facility. In another breakthrough, a partnership with New York's renowned Juilliard School fosters transatlantic collaboration in theatre, dance and music; and practitioners of the latter look beyond the constraints of classical training to embrace everything from a cappella to African drumming. At the arts centre, students explore mediums spanning the fine arts, textiles and 3D imaging. A sustainability initiative is in the pipeline, aimed at embedding eco-conscious practices into daily life. And such is the appeal of the offering at D'Overbroeck's that its boarding provision continues to grow, with a new boarding house under construction.

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM SOPER PHOTOGRAPHY



SOUTH EAST PUBLIC



DOWNE HOUSE •

Thatcham, Berkshire RG18 9JJ Website downehouse.net Head Emma McKendrick, since 1997; previously head of Royal High School Bath Pupils 542 girls: 53 day, 489 boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £14,450; boarding: £19,430 Bursaries 25% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Broadcaster Clare Balding, comedian Miranda Hart, actress Geraldine James

actress Geraldine James Parents say Emma McKendrick is the 'absolute heart' of this Berkshire school. Says one: 'She can be seen on campus daily, and her door is always open to both parents and pupils. Quite simply she is a legend in her own lifetime!' Despite her 28-year tenure, McKendrick is not opposed to change: she has recently introduced a flexi-boarding option, enhanced provision for day pupils - they now have a designated study space – and is launching a local and London bus service. Meanwhile, a community outreach programme encompasses a variety of enrichment activities such as a musical theatre day, sports masterclasses and Oxbridge interview practice. Perspectives are further widened by membership of the Global Schools Exchange (giving girls the chance to study in such far-flung realms as China, Japan and Brazil) and the Global Internship Programme, whereby Sixth-formers can travel the world, shadowing professionals in the likes of human rights law, venture capitalism and marketing.

EASTBOURNE COLLEGE ●● Old Wish Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 4JX

Website eastbourne-college.co.uk **Head** Tom Lawson, since 2016; previously deputy head of Christ's Hospital **Pupils** 622. Day: 202 boys, 147 girls; boarding: 171 boys, 102 girls Ages 13-18 Term Fees Day: £12,227; boarding: £18,554 Bursaries 18% of pupils, up to 95% **Alumni** Kent cricketer Tawanda Muyeye, comedian Eddie Izzard, MP Alison Griffiths According to parents, head Tom Lawson is 'engaging, visible, clever, witty' - and 'a dog lover'; so much so that Roy's homework club, which sees Sixth-formers mentor children from local schools in maths, is named after his pooch. What's more, sporting successes are seriously impressive: one player recently hit the school's first ever century in girls' cricket; the U18 girls tennis team recently reached national finals (for an admirable seventh time); the senior boys swimming team achieved a double gold in the national schools Bath Cup relays and 17 pupils were selected to represent Sussex in athletics. Then there's the drama department, which offers masterclasses with professional actors; the lucky music scholars, who last year were taken for a sneak peek of rehearsals of The Magic Flute at Glyndebourne, and the budding artists who display their work in the two gallery spaces.

EPSOM COLLEGE ● ● College Road, Epsom, Surrey KT17 4IO

Website epsomcollege.org.uk **Head** Mark Lascelles, since 2024; previously head of Dauntsey's Pupils 1,142. Day: 440 boys, 400 girls; boarding: 181 boys, 121 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £12,472; boarding: £18,864 Bursaries 9% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Broadcaster Jeremy Vine, former head of MI5 Sir John Scarlett, cricketer Nat Sciver Epsom College doesn't rest on the laurels of its reputation on the pitch, but constantly burnishes it. Current students and alumni regularly scoop regional and inter-prep medals and play in national tournaments, while sports scholars benefit from specialist training with elitelevel coaches, and an educational programme that includes sessions on psychology, nutrition and time management. But there's much more to this place than its playing fields. 'Sport and its values are part of life here, but it doesn't dominate, and it's not just about winning, explains one parent. Thespians can join in four major productions a year, and two large chapel choirs get the chance to tour abroad and perform on recording projects. (Everyone in Lower School also joins a choir in their first year; and no one is exempt from the wonderful inter-house choral competition, instituted in the 1800s.) In the creative department, there are pottery sessions throughout the week; and the art teachers are actual practitioners with their own studios so pupils can observe their individual talents in action. The daily Cultural Hour has been a really brilliant initiative, featuring guest speakers, enriching performances and debates; and clubs, often led by students, include the LGBTQ and Afro-Caribbean societies, as well as the Climate Committee. New head Mark Lascelles – whom pupils call 'nice', 'approachable' and 'really encouraging' - currently has a strategy to modernise the boarding model, keep fees in line with inflation and to expand internationally.

I ETON COLLEGE ●

Windsor, Berkshire SL4 6DW Website etoncollege.com Head Simon Henderson, since 2015; previously head of Bradfield College Pupils 1,345 boarding boys Ages 13–18 Term Fees £21,100 Bursaries 18% of pupils, up to 100% + Alumni Novelist George Orwell, actor Dominic West, The Prince of Wales

Eton receives about five applications per place, and admissions come with a range of prestigious scholarships: 14 King's Scholars are chosen in the summer of Year 8; and 12 Orwell Awards go to candidates for whom an education here would be transformational. Well, Henry VI did found the school in 1440 with the aim of providing free learning to boys with the same aim in mind; and it works hard to broaden its reach. Last year, the Eton Connect programme coordinated visits to its museums and collections by more than 5,000 state pupils. The motto here is Floreat Etona, and indeed, one of the school's strengths lies in the sheer diversity of opportunities offered to help its boys bloom. From football, rugby and cricket to Eton's very own Wall and Field Games, there are always sports to play; and with a major revamp underway, the facilities will soon include a new swimming pool and glass-backed squash courts, as well as renovated courts for fives and rackets. Then there's the dynamic societies programme, which regularly includes talks by distinguished speakers (prime ministers, Nobel laureates, CEOs – vou name it). As you would expect, drama and music here are really impressive; recently, talented students won the BBC Young Musician of the Year and the BBC Young Composer competitions. As head Simon Henderson tells Tatler, 'Boys here spend at least 50 per cent of their time, if not more, doing things that are nonacademic, which is absolutely deliberate and by design', because this mature approach engenders 'self discovery, self-discipline, communication, teamwork, collaboration and, most importantly, fun'.



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SOUTH EAST PUBLIC

HAILEYBURY ••

Haileybury, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG13 7NU Website haileybury.com **Head** Eugene du Toit, since 2024; previously head of Wellington School Pupils 915. Day: 189 boys, 181 girls; boarding: 270 boys, 275 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £13,700; boarding: £18,932 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Former prime minister Clement Attlee, filmmaker Christopher Nolan, rugby player Jamie George Academic feats are on the up at Haileybury: A-level results have just come in at an all-time high and 77 per cent of recent leavers secured places at Russell Group universities. But then, there are plenty of projects here that encourage pupils to explore their intellectual interests; and to understand their application in the real world, too. Take the eco map of the 500-acre site that is being drawn up to identify flora and fauna. Or the groundbreaking programme that aims to see Haileybury become the first secondary in Europe to launch a CubeSat (a small, cube-shaped satellite) into space. Or the Stan-X collaboration, which allows lucky pupils to work with genetics scientists from Stanford University, California, who are seeking cures for diseases such as diabetes and pancreatic cancer. All this innovation is fostered in the incredible new SciTech Centre, which offers cutting-edge teaching and study spaces. (It joins the original college building, designed in 1806 by William Wilkins, the man behind the National Gallery.) Sport is central to life at Haileybury, and its teams amass veritable cabinets of cups and trophies. Music scholars are versed in lesser-taught areas conducting, anyone? - and while new head Eugene du Toit cultivates a palpable spirit of ambition, happiness and mental health remain key priorities. The pastoral team has been expanded; and a sense of community is cemented at the meals taken together in the grand communal dining hall.

HEADINGTON RYE

Headington Road, Oxford OX3 7TD

Website headington.org **Head** Caroline Jordan, since 2011; previously head of St George's Ascot Pupils 1,150. Day: 25 boys, 933 girls; boarding: 193 girls Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,876; boarding £19,722 Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Actress Emma Watson, rower Katie Greves, broadcaster Julia Somerville The new entity of Headington Rye describes itself as a curious, confident, ambitious place that readies pupils for the future, whatever it may hold. And last year's merger of two schools - Headington and Rye St Antony – appears to have gone well, with the former's head girl 'quad' welcoming new arrivals with open arms. But even more change is afoot: Bertrand Leullier has joined as the prep's head; and the middle-school curriculum has been overhauled, to allow students a greater choice of subjects and more autonomy in studying them. (Alongside GCSEs, they can now opt for one-year accredited courses in such topics as financial literacy, global citizenship and creative writing.) The main sports here are hockey, netball, tennis, athletics, swimming and rowing, though alternatives - for example, Zumba and pilates - are also offered. Musicians can join a wonderful selection of orchestras, ensembles and choirs; and when art students aren't gathering inspiration from trips to the likes of New York and Kenya, they're hand-printing T-shirts to sell for charity (the green-fingered brigade even has a dye garden, where they grow plants for pigments used by the textiles department). Clubs range from contemporary dance to CCF, so rare is the girl who doesn't try something new or discover a passion.

HEATHFIELD SCHOOL •

London Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 8BQ

Website heathfieldschool.net Head Jonathan Williams, since 2025; previously deputy head (academic) Pupils 185 girls: 95 day, 90 boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £10,212;

boarding: £15,695 **Bursaries** 19% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Sport journalist Laura Scott, Jimmy Choo CEO Tamara Mellon, interior

designer Nina Campbell
Heathfield has joined the charity
Mill Hill Education Group, which
is among the largest of its kind
in Britain, and the partnership
promises to open up a range of
opportunities for students, further
enriching a school they already

love for being 'tight knit' and 'sup-

portive'. There is nothing small

about pupils' ambitions, especially on the games field, with girls competing in the National Schools Lacrosse Championships and the netball squad putting in stellar performances. (And this sporting prowess is set to be turbocharged by a refurbishment of the facilities.) In other developments, the

school's central courtyard is being revamped to create a dynamic space that can be put to a variety of uses throughout the year, from performances to learning in the fresh air; a new outdoor wellbeing area has become a cherished haven for students; and a push for greater sustainability has seen the girls take part in eco-committees and in

options. As for developing their intellects, the new Scholars' Circle provides an academic forum where gifted children can take the lead

research for alternative energy

in thought-provoking debates and presentations that look beyond the curriculum. It's another example

of Heathfield's commitment to helping girls flourish, which is regularly pointed out by parents.

The King's School's Crypt Choir took carol singing to new heights with a performance atop a moving rollercoaster

HURTWOOD HOUSE ••

Dorking, Surrey RH5 6NU Website hurtwoodhouse.com Head Cosmo Jackson, son of the founder; since 2004 Pupils 317. Day: 28 boys, 34 girls; boarding: 82 boys, 173 girls Ages 16–18 **Term Fees** Day: £14,938; boarding: £22,405 Bursaries 17% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Actors Emily Blunt and Harry Lawtey, composer Hans Zimmer Though famous for its glittering, all-singing, all-dancing creative output, Hurtwood House also achieves strong results - and instils in its charges an independent mindset that sets them on a clear path to university and beyond. Over the past five years, more than 60 per cent of leavers' A-level grades have averaged A*-A, and their further studies have usually straddled traditional degrees at the likes of UCL, Imperial or Nottingham and creative courses at the Bristol Old Vic, BIMM and the London Studio Centre. While there isn't a massive focus on sport, the recently introduced pickleball and spikeball are popular - students are coached in the latter by a member of the British national team - and perhaps they generate the enormous amount of energy that is channeled into the arts: the Hurtwood concert is a yearly epic, while a recent run of The Witches of Eastwick brought down the house. (The cast of more than 70 worked with professional musical, set and lighting designers, as well as choreographers and a full West End band.) Specialised courses are available in theatre, film and dance, and the children are also immersed in the ancillary aspects of making music. Indeed, Hurtwood's Project YouTube saw a team of students and a 12-piece band decamp to Abbey Road to film many of their singers and instrumentalists; and after working alongside the studios' own sound engineers, some even gained internships as a result of their experience. In the works is a new recreational complex, complete with commonroom, gym, recording studio and a Radio 1-style Live Lounge.

THE KING'S SCHOOL. **CANTERBURY** ••

Canterbury, Kent CT1 2ES Website kings-school.co.uk **Head** Jude Lowson, since 2023; previously senior deputy of King's College School Wimbledon Pupils 1,233. Day: 265 boys, 239 girls; boarding: 388 boys, 341 girls Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £12,618; boarding: £18,234 Bursaries Variable, up to 100%+ Alumni Playwright and poet Christopher Marlowe, astronaut Michael Foale, former England cricketer David Gower

The only change one romantic pupil would like here is reinstatement of the tradition of sending each other (and matron) carnations on Valentine's Day - from whose sale, they point out, the school used to raise a significant sum for charity. But charity is still very much a thing at King's: there's an annual sponsored sea swim in aid of the Royal Life Saving Society UK; a recent dinner netted more than £5,000 for Doctors Without Borders; and the students support a host of local food banks and good causes. Still, their souls seem as big as their hearts. Every year, they display their creativity during King's Week, a glorious amalgamation of music, drama, dance and art, showcased alongside science experiments, lectures, debates and quizzes. (The senior quiz team made the finals of the national schools challenge.) A new science centre - the first building erected in the cathedral precincts since the 1970s - has proved a worthwhile experiment, while a newly inaugurated Futures department launched its first Futures Fair this year. As for King's own prospects, flexi-boarding is to be introduced across the senior school, and new padel courts are in the pipeline. Music is an integral part of life: the cathedral provides an impressive backdrop for singing students; and this year, the Crypt Choir took carol singing quite literally to new heights in a collaboration with Chessington World of Adventures, where they performed atop a moving rollercoaster.



LANCING COLLEGE ••

Lancing, West Sussex BN15 ORW Website lancingcollege.co.uk Head Dr Scott Crawford, since 2025, previously deputy head (education development) at Magdalen College School Pupils 610. Day: 146 boys, 96 girls; boarding: 198 boys, 170 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £12,602; boarding: £18,439 Bursaries 30% of pupils, up to 100% + **Alumni** Songwriter Sir Tim Rice, comedian Alex Horne, triathlete Shirin Gerami Incoming head Dr Scott Crawford inherits a dynamic and fabled establishment. 'My husband went there in the late '80s, later recalling it with the fondest of memories," one mother tells us. When he went back to visit as a prospective parent, although he saw changes - say, the dining room's display of venerable old paintings now supplemented by photographs of such Lancing heroes as old boy Sir Tim Rice - 'he felt it had moved with the times while retaining its community and

charm'. Much of both derive from its absolutely jaw-dropping chapel (the largest such school building in the world), for which construction began in 1868 and only finished in 2022. And from here, the chaplain leads pupils in a host of charitable endeavours: collecting comestibles for the local food bank; hosting a Community Action group party at Christmas in a care home; and trips where students can support community projects abroad. Two hours a day are ring-fenced for pupils to enjoy much-needed free time between all the 120 extracurriculars - some may choose to get their hands dirty on the school farm but back at the coalface, weekly one-to-ones with academic tutors foster a culture of learning. Sixthformers immerse themselves in such complex topics as data handling and coding, courtesy of the new supercurriculum. Thanks to a new dedicated Sixth Form Centre, complete with its own kitchen, older students can prepare for life beyond the gates.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE SCHOOL ••

Website mcsoxford.org

Cowley Place, Oxford OX4 1DZ

Head Helen Pike, since 2016: previously head of South Hampstead High School **Pupils** 950 day: 847 boys, 103 girls Ages 7-18 Term Fees £9,604 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Bible translator William Tyndale, decorated soldier Noel Chavasse, actor Jonathan Bailey What do Saint Thomas More (Lord High Chancellor during Henry VIII's reign) and the Oscar-winning director Sam Mendes have in common? They are both alumni of this highly scholastic Oxford establishment, which is so steeped in history that it even has a secret choristers' tunnel running under Magdalen Bridge and into the eponymous college. And as you'd expect, music is woven through the soul of the school, with the annual choir service in the latter's chapel a calendar highlight. Today, Magdalen - which is mixed, but with far more boys than girls - has at its helm Helen Pike, a head whom parents deem 'super, dynamic and friendly'; and with a curriculum that is rich and ever-evolving, pupils are not only taught oracy and computing but have the flexibility to study for Latin GCSE after hours. (Recent A-level results delivered an impressive rack of 42 per cent A*s.) Good use is made of the utterly beautiful pitches: the hockey team is making a name for itself, the senior boys badminton team has been undefeated since 2021, and football is now offered alongside rugby in the Michaelmas term. Ten per cent of pupils receive fee assistance and the school is committed to a roster of outreach programmes. The Bridge academic enrichment programme supports high achievers drawn from local primaries, while a pupil mentoring scheme helps local children with university applications. Further afield, more than £250,000 has been raised for a partner school in Uganda, and a recent delegation from there was recently hosted at

Magdalen for just over a week.

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SOUTH EAST PUBLIC

OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL •

Belbroughton Road, Oxford OX2 6XA

Website oxfordhigh.gdst.net Head Marina Gardiner Legge, since 2021; previously head of Heathfield School **Pupils** 790 day girls Ages 4-19 Term Fees £7,839 Bursaries 12% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Psychology professor Sarah-Jane Blakemore, journalist Camilla Long, associate artist at the Royal Albert Hall Anna Lapwood Unashamedly academic, Oxford High School is also a bastion of single-sex education; for whipsmart head Marina Gardiner Legge believes that girls perform better without boys around. One of the moves she has made here is to empower her charges to make their own decisions; and thus they have helped to make the menus more sustainable and to organise conferences on such topics as extremism in European politics and cognitive psychology, featuring an array of distinguished speakers. Clever girls can enter the Conrad Challenge (an international STEM and business competition), produce their own TED Talks and seek practical ways to make a positive difference to society by means of the new Social Action initiative; and their brightness is reflected by their exam results, with an impressive 31 per cent of recent A-levels graded A*, and a healthy proportion of leavers going on to study medicine. 'The desire to excel and be challenged is palpable, with the girls sharing a like-minded positive attitude to learning and developing,' says one parent. But steam can be let off in dance classes, which are increasingly popular, and clubs spanning crochet, chess and poker (why not?). The school plans to celebrate its 150th anniversary in style from September 2025, with a concert, a specially commissioned piece of music written in collaboration with the pupils and a book of poetry. And even more exciting for parents wanting to enrol their children early will be the revamped, expanded prep school opening its shiny new doors by September 2026.

PRIOR'S FIELD •

Priorsfield Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 2RH

Website priorsfieldschool.com Head Zoe Ireland, since 2024; previously acting head of Farnborough Hill

Parnborough Hill
Pupils 349 girls: 300 day, 49
boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees
Day: £8,210; boarding: £13,415
Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Actresses Lily James
and Victoria Hamilton

Prior's Field believes it punches way above its weight and parents tend to agree. 'Its greatest strengths are the all-round education, the camaraderie among the girls, and the fact that our daughter loves going to school so much,' says one. 'Her love of learning is a testament to the good teaching.' New head Zoe Ireland described by one pupil as an 'inspirational role model' - has infused the school with fresh vision and energy. A tennis academy is being developed to support talented players all the way up to Sixth Form and the provision for football and badminton is expanding. Meanwhile, drama flourishes – a production of Into the Woods had the audience on its feet - as does music (scholars perform a Classics by Candlelight series for which they choose pieces based on such specific briefs as female composers, French music or music from cinema). Further afield, in the annual activities week, students head off on trips to try out new things; surfing and skiing have lately been added to the programme.

QUEEN ANNE'S SCHOOL •

Henley Road, Caversham, Berkshire RG4 6DX

Website qas.org.uk
Head Elaine Purves, since 2022;
previously head of St John's
International School, Belgium
Pupils 400 girls: 217 day, 183
boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees
Day: £9,210; boarding: £17,943
Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Olympic rower
Olivia Carnegie-Brown, TV
presenter Georgie Palmer

Its motto is 'Kind hearts, fierce minds and strong spirits'. And judging by its nurturing environment, this school - which describes itself as an 'expert in girls' education for 130 years' - has picked up a trick or two along the way. 'What I love about Queen Anne's is how unique everyone is,' says one pupil. In part, this is thanks to the emphasis on pastoral care: wellbeing questionnaires sent to students every Monday seek to address concerns ranging from sleep to nutrition. The students like to call themselves 'gutsy gals', and they're certainly that on the sporting field: they have strong team and individual success in lacrosse, athletics and tennis; and when one Year 11 student made a senior county cricket debut for Berkshire, it was a big talking-point. Everyone looks forward to the annual Bust Up! event, which sees the whole school come together in fancy dress for an afternoon of yeargroup songs, student-made videos and a grand-finale silent disco.

I QUEENSWOOD •

Hatfield AL9 6NS

Website queenswood.org
Head Jo Cameron, since 2016;
previously deputy head of Ipswich
High School for Girls Pupils 463
girls: 254 day, 209 boarding Ages
11–18 Term Fees Day: £11,353;
boarding: £18,106 Bursaries 13%
of pupils, up to 100% Alumni
Actress Helen McCrory, former vice
chancellor of Cambridge University
Alison Fettes Richard, TV presenter
Georgie Thompson

A 'relaxed and happy school' reports our researcher, Queenswood has been going from strength to strength in recent years. And with two or more applicants for every 11+ place, its bespoke approach to academia is in demand. Whether stretching bright sparks aiming for scholarships or supporting those with such learning difficulties as dyslexia – and meeting all academic needs in between - the school has a knack for bringing out the best in its girls and, says our researcher, 'will bend over backwards to get the education right for each student'. The majority of last year's leavers went on to Russell Group universities to read a range of subjects, from filmmaking to chemical engineering - there's no one-sizefits-all here - having benefitted from its exceptional facilities. (The immaculate grounds are home to a nine-hole golf course and a polo pitch, as well as the Personalised Learning and Wellbeing centres.) The children speak warmly of head Jo Cameron, particularly praising her interest in their ideas and for listening to the student body for suggestions on how to improve their lot; and our researcher was struck by her determination to understand and examine how her girls learn best, remarking that - in the hope of building confidence she 'positively encourages them to take risks and be self-aware'. Flexiboarding is a big hit here, and about 50 per cent board in one form or another, with 20 per cent staying at school for the weekends, so they can take full advantage of the vast array of extracurriculars.



RADLEY COLLEGE Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 2HR

Website radley.org.uk **Head** John Moule, since 2014; previously head of Bedford School Pupils 762 boarding boys Ages 13-18 Term Fees £20,112 Bursaries 17% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Poet Sir Andrew Motion, rugby player Will Stuart, TV and radio presenter Jamie Laing Parents say that head John Moule cultivates 'a fascinating dynamic of mutual respect, engagement and humour' with his pupils: 'He sets the tone for the school; and though he isn't too formal in his manner and has a good sense of humour, he expects high standards and results.' His charges in turn view him as a 'supportive' and 'reliable' figure, who has given the school a clear direction. ('It gives me great pride to be a part of that process,' says one.) Radley aims to provide boys with the understanding, skills and global awareness needed to contribute positively to a changing world; and this is strongly reflected in the recent launch of its Innovation scholarship, going to those with both an entrepreneurial mindset and an ability in coding, electronics, engineering, robotics, computer science or game design. However, it also espouses community outreach, with recent manifestations including a creativity competition for pupils at local primaries - run in partnership with Radley alumnus Jamie Laing and The Oxford Times – as well as 4,500 individual musical opportunities offered to local children and a Community Art Exhibition in which 2,500 pupils from 20 nearby schools were involved. At the moment, there is an ongoing conversation here about digital dependency and the extent to which educational ambitions can be helped or hindered by technology; a new music school is in the works; and there are plans to refurbish the library, spruce up the sports facilities so that there is space for a climbing wall and exciting bouldering room, and convert a barn into a cookery centre.



Reigate awards scholarships built around each child's potential — mainly for sporting academic and music excellence, but also for computing, robotics and Bollywood dance

REIGATE GRAMMAR

Reigate Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 0QS

Website reigategrammar.org
Head Shaun Fenton, since 2012;
previously head of Pate's Grammar
School Pupils 2,108 day: 1,034
boys, 1,074 girls Ages 3–18
Term Fees £9,515 Bursaries
15% of pupils, up to 100%
Alumni Prime minister Sir Keir
Starmer, comedian David Walliams,
survival expert Ray Mears
Pupils here love the 'optimistic and
vibrant' atmosphere, the 'range of
opportunities' and how connected
the school is to its neighbourhood.
Parents also have a long list of compliments, praising the 'extremely

Pupils here love the 'optimistic and vibrant' atmosphere, the 'range of opportunities' and how connected the school is to its neighbourhood. Parents also have a long list of compliments, praising the 'extremely attentive and approachable' head, the 'clear focus on kindness' and the policy whereby each head of year stays with his charges as they move up: 'Amazing, as the kids have someone to trust.' What's more, one of Reigate's quirks is the way it awards scholarships, which are built around each child and offered in

areas where they show excellence or potential. (So, while most awards are for academic, musical, artistic or sporting excellence, they have also been given for computing, robotics, Bollywood dance and more.) Of late, the school has made strides in innovation - there's a new head of AI, who has enhanced personal learning – and a sparkling new sports centre is in the pipeline. In other endeavours, there's an exciting schedule ahead with choirs set to sing at Glyndebourne; the dedicated thespians will perform Shakespeare at The Globe; and as part of a commitment to net zero, 3,500 trees will be planted locally. In addition, there are plans afoot to double the bursary provision, amp up community partnerships and forge global connections with 10 partner schools spanning four continents. And on the educational front, an inspiring new supercurriculum will include politics lectures from former cabinet ministers and opportunities to study Classics in Italy and Greece.

ROEDEAN SCHOOL •

Brighton BN2 5RQ

Website roedean.co.uk
Head Niamh Green, since 2023;
previously senior deputy head of
Mayfield School Pupils 615 girls:
315 day, 300 boarding Ages 11–18
Term Fees Day: £11,220; boarding:
£20,316 Bursaries 17% of pupils,
up to 100% Alumni Nurse Dame
Cicely Saunders, actress Marisa
Abela, anthropologist Ursula
Graham-Bower

On their first visit to Roedean, one parental couple was struck by 'clear evidence that this was a place where individual talents were nurtured and recognised'. Another parent praised the 'ethos that girls can be anything', the 'fact you can look at the sea during lessons' - glorious and the 'hands-on', 'friendly' head. There is a real emphasis on female empowerment; for example, to mark International Women's Day, this cliff-top school hosted a festival that celebrated inspiring females and tackled topics ranging from Jane Austen and fashion to engineering and veterinary science. And the same can-do spirit imbues everything from sports – the netball teams consistently rank highly in national competition – to the new library and upgraded classrooms that are helping learning flourish (as is the new Roedean Diploma, which is encouraging students to go beyond their usual interests and try new challenges). Here, talented artists exhibit at the likes of London's Oxo Tower; a CCF programme has been launched in collaboration with Lancing College; and there's an expanding Futures programme, designed to provide personalised guidance catered to each student's academic journey. As for the pupils, they're committed to making a social impact, whether raising thousands for charity or journeying to Moldova, where they have taught English to Ukrainian refugees and supported an orphanage. International travel is further fostered by an exchange programme with sister school Roedean South Africa, geography jaunts to Morocco and surfing trips to Fuerteventura.

PUBLIC SOUTH EAST

ST CATHERINE'S. **BRAMLEY** •

Station Road, Bramley, Guildford, Surrey GU5 0DF Website stcatherines.info Head Emma Watson, since 2025; previously head of Berkhamsted Girls Pupils 854 girls: 700 day, 154 boarding Ages 3–18

Term Fees Day: £7,915; boarding: £13,410 Bursaries 6.5% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Director Pietra Mello-Pittman, barrister Sam Knights, Professor Beverley McKeon Reynolds Sitting at the foot of the Surrey Hills, this all-female day and boarding school is attracting more families from London, drawn to the freedom promised by its 23-acre grounds and to the breadth of its offering. This includes a stunning selection of trips – such as STEM exchanges to Australia, lacrosse expeditions to Barbados and swimmers' trips to Lanzarote. Opportunities abound closer to home, too, with clubs for everything from board games to dissection, while there are more than 70 careers events every year. The focus on post-school life is further bolstered by the community of old girls, 400 of whom are involved in helping with networking and work experience. Upending stereotypes about gender and STEM, 67 per cent of the pupils here study science at A-level and 48 per cent of recent leavers went on to pursue degrees in its domain. Still, there's plenty of time for old customs. On St Catherine's Day, students are treated to Cattern cakes, while every spring they participate in a riotous game called Spyring - one survivor telling us: 'Everyone takes part, including the teachers, and it's complete carnage with people chasing each other around the lax pitches and out of downstairs windows... although that is now strictly forbidden.' Following stints at Stowe, Harrow and Berkhamsted Girls – as well as in the Army Air Corps as a Lynx pilot and Flight Commander - new head Emma Watson joined this year with a strong vision for the school. And no notion of glass ceilings.

ST EDWARD'S SCHOOL ••

Woodstock Road,

Oxford OX2 7NN Website stedwardsoxford.org **Head** Alastair Chirnside, since 2021; previously deputy head of Harrow **Pupils** 814. Day: 74 boys, 61 girls; boarding: 377 boys, 302 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £15,866; boarding: £19,832 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actors Lord Olivier, Florence Pugh and Emilia Clarke At 'Teddies', the proximity to the famous colleges' dreaming spires is exploited through its Oxford Lectures series. And its supercurriculum also comes with an inspiring roster of external speakers: from the likes of arts bigwig Will Gompertz to former NASA astronaut Dick Covey (whose talk in the quad was accompanied by a flight simulator, to the delight of pupils). But more important yet is the ambience. 'There's a certain "vibe" which is very difficult to explain,' explains one parent, 'yet this is its greatest strength.' And the children agree. 'The atmosphere is by far my favourite thing,' says

one, while another adds, 'The thing I love most is the community.' Gaudy Week, held at the end of the summer term, is always a highlight; and the support given at its art exhibitions, sports matches and dramatic performances certainly demonstrates how the students all come out to cheer each other on. Meanwhile, the recent, first wholeschool careers festival has borne drama performances.



ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL. ASCOT •

Berkshire SL5 7DZ

Website stgeorges-ascot.org.uk **Head** Hannah Fox, since 2025; previously academic and universities director at Harrow School Pupils 236 girls: 156 day, 80 boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £11,760; boarding: £18,720 Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Princess Beatrice of York, TV presenters Kirsty Gallacher and Gigi Salmon

'The staff really listen to the children and teach them they have a voice that will be heard,' says one parent. This school excels at handson education, offering individual attention to each pupil so they can reach their full potential; and that's manifested in outstanding pastoral provision, which includes a medical centre, chaplaincy and counsellors (including volunteer Sixth-formers). Students are protected by a safety net that helps them develop into women who are 'confident, capable, and connected' - the school's motto - and, according to another grateful parent, a rigorous yet congenial classroom environment provides 'academic value and a girl-power ethos'. The latter has been reflected in two Women in Computing careers events, attended by politicians and business leaders; and St George's also recently held a CanSat competition, whereby its students designed a satellite the size of a drink can to transmit environmental data – which earned them a prestigious Silver Industrial Cadet award. Meanwhile, everyone here is encouraged to tap into both their inner gardener and artist (this year, one pupil won a prize at the International Art Festival in Qatar). Because, despite its town location, St George's has a rural feel, and there are plans for more fruit trees, plus a communal allotment area where pupils will be able to harvest fruit and vegetables for cookery club. A wonderful posting for Hannah Fox – previously the academic and universities director at Harrow - replacing Liz Hewer, who spent nearly a decade as head.



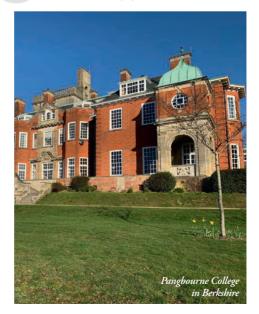
THE BENEFITS OF A CHILDHOOD

spent outside are well established. It's one of the reasons why Pangbourne College, situated in more than 230 acres of Berkshire countryside, just under an hour from London, is so appealing to parents.

A co-educational, independent day and boarding school for children aged 11-18 years old, Pangbourne's location within the North Wessex Downs, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, means that it can offer endless opportunities beyond the classroom, with a focus on adventure being key. Any parents worried about the impact of screen time on children will find its curriculum a literal breath of fresh air, with pupils spending more time in the great outdoors than sitting in front of a computer.

The school's adventure curriculum pushes students outside of their comfort zone, in order to encourage them to face their fears and grow from the experience. Through activities, such as bushcraft and survival programmes, assault courses, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Combined Cadet Force (CCF), pupils learn how to work together as a team, problem-solve and think critically through hands-on experience. There are also endless

Any parents worried about the impact of screen time on children will find the curriculum a literal breath of fresh air





sporting opportunities, including rowing at its boat club on the river Thames. Pangbourne prepares its students not just for academic excellence, but also inspires them to have the ability and confidence to think on their feet in scenarios that they have not been specifically prepared for – a key life skill that simply can't be taught. Find out more about what a Pangbourne education can do for your child at the Open Morning on Saturday, 4 October.

SOUTH EAST PUBLIC

ST HELEN & ST KATHARINE •

Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1BE Website shsk.org.uk Head Sarah Rollings, since 2025; previously head of Heathfield School Pupils 710 day girls Ages 9–18 Term Fees £8,520 Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Journalist Alice Thomson, actresses Charly Clive and Ellen Robertson

One father says moving his daughters here 'was the best thing we ever did'. Other parents love the 'passion and the gusto of all the staff' and praise an 'excellent reputation' balanced by 'amazing sports facilities, drama and theatre productions, a thriving music department, nourishing extracurriculars, an excellent social scene and more'. In short, this is a school that delivers on multiple fronts - including sport. More than 100 of its girls play at county level or above, and woe betide the team bowling against its formidable cricketers or facing its footballers. As for the educational offering, a new Helena Academic Programme underlines a commitment to enrichment through a series of lectures and activity recommendations, as well as giving the students a chance to present independent research at a showcase evening. The outdoor learning department encourages girls to step out of their comfort zones via orienteering, white-water rafting or scuba-diving; and ahead of the 125th anniversary in 2028, a bursary appeal has been launched, inviting parents and alumni to contribute to the school's fund for families who would otherwise be unable to afford school fees. STEM subjects are popular – 43 per cent of leavers opt for related university courses – and among new changes are the introduction of A-levels in both business and economics and a GCSE in food and nutrition, as well as the arrival from Heathfield of Sarah Rollings as new head. With her previous experience at St Helen and St Katharine's as director of sport, she'll certainly be primed to hit the ground running.



ST MARY'S, ASCOT • St Mary's Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 9JF

Website st-marys-ascot.co.uk Head Danuta Staunton, since 2019; previously in senior leadership team Pupils 384 girls: 20 day, 364 boarding Ages 11-18 Term Fees Day: £15,000; boarding: £21,060 Bursaries 8% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Court of Appeal judge Dame Philippa Whipple, hotelier Alex Polizzi, business executive Katherine Garrett-Cox Drenched in history, this Catholic girls' boarding school prides itself on combining pastoral care with top-quality facilities and a high calibre of teaching – as evidenced by the recent A-level results, with 77 per cent of leavers achieving A*-A grades - but it also puts huge energy into raising funds for a charity set up to support bursary provision and allow more pupils to experience its activities (which even include a Formula One appreciation society).

And talking of energy, thanks to a sustainability drive, two solar panels have been installed, meaning the school's electricity now comes from 100 per cent renewable sources. Meanwhile, green-fingered girls can help maintain the grounds, and everyone finds time for reflection in the wellbeing garden. When not staging a 70-strong production of Guys & Dolls, the drama department runs workshops and Q&As with such industry professionals as the casting director for Paddington in Peru. The choir recently enjoyed singing in St Mark's Basilica in Venice. Major sports are hockey, football, cricket, tennis and athletics, as well as trampolining and fencing. With classes in tap and pointe, dance is popular and showcased in a brilliant annual show. Another yearly highlight is the celebration of Shrove Tuesday – like Mardi Gras, known as Carnival Day - which is marked with skits, entertainment, live music and fancy dress.

