

TATLER®

TATLER SCHOOLS GUIDE 2025

Schools Guide 2025

The top prep and public schools in the UK

Editor's letter



IT'S MY GREAT PLEASURE TO WELCOME you to the 2025 *Tatler Schools Guide*, the definitive arbiter of the UK's top prep and public schools. We understand how daunting it can seem to choose a school for your child so we've done the hard work for you: visiting schools, talking to their heads, pupils and teachers, receiving candid answers to nearly 2,500 questionnaires before writing the reviews that we hope will help steer your choices.

A question I'm frequently asked is: how does a school gain admission to such a selective publication? My countrywide team of brilliant researchers constantly alert me to the buzz among parents in their areas – perhaps they've heard of a visionary head, or a new partnership with a leading public school, or a flush of investment. But before the ultimate decisions are made, I also look for balance regionally, nationally and, significantly, academically. The latter judgement call isn't just based on exam grades. While it's wonderful that some pupils have ambitions to study at Harvard or Oxbridge, just as many are neurodiverse and need schools to help support their learning accordingly. With that in mind, I'm very happy to be adding both Moon Hall School in Surrey and Fairley House in London to the 2025 Guide, where they join other educational specialists such as Bruern Abbey and Milton Abbey, all seeking out and celebrating those who learn differently.

One of the great privileges of my job is that I meet some of the most inspirational educators in the world. A conversation with Sir Anthony Seldon, one of Britain's pre-eminent historians and educationalists, got me wondering whether the ultra-resourced 'prep' schools on America's East Coast were a match for our own historically established gems. Thanks to some incredibly persistent board members, benefactors and alumni, I gratefully received invitations to visit six of the finest – not to mention notoriously media-shy – US preps (see page 60). And what I discovered is that, at heart, American and British boarding schools are very similar: they are places where dedicated teachers guide bright and erudite pupils towards achieving their best while respecting their friends and community.

No first-class campus or sparkling new building can top the benefits conferred by good teachers. Can the new technologies match them? And how will the burgeoning growth of artificial intelligence affect teaching? Sir Anthony is leading the way in helping parents and pupils navigate the ifs and hows of incorporating AI safely into their studies; and I am honoured that he has shared his thoughts on this urgent issue on page 6.

And what do young people believe schools should focus on teaching them in this evolving world? I'm delighted that a talented selection of both US and UK pupils have let us know (page 9). After all, they are the future.

Until next year,

TORI CADOGAN
Education Editor



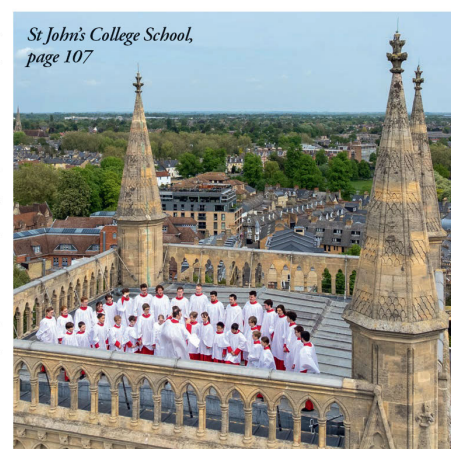
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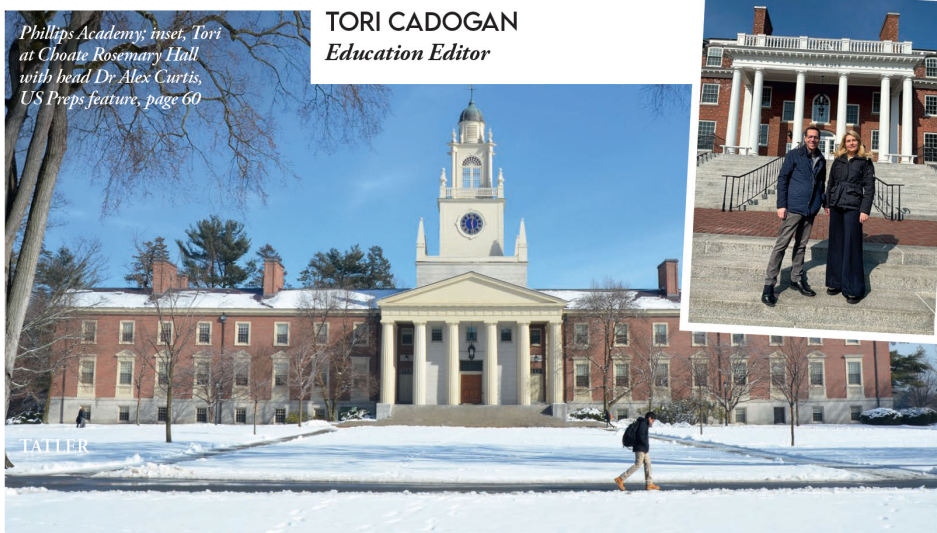
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ON THE COVER
Photographed by LUC BRAQUET
Styled by LYDIE HARRISON

The mother wears jacket and skirt, Dior. Bag, Veronica Beard. Watch, Seiko. Jewellery, Susan Caplan, 4Element and Gillian Horsup at Alfies Antiques. Buddy wears blazer, Amaia London. Shirt, Rachel Riley. Shorts and socks, Marks & Spencer. Bag, Cambridge Satchel. Otis wears blazer, Amaia London. Shirt, Rachel Riley. Shoes, Hush Puppies. Bag, Dolce & Gabbana. Amelle wears coat, dress and tights, Amaia London. Shoes, La Coquette. Hat, Cera Una Volta. Grooming: Amy Sachon, Bookings Editor: Laura Nicholson. Senior producer: Lottie Rand at One Production. With thanks to Westminster School.

All information believed to be correct at the time of publication



ON THE BALL
Make the grade in the fashion stakes, page 66

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 board 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 Royal 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 Service

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 to 2023

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PHOTOGRAPH: LUC BRAQUET. THE MOTHER WEARS JACKET, PRADA. JUMPER, GÖBI CASHMERE. SKIRT, EMILIA WICKSTEAD. SHOES, CASADEI. BAG, DOLCE & GABBANA. COAT (IN HAND), AMAIA LONDON. JEWELLERY, GILLIAN HORSUP. AT ALFIES ANTIQUES. SUSAN CAPLAN. LYDIE JEWELLERY. MINKA. AMELLE WEARS JUMPER, MIPOUNT. SKIRT, DOLCE & GABBANA. SHOES, LA COQUETTE. TIGHTS, AMAIA LONDON. BUDDY WEARS JUMPER, STELLA MCCARTNEY. SHIRT, TOMMY HILFINGER. TROUSERS, RALPH LAUREN. TRAINERS, MARKS & SPENCER. BAG, CAMBRIDGE SATCHEL.

ALL HANDS ON TECH!

Transformative technologies such as AI, machine-learning and robotics are ushering in a fourth education-revolution, a radical upheaval that requires schools to reconsider every aspect of the education they offer. It's time to embrace these exciting new opportunities – and adapt, says Sir Anthony Seldon

IN 25 YEARS' TIME, education will be far more stimulating, widespread and dynamic than at any point in human history. It has a wonderfully exciting future. But in this article, I am talking specifically about schools; and their future is far less certain and secure, because they will no longer be the sole purveyors of education. They will have to rethink every aspect of what they are offering, and the most successful will be those that adapt with the most intelligence, foresight and compassion.

We are still living in the era of the third education-revolution, one in which all learning was overseen by schools. (The first revolution was the beginning of learning, the second, the beginning of organised learning in schools some 500 years ago.) The classroom was king, with the all-knowing teacher standing at the front, organising and explaining what had to be learnt, sitting in judgement on it and communicating to others about performance. There were reports home, notoriously written by term-tired teachers, which were seldom read and, if they were, even more rarely acted upon.

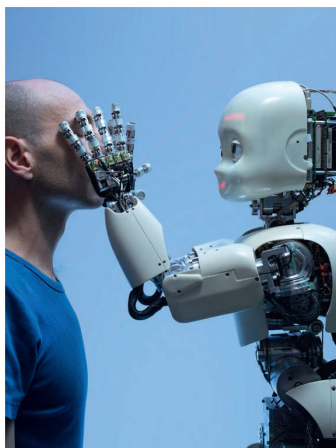
But a fourth education-revolution, with its myriad of technologies – including artificial intelligence (AI), distance-learning and machine-learning, virtual and augmented reality, blockchain, the Internet of



SETTING WHEELS IN MOTION

Above, German automotive engineer Karl Benz and his team of metal and coach workers at the Benz & Co factory in Mannheim, 1908. Who could have guessed how swiftly their early cars would revolutionise transport around the world?

Below, from left, teenagers can scroll on smart devices that will personalise the content and pace of their learning programmes, accessible any time, any place; a robot 'opening the eyes of a human being to the world that is coming'



Things, quantum-computing, robotics and more – is exploding that world. The arrival in late 2022 of Chat GPT blew everyone away. Suddenly, the world was aware of the transformative power of generative AI. The genie is out of the bottle. There can be no going back.

Consider the photograph *left*, taken in 1908. It is of Karl Benz and his metal and coach workers at his factory in Mannheim. What you can see are drive-shafts for the early cars, which were about to replace the principal mode of transport used around the world for thousands of years: horses. What those in the picture could not know is how rapid and how dramatic that transformation would turn out to be. How could they?

We are those people in that photo, on the cusp of the fourth education-revolution. But there is one notable difference. The coming upheaval will transform the world far more radically than the car and motorised transport did. It is hard to see something when you are in the middle of it – we can now understand the impact of the car and how our lives would not be imaginable without it – but it's almost impossible to conceive how the fourth education-revolution will turn our schools upside-down.

Look now at the image, *far left*. What you are seeing is a depiction

of teenagers with mobile devices. There is no aspect of the formal education their school is giving them that they're not able to benefit from – often far better – on their devices. Presentation of new material in maths, English or history? The devices will personalise it for them. Help with aspects of a new topic they doesn't understand? The devices will personalise it for them. Marking and feedback on how to improve? Again, the devices will personalise it. Feeling weary today and finding progress slow? The devices will personalise the material and take them at a pace at which they feel comfortable.

They will indeed be able to move at their own pace in every subject, at whatever time of day, weekend or holiday that they find most congenial for learning. An 11-year-old might want to work at the rate of a 16-year-old in physics, but a nine-year-old in languages. Those preferences can be accommodated. The machine will be able to understand their voices, read their faces, and produce material which is personalised and optimal, every time they access the technology. This isn't tomorrow's world. It's happening in some places right now.

There were fears, for sure, about the damage that could be done by the car, not least the speed at which travellers would be hurtled down roads. There are genuine and serious risks to AI which must be addressed. Already, social media and the unlicensed use of mobile phones by children have done unimaginable damage to their happiness, sense of identity, ability to concentrate and to have healthy childhoods. But with AI posing a far greater risk than pre-AI technology, we need to get ahead of it and provide safeguards. Because the benefits are greater than the downsides, and we must not let ourselves become hexed by the latter to the detriment of the former.

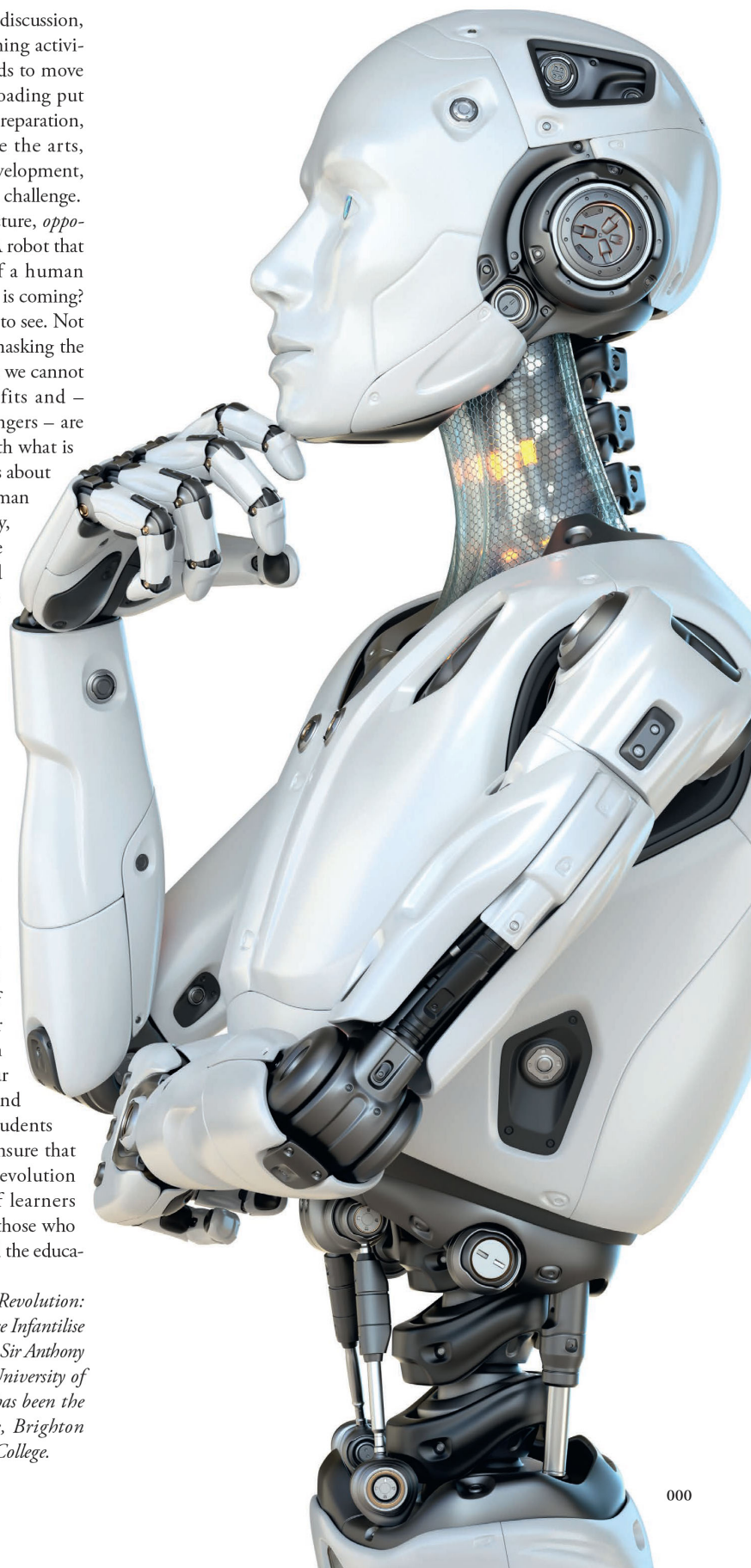
Schools need to smell the silicon. They need to start facilitating the shift of education from the classroom to AI technologies, freeing

up supervised time for discussion, debate and group-learning activities. The emphasis needs to move away from the heavy-loading put on exam-learning and preparation, and embrace far more the arts, creativity, character development, sport, volunteering and challenge.

Look at the third picture, *opposite*. What do you see? A robot that is opening the eyes of a human being to the world that is coming? That's what I want you to see. Not a robot shielding and masking the sight of humans so that we cannot see the gains or benefits and – mesmerised by the dangers – are unwilling to engage with what is coming. Nor one that is about to blind the eyes of human beings and, ultimately, replace us. Though some serious scientists and philosophers believe such a replacement is inevitable, it is nonsense. Were it ever to happen, it would only be because we have not been alert, taken the opportunities and made the most of them.

That is why, together with colleagues across schools, I have formed a new body called AI in Education – which draws on the expertise of school leaders across the world, the heads of exam boards, former education ministers in Britain and some of our leading AI scientists and specialists, as well as students themselves – to help ensure that the fourth education-revolution will be in the lives of learners everywhere, especially those who are failed by schools and the education system today. □

The Fourth Education Revolution: Will Artificial Intelligence Infantilise or Liberate Humanity? by Sir Anthony Seldon is published by University of Buckingham Press. He has been the head of Epsom College, Brighton College and Wellington College.



MAGIC TOUCH

*'We cannot always
build the future for our
youth, but we can build
our youth for the future'*
– Franklin D Roosevelt

E-Learning

NEW RULES FOR SCHOOL

Teachers, listen up! High-performing students from top transatlantic schools set the grade for a better educational experience



Lidia Zur Muhlen

***St Paul's School,
New Hampshire, US***
**EMBRACING DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS**

At St Paul's, I have learned how to develop my own opinions, listen to others and embrace challenging topics. As co-editor-in-chief and a writer for *The Partisan*, a student-run political publication, I have explored my views and discussed them openly with fellow columnists; writing articles taught me to welcome debate, because it forced me to make stronger arguments and not fall back on lazy generalisations. In my first piece, about gerrymandering, my editor at the

time showed me the important skill of writing with opposing views in the back of my mind; and when I argued that gerrymandering limits minority-voters' power, he provided a thoughtful list of counter-examples that challenged me to create a more nuanced rationale. All my work on *The Partisan* showed me that the more students explore and talk about various issues – even in disagreement – the better they can be at maintaining and creating their own fact-based and heartfelt positions. I believe schools need to continue fostering environments in which open dialogue is actively

encouraged. Education should teach students that, even when they find a peer's opinion offensive, they should not take it to heart – but rather, take notes. Whether through Harkness table discussions, student-run publications or debates, teachers must support students when they embark on these difficult conversations; and most importantly, they must show students how to approach those conversations with respect. The only way institutions can create leaders who will adequately address the world's many challenges is to teach students how to listen, learn and interact with each other. ▷



Danny Yoon

**Choate Rosemary Hall,
Connecticut, US
EMPLOYING AI**

The gap between the pace at which technology is evolving, and how little society comprehends it, is among our most pressing problems. AI has sparked passionate discussion worldwide, particularly about its impact on learning. Many schools have adjusted their educational frameworks to meet the new challenges it presents, specifically focusing on anti-cheating measures. However, the continual development of generative AI must make us question the viability of this approach. After all, the majority of educators don't have a background in AI technology, and it's difficult for them to determine whether it gives the equivalent help of a maths textbook, a Google search or a professional essay-writer; we simply don't know what it's capable of yet. So, rather than try to control the features of AI that can be utilised by their charges, they should attempt a fundamental restructuring of education and tackle its very essence. Choate, for instance, has been actively experimenting with AI in classrooms: students of US history have created political cartoons using Adobe Firefly; and in my computer science class, we have been encouraged to engineer some detailed prompts that can help in the learning of a new language. Throughout last year, I gained perspective on employing AI as a tool to enhance. New technology may not be the greatest-ever threat to education, but the greatest opportunity for it.



Jadesola Okunbi

**Rugby School, UK
CHANGE WITH THE TIMES**

In an effort to curb students' deployment of artificial intelligence in assignments and essays, many educational institutions have resorted to using AI-plagiarism detectors, most of which claim to have a 100 per cent accuracy rate. However, I believe one tiny, yet crucial detail is being overlooked: AI systems rely completely on machine-learning; thus it is merely a matter of time before these complex algorithms are able to detect what elements of AI-generated text actually seem 'AI-generated' and quickly compensate by resolving said flaws. In fact, many analysts believe that AI has the capability to become indistinguishable one

*Education must be refined so that we can
access its full potential – and our own*

day from human intelligence, so riddle me this: how effective will these AI detectors truly be in 10 years? Maybe even five? Formal education needs to be revolutionised to adapt to the dynamic times in which we live. I believe curriculums all around the world should be reviewed so that – if they don't already – they integrate into students learning more transferable and practical skills, such as financial literacy, workplace resilience and vocational experiences. With an increasing demographic now opting for apprenticeship schemes, the future of education is now dependent on institutions' flexibility and willingness to evolve.



Ayushi Fernando

**Westminster School, UK
TAILOR-MADE TEACHING**

Education is a paradox: seemingly constant, yet always unfolding and evolving around us. To live is to be educated. But if our personal experiences are the purest form of education, then what is the purpose of our standardised school system? Throughout the pandemic, in schools of all types, we saw many challenges, with students struggling to find themselves, or altogether be defeated by lessons planned with syllabus requirements in mind, rather than their recipients. This teaching can be inaccessible to much of our young population, leaving many behind, and some with the mindset that they might be at fault for not

adapting to a system that would not adapt for them. However, such difficulties create space for hope: what is imperfect can always be improved upon. The future of education, as I see it, involves more direct thought about the needs of each pupil. Now more than ever, it is imperative that a framework is created to allow young people to access the education already at their fingertips. The shift from a standardised to a personalised system will be paramount in the future success of schooling. If experience is 'pure' education, it must be refined through our schools so that we can access its full potential – and our own.



Isabella Gardiner

**Groton School, Massachusetts, US
THE HUMANITIES**

My parents have often spoken about growing up in Cold War America and the era's confidence in the power of the human mind to invent and create. At Groton, my peers and I have come of age in a very different world. Computers and AI are far more advanced than human brains and we are increasingly reliant on them. It feels to me that universities value STEM subjects more than the Humanities. In the GCSE system – at least, at my previous school in London – all three sciences and mathematics are required, while history and geography are both optional. But as AI capabilities push us to fundamentally question what it means to be human, I believe that a deep understanding of the Humanities is needed to stay ahead. At Groton, a uniquely small, close-knit school, this understanding comes from the close mentorship between students, their peers and instructors. Gathering around a table to debate everything from federalism to string theory, we dissect the world's complexities. As others are increasingly reliant on ChatGPT to explain physics problems, a Groton education has shown me that the key to our future is found in a more old-fashioned approach. The school's liberal arts curriculum celebrates critical thinking, mastering ideas, pulling apart texts and diving into theories. The intensity of the collaboration between students and teachers results not just in good SAT scores, but in eager, passionate explorers. □



PUBLIC

City of London School

London

ALLEYN'S SCHOOL ●●

Townley Road SE22 8SU

Website alleyns.org.uk

Head Jane Lunnon, since 2021;
previously head of Wimbledon High

Pupils 1,133 day: 540 boys, 593
girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £8,665

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to
85% **Alumni** Redemption Roasters
co-founder Ted Rosner; Nobel Prize
winning scientist Michael Houghton,
author Caleb Nelson

'If you're looking for the epicentre of forward-thinking education, here it is,' says a recent visitor to this co-ed in south London. The school is 'dynamic, diverse and thinking in the future tense', the visitor adds; and there's evidence around every corner. Its new curriculum, called AiQ, aims to integrate AI and thus ensure pupils are equipped to thrive in an ever-evolving digital society. Meanwhile, Alleyn's has opened a

Tech Box, an innovative, creative space intended to inspire its pupils and those of its partners – the school works with around 35 others locally, both state and independent – to become confident citizens of the brave new world. Meanwhile, The Well offers a sanctuary for calm reflection, is staffed by nurses and counsellors, and contains a room for psychological 'fitness activities'. (It was used to trial a new multi-sensory VR experience, designed to address mental health.) And there will be even more room for mindful breaks soon: The A-Line, inspired by New York's High Line, is a work

in progress, and will transform the school's unused areas between buildings into a biodiverse green pathway. Head Jane Lunnon 'is incredibly ambitious in improving Alleyn's and ensuring the wellbeing of students, offering unconditional support,' says one of her charges. But there's a healthy helping of fun mixed in with all the vision. Other pupils say they love the 'sense of community' forged by inter-house events, including the eagerly anticipated annual dance-off and girls versus boys netball match – after which, one child reports, they swap sports strips with one another.