The drama department at St Mary's, Ascot runs workshops and Q&As with such industry professionals as the casting director for Paddington in Peru

ST SWITHUN'S Alresford Road, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1HA Website stswithuns.com **Head** Jane Gandee, since 2010; previously director of studies at City of London School for Girls Pupils 716 girls: 508 day, 208 boarding **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,847; boarding: £18,332 Bursaries 12.5% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni GlaxoSmithKline CEO Dame Emma Walmsley, actress Emma Chambers, aviator Zara Rutherford Some students here love its 'small community' and 'inter-year connections'. One gives special mention to a 'culture of kindness' - describing her house as her 'second home' and echoing her, another remarks, 'A school is only as good as its culture and that's where Swithun's thrives.' Of late, efforts have been made to further improve that environment by limiting the use of mobile phones. But then, the pastoral care offered here has always been a big deal: a Positive Education programme uses an evidence-based approach to alleviating mental health challenges and building resilience; and a 'Sisters' system sees girls meet under the guidance of Sixth-form mentors to develop relationships and provide mutual support and encouragement. Not that the academics take second place. Just look at the 2024 A-level results, which were the highest in a non-pandemic year since 2015. (Twelve per cent of leavers chose to study medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine at university, while 29 per cent opted for STEM-related courses, including engineering, architecture and natural sciences.) Elsewhere, sporty types consistently excel at lacrosse, tennis and cricket - and will be delighted that planning permission has been received to build a facility containing multiple courts as well as a strength and conditioning area. 'The school is able to cater for parents' aspirations for their children,' says one father. 'I have witnessed, through my own, how it places great emphasis on contribution, collaboration and mutual respect as a way to progress.'

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PUBLIC SOUTH EAST

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL ••

Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HU Website sevenoaksschool.org **Head** Jesse Elzinga, since 2020; previously head of Reading Blue Coat School Pupils 1,244. Day: 403 boys, 390 girls; boarding: 220 boys, 231 girls Ages 11-18 **Term Fees** Day: £13,838; boarding: £21,419 Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Actor Charlie Higson, poet Olivia Cole, academic Sir Jonathan Bate A merger with Solefield to form the Sevenoaks Family of Schools means parents can now fully immerse their offspring here from the age of three. And there will surely be a clamour to do so, because the mothership provides an academic yet well-rounded experience that sets pupils up for the future. (The recent cohort of IB Diploma students scored an average of 39.6 points; 10 above the world average.) The school prides itself on its higher education department - its director has even penned a book on supporting students in their university applications – and offers from the US are particularly impressive:

18 recent leavers joined Ivy League institutions, while for the first time three took up places on soughtafter degree apprenticeships in the States, whereby they combine their studies with paid work at Morgan Stanley, Amazon and the Bank of America. On the pastoral front, the establishment is collaborating with the Institute of Teaching and Learning on a research project into the impact of mobile phones - and since the latter are banned until Year 11, this gives far more scope for appreciating the great outdoors. With more than 200 teams, and 1,200 fixtures every year, the games offering is strong and varied: more than 100 students regularly play at county or national level with about a fifth representing their country. Meanwhile, thespians love the Sackville Theatre, modelled on the National's Dorfman (formerly the Cottesloe), which allows for innovative and intimate staging; and music is notably on-song. The jazz programme has become increasingly popular, audibly bringing together the Sevenoaks community time after time.



STOWE SCHOOL ••

Stowe, Buckinghamshire MK18 5EH

Website stowe.co.uk **Head** Dr Anthony Wallersteiner, since 2003; previously head of history at Tonbridge School Pupils 905. Day: 145 boys, 125 girls; boarding: 375 boys, 250 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £11,386; boarding: £18,680 Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Sir Richard Branson, Olympian James Rudkin, humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton Asked to describe its ethos, Stowe doesn't mince its words: 'We are change makers.' And parents are clearly keen to be part of that process. There has been increasing demand for places - especially from the parents of day pupils - and the Stowe Group has expanded, with Ashfold School joining in 2024 as its third prep. (Families in the preps get a five and 10 per cent discount on day and boarding fees respectively if they choose to continue their child's education at Stowe.) But talking of change, newly opened is a brilliant new £8 million Design, Technology & Engineering Centre, where future engineers, product designers and architects have access to specialist workshops and up-to-the-minute machinery. Meanwhile, a new café in the Sixth Form Centre is proving popular, providing a great space for socialising and relaxed study. And next up on the works list are two new girls' houses and more sports facilities, which will include a new pavilion, café and changing rooms, as well as covered netball and padel courts. Then there's the absolutely gorgeous 750 acres of surrounding historic gardens, where lucky pupils can help their National Trust overseers in woodland management and even tend their own plots. But from debating and beagling to chess and puppetry, there's always something to keep the students occupied. Members of the motorcycle club are likely to spend the afternoon with head Anthony Wallersteiner, who enjoys scram-

TONBRIDGE SCHOOL •

Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9HA Website tonbridge-school.co.uk Head James Priory, since 2018; previously head of Portsmouth Grammar School Pupils 1,105 boys. Day: 650; boarding: 555 Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £15,526; boarding: £20,693 Bursaries 9% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actor Dan Stevens, musician Tom Chaplin, bookshop founder and entrepreneur Sir Tim Waterstone 'Collectively, the teachers are undoubtedly one of the school's greatest strengths,' declares a father, who remarks on their 'uncanny way of getting the best out of each boy'. Another backs him up: 'The staff genuinely take the time to understand both academic and sporting needs, ensuring every child gets the right support to excel.' And this is particularly true in the Sixth Form: its curriculum and enrichment programme offer four distinct pathways reflecting different interests and ambitions. And in a new partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, two MIT lecturers visit every year (a fantastic way for boys to experience firsthand some of what a US college education has to offer). These innovations clearly pay off. Two pupils struck gold at the International Mathematical Olympiad, placing them in the top 54 students worldwide; the debaters demonstrated their considerable oracy skills at the Oxford and Cambridge Schools' Debating competitions; and five Upper-sixth boys received the Jury's Special Award at King Alfred School's Festival de Théâtre Francophone for their performance of Ionesco's La Cantatrice Chauve. Sporting types repeatedly emerge from matches victorious: the U14 hockey team were finalists in the England Boys Schools U14 Tier 2 championships this year, while the U15 cricketers were semifinalists in the 40-over competition. All this is overseen by the visionary head James Priory who is, reports one pupil, 'a legend... he seems to be everywhere, doing everything, and is always approachable for a chat'.

TATLER 41

bling on the Bursar's Field.

SOUTH EAST PUBLIC

TUDOR HALL •

Wykham Park, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9UR Website tudorhallschool.com **Head** Julie Lodrick, since 2022; previously head of Kent College, Pembury Pupils 280 girls: 55 day, 225 boarding Ages 11-18 Term Fees Day: £11,610; boarding: £19,032 Bursaries 18% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Equestrian Emma Fisher, interior designer Flora Soames, jewellery designer Lady Margarita Armstrong-Jones Stay here long enough, and you'll probably hear the phrase 'So Tudor' - which describes something quintessential about the school that can't quite be explained. Staff dogs wandering through the classrooms? So Tudor. Equestrian feats? So Tudor. Loyalty and lifelong friendships cultivated through the horizontal (same-year) boarding house system? So Tudor. As part of its 175th anniversary celebrations, the school is curating an exhibition of memorabilia; and when birthdays are marked by special dinners at which the school's youngest member cuts the cake, leavers certainly have plenty to remember. Another big event is Tudor Fest, an annual twoday extravaganza that features live music, circus acts and performances from the brilliant girls' band; and the very same weekend, an on-site dog show raises money for a chosen charity. (So Tudor.) But enough of the heartwarming. A recent series of dynamic developments includes an exchange programme with Woodford House school, which allows the UK-based students to spend more than a month in New Zealand; and a termly publication called T3: The Tudor Teacher is now circulated around the community, exploring methodologies, sharing best practice and providing insights into the impact of the school's teaching and learning approaches from the girls themselves. There is much fun to be had here, and the nurturing environment helps pupils flourish. 'The girls are encouraged to take what they do seriously, but not take themselves too seriously,' says one parent.

WELLINGTON COLLEGE ••

Duke's Ride, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 7PU Website wellingtoncollege.org.uk Head James Dahl, since 2019; previously deputy head (pastoral and wellbeing) Pupils 1,180. Day: 140 boys, 98 girls; boarding: 460 boys, 482 girls Ages 13-18 Term Fees Day: £15,250; boarding: £20,750 Bursaries 14% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Author Sebastian Faulks, rugby player Fin Baxter, actress Ellie Bamber You may know the college's main building from The Crown, in which it masquerades as Kensington Palace. But it hasn't got above its station. The school was established by Royal Charter in 1853, as a living memorial to the Iron Duke himself, but add innovation to its traditions and you have a powerful formula. 'The opportunities are so broad that everyone can find their niche and thrive,' says a parent. The college has introduced two practical courses on AI and entrepreneurship,

while a new Sixth-form boarding

house, the school's 18th and the first house to be co-ed, has been enhanced by a hub that promotes university-style socialising and learning - and it's clearly effective, as further education destinations include several Ivy Leaguers. To mark the upcoming milestone of the student complement reaching 50 per cent boys and 50 per cent girls, as well as the 50th anniversary of girls' first admission, there will be a number of celebrations this year; among them, a trail in the grounds remembering pioneering women of local and global stature, as well as a film about the history of the school, a concert and a specially themed Speech Day. Meanwhile, Sir Anthony Seldon, the former head here, has been appointed founding director of a new global education network (Wellington College Education) comprising this and nine other establishments around the world, and will be aiming to create a unified vision of what responsible, imaginative learning means in the 21st century.

The phrase 'So Tudor' describes something quintessential about Tudor Hall that can't quite be explained. Dogs in the classrooms? So Tudor. Equestrian feats? So Tudor



WINCHESTER COLLEGE ••

College Street, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9NA

Hampshire SO23 9NA Website winchestercollege.org Head Elizabeth Stone, since 2023; previously principal of Queenwood School, Sydney **Pupils** 734. Day: 14 boys, 36 girls; 684 boarding boys Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £14,800; boarding: £20,000 Bursaries 19% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Former prime minister Rishi Sunak, rower George Nash, actor Tom Sturridge Applications to Winchester are on the up - especially for the Sixth Form – and have doubled since the school started welcoming girls (who have two new boarding houses) as well as day pupils. At the same time, a bursary drive is widening the school's social reach; and impressively, provision increased by 40 per cent in the last academic year. Of late, the facilities have also had a major revamp: the brilliant new sports centre boasts indoor cricket nets, squash and fives courts galore, plus a climbing wall; and next up are a swimming pool and full-sized Astroturf pitch. Like many public schools, this one has its quirks and idiosyncrasies. Thus, its 'Winkies' game is similar to rugby, and small groups of students meet several times a week to discuss and debate world history, literature, art and philosophy in 'Div'; the idea of the latter being that, away from the pressure of exams, the students will learn to think for themselves and solve problems through independent inquiry. And given the recent set of GCSE results, it succeeds: some 92 per cent of grades in 2021 were A*– A. Meanwhile, 73 students are supported by music awards, and there are 25 ensembles. Artists vie to win the Drew Jug competition, with the silver receptacle being used by the winning house when dining; and a travel award gives financial assistance to those wishing to visit areas of cultural importance. 'The school prides itself on providing a liberal arts education,' says our researcher - and also on its 'genuine community' of resident teachers. 'It matters when looking after pupils.'

PUBLIC SOUTH EAST

WOLDINGHAM SCHOOL • Marden Park, Woldingham, Surrey CR3 7YA

Surrey CR3 7YA Website woldinghamschool.co.uk **Head** Sue Baillie, from 2024; previously head of Queen Margaret's School for Girls, York Pupils 550 girls: 286 day, 264 boarding Ages 11-18 Term Fees Day: £11,726; boarding: £19,838 Bursaries 12% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Journalist Ore Ogunbiyi, actress Carey Mulligan, UN Trade and Development chief of communication Amalia Navarro Positive reviews are piling up for new head Sue Baillie, who commenced her role at this Surrey girls' school in September 2024. She's an approachable, smiling, waving presence, according to students; and already a frequent attender of sport fixtures and drama performances, which are a big part of life here. Parents, too, are struck by how many times they've been able to meet her in the intervening months, with one saying: 'She seems very keen on making positive changes and I look forward to seeing what she is able to achieve.' A 25-minute train journey from Clapham Junction, Woldingham is a popular choice for Londoners looking to give their children a countryside education, and 40 per cent of the intake comes from the capital. (Twenty-five per cent are from overseas, and the rest from the area.) However, there's an annual bursary for a local state school student, and more than a third of the children currently receive some form of fee assistance. Meanwhile, a new Sixth Form Centre and library has just opened, its café space and 50-seat lecture theatre offering a taste of university life. Speaking of which, more than half of the latest A-level results were A*-A and their winners headed off to the likes of Cambridge, Durham and Exeter. Finally, from September 2025, Year 7 girls will follow a bespoke programme called the Marden Diploma, which is designed to be inspiring but sufficiently academic for tackling the challenges of

GCSEs when they reach Year 9.



WORTH SCHOOL • Paddockhurst Road, Turners Hill, West Sussex RH10 4SD Website worthschool.org.uk Head Stuart McPherson, since 2015; previously a housemaster at Eton Pupils 661. Day: 216 boys, 163 girls; boarding: 179 boys, 103 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £12,451; boarding: £18,283 Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Art dealer Philip Mould, actor Robert Bathurst, rugby player Tom Mitchell The origins of the school lie in the 1606 foundation of a Benedictine community – in Douai, France – by a group of English and Welsh monks who'd left their homelands because of the severe penal laws against Catholics. Happily, they returned at the end of the 18th century and Worth was established, at first as an offshoot of Downside, becoming independent in 1957. Today, it shapes its offering around six values - humility, silence, worship, community, stewardship and

service – and believes they are lived

out every day. Parents certainly seem to think so, and love the focus on nurturing rather than on cramming for exams. They're also fans of the Catholic ethos: 'It's not trying to ram things down their throat and it's actually very positive for all the pupils, as it focuses on kindness and community.' But man cannot live by mindset alone. At the nitty-gritty level, a magnificent new Sixth Form Centre has gone down a treat, and an innovative, £2.5 million science building is in the works. Sports facilities include 12 football pitches, three cricket squares and an indoor golf simulator, and talented students compete at club and national level in all of them. There are more than 150 clubs and the student-led environment society is working on a communal garden, where they will plant flowers and encourage insect habitation. Singing is an important part of life here, with the choirs giving voice in Worth Abbey and at places of worship across the UK and abroad – even, once, in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City.

Singing is an important part of life at Worth School, with the choirs giving voice in places of worship across the UK and abroad – even, once, in the Sistine Chapel

WYCOMBE ABBEY •
High Wycombe,
Buckinghamshire HP11 1PE
Website wycombeabbey.com
Head Jo Duncan, since 2019;
previously head of Royal High
School Bath Pupils 644 girls: 76
day, 568 boarding Ages 11–18
Term Fees Day: £15,600;
boarding: £20,500 Bursaries
6.5% of pupils, up to 100%+
Alumni Activist Soma Sara, actress
Natalie Simpson, Paralympian

athlete Nikki Emerson Asked why they chose Wycombe, one mother gave a pretty persuasive answer: 'My daughter wanted to go there and only there.' Indeed, while parents praise the 'the reputation, the tradition, the network', pupils love the 'feeling of community', the effort that chef Paul puts into crafting such dishes as Katsu curry, and the head's 'strong drive to improve female education'. (Proof? More than 40 per cent of recent A-level results were graded A*.) A five-year strategic plan is to be implemented to make Wycombe stronger; and as part of that, an incoming director of global links will work with the international Wycombe Abbey family of schools to promote exchanges and forge stronger ties, while a new director of performance and athletic wellbeing will be nurturing the performance athletes. Because, when it comes to the pitch, these girls are big hitters: the lacrosse teams in several age groups were crowned Tri-County champions; the tennis players are aces; and the increasingly potent rowers have just begun entering competitions. But sporting prowess is only one feather in this school's cap. Be they devotees of digital photography, graphic design or glasswork, artists have access to a wonderful range of facilities, while musicians perform at such venues as St Mary's Church, Marylebone. The proximity to London allows regular trips to the capital; and there are equally regular jaunts to foreign climes, with the skiracing squad heading to the French Alps, Spanish speakers to Andalucia and keen classicists to Naples.

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South West & Wales

BADMINTON SCHOOL •
Westbury Road, Westburyon-Trym, Bristol BS9 3BA
Website badmintonschool.co.uk
Head Jessica Miles, since 2023;
previously head of Monmouth
School for Girls Pupils 517 girls:
347 day, 170 boarding Ages 4–18
Term Fees Day: £7,943; boarding:
£19,582 Bursaries 12% of pupils,
up to 100% Alumni Former prime
minister of India Indira Ghandhi,
novelist Dame Iris Murdoch,
actress Rosamund Pike
Badminton makes the most of being

Badminton makes the most of being in one of the UK's most academic and pioneering cities. But though its campus is a stone's throw from the buzz of Bristol's centre, you wouldn't know it: with sweeping lawns enclosed by high walls, the atmosphere breeds the calm of a 'steady ship', according to a parent. And for that, the 'brilliant' head Jessica Miles – who arrived in 2023 – is to be congratulated. Changes so

far made during her tenure include the introduction of 'hub breakfasts', where parents (over fresh fruit and buttery croissants) come to chat to Year 11s and Sixth-formers about their careers and journeys building them; a significant investment in the boarding houses, and a drive to improve the sporting provision. Outreach programmes also play a key part in life; and Badminton is committed to making a real impact to the wider community, with children leading science demonstrations at local primaries, fostering a love of reading at nearby state institutions and mentoring juniors. The girls are proud of the heritage of Badminton, which was founded on the idea that girls deserve the same level of education as their male counterparts. 'We are part of a school that's never been afraid to challenge expectations,' wrote a Lower-sixth candidate for school captaincy. 'We don't just follow history, we make it.'

BLUNDELL'S SCHOOL ••

Blundell's Road, Tiverton,
Devon EX16 4DN
Website blundells.org
Head Bart Wielenga, since 2018;
previously second master Pupils
874. Day: 330 boys, 229 girls;
boarding: 171 boys, 144 girls
Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day:
£11,202; boarding: £18,312.
Bursaries 25% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Racing driver Ben
Collins, Nobel prize winner Archibald
Hill, cricketer Dom Bess
In the heart of Devon, Blundell's

strikes a balance between tradition and modernity, delivering a truly well-rounded education that seems refreshingly unpretentious, in no small part thanks to the charisma and conviction of its head Bart Wielenga. A current mother reports its greatest strength is its 'breadth'; and Blundellians seize opportunities with both hands. There's heaps to do, whatever the level of interest or

ability: whether representing the school in matches - 300 students play in teams on any given Saturday - or performing in drama productions. Not to mention the World Challenge trips, with the upcoming expedition to Nepal causing great excitement. The school's mission includes character development, community and inclusivity, so exam results are not the be-all and end-all. But despite its non-selective admissions policy, more than 90 per cent of leavers have secured places at their first-choice universities in recent years. What's more, a new head of learning support is building on the foundations already laid, ensuring that nobody slips through the net. Upper Sixth sees boys and girls boarding in one co-ed house, Westlake, in preparation for further education. Confident and grounded students leave with down-to-earth and outward-facing perspectives, as well as a clutch of friends for life.

BRYANSTON ••

Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0PX

Website bryanston.co.uk
Head Richard Jones, since 2022;
previously acting head
Pupils 783. Day: 72 boys, 70 girls;
boarding: 344 boys, 297 girls Ages
3–18 Term Fees Day: £12,544;
boarding: £18,841 Bursaries 16%
of pupils, up to 100% Alumni
Designers Sir Terence, Jasper and
Sebastian Conran, adventurer Ben
Fogle, actress Emilia Fox

The motto – 'Both the new and the old' - is the bedrock of the distinct culture at Bryanston, where timetested values blend with a creative and contemporary approach to learning. With its parklands and views over Blandford Forum, the school wins in the setting stakes, and its interiors are special, too: the historic main building grand yet inviting, with walls hung with student works worthy of a London gallery. Head Richard Jones is described by fellow staff as 'an inspiration' and by pupils as always having a smile on his face; parents love how 'very straightforward' he is, and 'clear about what he wants to achieve'. Many also call Bryanston's personal tutor system 'a lot more comprehensive than those run elsewhere' and praise its level-headed approach to life beyond the classroom; notably its department of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Employability, whose first head was appointed in 2024. When students enter the Sixth Form, its one-onone teacher-pupil sessions - called 'correction periods' – ensure total support. Many families send three or four offspring here, believing all their needs will be addressed, and the academic record bears them out. Last year's IB cohort achieved record-breaking results: a 38-point average, with two pupils attaining 45 points and placing themselves in the world's top 0.5 per cent.

CANFORD ••

Canford Magna, Wimborne,
Dorset BH21 3AD
Website canford.com
Head Chris Wheeler, since 2025;
previously principal of Monkton
Combe Pupils 644. Day: 149 boys,
98 girls; boarding: 223 boys, 174
girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day:
£13,634; boarding: £18,165
Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to
100%+ Alumni The Earl of
Shaftesbury, ASOS co-founder Nick
Robertson, Child's Farm founder
Joanna Jensen

Stunning Canford presides over 250 acres of verdant land boasting its own award-winning arboretum of more than 3,500 trees (including a sweet chestnut said to be the biggest tree in Britain by girth). And students make the most of the great outdoors. Keen fishermen cast busily into the River Stour, which borders the estate, catching some whopping pike; and every year, the Canford Gallop sees pupils race around the Sunken Lawn, like the legendary Chariots of Fire quad sprint. Opportunities abound for sport lovers: there's a nine-hole golf course, and a cricket square that has been described as one of the nation's most beautiful; and real tennis enthusiasts can play in one of only four school courts in the country. There's history all around: A 3,000-year-old Assyrian carving adorned the walls of the school tuck shop (known as The Grubber) until it was sold for £7.7 million at auction - a windfall that funded a raft of scholarships and facilities back in the 1990s. Now set to open is a new Sixth-form college, which will include university-style social and study spaces, as well as a careers hub and accommodation wings. And leaving Canfordians certainly seem set up for life: 'I feel ready for real-world experiences,' says one. 'I have the confidence to learn and feel I could achieve anything.'

Every year, the Canford Gallop sees pupils race around the Sunken Lawn, like the legendary 'Chariots of Fire' quad sprint

CHELTENHAM COLLEGE ••

Bath Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL53 7LD Website cheltenhamcollege.org Head Nicola Huggett, since 2018; previously head of Blundell's Pupils 1,185. Day: 384 boys, 340 girls; boarding: 254 boys, 207 girls Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £15,270; boarding: £20,165 Bursaries 12.1% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Racing driver Jamie Chadwick, polar explorer Dr Edward Wilson, actor Adeel Akhtar Asked about the college's greatest strength, one mother gave a pithy reply: 'If you want to do well, this is the school that will help you do even better.' And pupils agree, praising the 'chance to find something you love and be encouraged and supported to pursue it further'. Thus, those of a dramatic persuasion have the chance to perform on the Cheltenham Playhouse stage, while the first ever Years 9-11 musical - High School Musical, as

it happens - brought the house

down. The sports department offers a variety of activities from rackets and rowing to equestrianism, polo, golf and clay pigeon shooting. Girls' football is thriving: three senior teams are now playing in fixtures; and a number of rugby talents are part of the Gloucester Academy Programme. (More than 2,500 spectators watched a recent charity match at Kingsholm Stadium, and more than 10,000 tuned in via livestream.) Philanthropic pupils raise thousands for good causes and the members of each house also support their own charity, with whom they develop relationships year-on-year. A new head of digital learning and strategy is steering students through AI and beyond, and changes to the GCSE curriculum now mean children are given more choice, while those taking nine rather than 10 subjects can opt into the new programme that delves into such fascinating topics as coding and robotics, criminology, business and entrepreneurship.



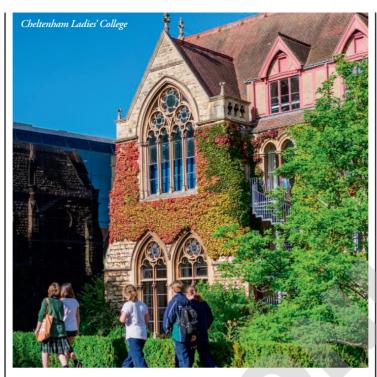
SOUTH WEST & WALES PUBLIC

CHELTENHAM LADIES' COLLEGE •

Bayshill Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 3EP Website cheltladiescollege.org Head Eve Jardine-Young, since 2011; previously director of studies at Blundell's Pupils 834 girls: 202 day, 632 boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £12,660; boarding:

Lerm Fees Day: £12,660; boarding: £20,100 Bursaries 8.5% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Actress Dame Kristin Scott Thomas, artist Bridget Riley, consultant forensic psychologist Dr Gwen Adshead

Founded in 1853, Cheltenham Ladies' College has long been a pioneer of girls' education, and the school's skilful mixture of tradition and innovation is embodied in its very buildings: spread over a 36-acre site in a residential part of town, its leafy quads are juxtaposed with modern glass blocks and an impressive sports hall, recently completed. Here, the view is that a single-sex regime allows girls to shine outside gendered stereotypes - on the cricket pitch, for example, or in the science lab – and as one parent comments, 'There is an empowering mindset and environment, in which they strive to do their best but are never arrogant.' (Results are strong: 70.4 per cent of last year's A-levels were graded A*-A, and the average IB point score was 39.3. Meanwhile, a new Project Green initiative focuses on oral communication as well as honing presentation and teamwork skills. And creatives are fully catered for: with artists taking fascinating trips both to galleries and to meet painters in their studios, while Year 9 students recently collaborated with some London contemporaries in exploring the theme of community, the results of which were exhibited in the college's dedicated exhibition space. About 1,000 music lessons are taught every week and a highlight in this field - surely for teachers and pupils alike – is the summer tour of the Veneto region in Italy, where performances are given in such prestigious venues as St Mark's Basilica in Venice.



CHRIST COLLEGE BRECON ••

Brecon, Powys LD3 8AF Website christcollegebrecon.com **Head** Gareth Pearson, since 2017; previously senior deputy head of Lord Wandsworth College Pupils 386. Day: 122 boys, 95 girls; boarding: 106 boys, 63 girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees Day: £8,736; boarding: £16,841 Bursaries 18% of pupils, up to 50% Alumni Pioneer in law Lord Atkin, gardeners David and Harry Rich, Paralympian James Roberts 'It's a wholesome place,' say the students of their beautiful haven in the rural Welsh countryside. 'There's encouragement and support in all its aspects.' Parents, meanwhile, praise 'an inclusive school where pupils can thrive across academia, sports, music, drama and art'. But despite its diminutive size, the children can still play rounds of golf and scale rockfaces, or finesse their cooking skills in the Masterchef club. They

can even mountain bike across the Brecon Beacons since, a few years ago, student-led negotiations with private landowners led to a series of hand-laid trails that are tailored to a variety of levels. Meanwhile, a suite of factory-fresh cricket nets reflects the game's increasing popularity among both boys and girls; and a new outdoor beach volleyball facility will be sure to enrich the summer term. But all that time in the great outdoors clearly doesn't dent achievement in the classroom: in 2024, the establishment saw its most impressive set of results ever, with 60 per cent of Sixth-formers leaving with A*-A grades in their A-levels and BTECs. As part of its mission to instil an international outlook and facilitate a global network, Christ College is in the process of creating more opportunities for overseas students to experience immersion in a British school - and vice versa. Links have already been forged with schools in Buenos Aires, Santiago and Tokyo.

Student-led negotiations with private landowners close to Christ College Brecon led to hand-laid mountain bike trails that are tailored to a variety of levels

CLAYESMORE ••

Iwerne Minster, Dorset
DT11 8LL

Website clayesmore.com
Head Jo Thomson, since 2016;
previously deputy head of Christ's
Hospital Pupils 491. Day: 134
boys, 129 girls; boarding: 118 boys,
110 girls Ages 7–18 Term Fees
Day: £9,909; boarding: £13,753
Bursaries 50% of pupils, up to
85% Alumni The Beatles manager
Brian Epstein, Gus Casely-Hayford,
impressionist Rory Bremner
In 1896, reformer Lex Devine
started Clayesmore with a guiding
principle: to give children 'an
all-round education'. Today, the

In 1896, reformer Lex Devine started Clayesmore with a guiding principle: to give children 'an all-round education'. Today, the dictum remains just as relevant. Indeed, parents love LEX – the visionary life-skills programme named after the founder - which aims to support pupils' personal development and help them acquire new skills and external qualifications. 'It's outstanding in both the prep and senior, and this sets the school apart when it comes to experiences. I cannot believe all the different things our daughter has tried,' says a mother. Following the development of a fantastic cafégallery-rendezvous complex, as well as an enlarged gym and spin studio for the sports centre, the finishing touches are now being applied, with landscaping, seating and an outdoor performance space. But the glorious Dorset countryside and rugged coastline also provide plenty of opportunities to breathe the fresh air: activities span riding, kayaking and paddleboarding; and cricket, supported by outdoor nets of England Cricket Board standard, is a particular strength. In other fields, horticulturally minded pupils have built a greenhouse made from recycled water bottles; musicians can join various orchestras, choirs and bands (one even for bagpipers); and the art department, housed in an old school building in a local village, offers pottery, printmaking and photography. What's more - and is there any greater accolade? - parents say the match teas are 'the best in Wiltshire and Dorset by a country mile'!

PUBLIC SOUTH WEST & WALES

CLIFTON COLLEGE ••

College Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3IH Website cliftoncollege.com previously deputy head (academic) Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £12,425; boarding: £19,280 Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Inventor of the

Head Dr Tim Greene, since 2016: Pupils 1,267. Day: 486 boys, 359 girls; boarding: 243 boys, 179 girls Belisha Beacon Leslie Hore-Belisha, comedian John Cleese, GB Olympic hockey gold medallist Lily Owsley 'Aim high, stay grounded' is the mindset at Clifton College, which is apt when you consider both its lofty location overlooking Bristol and its knack for producing allrounders who score solid A-level results and tend to go to Russell Group universities (with a smattering heading to Europe and the US). You could add mens sana in corpore sano, too: their Terriers' programme encourages outdoor pursuits among fresh joiners, and the impressive new Chellaram sports complex makes a brilliant base for a battery of highly successful teams, with the rugby squad recently winning the Daily Mail Trophy, the netballers continuing to carve out a regional name for themselves and the sailors tacking from strength to strength. Of late, the school has broadened its educational offering - teachers are now given ongoing professional development support - and those pupils with more of a penchant for Shakespeare than sport are not overlooked. The industry-standard Redgrave Theatre trains budding actors and production enthusiasts; and James Moore, the incoming director of performing arts, who hails from the Theatre Royal Bath, has plans to enhance the dramatic output, which will surely win rave reviews. The art department facilitates creativity across a range of mediums, from graphics and media to textiles and animation, and its devotees have been kept busy painting murals in the boarding houses while they seek further commissions in the community. But connecting with broader life in Bristol is much valued; and there are extracurricular opportunities to support local charities and primary schools, as well as to undertake work experience across the city.

Dauntsey's 1st XV spoke at assembly about their experiences of mental health issues and were given a standing ovation



DAUNTSEY'S ••

West Lavington, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 4HE Website dauntseys.org Head John Davies, since 2024; previously senior deputy head and vice principal of Kingswood School Pupils 840. Day: 260 boys, 260 girls; boarding: 160 boys, 160 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £9,465; boarding: £15,650 Bursaries Variable % of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Thomas the Tank Engine creator The Rev Wilbert Awdry, former president of the Maldives Mohamed Nasheed, Hong Kong pop star Eason Chan Unusually for a school based in landlocked Wiltshire, Dauntsey's has a long association with the sea. Indeed, over the years, thousands of pupils have sailed its 56-foot boat, the Jolie Brise, to participate in Tall Ships Races in Europe and beyond. An action-packed calendar of events also features Christmas musicals, inter-house competitions and funfairs. But, pupils tell us, the most hotly anticipated is the annual charity boules competition run by the Sixth-form boys. 'We're a very competitive school, so I love getting out there with some friends and challenging another group,' says one. And this spirit has clearly driven recent successes in the sporting arena: the girls' hockey team are getting a national reputation, while the rugby 1st XV – who recently won 11 of their 13 matches - have been putting their status to good use. To mark Movember, for which they raised £1,500, they took to the stage at assembly to speak about their experiences of mental health issues and were given a standing ovation. Elsewhere, while there have been refurbishments to the Sixth-form 17 Club and suite of sports facilities, Dauntsey's has also been innovating in the digital sphere with DAISIE: its very own AI model. Lucky that new head John Davies - described by his charges as 'astute' and 'friendly' - is a part of an AI research group based at Oxford University, which champions the responsible integration of

DEAN CLOSE SCHOOL ••

Shelburne Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL51 6HE Website deanclose.org.uk Head Bradley Salisbury, since 2016; previously deputy head Pupils 481. Day: 264 boys, 229 girls; boarding: 174 boys, 152 girls Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £11,700; boarding: £17,350 Bursaries 22% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Neuroscientist Timothy Bliss, actor Hugh Quarshie, England rugby player

Tom Pearson A middle-sized co-ed, Dean Close roots its outstanding academic and co-curricular offering in its religious principles: about 40 children attend the Christian Union every week, the chaplaincy is part of the pastoral care team and the school motto is verbum dei lucerna, or 'God's word, a guiding light'. 'All the pupils show kindness, with the older years looking out for the younger ones,' one mother tells us. 'They support each other in everything they do and are always there to pick someone up if they have fallen over or are upset.' Rugby is strong - on a recent Saturday, 12 alumni were actually playing in the Premiership. Meanwhile, mountain biking has a growing profile and the Dean Close equestrian team were crowned 2024 champions in the national schools competition. Three plays are staged annually, as well as open-text productions and smaller-scale studio work; and the musicians give spring shows, summer-term jazz, carol concerts and orchestral performances. Those with visual flair are encouraged by the visiting artists accommodated every year by the art department's BonBernard gallery; and clubs include model United Nations, beekeeping and a mock parliament where pupils thrash out the issues of the day. Students describe an 'especially happy' environment overseen by head Bradley Salisbury - who will move to Monkton Combe in January 2026. 'He's just a great person,' our student informant continues. 'Only sometimes can he be a tiny bit strict.'

MILLFIELD ••

TATLER

GODOLPHIN SCHOOL • Milford Hill, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 2RA

Website godolphin.org Head Jenny Price, since 2023, previously deputy head pastoral Pupils 400 girls: 200 day, 200 boarding Ages 11-18 Term Fees Day: £9,950; boarding: £15,474 Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 65% Alumni Dame Jilly Cooper, entrepreneur Deborah Meaden, former NFU president Baroness Batters 'Almost immediately, we felt our daughter was "seen",' says one mother, highlighting the 'lovely feeling of a wider community' here. This has 'really brought out her confident self: she has flourished academically, with teachers seeming to understand how best she learns'. Many day pupils live within a 50-mile radius – shuttled around Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset by a well-connected school bus and, boy, are they hardy. Two students recently became Godolphin's first ever winners of the prestigious Army Sixth Form Scholarships, which guarantee the girls a place at Sandhurst; seven teams successfully completed the demanding Ten Tors Challenge on Dartmoor; and the school squad were runners-up at the 2024 England Lacrosse National Schools Championship, with one player named the tournament's 'most valuable attacker'. Equally important, the establishment has now become co-ed, various facilities being revamped ahead of this change; and new boarding accommodation is also being developed. Meanwhile, plans are under way for landmark celebrations to mark the school's 300th anniversary in 2026; and a Future Skills Programme has been introduced to ready pupils for the modern world. All of this is overseen by dynamic head Jenny Price - aka 'Pricey' whom one student calls 'a kindness champion who makes sure we all know it'. They go on: 'She makes Godolphin the place it is today. She's very encouraging, always around and supports school events. I've seen her play at least three instruments in the orchestra!'



Two students recently became Godolphin School's first ever winners of prestigious Army Sixth Form Scholarships, which guarantee the girls a place at Sandhurst

MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE ••

Bath Road, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 1PA Website marlboroughcollege

Website marlboroughcollege.org Head Louise Moelwyn-Hughes, since 2018; previously head of St Edmund's School, Canterbury Pupils 1,004 boarding: 565 boys, 439 girls Ages 13-18 Term Fees £20,603 Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Textile designer William Morris, Sir John Betjeman, The Princess of Wales Reputedly built on the site of the wizard Merlin's grave, Marlborough College works its special powers to shape students into imaginative young adults, employing researched strategies to turn them into independent learners. (They call this the 'Marlborough mindset'.) And thanks to the launch of a bursary fund-raising campaign in 2023 one of the country's biggest ever and a record-breaker for the school - 100 life-changing free places are now awarded to eligible students. But then, education for all is a core

value here, reflected in an outreach programme for neighbouring state pupils and in hosting such activities as Riding for the Disabled and litter picking. Last year, students raised £100,000 for local charities, and the same commitment is displayed in every project they undertake; be that in leading assemblies or, last year, in staging a season of original work by students in the Bradleian Theatre – dedicated to exploring themes such as the ethics of population control against the backdrop of global catastrophe. And all that emphasis on the performing arts fosters debate and experimentation. The school has also embarked on a sustainability and biodiversity drive, which will see more solar panels and electric vehicles arrive on the premises; not to mention tree planting and dredging of the trout lakes where the children love to go fly-fishing. And building on their history of innovation, a 17th house will open in September 2026: just for day pupils, this will be the college's first fully co-ed house.

Butleigh Road, Street, Somerset BA16 0YD Website millfieldschool.com Head Gavin Horgan, since 2018; previously head of Worksop College Pupils 1,654. Day: 331 boys, 249 girls; boarding: 620 boys, 454 girls Ages 2–18 Term Fees Day: £12,770; boarding: £19,615 Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Para-astronaut John McFall, Olympic gold medallist rower Helen Glover, Formula One driver Lando Norris Founded in 1935 by RJO 'Boss' Meyer with the aim of preparing seven Indian students for Oxbridge, Millfield is now a large and thriving co-ed boarding school. Hailed for its ethos of encouraging pupils to be 'positive disruptors', it gets approximately four applications for every place, and there's increasing demand for entry at Sixth Form. In 2024, 20 per cent of leavers received offers from US universities, including Columbia, Cornell and Princeton. Academics aside, sport's what this establishment is really famous for. There are five Olympians on the 200-strong department's staff, and 50 acres of land have just been acquired to develop a football campus. What's more, there's a growing emphasis on championing the contribution of girls: coaches are now trained both in how to best support them during training and in awareness of female-specific injury prevention. This welcoming approach extends beyond the gates: the facilities are regularly used by nearby schools and clubs; and a highlight of the annual calendar is Community Day, when locals living with disabilities are invited to take part in activities organised by the students. As for their own extracurriculars, an hour every Friday is dedicated to trying something new - think beekeeping, scuba diving theory and model making - while weekends are busy and vibrant, and school trips sound glorious. Millfield is currently looking for a suitable location to house an international

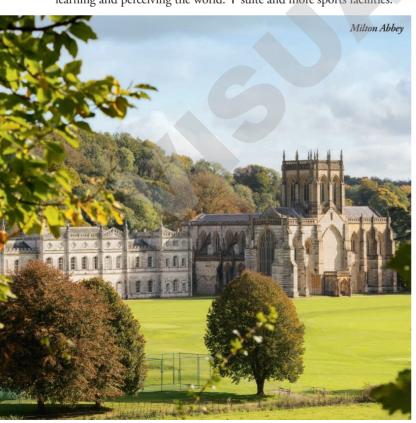
school. So watch this space.

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PUBLIC SOUTH WEST & WALES

MILTON ABBEY ••

Milton Abbas, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0BZ Website miltonabbey.co.uk Head James Watson, since 2023; previously senior deputy head **Pupils** 220. Day: 28 boys, 13 girls; boarding: 119 boys, 60 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £11,025; boarding: £20,995 Bursaries Variable % of pupils, up to 95% **Alumni** Sky News royal events correspondent Major General Alastair Bruce, documentary maker Anthony Geffen, dyslexic child prodigy Alexander Faludy James Ratcliffe, head of creative media, recently wrote and illustrated a book about the history of Milton Abbey, which he traces back to the Anglo-Saxon King Athelstan. But in its current iteration, it has existed since 1954, when it was founded as a forward-thinking alternative to the traditional public school: eschewing a one-size-fits-all approach, it wouldn't just prepare pupils for university, but for careers in commerce, too. And driven by its motto of 'Not just another school', it's still well known for its commitment to different ways of learning and perceiving the world. 'Many places talk a good SEN game, but it's peripheral to what they do,' says one parent of this deliberately small, resolutely residential establishment. (Ninety per cent of students are full boarders.) 'This was the first school we'd visited that really understood that some children learn differently and that education is about more than exam results.' Another, however, points out that it is no slouch academically: 'There's a myth that it's not for you if you want your child to go to Oxbridge, but all abilities strive and thrive here.' Particularly at sports – in everything from polo and golf to road cycling and football, some 95 per cent of the pupils represent the school in fixtures while such creative subjects as DT and photography are popular. The countryside management team works with the children on cultivating the gardens (originally designed by Capability Brown, no less); there is an open-to-all autumn trip to Iceland and a ski trip to the Alps; and funds are currently being raised for a raft of new developments, including an equestrian arena, an extended Learning Development suite and more sports facilities.





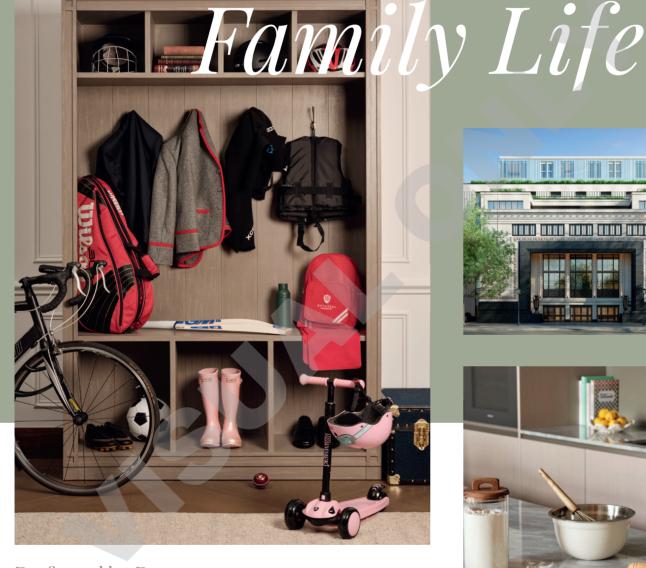
MONKTON COMBE ••

Church Lane, Monkton Combe, Bath BA2 7HG

Website monktoncombeschool.com **Head** Chris Wheeler, since 2016; previously principal and CEO of Hillcrest International Schools, Kenya **Pupils** 646. Day: 230 boys, 182 girls; boarding: 117 boys, 117 girls Ages 2–18 Term Fees Day: £10,815; boarding: £17,445 Bursaries Variable % of boarders, on application Alumni Historical novelist Bernard Cornwell, TED owner and entrepreneur Chris Anderson, former head of MI6 and former master of Pembroke College, Cambridge Sir Richard Dearlove Guided by the motto 'Thy word is truth', Monkton Combe never forgets its Christian origins, and it encourages pupils to balance an inquisitive, open-minded attitude with faith. The school also prides itself on attending to the journey of every individual child and works hard to ensure excellent pastoral care, manifest in small class sizes, dedicated staff and thoughtfully designed wellbeing spaces. With 23 nationalities represented, there's currently a drive to build and take pride in the student body's global network; and those who secure scholarships are offered a tailored programme of specialised training, mentorship, trips and enrichment activities. (It must be paying off, as academic results are very much on the up, with the percentage of A-levels graded A*-A rising from 31.5 to 41.7 between 2023 and 2024.) In the music department, it's all about performing, be that on Band Night or at intimate concerts with composers, singing evensong in St Paul's Cathedral or playing jazz at Disneyland Paris. And sport is not just about winning but learning life lessons. The prep school's 'Try-Athalon' is a much-loved event; and the addition of Nick Baker, former GB Paralympic head coach, promises to lend speed to the rowers' oars. However, the biggest change is the imminent arrival of new head - and alumnus -Bradley Salisbury, who will take over the reins in January 2026, with the mission of maintaining the school's traditional values while steering it into the future.



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ST MARY'S CALNE ••

Curzon Street, Calne, Wiltshire SN11 ODF

Website stmaryscalne.org Head Anne Wakefield, since 2024; previously deputy head of Benenden School Pupils 503. Day: 73 boys, 138 girls; boarding: 292 girls Ages 2–18 **Term Fees** Day: £14,520; boarding: £19,470 Bursaries 18.5% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni 2012 Olympic dressage gold medallist Laura Tomlinson, journalist and broadcaster Roya Nikkhah, actress Belinda Stewart-Wilson

'The girls here are full of kindness, there's not a meanie among them,' says one father, while a fellow parent adds: 'It's a happy and inspiring place where students thrive both academically and personally.' And much of that is thanks to the school's diminutive size – there are only 350 pupils - with close friendships being forged through the horizontal boarding structure. Not that it's short of facilities. The new clay court only adds to the prowess of the tennis players, who have access to an onsite academy with six full-time coaches; the drama department runs its own specialist enrichment programme for scholars; the ski-racing team competes abroad: and musicians deliver performances in venues from Oxford to Kensington. And then there is the artist-in-residence programme, and the close-by stables (whence an equestrian coordinator handles competition entries). As for clubs, they range from cèilidh and sculpture and ceramics to dissection and Young Enterprise, while the Grow club meets in the Platinum Jubilee garden to tend veg, fruit and flowers. Presiding over all this is new head Anne Wakefield, who's described by parents as both 'approachable' and 'incredible'. Having taken up the helm in 2024, she also leads the Lower School, where Year 7 and Year 8 boarding have been introduced. Here, 11- to 13-year-olds take a new approach to learning with a bespoke study programme that features digital literacy, wellbeing and creativity. No wonder the motto is 'Calne Girls Can'.



SHERBORNE •

Abbey Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3LF

Website sherborne.org Head Simon Head, since 2025, previously deputy master of Haileybury Pupils 573 boys: 42 day, 531 boarding Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £15,190; boarding: £19,200 Bursaries 19%

of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing, Coldplay singer-songwriter Chris Martin,

actor Hugh Bonneville One of Sherborne's unique selling points has always been that it offers the benefits of single-sex education but has fast ties to Sherborne Girls. And thanks to a merger with the latter - also bringing Sherborne and Hanford Preps into the fourschool group - this 'separate, yet together' relationship has become even stronger. Clubs and societies are integrated - the joint CCF recently won the coveted Pringle Trophy – while the schools share a library, coffee shop and even classrooms for some A-level subjects. (For example, boys can now study sociology at Sherborne Girls.) Another brilliant aspect is the open campus: students are very much woven into life in the town and locals can make use of magnificent new sports facilities, which include pickleball and a golf simulator. More than 20 different sports are on offer; and off the pitch, the drama department - which boasts a director-in-residence – is thriving. About 40 per cent of the school play musical instruments and choral singers regularly perform in the beautiful abbey. New head Simon Head takes the helm and will steer an establishment that parents say is dedicated to education yet refreshingly down-to-earth. 'It focuses on the collective and on service to others,' says one. 'At Sherborne, there's still room for ambition and achievement of excellence, but the boys don't take themselves too seri-

ously. So we think the net result is

that you get a young man that

you'd want to have sitting next to

you in the workplace.'

SHERBORNE GIRLS •

Bradford Road, Sherborne,

Dorset DT930N Website sherborne.com **Head** Dr Ruth Sullivan, since 2018; previously deputy master of Haileybury College Pupils 466 girls: 41 day, 425 boarding Ages 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £11,950; boarding: £18,685 Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni University of Oxford historian Margaret Macmillan, author Santa Montefiore, biologist Rosa Beddington Sherborne Girls recently marked its 125th anniversary in style. Along with an art exhibition and dramatic performance, it hosted an Old Girls concert and published a book on its history. (It began life when the MP for North Dorset decided a female equivalent of the centuries-old boys' establishment was needed in the town.) Today, its students love the single-sex 'learning environment, combined with the social aspect of having the boys next door'. And indeed, the relationship between the genders is fairly symbiotic, with shared performances, activities and clubs; not to mention coffees at Oueenie's café, named after a much-loved cleaner, where they can also watch recitals and Friday concerts. Head Ruth Sullivan, an Old Girl herself, is described by parents as 'a fantastic role model to aspire to' and has introduced a number of new initiatives: twice-termly Sleep Weeks prioritise welfare in that area with yoga and pyjama prayers, and allow lie-ins; smartphones are now banned for junior boarders; and biannual careers 'Aspiration' days take everyone off-timetable for a series of workshops, lectures and talks. Meanwhile, a new Sixth-form Baccalaureate has been introduced - the internal diploma encouraging students to adopt a range of leadership and voluntary roles - and digital leads have been appointed in all departments to advise on the strategic adoption of AI. Overall, parents choose this school for its commitment to 'opening the students' eyes to an enormous range of possibilities', and for its 'celebration of the girls and their achievements'.

SOUTH WEST & WALES PUBLIC

STONAR ••

Cottles Park, Atworth, Wiltshire SN12 8NT

Website stonarschool.com
Head Matthew Way, since 2019;
previously deputy head of Milton
Abbey Pupils 453. Day: 166 boys,
287 girls; boarding: 32 boys, 99
girls Ages 2–18 Term Fees Day:
£8,360; boarding: £18,320
Bursaries 4% of pupils, up to
15% Alumni Author and historian
Gitta Sereny, actress Romola Garai,
international three-day event rider
Georgie Spence

Kind, calm and family-oriented, Stonar is ensconced in 80 secluded acres of grounds, but its older students can walk to the nearby village of Atworth and from there catch the bus to Bath – which gives them the best of both worlds. There are 460 pupils in the prep and senior schools combined (30-plus per cent more than before the pandemic). Demand is still growing, and you can see why. A new Sixth Form Centre contains social spaces, study zones and a café; and the expanded equestrian area, which employs 17 full-time staff, has been given 10 more stables and another arena. Nearly half the pupils ride – many keep their own horses here - so it's hardly surprising the new course in equine management has proved popular; nor that the bar is set high by in-school showjumping competitions; nor that its junior team won the 2024 national schools championships at Hickstead. However, they also give rein to their imaginations: the creative arts department is ever popular; fashion design and textiles students recently contributed to a school exhibition showcase in Bath; and tech-minded pupils' work on a groundbreaking AI project – 'hi!ai' - that saw them create a Charles Darwin chatbot and employ the AI Sustainable Cities project to explore urban planning. 'The thing I love most about my school is the sense of family. I have always felt welcome and involved,' says one student; and when asked what they would change about it, replies: 'The fact I'm leaving next year.'



UWC ATLANTIC COLLEGE ••

St Donat's Castle, Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan, Wales CF61 1WF

Website uwcatlantic.org
Head Naheed Bardai, since July
2021; previously head of upper
school at Upper Canada College,
Toronto Pupils 375 boarding: 123
boys, 252 girls Ages 16–19 Term
Fees £111,110 for full IB Diploma
programme Bursaries 36% of
pupils, up to 100% Alumni
King Willem-Alexander of the
Netherlands, Princess Leonor of Spain,
former First Minister of Wales
Baroness Morgan

Housed in a 12th-century castle on the Welsh coast, UWC Atlantic has a spectacular setting. And since its foundation at the height of the Cold War by German educator Kurt Hahn, its pupils have been guided by his words: 'You are needed.' The school has a reputation for bringing on both royals and refugees and, according to parents, everyone is cherished and welcomed. 'On arrival, my son and his cohort were greeted by seniors banging pots and pans and carrying their bags to the dorm in the rain,'

recalls one parent, who also praises the enormous roster of activities that keeps all kinds of students occupied: 'It's hard not to shine there, given the incredible amount of extracurricular initiatives, from intimate to large scale.' Thus, a dedicated Growers and Harvesters group cultivates produce for the kitchen, while others care for the beloved rescue donkeys; the weekly Atlantic Dippers club is undeterred by icy seas, while the boat-builders launch their craft in them. Thirtysix per cent of pupils are supported by full scholarships - and the aim is to make this 60 per cent by 2032 - while the teaching staff hail from 15 different countries and bring a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. Led by head Naheed Bardai – described by parents as 'passionate', 'committed' and 'visionary' - Atlantic College recently pioneered a new educational pathway called Leadership for Just Futures, which examines such 'impact areas' as biodiversity, food, energy or migration; and its inaugural cohort has received offers from prestigious US universities that range from Stanford and Brown to Northwestern.

WESTONBIRT SCHOOL ●● Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8OG

Website westonbirt.org

Head Natasha Dangerfield, since 2013; previously deputy head of Harrogate Ladies' College **Pupils** 722. Day: 307 boys, 315 girls; boarding: 31 boys, 69 girls Ages 2–18 Term Fees Day: £8,055; boarding: £16,080 Bursaries Variable, up to 100% Alumni Actress Maxine Audley, author Georgia Byng, Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music Patsy Toh 'When we first looked around Westonbirt, what came across loud and clear was that it was an incredibly inspiring place to be,' declares one mother of this co-ed school, which takes boarders from the age of 10. 'Meeting the head on that first visit sealed the deal.' Pupils love her, too, with one saying of Natasha Dangerfield that 'she encourages you and believes in you, which is really nice'. (Adds another: 'If there is a home sports fixture, she will come and support us.') Alas, Dangerfield will be departing in December 2025, but leaves behind a re-energised establishment. Among other developments coming on-stream, a new prep building will be finished in January 2026, while juniors are already settling into a freshly refurbished boarding house and all the dorms are being spruced up. In the classroom, a Performance Pathway now aims to maximise performance, talent and potential across academia, sport, art, music and drama, while a Level 3 Agriculture BTEC is now available. Elsewhere, the 210-acre grounds are home to the kitchen garden and bee clubs. Sporty types relish the golf course and numerous pitches and courts; performers shine in the all-years Speech and Drama gala; and the Great Hall houses a magnificent organ that dates from Victorian times. Translated from Latin, the school motto is 'Overcome evil with good' and it strikes a chord. Pupils say they thrive on 'support from everyone' and the 'amount of opportunities we get'. \square



SHERBORNE SCHOOLS GROUP





FELSTED SCHOOL ••



Midlands & East Anglia

ELLESMERE COLLEGE ••

Ellesmere, Shropshire SY12 9AB
Website ellesmere.com
Head Jonathan Shaw, since 2025;
previously head at King's Ely
Pupils 540. Day: 229 boys, 143
girls; boarding: 102 boys, 66 girls
Ages 7–18 Term Fees Day:
£7,740; boarding: £16,368
Bursaries 25% of pupils, up to
50% Alumni The Duke of
Westminster, World Rugby chairman
Bill Beaumont, Net World Sports
founder Alex Lovén

'The goal is to capture self-belief,' states deputy head Vicky Pritt-Roberts, who thinks Ellesmere College's approach makes its pupils 'life ready'. And one mother said she instantly noticed a boost in her

son's confidence when he began to volunteer for such activities as reading poetry out loud in assembly. Unsurprisingly, considering its record of platinum Artsmark accreditation from Arts Council England, students are motivated to trust in their creativity, competing in music festivals and latterly performing their annual play for an international audience in Boston, Massachusetts; and since it's also an accredited Athlete Friendly Education Centre, competition is an integral part of the culture, manifest in the rigorous training offered in golf, swimming, shooting - and now dance. (Ellesmere is currently fourth in the independent school golf rankings; and three swimming alumni competed at the Paris Olympics.) Despite its idyllically English rural location, this establishment has a global outlook: its model extends to the Middle East, with two partners in Oman and Riyadh, and another in Doha to open its doors this month. And the globally minded ethos not only opens up great opportunities for exchange programmes but encourages students to explore further education abroad (one previous head girl - a Ukrainian - received an offer from Harvard while she was sheltering from bombs during a visit home). Jonathan Shaw took over as head at the start of this academic year, following the tragic passing of Brendan Wignall.

Felsted, Essex CM6 3LL Website felsted.org Head Chris Townsend, since 2015; previously deputy head Pupils 1,006. Day: 274 boys, 236 girls; boarding: 260 boys, 236 girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees Day: £12,216; boarding: £18,702 Bursaries 29% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Former surgeongynaecologist to the Royal Family Sir Marcus Setchell, England rugby player Max Malins, playwright Alecky Blythe The word that crops up most in regards to Felsted is 'family'. Pupils note how 'wonderful and welcoming' the whole community is, that students 'connect from all ages' and that 'everyone is included in activities'. Parents are keen to point out that staff frequently go above and beyond, and 'the support doesn't stop at the classroom'. Add to this a 90-acre 'village campus', numerous quirks and traditions from a 462-year history, and the fact that three quarters of senior students board, and it's little wonder bonds are fostered here that last for life. 'Felstedians are proud and loyal, and OFs often return to help with charity events or sports fixtures,' a recent visitor reports. By the same token, 300 of the current art students came together to assist an old boy in creating an art installation of 20,000 lights in Salcombe Bay for the 200th anniversary of the RNLI; and the entire complement of seniors travelled to Twickenham to watch the U18 rugby team win the RFU's annual national school tournament final. Many of Felsted's charges live within a 50-mile radius, but the rest come from as far afield as China, the Middle East and West Africa, so pupils leave with a 'wonderful group of diverse friends' and a decidedly international outlook, emboldened to 'make a positive difference' as they head off to top universities and competitive apprenticeships. Of last year's 117 leavers, 11 accepted places to study in Europe, at such institutions as Universität Bayreuth and the University of Belgrade.

PUBLIC

GRESHAM'S ●●

Cromer Road, Holt, Norfolk NR25 6EA

Website greshams.com
Head Douglas Robb, since 2014;
previously head of Oswestry School
Pupils 547. Day: 128 boys, 145
girls; boarding: 153 boys, 121 girls
Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day:
£11,670; boarding: £16,720
Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Industrial designer
Sir James Dyson, actress Olivia
Colman, England rugby players
Ben and Tom Youngs

Walk around Gresham's and you'll notice signs mounted on the walls that proclaim: 'Work Hard, Be Honest, Be Kind, Look Smart, Take Opportunities.' And those injunctions genuinely underpin life at this impressive establishment. There are so many activities in which to participate, from the bellringing society to Monday night house debates and the robotics club. (A team recently made it through to the world finals of the Vex competition in Dallas.) The school has even onboarded a head of agriculture to create a farm on its 200-acre estate; and this now boasts composting facilities, nearly 60 crop-trial plots and a studentrun egg business. The popular outdoor pursuits programme dispatches pupils across the adventure woodland obstacle course, instilling such skills as pioneering, navigation and campcraft; and their knees get a grazing from the annual Gritty Grasshopper challenge, a toughmudder-style event that raises money for charity. When they're not scaling the 25-metre climbing tower or whizzing down the 220metre zip wire, the students can be found thrashing it out on the playing fields; and the appointment of Ben Youngs - England's mostcapped men's rugby player – as head of performance promises to take sporting excellence to a new level. All this is artfully overseen by head Douglas Robb, who has occasionally been spotted serving students fish and chips on Fridays, and is described by one parent as 'very engaging, the sort of person you'd like to invite to a dinner party'!

KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL, BIRMINGHAM ●

Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham B15 2UA Website kes.org.uk Head Kirsty von Malaisé, since 2024; previously principal of King Edward VI High School for Girls Pupils 837 day boys Ages 11–18 Term Fees £7,145 Bursaries 14% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Author and philologist JRR Tolkien, former Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street, thriller writer Lee Child Founded in 1552, King Edward's champions diversity and learning, giving a seriously impressive education to some highly intelligent boys, whatever their background. (Roughly seven applicants vie for

each place, and there's an expansive

bursary programme.) Outreach is

important here, so the school offers

a range of free masterclasses, work-

shops, competitions and concerts

to local primaries, while its partner-

ship with the St Chad's Refugee

and Migrant Centre is a particular

point of pride. But so is considered

change. Thus, since September

2024, Kirsty von Malaisé has

been chief master and principal of

both this establishment and King Edward VI High School for Girls - the first time in their histories they've had a joint head - and she is reintroducing A-levels while building on the legacy of the IB Diploma by adopting a wider curriculum that encompasses such strands as School for Thought, a research skills programme. But life isn't just about exam results, which are unsurprisingly starry. The rugby teams, cricketers and squash players win cabinets-worth of silverware, while stage performers thrive in the senior productions held in tandem with their female peers. Talented musicians have the opportunity to play at such prestigious venues as the Birmingham Symphony Hall; and artists are inspired by a rare gift to the school, a stained-glass window by the esteemed alumnus Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Trip locations range from Greece and France to Lapland, while free time is filled with club activities, some of which are characteristically cerebral. Say, Anagnostics and Metascholen which is classics and philosophy, for those of us who haven't had a King Edward's education...

Gresham's has even onboarded a head of agriculture to create a farm on its 200-acre estate, boasting a student-run egg business



KING'S HIGH WARWICK • Banbury Road, Warwick CV34 6YE

Website kingshighwarwick.co.uk

Head Dr Stephen Burley, since 2021; previously deputy head (academic) Pupils 821. 809 day; 12 boarding. **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £7,290; boarding: £17,880 Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actresses Sophie Turner and Gemma Whelan, soprano Catherine Bott Parents rave about the 'curiosity and passion of the teachers' at this seat of learning, as well as extracurriculars that give a 'platform for all students to flourish' and the 'inspirational' head Stephen Burley, who puts his charges' wellbeing 'at the heart of all his decisions'. Help in ensuring the latter is provided by anti-bullying pupil ambassadors, a team of wellbeing prefects - and Parsnip the dog - although the therapeutic gardening club and a new 'Peace Pod' and prayer space play their part. The upshot is that classroom life is flourishing. The Year 7s are enjoying engineering lessons, GCSE examinees scored a record set of results and alternatives to GCSEs - such as the innovation and entrepreneurship programme - are also on offer. Sport is strong: at national level, the girls have been champions in clay pigeon shooting, and reached finals in water polo and swimming, while opportunities to compete and train in badminton, skiing, football and rugby have been added to the repertoire. Dance is celebrated with a showcase event, while the music department boasts four baroque ensembles and a recently-crowned BBC Junior Young Chorister of the Year from Year 8. Trips introduce students to Vietnam, Costa Rica and Morocco while, closer to home, free time can be spent at clubs that take in everything from origami to the National Council for Young Women. Next up will be membership of the new Warwick Schools Foundation Multi Academy Trust, a cross-sector partnership between the independent and state sectors with a focus on inclusion, SEND and the arts.

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MIDLANDS & EAST ANGLIA PUBLIC

THE LEYS ••

Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 7AD Website theleys.net Head Martin Priestley, since 2014; previously head of Warminster School **Pupils** 564. Day: 135 boys, 85 girls; boarding: 196 boys, 148 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £11,490; boarding: £17,406 Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni The King of Tonga, former reporter and MP Martin Bell, tennis player Jamie Murray 'The thing I love most about my school is the supportive and familial community,' says one pupil. 'It allows me to express myself, explore my interests, learn new things and, most importantly, make lasting memories in the process.' The Leys achieves its aims of both nurturing and stretching its charges by framing itself as a 'big, small school' which makes sense when you see it in operation. The majority of families live fairly locally, and pastoral care is driven by pupil-led initiatives such as a wellbeing app, available on school smart tablets, as well as mindfulness and yoga lessons (including twilight sessions for parents). At the same time, the school makes great efforts to capitalise on the opportunities and big ideas that abound in its hometown, so long a seat of learning. The Cambridge Experience initiative gives The Leys' children a chance to sing evensong in college chapels and share their award-winning boathouses, to attend university lectures and benefit from mentorship from post-grad students. Its artists exhibit at Michaelhouse, a public gallery in the centre, while its lucky musicians perform in many venues across the city. Back at base, creatives are embracing innovation in a new DT department – which houses 3D scanners and resin printers - and all are enjoying 2025's proud celebrations of the school's 150th birthday. 'It's a wonderful co-ed that offers both boarding and day spaces, set in an absolutely beautiful city,' concludes a current parent. 'The Leys is a well rounded, high-achieving place.'

MALVERN COLLEGE ••

College Road, Malvern,
Worcestershire WR14 3DF
Website malverncollege.org.uk
Head Keith Metcalfe, since 2019;
previously deputy head of Harrow
Pupils 652. Day: 67 boys; 48 girls;
boarding: 266 boys; 271 girls Ages
3–18 Term Fees Day: £13,415;
boarding: £19,765 Bursaries 12%
of pupils, up to 100% Alumni
Author CS Lewis, chief medical
officer for England Sir Chris
Whitty, 2023 Earthshot Prize
winner Talal Hasan
At the base of the Malvern Hills,
this school's surrounding country-

At the base of the Malvern Hills. this school's surrounding countryside is a runner's paradise; and since 1876, hardy pupils have pushed themselves in its annual eight-mile slog called The Ledder. Sport here is central to life – especially cricket, with students winning silverware at national levels and even going on to sign professional contracts - and now the Sixth-form curriculum includes a sport-focused BTEC, it even extends into the classroom. The new director of music is bolstering the performing arts and, alongside a house band, has introduced Live Lounge sessions, an all-girls jazz group and the Malvern Young Musician of the Year award. The Grade II-listed Memorial Library has been sensitively repurposed into a Sixth Form Centre, offsetting traditional wooden panelling and grand fireplaces with modern learning and social spaces; and parents say the effects of overhauling the dining room and its culinary offering has been 'VERY positive, already'. Next up, the school is hoping to stage more open-air community events and to forge a partnership with Morgan Motors. So parents who like the sound of this dynamic offering will be delighted to hear that sister prep The Downs Malvern has opened a nursery, so the educational experience can now start from six months.

MORETON HALL ••

Weston Rhyn, Shropshire SY11 3EW

Website moretonhall.org **Head** Michael Brewer, since 2023; previously head of Thetford Grammar School Pupils 351. Day: 66 boys; 168 girls; boarding: 117 girls. Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £10,236; boarding: £15,2,99 Bursaries 38.5% of pupils, up to 50% Alumni Opera and classical music composer Thea Musgrave, editor-in-chief of The Economist Zanny Minton Beddoes, judicial commissioner Dame Linda Dobbs Its picturesque rural setting is the backdrop to an environment that's as empowering as it is nurturing. 'Calm, invested and approachable' head Michael Brewer is a believer in an ethos of self-governance and independence, and parents talk glowingly of a 'family atmosphere, with Mr Brewer at the head of the table'. In sport, lacrosse is particularly strong, with the U15s recently crowned champions in the North Schools' tournament and the 1st XI securing victories over Manchester and Loughborough universities. But the children aren't boxed into particular interests here: one parent notes 'our daughter has often performed in the theatre and played on the sports fields on the same day'. And opportunities are expanding: the past 12 months have seen the swimming pool refurbished, a new gym built and the boarding accommodation refitted with musthave modularised furniture. As for learning, Moreton Hall balances academic rigour with pastoral care - resulting in 45 per cent of students securing A*-A grades at A-level last year - and a sturdy STEM programme supports the growing number heading into medical careers. Applause? The drama is indeed stand-out: a recent production of Made in Dagenham was a resounding triumph.

The Cambridge Experience initiative lets The Leys' pupils sing evensong in college chapels and attend university lectures

NEW HALL SCHOOL ••

Boreham, Essex CM3 3HS
Website newhallschool.co.uk
Head Katherine Jeffrey, since 2002;
previously deputy head of the Marist
School Pupils 1,334. Day: 493
boys, 551 girls; boarding 151 boys,
139 girls Ages 1–18 Term Fees
Day: £9,547; boarding: £15,348
Bursaries Variable % of pupils, up
to 100% Alumni CNN chief
international anchor Christiane
Amanpour, Saracens rugby player
Dom Morris, designer Dame
Anya Hindmarch

'My favourite thing about school is how everybody is always happy and caring,' says one pupil. They also praise the New Hall Voluntary Service's battery of initiatives, which range from helping out at the local allotment with the Wilderness Foundation to partnering with the Pachamama Project to produce reusable sanitary towels for the disadvantaged. This is as well as 100-plus clubs; say, French students serving up canapes at their cultural soirees, budding politicians thrashing out the issues in Question Timestyle debates and the animal care club tending their flocks at the on-site farm. Elsewhere, the new Sixth Form International Business and Languages Centre contains conference areas, university-style classrooms - even a replica of Downing Street! A carpet of wildflowers and trees now surrounds the outdoor performance venue while wellbeing walkers regularly make their way around the 70 acre-site. Combining food and foreign tongues, the modern languages cookery course is thriving; and horsey types can now avail themselves of an arena and two new Racewood equestrian simulators. Next up? The recent acquisition of nearby Grade I-listed Boreham House will eventually lead to a dedicated prep-school site, and there are plans for a learners' pool and art, science and cookery rooms. One parent concludes, 'There's an opportunity for each child to find their niche here and shine.' As for head Katherine Jeffrey: 'She is inspirational, a force of nature!'

NORWICH SCHOOL ••

The Close, Norwich NR1 4DD Website norwich-school.org.uk Head Steffan Griffiths, since 2011; previously deputy head of Magdalen College School Pupils 1,171 day: 674 boys, 497 girls Ages 3-18 Term Fees £7,091 Bursaries 6% of pupils, up to 100% + Alumni Admiral Lord Nelson, Olympic athlete Emma Pooley, England rugby player Freddie Steward Daily assembly here takes place in a medieval cathedral, beneath its 96-metre spire. Step through an ancient archway from Norwich's bustling streets and you enter an entirely different world. Welcome to an establishment that hums with purpose under the stewardship of the 'extraordinary' head Steffan Griffiths, who is described by one parent as an 'exceptional leader' with the 'necessary emotional intelligence to lead a school in the 21st century'. Thanks to the central location, independence comes early - Sixth-formers nip into town for lunch – so the city becomes part of the curriculum; and the open campus, interwoven with public space, fosters freedom and maturity in spades. No surprise that expectations are high for pupils; nor that they're repaid in impressive results. (Seventy per cent of GCSEs last year were graded 9-7, and 50 per cent of A-levels A*-A.) But what really stands out is the support given for whatever path is taken, whether to Oxbridge, art college or a professional riding career; not to mention the excellent pastoral care, with houses supplying a strong sense of belonging and a genuine three-way dialogue between faculty, parents and pupils. Thus, prefects are voted in by peers and staff together, and the school doesn't shy away from conversations around diversity and social responsibility. This is a buoyant place which cultivates the spirit as well as the mind. Griffiths talks about 'preparing pupils for a lifetime of leadership' and he delivers: confident, kind and refreshingly grounded, they leave with friends for life. And excellent exam results to boot.



There's staggering provision at Oundle for science and engineering, including 3D printers, plasma cutters and robotics kits

OAKHAM SCHOOL •• Chapel Close, Oakham, Rutland LE15 6DT

Website oakham.rutland.sch.uk Head Henry Price, since 2019; previously head of Wellington School Pupils 908. Day: 223 boys, 252 girls; boarding: 237 boys, 196 girls Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £10,968; boarding: £18,570 Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actor Matthew Macfadyen, England cricketer Stuart Broad, actress Katie Hall With rigorous academics, top-tier sports and a cultural offering to rival the West End, Oakham School provides a truly holistic education to a vibrant and inclusive community of children. Set in the heart of its namesake Rutland town and thoroughly embedded in the local community, 'Oakham is Oakham,' says head Henry Price. But what's said of him? Well, 'exceptional' Price 'loves his job and is not just running the place as a business', according to a parent who chose the school after meeting its 'polite, charming, balanced, humorous and very happy' pupils. As for the latter, they're spoiled for choice: as well as A-levels and BTECs, the school also offers the IB. (It was one of the first in the UK to do so - back in 2001 - and about a third of the students take that route.) And co-curricular life is stitched into the timetable: from sailing on Rutland Water to joining the Industrial Cadets, which involves working on real-life projects for companies. In the sporting arena, last year saw the U16 girls' hockey team make school history at the Olympic Stadium by reaching the Tier 1 Cup Final. Meanwhile, thanks to a shiny new Lower School Centre, from September 2025 Years 7 and 8 will now go to the main campus for lessons, while spending their downtime in their own tucked-away boarding house and common spaces. With thoughtful leadership, down-to-earth charm and a huge range of opportunities on offer, Oakham delivers a dynamic, all-round education that sets pupils up for bright futures.

OUNDLE SCHOOL ••

The Great Hall, New Street, Oundle PE8 4GH

Website oundleschool.org.uk

Head Dominic Oliver, since 2025; previously head of Lancing College Pupils 1,140. Day: 192 boys, 128 girls; boarding: 492 boys, 328 girls Ages 4–18 Term Fees Day: £12,695; boarding: £19,800 Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Conservationist Sir Peter Scott, biologist Richard Dawkins, rugby player Tom Curry The undeniable scale of Oundle is matched by its world-class facilities, serious scholastic firepower and proud tradition of doing things properly. (STEM lovers, for example, need look no further: there's staggering provision for science and engineering, including 3D printers, plasma cutters and robotics kits in the SciTec Centre.) The super-sized £24 million sports centre comes with a pool, a climbing wall, dance and spin studios and a room for elite training; outdoors, there's CCF, sailing on Rutland Water, hockey, rugby, dressage and pentathlon, where pupils compete at national level; and the whole-school cross country and inter-house relays also keep everyone moving. But it's that insertion of high-spec modernity into historic charm which distinguishes Oundle, whether in the shape of the recording studio for the UK's longest-running student radio station, the international language exchanges or the dazzling array of clubs and trips. All eyes are on new head Dominic Oliver, who has a high bar to jump: keeping the school academically elite but downto-earth – and educating the whole child. In that, however, he can certainly rely on a pastoral support team that's 'particularly special', according to a current parent who understands the stresses teenagers face today. ('The school seamlessly manages all of these emotions and pressures' and their son is 'not only surviving, but thriving'.) You see, what matters - as outgoing head Sarah Kerr-Dineen puts it – is not exam grades but the 'quality of the young people who leave us'.