PHOTOGRAPH: D SHEARING

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** 1,082 day boys **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees** £7,885 **Bursaries** 12% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** NFL player Jack Crawford, author Julian Barnes, cellist Steven Isserlis

It's hard to describe the aspirations a school has for its pupils in one word, but City of London might be able to do it in three: kindness, awareness, readiness. This boys' day school seeks to nurture a considerate community that understands the wider world and is prepared for the future. But how does it achieve these admirable aims? Its diverse pupil body certainly helps, as does a well-known emphasis on bursaries and outreach; not to mention a Wellbeing Hub open to all – both students and their parents – and special pastoral days, featuring a range of guest speakers. As for being 'ready', the school remains academically stellar and selective, with an entrance exam and interview required for admission and a minimum of six full-course GCSEs graded 9–8 for Sixth-form entry. City looks for enthusiasm and a 'sense that they enjoy learning' in all its candidates. And clearly, the process works: 26 per cent of university offers to 2024's leavers were from Oxbridge, which is not unusually high here. Beyond academia, this is a school that punches above its city-centre weight in sport: off-site, there's a facility where cricket and basketball are popular; and incredibly, on-site, there's a five-lane, 25-metre indoor pool. And music is very much part of the school, which is affiliated to the Royal College of Organists and has a consistently strong reputation for preparing pupils for Oxbridge organ and choral scholarships. Not forgetting dramatic success: a pupil production of courtroom drama *Blindsided* is now being taken from the school's 150-seat Winterflood Theatre to the Edinburgh Fringe.

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** 768 day girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £8,402 **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

'The intellectually edgy, kind and unstuffy independent school for girls in the heart of the City.' That is how this London day school describes itself. Meanwhile, one recent visitor says: 'The question here isn't what can you do, but what can't you do?!' Five years into her headship, Jenny Brown remains 'enchanted' by this ambitious institution and claims: 'We are not done.' Indeed, there are exciting new buildings in the works. The

headline act is a new Sixth-form centre – in the former Museum of London – which will open in September 2024. Results remain superb; in 2023, 86 per cent of A-levels were awarded A*–A and 95 per cent of GCSEs were graded 9–7. From September 2025, pupils will be able to select a social, political and economic course (SPEC) instead of a 10th traditional subject at GCSE. These are being devised, but current thinking includes ones on climate change and international relations. In the meantime, 2024 marks CLSG's 130th anniversary, which will be celebrated with a host of events, including a community day and a concert. There's a 'genuine sibling school' relationship with all-boys City of London, with whom Sixth-formers sometimes share lessons, while further integration is in the pipeline. Adding to the supportive spirit, more than 90 pupils receive bursaries; 78 per cent of them on full provision.

DLD College's catchphrase is 'London is our classroom' – and its pupils enjoy trips to Somerset House and Warner Bros Studios



DLD COLLEGE LONDON ●●

Westminster Bridge Road SE1 7FX**Website** dldcollege.co.uk**Head** James Kidd, since 2024; previously senior vice principal **Pupils** 420. Day: 117 boys, 65 girls; boarding: 110 boys, 128 girls **Ages** 13–19 **Term Fees** Day: £9,566; boarding: £17,166 **Bursaries** Scholarships available on application **Alumni** Novelist Martin Amis, actress Phoebe Waller-Bridge, businessman Baron Lebedev

A huge range of nationalities is represented at this modern alternative to a traditional boarding school, slap-bang between St Thomas' Hospital and Waterloo station. And incoming head James Kidd, who's poised to step up from his current role of senior vice principal, will surely continue the strong focus on educational innovation. The Year 9 curriculum revolves around skill-based recommendations made by the World Economic Forum, while there is a dedicated e-sports arena that encourages pupils to hone their digital skills. Given the school's views across the Thames towards the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, serious advantage is taken of all that the metropolis has to offer; and realising its catchphrase 'London is our classroom', Year 9 pupils enjoy weekly trips to such attractions as Somerset House, Chelsea Football Club and Warner Bros Studios. Not that their horizons are limited: others have headed further afield to Scotland and the Northern Irish coast, to explore Carrickfergus Castle and the Giants' Causeway. Pastoral care has been ramped up by the introduction of the E-Praise programme, whereby laudatory virtual points contribute to the overall house tallies, thus fostering competition as well as a sense of community, friendship and self-worth. And diversity is celebrated in myriad ways: each of the pupils' 62 nationalities is represented by a flag hung in the atrium; and the chefs in the global kitchen ensure that food plays a central role in the many cultural festivals and events that are celebrated.

DULWICH COLLEGE ●**Dulwich Common SE21 7LD****Website** dulwich.org.uk**Head** Dr Joe Spence, since 2009;

previously head of Oakham School

Pupils 1,654 boys: 1,514 day; 140boarding **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees**

Day: £8,807; boarding: £18,385

Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to100% **Alumni** Antarctic explorer

Sir Ernest Shackleton, actor Chiwetel

Ejiofor, author Michael Ondaatje

‘Every child can be who they want

to be at Dulwich,’ declares a current

parent, referencing the breadth of

the boys’ interests. Some are whizzes

at computer programming; others

play multiple instruments, includ-

ing electric; some represent the

school in sports teams; others com-

bine the lot. The sprawling 70-acre

site is home to more than 1,600

pupils, each able to find their niche

and – continues our source – take

‘pleasure in celebrating each other’s

success’. And the school’s unique

Free Learning programme is a

standout reason why many choose

Dulwich: free from the constraints

of the curriculum and examina-

tions, this multidisciplinary module

is freely engaged-in by students, and

‘teachers give freely of their time to

champion’ the initiative. Life here

looks to the future: the new and

sustainable lower-school building,

designed to be net zero, opened in

Easter 2024; and co-educational

opportunities have continued to

increase, with girls from some local

schools meeting Dulwich boys in a

range of academic and co-curricular

activities. Still, with so much on

offer and a jam-packed working

day, it’s good to hear that pastoral

care is ‘outstanding’: the school runs

its own internal reporting system,

whereby teachers directly notify

parents with praise or concerns.

‘Charismatic’ head Dr Joe Spence is

described as ‘deeply intelligent,

both emotionally and intellectu-

ally’, and he is adored across the

board; so it was a sad day when he

announced his retirement, standing

down after 16 years. In August

2025, Robert Milne will travel five

miles east from his current post at

Emanuel to take up the headship.

EMANUEL SCHOOL ●●**Battersea Rise SW11 1HS****Website** emanuel.org.uk**Head** Robert Milne, since 2017;

previously deputy head of King’s

College School, Wimbledon **Pupils**

1,110 day: 573 boys, 537 girls

Ages 10–18 **Term Fees** £8,263**Bursaries** 25% of pupils, up to100%+ **Alumni** Inventor of the

World Wide Web Sir Tim Berners-

Lee, animator Mark Baker, engineer

Mark Miodownik

Just a short walk from Clapham

Junction, the wonderful red-brick

edifice of Emanuel School has

recently been enhanced by the addi-

tion of a brilliant Sixth-form centre,

which houses a café, silent study

areas and an assembly space. And

the off-site sports ground is under-

going a phased revamp, with a new

all-weather pitch that provides a

home for girls’ hockey already

unveiled (and a stretch of new net-

ball and tennis courts is scheduled

next). Meanwhile, parents of the-

sians should pay attention, because

the performing arts are notable

here. While a whole host of term-

time shows are supplemented by

two plays taken to the Edinburgh

Fringe every other year, the non-

Caledonian years aren’t exactly

fallow, for this is when the drama

department runs its famous and

rather ambitious Play in a Week

project. Meanwhile, musicians span

genres, and have been known to

play in local venues; and lately, the

internationally renowned conduc-

tor Robert Hodge led an orchestral

workshop with Emanuel’s own

symphony orchestra.

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** 556 day girls**Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £8,650**Bursaries** Variable, up to 100%**Alumni** Actress Amanda Donohoe,

entrepreneur Grace Beverley, former

Conservative MP Theresa Villiers

‘Mrs Woodcock is the centre-rock

of our school,’ says a pupil. ‘She

always has her door open for any-

one, any time, and never fails to

speak to as many girls as she can.’

While the school prides itself on its

pastoral care, with a wellbeing prac-

titioner always available, efforts are

also made to care for the wider

community: last October’s annual

sponsored walk raised £26,000 for

Great Ormond Street Hospital; and

a long-running partnership sees

science lessons and Oxbridge men-

toring offered to local state pupils.

Meanwhile, the Hale Lecture series

is entirely organised by the pupils,

and has brought in the likes of

Channel 4 CEO Dr Alex Mahon

and Dr Melanie Garson, cyber and

tech geopolitics lead at the Tony

Blair Institute for Global Change.

Further innovation has come in the

form of the annual Teaching and

Learning Marketplace, where teach-

ers meet to share best practice with

each other, taking such themes as

metacognitive learning and ‘finding

joy in the classroom’. Approximately

10 per cent of leavers head on to

Oxbridge, with others to Madrid,

Rotterdam and New York.

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** 765day girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees**£8,810 **Bursaries** Variable, up to100% **Alumni** Filmmaker Emerald

Fennell, violinist Vanessa Mae,

actress Daisy Waterstone

‘The community is the most spe-

cial thing about our school,’ con-

fides one pupil. ‘Truly unique are

the friendships between girls of

different year groups, which are

developed through house events

and “big-sister” activities.’ One

such is drama – recently, pupils put

on three dazzling performances of

Legally Blonde: The Musical at

Battersea Arts Centre – and with

12 productions a year, this has been

ramped up by the unveiling of a

black-box studio theatre, complete

with a lighting rig and sound desk.

In other news, the junior school is

relocating to a building just off the

King’s Road, making space for 100

more children, while lucky Years 7

and 8 have had traditional exam

week replaced by a three-day festi-

val of workshops focused on

thought innovation and problem

solving. At the other end of the age

spectrum, Sixth-formers thrive

through the Enrichment pro-

gramme, which encourages them

to get stuck into such diverse topics

as Practical DIY, Utopia for Realists

and Guerilla Philosophy. Little

wonder that leavers are regularly

accepted to art and fashion schools,

as well as to far-flung and prestig-

ious universities such as Columbia,

McGill and UCLA. The new head,

Alexandra Haydon, arrived in

January from Millfield, and has

been quick to contribute to Francis

Holland’s emphasis on female edu-

cation and ambition. Recently, this

was exemplified by the successful

launch of Mission Impoppable,

which saw a high-altitude helium

balloon carrying a miniature replica

of the school mascot (who is

named The Fearless Girl) shot into

the stratosphere.



GODOLPHIN & LATYMER ●**Iffley Road W6 0PG****Website** godolphinandlatymer.com**Head** Dr Frances Ramsey, since

2017; previously head of Queen's

College **Pupils** 800 day girls**Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £9,762**Bursaries** 10% of pupils, up to100%+ **Alumni** Presenter Davina

McCall, scientist Baroness Greenfield,

Royal Academy of Engineering

CEO Hayaatun Sillem

Godolphin & Latymer's site in west London exudes dignity and purpose: girls stride to lessons with a sense of energy and focus; likewise to any of the 90 weekly clubs and societies. (Anyone for French cinema?) The school is committed to sharing its first-class resources with its wider community: in fact, as our researcher approached, a crocodile of local primary children was entering. And always thinking ahead, it has recently launched TED talks for Year 10, plus an MBA – Mini Business Activities – for Years 7 and 8, as part of their G&L Futures programme, which supports students in developing the soft skills that they will need beyond university. Environmentally minded girls have been busy leading an application to become an accredited Eco School, and the newly opened Sixth-form centre is surely thriving. January saw the inauguration of a modern library, and the courtyards have been re-landscaped as learning spaces. G&L is proud to offer a holistic educational experience that nurtures individuality and fosters leadership qualities; and pupils are rightly proud of the way it does so, citing its supportive environment and the myriad opportunities for personal development offered by some volunteering and leadership roles. Meanwhile, head Dr Frances Ramsey embodies the institution's values of compassion and innovation, which make it a compelling choice for ambitious young women seeking to excel academically as well as contribute meaningfully to society. It's no surprise that academic results are outstanding, with 79 per cent of last year's cohort achieving A*–A at A-level.

HAMPTON SCHOOL ●**Hanworth Road, Hampton,****Middlesex TW12 3HD****Website** hamptonschool.org.uk**Head** Kevin Knibbs, since 2013;

previously deputy head (pastoral)

Pupils 1,562 day boys (nine girls inpre-prep) **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees**£8,680 **Bursaries** 17% of pupils,up to 100%+ **Alumni** Queen

musician Sir Brian May, Google

executive Matt Brittin, England

rugby player Simon Amor

Hampton prides itself on being both 'seriously excellent' and 'seriously fun'. No surprise that its exam results are exceptional, with 32 per cent of recent A-level grades coming in at A* and more than 17 per cent of leavers heading to Global Top Ten universities. Facilities are top-notch, too: a professional-level climbing tower has recently been inaugurated. Budding journalists can demonstrate their fact-finding rigour with the new Hampton Studio, which gives students the

chance to interview their teachers. Dynamism continues outside the classroom with the likes of the Talk! initiative, which attracts an impressive array of speakers from all walks of life (including *The Sun*'s political editor, polling experts and BBC correspondents). As well as an emphasis on exams and extracurriculars, there's plenty of time for fun. An 80-strong pupil choir made a tour of Tuscany, singing a repertoire of Renaissance composers in the magnificent surrounds of Florence and Lucca; the classicists regularly head to Athens; and Sixth-form work experience placements are located in such far-flung destinations as France and Germany. But jollity is also available closer to home: 'I am being completely honest when I say I can't remember the last lesson [or] activity I had at Hampton in which I did not laugh,' explains one student. 'Tasteful humour is always encouraged and exhibited by every member of the school community.'

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**836 boarding boys **Ages** 13–18**Term Fees** £17,850 **Bursaries** 17%of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Sir

Winston Churchill, poet Lord Byron,

actor Benedict Cumberbatch

Unashamedly looking to the future, Harrow is buzzing with excitement as it marries tradition with freshness. Because head Alastair Land has initiated reforms in the curriculum that focus on 'modernity and newness', with an emphasis on digital, cognitive and social literacy. Forget heavy folders and ring binders; here, it's all about cloud-based learning, while still valuing such established skills as handwriting and reading; and the school's commitment to maintaining an all-male, full-boarding environment is based on the belief that it provides a unique opportunity for boys to experience a prolonged and enriching childhood. Just 40 minutes from central London, the facilities are top-notch – the school has a reputation for being one of the best in the country for sports – and the site is vast. A new science building has opened to great acclaim, a full refurbishment of the boys' dining facilities is coming to an end, and work will soon begin on the construction of a new sports centre with a 25-metre pool. Pastoral care is taken seriously here, and the support system includes 'shepherds' – every pupil has someone looking out for him – while beyond the school gates, the outreach programmes are thriving. Looking ahead, the school is keen to keep its education affordable, and is focused on building bursary funds. Indeed, last year nearly £5 million was extended to support the cost of its pupils' education. And when it's time to bid adieu, Harrovians are set for the big leagues, with a hefty chunk landing places at top-notch global universities, from Oxford and Edinburgh to such Ivy Leagues as Columbia and Princeton.

Harrow School

**IBSTOCK PLACE
SCHOOL ●●**
Clarence Lane SW15 5PY
Website ibstockplaceschool.co.uk
Head Christopher Wolsey, since 2021; previously deputy head

Pupils 1,083 day: 575 boys, 508 girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees** £8,935

Bursaries 4.8% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** TV cook Nigella Lawson, novelist Iris Murdoch, actress Emily Blunt

Having just celebrated its 130th anniversary, this co-ed school on an eight-acre campus bordering Richmond Park is described as ‘outstanding’ in all areas by parents. And its green space, next-gen facilities and strong sense of community – ‘hard to find’ in London – are overriding factors in them choosing to send their children here. They’re also particularly impressed by the fact that ‘an effort is made to constantly stay up-to-date and ahead in technology’, as evidenced by the recent appointment of a head of AI and the unveiling of a podcast studio, games room and e-sports arena (complete with professional coaching). ‘Computer gaming is one of the fastest-growing employers in the UK,’ explains the school, the new initiative reflecting Ibstock Place’s commitment to introducing its charges to future career paths. Pupils appreciate these efforts to prepare them for later life, with one saying: ‘The community offers up brilliant opportunities for work experience and extracurriculars that help us become well-rounded individuals and flourish as we move towards leaving school.’ But they’re in no hurry to depart when they’re blessed with ‘genuinely delicious’ food – chicken katsu curry is one favourite – and have a brilliant array of clubs that span everything from producing *The Wall*, their award-winning magazine, to kite making and Arabic culture. There is a Latin trip to Pompeii and a German-language trip to Vienna’s Christmas markets. Add a strong support system, events such as the Fashion Show, House Gardening and sports tours of South Africa – and what’s not to like?



Ibstock Place stays ahead in technology with the appointment of a head of AI, a podcast studio, games room and e-sports arena

**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 1,202 day girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees**
£8,181 Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Actress Sally Hawkins, author Anita Brookner, BBC chief economics correspondent Dharshini David

‘There is absolutely a place at JAGS for all types of student, from an array of backgrounds and with a variety of skills and needs. The strong academic support continues and there is a genuine emphasis on promoting the overall wellbeing of

the girls,’ says one parent. ‘Because it’s such a large school, with a vast array of activities, classes, teaching styles and personalities, my daughter has flourished.’ And certainly, efforts to extend the school’s provision have recently accelerated. Currently, in the senior school, 145 girls receive means-tested bursaries, to the combined value of £3 million. And as ever, results are top of the charts; the proof being in the latest A-level results, which saw a whopping 47 per cent of A* grades, and nearly a quarter of students offered places at Oxbridge (or further afield in the US, Canada or Spain, with the creative looking to Rada and Leeds College of Art). However, it’s not all about cramming. JAGS’s regular trips make

the most of London’s theatres, museums and galleries – not to mention that pupils fly off to New York or Singapore – and the recently launched Curriculum Plus focuses on developing areas of untested learning such as mastering the art of public speaking and understanding sustainability. An array of clubs continue to expand horizons: botanists can hone their understanding of plants and produce in the 22 acres of grounds, while others sign up for activities ranging from Bel Canto club to fashion society and Saturday literacy. And its house events are wildly popular; especially when the teachers get involved in such challenges as Teacher Strictly Come Dancing – or even Teacher Hunger Games!

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 1,506 day: 1,371 boys, 135 girls **Ages** 7–18

Term Fees £9,360 **Bursaries** 6% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Footballer Andrew Watson, actor Khalid Abdalla, *Newsnight* political editor Nicholas Watt

Facing directly onto Wimbledon Common, King's College School is characterised by spacious and light buildings with top-notch facilities, from the gleaming music block to the huge sports complex. It also boasts a fabulous reputation, not just academically – though results are right up there with the top London competition – but in terms of sport, drama and extracurricular offerings. (The choice is vast and 'caters to a wide spread of personalities and profiles', says a parent.) Pupils are super-bright self-starters who crucially have a deep love of learning; and last year, the school was awarded silver mental health status, honouring both the dedication of its pastoral teams over many

years and a newly introduced Empathy Project that encourages children to develop their interpersonal skills with others. Head Dr Anne Cotton has been at the helm since 2022 and is considered by a current pupil to be very 'connected to the wider school', meaning her charges feel they can approach her to talk about things they'd like to change. New on the agenda is the King's Arts event, a five-day celebration of culture, with performances from world-leading musicians. Meanwhile, a current Sixth-former applauds the opportunity she's had to teach PE at a local state primary; and these outreach partnerships are hugely important to the school, which has recently launched its own Connect programme for bright and talented Year 5 pupils at partner local primaries, aiming to deliver specialist support for senior-school applications. As for academic results, they're outstanding and lead to impressive destinations: last year 41 left for Oxbridge, 25 went to read medicine or dentistry, and 13 to such leading North American colleges as Yale and Brown.

LATYMER UPPER ●●

King Street W6 9LR

Website latymer-upper.org

Head Susan Wijeratna, since 2023; previously lower master at Eton College

Pupils 1,263 day: 625 boys, 638 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees**

£8,633 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actors Alan Rickman, Hugh Grant and Lily Cole

Of late, about a third of Latymer leavers have been heading to the US, and roughly 25 per cent to Oxbridge. It's the kind of statistic this west London powerhouse just pulls out of the bag – and here's another: the school is close to being able to offer a quarter of its children bursaries, supported by its Inspiring Minds campaign; and thanks to that programme, Latymer reckons it has one the most diverse pupil bodies in the independent sector. As for parents, says one: 'We chose Latymer due to a combination of the school's word-of-mouth reputation, its co-ed and well-rounded

education, its progressive, inclusive ethos, and its community's rich cultural diversity.' The whole school is grounded, they continued, in 'a shared mission of giving back'. Indeed, there's a lot of focus on outreach here: in a typical year, the school works with nearly 250 local partner schools, organisations and charities to run projects involving more than 3,000 students. Head Susan Wijeratna, who joined in 2023, is overseeing a bold reform of the curriculum: replacing GCSEs in all subjects but maths and English language with courses that will assess students through such alternative methods as group work and presentations, alongside written exams. Meanwhile, these clever pupils will soon be able to blow off steam on the new sports ground under development in Chiswick; and after that, they can refuel on food that would be the envy of Jamie Oliver. Think gnocchi, Greek salads and Japanese noodles.

New on King's College's agenda is the King's Arts event, a five-day celebration of culture with world-leading musicians

King's College School, Wimbledon



Merchant Taylors' School



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** 946 day boys **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £7,867

Bursaries 8% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actors Boris Karloff and Riz Ahmed, former politician Reginald Maudling

A haven for budding innovators, Merchant Taylors' offers an unrivalled STEM provision; hence, its up-to-the-minute robotics programme fielded an impressive 10 teams in the national Vex Robotic finals. But there's a focus on developing rounded individuals. The recently opened Julian Hill Cricket

Centre – which gives elite players and enthusiasts a year-round training base – is a world-class facility; and drama is thriving, with a recent production being staged in the picturesque Headmaster's Garden. This school's unique vertical tutor system is a real strength: on admission, each boy is assigned a personal tutor who will oversee his entire passage through the school, 'helping him to choose a rich, rewarding life outside the classroom, and taking a particular interest in all he does', and the resulting continuity ensures tight-knit bonds that last a lifetime, creating a supportive environment in which pupils can reach their full potential. Results are outstanding, and nine or 10 sets in maths and sciences alone means no one is left behind. Every year,

around 75 per cent of the boys go on to Russell Group universities and a good handful to Oxbridge. All of the above is led by dynamic head Simon Everson, who steers the ship with a steady hand, ensuring leavers are well-prepared for life beyond the school gates.