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THE PERSE SCHOOL ●● Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8QF

Website perse.co.uk Head Edward Elliott, since 2008; previously head of Sixth Form **Pupils** 1,734 day: 914 boys, 824 girls Ages 3-18 Term Fees £9,074 Bursaries 5.4% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Actor Colin McFarlane, founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company Sir Peter Hall, GB hockey player Tess Howard The Perse was founded in 1615, and is Cambridge's oldest surviving secondary school. Head Edward Elliott has worked here since 1997, and prides himself on presiding over a culture in which happy children enjoy taking part in a full academic and extracurricular life. Trips often head to exotic destinations such as Spain, France, Sweden and India while, closer to home, musicians are fortunate enough to perform in such beautiful venues around the city as St John's College Chapel. (Meanwhile, music scholars act as ambassadors, working with younger pupils in the school community.) Nascent artists can visit Cambridge's museums and galleries for inspiration - and display their work in their department's gallery – while the 100-plus clubs and societies provide plenty of opportunities to develop skills and pursue passions. The visiting speaking programme is particularly dynamic, welcoming an array of distinguished business leaders, sportspeople and politicians. The new sports centre – complete with swimming pool, climbing wall and games hall - is delighting exercisemad pupils, while thespians can join the school's very own stage production company. Looking at the results scoreboard, 130 of last year's A-level cohort secured three or more grades at A*-A, while 52 per cent of GCSEs were graded 9; and in testament to some seriously scholastic chops, a whopping 19 leavers headed to Cambridge, 18 to Oxford and 15 to Imperial. It is no wonder that a Perse education is in demand around the world; hence the January opening of its international school in Singapore.

In testament to some seriously scholastic chops at The Perse School, a whopping 19 leavers headed to Cambridge, 18 to Oxford and 15 to Imperial College London

REPTON SCHOOL

Repton, Derbyshire DE65 6FH Website repton.org.uk Head Mark Semmence, since 2019; previously head of Mount Kelly Pupils 1,029. Day: 287 boys, 281 girls; boarding: 268 boys, 193 girls Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £13,555; boarding: £18,275 Bursaries 33% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Legendary athlete Harold Abrahams, author Roald Dahl, actor George Rainsford The 100 school-owned properties dotted round town make Repton feel like a university campus, and its combination of historic buildings and swanky facilities confers a real sense of place. But it's constantly evolving, as evidenced by the Digital Priory classroom unveiled last year, which enables real-time collaboration with the worldwide Repton Family of Schools. So pupils can join their peers in Cairo, Dubai and Abu Dhabi to share work, attend classes and learn Latin, Mandarin and Arabic. Back in Blighty, pastoral care is a strength and sport is dazzling: last year Repton won a 51st national hockey title; and it's widely considered to be the top swimming school in the country. Boarding is full-time and day pupils can stay until 9pm. Academics are strong and rising, with four leavers heading to Oxbridge in 2024, plus a large

handful to Ivy Leagues.

ROYAL HOSPITAL SCHOOL ••

Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 2RX
Website royalhospitalschool.org
Head Irfan Latif, since 2024;
previously head of DLD College
London Pupils 642. Day: 138
boys, 128 girls; boarding: 196
boys, 180 girls Ages 11–18
Term Fees Day: £8,521; boarding:
£16,617 Bursaries 60% of pupils,
up to 95% Alumni Sailor Hannah
Stodel, England cricketer Reece Topley,
actress Kate Somerset Holmes
At its picture-perfect waterside
campus, Royal Hospital School's
seafaring heritage remains proudly
on show, and pupils in naval uni-

campus, Royal Hospital School's seafaring heritage remains proudly on show, and pupils in naval uniforms still raise the flag daily. Nonetheless, it manages to blend centuries-old tradition with a forward-looking approach under the command of new head Irfan Latif, who's 'very approachable, very passionate and very visible', according to parents. Taking the wheel last year, Latif has already established himself as a leader who 'makes sure the school stays on top of its game'. And that game is a full-boarding experience for 59 per cent of students – although Super Saturdays do offer flexibility with the choice of exploring interests or accessing academic support. Or, of course, sailing (a major USP at RHS, thanks to its world-class academy). But music is another pillar here, manifest in an extraordinary choir and marching band, as well as a school-wide love of singing that fills the chapel three times a week. Elsewhere, with a packed fixtures list, sports flourish. Art is vibrant, outreach projects are ubiquitous and the co-curricular offering is dizzying: more than 100 activities a week, supplemented recently by a pupil-established Taylor Swift club. In 2024, RHS celebrated more than half its GCSE examinees gaining top grades, its best-ever results. From this school with soul, pupils leave happy, grounded and equipped for all manner of future journeys. As one delighted parent put it: 'They don't just learn facts; they develop grit, resilience, and a sense of responsibility.'

PUBLIC

RUGBY SCHOOL ● ● Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 5EH

Website rugbyschool.co.uk Head Gareth Parker-Jones, since 2020; previously deputy head academic Pupils 867. Day: 118 boys, 109 girls; boarding: 353 boys, 289 girls Ages 13-18 Term Fees Day: £11,638; boarding: £18,352 Bursaries 41% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Author Lewis Carroll, writer Dolly Alderton, Deliciously Ella founder Ella Mills 'There is very little not to love about Rugby, but I think the environment it fosters is very difficult to beat,' says one student. 'Its ethos - The Whole Person, The Whole Point - is conveyed in how it encourages us to develop,' adds another. Teenagers typically tend not to agree with their parents, but on this they are united. 'The school's primary strength is its ethos. There is a genuine sense of inclusiveness that permeates every aspect,' notes one of the latter. Indeed, there is a strong focus on sharing facilities with the wider community - more than 100 state primary pupils pass through the school every week - while the Choral Outreach Celebration Day saw 500 local children sing. Fielding teams that run the gamut from A to F, sport is governed by a 'no one on the bench' approach, and those at the top of their game enjoy guidance from a truly impressive range of coaches with a wealth of professional experience between them. Meanwhile, actors tread the boards at the Edinburgh Fringe, and the week-long Festival on the Close welcomes thousands of visitors for performances and arts workshops. Renovation of the boarding houses continues; the IB programme is growing in popularity; and exciting foreign trips include multi-sports tours of South Africa, ski-racing jaunts in Canada and expeditions to Peru. Next up - and closer to home - Rugby's prep school group will be developed, making a significant contribution to preparing students for life at this venerable institution.

SHREWSBURY SCHOOL ••

Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY3 7BA Website shrewsbury.org.uk Head Leo Winkley, since 2018; previously head of St Peter's School, York Pupils 825. Day: 127 boys, 70 girls; boarding: 370 boys, 258 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £13,193; boarding: £18,912 Bursaries 45% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Naturalist Charles Darwin, mountaineer Andrew 'Sandy' Irvine, actor Sir Michael Palin Shrewsbury's appeal lies in 'its reputation as an all-round school with a beautiful campus right on the river and wonderful extracurricular provision', says one parent. They also love its 'ability to nurture students as individuals' and its power to ensure 'they feel part of a collective journey, where personal growth and community spirit go hand in hand'. There's a vast array of activities: nature lovers enjoy the wildflower meadow, and the beekeeping society nurtures the pollinators' garden; actors perform

at the Edinburgh Fringe; and the trips - ranging from cricket tours of Dubai and rowing camp in Spain to expeditions in Mexico and the Swiss Alps – sound particularly tantalising. The rowing squad is strong, bagging Shrewsbury's first ever girls' gold at the National Schools Regatta. And since all this activity drums up a robust appetite, it's lucky the award-winning chef delivers a menu whose standard is described as 'incredibly high'. In 2024, both heads of school left for Harvard, while another 22 pupils secured places at top international universities. And the school's global footprint is widening yet further with the opening of its first outpost in India: occupying 115 acres in Madhya Pradesh, it follows in the footsteps of others in Thailand, Hong Kong and Cambodia. As per public school tradition, Shrewsbury has a lot of unique slang. But thankfully, parents can decipher the lingo by means of a dictionary published by the school magazine.

Shrewsbury parents can decipher pupils' unique slang by means of a dictionary published by the school magazine



UPPINGHAM ••

Uppingham, Rutland LE15 9QE

Website uppingham.co.uk **Head** Dr Richard Maloney, since 2016; previously head of Bede's School Pupils 839. Day: 48 boys, 43 girls; boarding: 423 boys, 325 girls Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £11,358; boarding: £19,392 Bursaries 9.3% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actor and writer Stephen Fry, musician Harry Judd, chef and restaurateur Rick Stein Dating back to 1584, Uppingham's original buildings could easily be mistaken for Oxford colleges. And with it being the first British seat of learning to establish a dedicated department for the subject, music is a big deal here. The main Music School is in an old building that has been remodelled with a lot of glass – a mix of old and new – but there's also a music tech room, from which an own-label album will soon be emanating. The drama facilities are equally impressive, not least the 300-seat proscenium arch theatre. Art, textiles, design and photography are taught in the award-winning Leonardo Centre, while the huge and buzzing science block houses a lecture theatre that has hosted guest speakers ranging from the Poet Laureate Simon Armitage to the former Solicitor General Edward Timpson. Head Richard Maloney teaches philosophy - and his precept for his charges is: 'Be the positive change your community needs'. (Hence the thriving programme of service to others.) But the students are exposed to broad horizons, too, with trips to Everest Base Camp and the Nile. And talking of Egypt, the recently opened Uppingham Cairo - the first international school in the group – is a sign of things to come. As, at home, is the first dedicated house for day pupils, opened in September 2024; likewise the new Year 7 and 8 Lower School House, which aims to create an environment where youngsters are empowered in a safe and nurturing setting, while also benefiting from the seniors' facilities. \square



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North & Scotland

FETTES COLLEGE ••

Carrington Road, Edinburgh EH4 1QX

Website fettes.com Head Helen Harrison, since 2019; previously deputy head Pupils 715. Day: 147 boys, 131 girls; boarding: 241 boys, 231 girls Ages 41/2-18 Term Fees Day: £15,150; boarding: £18,000 Bursaries 8% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Former prime minister Sir Tony Blair, athlete Jake Wightman, author Elizabeth Macneal 'From the moment we visited Fettes we knew that it was the right fit,' declares a parent of three current pupils. 'The campus is absolutely stunning and the school's reputa-

tion, combined with its location,

made our decision an easy one.' The

college may be steeped in Scottish

traditions – Saturday night cèilidhs

are a highlight – but it adopts a

progressive approach (about half the Sixth-formers take the IB, half A-levels); and with 25 per cent of its pupils coming from more than 30 other countries, it's a truly international environment. Boarding is popular here – about 70 per cent are full-time - and weekends are packed with activities, be they golfing expeditions to the Highlands or watching internationals at nearby Murrayfield. (On Sundays, older Fettesians make the most of the city's museums, art galleries and cinemas.) Rugby and hockey are the main competitive sports but everything from tchoukball to fives is on offer. And every year, Fettes enters two teams into the Scottish Islands Peaks Race: three days of sailing and fell runs from Oban to Troon. Students claim the food 'is by far the best in the country', and Fishy Fridays are a highlight.

GIGGLESWICK SCHOOL •• Giggleswick, Settle, North

Yorkshire BD24 0DE Website giggleswick.org.uk Head Sam Hart, since 2022; previously housemaster at Winchester College Pupils 400. Day: 118 boys, 96 girls; boarding: 77 boys, 99 girls **Ages** 2–18 **Term** Fees Day: £9,675; boarding: £14,960 Bursaries 18.3% of pupils, up to 87.5% **Alumni** TV presenter Richard Whiteley, actor Anthony Daniels, golfer Gary Wolstenholme There is no specific motto at Giggleswick but if there were, it would be 'Throw yourself in', says head Sam Hart. In charge since 2022, this former army helicopter pilot encourages children to make the most of everything on offer at

the 500-year-old establishment.

Namely, sports and such outdoor activities as the 'Gigg to Gigg' ultramarathon, which last year raised nearly £1,000 for charity. The 250acre grounds are home to pitches galore, plus a dance studio, climbing wall and pool. Less energetic but no less excellent is the music provision: musicians have gone on to study at Berkeley, California and London's Trinity Laban. There are three orchestras and many other musical groups, and the inter-house singing and speaking competition is highly antipicated each year (themes have included 'decades' and movie genres). Recent leavers have headed to Durham, Exeter and the University of Hong Kong, while prestigious apprenticeships have been taken up at Jaguar Land Rover and the Ministry of Justice.



GLENALMOND COLLEGE ••

Glenalmond, Perthshire PH1 3RY

Website glenalmondcollege.co.uk **Head** Lucy Elphinstone, since 2025; previously head at Francis Holland Sloane Square **Pupils** 334. Day: 65 boys, 69 girls; boarding: 91 boys, 109 girls Ages 12-18 Term Fees Day: £11,060; boarding: £18,125 Bursaries 32% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actor Robbie Coltrane, golfer Carly Booth, former royal private secretary Baron Geidt Parents not only rate the 'long and proud history' of this traditional 24/7 boarding school, but also how it concentrates on 'the whole of each pupil's development', as well as the 'commitment and drive' of its staff. Plus, adds one: 'The activities are excellent for getting the boys and girls into the hills or onto the lochs at all times of the day and night!' Indeed, whether reaching the Scottish Rugby Plate finals or tackling the gruelling Strathpuffer 24-hour endurance race, the focused students push themselves to the limits. Outdoor education includes conservation, rock climbing and archery - and the new school bike trail is going down a storm with thrill-seekers while the classroom has seen the introduction of a Real World Learning initiative that offers skills to help students thrive in the 21st century, which will run alongside the standard curriculum. (Not that self-expression takes a back seat: the Pipes & Drums band, formed in the 1870s, makes an invigorating din, while visual types are inspired by artist-in-residence Christopher Moss.) There are exchange programmes with schools in the US, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, and students enjoy trips to destinations ranging from Stratford to Spain. Clubs include clay pigeon shooting and reeling skills are displayed at Burns Night and St Andrew's Day cèilidhs. In other news, a recent merger with nearby Craigclowan prep means children can have an all-through educational experience from the ages of three to 18 years old.



GORDONSTOUN ••

Elgin, Moray IV30 5RF Website gordonstoun.org.uk Head Peter Green, since 2024; previously executive head of Rugby School Group Pupils 513. Day: 77 boys, 91 girls; boarding: 199 boys, 146 girls Ages 4-18 Term Fees Day: £15,435; boarding: £19,930 Bursaries 33% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, King Charles III, Olympic rower Heather Stanning The birthplace of The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme lends itself naturally to outdoor pursuits: Gordonstoun claims 'the best classrooms don't have walls'. And while, for example, sailing is compulsory, our researcher observed that removing any choice builds the children's confidence and empathy. (Thus, on arrival in Year 9, the whole cohort goes camping in the Cairngorms National Park, a very Gordonstoun way for them to bond.) Along with the sail training, kayaking, power boating and sports galore, the 200-acre estate is also used for such activities as coastal treks, cliff climbing and orienteering. But come inside and it's far from hearty. The curriculum also includes dance - it's a popular choice at GCSE and Gordonstoun is proud of cultivating individual needs in its charges. Praise is heaped on the pastoral care here and the dedicated houseparents; especially vital for those from overseas, who make up about a third of those boarding. There are 40 nationalities represented at the school, so it gets a big tick in the 'diversity' box.

THE KING'S SCHOOL •• Wrexham Road, Chester

CH4 7QL
Website kingschester.co.uk
Head George Hartley, since 2017;
previously principal of Elizabeth
College, Guernsey Pupils 1,139
day: 683 boys, 456 girls Ages 4–18
Term Fees £6,588 Bursaries 8%
of pupils, up to 100% Alumni
Financial expert Martin Lewis,
GB rower Harry Brightmore,
broadcaster Jonathan Samuels
The King's School calls itself 'una-

shamedly academic', but parents praise its ability to strike a balance, with one saying it 'excels in both academic achievement and extracurricular development'. That much is evident from recent building improvements, including a newly refurbished gym - unveiled by Harry Brightmore, a 2012 leaver who won a gold medal for rowing in the Paris Olympics – as well as the revamped library and new Sixth Form Centre. Students praise the variety of opportunities offered here, from sport to crafts and foreign language films, with many citing it as their favourite thing about King's. The school is proudly future-facing, as witnessed by Friday morning careers breakfasts, when parents or alumni come in before classes to talk about their work. Last year saw almost 80 per cent of A-level results graded A*-B and more than half achieving straight A*-As. To keep stress levels low, two wellbeing nurses can be contacted through students' iPads;

according to a King's spokesperson,

they're a 'godsend through exams'.

LORETTO ••

Linkfield Road, Musselburgh,
East Lothian EH21 7RE
Website loretto.com
Head Pete Richardson, since 2024;
previously Vicegerent of Loretto
Pupils 495. Day: 163 boys, 133
girls; boarding: 112 boys, 87 girls
Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day:
£11,274; boarding: £16,544
Bursaries Variable % of pupils, up
to 100%+ Alumni F1 champion
Jim Clark, journalist Andrew Marr,
historian Clare Jackson

Those scarlet Loretto blazers, our researchers declare, are a genius idea and cheer up even the greyest days in the coastal town of Musselburgh, outside Edinburgh. The school's 85-acre grounds are divided by a busy road, but an underground tunnel solves the problem of waiting for traffic lights and there's a logical separation of the classrooms, music block, theatre and chapel from the accommodation and main school building. (Dating from 1827, it houses the dining hall.) Scotland's oldest boarding school takes great pride in its Caledonian heritage, and in its own traditions. Hence the reinstatement of the annual Loretto Day, a showcase of events bringing together children, parents, staff, alumni and governors and culminating in a cricket match between students past and present. A recurring sentiment expressed by parents and pupils alike is that Loretto feels like a prep school - or as one parent puts it, 'a senior with a prep vibe' - thanks to its smallish cohort and 'lovely cosy campus'. One current pupil says, 'I love that it's not too bustling or loud; and because of the class sizes, you get to know your peers better.' And with full, flexi- and weekly boarding on offer, Loretto's model offers the best of all worlds. One of the school's most treasured assets is its Golf Academy and, with director Adam McKinlay on board, it has gone from strength to strength: PGA professionals now teach some 74 extremely talented members, a large number from overseas families and many seeking to make a career in the game.

PUBLIC NORTH & SCOTLAND

THE MANCHESTER **GRAMMAR SCHOOL** • Old Hall Lane, Manchester M13 0XT

Website mgs.org

Head Dr Martin Boulton, since 2013; previously under master of Westminster School Pupils 1,658 day boys Ages 7-18 Term Fees £6,222 Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Actor Sir Ben Kingsley, cricket journalist Michael Atherton, author and TV presenter Dr Rangan Chatterjee This institution has long aimed to educate the brightest young minds of England's north west, regardless of their social, cultural, religious or financial backgrounds. And clearly, it's doing a sterling job. One of this school's greatest strengths is the diversity of the student body, as evidenced by the assemblies organised by Sixth-formers every Friday. (There are five options - Jewish, Muslim, an Indian forum for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, Christian and non-religious - but many pupils go to whichever they find interesting, irrespective of personal beliefs.) Another is the fee assistance programme, with around 200 full bursaries in place at a cost of £2.6 million in 2024-25. But it's not just about thoughtfulness and philanthropy here. There is a tradition that every child visits the 'Owl's Nest' - a one-time First World War army officers' mess, purchased and relocated to Disley by former High Master JL Paton - which is now used as a base for outdoor trips and camping expeditions. Then there's Activities Week in the summer term, which sees all teaching halted while around 450 boys embark on residential camps at Bassenthwaite, Borrowdale and Grasmere, respectively for mountaineering, water sports and walking. Back in town, work is underway on a dedicated Sixth Form Centre, with study and recreational areas, teaching and office space; and a new sports pavilion is in the pipeline, the majority of its £10 million funding donated by alumni, who are clearly keen to support their exceptional alma mater.



A tradition at The Manchester Grammar School sees every pupil visit the 'Owl's Nest'

– a First World War army officers' mess now used as a base for camping expeditions

MERCHISTON CASTLE SCHOOL •

Colinton Road, Edinburgh EH13 OPU

Website merchiston.co.uk Head Huw Jones, since 2025; previously deputy head of Warminster School Pupils 400 boys: 160 day, 240 boarding Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,000; boarding: £16,902 Bursaries 25% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Rugby union player Ben Afshar, former Governor of the Bank of Scotland Sir Peter Burt, architect John Honeyman

Parents are not offended when their sons prefer to spend weekends at school, as they are famously packed with activities. With a longer than average weekday timetable, traditional classes have been replaced with electives on Saturdays, so students can take part in activities spanning robotics, go-karting, hill walking, theatre trips and, of course, sports; and all this accompanied by downtime in preparation for the academic rigours ahead. Enthusiasm spills into every area at this all-boys boarder, the only one in Scotland. Located just 15 minutes from Edinburgh, Merchiston has a strong track record of leavers going into engineering, maths and tech careers. The integrated Engineering, Design and Computer Science facilities are described by one 'astounded' parent as 'inspiring'. (The school enters pupils into senior maths challenges and is often successful in obtaining Arkwright Engineering Scholarships.) At the time of writing, nine leavers had achieved Oxbridge interviews and, over recent years, many have taken up Ivy League places: impressive for a school which in the past was headlined mainly for its stellar sporting achievements. Merchiston certainly still excels in that arena. Playing fields of all descriptions fill its 100-acre grounds and the first XV have made it to Murrayfield for the Scottish Rugby Schools' Cup many times, with dozens of alumni later selected for Scotland's first team and its U20s. The all-weather tennis courts are now under a permanent dome and the academy for elite players judged the best in the country at last year's LTA Tennis Scotland Awards. And offering greater flexibility for families, Merchiston has introduced a new, accessible, 'core' day pupil option.

ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL •

Garscube Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6BG Website stge.org.uk

Head Carol Chandler-Thompson, since 2022; previously head at Blackheath High School, London Pupils 600. Day: 4 boys, 565 girls; boarding: 31 girls Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £7,941; boarding: £16,285 Bursaries 9% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Women's rights campaigner Marie Stopes, All3Media CEO Jane Turton, psychologist Cordelia Fine

With its gung-ho attitude to girls' education, St George's has come a long way since early editions of the school magazine – established in 1894 and still going strong explored such topics as 'How to Ride a Bicycle Without Loss of Feminine Dignity'. It continues to push boundaries under head Carol Chandler-Thompson, described by one parent as 'a driving force for a culture that thrives, and a continual eye on positive progress for the school and all its pupils'. Service to the wider community is woven into the ethos here: students raise money for good causes; local clubs and charities can use the school facilities; and state students are invited to lessons and workshops. (A recent Women in Computing event was attended by some 600 girls from 13 different schools.) What's more, these St Georgians can clearly grasp complex technical issues, because a group of them has just won a Silver Industrial Cadet award in the CanSat competition – to build a satellite the size of a drinks can while also excelling in a UK Space Design contest with their plans for a mining settlement on the moon. And when they're not solving problems in the heavens, they're at the Model United Nations Conference. As for the fabric of the place: 'There is no other school offering so many facilities in one beautiful campus,' a current parent says. And a 10-year refurbishment programme promises to modernise the school still further, with plans for a new central campus boasting modern teaching areas and a pastoral and wellbeing hub.

Website stleonards-fife.org Head Simon Brian, since 2021; previously deputy head of Charterhouse Pupils 567. Day: 201 boys, 198 girls; boarding: 85 boys, 83 girls Ages 4-18 Term Fees Day: £7,590; boarding: £18,140 Bursaries 6.3% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Former Vogue editor Audrey Withers, tennis player Kitty McKane Godfree, suffragette Margaret Haig Thomas Asked what they would change about this school, one student replied: 'I wish every lesson was longer.' Which suggests it's doing something a whole lot right. And parents certainly think so. ('We expected our children to be well educated,' says one, 'but we have been overwhelmed by the EQ and IQ skills they have developed.') Life at St Leonards isn't all about learning: 150 pupils are on the golf programme - they have access to more Trackman monitors and Flightscopes than any other school in Europe. Elsewhere, a rolling programme of redevelopment continues, with a new theatre-teaching space added to the two drama yurts on campus. The highlight of the musical calendar is the award of the Jull medal, for which talented vocalists compete. And outdoor expeditions explore Scotland's more remote corners. Further afield, geographers head to Iceland; and, there are foreign golf trips aplenty.



ST PETER'S SCHOOL, YORK ●●

Clifton, York YO30 6AB Website stpetersyork.org.uk Head Jeremy Walker, since 2019; previously principal of King's School Rochester Pupils 1,331. Day: 647 boys, 542 girls; boarding: 77 boys, 65 girls Ages 2–18 Term Fees Day: £9,360; boarding: £16,030 Bursaries 4% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Gunpowder plotter Guy Fawkes, cricketer Jonny Bairstow, TV presenter Kat Downes We're told this thriving day co-ed - steeped in 1,400 years of history and the fourth-oldest school in the world - 'runs like a well-oiled machine' without bending to the latest pressures and trends. An increasing number of pupils are supported by bursaries, and a new partnership with the racing car company Ginetta offers financial support and work experience to gifted STEM students looking to study engineering. Meanwhile, a cabinet of medals was recently amassed at the Royal Society of Chemistry's Olympiad competition; St Peter's magazine won Best Cover at the national School Media Awards; and disputive types thrashed it out in the national final of the Joutes Oratoires debating competition. Next up is a new Sixth Form Centre and a larger nursery. St Peter's motto of super antiquas vias (over ancient roads) captures the unique way its heritage supports its innovations. And its informal one - 'Crack on!' - is just as apt.



Sedbergh, Cumbria LA10 5HG Website sedberghschool.org Head Dan Harrison, since 2018; previously second master Pupils 745. Day: 12 boys, 8 girls; boarding: 400 boys, 325 girls Ages 3–18 Term Fees Day: £12,653; boarding: £17,508 Bursaries 72% of pupils, up to 100% Alumni Screenwriter Simon Beaufoy, cricketer Harry Brook, rugby union player Will Greenwood In the heart of a quaint market town; wrapped into the Howgill Fells; with 98 per cent of students living in, Sedbergh is the real deal when it comes to full boarding immersion. As head Dan Harrison remarks, 'At most schools which say they are "boarding", the English pupils actually go home from Friday to Sunday night. But on Saturdays, ours all stay for a full programme, so the weekends are jam-packed.' Not that its denizens are confined to their Northern fastness: the programme of overseas trips includes rugby and cricket tours of South Africa and Sri Lanka respectively, as well as art trips to New York. But at this institution, where tradition meets adventure, there's an awful lot to keep them busy. The legendary Wilson Run – 10 and a half miles of gruelling cross country over Baugh Fell - is a rite of passage, and extracurricular life sets the place apart. This year's production of Chicago raised the roof, with three nights of sold-out shows, plus matinee performances for the local community. (And the whole school was encouraged to take part, becoming involved in costumes, hair and make-up, and sound and lighting.) Sedbergh lives by its code of HARK - humility, ambition, resilience and kindness - and awards are given to those who exemplify those qualities. At the same time, says Harrison, 'We really want to keep them younger for longer, to create magical memories.' And bright futures: in 2024, 88 per cent of leavers secured places at their first-choice or insurance universities, with 44 per cent receiving Russell Group offers.



PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL WATT PHOTOGRAPHY

NORTH & SCOTLAND PUBLIC



STONYHURST ••

Stonyhurst, Lancashire BB7 9PZ Website stonyhurst.ac.uk Head John Browne, since 2016; previously head of St Aloysius' College, Glasgow Pupils 661. Day: 101 boys, 86 girls; boarding: 213 boys, 160 girls Ages 3-18 Term Fees Day: £9,348; boarding: £17,745 Bursaries 63% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, former New York Times CEO Mark Thompson, World Health Organisation co-director professor Gabriel Leung This Jesuit school is dedicated to shaping well-rounded individuals. Extracurricular activities encompass everything from the drone club to astronomy, 3D printing to the Conan Doyle Society. Girls' sports are on a roll, and teams are playing at a national level in rugby, football, cricket, tennis and netball. Indoors, the newly minted Aloysius House - designed specifically for Years 7 and 8, to ease their transition from the junior school to the college has gone down a treat. And at the other end of the age spectrum, the Sixth-form café is a popular space for socialising – and now business, with pupils able to gain practical experience through managing its supplies and operation. Many families have long links - there's currently even a seventh-generation pupil on the roll – and the student body hails from 32 countries; Stonyhurst now offers immersive two-term placements in its language school to support international pupils in the English proficiency needed for the curriculum.

STRATHALLAN ••

Forgandenny, Perth PH2 9EG
Website strathallan.co.uk
Head Mark Lauder, since 2017;
previously head of Ashville College
Pupils 576. Day: 174 boys, 144
girls; boarding: 145 boys, 113 girls
Ages 5–18 Term Fees Day:
£11,126; boarding: £17,009
Bursaries 23% of pupils, up to
100% Alumni Invictus Games
medallist JJ Chalmers, rugby player
Zander Fagerson, GB swimmer
Duncan Scott

There's a notable emphasis on the 'whole child' here; and the breadth of opportunity is fabulous - particularly in sports. 'If you want to play for your country or become an Olympian, that's a realistic prospect,' says the school. Hence the professionally led academies in rugby, shooting, swimming and tennis, and the arrangement whereby every pupil up to the age of 15 represents the school in a team at some level. The facilities and surroundings are staggering: green-fingered pupils have over the past year planted 550 trees around the campus and helped cultivate wildflower meadows to promote biodiversity. Lucky indeed are the bees in the school hives. Lucky, too, the appreciative children tucking in at Harry's - the revamped dining hall - perhaps before a stint at Strathallan Studios, the new record label, offering access to professional producers as well as recording facilities for their original music. Teaching staff are praised across the board, with parents reporting their enthusiasm filters down.

WITHINGTON GIRLS' SCHOOL •

Wellington Road, Manchester M14 6BL

Website wgs.org Head Sarah Haslam, since 2016; previously deputy head Pupils 756 day girls **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees** £6,330 Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni Designer Sarah Burton, director Joanna Natasegara, founder of neuropsychology Brenda Milner Withington is an undeniably academic establishment: its most recent results saw more than 40 per cent of A-levels graded A*, and 55 per cent of GCSEs scoring coveted 9s. But if the school encourages its students to succeed, it isn't afraid of letting them fail so long as they've had a go. And have a go they do: netball and lacrosse are strong and competitive; there are opportunities to practise yoga and dance; and the thriving and eclectic array of clubs, which includes Model United Nations, basketball and an electric harp ensemble, is much-loved by the children, with one saying: 'The number of extracurriculars is massive. I'm constantly wondering what else I can do – although with everything available, I'm never stumped!' Improvements continue to be made to the fresh-air facilities: alongside the outdoor classroom, a pond has been installed by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. In the classroom, there's currently a drive to invest in the training of teachers (who attend fortnightly professional development sessions and collaborate with their peers at Manchester Grammar School to discuss the latest educative thinking). When you consider that 'edupreneurial' guru Ross Morrison McGill asked Withington to be a case study for his book, it must be working. Meanwhile, community outreach is a big deal here - take 'Manchester Sings', a lovely occasion at which six local primaries join Withington Juniors to give voice in the cathedral - and the school gives lessons to local state students and also has a longstanding

commitment to supporting edu-

cational projects in The Gambia.

YARM SCHOOL ••

The Friarage, Yarm TS15 9EJ Website yarmschool.org
Head Dr Huw Williams, since
2019; previously second master of
Tonbridge School Pupils 1,167
day: 583 boys, 584 girls
Ages 3–18 Term Fees £6,788
Bursaries 6.2% of pupils, up to
100%+ Alumni Rower Katherine
Copeland, Conservative politician
Simon Clarke, actor and singer
Yazdan Qafouri

The first co-educational private school in the north-east of England, Yarm was founded in 1978 and rapidly made a name for itself. With waiting lists for each year group, the school encourages pupils to acquire skills that will help them contribute to the workplace, and society as a whole. A busy outdoor education department fosters resilience, leadership and teamwork, while an impressive roster of more than 100 extracurricular clubs offer opportunities for everything from chess and cookery to 'woodland adventures'. As part of a holistic approach to pastoral care, mindfulness is taught across all years, and a qualified emotional health and wellbeing practitioner is on hand. A sense of community is fostered by means of a peer-mentoring programme, while a recent Culture Week celebrated an array of heritages with such events as Bollywood dance workshops, international bake-offs, world-music performances and a photo competition. A recent revamp has spruced-up the facilities, introducing an impressive 750-seat auditorium, a lecture area, boat house and a wonderful library, while the Sixth Form Centre has also been refurbished and extended. Bursaries are available and 100 per cent scholarships are offered to exceptional Sixth-form students with the potential to succeed inside and beyond the gates of Yarm. And it's one of the few schools to participate in the prestigious Arkwright Scholarship programme, whereby the engineering and technical design industries sponsor the enabling, inspiring and nurturing of their future stars.

Little sanctuary

OneWelbeck's newly expanded paediatrics service is your one-stop solution for all your child's important healthcare needs

AS A PARENT, ONE OF THE MOST

stressful things you can go through is dealing with an unwell child. Unfortunately though, it's one of those things it's nigh on impossible to avoid, with the majority of children needing medical attention at one point or another — whether it's to help find and eliminate the cause of chronic ear infections, or to deal with the aftermath of falling off their bike.

Yet if you've ever been in the position of needing paediatric care in London, chances are you've discovered it's a fairly mixed bag in contrast to the adult offering. Not only is there a real lack of private options, but those that do exist are often incredibly disjointed, requiring one appointment for orthopaedics at one location, another for gynaecology somewhere else. It's enough to make even the calmest of individuals tear their hair out a little.

That's where the newly expanded paediatrics department at OneWelbeck comes in. Centrally located between Bond Street and Harley Street, this world-class facility offers parents and children alike one place from which to access multiple medical specialities, with a particularly extensive list of options available for those who are over 12 years of age (and a slightly reduced range of services for children aged over three). It's especially convenient if you need to plan medical appointments for multiple members of the family: a true gift if the entire household has come down with the same illness in one fell swoop which, as all parents will know, is so often the case.

'At OneWelbeck we are delighted to be growing our paediatric services which will provide high quality care and exceptional patient and family experience,' says Catherine Stuart, the centre's head of paediatric nursing.

'We have built our service with children at the heart of it, with trained paediatric staff and



children-friendly environments whilst ensuring children receive the same five-star service that adults do at our centres.'

Offering personalised care from start to finish, the centre was designed by doctors, with a distinctly unclinical feel intended to put both children and parents immediately at ease. Unlike traditional healthcare settings, you will find no scary white-strip lighting or cold and impersonal waiting rooms here – just warm and welcoming environments designed to help patients relax. Similarly, the teams within the centre provide the ultimate reassurance. As

A unique and individualised experience for all children who use our services, ensuring a safe and welcoming environment

highly skilled, experienced and empathetic paediatrics professionals, they really are adept at calming both nervous little ones and their worried parents – all while delivering exceptional care and attention.

'We will provide a unique and individualised experience for all children who use our services, ensuring a safe and welcoming environment,' says Stuart.

It goes without saying that the centre also boasts the most up-to-date technologies, with top-tier amenities to make your visit as comfortable as possible too. With more than 120 specialised consultants, you're guaranteed to find the right doctor - not to mention an appointment slot – to suit you and your child. A vast array of specialisms are represented, including ENT, dermatology and allergies, orthopaedics and sports medicine, neurology, gynaecology, men's health and urology. What's more, there are further specialities coming next year too, such as lung health, with the promise that OneWelbeck will be the most comprehensive paediatric centre in the capital. All imaging such as X-rays and MRIs are done on site too, making treatments seamless and helping to reduce any unnecessary stress children or their parents may feel throughout the process.

There's even an on-site pharmacy, which makes organising after-care nice and straightforward too. After all, when you've finally made it through the gamut of appointments, you just want to head straight home — not navigate another journey to a pharmacist.

'The wellbeing of children directly impacts the future,' explains Stuart. 'Paediatric healthcare services are crucial for ensuring children's health and development, fostering their potential, and contributing to a healthier future for them and society.' Hear, hear.

HITTING the high notes

With their mountain locations, top-flight facilities and steep fees, it's little wonder these Swiss boarding schools are renowned for educating international royals, alongside the progeny of the global elite. And they do their job to perfection, says Tatler's Education Editor after visiting the famous institutions



INSTITUT AUF DEM ROSENBERG

With its vibrant pink railings, roseadorned walkways and art nouveau villas, Institut auf dem Rosenberg feels more like a fairytale scene than a pioneering school. Sitting high above St Gallen, with views across the picturesque town and the Säntis mountain range on one side and Lake Constance on the other, this is bespoke education at its best. And herein lies the key to learning at Rosenberg: there is no set curriculum. Every student has a completely 'couture' syllabus – or Independent Development Plan - in order to maximise their potential.

So, with only 230 pupils on campus, there are 1,850 modules currently being taught. And forget about sets or year-groups: lessons are taken according to each student's ability, not their age. As the head of communications, Manuel Bernardo, explains, 'We have a team that does nothing else, day in, day out, but strategise and tailor to ensure the kids are on track. It doesn't matter if you are six years old, or 12 or 18.' As flexibility of options is essential, every student is prepared for Advanced Placement exams, A-levels or the International Baccalaureate, so the world is their oyster for university choices.

With its international intake, students often speak several languages. (The school teaches 34, guaranteeing no one loses touch with their mother tongue.) The staff-pupil ratio is an impressive 1:2. As might be expected, the facilities are phenomenal, dotted around 14 villas on the 25-acre campus. And when it comes to admissions, the process is as personalised as the education, with Bernardo often flying off to see prospective parents – 99 per cent entrepreneurs, more often than not 'first-generation creators' - in their home cities and finalising the details there.

However, it's only once background checks have been made and security clearance given that families are invited to visit the campus. 'Otherwise we would be over-run

SWISS SCHOO TO TO Rosenberg's 24-acre campus comprises 14 smart villas Fencing is one of 40 athletic options, archery to hip Mission O2, Leadership programme

by tours, and we are not a tourist attraction,' Bernardo laughs. And when they do, they will discover children boarding from five years old. Welcome to the beguiling Bears' Castle, whose generously sized common room comes complete with an indoor swing and giant stuffed panda toys to cuddle. There are currently 15 pupils in this house, where the boys' uniform features a bow- or neck-tie or a silk cravat, according to preference.

Like many aspects of life here, that dress code manages to offer both tradition and modernity. Founded in 1889, the school has been owned and run by the Gademann family since the 1930s, with Bernhard Gademann and his

wife, Anita, now headmaster and head of innovation respectively. And with its incomparable Creative Lab, innovation is certainly key. Instead of being confined to the normal curriculum, learning is intertwined with such horizon-expanding ventures as classes led by industry experts and university professors who can demonstrate the real-life relevance of their studies.

Take the problem-solving project that resulted in students collaborating to think up the school's new post office, bringing in the latest technology and computing. ('You come in, you hold your card on the reader, and it will pop open a little box where all your letters are,' says Bernardo.) Or the partnership with

the Danish SAGA Space Architects, which culminated in the world's tallest 3D polymer structure – the 'Rosie' space habitat, designed for life on the moon – although it's currently in the school's garden overlooking the lake.

The school's history is apparent, too, with stained glass windows in the ballet and fencing rooms, a gym decorated with listed murals, a stunning art pavilion for creatives and, perhaps most importantly, the bar with a DJ box for parties. At 165,000 Swiss francs (£148,095) per annum, such a highly personalised education doesn't come cheap, but that doesn't seem to detract from its appeal to the global wealth creators and their progeny.

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INSTITUT LE ROSEY

'The closest thing to skiing in Nigeria is slipping on your marble floor with socks on. But I've progressed so much that I'm now on the team,' says one pupil. When you consider its breathtaking campus in Gstaad – where the school decamps from January to March it's easy to focus on Le Rosey's snow sports, but that misses the point. Both this site and the main 69-acre one in Rolle, near Lake Geneva, are hives of dynamic pedagogy; and as the general director Christophe Gudin says, this is an arrangement that 'pushes our students to adapt'. He continues: 'The reality is, you come into one school and you start to get your bearings. Three months later, you're moving to a different school, where there's a different schedule, a different everything.'

Since its foundation in 1880 – with a roll of just four students, each of different nationality – diversity has been key at Le Rosey and, according to Gudin, the school

currently cares for pupils from 72 countries, some of whom even have three or four passports. Everyone is taught in French and English; there are 25 further languages that can be studied; and in this multifarious atmosphere, Roseans become not only culturally sensitive but habituated to life as members of today's globetrotting elite.

Education centres on 'multiple intelligences', including academic, sporting and artistic programmes, and the incredible facilities at Rolle ensure there are world-class opportunities in each of these areas. In the classroom, everyone is prepared for either the International or French Baccalaureates, and leavers head

off around the globe to leading institutions. (In this, they are ably supported by a Futures Department, which invites university admissions officers to an unsurprisingly popular annual conference in Gstaad.) In addition, the brand-new Philo Centre at Rolle – with seven labs, including two 250-square-metre mega-labs, 70 new classrooms and space for gaining real-life experience through resident start-ups – takes schooling to another level.

Meanwhile, sports at Rolle range from sailing at the Fleur d'Eau aquatic centre – on 100 metres of Lake Geneva's shoreline – to riding in the school's own equestrian centre. Artistic endeavours are

housed in the eye-catching Paul & Henri Carnal Hall, whose vast steel dome covers a 900-seat auditorium, in which The Royal Philharmonic played the inaugural concert in 2014, as well as Le Rosey's resident orchestra, the International Menuhin Music Academy. Also under its roof are 16 studios, as well as workrooms and facilities for creating sculpture, glassware and textiles; and for gastronomes, there's a teaching restaurant and kitchen.

To keep some perspective, Le Rosey insists its charges are polite and compassionate. Each year students sign up to a strict honour code. This includes the statement that 'dreams, promises and commitments are meaningless unless translated into action'. And Gudin also notes that, while there is no uniform, 'We're not in America. So if you see a pupil walking around in a hoodie, he should be in trouble.' Instead the children here learn to choose the right clothing for the right occasions. Mealtimes come with an expectation of good manners; and with such delicious treats as canard and chocolate soufflé on the menu, they're only too happy to comply.

Then there are the awe-inspiring trips, adventures and expeditions; for example to the school's Chyulu Wilderness Camp in Kenya where, gazing out at Mount Kilimanjaro, the teenagers can immerse themselves in the lives of the Maasai Mara tribes and even go off-grid without phones or access to wifi.

Annual fees are 154,000 Swiss francs (£138,586). With so much opportunity, Gudin muses there may be the misconception that this is a 'snobby' school but, as he explains: 'There is an element of level-playing field, because the children know most of their peers also come from wealthy families so this is not how you're going to distinguish yourself. You will always find somebody wealthier than you.' Instead, Roseans must rely on the courtesy and excellent education with which this unique, dualcampus school has endowed them.

COLLÈGE ALPIN BEAU SOLEIL

'A boarding school is essentially doing cool stuff with interesting people,' says dynamic head Stuart White. But it helps when it's literally a castle perched on a mountain. With an atmosphere more akin to a boutique resort than a place of learning, Beau Soleil is both homely and beautiful. Having moved from Gstaad to its present location in Villars-sur-Ollon in 1920, it comprises a central castle building with modern extensions on each side. Even the oldest parts of the school have windows that offer breathtaking vistas of the Great St Bernard Pass, the Alpine landmark that gave its name to the life-saving dogs.

The 300 students here are cared for by 200 staff; everyone knows each other, even though there are more than 55 different nationalities represented. Lessons are taught in French or English. According to White, the admissions criteria are simple: 'Number one, are you a nice person? Number two, are you enthusiastic?' Given the broad range of abilities, with about a third of the students neurodiverse, the IB outcomes are impressive: the class of 2024 achieved an average of 36.7 points before heading off to universities mainly in the UK and US.

Quite apart from the ski-lifts on its doorstep, Beau Soleil's facilities are exceptional. In partnership with the New York Conservatory, the Juilliard School, and following its curriculum, there are music, drama and performance spaces. There's an enormous outdoor patio for summer barbecues and pool parties, and – somewhat surprisingly – a full-sized indoor basketball court right in the middle of the school. Students are prepared for future careers with a Professional Learning Programme, which encompasses beekeeping, winemaking and the obligatory ski instructor's certification. And the pupil-run 17g coffee bar sees them participating in all aspects of its business from marketing to qualifying as baristas.

With annual fees of 165,950 Swiss francs (£148,948) and no bursary provision, there is 'normalised privilege' as White describes it - 'They don't go shopping in Gucci to make a point, that's just where they go shopping' - so the children can't boost their self-esteem with mere wealth. Notably, the school lays on as many outdoor activities as possible, such as seven annual challenges, one of which sees pupils traverse a 10K run through the valley. (Everyone dresses up and cheers, bringing an enormous sense of community fun.) Beau Soleil also offers up to 50 foreign trips a year, from climbing Hualca Hualca in Peru to sailing in the Seychelles, but White does insist 'they all fly economy'.





AIGLON COLLEGE

'At Aiglon, we work with such small class sizes that we can deliver a holistic education that is utterly unique for that child. No one has to be pigeonholed,' says its director of student expectations James Piggott. Rightly known for its adventure curriculum and breathtaking location, Aiglon is just as proud of its academics, music – it's an All-Steinway Institution – and character building.

Started in 1949 by John Corlette (who was inspired by his friend and mentor Kurt Hahn, the founder of Gordonstoun and UWC Atlantic College), its distinctive ethos values the balanced development of mind, body and spirit; and this underpins everything here, both inside and outside the classroom. As does a commitment to non-profit status, with its scholars' bursaries enriching the student body through socio-economic and geographical diversity. As school director Nicola Sparrow says, 'You will often see a classroom where you have a scholarship student sitting next to someone from a royal family, and we want them to feel equal and have equal access to education.'

And to some amazing facilities, such as the 21st-century sports hall housed in the Tony Jashanmal Building or the new Moghadam

Campus Hub offering an expansive dining and assembly space (a recent \$6 million donation – the largest gift in Aiglon College's history – is being used for ambitious campus plans). For somewhere that charges 159,000 Swiss francs (£142,710) per annum, it has a certain discreet and unpretentious air: the school imposes a strict pocket-money limit on younger year groups, and flashing well-known designer brands is banned on campus.

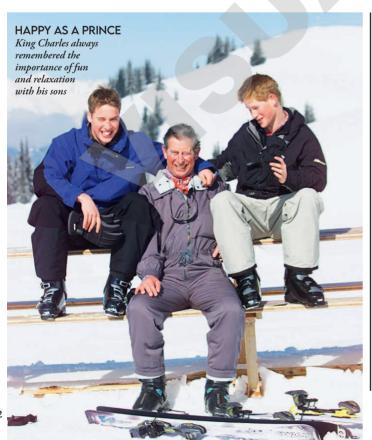
The 480 students here work hard to earn their stripes. They might be training with World Cup Alpine ski race champion Lindsey Vonn or joining the Bear Grylls Survival Academy to avail themselves of its teamwork-skills and mentoring programmes. And when they are not on the slopes – be they studying glaciers for geography or mountain biking in the summer months they're at the VEX Robotics world championship finals in Dallas, or working hard on the IB syllabus (with more than 20 per cent of last year's leavers achieving scores in excess of 40).

Talking of leave-takings, one tradition stands out: the annual torchlit Graduand Descent, which sees a procession of graduates skiing from Les Bouquetins down to Col de Soud, where everyone enjoys a celebratory dinner. *Allez!* □



RELAX, JUST DO IT

It's time for parents to stop beating themselves up, to re-draw boundaries and simply enjoy striving to be 'good enough'. So says Dr Tara Porter, who sees modern society's quest for perfectionism, with its relentless promotion of go-getting and high achievement, as a blight on healthy child-raising



WHEN I WAS A CLINICAL

psychologist for my local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service – and a school governor – I became used to parents approaching me in the playground with concerns, questions or gripes: sometimes they were worried about their child's happiness, behaviour or anxiety. Sometimes they were fretting about school lunches, the ethos or the homework. But often they were agonising over their offspring's progress or achievement.

On one occasion, a fellow mum in my own child's class approached me on a mission, and launched into her concerns about her son's reading. He wasn't picking it up, and what was she to do? I empathised: one of my children had also been slow to read, and it's a worrying and frustrating time for any parent. But how to solve it, she

demanded of me – because she wanted him to go to Westminster or City of London?

More than a decade later, this interaction has stayed in my mind. It wasn't dissimilar to many others I've had, but that one did seem to typify a belief – and consequent attitude – that I've often encountered since qualifying as a clinical psychologist in 1997 and becoming a parent myself in 2000. The belief that we can mould our kids into what we want.

I've mulled this over a lot as I've sat with thousands of teenagers paralysed by the anxiety caused by expectations of high achievement and perfection: girls who regularly self-harm but would never skip a class or get a B; boys disillusioned by school and resentful about work, and engaged in (or perhaps even addicted to) gaming or murky

online porn. Adolescents who, however hard they try or whatever they accomplish, never feel they're quite good enough and are stuck in relentless cycles of chasing something better, or have kind of given up.

There are lots of causes behind the mental health crisis in children and young people. Social media and associated internet horrors feature high up - while Covid took a terrible toll on many - and greater awareness and less stigma around the subject have contributed to more honesty from sufferers. But less discussed is the attitude of striving for 'better and more' that has infiltrated, possibly infected, our parenting and education system.

On one level, who can argue against people wanting upward mobility or the best for their kids? That's a no-brainer, right? We would arguably be neglectful if we didn't strive for our children. But those born this century have likely had the most opportunities, received the most certificates and grades, been the most observed and certainly the most photographed - in human history. And I wonder if the aforementioned mental health crisis is a sign that we have taken it too far, over a tipping point where our striving has actually become unhelpful?

What I've seen in the last and current generation of parents, of whom I am one – products perhaps of Thatcher's Britain - is the development of a belief that, if we work hard enough and want something badly enough, we can acquire or achieve it. But if this go-getting attitude can work well with our own careers or lives, it's not, I'm afraid, applicable to raising children. It's not the case that if we schedule and tutor and plan and organise, we can send them to the 'right' school or university and secure them a happy life. Indeed, clinical and research data suggest it could damage them: adolescents at high-achieving schools in the US, in systems of pressure with parental expectations and high-achieving peers, have mental illness six or seven times the rates of mental distress as national norms.

Psychologically, there are a couple of things going on. Many people are driven by a type of perfectionism - always seeking what is just out of reach – which drives them to sacrifice rest to increased effort, to tidy up more, to answer one more email; and if they have kids, to push them to do a bit more work, to practise their music longer and eat a healthier diet. But for the children, this can mean they never feel good enough - and we psychologists know that's really bad for their mental health: it's linked to anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and eating disorders, depression and self-harm.

And yet our society is one in which perfectionism is constantly venerated and actively admired: an evil dictator with very good press. Perfectionism can be transmitted to children by a number of routes. First, the constant anxiety and stress that it can inflict on adults is highly contagious. Second, it gets in the way of the former seeing the sons or daughters they truly have and connecting with them. Third, it prevents parents from putting their relationship with their offspring front-and-centre because, being pulled into the world's external standards, they believe their children ought to be doing this or that; and over the years, the kids

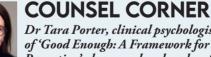


absorb the attitude that what matters isn't their own thoughts and feelings but those of other people.

By the time they are teenagers, highly invested in their peer relationships and suggestible to social media, some can become completely preoccupied by what others think of them; some to feel disenfranchised from life itself and to have given up trying to please anyone because it seems unachievable.

What we really should want for our children is that they have their own intrinsic motivation, which comes not from reaching our expectations but from finding their own. Of course, they require opportunities and support to do that - they need a good enough home - but not a relentless schedule of selfimprovement and classes and no time to relax or play. (And nor do you.) So at an early age, they should be read bedtime stories, not forcefed phonics to give them the competitive edge at six. They should eat enough nutritious food without every morsel being organic or sugarfree. They should have enough sleep without any consternation if the routine is dropped for one night.

But maybe – to the parent – this approach sounds like a cop-out, an excuse to be lazy or not try? Not at all. It demands self-reflection, balance and the emotional maturity not to compete. It means letting go of the illusion of control; and a willingness to 'show up' in a relationship with your child, whether or not they're a high achiever or indeed anything like you. As Carl Jung famously said, 'the greatest burden a child must bear is the unlived life of its parents'. But do you know what? When given a good enough environment and their own free will, children often turn into outstanding adults.



Dr Tara Porter, clinical psychologist and author of 'Good Enough: A Framework for Modern Parenting', draws on her decades of experience to support and empower parents with sage advice

- Follow your child's interests on activities
- Keep an eye on their academic progress, and provide some support in reading and homework
- Allow child-led and free play
- Be with your child with warmth and interest in them

- Impose multiple activities of your own choice
- Employ a bank of tutors to get them into the most fiercely competitive schools (where they then won't be able to keep up)
- Commodify every play opportunity or make everything about learning
- Lead most interactions with what they should be doing

















Eliza wears cardigan, £1,950, and shirt, £880, BRUNELLO CUCINELLI. Trousers, £650, ROCHAS. Shoes, £126, BOBBIES. The mother wears top, £801, skirt, £2,061, and belt, £675, ETRO. Shoes, £860, CASADEI. Dottie wears jacket, £500, and trousers, POA, BABY DIOR. Shoes, £30, SCHUH. Radio, ROBERTS RADIO. Blanket, GRANGER HETZOG. Napkins, from £24, mug set, £36, dinner and side plate set, £64, and five-piece cutlery set, £32, ROSIE DALIA. Teapot, PEGGY PORSCHEN BELGRAVIA. Strawberry tarts, PAUL. Cakes, OTTOLENGHI, OLE & STEEN







alisontod.co.uk

Carolina Herrera

Children Salon childrensalon.com Chloé chloe.com Clarks clarks.com

Dior dior.com

Etro etro.com

Granger Hertzog

House of Bruar houseofbruar.com J&M Davidson

La Coqueta lacoquetakids.com Le Kilt lekilt.co.uk

Malone Souliers

Manolo Blahnik

Paul paul-uk.com

ralphlauren.co.uk Rachel London

rachel-london.com Roberts Radio robertsradio.com

Self Portrait self-portrait.com

Tommy Hilfiger tommy.com

Vince vince.com







London

BASSETT HOUSE SCHOOL ••

60 Bassett Road W10 6JP
Website bassetths.org.uk
Head Chris Woodward
Pupils 150 day: 71 boys, 79 girls
Ages 2–11 Term Fees £9,179
Parents here praise the 'grounded, inclusive atmosphere', and peers who 'aren't just driven by materialism'. And those considering BHS

will be pleased to know that not

only are there plans to open a

STEAM centre, but the cosy co-ed

is now accepting children from the age of two rather than three. The nursery offers French, Spanish and yoga sessions; popular clubs include ballroom dancing, beatboxing and riding; and elsewhere the girls' football team is thriving, while children of all ages are charged with maintaining the Church Garden. 'What I love most about this place is that it pushes us to be the best, and to try the best we can,' says one pupil, the only change they'd make being to 'bring back school dogs'.

BRIGHTON COLLEGE PREP KENSINGTON • •

10–13 Prince's Gardens SW7 1ND

Website brightoncollegeprep kensington.co.uk

Head Lois Gaffney Pupils 360 day: 191 boys, 169 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees £12,264

Despite being very much in its infancy – only opening its doors in September 2023 – this co-ed South Kensington prep school is already oversubscribed, with around seven applications per place. We're not surprised: not only does it happen to boast 'one of the best locations in London', as a recent visitor put it, but it also lures in 'phenomenal' specialist teachers. The facilities

are next-level, too: from the two acres of sprawling gardens, directly behind the school's white stucco buildings, to the state-of-the-art 'Makerspace' complete with lasercutters, 3D printers, and hi-tech equipment for robotics, coding, electronics and more. And when it comes to activities, the Imperial College pool, its 'ginormous' sports centre and Hyde Park are just next door. It's a combination of stellar attributes that clearly works. In a recent survey, an astonishing 100 per cent of parents reported that their children were happy at school, while the first Year 8 leavers' cohort secured places at such top seniors as Wellington, Charterhouse and, of course, Brighton College.

PREP

BROOMWOOD ••

68–74 Nightingale Lane SW12 8NR Website broomwood.com

Heads Michael Hodge (principal and boys), Louisa McCafferty (girls), Caron Mackay (pre-prep) **Pupils** 569 day: 294 boys, 275 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** £9,722 Kudos from one parent for the caring approach of 'warm, friendly, welcoming' principal Michael Hodge. They add that Broomwood is 'not your typical London prep in many ways', and you can tell that from its structure: the school is spread across four locations within walking distance of each other; and children can start at the pre-school and then pre-prep, where both genders learn together until Year 3. Music is encouraged - more than 70 per cent learn an instrument – and the orchestra is extremely popular. Drama is also vibrant, and there is a strong track record of thespians securing scholarships to senior schools. As for pastoral care, it's top-notch and pupil-led.

BUTE HOUSE •

Luxemburg Gardens W6 7EA Website butehouse.co.uk

Head Sian Bradshaw **Pupils** 329 day girls Ages 4-11 Term Fees £9,398 Brook Green-based Bute House is open from 7am to 6pm, which makes it very popular with working parents. But there's a lot to be crammed into those long days, too, with sports being very competitive - facilities are shared with St Paul's Girls – and the swimming, netball and gymnastic squads regularly achieving regional and national success. Guided by the motto 'Each girl runs her own best race', pupils are not ranked against each other; and a supportive environment is further fostered by a dedicated internet portal, which helps them navigate friendships and the stresses of modern life (not to mention the new wellbeing hub, where the girls can dance, practise yoga and meditate). Clearly, the school's recipe is effective. Between 2021 and 2023, Bute House leavers scored a cool total of 216 scholarships.



CONNAUGHT HOUSE SCHOOL ••

47 Connaught Square W2 2HL Website connaughthouseschool.co.uk Head Victoria Hampton Pupils 75 day: 38 boys, 37 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £8,988

'The school's greatest strength is its principal, Victoria Hampton,' says one parent, who also commends the 'individualised attention, due to small class sizes' and a 'family-like atmosphere'. Sequestered in a townhouse a stone's throw from Marble Arch, this family-run institution largely attracts local residents in the Paddington and Marylebone areas.

Some lucky students walk through Hyde Park to get there; and its central location guarantees some brilliant school trips, such as visits to the British Museum and the National Theatre. The wide range of extracurriculars on offer include comic books, Lego robotics and baking clubs. (The latter, which has a long waiting list, arose from a student council request.) Meanwhile, the school's focus on charity and giving back is maintained through a yearly readathon and such initiatives as clothing donations to the Marylebone Project and Easter egg collections for St John's Hospice.



DULWICH PREP LONDON ••

38–42 Alleyn Park SE21 7AA Website dulwichprepsenior.org.uk Head Louise Davidson Pupils 812 day and boarding: 789 boys, 23 girls Ages 2–16 Term Fees £9,745

Set in 29 acres, the biggest boys' prep in the UK can be found in the heart of Dulwich. Although, now, it's no longer exclusively a prep. The school has added a senior section and in September 2025 welcomed some 20 pupils aged 13-plus - a number that is due to grow to 60 per year - to a space conceived with more mature learning in mind, complete with study pods and breakout spaces that utilise round Harkness tables designed for deep, democratic discussions. Meanwhile, the pre-prep building has been expanded and the nursery provision extended to accommodate twoyear-olds. The treats they have in store! The associate musician in residence has been sparking imaginations with his drive to remix classical organ music; a West End theatre director presides over the enormous drama studio; and if boys need some time out, they can head straight from the playground to the wellbeing corridor, which the students themselves helped to design.

LONDON PREP

EATON HOUSE THE MANOR SCHOOL ••

58 Clapham Common North Side SW4 9RU

Website eatonhouseschools.com Head Sarah Segrave (boys), Claire Fildes (girls) Pupils 634 day: 427 boys, 207 girls Ages 4–13 (boys), 4–11 (girls) Term Fees £9,855 (boys), £9,590 (girls)

'We have the best supper-table conversations,' says one mother, pleased with how astute her son has become since starting at Eaton House The Manor. Through roughly 60 after-school clubs - such as running and politics and current affairs – it prioritises the passions of each pupil; and its professionalcalibre theatre allows them to stage excellent shows that employ elaborate costumes and special effects. Sport, meanwhile, includes cricket and football on Clapham Common. And back in its own grounds, two school buildings - one for boys, one for girls - allow the children to reap the benefits of same-gender education while still mingling with the opposite sex.

EATON SQUARE SCHOOL ••

55–57 Eccleston Square SW1V 1PH

Website eatonsquareschools.com Head Trish Watt Pupils 258 day: 145 boys, 113 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £10,650

Sprawling across three tall, white Pimlico townhouses, one of nonselective Eaton Square's strengths is its supportive faculty: 'The teachers are really open to new ideas, listen to students' opinions and try to make the school welcoming,' says one pupil. Alongside an extensive sporting programme – the swimmers travel to Tenerife every year for a specialist camp – there's also a strong focus on public speaking; and at this TEDx-accredited centre, the children are encouraged to create their own Ted Talks. Following a revamp of the nurseries and the addition of a brand-new STEAM room, next up is an expansion of the art and DT provision. Expect sewing machines and 3D printers.



L'ÉCOLE DE BATTERSEA •• Trott Street SW11 3DS

Website lecoledebattersea.co.uk Head Cecilia Beylefeld Principal Laurent Balerdi Pupils 273 day: 141 boys, 132 girls Ages 3–11 Term Fees £6,615

The unique selling point of L'Ecole de Battersea is that it gives an education in two languages - and cultures. Picking the best from both, this means the British sense of humour is cultivated through dressing-up days, shows and parties (not to mention annual guided tours of the Houses of Parliament, as well as Shakespeare festivals); but luckily for the pupils, it also means a French approach to food, with lunches running to three sophisticated courses. Every day starts with a 30-minute sports session, and students tend to be keen on fencing, which is part of the curriculum from Year 3 onwards and taught in both English and French. Trips roam the UK and France, and much fun is had in the newly renovated playground. Laurent Balerdi is the incoming principal, and promises to maintain the school's warm, supportive atmosphere.

FAIRLEY HOUSE ••

218–220 Lambeth Road SE1 7JY

Website fairleyhouse.org.uk Head Michael Taylor Pupils 91 day: 62 boys, 29 girls Ages 4–12 Term Fees £15,492

'All of a sudden, nothing is impossible.' The school's official motto perfectly encapsulates its mission of helping dyslexic pupils (as well as those with dyspraxia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia) who struggle in mainstream education to discover a love of learning and realise their full potential. And that's why its student houses are named after such celebrities with learning difficulties as Daniel Radcliffe and Keanu Reeves. Fairley House offers admission throughout the academic year; prizegivings are held weekly; the Archbishop's Park offers wonderful sporting opportunities; and lessons are due to start in a new, state-ofthe-art building in late 2026. 'Fairley House recognises the steps made by every child in overcoming challenges,' says one parent. 'It really does have a "magic formula" that helps them grow in confidence and enjoy all aspects of school life.' FALKNER HOUSE ••

20 Penywern Road SW5 9SU; 19 Brechin Place SW7 4QB

Website falknerhouse.co.uk Head Eleanor Dixon (boys), Flavia Rogers (girls)

Pupils 305 day: 148 boys, 157 girls **Ages** 4–11 **Term Fees** £9,799

Falkner House's boys are smart enough, but the girls' uniforms are something else: their navy capes trimmed with red, and knitted red hats adorned with magnificent tassels, make them instantly identifiable. Still, sartorial style isn't the only selling point of this family-run school split between two same-sex sites. Jaunts to major galleries are commonplace and there are PE sessions in Holland and Battersea Parks. Meanwhile, martial arts and dance are popular, and students can take part in mixed-gender productions. (A recent performance of songs from musicals brought the house down.) With leavers heading to the likes of Latymer Upper School, St Paul's and Westminster, this prep strikes the right balance between caring for children and cultivating big ambitions along the way for them too.

PREP

FRANCIS HOLLAND PREPARATORY SCHOOL •

15 Manresa Road SW3 6NB Website francishollandprep.org.uk Head Suzy Dixon Pupils 230 day girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £10,524

This ambitious yet nurturing prep has 'exceeded all our expectations', according to one delighted parent. As for Suzy Dixon, she's 'everything you could want in a head' and she has 'worked tirelessly' to ensure the move from Sloane Square to Manresa Road has been seamless. (In September 2024, the school relocated to new premises in the leafy heart of Chelsea, doubling its space and, crucially, enabling it to extend its awardwinning education to at least 100 more girls.) These children are encouraged to be curious; and the curriculum is broad and exciting, underpinned by 89 clubs that embrace everything from debating and finance to fencing and cookery. With nearly 80 per cent of the intake moving up to the Francis Holland Seniors, pupils can make a smooth transition into two of London's most sought-after all-girls institutions, while other popular destinations include Putney High, St Paul's Girls and St Mary's Ascot.

Sport is very strong at Glendower, with the ski squad particularly zippy, bombing down runs at the IAPS championships in Italy

FULHAM PREP SCHOOL •• 200 Greyhound Road W14 9SD Website fulham.school

Website fulham.school Head Thomas Lewis Pupils 325 day: 194 boys, 131 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees £8,481

'Mr Lewis has arrived as a breath of fresh air!' says one parent. 'He's everywhere,' says another. 'He's so involved, and knows the names of every child, mother, father and sibling, as well as - unbelievablythose of their pets.' Meanwhile, the Year 6 summer show is always a highlight, as is a spring extravaganza that sees pupils showcase their talents. Four choirs and 12 ensembles keep singers and instrumentalists in tune, and music technology is popular with budding producers. As has long been the case, many pupils start their Fulham journey aged two at the pre-prep. But a big change has been the closure of the senior school: after Year 8, leavers will now have priority entry to the associated Wetherby Pembridge Olympia, which opened this year.

GARDEN HOUSE SCHOOL ••

Turks Row SW3 4TW
Website gardenhouseschool.co.uk
Head Richard Lock (boys),
Emma Studd (girls) Pupils 451
day: 183 boys, 268 girls

Ages 3–11 **Term Fees** £9,600 The Garden House motto translates from Latin as 'Not for one, but for all', and this is at the heart of a Kindness Code that has shaped this school's ethos for more than a third of its 75-year existence. Here, girls and boys are separated for academics but come together for extracurriculars, of which there are many. Musicians give concerts at the Cadogan Hall; a recent production of The Sound of Music was staged in a West End theatre; and clubs range from debating to Lego robotics. The optional ParentEd talks, which explore how children can be supported at home, cover such lofty topics as 'the importance of thinking scientifically' and 'philosophy for children'.

GLENDOWER PREP SCHOOL •

86–87 Queen's Gate SW7 5JX Website glendowerprep.org Head Claire Boyd Pupils 270 day girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £10,428

Glendower was founded with a mission to provide an academically ambitious and intellectually uncompromising education to girls at a time when that was the preserve of boys. This mission remains central, as evidenced by the new Her Voice Leads programme, consisting of philosophy-driven seminars that explore the impact of influential female leaders and thinkers. Meanwhile, a wholly modern reworking of The Jungle Book captivated audiences and, elsewhere, creativity is sparked by the Year 3 Silent Movies project. The new head of art promises to invigorate self-expression; and sport is strong, with the ski squad particularly zippy – bombing down runs at the IAPS championships in Italy.

THE HALL SCHOOL •

23 Crossfield Road NW3 4NU Website hallschool.co.uk Head Carl Rycroft Pupils 474 day boys Ages 4–13 Term Fees £10,344

Before they became parents, one couple spotted a group of Hall boys 'walking down the road with great verve'. That inspired them later to send their three boys to this academic establishment – which offers a broad experience of education and the results did not disappoint. As they now say, 'The school very much fosters a "growth mindset" and is particularly skilled at creating an environment where the children note and celebrate one another's achievements.' Meanwhile, the recent upgrade of the senior school buildings has been completed, introducing some smart specialised science, IT, arts and performance rooms. (The latter will be particularly useful for the 93 per cent of boys who learn musical instruments.) But from song club to DT and podcasting, there's truly never a dull moment at The Hall.



LONDON PREP



HORNSBY HOUSE SCHOOL ••

Hearnville Road SW12 8RS Website hornsbyhouse.org.uk Head Edward Rees Pupils 437 day: 210 boys, 227 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £8,082

'As soon as I walked into Hornsby, I felt at home,' says one parent, who describes the head, Edward Rees, as 'approachable and down to earth'. As most pupils live within walking or cycling distance, there's a focus here on serving the local community. The same generosity of spirit is reflected in the provision of five specialist SEND teachers and assistants. Away from book learning, every student displays artwork in the annual summer exhibition, takes off-site jaunts to Forest School and can join one of four choirs. Work has started on extending and refurbishing the main building; and this will result in a fabulous new performing arts space - which will doubtless be put to good use, given that the staff recently staged a surprise nativity play for children and parents – the head of the Lower School rode in astride a real camel!

KENSINGTON PREP SCHOOL ●

596 Fulham Road SW6 5PA
Website kensingtonprep.gdst.net
Head Rachel Floyd
Pupils 300 day girls Ages 4–11

Pupils 300 day girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £8,704

Families clamour to get their girls into this Fulham-based school, whose appeal, says one parent, is that it 'strives to perfectly balance inspiring children to learn - for the passion of learning – while preparing them for the 11-plus exams'. Underpinning this approach is the motto 'Growing great minds'; so curiosity, contentment and creativity are cultivated here. Extracurricular options include artistic gymnastics, coding and football (in partnership with Fulham FC), and on the recently introduced outdoor classroom days, the whole school joins in such activities as building fires and planting. The popular head is moving on, and whoever takes over will inherit a happy, wholesome and high-achieving - establishment, which tends to send leavers to the likes of St Paul's Girls, Putney High and Godolphin & Latymer.

KNIGHTSBRIDGE SCHOOL ••

67 Pont Street SW1X 0BD Website knightsbridgeschool.com Head Shona Colaço Pupils 379 day: 190 boys, 189 girls Ages 3–16 Term Fees £10,789

Knightsbridge School certainly makes the most of its location. Students recently designed a menu in collaboration with the nearby Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park and even sampled some dishes whipped up by its chef - while, surely inspired by their chic surroundings, they also attended a JCA London Fashion Academy workshop led by Jimmy Choo himself. Children participated in an entrepreneur competition for which they presented sustainable product ideas to businesspeople, and spent as much energy in raising money for charity as well. Budding actors perform at the Chelsea Theatre, while the school choir performs carols for nurseries and nursing homes. 'KS's biggest strength is that it is such a happy place, where each child can be themselves and find their way,' concludes one parent.

NEWTON PREP SCHOOL ••

149 Battersea Park Road SW8 4BX

Website newtonprepschool.co.uk Head Graeme McCafferty Pupils 641 day: 346 boys, 295 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees £9,780

A truly 'fresh and forward-thinking school' with an 'unstuffy vibe', according to one recent visitor, Newton Prep is a hidden south London gem. Even longtime locals report their surprise and delight when they discover its unusually vast facilities, which include a large all-weather pitch, three sports halls, a dance studio and an orchard garden. Parents love that this is a prep that 'cares about academics and supports the children to reach their maximum potential' without being a hothouse. This makes for decidedly well-rounded, kind and happy pupils who relish their time here. 'I've done things,' one told us, 'that I never would've thought of.'

NORLAND PLACE SCHOOL ••

162–166 Holland Park Avenue W11 4UH

Website norlandplace.com Head Patrick Mattar Pupils 230 day: 115 boys, 115 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees £9,574

It is housed in three conjoined and impressive buildings in Holland Park, but parents love how Norland Place is neither 'overly smart' nor flashy. Instead, it 'has its priorities right', with staff that are 'genuinely invested', who always 'strive for the best for children'. In turn, the students enjoy their time here so much that they can sometimes be found wearing their uniforms on weekends; a reminder of the 'amazing community' they adore being a part of. 'I feel like I'm in a big family,' one current pupil tells us - and they certainly are one. Most live within a 20-minute walk from the school, some have parents or grandparents who also attended, and all the children are heavily involved in the neighbourhood, whether they're visiting care homes or supporting local charities.

PREP LONDON

NOTTING HILL PREP SCHOOL ••

95 Lancaster Road W11 1QQ Website nottinghillprep.com Head Maxine Shaw Pupils 385 day: 184 boys, 201 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees £13,575

Of this nurturing establishment which focuses on emotional intelligence, mindfulness and resilience building - one parent says: 'It is far more than just a place to teach reading and writing.' The learning is based on the principles of Edward de Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats' for Facts, Creativity, Cautions, Emotions, Thinking and Positives - an approach that encourages curious and inquisitive minds. And impressively, this is currently the only prep in Britain to whom Exeter University has awarded the status of an advanced accredited Thinking School. But, most importantly, as per one happy parent, 'It feels like a big family, in which everyone looks out for each other.'

ORCHARD HOUSE SCHOOL ••

16 Newton Grove W4 1LB

Website orchardhs.org.uk Head Henrietta Adams Pupils 410 day: 194 boys, 216 girls Ages 3-11 Term Fees £8,811 It's always a good sign when parents report that their children 'run into school each morning without looking back, and come out each day smiling, sharing what they've done'. Such is the case at Orchard House, the co-ed prep loved by parents for its close-knit community, bespoke curriculum, 'personable approach' and 'excellent' pastoral care. Parents also speak highly of its 'strong network of SENCO support', including a life coach as well as speech, language and occupational therapists. And as for the students themselves, they tell us the padel lessons, 'amazing' trips and STEM subjects are what they love most; the latter largely thanks to the sparkling new innovation hub, which offers everything from a 3D printer and green-screen studio and learning activities such as coding for Lego Spike challenges.