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** 1,097 day girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees** £8,514

Bursaries 9.7% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** *Vogue* editor-in-chief Dame Anna Wintour, psychotherapist Susie Orbach, psychologist Tanya Byron Since Vicky Bingham took up the reins, it's been all go. One of the head's much-approved decisions was to get rid of the murky-brown school blazers; and her regular Bingham's Bites lunches (at which she can hear what her charges actually think, and teach them to talk confidently to their future bosses) have proved popular. There has also been a huge recruitment drive for the best and brightest staff. As a result, Robin Street has joined as director of innovation, and there is now a strong co-curricular programme that includes modules in financial literacy, oracy and 'entrepreneurial milestones'; plus the school is pioneering the use of AI in the curriculum, with a focus on using 'tech to maintain scholarship'. One visitor noted that, rare in a London girls' day school perhaps, the pupils here are 'unfussed about peer pressure', intellectually confident and socially at ease with each other – but 'not sharp-elbowed'. Still, last year saw 88 per cent of them secure offers from their first-choice universities, from Ivy League to Oxbridge – about 20 per cent to the latter. These girls aim high and are given the tools to soar higher.



North London Collegiate School

PHOTOGRAPH: BRONN LLOYD-EDWARDS

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** £8,297 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100%+**Alumni** Journalist Sophie Raworth, lawyer Sandie Okoro, costume designer Jenny Beavan

If you want to know why Putney is renowned for its academic success, look at last year's results: more than three-quarters of its GCSEs were graded 9–8. But it's not all work and no play. In head Jo Sharrock's words, the school manages 'not to take itself too seriously', and her 'delightful and enthusiastic' girls are involved in a vast array of extra-curricular clubs and societies – 150 and counting – which take in foreign affairs, fashion and Scrabble. Developing pupils' thinking skills and encouraging them to explore the adventure of learning, this year also sees the Ignite programme take shape in the Junior School, with planned events including Think Like an Engineer and a Future Thinking careers event. Sharrock had a tough act to follow after the departure of her popular predecessor Suzie Longstaff, but she has sailed through her first year to great acclaim, and pupils seem happy with her, one even saying that 'her Monday morning assemblies are a highlight'. As for the children, they're the leaders of tomorrow – in the last academic year, one was appointed Chair of the London Youth Board, advising on young people's global input into health policy at a forum set up by the World Health Organisation and UNICEF – and there's an emphasis on setting sights firmly on post-school achievements. The girls are inspired to greatness by returning alumnae and high-profile guest lecturers, with last year's roster including Hanneke Smits, the worldwide chair of the 30% Club, which is a business-led campaign to boost female representation at board and C-Suite level in the planet's biggest companies.

QUEEN'S COLLEGE ●**Harley Street W1G 8BT****Website** qcl.org.uk**Head** Richard Tillett, since 2017;previously senior deputy head of Harrogate Ladies' College **Pupils** 647 day girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees**£8,575 **Bursaries** 10.8% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Director MJ Delaney, broadcaster Emma Freud, TV executive Claudia Rosencrantz

Queen's College has an inspiring history as a pioneer in girls' education. The first school in the UK to offer academic qualifications to young women, it was granted a Royal Charter in 1853 by Queen Victoria and, until the death of Queen Elizabeth II, has always had a queen as patron. Given such a trailblazing heritage, it may come as no surprise that there's a focus here on developing resilience; and in the classroom, this means adopting a model that allows children to reflect on what they did to help them succeed, and figure out how they can do better. 'Our headteacher, Mr Tillett, is a very kind and loving principal,' says one pupil. 'Recently, he has set a task – for every student and teacher to be "resilient-ready" – and I have noticed that this has helped me very much during class.' A similar initiative has been the Thrive programme, under which children have lessons in such topics as truth, diversity and current affairs; and a point of pride is the newly opened Thrive Centre, which adds 1,100 square feet to the college footprint and has a study and meeting room, as well as a quiet sensory space that allows pupils to relax away from the hustle and bustle of school. The central London location means plenty of visits to museums, concerts and galleries; and sounding equally tantalising are those abroad, such as the Brass expedition to Italy and the Spanish one to Granada. But Queen's College children can still get their hands dirty: the gardening club tends to a central courtyard that boasts a 'living wall'; and a brand-new garden is in the works. No surprise students head to top universities.



Merchant Taylors' offers an unrivalled STEM provision; hence its robotic programme fielded 10 teams in the national Vex Robotics finals

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**£8,158 **Bursaries** 7% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Actresses Dame Angela Lansbury and Helena Bonham Carter, BBC Europe editor Katya Adler

Busy and buzzy, South Hampstead High is thriving; and the warm atmosphere is palpable from the moment you walk through the door to meet its bubbly, driven girls. The school is highly academic. Typically, 20 per cent of leavers receive Oxbridge offers (others look to the Ivy League), and last year's results were impressive, with 72 per cent of A-levels graded A*–A and 83 per cent of GCSEs 9–8. But studying here is not only about books and exams: supporting the pupils' mental health and a focus on emotional resilience is important, too; and the school

recently launched a new collaboration with Tooled Up Education, a digital library of evidence-based resources for parents and teachers on all aspects of parenting, learning and family life. And this clearly works: the latest ISI inspection highlighted the pervasive culture of 'joyful scholarship' here. One parent tells us that it isn't just for one specific type of girl; meaning the students grow up surrounded by friends with different interests, strengths and skills. Meanwhile, the new padel court is open for business, building work to enhance spaces for Sixth-formers is complete and the school plans to lead the way in becoming carbon-neutral through the pupil-led Project Zero. New head Anna Paul arrived from Godolphin & Latymer last year with big shoes to fill – her predecessor Vicky Bingham was unanimously deemed a success – but she is already credited with being 'a fabulous female role model' by one current father. And in the words of one of her charges, 'I can't wait to see what she does next!'

ST PAUL'S GIRLS' SCHOOL ●

Brook Green W6 7BS

Website sps.org

Head Sarah Fletcher, since 2017; previously head of City of London School for Girls **Pupils** 808 day girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £10,531 **Bursaries** 11% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Cook Thomasina Miers, rower Donna Eriebet, actress Viola Pettejohn

With eight applicants per place, this hub of creativity, brilliance and attainment is as popular as ever and shows no signs of slowing down. While its stratospheric academic reputation is well deserved, our researcher was keen to point out that the school is, above all, 'kind and welcoming'. This is not a hot-house, but a liberal institution where intelligent youngsters flourish, and the outstanding results come as a by-product of both the pedagogy and the pupils' engagement in, and 'evident love' of, learning. The teaching is defined by the power it instils in the girls: discussion, debate and individual research are at the heart of every lesson; the aim being not simply to increase the pupils' knowledge, but to help them grow into active learners who are able to think imaginatively, problem-solve and work collaboratively. Meanwhile, the computer science and creative technology department continues to expand; and with the girls keen to learn more about the tech that will play an important role in their futures, a whole host of clubs has been set up, from programmable electronics to rapid prototyping. (Some of them are offered to its local partner secondary schools.) Ultimately, it's about the breadth of offering at St Paul's Girls' School: last year's musical *Beauty and the Beast* had a cast of 60 and orchestra of 35; the gardening club is busier than ever; and pastoral care is personalised at every stage. Results are, of course, staggeringly impressive: 88 per cent of A-level and Pre-U scored A*–A last year, and 44 students took up places at Oxbridge, with 15 to top American colleges.



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** 990: 936 day; 54 boarding **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,390; boarding: £15,636 **Bursaries** 8.9% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Actor Rory Kinnear, politician George Osborne, neuroscientist Sir Menelaos Pangalos There's a deserved reputation for scholarship at St Paul's, but our visitor noted the 'friendly and happy atmosphere that emanated at every level' and declared that entry is not just about being bright, although that's something of a prerequisite; 'they really need to love learning'. This academic prowess exists in harmony with a vast range of extracurriculars, as well as an emphasis on developing the whole person. The boys love their 100-minute lunch breaks – a St Paul's tradition that gives them time to sit and talk properly with friends while they eat,

as well as to take part in one of the 100 clubs and societies on offer, often in conjunction with St Paul's Girls. (Pupils' involvement in establishing these is encouraged, and Finance Society is a firm favourite.) 'Knowledgeable' and 'welcoming' Sally-Anne Huang has held the post of High Master since 2020, when she became the first female head in the school's then 519-year history. With an ambitious redevelopment programme now complete, she's waved goodbye to the main campus's 1960s buildings and it's all looking suitably sophisticated. St Paul's is committed to offering its education to as many boys as possible – the cost of running its bursary programme is a staggering £3.3 million a year – and the boys are encouraged to be academically curious and quietly self-confident but 'never arrogant'. They leave with a spring in their step to the best universities, and an average of 32 per cent of leavers have gone on to Oxbridge in the last five years.

St Paul's boys' involvement in establishing clubs and societies is encouraged, and Finance Society is a firm favourite

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE SCHOOL ●●

Hampstead NW3 6XH

Website ucs.org.uk

Head Mark Beard, since 2013; previously deputy head of Brighton College **Pupils** 1,310 day: 1,193 boys, 117 girls **Ages** 4–18

Term Fees £8,937 **Bursaries** 6.1% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Athlete Sir Roger Bannister, Nobel Prize winning mathematical physicist Sir Roger Penrose, mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington

UCS is where tradition meets innovation. Founded in 1830 by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, it remains committed to its founding values of tolerance, inclusion and belonging; and with its 'greatest asset' being its teachers, according to one parent, it has achieved that hard-to-find balance of 'developing each pupil's potential and character in both a nurturing and demanding way'. At the heart of the establishment is 'exceptional' head Mark Beard, who works hard to 'create an environment in which everyone can thrive'. His pupils love receiving his personalised birthday greeting and appreciate his open-door policy, embodying the school's spirit of accessibility and engagement. Their voices are also heard and valued: there is a Sixth-form union and open communication between students and staff. Here, there's an 'emphasis on raising well-rounded pupils', and they are involved in extracurriculars that range from performing productions at the Edinburgh Fringe every summer to tending an on-site allotment which is a surprise and delight to find in such close reach of the capital. Looking ahead to its 200th birthday in 2030, UCS has secured planning permission to refurbish and extend part of the campus, to include a medical and wellbeing centre, a lower school social and pastoral hub, a new café and more. Meanwhile, academic results are strong: 72 per cent of last year's cohort achieved A*–A at A-level, which led to 88 per cent taking up places at their first or second choices of university.

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL ●●

Dean's Yard SW1P 3PB**Website** westminster.org.uk**Head** Dr Gary Savage, since 2020; previously head of Alleyn's School**Pupils** 769. Day: 512 boys, 74 girls; boarding: 118 boys, 65 girls**Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £13,245; boarding: £17,496**Bursaries** 5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Philosopher John Locke, architect Sir Christopher Wren, actress Imogen Stubbs

Who could wish for a better London location? Westminster's unique setting and proximity to the Abbey reflect its centuries-old, city-central duality. Despite being in the middle of the capital, there's no compromise on facilities, space or co-curricular opportunities; sport is set up so that pupils can take part both competitively and recreationally; and on that front, after being closed for a year for renovations, the 13-acre Vincent Square playing fields and pavilion have now reopened. Head Dr Gary Savage is, according to one Sixth-former, 'as equally omniscient as he is omnipresent'; and parents praise the team he has built around him, 'one of the greatest strengths being the quality of the staff that he recruits'. In that respect, head of modern languages Mr Hopwood is widely regarded as outstanding: according to one boy, 'Challenging your subconscious and leaving every lesson feeling empowered is the definition and fun of a liberal education, and Mr Hopwood delivers nothing less.' What's more, exciting changes are afoot; and 2026 will see one of the most significant developments in Westminster's almost 500-year history, when girls as well as boys will be welcomed into all years at both the main and the Under School. Academic excellence goes without saying here. The pupils benefit from 'consistently outstanding teaching' and the results are staggering, with 96 Oxbridge offers to leavers last year. Summing up, 'There is no Westminster stereotype. Every pupil is a strong, highly intelligent, deeply inquisitive individual,' as one current parent explains.

WHITGIFT ●

Haling Park CR2 6YT**Website** whitgift.co.uk**Acting head** Andrew Halls, from September 2024; previously head of King's College School Wimbledon**Pupils** 1,550 boys: 1,450 day; 100 boarding **Ages** 10–18**Term Fees** Day: £8,685, boarding: £17,040 **Bursaries** 50% of pupils, up to 50% **Alumni** Footballer Callum Hudson-Odoi, BBC director general Tim Davie, actor Kit Connor

On arrival at Whitgift, our visitor was welcomed by 'a gaggle of polite, diverse and enthusiastic young men'; and a current mother tells us the boys here are both 'interested and interesting'. They certainly have plenty to keep them busy, with 80-plus clubs and societies offering everything from digital art to beekeeping, and there are marvellous sports facilities to make the most of. In the last decade, the school has won more than 300

national titles across a wide range. The Whitgift 7 programme immerses Year 7s in experiences that will lay the foundation for their educational journey; last year saw it add the First Form Play Series – in which pupils perform in five 30-minute shows – to foster a passion for drama early. Despite the school being proudly all-rounder, academic results are strong; and last year, nearly a quarter of all A-level grades were A*, while 62 per cent of leavers secured places at Russell Group universities. Pastoral care is also a priority, with one mother describing the school as 'a calm and kind space'. At the end of last academic year, head Chris Ramsey moved on to a new position and will be much-missed, but interim head Andrew Halls will have the world at his fingertips. Toby Seth, from Pocklington School, will take over in 2025, inheriting a forward-thinking gem.

WIMBLEDON HIGH SCHOOL ●

Mansel Road SW19 4AB**Website** wimbledonhigh.gdst.net**Head** Fionnuala Kennedy, since 2020; previously senior deputy head**Pupils** 1,052 day girls **Ages** 4–18**Term Fees** £8,297 **Bursaries** 5% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Journalists Samira Ahmed and Afua Hirsch, astronomer Sheila Kanani

In the heart of leafy Wimbledon lies a red-brick haven where young women are taught to 'find their voices and go out and shake up the world'. WHS is increasingly oversubscribed each year, currently with around 10 applicants per place, but students who do make it past the 11+ are given every opportunity to reach their full potential in a nurturing atmosphere, complete with best-in-class teachers and extensive sports facilities – see the 25-metre swimming pool – not to mention a fully functioning theatre, high-spec art studios, and an ultra-modern STEAM Tower. With all this and more at the pupils' disposal, success comes naturally – academically and beyond. An impressive 72 per cent of last year's A-level cohort were marked A*–A; there were particularly outstanding results in STEM subjects, with everyone who took further maths and computer science awarded A*; and at GCSE, 76 per cent of grades were 9–8. Here, 'confident but not arrogant' girls excel in everything to which they turn their attention, whether that's representing Great Britain in tennis, hockey or swimming, winning gold medals at the National Schools Regatta, singing in the Vatican or producing the *Unconquered Peaks* magazine. And a recent production of Sophocles' *Antigone* was particularly stand-out. ('There are nights when the fact that I get to be the head of this school blows my mind, and this was one of them,' said Fionnuala Kennedy.) It's clear that this school's ethos of giving back comes from the top: WHS works with local primaries to offer mentoring, and the girls also undertake some partnership activities with Downview women's prison. □



Westminster School

South East

ABINGDON SCHOOL ●

Abingdon OX14 1DE

Website abingdon.org.uk

Head Michael Windsor, since 2016; previously head of Reading Blue Coat School

Pupils 1,289 boys; 1,153 day; 136 boarding

Ages 4–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,140; boarding: £16,600

Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to 100% of day fees **Alumni** The King's private secretary Sir Clive Alderton, comedian David Mitchell, former rugby player Theo Brophy Clews Abingdon is oversubscribed at every entry point, and the clamour to

attend is easy to understand: the standard of academics is equalled by the extracurriculars, to provide the ultimate all-round education. Exam results and leavers' destinations are as impressive as they come: 60 per cent of last year's GCSEs were graded 9–8, 70 per cent of A-levels were A*–A, and almost everyone was placed at their first-choice university: 19 went to Oxbridge and the rest to Russell Groups and such international big-hitters as Trinity Dublin, Leiden and UCLA in the US. Thanks to the Other Half programme, fun activities are integrated

into the timetable; and with more than 150 clubs to choose from, Abingdonians have every chance to discover and pursue what they truly enjoy. Sporty types are spoiled for choice, with the likes of canoeing and water polo on offer, while the more obscure clubs include flight simulation, bell-ringing and code-breaking. Creative endeavours are popular, too: 25 per cent learn one or more instruments; the senior drama production of *A Monster Calls* was a sell-out hit, featuring physical theatre, stilt-walking and rope work; and each year culminates in a large arts festival and a live rock concert. Ever-evolving, Abingdon has announced that it will go co-ed, welcoming girls to Year 7 and the Sixth Form in 2025 – and it's on track to increase bursary provision to 10 per cent in the next few years.

ARDINGLY COLLEGE ●●

Haywards Heath RH17 6SQ

Website ardingly.com

Head Ben Figgis, since 2017;

previously deputy head of Oakham

Pupils 1,045. Day: 395 boys, 325 girls; boarding: 167 boys, 158 girls

Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,995; boarding: £14,925 **Bursaries** 15%

of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni**

Private Eye editor Ian Hislop, former diplomat Sir David Manning, archaeologist Sue Hamilton

Besides its excellent sporting and academic reputation, parents choose Ardingly for its 'friendly, open and unpressured feel'. Pupils, too, praise the 'really nice community' atmosphere that extends from the head, who is 'always smiling and willing to have a chat', all the way down the rest of the school: 'Everyone knows each other and people are approachable'. But what really stands out here is the quality of teachers. The pupils told us how they are able to 'really instil a passion in you for their respective subjects', while parents 'truly can't believe how above and beyond some go', adding that they consistently 'achieve the impossible'. The proof is in the pudding: last year's cohort won Ardingly the honour of being placed the top school in West Sussex for A-level and IB results, with 90 per cent gaining A*–B grades (and the school is particularly proud that one of its Ukrainian refugee pupils, on a full bursary, achieved results of 9s and 8s in all her GCSEs). No wonder applications are healthy, with two or three for every place. Though selective, Ardingly strives 'not to be too narrowly so', and takes into account character and performance in team activities, not just exam scores. The establishment has just signed an agreement to open its next two international schools in Kazakhstan – and plans to use the income from these to fund additional bursaries back home – while the appointment of a dedicated director of enterprise and employability will help students prepare for the jobs of the future and the rapidly changing world of work.

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

Pupils 770. Day: 215 boys, 196 girls; boarding: 160 boys, 199 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £11,925; boarding: £15,395

Bursaries 13.4% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** The Earl of Snowdon, actors Minnie Driver and Daniel Day-Lewis

At the forefront of education reform since 1893, Bedales has just become the first school in the UK to scrap GCSEs. Its charges will now sit the national exams in just maths and English language, filling the rest of their curriculum with other traditional subjects and Bedales Assessed Courses (BACs) that have been specially developed to encourage the students to question, challenge and think for themselves. This is all part of visionary head Will Goldsmith's 10-year plan, which will also see the school transition to mixed boarding houses, set a course to reach net zero by 2045, double the number of full bursaries and much more. Conservative types may think this further proof of the place's famously liberal character; but it's worth noting that many of the 'alternative' ideas it pioneered years ago are now making their way into the more traditional mainstream. Take outdoor learning, wellbeing, 'global awareness' and gardening: all the rage now, but a cornerstone of the Bedales method since day one. Indeed, Outdoor Work is one of the BACs on offer, and pupils love being involved in the management and upkeep of their farm, and look forward to lambing season in particular. They are also big on creativity and individual expression through art, drama and music, with thoroughly modern amenities to match; while daily timetabled slots for co-curriculars mean they can explore all manner of interests. Clearly, it's a formula that works: last year, 84 per cent of leavers bagged places at their first-choice universities.

BEDFORD SCHOOL ●

Bedford MK40 2TU

Website bedfordschool.org.uk

Head James Hodgson, since

2014; previously senior deputy head of Magdalen College School

Pupils 1,113 boys: 863 day, 250 boarding **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees**

Day: £8,565; boarding: £14,746

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

While academic excellence, tradition, boarding provision and a strong sporting record are what initially draw parents to Bedford, more often than not it's the children they meet when visiting who clinch the deal. 'The boys have such a healthy and happy attitude towards learning and are passionately proud to be part of the school,' one was impressed to discover on Open Day. Bedfordians have access to 'superb' facilities – including an observatory, flight simulator and nature reserve – but one father says they're provided with 'a grounded environment that is not detached from reality'. The motto – 'That they be good men' – is ingrained in all aspects of life; and Bedford leads by example, awarding transformational bursaries, partnering with local schools and hosting enrichment and careers events for the borough. Meanwhile, seniors mentor the younger years in a vertical tutor-group structure, and will soon embark on a service expedition to Malawi; individual successes are celebrated with a Man of the Week award; and the 'MoBros' have raised more than £100,000 for Movember over the past decade. 'Resilient, confident and well-rounded young men', according to one parent, go on to be successful both here and beyond. Last year's GCSE results set a new school record: 71 per cent were graded 9–7 (and one boy got the world's top mark for his design technology iGCSE), while 44 per cent of A-levels were A*–A. Seventy-five per cent of leavers went on to Russell Group universities, and a handful won golf scholarships to the United States.

BENENDEN SCHOOL ●

Cranbrook, Kent TN17 4AA

Website benenden.school

Head Rachel Bailey, since 2024;

previously head of Royal Masonic School for Girls **Pupils** 560 girls: 40 day, 520 boarding **Ages** 11–18

Term Fees Day: £12,094; boarding: £16,738 **Bursaries**

9.5% of pupils, up to 100%+

Alumni Humanitarian Sue Ryder, The Princess Royal, Baroness

Manningham-Buller

Benenden's strapline is 'A Complete Education', and it aims to achieve this by organising its curriculum into categories: creativity and culture, services and responsibility, global outlook, personal development, innovation and enterprise. The upshot? Well, 73 per cent of recent leavers went to Russell Group universities and 57 per cent of A-levels were graded A*–A. The food here is delicious – and fuel is

needed when cricket, lacrosse and football are going from strength to strength, and some afternoons are spent practising marching with the CCF. Benenden has just marked its centenary year, and as part of the festivities performed *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* at the London Coliseum. Anna Birkett, the first Benenden Senior to become Chairman of Governing Council – and herself a student during the 50th anniversary year – attended the celebrations, including the Inspiring Future Female Leaders Conference, where The Princess Royal was a keynote speaker among Hollywood producers and a former director-general of MI5. The milestone provided opportunity to revitalise the curriculum, adding short-course electives such as journalism and creative technology. All in all, Benenden is in a strong position to welcome its new head, Rachel Bailey.

Outdoor learning, wellbeing and 'global awareness' are all the rage in mainstream schools, but have been a cornerstone of the Bedales method since day one



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** 1,961.

Day: 1,013 boys, 863 girls; **boarding:** 50 boys, 35 girls **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £8,840; **boarding:** £14,580 **Bursaries** 2.4% of pupils, up to 100%

Alumni Sailor Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, DJ Roman Kemp, space physics professor Dr Suzi Imber

Spread across three different sites, Berkhamsted covers the spectrum of ages, from pre-prep to Sixth Form; and in its senior school it operates the 'diamond' teaching structure, whereby boys and girls are segregated into single-sex lessons from 11 to 16, and then return to co-education at an age when they can run their own houses. Such independence serves leavers well: there's been an uptick in those considering study abroad, and the head of international universities has supported applications to the likes of Columbia University in New York and the University of Hong Kong. Actually, there are plenty of opportunities to travel while still at school (geographers have been on trips to Iceland, while the outdoor education team has been known to hit the slopes of the Dolomites). But adventure is also found closer to home in the thriving DofE and CCF schemes; and those who would rather focus on creative pursuits may be found in the theatre where, recently, a play written by three pupils headed to the Edinburgh Fringe. An artist-in-residence is on-site to support dab hands with a paintbrush, while musicians perform at services, concerts and large-scale productions – the annual Young Musician of the Year competition always being a highlight. 'We are encouraged to make the most of all the opportunities we have, such as sport and music, and pursue this throughout our time at Berkhamsted School,' concludes one pupil.

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: 81 boys, 44 girls; **boarding:** 420 boys, 289 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £13,032; **boarding:** £16,290

Bursaries 15.5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Photographer and social activist Misan Harriman, England cricketer Lauren Bell, wildlife filmmaker Bertie Gregory

Offering weekly and full boarding, this red-brick and flintstone enclave surrounded by lush playing fields is beautiful and homely; its friendly atmosphere aided by Year 9 entrants beginning in Faulknors, where they get to know each other before dispersing into their senior houses. Meanwhile, head Dr Christopher Stevens has overseen a revamp of other key areas, investing in common rooms, and improving the dining hall, the squash courts and

classics block. (The newly opened St Andrew's study centre saw £9 million spent on converting a church into a modern 'co-working' space – complete with seminar rooms, library and café – which should help prepare students for employment and study in later life.) Plans for a new wellness centre are also in the pipeline, as is the Bradfield Diploma, which aims to encourage pupils to take part in activities outside their comfort zones. In music, the GCSE is being replaced by the school's own syllabus, which will allow a wider range of assessments; and a recent highlight was a stirring rendition of Rutter's 'Gloria' and Handel's 'Zadok the Priest', held in Reading Town Hall, which was organised with the Berkshire Music Trust and three local state schools. 'The stand-out element of Bradfield that I love is the teacher-student dynamics,' one pupil says. 'Every teacher is very personable and displays their character and sense of humour.'

At Brighton College, standard public school hierarchies have been toppled by casting the Sixth Form as mentors to the new intake



BRIGHTON COLLEGE ●●

Eastern Road, Brighton BN2 0AL

Website brightoncollege.org.uk

Head Richard Cairns, since 2006; previously deputy head of Magdalen College School **Pupils** 1,112.

Day: 405 boys, 300 girls; **boarding:** 212 boys, 195 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term**

Fees **Day:** £10,080; **boarding:**

£14,420 **Bursaries** 51% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** England

rugby player Marcus Smith, director Chloé Zhao, cricketer Clare Connor

Quizzed as to why they selected Brighton College, one parent said its strong academic reputation was definitely a draw – exam results are exceptional and the most popular university destination is Oxbridge – but they then emphasised that its appeal lies in much more than grades. Many agreed they chose the school based on its success in many aspects of education: 'the focus on turning out decent, humble, socially-aware and interesting men and women who are capable of not only reaching their full potential as individuals, but of using their privileged education to benefit others and society as a whole'. This outcome is almost certainly shaped by the college's focus on the importance of kindness, which it maintains is its currency, woven throughout the curriculum and the school day. Pupils and staff are encouraged to commit random acts of kindness and then talk about them during assembly. Meanwhile, standard public school hierarchies have been toppled by embedding the Sixth Form into the pastoral care programme, casting individuals as peer mentors to the new intake. This ethos spreads into the wider world, too: recently, 23 Ukrainian children were offered full scholarships; and pupils volunteer across the city, visiting the elderly and tutoring in local primaries. London-based parents who like the sound of Brighton College but wish to stay in the capital will be mighty pleased to learn that the latest outpost – a prep school, for ages 2–13 – has just opened in the heart of Kensington.

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** 999.

Day: 448 boys, 430 girls; *boarding:*

78 boys, 43 girls **Ages** 4–18

Term Fees *Day:* £7,895; *boarding:*

£16,390 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils,

up to 100%+ Alumni Actor Chuk

Iwuji, professor of respiratory and

critical care medicine Nick Hart,

rocket engineer Alia Ardon

Caterham is hearing from a record number of applicants – about five per place – some of whom will be awarded such unusual scholarships as that for entrepreneurship and innovation, available to those who have already developed apps and computer games or built online businesses. Meanwhile, it continues to boost EDGE, its curriculum teaching problem-solving, digital and entrepreneurial skills; and it has just launched the UK's first educational chatbot, which supports children from reception to Upper Sixth and is now ready to be rolled out to other schools. There's a lot of outreach here: 'It is an independent school, but it does a huge amount in the local community to support and share educational resources with local schools,' shares one mother. A Saturday programme supports local children receiving free school meals, and exposes them to a blend of academics and activities such as drama, coding and climbing. Elsewhere, pupils, parents and staff recently undertook a massive environmental project by saving nearly 160 acres of nearby woodland that was under threat. And the new sports centre, opened by Dame Kelly Holmes, has been a great success, attracting several Team GB athletes to train here in the holidays. 'This seems to us to be *the* school for all-rounders, strengthening whatever your child's interests and talents might be and encouraging them to achieve their full potential,' cheerleads one happy mother. 'Caterham punches well above its weight.'



Christ's Hospital

CHARTERHOUSE ●●

Godalming, Surrey GU7 2DX

Website charterhouse.org.uk

Head Dr Alex Peterken, since 2018;

previously head of Cheltenham

College **Pupils** 950. *Day:* 51 boys,

35 girls; boarding: 549 boys, 315

girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** *Day:*

£13,339; *boarding:* £16,716

Bursaries 7.2% of pupils, *up to*

100%+ Alumni Former prime

minister Lord Liverpool, composer

Rachel Portman, former chancellor

of the exchequer Jeremy Hunt

If you want to send your children here, you'd better brush up on your glossary of Charterhouse's private language. The Sixth Form are 'specialists', dinner is 'homebill' and teachers are 'beaks'. But what else would you expect from one of the oldest seats of learning in the country, founded in 1611? The main building was erected by the Lucas brothers, who built the Royal Albert Hall, so it's apt that the performing arts are strong: a recent production

of *Titanic* was a dramatic and technical tour de force, while Candlelit Carols and the Eve of Carthusian Day concerts are always atmospheric. In other creative news, an extension that will double the size of the music school is set to be started imminently; and an art and design centre is in the final stage of construction. In more hard-headed mode, The Hub's sparkling-new business, leadership and entrepreneurship centre is home to the FutureU programme, which aims to provide pupils with transferable skills that will help them thrive in the world of work, supplemented by a unique Sixth-form qualification in applied entrepreneurship. The glorious 250-acre campus has ample space for 17 grass pitches, three Astros, 24 tennis courts, an athletics stadium and a nine-hole golf course. The equestrian and basketball teams are formidable, while three pairs of eagle-eyes have secured spots on the British Cadet Rifle Team.

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL ●●

Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0LJ

Website christs-hospital.org.uk

Head Simon Reid, since 2016;

previously head of Gordonstoun

Pupils 900. *Day:* 30 boys, 30 girls;

boarding: 420 boys, 420 girls

Ages 11–18 **Term Fees** *Day:*

£9,726; *boarding:* £14,948

Bursaries 75% of pupils, *up to*

100% Alumni Poet Samuel Taylor

Coleridge, England rugby player Joe

Launchbury, actor Roger Allam

One pupil describes Simon Reid as

a 'steady, composed head' who's not

afraid to voice a stern opinion when

needs be – 'and is definitely not

afraid to crack jokes'. His most

famous escapade was to plummet

fully-suited into a local pond on a

freezing winter day for a school

fundraiser. But charity, outreach

and community support have long

been an integral part of life here.

(Christ's awards more bursaries than

any of its UK peers and has recently

appointed a full-time equity, diver-

sity and inclusion lead.) So has

music, with nearly 100 lessons

given every day, and one cherished

tradition is the four-times-weekly

gathering of the 100-strong band in

the vast quad, to march everyone

into lunch. Not that the ensemble

doesn't have a full diary, also playing

at the Brighton Children's parade,

the Lord Mayor's Show and the

Tower of London – which actually

has a policy of allowing free entry to

children wearing the historic uni-

form and its famous blue 'cassock'-

style coat. Of the 900 pupils, 840

are full-boarders; and as you'd

expect of an institution whose

motto is 'A School Like No Other',

the application-to-place ratio here

is a staggering six-to-one. Saturday

morning lessons are mandatory for

all, while the afternoons are for

activities and sports. And with a

running track, outdoor-exercise

adventure trail and host of padel

courts among new facilities – join-

ing the existing collection of tennis

courts, cricket fields and pitches –

who could ask for more? Well, one

boy told us he wished his schedule

allowed him 'more free time, due to

everything that's on offer here'.

CRANLEIGH ●●

*Horseshoe Lane, Cranleigh,
Surrey GU6 8QQ*

Website cranleigh.org

Head Samantha Price, since 2024; previously head of Benenden

Pupils 683. Day: 117 boys, 81 girls; boarding: 280 boys, 205 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£13,265; boarding: £16,265

Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to 100%

Alumni Historian Lord Roberts of Belgravia, actress Julia Ormond, England cricketer Ollie Pope

This school has just welcomed its first-ever female head, the brilliant Samantha Price, who joins after a decade at the helm of Benenden; and rather fittingly, just in time for the school's 25th anniversary of co-ed boarding. It's still early days, of course, but we're told she's keen to expand Cranleigh's already notable partnerships programme, while also helping to oversee the latest international opening in Bahrain. Back on home turf, the institution's purposely small size – capped at 700 pupils – continues to be one of its greatest strengths, much to the chagrin of the many families vying for entry; however, parents say this fosters 'individual and caring attention that's tailored to each child's needs' and in which each 'is celebrated for their uniqueness'. And the beautiful 280-acre grounds and facilities are big draws, too, with one recent visitor saying they were 'struck by how attractive it is' and found themselves 'fighting not to invoke the Hogwarts comparison' at almost every turn. Well-known for sports, Cranleigh boasts 10 grass pitches, 13 cricket nets, a 25-metre swimming pool, equestrian centre, golf course, new spin studio and squash courts, plus much more; but the focus is on encouraging 'love of a physically active life' rather than on securing silverware (for which Cranleighans also have a knack). One pupil sums it up best: 'My favourite thing is the wide range of opportunities. They have allowed me, and so many others, to gain confidence through trying something new – and having a bit of a laugh about it along the way.'

CULFORD SCHOOL ●●

*Culford, Bury St Edmunds,
Suffolk IP28 6TX*

Website culford.co.uk

Head Claire Bentley, since 2023; previously interim head

Pupils 895. Day: 342 boys, 305 girls; boarding: 133 boys, 115 girls

Ages 1–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,515;

boarding: £13,500 **Bursaries** 10%

of pupils, up to 25% **Alumni** Snoop

founder Dame Jayne-Anne Gadhia, former football commentator John Motson, rugby player Tommy Freeman

Tucked away in 480 acres of Suffolk parkland, Culford also appointed its first female head, of whom one parent declares: 'Mrs Bentley is outstanding. She's highly qualified, extremely capable and our trust in her is complete.' As it should be: the change in leadership has ushered in a new strategic five-year plan, which will focus on developing the skills and leadership abilities of teachers; the facilities have had a

considerable revamp; a new design and technology centre has seen the number of pupils studying the subject double; and a new short-game course has become a shrine for those keen golfers who already benefit from a special academy. Creatives do great things in the art centre, which has several textile studios, a ceramics workshop and a gallery, as well an exclusive Sixth-form space designed to evoke art college. Extracurricular offerings cater for all (even model aeroplane enthusiasts) and the new falconry programme has seen pupils gain hands-on experience with all kinds of raptors. Meanwhile, trips abroad offer more chances to spread wings – think skiing, and white-water-rafting in Morocco. Once back, the youngsters feel in very safe hands. 'Hands down, the best thing about Culford is its pastoral care,' one says. 'There are so many avenues of support at so many levels.'

Culford School's new falconry programme has seen pupils gain hands-on experience with all kinds of raptors



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 755. Day: 242 boys, 185 girls; boarding: 148 boys, 180 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees**

Day: £9,900; boarding: £17,960

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to

50% **Alumni** Actors Rupert Friend

and Phia Saban, former secretary of state for defence Ben Wallace

The only private senior school in Oxford that's co-ed from the age of 11, it is famously laid-back: teachers and students are on first-name terms, there's a 'light-touch' uniform policy for younger years, digital devices are allowed under guidelines and AI is encouraged for revision. It makes for a 'lovely and supportive' community, say parents, who are keen to dispel preconceptions that an informal atmosphere leads to under-performance. Last year's results speak for themselves: at A-level, 55 per cent were awarded A*–A; everyone who took Extended Project Qualifications got A*–B; and at GCSE, 35 per cent of grades were 9–8. One family we spoke to was delighted that, after moving their daughter from a 'hot house' that was harming her mental health, she was already 'far happier' and still predicted to get top grades. And it must help that the pastoral care is 'excellent'; much helped by 'strong' rapports between pupil and teacher, and an emphasis on treating children both as equals and celebrating individuality. In line with this, D'Overbroeck's is building a new boarding house with design input from pupils. And it's working on the introduction of an A-level programme based on architectural design. Drama is strong: the latest production of *Sweeney Todd* saw audiences 'blown away' by the talent displayed by Years 7–13. Being part of the Nord Anglia Education family ensures plenty of opportunities, such as expeditions to Kilimanjaro, a Unicef programme in Houston and a partnership with the world-leading music school Juilliard.



Eastbourne College

DOWNE HOUSE ●

Thatcham, Berkshire RG18 9JJ
Website downehouse.net

Head Emma McKendrick, since 1997; previously head of Royal High School Bath **Pupils** 555 girls: 34 day, 521 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £12,610; boarding: £16,995 **Bursaries** 25% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Broadcaster Clare Balding, comedienne Miranda Hart, actress Geraldine James

There are three applicants per place at Downe House, a traditional girls' boarding school, which has made great strides in instilling in its charges an international perspective, as well as preparing them for the demands of the world of work. The new Super-Curricular Elective programme offers a chance to explore a career in law; while the global internship programme invites pupils to apply for work in asset management in Germany or equine veterinary work in Australia. As for school exchanges, students can go to such far-flung places as India, Brazil and Japan. If this is music to the ears, consider this: the renowned composer Bob Chilcott has taken up a residency and there's a scholarship in his name for choral singing. Artists can develop across a wide range of spheres, from textiles, ceramics and 3D-design to photography. Whatever free time is left might be spent in the debating and public speaking club, reeling with the Caledonian Society – in partnership with boys' schools – and cooking with Leiths.

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** 651. Day: 203 boys, 158 girls; boarding: 173 boys, 117 girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,360; boarding: £15,725 **Bursaries** 17% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Kent cricketer Tawanda Muyeje, actress Patti Clare, former veterans' minister Johnny Mercer Parents speak warmly of the 'very personable' Tom Lawson and one mother said her son was impressed that the head was wearing Star Wars socks at the admissions interview: 'Little details like this put nervous children at ease.' Lawson and his staff sail a happy ship, and a unique factor of the school is its relationship with the sea. Recently, the college was given a national award for innovation in sport, which commended its commitment to making positive use of the water. Minds are also stimulated: an international coach has been appointed to the unique post entitled Graduate Debater in Residence, and all that logic-honing has paid dividends, with half its sharp-minded leavers' A-levels marked A*–A. Cultural pursuits prosper, too: one pupil recently won a Royal Opera House wardrobe challenge with a Baroque-inspired costume for *The Magic Flute*, and was also named a winner in the Young Fashion Designer UK competition.

EPSOM COLLEGE ●●

Epsom, Surrey KT17 4JQ
Website epsomcollege.org.uk

Head Mark Lascelles, since 2024; previously head of Dauntsey's **Pupils** 1,103. Day: 430 boys, 369 girls; boarding: 179 boys, 125 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £11,101; boarding: £16,791 **Bursaries** 10% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Broadcaster Jeremy Vine, former head of MI5 Sir John Scarlett, cricketer Nat Sciver

While stewarded by the renowned educator Sir Anthony Seldon for the past 18 months, Epsom continued to build on its reputation for both inclusiveness and competitiveness. And now it has found a new leader in Mark Lascelles, whose 'deep experience, great empathy and high intellect' – says Sir Anthony – promise 'a very exciting future indeed'. Lascelles has inherited an energised college. Its most recent results – 59 per cent of A-levels marked A*–A, and 83 per cent of GCSEs awarded 9–7 – were among the most improved in Britain. (Impressive, since it is not unbendingly selective.) Its leavers went on to top-notch institutions; and gratifyingly for a school that was established in 1853 as the Royal Medical Benevolent College, 13 per cent followed medicine, dentistry or veterinary science. As for its 72-acre Surrey campus – to which pupils are allowed to drive – it brims with modern facilities. These don't just include the staggering Mermaid complex, which incorporates a gallery, lecture theatre, performance space, café and classrooms. There's also amazing provision for sports, for which the school is famous; and a new, £10 million Sixth-form centre has created a senior co-ed social space, which boarders use in the evenings to host screenings, guest lectures and open mic sessions. The college is all-embracing, welcoming talented children from disadvantaged backgrounds and refugees. And while it's rooted in its Surrey community, the handy proximity to London and its airports makes it an attractive option for both cosmopolitan and metropolitan parents.

ETON COLLEGE ●

Windsor, Berkshire SL4 6DW
Website etoncollege.com

Head Simon Henderson, since 2015; previously head of Bradfield College **Pupils** 1,342 boarding boys **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** £17,583 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Novelist George Orwell, actor Dominic West, *The Prince of Wales*

One of the only all-boys boarding schools left in the country, Eton is an exemplar in providing its pupils with a stratospheric range of opportunities. There are nearly 30 sports on offer – including their esoteric field and wall games – and creativity is a vital part of the jam-packed life here. Each year there's a dynamic mixture of whole-school and house dramas on stage, as well as other pupil-led initiatives, while the recent School Play Festival saw a week dedicated to immersing the entire institution in the wonderful world of theatre. Pianists have the chance to play on Steinway and Fazioli pianos, and sometimes play external gigs in such iconic venues as Ronnie Scott's in Soho. Trips and tours span the globe. (Think rugby in Thailand, rowing and hockey in Spain and cricket in Sri Lanka.) And as you might expect, a range of Nobel laureates and former world leaders regularly descend on the school to deliver lectures and talks. Horizon-broadening is continued by means of the societies programme, which allows boys to avidly discuss topics as varied as philosophy, economics, geography, feminism and social impact. And talking of social impact, of late, the school has made real efforts to broaden its reach and share its ample benefits with those who might not otherwise be able to access them. Summer University Preparation Courses – free, non-residential and subject-based – are open to Year 12 state-school pupils; and a landmark initiative is the opening of three co-ed Sixth-form colleges in Dudley, Middlesbrough and Oldham, which will be imbued with Eton's educational ethos and rigorous academic curriculum.

HAILEYBURY ●●

*Haileybury, Hertford,
Hertfordshire SG13 7NU*
Website haileybury.com

Head Eugene du Toit, since 2024; previously head of Wellington School **Pupils** 916. **Day:** 197 boys, 167 girls; **boarding:** 265 boys, 287 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £11,540; **boarding:** £15,945

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Former prime minister Clement Attlee, playwright Sir Alan Ayckbourn, filmmaker Christopher Nolan

An hour from London, set in 500 Hertfordshire acres and consistently oversubscribed, Haileybury is firmly on the co-ed map. With its wide open spaces, sports pitches as far as the eye can see and Neoclassical architecture, it feels more like a university campus than a school. And both its outlook and achievements are similarly ambitious; for example, the new science and technology centre, which doubled the size of the provision, now houses the prestigious Stan-X project (in which pupils work on university-standard

biomedical research, alongside scientists at Stanford and Oxford). So it's little surprise seniors have their sights set on the Ivy League, as well as the Russell Group; nor that a Lower-sixth student recently took a place at Yale and didn't even consider Oxbridge. The establishment is recognised for its IB offering, and was one of the first UK schools to embrace it; and traditionally, if a pupil couldn't decide between IB or A-levels, they would always go and ask 'jolly and approachable' head Martin Collier, whose door was always open – as were his windows, through which students often popped their heads to say hello. He has now retired and his extremely big shoes have been filled by the former head of Wellington School. So it will be the experienced Eugene du Toit to lead Haileybury into its next phase. However, its 'Lift up your Hearts' motto will remain; as will the pupil-led senate system that cares for the school's upbeat youngsters, and the wellbeing centre where they can see counsellors, practise yoga or tend to the garden.

*In Haileybury's prestigious Stan-X project,
pupils work on biomedical research,
alongside scientists at Stanford and Oxford*

**HEADINGTON RYE
OXFORD ●**

Headington Road, Oxford
OX3 7TD
Website headington.org

Head Caroline Jordan, since 2011; previously head of St George's Ascot **Pupils** 1,077 girls: 871 day, 206 boarding **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £7,515; **boarding** £15,027 **Bursaries** 5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actress Emma Watson, rower Katie Greves, broadcaster Julia Somerville

Over the course of the next two years, Headington is to merge with neighbouring school Rye St Antony to become Headington Rye Oxford, which will operate a senior school for day and boarding girls on the former's site, and a mixed day prep on the latter's. The new institution will have an enhanced curriculum, with more than 30 subjects on offer across GCSE and A-level, as well as BTECs in enterprise or sport and a Leiths food and wine certificate. This change is being spearheaded by head Caroline Jordan, described by parents as 'empathetic', 'charismatic' and 'a great example of female leaders that girls will aspire to become'. The new set-up will build on solid foundations: artistic minds already thrive in the dynamic Hive, which boasts the Emma Watson Gallery – the actress is an old girl – as well as art and lens-media studios, a kiln room and a digital manufacturing space (and students working with fabric are lucky enough to have a garden whence they can derive their dyes). Meanwhile, popular extra-curriculars include contemporary dance and rowing – work has just finished on the school's first-ever dedicated boathouse – while clubs include Amnesty International, musical theatre and medical ethics. 'The relationship with teachers is something that I don't think you get at other schools. I think we are talked to as equals and encouraged to engage with adults,' says one youngster, when asked what they love about Headington. 'My other favourite aspect is the ability to pursue whatever your passion is with full enthusiasm.'