PARKGATE HOUSE SCHOOL ••

80 Clapham Common North Side SW4 9SD

Website parkgate-school.co.uk Head Malcolm McKinlay Pupils 160 day: 82 boys, 78 girls Ages 2½–11 Term Fees £8,266

Ages 2½-11 **Term Fees** £8,266 A true 'village school in London', Parkgate House is a family-run and cosy prep. And receiving around 10 applicants per place, this Clapham gem certainly punches above its weight. In the words of one happy mother, it's able to 'tailor the education of each pupil to fit their needs, while including them in the wider community'. Headmaster Malcolm McKinlay gets thumbs-up across the board, with one father praising his 'spot-on' advice about senior destinations. Bringing school life into the family, the Reception and Year 1 blog posts daily photos to spark supper-table conversations. For higher up the school, whether they've debated great matters in the critical thinking club, tackled fencing in Activities Week, or mastered mathematics on Clapham Common, Parkgate pupils leave here as happy and well-rounded individuals, ready to fly.

PEMBRIDGE HALL SCHOOL •

18 Pembridge Square W2 4EH Website pembridgehall.co.uk **Head** Sophie Banks **Pupils** 460 day girls Ages 4-11 Term Fees £10,735 Parents are thrilled: their daughters are 'happy and thriving', the school is doing 'a remarkable job preparing the girls for what comes next' and head Sophie Banks is a 'true change maker'. The sense of community here is palpable, with many parents regularly attending assemblies, and awards given for everything from academics to kindness. And music is a serious business: five choirs, an orchestra, a number of string quartets and a harpsichord-powered Baroque chamber group. ('If a pupil wants to play an instrument, the school will find a teacher.') What's more, the school is buzzing with excitement over its brand new recording studio, where girls can dive into podcasting, songwriting and production. Students now also have access to the superb 15-acre sports grounds on Wood Lane complete with floodlit Astroturf, tennis courts and cricket nets -

which will spur on a bolstered Sport

for All programme.

PROSPECT HOUSE SCHOOL ••

75 Putney Hill SW15 3NT Website prospecths.org.uk Head Kelly Gray Pupils 280 day: 146 boys, 134 girls Ages 3–11 Term Fees £8,998

New head Kelly Gray joined in September 2024 and in relatively short order has 'gained humongous popularity and respect from pupils, staff and us', says one mother. At the core of Prospect's education is 'confidence, not arrogance' and our researcher declared the students 'happy in their own skins'. The attention paid to wellbeing is outstanding - with each member of staff actively promoting the idea that mental health is as important as physical health - and a current parent says the 'constant support and encouragement' given to their children 'makes them believe they can fly'. Expect them to soar, thanks to exciting upgrades and augmentations planned for the next 18 months: inspiring creativity, innovation and confidence, these will include a modernised art studio, a fully stocked library, cutting-edge VR headsets, a revamped computing lab and a new drama space.



LONDON PREP

RAVENSCOURT PARK PREP SCHOOL ••

16 Ravenscourt Avenue W6 OSL Website rpps.co.uk Head Carl Howes Pupils 418 day: 212 boys, 206 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £8,631

Askew Road acolytes and the Brackenbury brigade clearly jostle to get into this co-ed prep: more than 250 applicants tend to vie for its 60 annual Reception places. And there's a clue to the reason in its 'Be part of the family' motto. There's a strong emphasis on pastoral care here, which is underpinned by the likes of a Personal, Social, Health and Emotional curriculum and an anti-bullying week. The actual 20.5-acre Ravenscourt Park is the setting for many after-school sports and PE sessions, while the Ealing Cricket Club and Popesfield ground are used for football, rugby, cross country and cricket. Every week, there are 250 music lessons; artists can join the graphic design club; and there's a parent-teacher choir. According to pupils, even the food is 'OMG. Amazing.'

ST CHRISTOPHER'S SCHOOL •

32 Belsize Lane NW3 5AE Website stchristophers.london Head Christopher Hammond Pupils 254 day girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £8,455

This prep instils a love of sport and of running around in the fresh air just for the fun of it; but each year group also puts on an annual drama production, with Matilda and The Wizard of Oz among previous big hits. A haven of happiness, academic curiosity and emotional resilience, it is no surprise that St Christopher's annually receives 240 applications for a mere 40 Reception places. (Parents say credit is due to the 'wonderful' interim head Mark Maddocks, who 'ensured the magic lived on' until the arrival of Chris Hammond in April 2025.) And the school is rightly proud of its leavers, whose pastures new regularly include St Paul's Girls, Downe House and City of London School for Girls.



ST JAMES PREP

Earsby Street W14 8SH Website stjamesprep.co.uk Head Hilary Wyatt Pupils 155 day: 70 boys, 85 girls Ages 2–11 Term Fees £8,615

St James Prep celebrates its 50th birthday in 2025, continuing its mission of providing a holistic education to children in the middle of London. Always long ahead of the curve on mental health, it was recently recognised with a Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS) – and it

is not very hard to see why. This is a vegetarian establishment that teaches Sanskrit and encourages a meditative 'pause' at the beginning and end of every lesson. The school also runs a three-day Shakespeare Festival and bi-termly open-mic music teas. It has pottery wheels and a kiln, a vegetable garden and a teaching kitchen. And this year saw the opening of the Courtyard Café, a device-free zone for older pupils and parents, as well as locals invited in for reading clubs, art sessions, concerts and more.



ST PAUL'S JUNIORS •

Lonsdale Road SW13 9JT Website stpaulsschool.org.uk

Head Oliver Snowball **Pupils** 505 day hove **Ages** 7

Pupils 505 day boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees £9,551

SPJ may be known as a place for highly intelligent and athletic boys, but it recognises talent across the board. 'We love bookworms and rugby players, computing whizz-kids and musicians, chess players and budding engineers, thespians and artists,' the school tells us. 'The only commonality is a love for learning and an agile, curious mind.' But don't just take their word for it: one pleased student praises the 'endless and varied opportunities' here, while a parent points to the 'amazing grounds and sports facilities', as well as the academic reputation. Meanwhile, the Forest School continues to be a big success, with pupils heading outdoors to learn to light fires and build shelters, thereby helping them to develop practical and selfmanagement skills. And things can only get better: two new buildings are currently under construction, with completion due this winter.

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PREP LONDON

ST PHILIP'S SCHOOL •

6 Wetherby Place SW7 4NE Website stpschool.co.uk Head Alexander Thomas Pupils 80 day boys Ages 4–13

Pupils 80 day boys Ages 4–13 Term Fees £9,840

Known for its charming location in a classic South Kensington townhouse - Number six, Wetherby Place – St Philip's will be bigger from September 2025: it's expanding into Number five. Last year, parents raised the funds required to extend the school's offering and it will soon welcome Reception boys into the fold. Though there's no faith requirement here, Catholic values are front and centre; and there is an emphasis on empathy, visible through such initiatives as a new Big Brothers buddy scheme. There's 'method to the kindness', says head Alexander Thomas, who calls his domain an 'academic dynamo'. But lots of lovely touches - among them the pupil-created game of 'Basket-Pong', whose rules are incomprehensible to adults speaks to its playful environment.

SUSSEX HOUSE SCHOOL • 68 Cadogan Square SW1X 0EA

Website sussexhouseschool.co.uk Head Nicholas Kaye Pupils 187 day boys Ages 8–13 Term Fees £11,544

This Chelsea institution may be best known for the 'outstanding academic record' praised by a current mother, but it also pursues 'a balanced approach with an equal emphasis on arts, sports and personal development'. For one of her coevals, the school's dedication to drama and music came as 'a pleasant surprise', while others pointed to the 'wide range of sports and activities' on offer, despite the relatively small campus. 'Quirky and wonderful in all the right ways', Sussex House has just two classes per year group, each with a maximum of 20 pupils to ensure 'every child receives ample attention' and is 'supported to find their strengths and flourish'. And flourish they do, under the watchful eye of the 'legendary' head Nicholas Kaye.



THOMAS'S BATTERSEA ● ● 28–40 Battersea High Street SW11 3JB

Website thomas-s.co.uk Head Rupert Hawkins Pupils 540 day: 300 boys, 240 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees £10,962

With a red-brick facade, ginormous playground and bright and airy classrooms, Thomas's Battersea is a firm favourite. Now, its lucky pupils can progress to the newly opened co-ed Thomas's College in Richmond and benefit from its approach all the way through to university entrance. And as at the Clapham school, the introduction of the Thomas's Baccalaureate looks set to reinvigorate learning in Years 7 and 8 by incorporating elements including volunteering, coursework and an extended essay on a humanities subject. Students also thrive on the diverse offering of extracurriculars; and with options from gardening to litter picking, it all contributes to the purposeful milieu engendered by the greatly admired new head Rupert Hawkins.

THOMAS'S CLAPHAM •• Broomwood Road SW11 6JZ Website thomas-s.co.uk

Website thomas-s.co.uk
Head Nathan Boller Pupils 655
day: 330 boys, 325 girls Ages 4–13
Term Fees £10,247

Parents talk of a 'nurturing and caring' environment, and a 'progressive, open-minded and creative' philosophy at this classic Clapham prep, which prides itself on cultivating a culture of thinking. But both contemplation and academic achievement are being turbocharged by a multi-million-pound master plan, which will transform the classrooms and departments here, as well as support nature and sustainability initiatives. (There's already a thriving partnership with the Eden Project, while staff are being trained in outdoor learning.) Not to mention the new digital media programme, intended to set up pupils for later life. Senior schools obviously consider them to be well-prepared: 50 scholarships and awards went to last year's cohort of leavers.

THOMAS'S FULHAM ••

49 Hugon Road SW6 3ES

Website thomas-s.co.uk

Head Annette Dobson Pupils 420 day: 220 boys, 200 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £10,507

Not only the 'kind atmosphere' and 'school values' were lauded by pupils here. The teachers also came in for praise 'because they believe in you'. And there's a real family feel at this prep: both girls and boys play cricket; boys' dance is growing in popularity; and with 18 choirs and ensembles, music is strong. Clubs include sewing and hip-hop, while budding gardeners can get their hands dirty in the adjacent South Park. Wellbeing is supported by mindfulness programmes and emotional literacy support assistants, and there's also a learning support department that offers a range of interventions to students who have additional needs. A 'busy, happy place with a balanced approach to education', concludes one parent, before adding: 'Our children always skip in!'

THOMAS'S KENSINGTON ••

17–19 Cottesmore Gardens W8 5PR

Website thomas-s.co.uk Head Alex Matthews Pupils 329 day: 149 boys, 180 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees £11,545

Thomas's Kensington describes its offering as 'education in technicolour, with large doses of kindness, enquiry and academic rigour'. Much effort has also gone into shaping the pastoral provision: staff, parents and pupils alike have access to an on-site counsellor: there are weekly lessons on wellbeing; and the children use a chart pioneered by Yale University to monitor and thus regulate their emotions. Still, huge change is afoot. There's a new head teacher Alex Matthews – and the school has just moved to a new site: an achingly modern premises which will combine the lower and prep schools in lots more green space. Education here is about to get even more colourful.

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LONDON PREP

TOWER HOUSE •

188 Sheen Lane SW14 8LF Website thsboys.org.uk Head Neill Lunnon Pupils 180 day boys Ages 4–13 Term Fees £7,513

Tower House started life as a music school, and creativity still abounds here. The head of drama's own adaptation of Harry Potter was a smash hit; a troupe of thespians are headed to the 2026 Edinburgh Festival; and the newly introduced Tower House Art Fair will invite every boy to submit a piece of work, which will be put up for sale. What's more, the boys are real book-lovers, thanks to such initiatives as the new library ambassadors programme and creative writing workshops led by an author-in-residence. 'I've never been in a school that exudes such a feeling of community and home so instantaneously,' says one parent, 'but simultaneously focuses immensely on improving the academic abilities of the children.'

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR SCHOOL ●

Ambrosden Avenue SW1P 10H Website choirschool.com **Head** Neil McLaughlan **Pupils** 282 day and boarding boys Ages 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £10,110 boarding (choristers only): £4,280 Catholicism underpins this central London establishment: there are prayers before lunch in the preprep, prayers in all the classrooms at the day's start and end, as well as frequent opportunities to attend mass. And as the name suggests, the school is also possessed of a historic choral tradition, providing choristers to the cathedral - where they sing six masses a week - and sending them on tours to the likes of Hungary, America and Italy. But not all is sacred here: fun can be had in the brilliant playground, and the clubs span football, gardening and even sewing. Head Neil McLaughlan has concentrated on matching the choristers' excellence in hitting academic heights, and recent leavers scored scholarships to such senior schools as Dulwich

College, Harrow and Eton.



WESTMINSTER UNDER SCHOOL

27 Vincent Square SW1P 2NN Website westminsterunder.org.uk Head Kate Jefferson

Pupils 277 day boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees £11,113

Proud parents praise the 'inspirational teaching' and 'independence of thought' at this blue-chip prep, which sends the majority of its pupils onto Westminster proper. It is, states one, 'quite simply the best school in London, and certainly one of the best in the whole world'. Things are about to get even better. In September 2026, Westminster Under will not only unveil a brandnew pre-prep for children aged four and over, but the doors will be opened to girls for the first time. At the moment, green-fingered pupils grow vegetables in Vincent Square; budding artists do their thing in studios often likened to Manhattan lofts; and music thrives, with one standout event being the annual carols at St Margaret's Church by Westminster Abbey.

WETHERBY PREPARATORY SCHOOL ●

48 Bryanston Square W1H 2EA Website wetherbyprep.co.uk Head Nina Kingsmill Moore Pupils 350 day boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees £11,120

On arrival in August 2024, head Nina Kingsmill Moore reshuffled her senior leadership team, reformed the PTA and oversaw a school-wide competition to design a Random Acts of Kindness box. ('She is focused, visionary, and approachable,' says one parent.) And with the opening of the muchanticipated Wetherby co-ed senior school, there's been another development: now the boys can also use the new Wetherby Pembridge Sports Ground in Wood Lane. Meanwhile, an inspired exchange programme allows pupils to study at partner schools around the globe; and thanks to the introduction of Metaverse technology to the curriculum, they will be able to collaborate virtually with contemporaries at these institutions. \square

LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 10

Alleyn's School ••

City of London School

City of London School for Girls

Dulwich College ●

Francis Holland School,

Sloane Square

Hampton School ●●

Ibstock Place School ●●

James Allen's Girls' School

King's College School,

Wimbledon ●

Latymer Upper School ●●

Merchant Taylors' School

North London

Collegiate School

Putney High School

Queen's College

South Hampstead

High School

St Paul's School ●

University College School •

Westminster School ●

Wimbledon High



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South East

ALDRO ••

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Lombard Street, Shackleford, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6AS Website aldro.org

Head Chris Carlier Pupils 221 day and boarding: 151 boys, 70 girls Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day: £9,858; boarding: £15,000

It's a surprise to find a private, selective, co-ed boarding and day prep on the edge of the small, perfectly formed Surrey village of Shackleford. And it's an eye-opener when you discover its success rate, with an impressive 25 per cent of the 2024 cohort awarded academic scholarships to

such prestigious institutions as Winchester and RGS Guildford. Girls arrived four years ago and have been quick to make their mark, particularly in the sports they play on the recently laid allweather pitch. (They have quickly accumulated a wealth of trophies under the guidance of their new head of department Steph Oland.) Boarding is another of Aldro's notable strengths: due to increased demand, 2024 saw the launch of the full version for girls; and at the time of writing, work is underway to double the capacity of the current provision.

Alongside its anti-homework policy, Caldicott does not demand that pupils board until they are absolutely ready **BRAMBLETYE** ••

Lewes Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3PD

Website brambletye.co.uk

Head William Brooks Pupils 211

day and boarding: 109 boys, 102

girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day:
£10,510; boarding: £13,245

£10,510; boarding: £13,245 Twice recently, Brambletye head Will Brooks has received emails from members of the public, saying how impressed they were by the behaviour of his charges on London school trips. That's what you might expect of this friendly, tight-knit prep, surrounded by woods, sports fields and playgrounds. And much of its success, according to one parent, is down to Brooks's ability to engage with children: 'Our son's first interaction with him was via Zoom, and his ability to captivate a three-yearold's attention was remarkable.' Little wonder a spot at his Friday lunch table is highly sought-after by pupils, who are soon also to enjoy a 'paddock-to-plate' outdoor learning and cooking initiative.

BRIGHTON COLLEGE PREP HANDCROSS ●●

London Road, Handcross, Haywards Heath RH17 6HF Website brighton college prephandcross.co.uk **Head** Jonnie Besley Pupils 431 day and boarding: 198 boys, 233 girls Ages 8-13 Term Fees Day: £9,883; boarding: £12,903 Following a decade-long partnership with Brighton College, this historic co-ed prep - previously known as Handcross Park School has now been rebranded. And as a result, pupils continue to benefit from shared facilities, expert staff and exclusive opportunities, be they meeting the England rugby team or spending weekends at the College (40 per cent of leavers go on there.) Back on-site, the boarding house has been refurbished and extended to meet demand, while a new Upper School common room is in the pipeline. Parents describe the atmosphere as 'magical' and 'laidback'; and they love Handcross's ability to 'cultivate a great sense of enjoyment in learning'.

BRUERN ABBEY SCHOOL •

Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 1UY

Website bruernabbey.org Head John Floyd Pupils 152 day and boarding boys Ages 8–13 Term Fees Day:

£11,943; boarding: £14,744 'Every boy at Bruern is there for a reason somehow linked to neurodiversity and that's precisely why no one can ever be the odd one out,' says one parent; and the establishment's experience of supporting dyslexic children has proved such a draw that its senior school has been expanded with plans for a new boarding house. Meanwhile, the LAMDA curriculum has been introduced; and a production of Peter Pan - featuring audience participation and video sequences - was particularly ambitious. Asked what they would change about their school, one student suggested it should 'stop cross country!' And to adults who still shudder at memories of running through mountains of mud, this sounds quite sensible.

PREP SOUTH EAST

CALDICOTT •

Crown Lane, Farnham Royal, Buckinghamshire SL2 3SL Website caldicott.com Head Jeremy Banks Pupils 258 day and boarding boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day: £13,683; boarding: £17,045 'Manners, tradition, strength, kindness and resilience are ingrained in the boys; and by having these aims as the basis of teaching, Caldicott gives the best preparation for the next stage,' one parent says neatly. Alongside its anti-homework policy - no wrestling with maths at the kitchen table late into the night the school cherishes flexibility and does not demand that pupils board until they are absolutely ready. A new sports pavilion promises to delight students and parents alike, while drama is thriving: in recent years, one boy starred in a Danny Boyle film and another in the stage show of *Matilda*. Academics deputy head Ma'am Naidoo guides boys to leading senior schools (historically, Eton and Harrow are top choices).

CHEAM SCHOOL ••

Headley, Newbury, Berkshire RG19 8LD

Website cheamschool.com Head Nick Milbank Pupils 373 day and boarding: 220 boys, 153 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £10,335; weekly boarding: £13,245 Cheam is a 'magical prep school with a mixture of old traditions and modern approaches', said one parent whose children's confidence has grown 'immensely' since starting here. Since January, Nick Milbank has been the new head, continuing the development of the Cheam Diploma, the school's 'character education' initiative, as well as its fine pastoral care (note the sensory garden and The Nest, a dedicated wellness space). Acts of bravery are celebrated in this nurturing community - be it a Year 6 pupil with additional needs standing up in assembly to describe their challenges, or a Year 4 singing a solo – and there's a new leadership talk programme, featuring high-profile guests telling tales of perseverance.

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL SCHOOL ••

Brewer Street, Oxford OX1 1QW Website cccs.org.uk Head Richard Murray Pupils 125 day and boarding: 115 boys, 10 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £8,497; boarding (choristers only): £5,340

With its medieval buildings in the shadow of the magnificent Christ Church Cathedral, CCCS is in a prime Oxford location. Sports take place on glorious Christ Church Meadow; and 'watching your son at the crease here on a sunny summer afternoon would be bliss', says our reviewer. The establishment has one of the most admired choirs in the world; there's a piano in almost every classroom and, at the core is the cathedral chorister programme. However, academic performance is excellent across the board at Common Entrance; and football and cricket are taken seriously. Pupils come from the local area as well as from Asia, the US and Latin America, making it an ideal place for international friendships to blossom.

COTHILL HOUSE ••

Cothill, Oxfordshire OX13 6JL Website cothillpst.org Head George May Pupils 165 day and boarding boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day: £9,130; boarding: £14,030

It's all change here. After taking on day pupils and starting flexiboarding, from September 2025 it will also be mixed gender. (Initially accepting girls in Years 3 to 5, with boarding starting from Year 4, the school aims to be fully co-ed by 2028.) What's more, head George May wants to convert one of the buildings into a dedicated STEAM centre incorporating music, arts, tech, science and robotics. But amid all the excitement, customs are cherished too. Thus, woodwork, run by an 81-year-old ex-policeman called PC, is popular; and 'Weeklies' - short reports - are still issued. Outdoors, the classic sports offering also takes in polo, shooting and even climbing. Asked what they would change, one pupil said: 'Nothing, it's already perfect. You can't go wrong at Cothill.'

COTTESMORE SCHOOL ••

Buchan Hill, Pease Pottage, West Sussex RH11 9AU

Website cottesmoreschool.com Head Tom Rogerson Pupils 200 day and boarding: 116 boys, 84 girls Ages 8–13 Term Fees Day: £8,506; boarding: £12,499

£8,506; boarding: £12,499 Cottesmore has a spirit that allows 'children to flourish' and gives them 'freedom to develop a sense of individuality', says one parent. True, the school respects tradition: writing letters with fountain pens is encouraged; as is lunchtime conversation. True, it embraces the great outdoors, but it keeps an eye on the future: running the world's first online e-sports championship for prep-school-aged students; responsibly integrating AI; and inviting local primaries for an annual climate change and sustainability week, dubbed COTT28. Pupils love The Feast, served by staff on the last day of Christmas term; and special occasions are marked by 'Stay-ups', when pupils burn the midnight oil and enjoy treats.



SOUTH EAST PREP

CUMNOR HOUSE SUSSEX ••

Danehill, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH177HT Website cumnor.co.uk Head Fergus Llewellyn Pupils 350 day and boarding: 195 boys, 155 girls Ages 4-13 Term Fees Day: £9,234; boarding: £10,950 Our researcher was struck by the 'happy and humbly confident' attitude of pupils at flourishing Cumnor. Despite being nonselective, its results are strong, and last year saw an impressive 60 per cent of leavers head to senior school with scholarships or awards. Each leaver receives a personal letter from head Fergus Llewellyn, who writes to remind them of their individual qualities and potential. The parent community is markedly engaged, and Llewellyn keeps in close contact with them. The new pastoral leadership team has introduced a framework to ensure every student feels supported, aided by a wellbeing hub. There are external speaker events and an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA). And as for magical experiences, ask any student about the treasured

tradition of 'Garden Shakespeare'.

DORSET HOUSE SCHOOL •• Church Lane, Bury, Pulborough,

West Sussex RH20 1PB Website dorsethouseschool.com Head Matt Thomas Pupils 126 day and boarding: 65 boys, 61 girls Age 4–13 Term Fees Day: £9,130; boarding: an additional £163 for

four nights per week 'One of Dorset House's greatest strengths is its relatively small size,' explains one parent. 'You feel without a shadow of doubt that your children are valued as individuals and that their teachers know them inside out.' Indeed. with 'Small is Beautiful' as a sort of informal catchphrase, children are encouraged to explore the enchanting landscape. Dogs wander around, lessons are taken outside as much as possible and lunch can be eaten alfresco (come rain or shine) under a marquee on the terrace overlooking the River Arun. Year 7 Enterprise Projects see students raising money for charity by making products to sell at a farmers' market, and a new enrichment programme has introduced lessons in topics ranging from Greek theatre and engineering to geology and journalism.

DRAGON SCHOOL •• Bardwell Road, Oxford OX2 6SS

Website dragonschool.org Head Emma Goldsmith Pupils 799 day and boarding: 430 boys, 369 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £11,130; boarding: £16,590 'The head is, in every way possible, the best role model for the pupils,' declares one parent, who describes Emma Goldsmith as 'an educationalist at heart', leading a school that prides itself on cultivating freethinkers and lifelong learners. Pupils who prefer to express themselves creatively are delighted with the sparkling new music and performing arts building; cricketers bowl down fine Oxford squares; rowers enjoy the purpose-built boathouse; and the likes of judo and riding are also accommodated. A truly unique aspect of this establishment is the Dragon Quest: a bespoke, skills-based curriculum that helps pupils discover and develop new interests, from filmmaking to agriculture (through visits to local farms). Given all this activity and inspiration, it's little wonder recent leavers were awarded a whopping 77 scholarships.

EDGE GROVE ••

Aldenham Village, Hertfordshire WD25 8NL Website edgegrove.com Head Ed Balfour Pupils 397 day: 261 boys, 136 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day: £8,446

Largely attracting families from the south Hertfordshire and north London areas, Edge Grove concentrates on the three R's: rigour, relevance and relationships. But reading and writing haven't been forgotten: the school recently took part in the Guinness World Record largest poetry lesson ever (involving 500 schools), and one pupil was congratulated by a prominent politician for his work in raising awareness of the wonder of libraries. Elsewhere, there's a nursery with spaces for 40 tots, as well as a vibrant Forest School, and recently inaugurated is a weekly Celebration Assembly at which children can showcase their artistic achievements. Meanwhile, gardening club members cultivate vegetables and flowers across raised beds and polytunnels, and other extracurriculars that spark the imagination include Lego robotics, music technology and general knowledge club.

ELSTREE SCHOOL ••

Woolhampton Hill, Berkshire RG7 5TD

Website elstreeschool.org.uk
Head Sid Inglis Pupils 300 day
and boarding: 180 boys, 120 girls
Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day: £10,680;
weekly boarding: £13,530
'It's a happy school that's all about
supporting each individual child

supporting each individual child while involving the whole family,' one parent tells us. So while their progenitors (15 per cent of whom are alumni) are throwing themselves into 5K runs, Scottish reels and golf, the pupils might be found scaling the climbing wall, playing the esoteric Bat Room cricket or, when it snows, tobogganing - in kayaks! - down the parkland. New learning development facilities are in place for children who benefit from one-to-one lessons, as well as a new arts centre and enhanced ICT and digital learning amenities.



PREP SOUTH EAST



Feltonfleet's annual 'Les Césars' awards (their own Palmes d'Or) recognise outstanding work in the pupils' French film projects

FARLEIGH • •

Red Rice, Andover, Hampshire SP11 7PW Website farleighschool.com Head Fr Simon Everson Pupils 448 day and boarding: 226 boys, 222 girls Ages 3-13 Term Fees Day: £10,485; boarding: £13,890 Despite its Georgian architectural grandeur and beautiful surroundings, Farleigh exudes a genuine warmth. The pre-prep pupils can get their hands dirty in a 'mud kitchen', while the wooden play area with monkey swing and slides is dubbed Fortress Farleigh. A seven-strong team of qualified professionals provide learning support to those who need it, while pastoral care is underpinned by daily meetings with tutors. As for long-standing head Fr Simon Everson: 'He's a living legend,' says one parent. 'It amazes us that he still knows every child's name and even has nicknames for many of them.' Everson is central to the sense of spirituality at the heart of the school - he has married two former Farleighian couples in its chapel - and while the ethos here is rooted in Roman Catholicism, all faiths are welcome. FELTONFLEET SCHOOL ••

Byfleet Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 1DR Website feltonfleet.co.uk Head Shelley Lance Pupils 317 day and boarding: 182 boys, 135 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £8,199; boarding: £9,724

'The thing I love most about my school is that it creates an environment in which everyone cares about each other,' says one pupil. At this day and flexi-boarding co-ed just a hop from Surrey and south west London, the boarders known as Feltonfleet Knights – start each year with a Harry Potterstyle ceremony, complete with swords; but great emphasis is also placed on mental health literacy, and mindfulness is embedded in a timetable whose new 'Intelligences Curriculum' guides pupils through the moral questions entangled with AI. Meanwhile – roll cameras – the annual 'Les Césars' awards (their very own Palmes d'Or) recognise outstanding work in their French film projects. And an exciting redesign is coming: look out for new STEM, English and maths mastery centres and a whizz-bang library.

GODSTOWE ••

Shrubbery Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP13 6PR Website godstowe.org **Head** Kate Bailey **Pupils** 395 day and boarding: 9 boys, 386 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £8,700; boarding: £13,380 Britain's first all-girls boarding prep may have just celebrated its 125th anniversary, but its success lies in constantly moving with the times. In the past year alone, head Kate Bailey - described by a recent visitor as 'extremely friendly, engaged and passionate' - has added a bus service from west London and a train route to Marylebone; introduced the Godstowe Dove Diploma; made the annual USA lacrosse tour a nonselective venture and partnered with senior schools to bolster STEM provision. Music is an important part of Godstowe life, with more than 87 per cent of pupils learning instruments; boarding is 'huge'; and 100-plus weekly activities ensure pupils are beyond busy. Then there's the enviable record of sending girls to their first-choice senior schools, with Cheltenham and Wycombe Abbey firm favourites.

HEATH MOUNT SCHOOL •• Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone, Hertfordshire SG143NG Website heathmount.org Head Chris Gillam Pupils 505 day and boarding: 281 boys, 224 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £9,414; flexi-boarding: £11,646 Asked why they chose it, one parent replied: 'The combination of academic ambition, pastoral care and the sheer joy of childhood that Heath Mount offers was irresistible. It's a school that takes learning seriously but never at the expense of happiness.' This gorgeous co-ed has a newly minted enclosure for rabbits and chickens, while the most coveted award is the 'golden pine cone' for best den. And this adventurous attitude translates into serious sporting success – it recently became the first-ever prep to be IAPS netball champions across two

HIGHFIELD AND BROOKHAM SCHOOL •• Highfield Lane, Liphook,

music by Mozart and Metallica.

year groups - while fostering crea-

tivity, too: 250 pupils performed in the summer concert, featuring

Hampshire GU30 7LQ Website highfieldandbrookham.co.uk Head Suzannah Cryer Pupils 450 day and boarding: 245 boys, 205 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £10,725; boarding: £13,575 For more than a century, the Mills family has held sole responsibility for Highfield and Brookham. It is this rare state of affairs that has allowed the school to work so closely with families and to understand the needs of each child. And the proof is in the pudding: last year, an impressive 29 scholarships were secured by 22 pupils to 10 prestigious senior schools, including Benenden, Marlborough and Wellington. The recipe includes the New Skills Builder Acceleration programme, which equips pupils with the tools for an ever-changing world. There's also a healthy focus on keeping active, with sport every day except for Thursdays, weekly swimming lessons and time for woodland explorations.

SOUTH EAST PREP

HOLMEWOOD HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

Barrow Lane, Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0EB Website holmewoodhouse.co.uk Head Ruth O'Sullivan Pupils 449 day and boarding: 246 boys, 203 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £9,450; boarding: £13,590

'We could not wish for a better start to our children's education,' one parent tells us. Not only does this co-ed prep boast an 'incredible amount of green space' and a 'childcentred' and 'progressive' head in Ruth O'Sullivan, it's filled with 'happy kids' who 'love to learn'. Whether using virtual reality goggles in class, building green kit cars to race at Goodwood, embracing co-curriculars such as fencing and stone-stacking, or taking on leadership roles from a young age, the students benefit from the school's knack for keeping things interesting. Last year's leavers went on to the likes of Benenden, Eastbourne and Sevenoaks, with a significant number of scholarships and awards.

LAMBROOK SCHOOL •• Winkfield Row, Nr Ascot, Berkshire RG42 6LU

Website lambrookschool.co.uk Head Jonathan Perry Pupils 623 day and boarding: 330 boys, 293 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £10,669; boarding: £50.40 per night Beholding its 52 acres of beautiful grounds (complete with an orchard, a nine-hole golf course, 25-metre pool and endless sports pitches), parents find themselves 'immediately smitten'. But while the idyllic location and 'incredible' facilities make a strong first impression, Jonathan Perry seals the deal. The longstanding head is 'an absolute legend', who blows parents away with his 'charisma, charm and clear values' - and leads by example: last year, he embarked on a charity bike ride from Lambrook to Paris, sponsored to the tune of £200,000-plus. That 'get-stuck-in-and-give-it-a-go' mentality extends to the pupils, who enjoy a 'staggering' array of co-curriculars, from jazz and podcast making to mini MasterChef.



LOCKERS PARK •

Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 1TL Website lockerspark.co.uk Head Gavin Taylor Pupils 190 day and boarding boys Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £8,717; boarding: £12,881

From the delicious Christmas Feast to the weekly distribution of sweets to deserving children, traditions at Lockers Park seem to encapsulate a lot of fun. What's more, the boys - who wear blue cords with shirts of their own choice, rather than formal uniforms - say they feel comforted and supported here. ('I like how small it is, because we don't just grow close friendships with the people in our year, but with boys in the whole school,' says one.) Diminutive class sizes allow teachers to closely monitor progress, and outside the classroom there is plenty to keep everyone occupied. The new golf simulator and a climbing wall are big hits; and plans are in the pipeline for both an impressive woodland food technology suite and an upgraded design technology workshop.

LUDGROVE SCHOOL •

Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3AB Website ludgrove.net Head Simon Barber Pupils 186 boarding boys Ages 8–13 Term Fees £13,384

There's no rush to 'grow up' at Ludgrove - which is what draws so many parents to this 'wholesome' and 'traditional' school. No screens or gadgets here: instead, the boys are encouraged to 'run around with their friends, have a lot of fun, and just get muddy', as legendary head Simon Barber puts it. (Hence, popular pastimes include outdoor skills, farm club, golf and mountain biking - on top of organised games five afternoons a week.) But as a counterweight to all that sport, Ludgrovians also take part in five big-scale drama productions a year, express themselves in the ceramics studio and are encouraged to explore their musical sides. In short, 'it's boy heaven', according to one recent visitor. And such happy pupils invariably thrive, heading on to some of the country's most notable senior schools, often armed with awards and scholarships.

MILBOURNE LODGE SCHOOL ••

Arbrook Lane, Esher, Surrey KT10 9EG

Website milbournelodge.co.uk **Head** Judy Waite **Pupils** 245 day: 180 boys, 65 girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** £8,208

A strong community spirit thrives at this leafy Surrey school, where parents heap praise on the pastoral care, calling it 'one of Milbourne's standout qualities'. And the attention and support given to every pupil is evident in the strong relationships they develop with their teachers. (There's a 'deep commitment to every child's happiness and development', according to one parent.) These happy and creative kids almost all learn at least one instrument – they gain confidence through performing in front of small audiences at regular teatime concerts - and the choirs are so popular that nearly the whole school is in one. Senior choices include St Paul's and Westminster. But what Milbournians won't find at these destinations is 'Puttocks', the quirky cricket-cum-rounders game unique to this popular prep.

PREP SOUTH EAST

MOON HALL SCHOOL ••

Flanchford Road, Leigh, Reigate, Surrey RH2 8RE Website moonhallschoolreigate.co.uk Head Michelle Catterson

Pupils 200 day: 101 boys, 99 girls Ages 7–16 Term Fees Day: £12,112 'We don't measure pupils' success based on GCSEs,' says Moon Hall head Michelle Catterson (who's also chair of the British Dyslexia Association). 'Instead, it's all about the progress they make throughout their time here.' This prep's USP is providing specialist support to dyslexics in a nurturing environment while following the national curriculum; and its charges seem incredibly happy to be here, surrounded by friends who are 'the same' as them. Learning touchtyping, they also benefit from the school's commitment to 'assistive' technology - 'key in promoting pupil independence'. Its latest additions comprise an ultra-modern DT suite, science lab and arts studio. Interested parents should check out Moon Hall's open-to-all assessment centre and generous bursaries.

MOULSFORD ••

Moulsford-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 9HR Website moulsford.com **Head** Ben Beardmore-Gray **Pupils** 360 day and boarding: 353 boys, 7 girls Ages 3-13 Term Fees Day: £8,065; boarding: £10,205 The proximity of the Thames means there are ample opportunities for canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding, which - just like the sports, drama and music - are inclusive, with 'down-to-earth' children participating at every level. (A current parent reports: 'My son plays an instrument with more enthusiasm than talent, but he has always been encouraged to perform and given a platform to do so.') Singing is huge here and 120 pupils are members of senior choirs, not to mention the pop ensemble. As for parental engagement, events are extremely well attended: the fathers' lunch at the RAC Club numbers 220-plus, and the summer ball's 400 tickets sell out in a week. And

now that the school has gone fully co-ed, the dancing may improve!