HEATHFIELD SCHOOL ●

*London Road, Ascot,
Berkshire SL5 8BQ*
Website heathfieldschool.net

Head Sarah Rollings, since 2021; previously senior deputy head of Cranford House School **Pupils** 230 girls: 100 day, 130 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £9,430; **boarding:** £15,254 **Bursaries** 15% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Fashion editor Isabella Blow, philanthropist Daphne Guinness, actress Sienna Miller

Heathfield's applications are on the rise after the introduction of weekly and part-time boarding – as well as the extension of school bus routes locally and into London – and there are now between three and four applicants trying for each place. Not least because of its cosy environment, with one parent saying: 'I like that it's a small school that nurtures children and has a more rounded view of education, rather than just academics, academics, academics!' Houses have such names as Austen and Seacole to foreground female role models, and the boarding system is organised by age to cater for different needs at different stages. Elsewhere, a push is underway on the technological front: new computer-science facilities are being developed, while both the AI in the fashion workshop and experiments with a 3D chocolate-printer have proved exceptionally popular. Meanwhile, design and textiles are big here: the biennial catwalk show is a feast for the eyes, with the latest iteration seeing representatives from Models 1, Dior and Harrods grace the audience; and impressively, Heathfield is the only school to have a collaborative agreement with Parsons Paris (as well as a creative partnership with Falmouth School of Art). And on the sporting front, lacrosse, netball, gymnastics and riding are strong, while less strenuous types can opt for yoga and wellbeing walks. Trips abroad include the exciting Heathfield World Challenge: an adventure in Borneo that takes in trekking, volunteering, white-water rafting and zip-wiring through the rainforest canopy.



Haileybury



The King's School, Canterbury

HURTWOOD HOUSE ●●

Dorking, Surrey RH5 6NU

Website hurtwoodhouse.com

Head Cosmo Jackson, son of the founder; since 1992 **Pupils** 353. **Day:** 24 boys, 38 girls; **boarding:** 104 boys, 187 girls **Ages** 16–19 **Term Fees** **Day:** £12,395; **boarding:** £18,592 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actors Emily Blunt and Jack Huston, composer Hans Zimmer

This co-ed Sixth-form boarding college sits remotely on one of the Surrey Hills, and its tree-screened setting makes you forget it's a mere hour's drive from west London. But what you'll always remember is its drama: founded by Richard Jackson in the 1970s, and now run by his son Cosmo, it has maintained a reputation for professional-level performing arts; and nearly a third of its cohort study A-level drama

and theatre, while scores opt for media studies in which they learn the business of filmmaking. (A unique academy also enables students to bring to the screen work that reflects their passions; and in previous years, this has taken teams to Venice for a film about Murano's glass factories.) The Christmas musical runs for 10 nights and last year, for *Legally Blonde*, a cast of 70 was directed by West End choreographers and musical directors. Equally legendary is the Hurtwood concert, a six-night feast of rock, pop and dancing that pays testament to the work of the numerous music teachers and vocal coaches. However, those who love being on-stage don't hog all the limelight: ultra-modern studios allow sound engineers of the future to learn their trade, while budding producers can opt for a music technology A-level.

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 1,282. **Day:** 276 boys, 244 girls; **boarding:** 414 boys, 348 girls

Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** **Day:**

£10,920; **boarding:** £15,720

Bursaries Variable, up to 100%+

Alumni Playwright and poet

Christopher Marlowe, astronaut

Michael Foale, former England

cricketer David Gower

It's the oldest school in England – perhaps the world – and the setting of The King's School, Canterbury is 'an amazing place to wake up to every day', according to one happy boarder. But there's great substance here as well as style. In September 2023, Jude Lowson took over as head, the first woman to be at the helm of this historic establishment since its inception in 597, and the impressions among staff and parents alike have so far been very positive. Quite evidently, she is keen to fully embrace the King's ethos, and the pupils are enthusiastic about her, too. 'She has become a regular on the sidelines at matches and in the audience at concerts and plays, and she has established a reputation for being friendly and approachable,' says one. Strong results mean King's is climbing the league tables, with 66 pupils achieving three A*–As at A-level and half of GCSE exam results graded 9–8. And the A-level options are also impressive, with 33 subjects to choose from, including Japanese, history of art and two history courses. Beyond the classroom, the pupils enjoy adventures around the globe, with economists jetting off to the New York Stock Exchange and geologists voyaging to the bubbling lagoons of Iceland. Everyone looks forward to King's Week, an annual extravaganza that is dedicated to music, drama and the arts; and last year saw spellbinding performances of *Hamlet* and a musical serenade at dusk in the cloisters of the cathedral.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE SCHOOL ●●

Cowley Place, Oxford OX4 1DZ

Website mcs.oxford.org

Head Helen Pike, since 2016;

previously head of South

Hampstead High School **Pupils**

955 **day:** 857 boys, 98 girls **Ages**

7–18 **Term Fees** £7,259

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to

100%+ **Alumni** Saint Thomas More,

decorated soldier Noel Chavasse,

film director Sir Sam Mendes

Educators at the highly intellectual

MCS take every prospective pupil

seriously. 'It was the only school

where they talked to my son rather

than me when we toured around

it,' says one parent, who believes its

strengths lie in 'academic excel-

lence, combined with caring and

supportive teaching'. Grades are

consistently top-notch, with 85 per

cent of recent A-levels graded at

A*–A; pupils head to the best uni-

versities, and there are always lots

of opportunities for learning exten-

sion. Mandarin has been introduced

as a subject, while a partnership

with the Oxford Botanical Gardens

has piqued the interest of nature-

lovers; and the Biology Garden is

a trove of rare plants. Meanwhile,

music here truly is magical; and not

just because of the 'secret' tunnel

under Magdalen Bridge, a nifty

shortcut to the daily services in

which the choristers participate as

members of the Magdalen College

Choir. Eighty per cent of the stu-

dents learn an instrument and a

widespread passion for singing and

drama was displayed at a recent per-

formance of *Oklahoma!* Pastoral

care is anchored by the house sys-

tem and counsellors; and there is

a thriving outreach programme,

underpinned by one of Magdalen's

aims: to equip pupils to make a

positive and lasting contribution to

their communities. For example: an

academic enrichment programme

helps children from primary schools

across the region; £200,000 has so

far been raised to build and support

a school in Uganda; and there is a

longstanding relationship with

local hospitals to produce bespoke

artwork for them.

Music at MCS is truly magical; and not just because of the 'secret' tunnel under Magdalen Bridge, a nifty shortcut to the daily services in which choristers participate

OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL ●

*Belbroughton Road,
Oxford OX2 6XA*

Website oxfordhigh.gdst.net

Head Marina Gardiner Legge, since 2021; previously head of Heathfield School **Pupils** 823 day girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees** £6,732 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Homeware designer Emma Bridgewater, actress Miriam Margolyes, psychology professor Sarah-Jane Blakemore Though Oxford High is known for its strong exam results, one parent told us they chose it simply for its character rather than its academics. ‘Unashamedly feminist; no limits on learning; pupils empowered to speak up on topics that matter to them and to be the best versions of themselves,’ they say. ‘The school is definitely all about substance, not style.’ Here, these empowered girls devise and host virtual conferences on topics as diverse as extremism in European politics, the power of the brain and Brexit (at which Alistair Campbell spoke). And a Year 12 team recently reached the global finals of a prestigious STEM competition: an achievement that saw them compete at the NASA headquarters in Houston, where they won two awards for their idea for a netting system to collect orbital space debris. Back on solid ground, Earth studies has just been introduced as a subject, allowing a focus on topical issues such as waste, climate change and sustainability; and a new Social Action Initiative encourages engagement across the community, so pupils are involved in both tree-planting schemes and supporting food banks. Lucky musicians can even perform in a splendid programme of concerts at wonderful venues across Oxford; plus, the children have collaborated with the Oxford Opera Company to write and perform their own work. ‘We love how much of the school is student-led,’ adds another parent. ‘Creativity is celebrated in all its facets, whether in artistic or musical endeavours, or in scientific thinking, establishing new clubs or even social enterprises.’

PRIOR'S FIELD ●

*Priorsfield Road, Godalming,
Surrey GU7 2RH*

Website priorsfieldschool.com

Head Zoe Ireland, since 2024;

previously acting head of Farnborough Hill

Pupils 382 girls: 322 day, 60 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £7,635; boarding: £12,475

Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Philanthropist Diana Brooks, actresses Lily James and Victoria Hamilton

The school motto – ‘We live by admiration, hope and love’ – sets the tone for this girls’ institution, where new head Zoe Ireland has just taken over. She had been learning the ropes for a few months under the outgoing head, and parents believe the ‘seamless transition ensures the commitment to both academic and personal development will persist with unwavering dedication’. Other changes here include classical civilisation being offered as an A-level subject and the introduction of Model UN as an extracurricular. And in their spare time, you can find pupils trampolining, at the creative writing club or even perfecting their balance (and dance moves) at roller disco. The Huxley Programme encourages everyone to reach their academic potential beyond the curriculum, so participants play chess, debate and enter into the prestigious Huxley Essay prize. Meanwhile, pupils love RAG day, when activities are staged to raise funds. Plus, the tennis academy serves sporty pupils.



Queenswood

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 425 girls: 225 day, 200 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,365; boarding: £15,657

Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Olympic rower Olivia Carnegie-Brown, TV presenter Georgie Palmer, model Daphne Selfe

‘I would absolutely send my daughter here, it shouldn't be a best-kept secret,’ said a recent visitor, who was unexpectedly taken by the Berkshire girls’ school, finding the charming pupils ‘obviously clever but not overly studious’. This is a place of high-achieving young women, nearly half of whom achieved A*–A grades at A-level last year. Academics apart, the highly anticipated new cookery room has opened after some significant refurbishment; and sports day saw the introduction of the Burley Cup – named after former director of sport Nicola Burley, who left in 2023 after 21 years of service. Relatively new head Elaine Purves has thrown herself into every event and won the trust of her charges by, according to insiders, ‘bridging the gap’ between the pupil body and senior leadership. As one girl neatly puts it: ‘Her extensive experience, modern outlook and unwavering enthusiasm make Queen Anne's a happy school with a bright future.’ Hear hear!

QUEENSWOOD ●

Hatfield AL9 6NS

Website queenswood.org

Head Jo Cameron, since 2016; previously deputy head of Ipswich High School for Girls **Pupils** 482 girls: 261 day, 221 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,840; boarding: £15,345 **Bursaries** 11% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actress Helen McCrory, former vice chancellor of Cambridge University Alison Fettes Richard, TV presenter Georgie Thompson

It's not just this school's friendliness or openness that parents praise. Nor the flexi-boarding that allows stays of just one or two nights a week. In addition, there is ‘the ability to reward every child and to nurture every individual's strengths’, and the ‘very strong pastoral support from all the teachers, who demonstrate that they understand how teenage girls learn’. Such youngsters aren't exactly famed for agreeing with their progenitors but, on this occasion, there appears to be consensus. The academic staff – one pupil says – ‘often go out of their way to support you, both to do with school and mental health’; and she continues: ‘My favourite thing about Queenswood is the time the teachers put into helping you improve your grades.’ Certainly, this institution prides itself on its bespoke approach to education. It champions personalised learning and its dedicated department is particularly strong, providing targeted literacy and numeracy intervention in small-sized classes. The school also aims to develop its pupils on the pitch and has a tradition of sporting excellence, reflected in the huge roster of recent titles and achievements. (Last year, the tennis team won the Aberdare Cup for the 28th time, a recent head girl was part of the GB Hockey Elite Development Programme, another rode for the GB equestrian team – the list goes on.) A five-year strategy of improvement is underway and has so far produced some upgraded science labs and a calming wellbeing centre, with resurfacing the Astro courts up next.

RADLEY COLLEGE ●

Abingdon, Oxfordshire
OX14 2HR

Website radley.org.uk

Head John Moule, since 2014;

previously head of Bedford School

Pupils 766 boarding boys

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** £17,050

Bursaries 15% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Poet Sir Andrew Motion, rugby player Will Stuart, presenter Jamie Laing

Radley applications have reached record highs, particularly those for scholarships and bursaries; the latter numbering the newly launched and all-inclusive Keys Award, given to talented children from state schools. Well, successful candidates are in for a treat, according to one 'shell' – or first-year Radleian – who says head John Moule is not only universally liked but knows 'every single boy'. The pupil goes on: 'He dedicates his time to ensuring they make the most of the Radley experience.' And there's certainly a great deal to get out of this traditional, academically strong school, shaped by its history and Christian ethos but also by its commitment to open debate. There's even a newly launched 'Talking Heads' webinar series for parents, in which staff address a wide variety of topics. Reviews from parents are consistently stellar, with many reserving particular praise for the pastoral care, which they frequently describe as 'outstanding' and 'excellent'. Another strong suit at Radley is its masterful management of single-sex education. 'Boys get stuck into creative areas (drama, music, art) without any inhibition,' says one parent, and that's 'something friends who have boys at mixed schools complain their sons soon drop when girls are thrown into the mix'. On cue, there are plans for the redevelopment of the concert hall and a new music production suite. However, links with all-girls Downe House remain strong, ensuring the young men experience life beyond this blissful bubble; and an old barn is being converted into a cookery school. It seems that anything is possible at this outstanding establishment.



Roedean School

Reigate Grammar is the sort of school that will pause lessons for snowman-building and install a fairground in the summer term to ease exam-season anxieties

REIGATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL ●●

Reigate Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 0QS

Website reigategrammar.org

Head Shaun Fenton, since 2012;

previously head of Pate's Grammar

School Pupils 1,128 day: 552 boys,

576 girls **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees**

£8,100 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils,

up to 100%+ **Alumni** Comedian

David Walliams, PM Sir Keir

Starmer, survival expert Ray Mears

It's little wonder that parents at this co-ed day school in the sought-after Surrey town of Reigate rave about its outstanding reputation and consider it the best in their area. Its academic performance is always superb; but in 2023, it excelled itself, with more than two-thirds of all GCSEs graded 9 or 8. Meanwhile, 96 per cent of A-levels were graded A*–B and 98 per cent of university applicants received offers from Oxbridge, Russell Group universities or medical establishments. Even so, the youngsters exhibit no signs of being under

excessive pressure, instead extolling a 'sense of camaraderie'. ('It feels like a big family, where everyone supports each other,' says one.) Head Shaun Fenton adds to the convivial atmosphere, writing personal letters to pupils to congratulate them on achievements; he sends videos with birthday messages to each child and throws a party for all who have a term-time birthday, his only concern being that he eats too much cake! This is the kind of school that will pause its lessons for snowman-building, hire an ice rink before Christmas and install a fairground in the summer term to ease exam-season anxieties. Having achieved an Eco-Schools Green Flag with Merit, it's proud of its environmental mission, and is bringing local schools together in a council to discuss ways of living sustainably. As for trips, pupils might be found walking up volcanoes in Iceland, studying politics in Washington DC or learning about classical civilisation in Rome. The world is truly RGS's oyster.

ROEDEAN SCHOOL ●

Brighton BN2 5RQ

Website roedean.co.uk

Head Niamh Green, since 2023;

previously senior deputy head of

Mayfield School **Pupils** 681 girls:

369 day, 312 boarding **Ages** 11–18

Term Fees Day: £9,410; boarding:

£17,200 **Bursaries** 16% of pupils,

up to 100% **Alumni** Nurse Dame

Cicely Saunders, actress Marisa

Abela, anthropologist Ursula

Graham-Bower

Committed and hardworking, new head Niamh Green certainly inherited a flourishing establishment: her girls recently scored the school's best-ever A-level results, A* being their most common grade. And there's no shortage of subjects to study, with dance, media studies and computer science all now introduced for A-level, as well as a useful art foundation course. Also being rolled-out is the Roedean Diploma, which will focus on three major areas: academic, pastoral and co-curricular. Regarding the third, though, there's already plenty to do outside the classroom. Pupils recently raised £40,000 for charity through such activities as a Year 7 abseiling expedition; and last summer, a group travelled to Moldova to teach English to children and refugees. Meanwhile, pianists are having a grand old time, thanks to the delivery of 10 Steinways, whose arrival was marked by renditions of Dvořák's 'Slavonic Dance in G Minor'. Drama thrived with productions of *Six*, *Les Misérables* and *Mary Poppins*. And outdoorsy types will be pleased to know a CCF partnership with Lancing College is in the offing. Much of life at Roedean is dictated by its glorious position by the sea, which can occasionally be accessed through a 'secret' tunnel. Taking a dip in it is growing in popularity – there's a cross-Channel swim every couple of years – and Year 7s can now gain their Royal Yachting Association Level 1 Sailing as part of the rather fun-sounding Wild Friday programme. 'I wouldn't really change anything,' avers one pupil. 'It's perfect just the way it is.'

**ST CATHERINE'S,
BRAMLEY ●**

*Station Road, Bramley,
Guildford, Surrey GU5 0DF*
Website *stcatherines.info*

Head Alice Phillips, since 2000;
previously deputy head of Tormead
School **Pupils** 859 girls: 686 day,
173 boarding **Ages** 3–18

Term Fees Day: £7,465; boarding:
£12,650 **Bursaries** 7% of pupils,
up to 100%+ **Alumni** Journalist
Isabel Hardman, sailer Emily

Mueller, designer Kiki McDonough
One parent says St Catherine's
appeals on two levels. First, there's
the academic excellence: 'It main-
tains high standards and provides
students with the necessary support
and resources to excel.' Second is
the holistic education: St Catherine's
'places emphasis on the development
of character, values and life skills'.
Certainly, the strength of the former
can't be questioned – 46 per
cent of GCSE results come in at
grade 9, and a large chunk of leavers
head on to Russell Group universi-
ties – but there's also evidence
aplenty of the latter. Both team and
individual sports are in fine fettle:
the netball stars shoot, and the
swimmers glide, to the top of
various competitions, while the
athletics squad can regularly be
found vaulting past the opposition.
Meanwhile, the equestrian team is
particularly good – one girl has
been ranked the best showjumper
in the UK for her age category –
and another pupil was ranked first
for both junior and adult freestyle
in the British Indoor Skydiving
National Championships. For the
musically minded, there are more
than 40 different ensembles, and
the brilliant, purpose-built auditor-
ium has an orchestra pit and seats
for 300 (the perfect setting for *Shrek
the Musical*). Textiles flourish, and
are showcased at the greatly anti-
cipated annual fashion show. To give
them a taste of art college life,
Sixth-form artists have their own
space, which they can access at
weekends and in the evenings; and
the photography studio is equipped
with professional lighting and edit-
ing software.

ST EDWARD'S SCHOOL ●●

*Woodstock Road,
Oxford OX2 7NN*

Website *stedwardsoxford.org*

Head Alastair Chimsides, since 2021;
previously deputy head of Harrow

Pupils 810. Day: 79 boys, 62 girls;
boarding: 368 boys, 301 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£13,395; boarding: £16,743

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to
100%+ **Alumni** Actors Lord Olivier,
Florence Pugh and Emilia Clarke

Everyone at Teddies loves Gaudy
Week. After a range of dramatic
and musical performances, topped
with a prize-giving ceremony, the
summer holidays start. And it
sounds like they come well-earned.
Citing the 'vast' number of extra-
curriculars – 'from societies to
weekly talks, music and drama,
dance and much more' – one pupil
tells us: 'There is a big emphasis on
joining as much as possible.' As for
intellectual life, the children benefit
greatly from studying in the most

cerebral city in the world. The
Oxford Lectures programme sees
academics from leading universities
come for a day of seminars; the St
Edward's Fellows programme sees
Oxonian postgraduates work there
as part-time teachers; and Oxford
Days see the lucky children spend
time in the university's depart-
ments. The rowing culture rubs off,
too: the boys' 1st VIII recently saw
off competition from the likes of St
Paul's and Eton to win the Princess
Elizabeth Cup at Henley; and the
girls have racked up their fair share
of silverware, too. Pastoral care has
recently been expanded to include
an in-house school doctor, psy-
chologist and counsellor, while the
beefed-up careers and higher edu-
cation department increasingly
finds itself guiding Sixth-formers
who want to study abroad, with
more and more heading to such
American destinations as Harvard,
Parsons School of Design and New
York University.

St George's School, Ascot

**ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL,
ASCOT ●**

Berkshire SL5 7DZ

Website *stgeorges-ascot.org.uk*

Head Liz Hewer, since 2016;
previously deputy head of St Mary's,
Ascot **Pupils** 270 girls: 159 day,

111 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term**

Fees Day: £9,520; boarding:

£15,145 **Bursaries** 30% of pupils,
up to 100% **Alumni** Princess

Beatrice of York, presenters Kirsty
Gallacher and Gigi Salmon

This small yet mighty Berkshire
girls' institution marked its 2023
centenary with such events as
a grand ball and a sun-drenched
alumnae day. It also joined in the
coronation-celebrating Big Help
Out initiative, which saw all the
girls and teachers come together
to make a tangible difference to
the local community; and when
describing St George's, the most
common word parents seem to use
is 'nurturing'. As for the Georgians
themselves, says one: 'Honestly,
there is not a single thing about
school life I would change,' while
all agree this school draws its
strength from the friendships and
sisterhood that flourish across year
groups. Bucking the national trend,
St George's maintained the excel-
lent standards achieved in 2022,
with nearly a third of leavers gain-
ing all A*–A grades. (What's more,
computer science can now be
studied at A-level, demonstrating
the passion for STEM subjects.)
Elsewhere, the facilities took a great
leap forward. A new music technol-
ogy room and recording studio was
opened and named The Hillier
Room after director of music Ian
Hillier, who has just celebrated 40
years in the department; a dedi-
cated kitchen was unveiled to host
the newly introduced food prepara-
tion GCSE course; and up on the
roofs of the swimming pool and
theatre, 300 solar panels were
installed, generating 80 per cent of
the energy needed last summer
term. On that note, electric-car
charging points and blissful wild
flower meadows add to the eco-
friendly ambience of the school and
minimise its carbon footprint.

ST HELEN & ST KATHARINE ●

Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1BE

Website shsk.org.uk

Head Rebecca Dougall, since 2015; previously head of Royal High School, Bath **Pupils** 720 day girls

Ages 9–18 **Term Fees** £7,380

Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Journalist Alice Thomson, actresses Charly Clive and Ellen Robertson

By all accounts, this selective Oxfordshire day school is a place where bright teenagers with inquiring minds bloom and grow into erudite young women (with 73 per cent of A-levels graded A*–A). ‘This is no place for either flicky-haired posh girls or polite, competitive intellectuals,’ says one parent. It ‘feels vibrant, spirited and inclusive’. On the up, too. A new Sixth-form centre, the Benedict Building, had an exceptional first year, hosting the school’s inaugural Business of Sport conference to explore opportunities in that arena. And a new Activities Week was introduced, giving the HelKats a chance to enjoy everything from science trips to theme parks and a one-day film school. With 2028 marking the school’s 125th birthday, the Anniversary Bursary Appeal was launched in May. Pastoral care is strong, and the school says: ‘Talking things through – whether it’s a molehill or a mountain – is immensely important at St Helen’s and we are proud that students of all ages confirm that they know there is always someone that they can talk to.’ Meanwhile, the beautiful chapel’s centenary was celebrated in style with a series of special dinners, a concert featuring scratch choirs, and the creation of a unique artwork, *Space Whispers*. There was success on the cricket pitch, too: the U13 and U15 teams both won their ECB Schools National Indoor Cricket Finals at Lord’s. And, of course, the entire establishment enjoyed the time-honoured tradition of the ‘HelKat Hokey-Cockey’, performed on the quad each July to bid a fond farewell to leavers.



St Mary's, Ascot

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 390 girls: 20 day, 370

boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees**

Day: £12,500; **boarding:** £17,550

Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to

100%+ **Alumni** Court of Appeal

judge Dame Philippa Whipple,

hotelier Alex Polizzi, business

executive Katherine Garrett-Cox

Small year groups and a close-knit community mean lifelong friendships are formed at this ambitious, Catholic girls' boarding school. The familial atmosphere and mutual respect also manifest themselves in the pupil-faculty relationships. ‘To choose a favourite teacher at St Mary’s is like picking between ice cream or chocolate cake,’ says one girl. ‘Impossible. They all have a level of understanding for their field that is so intricate that I sometimes

think I’m at a university lecture.’ That goes towards explaining why results are so strong, despite a non-selective admissions policy. (In 2023, 92 per cent of A-levels were A*–B, with 10 per cent of leavers securing places at Oxbridge, while 87 per cent of GCSE grades were 9–7.) But the real secret to the success of St Mary’s is small-school pastoral care combined with the impressive facilities and coaches of a much larger establishment. Girls make the most of these ‘seven days a week until at least 9pm’, according to relentlessly positive and forward-thinking head Danuta Staunton. She also says that football and cricket are now fully developed, while nine drama productions are staged every year, including those of an elite new acting company called The Players. Another new arrival is resident chaplain Canon PJ Smith, who is reportedly already a much-loved addition and has ignited a new spark in collective worship.

Electric-car charging points and blissful wildflower meadows add to the eco-friendly ambience of St George's School, Ascot and minimise its carbon footprint

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**

742 girls: 519 day, 223 boarding

Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,001;

boarding: £15,212 **Bursaries** 12%

of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni**

GlaxoSmithKline CEO Dame

Emma Walmsley, actress Emma

Chambers, aviator Zara Rutherford

St Swithun’s was founded in 1884 with the aim of educating every girl to their full potential; and as it celebrates its 140th anniversary, it still cherishes those original ideals. ‘The teaching staff are friendly and accessible... and there is a positive energy about the whole school,’ says one mother. ‘Jane Gandee is an excellent head: strong, smiley, switched-on, feisty, feminist and feminine,’ who ‘encapsulates the qualities of St Swithun’s and is a great role model for the girls’. Meanwhile, the latter inform us that the extracurriculars on offer here are extremely diverse – think fencing, the allotment club and ‘an abundance of musical groups like samba, string orchestra and swing band’. The new Sweat, Velocity and Stride programmes aim to get everyone moving, while the drama department has been experimenting with such innovations as the Pace initiative, which encourages students to unleash their full imaginations. Creative students can shine in the St Swithun’s Arts Festival, while an artistic enrichment programme has been forged with local schools. There’s no place like home, of course; but 45 per cent of senior pupils are boarders, who enjoy single rooms from the age of 12; and pastoral care includes a ‘families’ system whereby groups of juniors are knitted together by Sixth-form ‘aunties’. ‘I feel extremely supported in school because there are so many people I can talk to,’ shares one girl. ‘There is my house mistress (who is the best) and we also have a school psychologist who has been very helpful to everyone and has an inviting personality.’



Stowe School

SEVENOAKS SCHOOL ●●

Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HU

Website sevenoaksschool.org

Head Jesse Elzinga, since 2020; previously head of Reading Blue Coat School **Pupils** 1,215. **Day:** 400 boys, 382 girls; **boarding:** 220 boys, 213 girls **Ages** 11–18

Term Fees **Day:** £11,632; **boarding:** £17,850 **Bursaries** 6% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni**

Actor Charlie Higson, academic Sir Jonathan Bate, poet Olivia Cole

This Kent co-ed has a rich, near-600-year history, combined with future-facing modernity. It's one of the largest IB schools on the planet, and in 2023 pupils achieved an average score of 39 – eight points above the world average – with five securing the top score of 45. (Only 25 managed this in the whole of the UK.) The school's involvement with Harvard's ground-breaking Human Flourishing Programme –

which encompasses such 'mindfulness' practices as chair yoga – means the children are well-supported. Such humanity aside, they're not afraid of AI here; in fact, there are many bold pupil-led initiatives, including a software package – developed by a Lower-sixth student – that allows visually impaired people to play chess. Sport is robust here, too, with plenty of individual talent – 20 pupils compete at national and international level and there are more than 80 county players. Fencing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, sailing and shooting are offered as well as traditional games, and the pool boasts a UV filtration system that negates the need for excessive chlorine. Sevenoaks also hosted the Knight Frank Schools Triathlon in 2023, welcoming 718 competitors from 17 local preps and primaries, and raised £93,000 for the charity Restless Development.

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:** 140 boys, 115 girls; **boarding:** 395 boys, 255 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** **Day:**

£9,488; **boarding:** £15,567

Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to

100%+ **Alumni** Sir Richard

Branson, Olympian Marilyn Okoro,

humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton

'Heading up the main driveway to Stowe, a picture-perfect scene unfolds in the bleak winter landscape,' wrote a delighted visitor to the timeless Buckinghamshire co-ed. 'The school's beagle pack is out on morning exercise, racing off across distant fields.' She resisted the urge to don a pair of wellies and join them, however, and instead discovered seemingly endless exciting developments within the main house which, like its grounds, is Grade I-listed. The magnificent State Dining Room has been returned to former glory through a refurbishment, while the construction of an £8.8 million design, technology and engineering building is in progress, alongside a shiny new indoor sports dome. Once various infrastructure projects are complete, the school population will grow from the current 905 pupils to a total of more than 1,000 by the 2026/27 academic year – with a 50:50 gender split – and there will be flexi-boarding for day children from 2025. Meanwhile, the ambitious Change 100 programme aims to raise £100 million to provide, in perpetuity, full bursaries for 100 pupils. Stoic parents speak incredibly highly of head Dr Anthony Wallersteiner, who credits much of his success to being the first head able to focus exclusively on education, following an agreement with the National Trust to manage the Stowe estate in 1997. The eloquent pupils have nothing but praise for the school's 'friendly atmosphere, supportive staff and amazing facilities'.

TONBRIDGE SCHOOL ●

Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9HA

Website tonbridge-school.co.uk

Head James Priory, since 2018;

previously head of Portsmouth

Grammar School **Pupils** 802 boys.

Day: 347; **boarding:** 455 **Ages**

13–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £13,202;

boarding: £17,597 **Bursaries** 9%

of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni**

Novelist EM Forster, cricketer Colin

Cowdrey, actor Dan Stevens

Increasingly, co-ed may be the norm, but Tonbridge offers 'an expertise with boys' that allows them to truly flourish. That's according to head James Priory who, despite joining from a day school in 2018, also recognises the great value of boarding and the depths it gives to relationships. The pupils also appear to appreciate this, praising their 'tight-knit community' nestled in 150 acres of west Kent and the chances it gives to 'form close friendships'. Still, Tonbridge also has well-integrated day provision and is thinking creatively about more partnerships with girls; so beyond the usual socials, dances and plays, it has recently introduced joint sessions with local schools on such societal issues as vaping. Clearly, this sociable atmosphere doesn't come at the expense of academic results. In 2023, 97 per cent of Sixth-formers were marked A*–B, while an impressive 29 boys made the clean sweep of A* in all their subjects at A-level. (Leavers jetted off to unis in Canada, Hong Kong and Abu Dhabi.) Sport is also strong, with a hub featuring some of the very best facilities in the South East, including a pool, gym and world-class athletics track. And other activities – known as Pursuits – are thriving, too. Every term sees the founding of new societies, with more unusual offerings including beekeeping, rocketry, robotics and mahjong; not forgetting conservation, which involves looking after pigs and woodlands. In 2023, the school's Giving Day raised more than £500,000 for the second year in succession, while around £2.8 million is annually disbursed on fee remissions.

TUDOR HALL ●

Wykham Park, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9UR

Website tudorhallschool.com

Head Julie Lodrick, since 2022; previously head of Kent College, Pembury **Pupils** 302 girls; 82 day, 220 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,975; boarding: £16,350 **Bursaries** 22% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Equestrian Emma Fisher, director Serena Armitage, jewellery designer Lady Margarita Armstrong-Jones

Tudor Hall's motto, *habeo ut dem* ('I have that I may give'), lies at the very core of its life. Thus, the 175th anniversary of the school's founding will be celebrated by the launch of a revitalised programme of transformational bursaries for entry into Year 7 and the Sixth Form – though the total value of bursaries awarded last year was more than £1 million. The Tudor in Three Continents programme has been restored after the pandemic, sending senior volunteers to support children's charities across Asia, Africa and Europe. And as soon as they join, girls are involved in planning a tea party for the local elderly people's care home where they perform a variety of musical acts. (Those newbies are kept busy, with another tradition seeing them create a Christmas play at the end of their first term.) Other popular annual events? Tudor Fest, a two-day extravaganza of face-painting, circus acts and great food; the Dog Show, in which families enter their pets for such categories as 'The Waggiest Tail' and 'The Best Golden Oldie'; and Enrichment Week, which culminates with an outdoor cinema and dodgems, the latter kept for the Leavers' Ball the following day. Sport here includes lacrosse, athletics and gymnastics – and its equestrian team is well established. Meanwhile, a horizontal boarding structure fosters deep ties, says one pupil: 'It means we are all a lot closer and spend all our time together.' And size, she continues, definitely matters: 'I love Tudor because it is much smaller compared to other secondary schools, so you feel like you know everyone.'

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** 1,100. Day: 131 boys, 102 girls; boarding: 451 boys, 416 girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £12,700; boarding: £17,370 **Bursaries** 11.5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** High jumper Morgan Lake, comedian Rory Bremner, actress Ellie Bamber

It may sound trite, but there truly is something for everyone at this remarkable institution. On its 400-acre campus – which hosts an uplifting array of flora and fauna, as well as more than 1,300 pupils and staff – the children can make the most of a 950-seater theatre and every pitch, court and studio you could think of. (There's even a climbing wall and a nine-hole golf course.) 'If you have a talent, Wellington will provide a forum for you to shine,' opines one parent.

'But the school is pupil-led and, while they are all strongly encouraged to take part, they get to decide what they want to engage in.' That's behind what one parent describes as the 'effervescent spirit' here, and makes it feel like a place to truly live as well as study. Results remain strong; and providing a choice between A-levels and IB appears successful, with more than 30 per cent A* results in 2023. Other notable academic successes included 12 offers from some of the most competitive colleges in North America, including Harvard and Stanford, as well as 22 from Oxbridge. An in-depth curriculum review has led to an extra hour per week in the timetable for each academic subject and the launch of 'Fragments', a culturally focused extension course for the Fourth Form. And under development is the Life Beyond Wellington careers programme that is hoped to be housed in a purpose-built hub, which will join the newly opened Sixth-form centre.

WINCHESTER COLLEGE ●●

College Street, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9NA

Website winchestercollege.org

Head Elizabeth Stone, since 2023; previously principal of Queenwood School, Sydney **Pupils** 726. Day: 9 boys, 34 girls; 683 boarding boys **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £12,789; boarding: £17,285 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Former prime minister Rishi Sunak, rower George Nash, actor Tom Sturridge

Since 2022, this previously boys-only school has welcomed day girls into Sixth Form. And now there's a woman at the helm of the historic establishment. Elizabeth Stone became Winchester's first female head in September 2023 – joining from Queenwood School, Sydney – and she's inherited a pupil body capable of sky-high results: 80 per cent of the 2023 A-level grades were A*–A, 15 leavers scored four or more A* grades and 34 secured Oxbridge offers. (Others headed to Harvard, Yale and MIT.) No surprise that the school receives approximately four applications per place at 13-plus, with a substantial growth in hopefuls over the last five years. (The brightest of these are invited to take part in Election, an academic scholarship exam and interview process, which typically takes place over three days in the spring of Year 8.) But how do these exceedingly smart teenagers cope with the pressure? The majestic surroundings surely help, with the architectural wonders of the city and a National Park on their doorstep. Then there's Div, a Winchester institution that remains at the heart of the education here: at its meetings, pupils debate world history, literature, art and philosophy without the pressure of exams; and this serves both as an intellectually stimulating break and apt preparation for a world in which thoughtfulness and problem-solving are as important as results. Winchester College Football, affectionately known as 'Winkies' and only played in the Spring Term, provides another popular source of welcome relief.

Tudor Fest is a two-day extravaganza of face painting and circus acts, and Tudor Hall's Enrichment Week culminates with an outdoor cinema and dodgems



WOLDINGHAM SCHOOL ●

*Marden Park, Woldingham,
Surrey CR3 7YA*

Website woldingham.school.co.uk

Head Sue Baillie, from September 2024; previously head of Queen Margaret's School for Girls, York
Pupils 580 girls: 261 day, 319 boarding
Ages 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,860; boarding: £16,685
Bursaries 12% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Journalist Ore Ogunbiyi, actress Carey Mulligan, politician Helen Whately

Girls here inform us they are fired up by house spirit ('probably one of the most important aspects of the school'), which is galvanised at the start of every year by a day when each house spends the time creating costumes and rehearsing dances and plays to perform for their peers. Other highlights are Woldingham's Got Talent, Strictly Woldingham and the staff Christmas pantomime. You might also find these girls working on their personal growth, which has been a huge priority of late. #WriteYourOwnStory is the school's mantra, which encourages everyone to become the authors of their destinies, and they reflect on their development in personal growth journals. Meanwhile, a new leadership programme empowers them with a range of leadership and teamwork skills, and connections with wider communities are forged through a range of initiatives. The head of science hosts local primaries for afternoons of STEM-focused activities; the annual junior choir festival sees local children perform in the industry-level 630-seat auditorium; and every year the whole school undertakes a sponsored walk to support those living with poverty and homelessness. Pastoral care sees wellbeing lessons woven through the curriculum, and the sports department organises masterclasses with national and Olympic athletes. Still, there's no resting on laurels here, and much change is afoot. Set to open under incoming head Sue Baillie is a new library and Sixth-form centre, which will boast a café, smart collaborative workspaces and a careers hub.

**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 672. Day: 219 boys, 163 girls; boarding: 188 boys, 102 girls
Ages 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,290; boarding: £15,110
Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Art dealer Philip Mould, actor Robert Bathurst, rugby player Tom Mitchell

The origins of Worth School lie in a Benedictine community in France, founded in 1606 by a group of English and Welsh monks. They opened a British outpost in Sussex in the 1930s; and today its school – which sprawls across 500 acres of the South Downs – is still home to 11 members of the order, who imbue the place with a sense of calm and spirituality. Indeed, Worth prides itself on providing an education that feeds both soul and mind. Its ethos is rooted in a gentle Catholicism, governed by the traits

of humility, silence, worship, service and stewardship; and at Wednesday Worship, pupils light candles for someone special to them. Music is really strong: 50 per cent of children learn instruments; the sublime abbey provides quite the setting for their gala concerts; and the Gospel Choir gives them the opportunity to sing a cappella in jazz, pop and contemporary styles. But given all the outdoor space, it's little wonder sport is popular, too. There are a whopping nine rugby and 12 football pitches, as well as a golf course (not to mention the indoor golf facility with a simulator, a launch monitor and analysis capabilities). And other facilities are constantly being upgraded, with a new £2.5 million science building currently in the works. This focus on science, spirituality and sport nurtures the youngsters but doesn't distract them from life's important challenges. Asked what they'd change about the school, one was uncompromising: 'The price of fruit pastilles in the Pitstop Café'

A lovely Wycombe Abbey tradition of Dorm Decs sees juniors decorating the desks of seniors with sweets and motivational cards during exam periods

WYCOMBE ABBEY ●

*High Wycombe,
Buckinghamshire HP11 1PE*

Website wycombeabbey.com

Head Jo Duncan, since 2019; previously head of Royal High School Bath
Pupils 643 girls: 70 day, 573 boarding
Ages 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £12,900; boarding: £16,975
Bursaries 6% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Lady Chief Justice Dame Sue Carr, history presenter Alice Loxton, aerospace engineer Scarlett Koller

Highly selective and consistently ranked as one of the top all-girls establishments for exam results, Wycombe Abbey is rightfully known as a perch for high-fliers. The three most popular leavers' destinations over the past decade have been Oxford, Cambridge and UCL – which accounted for approximately 40 per cent of the cohort – though they have been increasingly keen on US hotspots and found success at Stanford and Princeton. However, it's the nurturing atmosphere, sisterhood and boarding that set this place apart as much as the stellar academics. Indeed, it would be impossible to sustain the latter without the former. Ninety per cent of the children are full boarders; and the mixed-year dorms are divided into 'house families', in which one starts as a 'daughter' – with a 'mother' in the year above, and a 'grandmother' in the year above that. (Another lovely tradition that makes this place feel like home is 'Dorm Decs', which sees juniors decorating the desks of seniors with sweets and motivational cards during exam periods.) In the last year, Wycombe has moved forward with its Campus Master Plan – which has included upgrades to boarding houses, as well as a significant refurbishment of the performing arts centre – and plans are afoot for a new innovation design centre. Sport is led by Sophie Bryett-Windle, an ex-England netballer; and pupils are encouraged to start their own societies. Currently there are more than 50 options; the latest, SwiftieSoc, being dedicated to Taylor Swift. □



PUBLIC

Canford

South West & Wales

BADMINTON SCHOOL ●

Westbury Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS9 3BA

Website badmintonschool.co.uk

Head Jessica Miles, since 2023;

previously head of Monmouth School for Girls **Pupils** 550 girls:

370 day, 180 boarding **Ages** 4–18

Term Fees Day: £6,850; boarding:

£17,125 **Bursaries** 12% of pupils,

up to 100% **Alumni** Former prime

minister of India Indira Gandhi,

novelist Dame Iris Murdoch,

actress Rosamund Pike

Badminton combines the best of town and country. Housed on an attractive campus boasting green lawns and ancient yews, it's only a 15-minute drive from Bristol city centre; and with more than enough entertainment on the doorstep, this means there's no mass exodus of boarders at weekends. Not that it's a seven-day-a-week, Londoner-free

zone (increasingly, families are attracted by the weekly boarding option and the fact that the fast train from the capital takes about 80 minutes). Established in 1858, Badminton was one of the first schools to promote the education of young women, and that spirit is still evident in solid results. (In 2023, 48 per cent of A-levels were graded A*–A and 69 per cent of GCSEs 9–7.) Of head Jessica Miles, one visitor notes that her vision so far has been to 'steady the ship' rather than effect overnight change. One notable tradition is Pump Handles, whereby every pupil shakes hands with every teacher in a respectful ceremony at the end of each term. And after their last Pump Handles is over, nearly half of the leavers go on to top universities, with a further 10 per cent heading to destinations in America and Hong Kong.

BLUNDELL'S SCHOOL ●●

Blundell's Road, Tiverton, Devon EX16 4DN

Website blundells.org

Head Bart Wielenga, since 2018;

previously second master **Pupils**

896. **Day:** 322 boys, 219 girls;

boarding: 196 boys, 159 girls

Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£9,330; boarding: £15,250.

Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to

100% **Alumni** Racing driver Ben

Collins, Nobel prize winner Archibald

Hill, cricketer Dom Bess

'Bart has proved to be a great head: fair, firm when needed, humorous where appropriate and compassionate.' That's how one father describes South Africa-raised Bart Wielenga, who's also popular with his pupils, many of whom note his propensity to greet them while patrolling his domain. Younger members may have had the benefit of receiving

timetabled 'character' lessons from him. But while Blundell's may be relatively non-selective, the scholarship assessment process is rigorous, and last year, more than half of A-levels were graded A*–A; and 91 per cent were A*–B. Generations of Blundellians remember 'with dread and fondness' the whole-school Russell Run across local hills, while Christmas dinner – called The Gut – is a keenly anticipated event. A new head chef has added fresh flavours to the food (which one pupil describes as 'genuinely delicious', especially fish and chip Fridays and the special Lunar New Year celebration). As for parents, there's a 'big social life' around the school, with large crowds at sport fixtures and an increasing number of families continuing to work from home since the pandemic, making the most of the glorious Devonian lifestyle.

BRYANSTON ●●

*Blandford Forum, Dorset
DT11 0PX*

Website bryanston.co.uk

Head Richard Jones, since 2022;
previously acting head

Pupils 810. Day: 56 boys, 69 girls;
boarding: 365 boys, 320 girls *Ages*
3–18 *Term Fees* Day: £10,920;
boarding: £16,389 *Bursaries* 19%
of pupils, up to 100% *Alumni*
Artist Lucian Freud, Nobel Prize
winner Frederick Sanger, actress
Emilia Fox

Bryanston has enhanced its arty reputation by convening an Arts Advisory Board that is composed of alumni who, between them, have chalked up such achievements as winning Olivier awards, producing *Succession* and heading up the UK arm of Jay-Z's Roc Nation company. In the same spirit, aspiring actors enjoy masterclasses from visiting professionals, training opportunities with the tech team and full-scale productions of such classic shows as *Phantom of the Opera*. Meanwhile, musicians give an annual performance in Sloane Square's Holy Trinity Church, and artists lately showcased their work at London's Gallery 8. Sporty types also have their own advisory board, which includes former Sri Lankan cricketer Kumar Sangakkara and Abbie Brown, the captain of GB women's rugby sevens team. A focus on innovation will soon see all pupils provided with iPads, but it has long been displayed in the Car Club (founded in the 1930s), whose members are currently designing and building an electric car. And outside the classroom, children might be found Pioneering – activities that include projects as varied as constructing a Greek theatre and converting an old pigsty into a staff residence – or trying their hand at beekeeping, polo and drone-racing.

CANFORD ●●

*Canford Magna, Wimborne,
Dorset BH21 3AD*

Website canford.com

Head Ben Vessey, since 2013;

previously senior deputy head of
Christ's Hospital *Pupils* 662. Day:
151 boys, 103 girls; boarding: 231
boys, 177 girls *Ages* 13–18

Term Fees Day: £11,957;
boarding: £15,780 *Bursaries* 13%
of pupils, up to 100%+ *Alumni*
The Earl of Shaftesbury, ASOS
co-founder Nick Robertson, Child's
Farm founder Joanna Jensen

In 1994, a 3,000-year-old Assyrian carving discovered in Canford's tuck shop was sold for £7.7 million at auction; and thanks to this fortuitous find, an impressive sports hall and all-singing, all-dancing theatre are still thriving at the school. In the last four years, two new boarding houses, plus a new library, outdoor education centre, an assembly hall and extended dining facilities were also opened; and a university-style Sixth-form college will be unveiled in 2025/26. In 2023, the school marked its centenary with events that celebrated the treasured 'Always a Canfordian' ethos, as well as some of the highest exam results in its history. (This saw 99 per cent of A-level papers graded A*–C, and an impressive 66 per cent A*–A.) Most pupils live within a 90-minute drive – although three per cent of boarders are international. More than 8,000 hours of partnership are given by pupils and staff to the local community, including to a formerly failing high school, renamed The Bourne Academy, which is fully sponsored by Canford. While head Ben Vessey says it's impossible to say what makes a typical Canfordian, he adds that they 'really value what they get, understand how important community is and lead with a sense of graciousness'.