Tickets for Moulsford's summer ball sell out in a week. And now that the school's gone co-ed, the dancing may improve!



NEW COLLEGE SCHOOL • Savile Road, Oxford OX1 3UA Website newcollegeschool.org

Head Dr Matthew Jenkinson
Pupils 155 day boys Ages 4–13
Term Fees Day: £8,741

Tucked away among the university buildings, this small urban boys' prep only has one class per year and most families live locally. (There are regularly 40 to 50 bikes in the stands.) Music is notably strong - founder William of Wykeham made provision for 16 choristers to sing the daily services in the stunning college chapel but in contrast to some chorister schools, the boys have no commitments outside the academic terms, so they can have an amazing musical experience without any impact on family life. Every pupil takes part in a drama production each year, a highlight being the performance of a Shakespeare play in the New College Chapel. No rugby here: rather, there's hockey and football in winter; cricket, tennis and athletics in summer.

SOUTH EAST PREP

PAPPLEWICK •

Windsor Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7LH Website papplewick.org.uk Head Tom Bunbury Pupils 209 day and boarding boys Ages 6–13 Term Fees Day £11,568; boarding: £15,066 'This school is all about the pec

'This school is all about the people - the teachers, the parents and most importantly the boys,' says a recent visitor to this all-male prep. And though it's technically nonselective, pupils are screened by head Tom Bunbury, a 'gentle, measured man' with a knack for picking the brightest candidates. According to Papplewick, character is the main criterion. But what does that mean to Bunbury? 'The nicest boys I can find,' he says. 'And nice means kind.' Drawn to enthusiastic chaps with a 'spark', he's also adept at seeing the potential in shy types, who come out of their shells at this homely haven. Standards are high, but fun is never forgotten and there's an abundance of banter between staff and their charges.

THE PILGRIMS' SCHOOL ● Inner Close, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9LT

Website thepilgrims-school.co.uk Acting head Tim Butcher Pupils 237 day and boarding boys Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £9,329; boarding: £11,859

The announcement of a merger with Winchester College means that, from the 2025-26 academic year, Pilgrims' now offers an allthrough education from four to 18. This hidden gem prides itself on its remarkable music achievements: the chamber choir heads on tour to locations such as Sorrento and performs with the likes of the English National Ballet; 88 per cent of pupils play instruments; and 16 recent leavers won music scholarships to senior schools. However, drama is also popular among this sensitive bunch and art is displayed in a yearly exhibition. An outdoor classroom means there's time for embracing the elements, and the pre-prep grows vegetables in the kitchen garden.



Memories at Princes Mead are made at the summer camp-out, when tents are pitched in the grounds, and at the pre-prep water party, which usually descends into pupil-teacher water-pistol duels

PRINCE'S MEAD .

Kings Worthy, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1AN

Website princesmeadschool.org.uk Head Adam King Pupils 290 day: 160 boys, 130 girls Ages 3–11 Term Fees £8,005

The children here love 'caring and fun' head Adam King, fish and chip Fridays and 'how easy it is to make friends'. Parents, meanwhile, are smitten by the 'inspired staff' and the 'freshness and creativity that runs through all the activities and subjects'. There's a new red-and-blue uniform (with no ties); Forest School has been rolled out to all ages; and a wonderful amphitheatre is the venue for such outdoor events as the cosy-sounding stargazing evenings, which are accompanied by hot dogs and mugs of cocoa. More memories are made at the summer fete and camp-out, when tents are pitched in the grounds; and at the pre-prep water party, which usually descends into pupil-teacher water-pistol duels.

ST ANDREW'S SCHOOL, BERKSHIRE ••

Pangbourne, Berkshire RG8 8QA Website standrewsberkshire.co.uk

Head Ed Graham Pupils 315 day and boarding: 157 boys, 158 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £9,070; boarding: £170 for four nights You just know you're going to have fun at St Andrew's when you pass the digital sign displaying the day's riddle set by Ed Graham, who parents describe as 'the sort of head every prep school needs'. But wait until you see the rest of the offering, with a new performing arts centre to fire imaginations and a big focus on Forest School, which takes place 'whatever the weather'. The pupils here gain an all-round education through the Pre-Senior Baccalaureate. Breakfast and afterschool clubs provide crucial wraparound care for children of working parents. And now, a west London bus service will collect weekly boarders on Monday mornings and

return them on Friday nights.

ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL WINDSOR CASTLE ••

Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1QF Website stgwindsor.org

Head Emma Károlyi **Pupils** 296 day and boarding: 184 boys, 112 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,676; boarding: £10,785 At the foot of Windsor Castle, the remodelled kindergarten here has gone down a treat; and it's among its tastefully neutral hues that toddlers begin the International Baccalaureate Primary Years syllabus. St George's motto is 'Real world ready' and multiple foreign trips both broaden perspectives and foster a love of learning. (Senior pupils can join an exchange programme with a school in Kenya.) But there's also plenty to do in Blighty: from scuba diving to street dance, there are more than 80 clubs; and the acclaimed choristers provide a beatific soundtrack in chapel. 'My children run in every day and come out with the biggest smiles on their faces,' says one parent. 'What more could I ask for?'

PREP SOUTH EAST

ST HUGH'S SCHOOL ••

Carswell Manor, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8PT

Website st-hughs.co.uk
Head David Griffiths Pupils 330
day and boarding: 158 boys, 172
girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:
£10,322; boarding: £12,640
Wellies are on the menu at this
superbly resourced country prep

superbly resourced country prep, where children are encouraged to be children, making use of the grounds as a space for learning and exploring. Still, the rosy-cheeked and self-assured pupils love spending time in the Hogwarts-ish Dovecote Library bursting with books and adorned with ceramic birds modelled each year by leavers. Meanwhile, boarders' nights are enlivened by such wholesome fun as Spotlight (hide-and-seek in the dark). Head David Griffiths is considered 'very impressive' for his calm and considered approach; and he seems to have a knack for placing his students in the senior schools best suited to their individual character and strengths.

ST JOHN'S BEAUMONT •• Priest Hill, Old Windsor, Berkshire SL4 2IN

Website sjbwindsor.uk **Head** Philip Barr **Pupils** 203 day and boarding: 189 boys, 14 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £9,134; boarding: £13,909 St John's Beaumont is a place of quiet transformation: newly co-ed, internationally minded and brimming with purpose. The pastoral care is fantastic - there's a 'secret resilience club' that aims to increase a growth mindset (whereby children understand that persistence and effort pay off) - and although it's no longer a Catholic school, the ethos of its Jesuit founders is still central, with students encouraged to seize opportunities with gratitude and gumption. Such touches as a daytime phone ban, golden tickets for good behaviour and Friday night prayers keep the pupils grounded. Our insider described them as 'some of the nicest I've ever encountered: charming, chatty, and with a good sense of fun'.

SAINT RONAN'S ••

Water Lane, Hawkhurst, Kent TN18 5DJ

Website saintronans.co.uk

Head Joe Lewis Pupils 410 day

and boarding: 209 boys, 201 girls

Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day:

£9,360; weekly boarding: £11,308 Saint Ronan's calls itself 'magical, majestic, muddy'; and mud is a recurring motif in others' descriptions. 'The staff and children exude happiness, helped by rosy cheeks from lots of free play outside and muddy knees,' says one parent, who also praises the focus on children enjoying their youth 'for as long as possible'. Meanwhile, new head and sports coach Joe Lewis - 'amazing' and 'kind', say his charges – is aiming to bolster weekly boarding; and along with nursery provision from the age of two, there are plans for a new dining-room complex and an expanded farm. (Piglets and giant rabbits are already in situ.) 'Match teas are served with flair out of the back of Doris, a converted horse box,' says one parent. Laughter, joy and buckets of mud really are the name of the game here.

SHREWSBURY HOUSE SCHOOL ●

Ditton Road, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 6RL

Website shrewsburyhouse.net Head Joanna Hubbard Pupils 313 day boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees £8,875

'The great character of all the boys I met was the best accolade for SHS that I can think of,' reports a recent visitor, going on to describe each one as 'engaging, natural and - honestly - just really delightful'. Parents, too, credit this school with turning out 'kind, wellrounded, decent, well-educated and inquisitive young men', who go on to thrive at the likes of Westminster, Wellington and Eton. And by all accounts, these results come from the top: Tatler award-winning head Joanna Hubbard has cultivated an environment in which kindness is king, pastoral care is a priority and pupils are stretched to be their best. Couple this with specialist teachers, impressive facilities and endless opportunities to discover and develop interests, and excellence naturally follows.

SUMMER FIELDS ● Mayfield Road, Oxford OX2 7EN

Website summerfields.com Head David Faber Pupils 270 day and boarding boys Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £10,650; boarding: £15,280

If you choose Summer Fields for your son, he will 'learn to take his wins, whether sporting or academic, with enthusiasm but also humility', according to one grateful parent. Children here are encouraged to enjoy learning, nurtured by teachers who value educating through positive affirmation; the excellent pastoral care provision being a testament to their approach. (Thanks to the 'Whispers' programme, pupils can anonymously report their struggles.) This commitment to wellbeing extends to the physical, too, with the boys taking part in such sports as Fives, squash and polo in the sprawling 70-acre grounds. But the students are just as creative as they are athletic, with 80 per cent of the children taking music lessons and more than 15 concerts given every year.



PREP SOUTH EAST

SUNNINGDALE SCHOOL ● *Dry Arch Road, Sunningdale,*

Dry Arch Road, Sunningdale Berkshire SL5 9PY

Website sunningdaleschool.co.uk Head Tom Dawson Pupils 110 day and boarding boys Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day: £10,224; boarding: £13,080

Just 30 minutes from London, this warm all-boys prep combines the best of both a traditional and 21stcentury education. Dogs roam the halls, pupils call each other by their surnames, dorms are themed think pirate, circus, treehouse - and hot chocolate is on tap on Friday nights. Meanwhile, 'outstanding' head Tom Dawson - only the eighth in the school's 150-year history is so full of energy that parents say 'you can feel it bouncing round the boys and his team'. Last year's Common Entrance results were outstanding, with three starred passes each to Eton and Harrow (the school is unashamedly pro-CE – the head calls it 'a brilliant exit exam').

SWANBOURNE HOUSE ••

Swanbourne, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK17 0HZ Website swanbourne.org Head Nick Holloway Pupils 309

Head Nick Holloway Pupils 309 day and boarding: 182 boys, 127 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £8,808; boarding: £12,006
Although Swanbourne is part of the Stowe Group, head Nick Holloway – described by a recent visitor as 'young yet unflappable' and by one parent as 'the sort of visible, kind and supportive head most schools wish for' – says the relationship is 'light touch and not overbearing'. Nevertheless, there are perks, from masterclasses with the big school's hockey coach

to exemption from entrance tests and fee discounts for those who progress there (five per cent off for day pupils; 10 per cent for boarders). Whatever, Swanbourne stands on its own two feet: amid wooded grounds at the edge of a pretty village in north Buckinghamshire. Ambitious plans are underway for improvements to the library and further restoration of the estate; but a lower-key highlight is the informal peer-to-peer concerts, ranging from the classics to the pupil's own compositions. 'The wellbeing hub is also a hit with the children,' says one mother. 'From Year 3, all the pupils go regularly when they need some quiet time."

At Sunningdale, dogs roam the halls, pupils call each other by their surnames, dorms are themed — think pirate, circus, treehouse — and hot chocolate is on tap on Friday nights

TWYFORD SCHOOL •• Twyford, Winchester,

Hampshire SO21 2AA Website twyfordschool.com Head Andrew Harvey Pupils 422 day and boarding: 247 boys, 175 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day: £9,978; boarding: £12,594 'It's an incredibly friendly, unpretentious school,' says one parent. 'The teachers know every child's name and it has a real sense of family.' This spirit of togetherness is manifest in the new cookery school where every year group will have timetabled lessons (and the boys will surely be inspired by the new edition of the 'Twyfoodian' cookbook). Sport is strong, with frequent games of the beloved 'Court Cricket' in the summer term; a new head of drama has helmed a number of brilliant productions; and a new Twyford Express transport service - which will enable weekly flexi-boarding - is set to make the

education here more accessible.



SOUTH EAST PREP

WALHAMPTON ••

School Lane, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 5ZG Website walhampton.com Head Jonathan Timms Pupils 344 day and boarding: 196 boys, 148 girls Ages 2-13 Term Fees Day: £8,120; boarding: £11,445 'The opportunity for the children to have instant access to nature. with acres of land and lakes to enjoy, must undoubtedly have a bearing on their wellbeing,' says one parent. And on their health: the first Walhampton triathlon recently saw them swimming, biking and sprinting around these beautiful grounds, which also offer opportunities for climbing trees, building dens and taking riding lessons (not to mention Friday evening outdoor tactical Gladeiator battles between teachers and students). Life also thrives inside the classroom: an extended STEAM area is put to good use; and about 40 per cent of leavers win scholarships to such destinations as Eton, Radley, Harrow and Marlborough.

WELLINGTON COLLEGE PREP ••

Crowthorne Road, Sandhurst, Berkshire GU47 8PH

Website wellingtoncollegeprep.org.uk Head Ed Venables Pupils 385 day and boarding Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £9,030; boarding: £12,150 Every Monday assembly concludes with a 'Joke Off'; that is, the head Ed Venables and the head boy or girl each telling a gag with the pupils voting for the winner. From dance troupe to lunchtime concerts - and extracurriculars that include photography and sports psychology - the opportunities here are vast; and they've been ever-expanding since the school changed its name from Eagle House to reflect its long partnership with neighbouring Wellington College. The teaching block has had a £1 million investment, and the use of the senior school's facilities is a huge bonus. 'My girl's days are filled from morning to home-time,' says one parent. 'And even then, I often find myself trying to coax her into the car.'



WESTBOURNE HOUSE •• Coach Road, Chichester, West Sussex PO20 2BH

Website westbournehouse.org
Head Martin Barker Pupils 342
day and boarding: 195 boys, 147
girls Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day:
£8,750; boarding: £12,050
Parents love the 'vocational, inspirational teachers' here, as well as 'the space, the sport and the freedom for children to run around and simply be children'. Westbourne House prides itself on working its magic on every pupil; not least through its emphasis on outdoor learning in the early years (which

goes beyond even the woodland Forest School to kayaking on the lake, maths classes with birdwatching and taking 'listening walks' in the lovely grounds). A culture of compassion is fostered by peer-mentoring programmes and a Kindness Committee; a designated wildlife corridor is being established; and the recently launched Guest Artist gallery sees local practitioners display their work and deliver inspiring workshops. All this is overseen by head Martin Barker, who is described by his charges as 'kind', 'thoughtful' and a 'great listener'.



WINDLESHAM HOUSE •• London Road, Washington, West Sussex RH20 4AY Website windlesham.com Head Ben Evans Pupils 312 day and boarding: 175 boys, 137 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day:

£10,792; boarding: £14,309 'The school's strengths lie in the fact that they offer so much opportunity for the children to try new skills and activities,' says a parent. 'They also promote an environment in which effort is considered a good thing, rather than deeply uncool.' And nowhere more than in learning modern languages (the specialist unit is now called the Languages, Culture and Linguistics Department). In addition, the twoyear Windlesham House Diploma & Futures programme is designed to equip pupils with the skills needed to flourish going forwards. The evolving sports offering now includes a golf simulator, trampolining and NFL Flag football. □

LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 26

Abingdon School ●

Ardingly College

Bedales School

Bedford School ●
Berkhamsted ● ●

Bradfield College ••

Brighton College ● ● Caterham School ● ●

Caternam School ••
Charterhouse ••

Cranleigh ••

Culford School

Eastbourne College ••
Headington School •

The King's School, Canterbury

Magdalen College School ●

New Hall School • • Oxford High School •

Reigate Grammar School ••

St Catherine's, Bramley

St Helen & St Katharine ••
St Swithun's ••

Sevenoaks School ••
Stowe School ••

Tonbridge School ●
Wellington College ●●

Worth School ●●

SOUTH WEST PREP



South West

ALL HALLOWS SCHOOL ••

Cranmore Hall, East Cranmore, Somerset BA4 4SF

Website allhallowsschool.co.uk Head Dr Trevor Richards Pupils 250 day and boarding: 120 boys, 130 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £7,755; boarding: £12,270 'There's a real sense of family and warmth throughout the school,' says one charmed parent, who believes All Hallows nurtures its students with consideration and patience. All credit to head Trevor Richards (a PhD in Educational Psychology) for ensuring his charges reach their academic

potential while protecting their wellbeing. For all its rich history, the establishment uses cutting-edge technology to teach children how to thrive in a tech-savvy world; but outdoor adventure is also encouraged through its Forest School, where they learn about conservation in their own woodland. Other activities include Lego STEM, coding and bouldering. And although it's tucked away in rural Somerset, its boarding house is a cultural tapestry, with lodgers from as far as Japan and Kuwait.

BEAUDESERT PARK

Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire GL6 9AF Website beaudesert.gloucs.sch.uk Head Chris Searson Pupils 367 day and boarding: 199 boys, 168 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £9,140; boarding: £11,000 Pupils here look forward to the winter term as much as the summer. When it snows, sledges replace day-boys' sports bags at drop-off and everyone takes to the banks of the surrounding grounds. Parents say head Chris Searson is 'buzzing with energy' - and love how he makes it clear that the big school events are not so much staged for their benefit but rather to develop 'the children's growth and confidence'; he and his wife Harriet engender 'a wonderful family feel'; and leavers spring into the next stage at establishments that suit their individual characters. As for the food, one mother was recently told her cooking was 'almost as good as school's'. No higher praise!

CHAFYN GROVE ••

Bourne Avenue, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 1LR Website chafyngrove.co.uk

Head Simon Head Pupils 171 day and boarding: 80 boys, 91 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £7,735; boarding: £10,568 Simon Head is not only liked by parents - who praise his measured approach - but also by his pupils, who describe him as 'fabulous' and 'amazing' and rave about Peggy, his golden retriever. When asked to sum up his school in one phrase, he merely states, 'mobile phonefree'; and at this small, nurturing prep, children are encouraged to be children. Spending time with family is prioritised over lessons on Saturdays, while games have become an important element of weekdays. (The facilities are sensational.) And if Head calls sport 'a wonderful vehicle for life lessons: how to win, how to lose', one parent commends the SEN team, who genuinely focus on all individuals under their guidance.

HANFORD SCHOOL •

Child Okeford, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8HN Website hanfordschool.co.uk Head Hilary Phillips Pupils 90 day and boarding girls Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day: £7,758; boarding: £10,116

Hanford is part of the wider Sherborne Schools group, but it has retained a distinct philosophy that appeals to adults who want to extend their offspring's childhood for as long as possible. Here, girls climb trees and jump on ponies, while detention doesn't even exist but is replaced by a 'Serves You Right' regime, whereby cheeky pupils are asked to do such chores as classroom tidying. But it's not just the freedom that parents appreciate; those whose children sleep at home also like the recent introduction of a flexible schedule that gives them some choice over the length of the school day: if their work interferes with pick-up or drop-off times, their girls can join boarders for breakfast and/or supper.

HAZLEGROVE PREPARATORY SCHOOL •• Sparkford, Somerset BA22 7IA

Website hazlegrove.co.uk Head Ed Benbow Pupils 359 day and boarding: 192 boys, 167 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day: £8,457; boarding: £13,288 It must be a good sign when a pupil describes their head as a 'chatterbox'; and Hazlegrove's is beloved by all who encounter him. Step forward, Ed Benbow, who's lucky enough to have the 'absolute gold' - according to one parent - Mrs B at his side. Together, they make a 'genuinely wonderful' team. Case in point: pupils who read a million words during the term were invited to a 'Millionaire's Lunch' to celebrate their achievement. Pastoral care is extremely strong: boys and girls are taught to be 'kind, respectful and courageous'. The school cares equally about the parent community. A military mother reports that she's happily made great friends with some of the fixed local families.

who include a number of farmers.

KITEBROOK ••

Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire GL56 ORP Website kitebrookpst.org Head Christine Cook Pupils 316 day and boarding: 142 boys, 174 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,340; boarding: £72 a night Kitebrook boasts perhaps the most picture-perfect setting imaginable for schooling children. Sitting at the end of a sweeping driveway, the caramel-coloured Cotswolds manor house (prospective parents might like to know) is also just a short drive from the Daylesford farm shop. A strong sense of community and family underpins the place, which cherishes such traditions as cosy storytelling by the fireplace and singing on the stairs. There's also a strong focus on outdoor education and environmental awareness, with pupils learning about nature through such budding initiatives as creating a garden for the RHS Malvern Spring Show. Sporty children will be glad of a new Astroturf in the works and fledgling fabricators will be able to flex their creativity in a new DT space that's in the pipeline.

PERROTT HILL ••

North Perrott, Somerset TA18 7SL

Website perrotthill.com
Head Alex McCullough Pupils
153 day and boarding: 77 boys, 76
girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day:
£7,850; boarding: £9,750

Asked what was especially appealing about this small school, one parent listed the location, the culture and the standard of teaching. The first is fabulous: the expanses of garden and woodland provide space for exploration. The second is underpinned by the unofficial catchphrase 'Only at Perrott', which seems quite justified when you consider the sound of cattle lowing from the fields, or that there is a 'Goblet of Fire' that appears at assembly, from which names are drawn to acknowledge excellence in reading. Learning is fostered inside and outside the classroom; and the Young Farmers' club leads jammaking sessions (sold in aid of the Farms for City Children charity). Match teas are so good one parent asked for the recipe of the spiced parsnip and truffle oil soup: 'It was out of this world,' she said.

PINEWOOD SCHOOL ••

Bourton, Shrivenham, Wiltshire SN6 8HZ Website pinewoodschool.co.uk

Head Neal Bailey **Pupils** 400 day and boarding: 227 boys, 173 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £9,380; boarding: £11,905 Driving round the 84 acres of Pinewood's grounds, you feel like Elizabeth Bennet visiting Mr Darcy at Pemberley. One pleased parent describes it as a 'school that champions traditional country values, yet has a modern outlook on life'. Its holistic approach to education sees the children grow seasonal produce in its Victorian walled garden for farm-to-fork meals. The faculty also fosters a diverse learning programme, which includes teaming up with a Japanese prep on projects, including one on Hokusai's paintings. And when celebrating its 150th birthday this year, excellence was on full display: highlights included a 24-hour

marathon, a 150-voice choral con-

cert and Pinefest, a musical family

festival at which pupils past and

present celebrate all that is great

about their alma mater.

During assembly at Perrott Hill, a 'Goblet of Fire' appears, from which names are drawn to acknowledge excellence in reading



SOUTH WEST PREP



PORT REGIS ••

Motcombe Park, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 9QA

Website portregis.com
Head Titus Mills Pupils 317 day
and boarding: 167 boys, 150 girls
Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day:
£10,625; boarding: £13,800

£10,625; boarding: £13,800 On arrival, our researcher was greeted by 'the most charming bunch of 12 and 13 year-olds anyone could have the pleasure of meeting'. This prep is described by one parent as 'full of heart and soul', a place where 'children are 'carefully nourished and loved'. And another mentions the 'galvanising and welcoming' head Titus Mills and his wife Jemima: 'Hats off to them!' We are informed that, under the former's four-year tenure, the school is warm and kind with an inclusive learning environment, while keeping standards high. Admission enquiries rose by 13 per cent last year, and leavers secured 24 scholarships to 14 leading senior destinations, including Wycombe Abbey, Wellington and Radley. According to our visitor, the students are 'smiley' and 'confident'. A third parent declares Port Regis 'a glittering example of what a private school should be like'.

SANDROYD PREP ••

Rushmore, Tollard Royal, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5QD Website sandroyd.org

Head Sarah Segrave Pupils 203 day and boarding: 105 boys, 98 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day:

£9,870; boarding: £12,258 Rolling fields, tall trees that shade roe deer, a 'temple' that shelters children on drizzly break-times: Sandroyd's setting is spectacular. 'I had tears in my eyes when we first looked around,' one parent tells us, while a recent visitor dubbed it 'a pretty perfect place to spend your childhood'. The students agree though, when asked what they love most, they were divided between the grounds, the sports and the fact that it's small enough that 'everyone knows each other'. Parents appreciate the 'low-key' approach, which allows 'children to enjoy school while getting to where they need to be', and are pleased there is neither an 'obsession with the curriculum' nor a 'running commentary' about results. Instead, teachers focus on 'developing a passion for learning'. No doubt new head Sarah Segrave,

who joins from Eaton House, will

continue to take this haven from

strength to strength.

SHERBORNE PREP

Acreman Street, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3NY

Website sherborneprep.org

Head Annie Gent Pupils 201 day
and boarding: 106 boys, 95 girls

Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:

Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £7,800; boarding: £11,220

'I always feel comfortable and happy when I'm at school,' reports one student. 'Everyone is very supportive of each other.' And this sense of community is evident at the numerous events that shape the Sherborne calendar: runs, concerts and fairs among them. Meanwhile, cross-curricular days are popular, offering off-timetable opportunities for learning, while such esoteric competitions as the conker championship are cherished. Energy expended is replenished by the talented catering team, whose southern fried chicken and picnic hampers are loved by pupils and staff alike. Everyone looks forward to the 'play in a week' event, when every year-group stages a drama. Access to the facilities of the Sherborne Schools Group is a big bonus. While the prep feeds these two, leavers also head to the likes of Canford, Millfield and Sevenoaks, often backed by a scholarship.

TRURO SCHOOL PREP ••

Treliske House, Highertown, Truro, Cornwall TR1 3QN Website truroschool.com Head Rob Morse Pupils 280 day: 170 boys, 110 girls Ages 3–11

Term Fees Day: £6,127 Truro School Prep is 'a sanctuary of opportunity, a springboard for selfdiscovery, and a nurturing ground' for young children, raves one parent, who explains how its ethos of confidence-building helps pupils reach their full potential. A visitor found head Rob Morse to be 'distinguished, dapper, dedicated and delightful... a natural leader with a love of education and all things Cornish'. Morse uses 'metacognitive' practices to nurture assertive pupils who engage in self-reflective, critical thinking; and this results in high achievers – exemplified by students who were runners-up in the Quiz Club National Mathematics Final in Oxford. He is also an advocate of 'a healthy dose of laughter along the way'. This learning setting, founded on positive affirmation, has allowed creativity to flourish, its strong music culture earning the choir the honour of performing for King Charles at Truro Cathedral in 2023. With a fine golf course on the doorstep and close ties to the prestigious Rajasthan Royals cricket academy, Truro is also establishing its presence as an elite sporting school. □

LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 44

Badminton
Blundell's
Cheltenham College
Christ College Brecon
Clayesmore
Clifton College
Dean Close School
Haberdashers' Monmouth
Schools
Millfield
Monkton Combe
St Mary's Calne
Stonar School
Stonar School

Westonbirt ••











BOARDING AND DAY CO-EDUCATION FOR PUPILS AGED FROM 7-18.
INSPIRING ACADEMICS SUPPORTED BY A FULL PROGRAMME OF CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS, SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES.

AT CRANLEIGH

PREP



Midlands & East Anglia

BEESTON HALL SCHOOL ••

West Runton, Cromer,
Norfolk NR27 9NQ
Website beestonhall.co.uk
Head Fred de Falbe Pupils 168 day
and boarding: 79 boys, 89 girls
Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £9,193;
boarding: £12,269
With its rhododendron-lined driveway, roaring fires and dogs in the

classrooms, Beeston Hall gives the

impression of being a family house that is run as a school: 'It felt personal, homely,' says one parent of her first impression; and her peers – of whom an impressive 30 per cent once attended here themselves as children – also love the cosy atmosphere. The music school is being revamped to include a dance and recording studio, the new head of drama has introduced the

LAMDA syllabus and both the new head of learning support and the senior mental health lead are laser-focused on supporting their charges' wellbeing and confidence. In Year 8, public speaking is now encouraged through pupil lectures to parents and teachers on topics that span everything from bitcoin to communism. And next up? A nursery, opening in 2026.

BILTON GRANGE ••

Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 6QU Website biltongrange.co.uk Head Gareth Jones Pupils 381 day and boarding: 203 boys, 178 girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £9,970; boarding: £13,830 'We were blown away by the grounds, the facilities and the staff, who are all A+++,' says one parent here, where demand for places has surged. (Hence the addition of a further Year 2 class and a boarding house with a helter-skelter slide to transport children to lower levels.) A wellbeing hub is in the works, as is an amphitheatre for performances en plein air. Outdoor learning is a big part of life; and lately, some Year 7s followed a night's camping with an early-morning archaeological dig. Asked what they loved most about school, one pupil said 'our brotherhood and friendship'.

THE ELMS ••

Colwall, Malvern,
Worcestershire WR13 6EF
Website elmsschool.co.uk
Head Ed Lyddon Pupils 160 day
and boarding: 86 boys, 74 girls
Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:
£9,166; boarding: £12,615

'The ethos, the countryside, the animals and then, ultimately, the children were magical. I thought: "If I could do it all again, I would want to go here",' says one mother, remembering her first impressions of The Elms. The students here are outdoorsy - the U13 cricket team were crowned county champions last year - and they love their Rural Studies lessons at the school farm. 'I was told to bring my wellies for the tour,' said a visitor. 'Good job I did. First stop was the pig pens, which is home to a variety of rare breeds and a litter of newborn piglets.' In other developments, the dorms are being refurbished and a new wellness garden will offer children a place to find tranquillity. Better yet, with stabling and an arena, they can keep their own steeds at school. 'I have riding lessons and hacks, which is amazing," raves one pupil. 'Plus, I can visit my pony at breaktime for cuddles.'



KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE ● ●

West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DN Website kcs.cambs.sch.uk Head Yvette Day Pupils 392 day and boarding: 247 boys, 145 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £7,862; boarding: £12,180; choristers: £4,019

boarding: £12,180; choristers: £4,019 Founded by King Henry VI and tucked in among Cambridge's most beautiful colleges, King's College School prides itself on shaping pupils who are kind, communityminded, inventive and interesting to talk to. Staff and pupils alike

enter the Creativity Competition every year, judging each other's work, and artists benefit from the school's kiln and printing press. The chess club is popular, as is one devoted to 'chanter' (bagpipes); and there's plenty of fresh air to be had at the Forest School, the outdoor swimming pool and the array of pitches and courts. Meanwhile, music is important (and so is tradition): there are 400 music lessons taken weekly, regular recitals and the King's Choristers still wear Eton suits and top hats to chapel.

Demand at Bilton Grange has surged, hence a new boarding house with a helter-skelter slide to transport children to lower levels



MOOR PARK ••

Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 4DZ Website moorpark.org.uk Head James Duffield Pupils 155 day and boarding: 88 boys, 67 girls Ages 3 months –13 Term Fees Day: £8,742; boarding: £12,936

'Moor Park's greatest strength is its ability to bring out the best in every child,' says one parent, who praised its warmth, energy and sense of community. 'No matter their interests or abilities, every individual is valued and given opportunities to shine.' At this traditional rural prep, childhood is allowed to be a muddy, joyful adventure. (The school has woven an outdoor education programme into the curriculum - and denbuilding is a very popular pursuit.) Boarding is totally flexible and plans are afoot to extend the nursery, where the children go outside every day no matter the weather. This happy and wholesome haven is overseen by head James Duffield, who is described by one pupil as 'a lively soul but with a serious side, mixing fun and work together'.

OLD BUCKENHAM HALL ••

Brettenham Park, Ipswich, Suffolk IP7 7PH

Website obh.co.uk

Head James Large Pupils 220 day and boarding: 112 boys, 108 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day: £8,157; boarding: £11,883

For all its modernity, there's something a bit Beatrix Potter about this prep. Children can play in acres of grassland, help run a farm that has chickens and fruit trees, and get stuck into the annual school game Merchant Men (unique to OBH, say staff - 'don't ask us about the rules, as only the children truly understand the game'). But along with outdoor fun, there's serious stuff going on in the classrooms. Take the new computer science curriculum, which encompasses advanced coding and robotics. It's little wonder that the number of scholarships to senior schools has doubled in the past year, with popular destinations including Oundle, Eton and Uppingham.



ORWELL PARK ••

Nacton, Suffolk IP10 0ER Website orwellpark.co.uk Head Guy Musson Pupils 207 day and boarding: 124 boys, 83 girls **Ages** 2½–13 **Term Fees** Day: £9,397; boarding: £13,798 Orwell Park is really passionate about preserving the magic of childhood. Pupils happily roam the 110-acre site and throw themselves into a varied sporting programme that includes skiing, riding, sailing and the niche-sounding Footgolf. A new outdoor wellbeing area offers space for reflection, while co-curricular activities range from LAMDA lessons to kit-car building, street dance to astronomy. Opportunities abound for musicians - the Orangery recital series witnesses brilliant individual performances - while a recent staging of the musical Matilda garnered rave reviews. Artists' work is regularly exhibited, and the children take trips to the likes of India and (closer to home) Walsingham Castle. Senior school destinations span Benenden, Oundle, Eton and more, and leavers tend to receive a constellation of scholarship offers.

PACKWOOD HAUGH ••

Ruyton XI Towns, Shrewsbury SY4 1HX Website packwood-haugh.co.uk Head William Goldsmith Pupils 193 day and boarding: 132 boys, 61 girls Ages 4-13 Term Fees Day: £9,494; boarding: £12,135 'We felt it would give our children all the opportunities they wanted in whatever direction they wanted,' says one parent, explaining their choice of Packwood Haugh, and she adds: 'It would also nurture them, support them and give them wonderful memories of school life.' This small establishment strives to provide an education that's full of wonder – and to spur ambition. (As part of the Shrewsbury Global Family of Schools, it collaborates with partners around the world.) The new science centre, with three state-of-the-art laboratories, is an inspiring place for learning, and the theatre is staffed by a pupil-led technical crew. 'I feel like I am supported both by my friends and my teachers,' concludes one child. 'And it's nice that we are allowed and encouraged to be independent and to use our own knowledge.'

ST FAITH'S ••

Trumpington Road,
Cambridge CB2 8AG
Website stfaiths.co.uk
Head Dr Crispin Hyde-Dunn
Pupils 553 day: 300 boys, 253 girls
Ages 4–13 Term Fees £8,354
St Faith's was one of the first preps in the country to introduce engineering as a subject – fitting, since the inventor of the hovercraft was an alumnus – and its pupils are certainly bright buttons: a recent cohort of leavers bagged an impres-

sport, art, drama and music. The school wants its charges to be their best selves and has therefore introduced a bespoke digital skills curriculum as well as extra tutor time, so that children can work more closely with staff in reviewing their strengths and targets. Sporty students compete regularly in regional and national competitions, while some gifted choristers sing at the Cambridge colleges. Parents will be delighted to hear that plans are underway to open an earlier entry point with a 3+ class in 2026.



ST JOHN'S COLLEGE SCHOOL ● ●

Grange Road, Cambridge CB3 9AB

Website sjcs.co.uk Head Neil Chippington Pupils 415 day and boarding: 229 boys, 186 girls Ages 4-13 Term Fees Day: £8,332; boarding: £13,128 Parents describe Neil Chippington as a 'gentle' and 'fabulous' head, who presides over a 'culture of respect and genuine kindness'. There's a strong emphasis on wellbeing here; and it's underpinned by the unique Emotions 4 Learning curriculum, which aims to develop empathy and the regulation of feelings, as well as to manage stress. St John's College School traces its roots to the 17th century and with these historic origins as a choir school, music remains its beating heart: 60 concerts are given every year, and choristers who sing in the St John's Chapel Choir have two thirds of their boarding fees paid. Of late, Chippington has embarked on a campaign to raise more money for bursaries, and he's also bolstering the partnership and outreach programme, which includes a Singing with Dementia project, whereby the children learn to sing

with patients in local care homes.



WINCHESTER HOUSE SCHOOL • •

High Street, Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7AZ Website winchester-house.org Head Antonia Lee Pupils 338 day and boarding: 186 boys, 152 girls **Ages** 3–14 **Term Fees** Day: £9,272; weekly boarding: £12,638 Winchester House aims to change the world one pupil at a time, through scholastic excellence, creativity and character building. But there's a strong sense of fun at its heart, perhaps best embodied by the annual Pumpkin Roll race in which children send the orange gourds spinning down the drive.

Some of the school's brightest sparks recently represented the UK in the international Da Vinci Academic Decathlon, finishing third; and with a major fundraising effort promising a state-of-the-art update to the theatre, there will be even more opportunities for performers. Athletic types can avail themselves of impressive facilities - and, for their efforts, bag sports scholarships to senior schools. (Last year's cohort actually scored 12.) And all leavers take part in the ageold ritual of 'signing' the stones at the top of the historic tower, where they can still find evidence of the generations that preceded them.