CHELTENHAM COLLEGE ●●

*Bath Road, Cheltenham,
Gloucestershire GL53 7LD*

Website cheltenhamcollege.org

Head Nicola Huggett, since 2018;
previously head of Blundell's

Pupils 1,191. Day: 301 boys, 254
girls; boarding: 343 boys, 293 girls
Ages 3–18 *Term Fees* Day:

£12,475; boarding: £16,475
Bursaries 12.1% of pupils, up to
100% *Alumni* Polar explorer Dr
Edward Wilson, racing driver Jamie
Chadwick, actor Adeel Akhtar

'The most noticeable characteristic of Mrs Huggett is her investment in the people who make "College" such a special community,' says one pupil of the popular head. 'Speaking to her for the first time, one feels as though you already know her.' Parents are equally enamoured. 'My girls have mentioned Mrs Huggett popping her head round their dorm doors for a chat,' says one mother. Certainly, Huggett seems to preside over a thriving ecosystem. Sport is strong: in hockey, six pupils have

represented GB, England and Wales in the last three years, while others have been offered professional rugby contracts; top-notch polo players and showjumpers are complemented by skilled cricketers; and a Talented Athlete Programme supports those with the potential to compete at the highest level. Gifted musicians also have ample opportunities to crescendo. A notable recent concert saw scholars perform piano concertos by Tchaikovsky, Liszt and Rachmaninoff, accompanied by an orchestra made up of pupils and local professionals. (An All-Steinway school, pupils score scholarships to the likes of Juilliard music school and King's College London.) A new director of digital learning is set to ramp up the use of tech; and interesting changes to the curriculum are afoot, with electives being added to the timetable, enabling lucky Fourth-formers to study subjects as diverse as astronomy, the world of Shakespeare, sustainability and anatomy and dissection.

Bryanston's Arts Advisory Board comprises alumni who have won Olivier awards, produced 'Succession' and headed up the UK arm of Jay-Z's entertainment company



CHELTENHAM LADIES' COLLEGE ●

Baysbill Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 3EP

Website cheltladiescollege.org

Head Eve Jardine-Young, since 2011; previously director of studies at Blundell's **Pupils** 855 girls: 189 day, 666 boarding **Ages** 11–18

Term Fees Day: £10,500; boarding: £16,200 **Bursaries** 8% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Scientist Dame Mary Archer, Sweaty Betty founder Tamara Hill-Norton, former home secretary Amber Rudd

How to spot a CLC girl? Academic prowess is certainly a hallmark of this selective school, where more than 70 per cent of A-level grades were A*–A and almost 90 per cent of GCSEs 9–7. One might also expect a fine balance of the physical and cerebral: in September 2023, psychology was added to the Sixth-form curriculum in response to high demand, as were Higher Project Qualifications in dance and PE. A CLC girl will know that the school's tight-squeeze 'shortcut' staircase is affectionately known as the 'Bunny Run' and appreciate that, while fashions come and go, Trashion – 'the house tradition of making an outfit entirely from rubbish' – is eternal. She'll be fuelled by the school's excellent match teas and eagerly anticipate bao buns, all of which will likely be well-needed after anything from riding to modern pentathlon, not to mention 16 other sporting options. (Recent leavers include national and international athletes in equestrianism, skiing, rowing and lacrosse.) She'll be up for new endeavours, beholding the night sky in the StarLab and meeting skunks and spiders in the Animals in Hands club. And she might well be musical: more than half of pupils learn at least one instrument. Most of all though, she'll wax lyrical about the welcoming embrace of this remarkable institution's 'family feel' and will probably stay on for Sixth Form, like 90 per cent of her peers. There's no specific grade threshold to do so; rather, evidence of effort, motivation and engagement in college life.



Christ College Brecon

CHRIST COLLEGE BRECON ●●

Brecon, Powys LD3 8AF

Website christcollegebrecon.com

Head Gareth Pearson, since 2017; previously senior deputy head of Lord Wandsworth College

Pupils 390. Day: 108 boys, 87 girls; boarding: 109 boys, 86 girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees** Day: £7,702; boarding: £14,319

Bursaries 17.5% of pupils, up to 50% **Alumni** Pioneer in law Lord Atkin, gardeners David and Harry Rich, Paralympian James Roberts

Founded by Henry VIII in 1541, this establishment prides itself on its two-pronged approach: maintaining a caring 'family', while offering the opportunities you might associate with a larger school. 'What I love most is how our small pupil-and-staff body results in a tight-knit community. Everybody has time for each other,' says one pupil. 'I have never seen a school community where the teachers and children meet so often to work together on

projects, events or issues.' Given the location in a stunning national park, much of this bonding happens in the great outdoors. Character-building challenges in the Brecon Beacons are common, and a lot of time is spent on the sports pitch. (Dating back to 1879, the traditional 'varsity match' against local rival Llandovery College is the oldest school-rugby game in Wales and draws 1,000-plus spectators.) Extra-curriculars offer even more of a chance to muddy the knees: think riding, climbing and mountain-biking. And all this activity is fuelled by hearty breakfasts at which Welsh sausages are proudly served in the widely held belief that bacon is no substitute. A new boarding house is in the pipeline. So is a new Cultural & Academic Preparation scheme, aimed at supporting international pupils, who comprise 20 per cent of the total. Every year, five Spirit Days celebrate such different disciplines as music and sport; open to parents, they are firm calendar favourites.

While fashions come and go, Trashion – the Cheltenham Ladies' College house tradition of making an outfit entirely from rubbish – is eternal

CLAYESMORE ●●

Iwerne Minster, Dorset DT11 8LL

Website clayesmore.com

Head Jo Thomson, since 2016; previously deputy head of Christ's Hospital **Pupils** 511. Day: 136 boys, 130 girls; boarding: 128 boys, 117 girls **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,909; boarding: £13,753 **Bursaries** Variable, on application **Alumni** 'Morph' creator Tony Hart, The Beatles manager Brian Epstein, impressionist Rory Bremner

Founded by educational reformer Lex Devine in 1896, Clayesmore was intended as an antidote to the rigours of contemporary public schools; and his approach is still going strong. Head Jo Thomson oversees a place where 'everyone is known and noticed', neurodivergence is considered a 'superpower' and arrogance is frowned upon. Our researcher compared it to a 'happy family home' where all ages mixed, and noted that pupils valued the cleaners and matrons as much as any other staff. At the school's heart is the LEX personal development programme (headquartered in its own space). Run on Saturday mornings, and mandatory for boarders, it began when Thomson wanted to ensure her daughter could change a car tyre; and its range of activities is a real-life manifestation of Lex Devine's desire for a holistic curriculum through which the special and different talents inside each and every child could be nurtured. LEX's bright idea is that Clayesmore pupils acquire the skills, understanding and values that lead to fulfilling lives. Aiming to encourage selflessness, integrity and service – as well as a sense of wonder and respect for the environment – it achieves this through everything from cooking and DIY to paddle-boarding, from riding on the school's 62-acre estate to personal finance management and driving safety. And it requires the type of tangible results that can enhance a CV. Recent trips have been taken to Biarritz, New York, Les Deux Alpes and Borneo. And higher education destinations are impressive.

CLIFTON COLLEGE ●●

*College Road, Clifton,
Bristol BS8 3JH*

Website cliftoncollege.com

Head Dr Tim Greene, since 2016; previously deputy head (academic)

Pupils 1,268. Day: 489 boys, 376 girls; boarding: 241 boys, 162 girls

Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£10,560; boarding: £16,395

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to

100% **Alumni** Inventor of the Belisha Beacon Leslie Hore-Belisha, comedian John Cleese, GB Olympic hockey gold medallist Lily Owsley

The tagline here is 'Aim High, Stay Grounded', which is as appropriate literally as it is metaphorically. Founded in 1862, this co-ed boarding and day school has sweeping views over Bristol, but is also intimately woven into the bustling life of the city below. Thus, it recently hosted the inaugural Bristol Young City Poet Competition, as well as an event featuring the Renewal Choir Bristol to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Windrush generation's arrival in the UK; no wonder it has a place on Monopoly

Bristol's official new board. But there are also plenty of opportunities for pupils to spread their wings beyond the Severn Estuary. A lucky group of Sixth-formers recently travelled to northern Italy for an alluring programme of cultural excursions, fine food and concerts, while some daring climbers headed to the southern Alps. Back home, the campus is a wonderful mix of old and new: the Grade II-listed Percival Library houses more than 15,000 books and a digital library. Meanwhile, a new outdoor adventure programme called Terriers has been introduced, and opening soon is a vast, state-of-the-art, environmentally conscious complex for sports – housing badminton, tennis, netball and basketball courts – which means the athletic cohort is also set to fly. (Rackets is already a very popular offering with the girls.) The best thing about this brilliant, all-round educational offering? It starts young – the pre-prep runs a forest school – and ends late, with one of the most active societies of alumni in the country.

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:

£7,910; boarding: £13,090

Bursaries 3% 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

While some teenagers may be a little critical of their schools, that's not the case at Dauntsey's. 'I love the atmosphere,' raves one child. 'All the pupils are here to help you, and you always know that someone will be there to offer some advice.' Asked what they would change, another seemed stumped: 'I can't really think of anything. I really like it how it is!' That strong sense of a closely bonded community shines through, not least because it's packed full of siblings. And so does the gung-ho spirit for which the school is renowned. Amazingly, it has in Sam Moore its very own dedicated head of adventure, and a programme that ensures learning continues away from the desk. And the most epic element of this is crewing the *Jolie Brise*, the school's very own 56-foot cutter, which can often be spotted bobbing around the Atlantic; but when they're not out riding the waves, intrepid pupils can be found on expeditions to the Arctic or Iceland, on ski and sports trips, or travelling to Paris to compete in the marathon. Given all these challenges and exploits, it seems incredible that there's even time for their thriving arts scene; however, dance is on the timetable and popular, and everyone loves the biennial summer festival. 'It's a genuinely fantastic school and we feel incredibly lucky that our three children have had such an amazing education there,' concludes one mother. 'We really couldn't have asked for more.'

DEAN CLOSE SCHOOL ●●

*Shelburne Road, Cheltenham,
Gloucestershire GL51 6HE*

Website deanclose.org.uk

Head Bradley Salisbury, since

2016; previously deputy head

Pupils 481. Day: 140 boys, 130 girls; boarding: 106 boys, 105 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£10,225; boarding: £15,150

Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to

100% **Alumni** Neuroscientist

Timothy Bliss, actor Hugh

Quarshie, England rugby player

Tom Pearson

This central Cheltenham co-ed was founded as a Christian Evangelical school; and the faith's values still run through it, the Christian Union group being popular with pupils. However, students also spend their time pursuing such extracurricular activities as tending vegetables and wildflowers in the gardens, or getting their adrenaline pumping at the drone club, where they build and race mini-copters round an aerial course. In other news, the Flecker Challenge was recently launched, to test and reward thinking beyond the curriculum; and Sixth-formers study the useful Nexus programme, covering such topics as finance, personal development and world perspectives. Around 55 per cent of the children are boarders, and 70 per cent of those tend to stay for weekends, which are action-packed and crammed with such activities as cinema and paintballing trips. Meanwhile, Decanians are very handy at whacking hockey balls and are regulars at the schools championship national finals; and the rugby team has produced five U18 England players in the last few years. Equestrianism is increasingly popular, with the team achieving some notable clear rounds of late. Vocalists can exercise their chords at the scholars' concerts, chamber choir evensongs and RocSoc nights; and The Disguised Decanian, a masked-singer competition for charity, is a regular hit. Elsewhere, Dean Close's art gallery displays pupil-made creations and opens its doors to local schools annually for a workshop and exhibition.



Clifton College

GODOLPHIN SCHOOL ●

*Milford Hill, Salisbury,
Wiltshire SP1 2RA*

Website godolphin.org

Head Jenny Price, since 2023,
previously deputy head pastoral
Pupils 450 girls: 225 day, 225
boarding **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees**

Day: £9,130; boarding: £13,870

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to
100% **Alumni** Novelist Jilly
Cooper, entrepreneur Deborah
Meaden, sailor Hannah White

This historic girls' school has a legacy that dates back nearly three centuries, and plans are already under way for its 300th anniversary celebrations in 2026. However, change is afoot here in the heart of Salisbury: from September 2024, Godolphin Prep will welcome boys across all year groups, and the senior school will follow suit 12 months later. And though pupils seem excited by the change, one third-year girl wondered aloud about the future of the traditional blue 'pinny' – compulsory to wear until the Sixth Form, and which many girls assured a recent visitor 'is so comfy' – once boys join. This remains a happy place with a popular head. 'Mrs Price is just a beacon of positivity,' says one of her enthusiastic charges. 'She's so integrated into the school community'; and this is evidenced by her attendance at matches, music events and even on trips (she recently returned from a GCSE Spanish jaunt to Alicante). But at this down-to-earth establishment, all the staff members are just as approachable, we're assured by one mother, and small class sizes ensure they have a good knowledge of every girl. Outside of lessons, there has been long-standing success in lacrosse, or 'lax' as it's more familiarly known; and the head of lacrosse Jamie Powell demonstrated his own prowess by winning gold for GB in the men's World Super Sixes in Hong Kong. In 2023, nearly half of A-level results were graded A or above; and 97 per cent C or above. Leavers head to Russell Group universities or to pursue top degree-apprenticeships at the likes of Google, PwC and Dyson.



A third-year girl at Godolphin wondered about the future of their traditional blue 'pinny' – worn until Sixth Form – once boys join the senior school in September 2025

**MARLBOROUGH**

COLLEGE ●●
Wiltshire SN8 1PA

Website marlboroughcollege.org

Head Louise Moelwyn-Hughes,
since 2018; previously head of
St Edmund's School, Canterbury

Pupils 1,012 boarding: 567 boys,
445 girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees**
£16,995 **Bursaries** 10% of pupils,
up to 100% **Alumni** Textile
designer and social activist William
Morris, poet Sir John Betjeman,
The Princess of Wales

Innovation abounds at magnificent Marlborough. The classic of co-educational boarding just opened a purpose-built centre for learning support and revised its schedules to allow more time for enrichment, societies and extracurriculars. Then there's the Marlborough Mindset, newly instituted to help students understand how their brains work and develop habits for independent and effective working. Next up will be a new digital learning strategy, which will integrate computing into classroom learning; a refresh of the science building; and a ramping-up of the sustainability and biodiversity plan, which will see a number of energy-saving initiatives, among them tree-planting, dredging the trout lakes and the introduction of electric vehicles and solar panels. In the wider community, the launch of the Marlborough Difference Campaign in 2023 took 36 hours to raise an impressive £1.3 million, which will go towards the creation of 100 free places for talented young people from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. But the school's traditional selling points still carry weight; namely, full boarding – 80 to 95 per cent of pupils stay on every weekend – and a host of activities crammed into the days. Thespians have the run of the Ellis Theatre, artworks are displayed in Marlborough's own Mount House gallery, and the chess club has enjoyed a recent resurgence in popularity. Sport extends to country pursuits – think fishing and clay pigeons (one student even became a double junior women's world champion in skeet shooting).

**MILLFIELD ●●**

**Butleigh Road, Street,
Somerset BA16 0YD**

Website millfieldschool.com

Head Gavin Horgan, since 2018;
previously head of Worksop College

Pupils 1,725. Day: 353 boys, 301 girls; boarding: 631 boys, 440 girls
Ages 7–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£10,780; boarding: £16,560

Bursaries 17% of pupils, up to

100%+ **Alumni** Para-astronaut

John McFall, Olympic gold

medallist rower Helen Glover,

Formula One driver Lando Norris

As you cross the Somerset hills near the ancient city of Bath, with Glastonbury Tor visible in the distance, a growing number of tracks, pitches and modern buildings gradually come into view. These are Millfield's impressive facilities, all generously shared with and used extensively by local schools and groups (and everyone looks forward to the Community Day in June, when 700 guests are welcomed to the campus to take part in student-led activities). In the same spirit of philanthropy, Millfield's 90th anniversary celebrations will continue to see money raised for the

Brilliance Campaign, which funds scholarships and bursaries. This consistently popular co-ed day and boarding school receives at least four applications for every place – the number increasing in recent years, especially for the Sixth Form – and the reason lies in its leavers' results. In 2023, a record 46 pupils went to competitive US universities, 80 per cent achieving academic and sports scholarships, and nine on 'full rides' worth millions of dollars. Millfield is known for its unique sporting provision and success in a broad range of disciplines, and rightly so: there are more than 50 specialist youth coaches across 27 sports, from rugby and hockey to clay pigeon shooting and fencing, not to mention eight Olympic athletes among the staff body. But it's not all fun and games, of course. The arts thrive here, with the school's Atkinson Gallery curating frequent exhibitions – the latest is with climate change charity Cape Farewell. Meanwhile, in March 2024, 70 school singers joined British composer Helen Ostafew for a concert at Wells Cathedral – just another day at Millfield.

MILTON ABBEY ●●

**Milton Abbas, Blandford
Forum, Dorset DT11 0BZ**

Website miltonabbey.co.uk

Head James Watson, since 2023;

previously senior deputy head

Pupils 216. Day: 31 boys, 9 girls;
boarding: 113 boys, 63 girls

Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£9,190; boarding: £17,500

Bursaries Variable % of pupils, on application **Alumni** Sky News royal events correspondent Major General Alastair Bruce, documentary-maker Anthony Geffen, dyslexic child prodigy Alexander Faludy

Prepare to have your breath taken away by this beautiful place, with its gothic windows, grey stonework and stunning courtyard, all giving on to a magnificent vista of green grounds housing both a golf course and a farm. Milton Abbey is one of the only schools in the country to offer agriculture GCSE; and, alongside studying for their countryside management BTEC, pupils can spend their free time on such extra-curriculars as the Shetland pony trap riding club. What's more, since one of the founding ideals of the school was to prepare pupils not just for life at university but also in commerce, vocational opportunities abound. The intellectual aim here is to 'learn differently', and the staff are incredibly focused on discovering and fostering what works for each individual child. Pupils can use the likes of computers and dictation software to enhance their experience, and there is absolutely no stigma in popping in to see the Learning Development (or 'LD') team to get some additional support with revision strategies or subject choices. Artistic types are well catered-for, with options such as creative media, film and TV and design technology and – given their trips to Milan – fashion sounds worth signing up for! Sport is played three afternoons a week, and girls' rugby and cricket are thriving. The Boathouse gym has just had a total refurbishment, and new grass tennis courts are sure to facilitate the happy whiling-away of many a summer's evening.

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** 698. Day: 242 boys,

209 girls; boarding: 132 boys, 115

girls **Ages** 2–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£8,930; boarding: £14,245

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

Parents rate Monkton Combe for its 'beyond brilliant' pastoral care, its 'down-to-earth' values and its 'strong sense of ethics and doing the right thing, rather than just the easy thing'. They're also fans of its broad approach to learning. And certainly, this is not the right place if you're looking for exam-factory-type schooling, because – for starters – the admissions process eschews formal testing (instead, candidates are assessed over a day of activities focused on collaboration, communication and creativity). Meanwhile, a flagship initiative has been Wild Monkton Day, dedicated to celebrating the great outdoors by hiking up mountains, canoeing, paddle-boarding and playing combat archery; and another point of pride is the Innovate curriculum, which encourages children to lead their own learning. A pioneering standing desk study, in partnership with Loughborough University, has resulted in pupils having greater freedoms in their environment; and next up will be an innovative futures programme to help them navigate the changing nature of work. As for extracurricular clubs, the range is wide and wacky: think ceramics, metal detecting, beekeeping and ultimate frisbee. Weekend time-off can be spent at school or exploring the beautiful surrounds of Bath, which is just a mile away. Overall, the vibe is wholesome, holistic and happy. 'A hidden gem that should not be overlooked,' says one mother.

ST MARY'S CALNE ●

Curzon Street, Calne, Wiltshire SN11 0DF

Website stmaryscalne.org

Head Anne Wakefield, since 2024; previously deputy head of Benenden School

Pupils 350 girls: 80 day,

270 boarding Ages 2–18 Term

Fees Day: £12,200; boarding:

£16,355 Bursaries 13% of pupils,

up to 100% Alumni 2012 Olympic

dressage gold medallist Laura

Tomlinson, journalist and

broadcaster Roya Nikkhah, actress

Belinda Stewart-Wilson

A recent visitor notes that, about 10 minutes before you drive up to St Mary's Calne, you will go past 'Racehorses Crossing' road signs. No, they aren't warning of the pupils' mounts. However, riding is very popular at this establishment on the edge of the North Wessex Downs; so much so that it has a dedicated equestrian coordinator, and pupils stable their own steeds at a local livery. The intentionally small community of (according to

our researcher) 'wonderfully polite' girls celebrated the school's 150th anniversary in 2023 with a flurry of glamorous events – from a ball in London to an exhibition in Calne – as well as an all-years picnic. But at a more profound level, the school launched the Chrysalis Campaign, an ambitious bursary programme designed to build a strong and sustainable fund for future Calne girls. And how they will benefit from the ethos of 'Calne Girls Can!' (A case in point is the Year 11 pupil who founded a crochet society that produces 'bonding blankets' for babies in intensive care units.) At the beginning of this academic year, the school will welcome a new head, ex-Benenden deputy head Anne Wakefield; and she will inherit the new 'Win Your Own Race' academic strategy. However, her pupils seem to have already put it into practice. The highest A-level grades in 12 years were achieved by the 2023 cohort, with 70 per cent graded A*–A.

One St Mary's Calne girl founded a crochet society that produces 'bonding blankets' for babies in intensive care units

**SHERBORNE GIRLS ●**

Bradford Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3QN

Website sherborne.com

Head Dr Ruth Sullivan, since

2018; previously deputy master of

Haileybury College

Pupils 475 girls: 48 day, 427

boarding Ages 11–18 Term Fees

Day: £10,110; boarding: £15,730

Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to

100% Alumni University of

Oxford historian Margaret

Macmillan, author Santa

Montefiore, biologist Rosa Beddington

'We felt in our gut and still feel Sherborne Girls' is so authentic,' explains one mother, who believes its strength emanates from its head, her 'love of learning' and the 'second-to-none' pastoral care that she oversees. 'There is a sense of genuine nurture and fun running throughout school life, which in turn gives the girls confidence to achieve and get results across the curriculum.' Education here looks beyond the classroom. It was the first school to appoint an ecology, conservation and sustainability ambassador in residence, which has really helped pupils focus on green issues and look for ways to reduce their carbon footprints; the campus is being rewilded; and Year 9 girls all take environmental studies as part of their curriculum lessons. A focus on the great outdoors is also being complemented by a move to harness the benefits of technology; and an industry expert is helping to develop a bespoke AI strategy that will unlock the myriad opportunities and prepare girls for a rapidly changing future. In their free time, a short walk into the honey-hued local town means pupils can have some autonomy – popping into shops and frequenting the cafés – and the unique relationship with Sherborne School leads to many brilliant co-ed concerts, performances and activities (as well as a number of lasting friendships). 'Having a town, a separate sports centre and a boys' school makes me feel incredibly independent,' reports one girl. 'There's a perfect balance to life here.'