WITHAM HALL ••

Witham on the Hill, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 0JJ

Website withamhall.com

Head William Austen Pupils 231 day and boarding: 129 boys, 102 girls Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £8,360;

boarding: £11,310

Beautiful grounds, academic rigour, strong sports, lifelong friendships. No wonder Witham calls itself the quintessential English prep – but it has earned the accolade. In sports, both its netball and hockey teams reached the IAPS finals last year; and two of its girls were crowned national champions (at U12 clay pigeon shooting and U11 triathlon respectively). In the arts, LAMDA lessons prove popular, while the school's musical ensembles include rock and string groups, as well as its band of marching drummers. And if they have any energy to spare, the children will soon be able to expend it on an assault course being constructed in the Walled Garden. Leavers head to the likes of Oundle, Uppingham and Oakham with the happy, can-do attitude they have already absorbed through such ventures as the 'Snack Shack': entirely student-run, it provides sweets and nibbles at school events, with the profits going to charity. As for the school food itself? It is deemed 'absolutely amazing' by one student. 'We look forward to meatballs and mash, and I love the chips in match teas.' □



Publics with preps: see page 54

Ellesmere College ●●

Felsted School ●●

Gresham's ●●

King's High Warwick ●●

Moreton Hall ●●

New Hall School

Norwich School ••
Oundle School ••

The Perse School ●●

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Shrewsbury School ● ●

Uppingham ●●



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NORTH & SCOTLAND PREP



North & Scotland

ARDVRECK SCHOOL •• Crieff, Perthshire PH7 4EX Website ardvreckschool.co.uk Head Ali Kinge Pupils 147 day and boarding: 71 boys, 76 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £8,476; boarding: £12,731 Wellies are non-negotiable at Ardvreck, most importantly for the longstanding morning-break favourite of 'Dams and Dens'. And now, activities like finding the right shrubbery for a den or blocking streams like beavers have a new rival in a zipline, allowing the woodlands to be viewed from a new lofty angle. An adventurous lot, the children at this Highlands prep can enjoy all the pleasures of playing outside - nonetheless, a popular recent indoor addition has been a swimming pool - and, as one parent puts it, 'be free from the pressures of dressing and looking a certain way'. But whatever they are up to, they're led by example. 'If the staff are not having fun, they're doing it wrong,' says the head, Ali Kinge, who is clearly respected by both staff and pupils and garnered a particular mention from one parent for her 'phenomenal' leadership, 'fairness, consistency and determination'.

AYSGARTH SCHOOL ••
Newton-le-Willows, Bedale,
North Yorkshire DL8 1TF

Website aysgarthschool.com Head Jonathon Anderson Pupils 220 day and boarding: 151 boys, 67 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £10,612; boarding: £13,805 Parents praise head Jonathon Anderson for being approachable and connected with their children. 'His door is always open,' says one, while another chimes in that he is 'highly respected for his strong leadership, and the twinkle in his eye'. Aysgarth sees boarding as an opportunity to fully embrace childhood, and there's an emphasis on fun and esoteric games. 'Spotlight' challenges pupils to 'break out' of school and creep to the cricket pavilion in the dark; 'COW' is similar to cricket, but points are scored by launching the ball into the head's garden; and 17 dogs mean there's always fetch to be played. Girls were welcomed in 2024; provision is being expanded to meet growing demand for places.

BELHAVEN HILL SCHOOL ••

Dunbar, East Lothian EH42 1NN Website belhavenhill.com Head Oliver Langton Pupils 136 day and boarding: 75 boys, 61 girls Ages 5–13 Term Fees Day: £10,200; boarding: £12,800 It's Scotland's last prep to offer full boarding or none at all - there's no flexi-provision – but head Olly Langton believes that 'guaranteeing everybody who is boarding will be there all the time means you can build really good friendships'. Our reviewer found happy children who loved the dorms with their homely pine beds, cosy blankets and personalised pinboards. Exeats are fortnightly while 'In Weekends' are activity-packed. From its perch on the East Lothian coast, you can hear the sea, and much outdoor time is spent on the beach. Langton tells senior schools - Loretto, Gordonstoun and Rugby - that they 'want Belhaven pupils, not because they have to be the best at something specific but because they have a wonderful approach to life'.

CARGILFIELD •• Gamekeeper's Road,

Edinburgh EH4 6HU Website cargilfield.com Head Colin MacIntosh Pupils 296 day and boarding: 159 boys, 137 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,690; weekly boarding: £10,670 Cargilfield endeavours to offer children 'an everyday adventure', and life at this Edinburgh prep does seem exceptionally fun and varied. Outdoor activities, and the Band of Pipes and Drums, sound wonderfully boisterous, while a roster of trips and tours includes Munro and bothy weekends. Extracurricular activities span debating and baking, and the surf-skating club is proving to be particularly popular. The flexi-boarding regime is praised by parents, who also love the tight-knit 'great family of people'. (Says one: 'It's not just the teaching staff but the people who run the grounds, the kitchens and the office.") With the arrival of new head Colin

MacIntosh, Cargilfield certainly

has an exciting chapter ahead.

PREP NORTH & SCOTLAND

CUNDALL MANOR SCHOOL ••

Cundall, York YO61 2RW Website cundallmanorschool.com Head Simon Weale Pupils 300 day and boarding: 162 boys, 138 girls Ages 2–16 Term Fees Day: £8,172; boarding: £9,935

'The food is amazing,' declares one student, who also adores the uniform: 'I love the summer dress and I'd wear it all year round if I was allowed!' Clearly, Cundall Manor is getting something very right. A small school with big ambitions, it places huge emphasis on fun the pink and blue minibuses are reminiscent of Liquorice Allsorts, teepees dot the landscape, the annual go-kart race sees pupils hurtling down a hill in makeshift vehicles - and the new head Simon Weale has gone down a treat with parents. 'He has hit the ground running and absolutely everything I have heard about him so far has been super-positive,' says one. 'He seems to set just the right tone.'

MOWDEN HALL SCHOOL ••

Newton, Stocksfield, Northumberland NE43 7TP Website mowdenhallpst.org **Head** Phil Sturt **Pupils** 227 day and boarding: 127 boys, 100 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £7,974; boarding: £11,343 Spotting the resident short-eared owl during a bird-watching session and learning how to ring the church bells are two of the more unusual Mowden Hall activities that make the school so special. There's a warm, calm atmosphere at this small rural prep, which consistently punches above its weight academically. Philosophy and ethics are taught alongside the curriculum and popular senior destinations include Oundle, St Mary's Ascot and Eton. There is a huge appreciation for nature and contented pupils are encouraged to explore the well-maintained grounds and woodland. Having been on staff for three years, recently appointed head Phil Sturt is already a well-liked member of the Mowden family

whose own children are pupils here.

QUEEN MARY'S SCHOOL •• Baldersby Park, Topcliffe, North Yorkshire YO7 3BZ Website queenmarys.org Head Carole Cameron Pupils 85 day and boarding: 84 girls, 1 boy Ages 3-16 Term Fees Day: £9,556; boarding: £13,173 'Oueen Mary's feels like a second family,' says one enthusiastic pupil of this 'fun and friendly' prep. 'It's hard to put into words, but you just become absorbed in the vibe it gives off.' Girls love the music tours

to Vienna and trips to Italy. And the facilities – a new cinema room, upgraded boarding accommodation and a multi-purpose Orchard Learning Space – are outstanding. The Year 4 orchestra gives every student the chance to try a stringed instrument, and academic excellence is a hallmark. Away from the classroom, the equestrian centre is highly reputed: the school team were national champions in the NSEA competition and individuals have qualified for Hickstead and the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

ST MARY'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL ••

Abbey Park, Melrose,

Roxburghshire TD6 9LN Website stmarysmelrose.org.uk Head William Harvey Pupils 141 day and boarding: 58 boys, 76 girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day: £8,060; boarding: £10,240 For the past 10 years, all St Mary's Melrose leavers have been accepted by their first-choice senior schools. This is a 'close-knit, cohesive and supportive' community, according to our visitor, who found its 'nice, normal, chatty children' excelling at sport. (The girls' U11 hockey and netball teams have represented Scotland in the IAPS championships, while the equestrians gained silver at the NSEA championships.) And if the refurbished Brownlie Gym has boosted indoor PE and games, more importantly, it has provided an ideal spot for the boarders' disco. In other areas, there's a wonderful art department; and all children take part in at least one drama production each year.

Cundall Manor School emphasises fun teepees dot the landscape and pupils hurtle downhill in the annual go-kart race



TERRINGTON HALL.

Terrington, York YO60 6PR Website terringtonhall.com Head Huw Thomas Pupils 196 day: 97 boys, 99 girls Ages 3-13 Term Fees Day: £7,548; boarding: £42 per night Showcasing rural North Yorkshire at its very finest, every classroom window at this prep gives on to breathtaking scenery. And the children certainly make the most of their surroundings, enjoying hours of outdoor play as well as a Forest School. Boarding is weekly - flexi is an option, too - and parents commend both the 'warm, friendly and cohesive community' and the 'caring environment and dedicated teaching staff'. (Parent reps meet monthly with 'insightful and decisive' head Huw Thomas.) Popular senior destinations include Winchester, Repton and Oundle. But wherever the children move on, let's hope the match teas live up to the absolutely delicious fare served by Terrington and mentioned to our reviewer by every parent and pupil with whom they spoke. And the Christmas feast: 'The tables are lined up like in Harry Potter with decorations and crackers,' says one pupil. 'After Billy the chef's lunch of turkey, pigs in blankets and cranberry sauce, we do fun activities like a big Christmas quiz.' □

LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 62

Fettes College ●● Giggleswick School Gordonstoun ●● The King's School, Chester •• Loretto ●●

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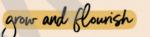




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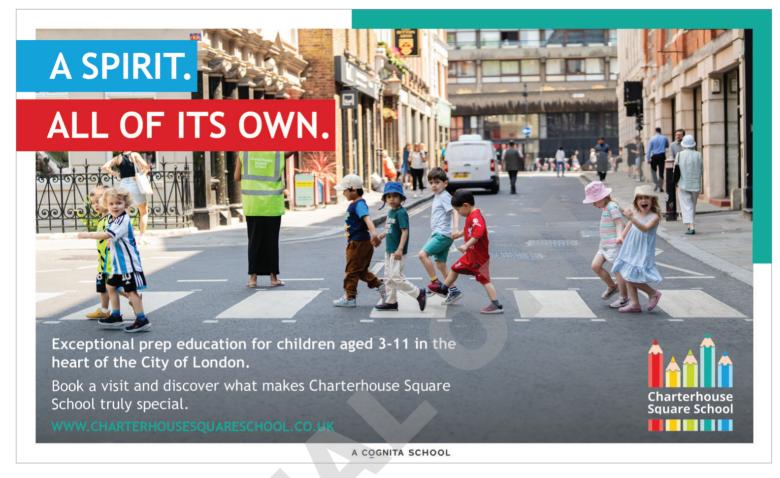








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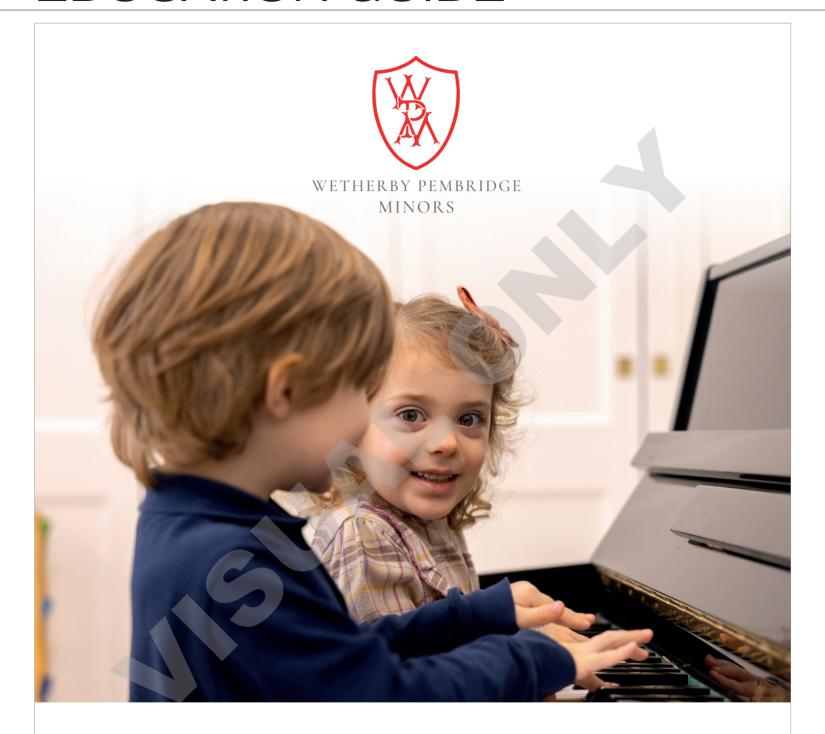
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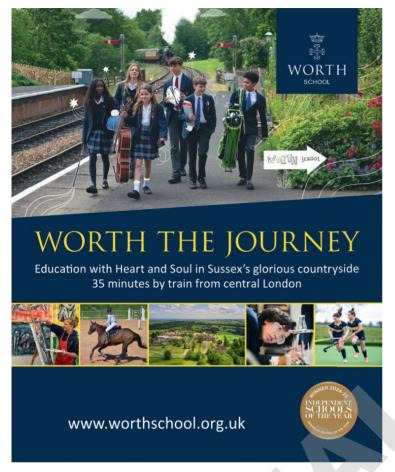




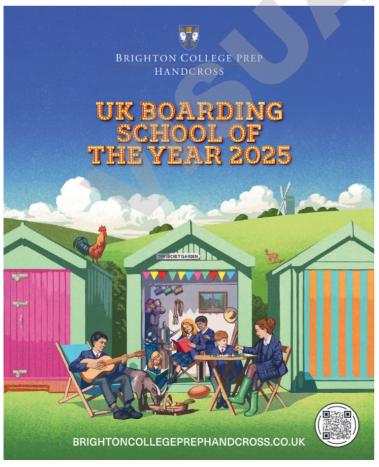




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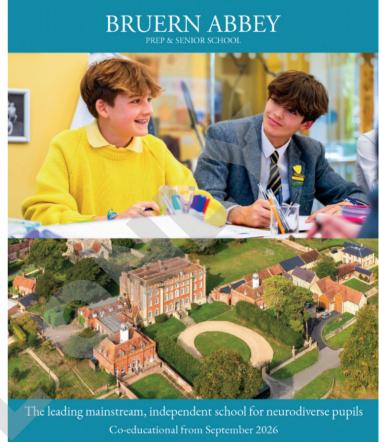














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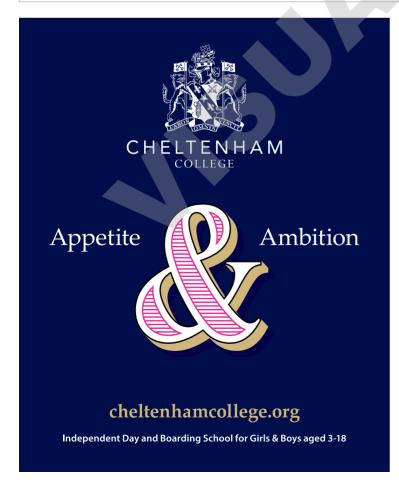
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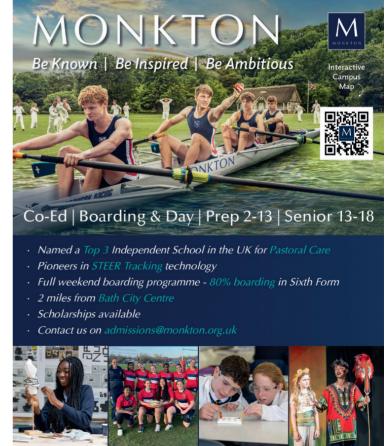








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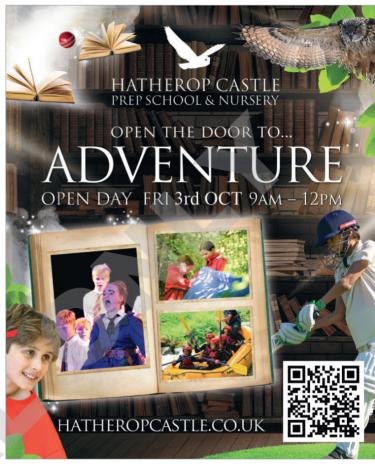


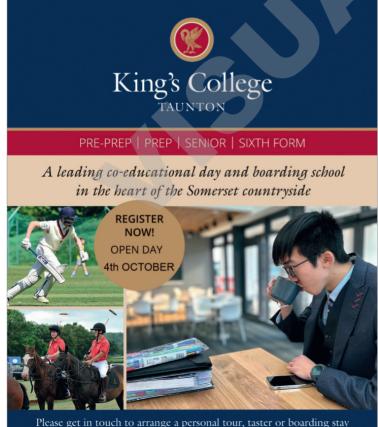
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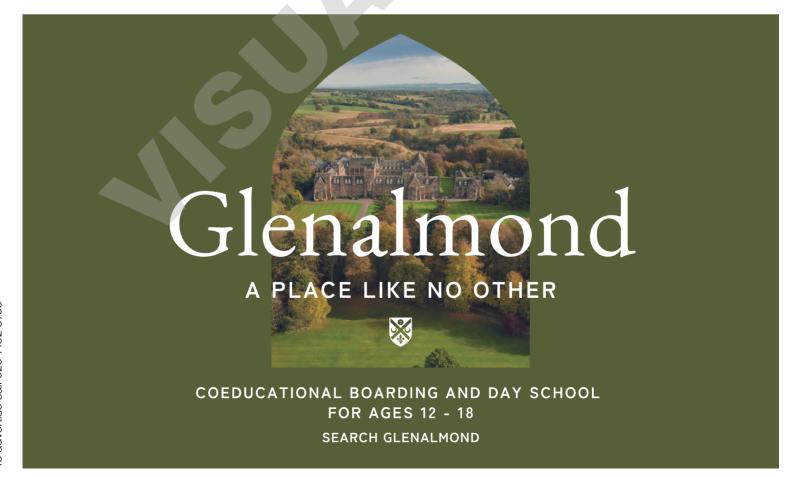
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- 49 Monkton Combe Church Lane, Monkton Combe, Bath BA2 7HG (monktoncombeschool.com)
- 56 Moreton Hall Weston Rhyn, Shropshire SY11 3EW (moretonhall.org)
- New Hall School The Avenue, Boreham, Chelmsford CM3 3HS (newhallschool.co.uk) 56
- North London Collegiate School Canons Drive, Edgware, London HA8 7RJ (nlcs.org.uk)
- 57 Norwich School The Close, Norwich NR1 4DD (norwich-school.org.uk)
- 57 Oakham School Chapel Close, Oakham, Rutland LE15 6DT (oakham.rutland.sch.uk)
- Oundle School The Great Hall, New Street, Oundle, Northamptonshire PE8 4GH 57 (oundleschool.org.uk)
- 36 Oxford High School Belbroughton Road, Oxford OX2 6XA (oxfordhigh.gdst.net)
- 59 The Perse School Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8QF (perse.co.uk)
- 36 Prior's Field Priorsfield Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 2RH (priorsfieldschool.com)
- 21 Putney High School Putney Hill, London SW15 6BH (putneyhigh.gdst.net)
- Queen Anne's School Henley Road, Caversham, Berkshire RG4 6DX (qas.org.uk) 36
 - Queen's College Harley Street, London W1G 8BT (qcl.org.uk)
- Queenswood Brookmans Park, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL9 6NS (queenswood.org) 36
- 37 Radley College Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 2HR (radley.org.uk)
- 37 Reigate Grammar School Reigate Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 00S (reigategrammar.org)
- 59 Repton School Repton, Derbyshire DE65 6FH (repton.org.uk)
- Roedean School Roedean Way, Brighton BN2 5RQ (roedean.co.uk) 37
- Royal Hospital School Holbrook, Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 2RX (royalhospitalschool.org)
- 60 Rugby School Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 5EH (rugbyschool.co.uk)
- 38 St Catherine's, Bramley Station Road, Bramley, Guildford, Surrey GU5 2AQ (stcatherines.info)
- St Edward's School Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 7NN (stedwardsoxford.org) 38
- 38 St George's School, Ascot Wells Lane, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7DZ (stgeorges-ascotorg.uk)
- 64 St George's School Garscube Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6BG (stge.org.uk)
- 40 St Helen & St Katharine Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1BE (shsk.org.uk)
- 65 St Leonards School St Andrews, Fife KY16 9QJ (stleonards-fife.org)
- 40 St Mary's, Ascot St Mary's Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 9JF (st-marys-ascot.co.uk)
- St Mary's Calne Curzon Street, Calne, Wiltshire SN11 0DF (stmaryscalne.org)
- 21 St Paul's Girls' School Brook Green, London W6 7BS (spgs.org)
- 22 St Paul's School Lonsdale Road, London SW13 9JT (stpaulsschool.org.uk)
- 65 St Peter's School, York Clifton, York YO30 6AB (stpetersyork.org.uk)
- 40 St Swithun's Alresford Road, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1HA (stswithuns.com) Sedbergh School Sedbergh, Cumbria LA10 5HG (sedberghschool.org) 65
- 41 Sevenoaks School High Street, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HU (sevenoaksschool.org)
- 51 Sherborne Abbey Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3LF (sherborne.org)
- 51 Sherborne Girls Bradford Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3QN (sherborne.com) 60
- Shrewsbury School Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY3 7BA (shrewsbury.org.uk) South Hampstead High School Maresfield Gardens, London NW3 5SS (shhs.gdst.net) 22
- 52 Stonar Cottles Park, Atworth, Wiltshire SN12 8NT (stonarschool.com)
- 66 Stonyhurst Lancashire BB7 9PZ (stonyhurst.ac.uk)
- Stowe School Stowe, Buckinghamshire MK18 5EH (stowe.co.uk) 41
- Strathallan Forgandenny, Perth PH2 9EG (strathallan.co.uk) 66
- 41 Tonbridge School High Street, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9HA (tonbridge-school.co.uk)
- Tudor Hall Wykham Park, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9UR (tudorhallschool.com) 42
- 22 University College School Frognal, Hampstead, London NW3 6XH (ucs.org.uk)
- 60 Uppingham Uppingham, Rutland LE15 9QE (uppingham.co.uk)
- UWC Atlantic College St Donat's Castle, Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan CF61 1WF 52 (atlanticcollege.org)
- 42 Wellington College Duke's Ride, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 7PU (wellingtoncollege.org.uk)
- 23 Westminster School Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3PB (westminster.org.uk)
- 52 Westonbirt School Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8QG (westonbirt.org)
- Whitgift Haling Park, London CR2 6YT (whitgift.co.uk)
- Wimbledon High School Mansel Road, London SW19 4AB (wimbledonhigh.gdst.net) 23
- Winchester College College Street, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9NA 42 (winchestercollege.org)
- Withington Girls' School Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester M14 6BL (wgs.org) 66
- Woldingham School Marden Park, Woldingham, Surrey CR3 7YA
- (woldinghamschool.co.uk)
- 43 Worth School Paddockhurst Road, Turners Hill, West Sussex RH10 4SD (worthschool.org.uk)
- 43 Wycombe Abbey High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP11 1PE (wycombeabbey.com)
- 66 Yarm School The Friarage, Yarm, North Yorkshire TS15 9EJ (yarmschool.org)

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Prep schools

- 96 Aldro Lombard Street, Shackleford, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6AS (aldro.org)
- 106 All Hallows School Cranmore Hall, Somerset BA4 4SF (allhallowsschool.co.uk)
- 114 Ardvreck School Crieff, Perthshire PH7 4EX (ardvreckschool.co.uk)
- 114 Aysgarth School Newton-le-Willows, Bedale, North Yorkshire DL8 1TF (avsgarthschool.co.uk)
- 86 Bassett House School Bassett Road, London W10 6JP (bassetths.org.uk)
- 106 Beaudesert Park School Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire GL6 9AF (beaudesert.gloucs.sch.uk)
- 110 Beeston Hall School West Runton, Cromer, Norfolk NR27 9NQ (beestonhall.co.uk)
- 114 Belhaven Hill School Dunbar, East Lothian EH42 1NN (belhavenhill.com)
- 110 Bilton Grange Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 6QU (biltongrange.co.uk)
- 96 Brambletye Lewes Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3PD (brambletye.co.uk)
- 96 Brighton College Prep Handcross London Road, Handcross, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 6HF (brightoncollegeprephandcross.co.uk)
- **86 Brighton College Prep Kensington** Prince's Gardens, London SW7 1ND (brightoncollegeprepkensington.co.uk)
- 87 Broomwood Nightingale Lane, London SW12 3TE (broomwood.com)
- 96 Bruern Abbey School Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 1UY (bruernabbey.org)
- 87 Bute House Luxemburg Gardens, London W6 7EA (butehouse.co.uk)
- 97 Caldicott Crown Lane, Farnham Royal, Buckinghamshire SL2 3SL (caldicott.com)
- 114 Cargilfield Gamekeeper's Road, Edinburgh EH4 6HU (cargilfield.com)
- 106 Chafyn Grove Bourne Avenue, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 1LR (chafyngrove.co.uk)
- 97 Cheam School Headley, Newbury, Berkshire RG19 8LD (cheamschool.com)
- 97 Christ Church Cathedral School Brewer Street, Oxford OX1 1QW (cccs.org.uk)
- **87 Connaught House School** Connaught Square, London W2 2HL (connaughthouseschool.co.uk)
- 97 Cothill House Cothill, Oxfordshire OX13 6JL (cothillpst.org)
- 97 Cottesmore School Buchan Hill, Pease Pottage, West Sussex RH11 9AU (cottesmoreschool.com)
- 98 Cumnor House School Danehill, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 7HT (cumnor.co.uk)
- 115 Cundall Manor School Cundall, York YO61 2RW (cundallmanorschool.com)
- 98 Dorset House School Church Lane, Bury, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 1PB (dorsethouseschool.com)
- 98 Dragon School Bardwell Road, Oxford OX2 6SS (dragonschool.org)
- 87 Dulwich Prep London Alleyn Park, London SE21 7AA (dulwichpreplondon.org)
- 88 Eaton House The Manor School Clapham Common North Side, London SW4 9RU (eatonhouseschools.com)
- 88 Eaton Square School Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PH (eatonsquareschools.com)
- 88 L'École de Battersea Trott Street, London SW11 3DS (lecoledebattersea.co.uk)
- 98 Edge Grove Aldenham Village, Hertfordshire WD25 8NL (edgegrove.com)
- 111 The Elms Colwall, Malvern, Worcestershire WR13 6EF (elmsschool.co.uk)
- 98 Elstree School Woolhampton Hill, Berkshire RG7 5TD (elstreeschool.org.uk)
- 88 Fairley House Lambeth Road, London SE1 7JY (fairleyhouse.org.uk)
- 88 Falkner House Penywern Road, London SW5 9SU; Brechin Place, London SW7 4QB (falknerhouse.co.uk)
- 99 Farleigh Red Rice, Andover, Hampshire SP11 7PW (farleighschool.com)
- 99 Feltonfleet School Byfleet Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 1DR (feltonfleet.co.uk)
- 89 Francis Holland Preparatory School 15 Manresa Road, London SW3 6NB (francishollandprep.org.uk)
- 89 Fulham Prep School Greyhound Road, London W14 9SD (fulham.school)
- 89 Garden House School Turks Row, London SW3 4TW (gardenhouseschool.co.uk)
- **89 Glendower Prep School** Queen's Gate, London SW7 5JX (glendowerprep.org)
- 99 Godstowe Shrubbery Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP13 6PR (godstowe.org)
- 89 The Hall School Crossfield Road, London NW3 4NU (hallschool.co.uk)
- 107 Hanford School Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8HN (hanfordschool.co.uk)
- 107 Hazlegrove Preparatory School Sparkford, Somerset BA22 7JA (hazlegrove.co.uk)
- 99 Heath Mount School Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone, Hertfordshire SG14 3NG (heathmountorg)
- 99 Highfield and Brookham Schools Highfield Lane, Liphook, Hampshire GU30 7LQ (highfieldandbrookham.co.uk)
- 100 Holmewood House School Barrow Lane, Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0EB (holmewoodhouse.co.uk)
- 90 Hornsby House School Hearnville Road, London SW12 8RS (hornsbyhouse.org.uk)
- 90 Kensington Prep School Fulham Road, London SW6 5PA (kensingtonprep.gdst.net)
- 111 King's College School, Cambridge West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DN (kcs.cambs.sch.uk)
- 107 Kitebrook Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire GL56 ORP (kitebrookpst.org)
- **90 Knightsbridge School** Pont Street, London SW1X 0BD (knightsbridgeschool.com)
- 100 Lambrook School Winkfield Row, Nr Ascot, Berkshire RG42 6LU (lambrookschool.co.uk)
- 100 Lockers Park Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 1TL (lockerspark.co.uk)
- Ludgrove School Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3AB (ludgrove.net)
- 100 Milbourne Lodge School Arbrook Lane, Esher, Surrey KT10 9EG (milbournelodge.co.uk)
- 101 Moon Hall School Flanchford Road, Leigh, Reigate, Surrey RH2 8RE (moonshallschoolreigate.co.uk)
- 111 Moor Park Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 4DZ (moorpark.org.uk)
- **101 Moulsford** Moulsford-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 9HR (moulsford.com)

- 115 Mowden Hall School Newton, Stocksfield, Northumberland NE43 7TP (mowdenhallpstorg)
- 101 New College School Savile Road, Oxford OX1 3UA (newcollegeschool.org)
- 90 Newton Prep School Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BX (newtonprepschool.co.uk)
- 90 Norland Place School Holland Park Avenue, London W11 4UH (norlandplace.com)
- 91 Notting Hill Prep School Lancaster Road, London W11 1QQ (nottinghillprep.com)
- 111 Old Buckenham Hall Brettenham Park, Ipswich, Suffolk IP7 7PH (obh.co.uk)
- 91 Orchard House School Newton Grove, London W4 1LB (orchardhs.org.uk)
- 112 Orwell Park Nacton, Ipswich, Suffolk IP10 0ER (orwellpark.co.uk)
- 112 Packwood Haugh Ruyton XI Towns, Shrewsbury SY4 1HX (packwood-haugh.co.uk)
 102 Papplewick Windsor Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7LH (papplewick.org.uk)
- 91 Parkgate House School Clapham Common North Side, London SW4 9SD
- 91 Parkgate House School Clapham Common North Side, London SW4 95D (parkgate-school.co.uk)
- 91 Pembridge Hall School Pembridge Square, London W2 4EH (pembridgehall.co.uk)
- 107 Perrott Hill North Perrott, Somerset TA18 7SL (perrotthill.com)
- 102 The Pilgrims' School Inner Close, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9LT (thepilgrims-school.co.uk)
- 107 Pinewood School Bourton, Shrivenham, Wiltshire SN6 8HZ (pinewoodschool.co.uk)
- 108 Port Regis Motcombe Park, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 90A (portregis.com)
- 102 Prince's Mead Kings Worthy, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1AN (princesmeadschool.org.uk)
- 91 Prospect House School Putney Hill, London SW15 3NT (prospecths.org.uk)
- 115 Queen Mary's School Topcliffe, North Yorkshire YO7 3BZ (queenmarys.org)
- 92 Ravenscourt Park Prep School Ravenscourt Avenue, London W6 OSL (rpps.co.uk)
- 102 St Andrew's School, Berkshire Pangbourne, Berkshire RG8 80A (standrewsberkshire.co.uk)
- 92 St Christopher's School Belsize Lane, London NW3 5AE (stchristophers.london)
- 112 St Faith's Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 8AG (stfaiths.co.uk)
- 102 St George's School Windsor Castle Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1QF (stgwindsor.org)
- 103 St Hugh's School Carswell Manor, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8PT (st-hughs.co.uk)
- 92 St James Prep School Earsby Street, London W14 8SH (stjamesprep.org.uk)
- 103 St John's Beaumont Priest Hill, Old Windsor, Berkshire SL4 2JN (sjbwindsor.uk)
- 113 St John's College School Grange Road, Cambridge CB3 9AB (sics.co.uk)
- 115 St Mary's Preparatory School Abbey Park, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9LN (stmarysmelrose.org.uk)
- 92 St Paul's Juniors Lonsdale Road, London SW13 9JT (stpaulsschool.org.uk)
- 93 St Philip's School Wetherby Place, London SW7 4NE (stpschool.co.uk)
- 103 Saint Ronan's Water Lane, Hawkhurst, Kent TN18 5DJ (saintronans.co.uk)
- 108 Sandroyd Prep Rushmore, Tollard Royal, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5QD (sandroyd.org)
- 108 Sherborne Prep Acreman Street, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3NY (sherborneprep.org)
- 103 Shrewsbury House School Ditton Road, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 6RL (shrewsburyhouse.net)
- 103 Summer Fields Mayfield Road, Oxford OX2 7EN (summerfields.com)
- 104 Sunningdale School Dry Arch Road, Sunningdale, Berkshire SL5 9PY (sunningdaleschool.co.uk)
- 93 Sussex House School Cadogan Square, London SW1X 0EA (sussexhouseschool.co.uk)
- 104 Swanbourne House Swanbourne, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK17 0HZ (swanbourne.org)
- 115 Terrington Hall Terrington, York YO60 6PR (terringtonhall.com)
- 93 Thomas's Battersea Battersea High Street London SW11 3JB (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 93 Thomas's Clapham Broomwood Road, London SW11 6JZ (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 93 Thomas's Fulham Hugon Road, London SW6 3ES (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 93 Thomas's Kensington Cottesmore Gardens, London W8 5PR (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 94 Tower House Sheen Lane, London SW14 8LF (thsboys.org.uk)
- 108 Truro School Prep Treliske House, Truro, Cornwall TR1 3QN (truroschool.com)
- 104 Twyford School Twyford, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 2AA (twyfordschool.com)
 105 Walhampton School Lane, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 5ZG (walhampton.com)
- 105 Wellington College Prep Crowthorne Road, Sandhurst, Berkshire GU47 8PH (wellingtoncollegeprep.org.uk)
- 105 Westbourne House Coach Road, Chichester, West Sussex PO20 2BH (westbournehouse.org)
- 94 Westminster Cathedral Choir School Ambrosden Avenue, London SW1P 1QH (choirschool.com)
- 94 Westminster Under School Vincent Square, London SW1P 2NN (westminsterunder.org.uk)
- 94 Wetherby Preparatory School Bryanston Square, London W1H 2EA (wetherbyprep.co.uk)
- 113 Winchester House School High Street, Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7AZ (winchester-house.org)
- 105 Windlesham House London Road, Washington, West Sussex RH20 4AY (windlesham.com)
- 113 Witham Hall Witham on the Hill, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 OJJ (withamhall.com)

Swiss schools

- 71 Aiglon College Avenue Centrale 61, 1885 Chesières (aiglon.ch)
- 71 Collège Alpin Beau Soleil Route du Village 1, 1884 Villars-sur-Ollon (beausoleil.ch)
- 69 Institut auf dem Rosenberg Höhenweg 60, 9000 St Gallen (instrosenberg.ch)
- 70 Institut Le Rosey Château du Rosey, 1180 Rolle; Chalet Rex, 3780 Gstaad (rosey.ch)



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BUN FIGHTS!

Hold fire on the mini sausage rolls... match teas just got thoroughly, competitively, gourmet

WHILE RIVAL PUPILS TOUGH IT OUT OVER A

game of rugby, cricket or lacrosse, there's a more subtle (though socially significant) tussle taking place on the sidelines. That's because match tea is the ultimate arbiter of local school hierarchies. A-level results? Pft! Everyone knows it's really about who has the best strawberries and cream. Every year, Tatler Schools Guide researchers are overwhelmed by the sheer number of institutions who stake a claim to providing the ultimate match tea. So whose really is the best on the circuit?

No surprise that Eton thinks it wears the crown; and as it has been sourcing, prepping and cooking its own food since 1440, the college is certainly well practised. (Its kitchen - the second-oldest still working in England – produces scones and cakes that have spectators raving.) Radley must be a contender, too. For more than a century, the refreshments served on the veranda of the old cricket pavilion were legendary; and today, a parent tells us, standards are upheld on the first floor of its modern sister, 'with a fantastic view over the playing fields'. And then there's Bedford, which toasts its cricket sixes tournaments with champagne in the Head Master's Garden.

Beat that? Well, some places go gourmet: Bradfield provides a 'tasting menu' of such dishes as peppered venison loin and penang prawn curry. Others score points for homeliness: say, Downe House's little van that offers hot chocolate and sausage rolls. And in the wise words of a St Paul's Junior: 'You can never go wrong with squash and a jam-filled doughnut.'

But the crème de la crème must be Lambrook. Parents are enraptured by the smoked salmon sandwiches and grand cakes: 'I would go for the match tea even if my son weren't playing that day,' confessed one parent. JASMINE PARKER

FLAVOUR OF THE SEASON















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