SHERBORNE ●

Abbey Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3LF

Website sherborne.org

Head Dr Dominic Luckett, since

2016; previously head of Mill Hill

School Pupils 587 boys: 38 day,

549 boarding Ages 13–18 Term

Fees Day: £12,850; boarding:

£16,250 Bursaries 20% of pupils,

up to 100% Alumni Computer

scientist and mathematician Alan

Turing, musician Chris Martin,

actor Hugh Bonneville

Located in a stunning market town, Sherborne ticks all the boxes. The school embraces traditional values but pairs them with a modern outlook: hence, looking to the future and embracing change, it has appointed a digital learning lead to develop the use of AI in the classroom; while September 2024 will see the launch of a new, thematic Year 9 curriculum, to allow the boys to develop such key skills as lateral thinking, complex problem-solving and teamwork before embarking in earnest on their GCSE courses. And exciting developments are afoot: 2023 marked the opening of the multimillion-pound sports centre – which provides peerless facilities for pupils as well as the wider community – and the boys are making the most of the double sports hall and climbing wall, the four squash courts and the performance and leisure gyms, not to mention the golf simulator. Closely connected to Sherborne Girls, the school offers co-education but not as you may know it. There are joint trips, orchestras, choirs, societies, musicals and plays, but the schools are ultimately independent of each other. The Sixth-form curriculum is broad, with an extensive range of A-level and BTEC courses, and leavers' destinations are impressive: 67 per cent secured places at their higher-education first-choices in 2023, with a whopping 74 per cent Russell Group-bound. Notably, last year saw the greatest diversity in degree subjects and destinations that Sherborne has ever seen, with five pupils heading across the pond to top US and Canadian colleges.

STONAR ●●

**Cottles Park, Atworth,
Wiltshire SN12 8NT**

Website stonarschool.com

Head Matthew Way, since 2019; previously deputy head of Milton Abbey **Pupils** 438. **Day:** 129 boys, 182 girls; **boarding:** 35 boys, 92 girls **Ages** 2–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £7,040; **boarding:** £13,480

Bursaries 10% of pupils, up to 50% **Alumni** Author and historian Gitta Sereny, actress Romola Garai, international three-day event rider Georgie Spence

Established in 1895, Stonar is a small yet mighty co-ed set in charming Wiltshire countryside and known for its extensive riding provision. There's a place for every kind of equestrian here – from beginners to the Sixth-formers who bring their own horses to school and compete regularly – and more stables plus an additional outdoor arena are in the works. However, this school is far from a one-trick pony, as parents and staff are keen to point out. Overjoyed, one of the former describes how their daughter's newfound love of the game of hockey won her a place in the first team: 'For someone who was not that keen on team sports, this is a momentous achievement!' Meanwhile, computer science is popular – pupils are in the middle of a pioneering AI project called 'hi!ai' – and the creative arts and design department, housed in a newly completed centre, has been particularly successful, scoring a perfect 100 per cent run of A*–B grades at A-level in 2023. With an increase in applications across all key entry points, Stonar has grown by more than 30 per cent in the last five years. But luckily, as one parent attests, small class sizes allow individually targeted teaching to continue and flourish. The head Matthew Way is popular and 'likes a good handshake', according to one pupil. And according to Way: 'Stonar has a unique charm and freedom [which] allows our pupils to be themselves, to be content and to focus their energies on positive achievement.'



Westonbirt School

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** 381 **boarding:** 124 boys, 257 girls **Ages** 15–19 **Term Fees** £94,000 for full IB Diploma programme **Bursaries** 46% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, Princess Leonor of Spain, Médecins Sans Frontières Denmark founder Camilla Bredholt

The offspring of royal families from across the world have long flocked to this Hogwarts-style institution, housed in a castle above the Bristol Channel. The school was founded in 1962 with something of a political motivation – to oppose the seeds of division and discontent sowed by the Cold War, and to unite youngsters from different backgrounds and cultures – and this aim is still true. A huge network of volunteers finds and selects students from more than 155

countries, of which nearly half receive fee assistance. Parents love the 'understanding between nationalities, backgrounds and religions', the 'focus on giving back through community service' and the staff's desire to 'teach a new generation of leaders and changemakers'. But they also praise the 'driven, passionate and inspiring' head Naheed Bardai, who was invited to speak at COP28 about how the school is transforming education for young people to survive and, indeed, thrive in a climate-damaged world. The Systems Transformation programme, a pioneering new venture, is of particular note: its inaugural 24-strong cohort are exploring high-level concepts – such as transformative change, leadership and just futures – then applying the knowledge to key areas that they care about, including biodiversity and migration. Even better? UWC will soon be passing on its dynamic focus on change through a Centre for Systems Transformation, where it will conduct research, train teachers and create a learning framework to freely share with other educational institutions.

WESTONBIRT SCHOOL ●●

Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8QG

Website westonbirt.org

Head Natasha Dangerfield, since 2013; previously deputy head of Harrogate Ladies' College **Pupils** 746. **Day:** 307 boys, 341 girls; **boarding:** 31 boys, 67 girls **Ages** 2–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £6,890; **boarding:** £14,175

Bursaries Variable, up to 100%

Alumni Actress Maxine Audley, author Georgia Byng, Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music Patsy Toh Sitting in 200-plus acres of idyllic Gloucestershire parkland, at the end of a sweeping, cedar-flanked driveway, Westonbirt's position provides more than ample space for sport, outdoor learning and a popular co-curricular programme. And the school is set to make even better use of all this glorious land with the September 2024 introduction of a new Performance Pathway – in addition to the scholarship programme – which will maximise potential across academics, sport, art, music and drama at bronze, silver and gold levels. Recent investment in AstroTurf, as well as tennis and netball courts, will only add to the success; as will the fact that head Natasha Dangerfield – who's 'really, really lovely' and 'kind', according to pupils – is currently President of England Lacrosse. Westonbirt is just as impressive inside as out, filled with grand oak panelling, atmospheric lighting, marbled floors and fireplaces. But the key strength of this 'family-feel' school, according to one parent, is that it's 'large enough to provide breadth academically and to field decent sports teams, but small enough to get to know the children, and for parents to know the staff well'. Pupils also praise the small class sizes, especially in the Sixth Form, and the community spirit. Boarders come from more than 20 countries, and far-flung exchange trips to the likes of Thailand and Japan give students a global outlook, as do cultural jaunts to European cities. Closer to home, clubs as diverse as beekeeping and Lego League are flourishing. □



Ellesmere College

Midlands & East Anglia

ELLESMERE COLLEGE ●●
Ellesmere, Shropshire SY12 9AB
Website ellesmere.com

Acting head Vicky Pritt-Roberts,
since 2024; previously deputy head

Pupils 427. Day: 137 boys, 66
 girls; boarding: 141 boys, 83 girls

Ages 7–18 **Term Fees** Day:
 £7,675; boarding: £13,951

Bursaries 20% of pupils, up to
 50% **Alumni** The Duke of
 Westminster, philanthropist Lady
 Edwina Grosvenor, World Rugby
 chairman Bill Beaumont

In January 2024, Ellesmere College
 announced the profoundly sad loss
 of Brendan Wignall, whose life was
 taken by cancer. And so ended his
 27-year tenure at the helm of this

thriving Shropshire co-ed, with
 Vicky Pritt-Roberts taking on the
 role of acting head. However, his
 impressive legacy remains and
 includes World Class School
 Accreditation for 'high perfor-
 mance learning', a concept that
 aims to teach advanced thinking
 skills and build better brains. This
 befits such a truly international
 establishment, whose pupils hail
 from a range of countries as diverse
 as Romania, Switzerland and
 Mexico – as well as the UK – and
 who number more boarders in the
 senior school than day pupils. But
 that's only one arrow in its quiver.
 Though competitive games are
 open to all – and it's also recognised

that sport is not for everyone – the
 college nonetheless remains a 'hot-
 spot for sports', according to one
 teacher. There are in-house acad-
 emies for everything from swim-
 ming to golf and shooting, and
 great pride is taken in each success.
 The school cheered on three recent
 leavers who competed in the Tokyo
 Olympics, among them gold-
 medal swimmer Freya Anderson.
 Drama is also popular, with Lamda
 examinees and lavish plays; and so
 is music, which is performed by a
 wealth of choirs and several Grade
 8 instrumentalists. It's no wonder
 days are packed, from 8.30am to
 5.30pm – even for day pupils. 'As
 one says: 'Life never gets boring.'

FELSTED SCHOOL ●●

Felsted, Essex CM6 3LL

Website felsted.org

Head Chris Townsend, *since*
2015; previously deputy head

Pupils 1,022. Day: 262 boys, 224
 girls; boarding: 286 boys, 250 girls

Ages 4–18 **Term Fees** Day:
 £10,180; boarding: £15,585

Bursaries 30% of pupils, up to
 100% **Alumni** Former surgeon-
 gynaecologist to the Royal Family
 Sir Marcus Setchell, England
 rugby player Max Malins,
 playwright Alecky Blythe

We're told by a visitor that Felsted's
 biggest strength is its strong sense
 of community; and though 80 per
 cent of its pupils live within 30
 miles of the 'charming village' where
 it's located, many still choose to
 board, no doubt attracted by the
 feeling that it's 'one big family'. Old
 Felstedians are known to be 'proud
 and loyal', returning to their alma
 mater to help with charity events,
 sports fixtures and the international
 summer school; and some of its
 most esteemed alumni have pre-
 sented prizes or hosted talks on
 Speech Day. With 21 Olympians
 on the books so far, new-gen
 'Feldos' certainly have plenty of role
 models – and a bar set high – but
 they take it all in their stride, mak-
 ing the most of the opportunities at
 their disposal to discover interests
 and talents of their own. In the
 senior school, two afternoons a
 week are devoted to activities, some
 of the most popular being polo,
 CCF, inter-house bake-offs, the
 Pride Society and the sustainability
 committee. But an understanding
 of world issues and a desire to make
 a positive difference pervades all
 years: pupils regularly help at a
 London night shelter and food
 bank, take part in the annual char-
 ity Colour Run and support coffee
 growers in Uganda through the Safi
 initiative. (And two Sixth-formers
 recently contested the gruelling,
 24-hour, 106km 'Bob Graham
 Round' fell run to raise money for
 an Armed Forces charity.) All this
 and – according to one child –
 plenty of fun, too: 'At Felsted,' they
 say, 'I belly-laugh every day.'

GRESHAM'S ●●

**Cromer Road, Holt, Norfolk
NR25 6EA**

Website greshams.com

Head Douglas Robb, since 2014;
previously head of Oswestry School

Pupils 540. Day: 140 boys, 135 girls; boarding: 150 boys, 115 girls
Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,190; boarding: £14,600

Bursaries 11% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Industrial designer Sir James Dyson, actress Olivia Colman, England rugby players Ben and Tom Youngs

Set in 200 acres of playing fields and woodland on the rugged north Norfolk coast, Gresham's exudes an atmosphere of space and freedom. A visitor describes head Douglas Robb as 'friendly and warm'; but he is also a huge credit to the school, frequently serving lunch to his pupils so he can check in with them on a personal level. He wants them to understand that coming to a school like this is a privilege and, continues our informant, that 'they owe their parents the effort to get stuck in and try things'. Instilling this message certainly seems to be working. The children grab with both hands all the opportunities on offer, be they extracurricular activities, STEAM projects in The Dyson Building or, say, a Music from the Movies concert in the woods' outdoor amphitheatre. Seven of the houses are a mix of day and boarding students across different age groups – 'All the years get along well with each other,' reports one youngster – and there is another solely for Sixth-form day pupils. Chapel is popular: led by 'Rev Jack' with boundless energy and passion, it's a place for pupils to dwell on broader responsibilities to the community through fundraising and volunteering. But in more traditional mode, the house music competition is a much-anticipated annual event; and the staff versus First XI hockey match never fails to attract vociferous crowds. We asked one current pupil what could be changed for the better here and, without hesitation, they replied: 'Nothing, in my eyes.'

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 905 day boys **Ages** 11–18

Term Fees £6,108 **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 After 39 years in education – and five heading up KES – Dr Katy Ricks has retired. And in a historic move, the two roles of Chief Master of King Edward's and Principal of King Edward VI High School for Girls have been combined. Kirsty von Malaisé – who was previously in charge of the girls – is now Chief Master & Principal of both schools, a move that will see further harmonisation of both pupil and staff experience, already started under the existing integrated leadership team, allowing the schools to both

offer the best education, within and beyond the curriculum. But a spirit of adventure permeates day-to-day life: there are more than 140 trips on offer every year; and on Friday afternoons, lessons are scrapped in favour of skills-enhancing activities. Proudly diverse and accessible, KES has raised almost £15 million for its bursary programme to date, and the thriving partnerships scheme annually engages with more than 13,000 children from 200-plus primaries. The breadth of sporting opportunity is also staggering: the school fields 84 teams in 15 different sports, and 21 varieties can be practised in the co-curriculars and clubs. On top of that, academic results are consistently strong, as leavers' destinations reflect: last year four headed to Oxbridge, 20 went on to read medicine or dentistry, 15 to study economics, eight to read history and five won engineering places – a breadth that shows KES's priority is for students to secure offers from universities that are the best for their chosen course.

Ellesmere College is a hotspot for sports. The school cheered on three leavers who were in the Tokyo Olympics, among them gold-medal swimmer Freya Anderson



KING'S HIGH WARWICK ●

**Banbury Road, Warwick
CV34 6YE**

Website kingshighwarwick.co.uk

Head Dr Stephen Burley, since 2021; previously deputy head (academic) **Pupils** 828. 821 day; 7 boarding. **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £5,786; boarding: £14,470

Bursaries 7% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actress Sophie Turner, Liberal Democrat peer Baroness Jolly, soprano and radio presenter Catherine Bott

One mother feels 'privileged to have experienced King's as both an Old Girl and as a parent, and delighted the ethos remains very similar'. But this school isn't stuck in the past. Since its foundation in 1879, that ethos has been one of constant, benign transformation, aiming to nurture pupils' characters and to improve their opportunities. King's is experiencing a surge in Sixth-form applications, with new arrivals outnumbering those who depart after GCSEs. And its results speak for themselves, with nearly 80 per cent of leavers going on to study at their first-choice destinations and 59 per cent to the Russell Group. However, there's almost no area in which it doesn't excel: from its top-level sports and drama to music, the latter housed in an ultra-modern new building. One teacher who deserves special recognition is deputy (academic) Dr Philip Seal; not least for inventing the 'Seal Wheel', which helps girls make decisions. As for inspiring head Dr Stephen Burley, he's particularly proud of the truly committed pastoral care and wellbeing programmes, and of the partnership King's has formed with Evergreen School for special needs. At this outward-facing establishment, pupils have regular contact with boys from nearby Warwick School: they share common rooms and study areas in the Sixth-form centre, stage theatrical productions and team up in a wealth of extra-curricular activities. (The cadet force is a draw for all ages.) And with the new Way House now open for Sixth-form boarders, King's continues to be future-ready.

THE LEYS ●●

*Trumpington Road,
Cambridge CB2 7AD*
Website theleys.net

Head Martin Priestley, since 2014; previously head of Warminster School
Pupils 571. Day: 137 boys, 85 girls; boarding: 199 boys, 150 girls
Ages 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £9,680; boarding: £14,660 **Bursaries** 20% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** The King of Tonga, former reporter and MP Martin Bell, tennis player Jamie Murray

Head Martin Priestley is fond of describing The Leys as 'a big, small school'. Set in 50 acres by the River Cam, it doesn't feel small, with its sweeping playing fields and a newly built Great Hall that houses a café, state-of-the-art science labs, drama studios and an assembly space. The school makes the most both of its self-contained enclave and its position in this storied grove of academe: thus, the Cambridge Experience (CamEx) programme facilitates everything from Evensong in wonderful college chapels and access to an award-winning boathouse, to attendance at university lectures and mentoring from post-grad students. And while it's not a hot-house, its cerebral atmosphere produces tangible results, with 18 per cent of A-levels coming in at A*. Pupils can also act the part – there are five productions every year – while those who prefer working behind the scenes can become involved in the technical elements of theatre, from lighting to set design. They're a tuneful bunch, too: 35 per cent learn an instrument and lucky music scholars perform in stunning Cambridge churches. Meanwhile, those who want support with their mental health are offered mindfulness lessons and yoga, and can access a wellbeing app as well. With 18 per cent of the children coming from overseas, there's full boarding provision alongside a flexible option, which allows local pupils to be integrated into boarding houses but sleep and eat breakfast at home – a great option for families who want the very best of both worlds.

MALVERN COLLEGE ●●

*College Road, Malvern,
Worcestershire WR14 3DF*
Website malverncollege.org.uk

Head Keith Metcalfe, since 2019; previously deputy head of Harrow
Pupils 650. Day: 103 boys; 77 girls; boarding: 242 boys; 228 girls
Ages 13–18 **Term Fees** Day: £11,130; boarding: £16,405 **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

Occupying a 250-acre site on the edge of the Malvern Hills, the magnificent setting of this self-assured school is matched by the dynamism of its pupils. The effort comes from them, our researcher is told, and might take the form of producing and directing their own performances, staging fundraising events or setting up a new academic society. Whatever they do, they are encouraged to take risks, try new things and discover who they are; a 'can-do' approach that's reflected in the college's own endeavours. Thus, the Memorial Library is being sensitively repurposed as a Sixth-form centre – modelled on a university learning space – and The Grub is being given a makeover with a cool new café and co-working area. Our researcher was impressed by the sports centre, with its yoga and Pilates studios, and the 'Soho backstreet' ambience of the theatre. And we love the sound of the Malvern College Challenge, a cycling expedition lasting three weeks, during which access to social media is barred. Welcoming head Keith Metcalfe gets the thumbs-up from his charges, and is described by a Sixth-former as someone who 'wants what is best for the school'. And his success can be judged by his leavers' destinations: in 2023, 75 per cent received offers from their first-choice universities.

MORETON HALL ●●

*Weston Rhyn, Shropshire
SY11 3EW*
Website moretonhall.org

Head Michael Brewer, since 2023; previously head of Thetford Grammar School
Pupils 300. Day: 24 boys; 148 girls; boarding: 1 boy; 127 girls. **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,695; boarding: £12,995 **Bursaries** 50% of pupils, up to 30% **Alumni** Actor Sheila Reid, editor-in-chief of The Economist Zanny Minton Beddoes, judicial commissioner Dame Linda Dobbs

Head Michael Brewer joined rural Moreton Hall in September 2023, and has since focused on improvements, this year putting £1 million into generally sprucing up the facilities, revamping the sports hall and creating a new swimming pool. He has also been looking at how to develop the curriculum and – given the enthusiasm of the school's thespians – introducing drama qualifications. (One audience member described a recent show as 'worthy of the West End, and a great example of Moreton Magic at work!') Sport is also an important part of life here and lacrosse is particularly strong, with the senior team making the finals of the 2023 national schools championship. In their spare time, pupils might be found kayaking on the canal bordering the grounds, or rock climbing and mountain biking through the Shropshire Hills and Snowdonia National Park. Meanwhile, those who are commercially minded – preferring to get their adrenalin through strategy and negotiation – have a brilliant opportunity in the pupil-led Moreton Enterprises, helmed by Sixth-form directors who manage a constantly evolving business. Medicine as a career option is a big deal here, and an impressive number go on to study it, while half of the general cohort head to Russell Group universities.

NEW HALL SCHOOL ●●

Boreham, Essex CM3 3HS
Website newhallschool.co.uk

Head Katherine Jeffrey, since 2002; previously deputy head of the Marist School
Pupils 1,341. Day: 502 boys, 551 girls; boarding 157 boys, 131 girls **Ages** 1–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,256; boarding: £13,131 **Bursaries** Variable % of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Painter Leonora Carrington, CNN chief international anchor Christiane Amanpour, Saracens rugby player Dom Morris

Acquired by Henry VIII in 1517 and Mary Tudor's home for many years, New Hall is approached by a long avenue of trees which opens majestically onto the site of one of the oldest Catholic schools in the country. Founded in Belgium in 1642 – before moving to its current site in 1799 – it's now a thriving establishment catering to more than 1,000 pupils, who can sometimes be seen scurrying around the Tudor grounds on history-themed scavenger hunts, seeking hidden crests, statues and curiosities – and it's known for its diamond teaching model, whereby co-educational and same-sex learning are woven together from nursery through to Sixth Form. It's currently pushing to ensure that its educational offering is as innovative and dynamic as possible; hence the Sixth-form centre has been refurbished and will soon be joined by a business centre for the study of all things economic. Meanwhile, an examination hall is also under construction, as is a collection of state-of-the-art studios for the school's many dancers. And those who prefer four legs to two might be interested in the recent opening of the Learn to Ride centre, which is home to three horses (Winnie, Lilly and Kevin) as well as two equestrian simulators. A three-acre on-site farm houses a variety of rescue animals – from ferrets and rabbits to sheep – and is used creatively to enhance the curriculum in various ways, among them supplying data for biology projects and an apt location for readings from Charlotte's Web.

New Hall pupils scurry around the Tudor grounds on history-themed scavenger hunts, seeking hidden statues and curiosities

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 1,194 day;**681 boys, 513 girls**Ages 4–18**Term Fees £7,091 Bursaries 6%**of pupils, up to 100%+ Alumni**Admiral Lord Nelson, Olympic**athlete Emma Pooley, England**rugby player Freddie Steward*

Could there be a more picturesque setting than Norwich's cathedral close, where cobbled passageways and church properties alternate with the choir school's buildings?

As one member of staff says, 'Our corridors really are the streets!' And the relationship between town and gown reflects that. 'Courteous' pupils mingle easily with the public, according to our researcher.

Sixth-formers can take lunch off-bounds; and the school's city-centre location makes it easily accessible for pupils travelling from across Norfolk and Suffolk. But while steeped in tradition, this school is far from hidebound. Take the 'Wollow' (World of Languages and Languages of the World) scheme that it has spearheaded: hundreds of others now use its resources. Or its espousal of the making and studying of films. Or its spectacular visual arts offering (including its own gallery, The Crypt, beneath the chapel). And the icing on the cake? No pressure. One girl told our researcher that, once she had decided against university, the teachers didn't try to dissuade her; only to guide her towards her best future. All the same, 95 per cent of leavers do go on to higher education – often at blue-chip seats of learning – with the remainder likely to pursue such non-UCAS routes as an HSBC degree apprenticeship. And thanks to the generosity of, among others, the Worshipful Company of Dyers, bursary provision here is valued; there are also scholarships awarded as recognition of pupils' talents in everything from drama and sport to choristry. No wonder Old Norvicensians sing the school's praises so highly.

TATLER



Oundle's flared culottes for girls are popular on cold days, when it's easy to put on a pair of cosy pyjama bottoms underneath

OAKHAM SCHOOL ●●

*Chapel Close, Oakham,**Rutland LE15 6DT**Website oakham.rutland.sch.uk**Head Henry Price, since 2019;**previously head of Wellington School**Pupils 974. Day: 250 boys, 249**girls; boarding: 256 boys, 219 girls**Ages 10–18 Term Fees Day:**£9,220; boarding: £15,515**Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to**100%+ Alumni Actor Matthew**Macfadyen, England cricketer**Stuart Broad, actress Katie Hall*

It may not conform to the grand, stately-home architecture of a classic public school, but Oakham's large and well-thought-out campus and fantastic facilities more than make up for that. Think 47 acres of grass pitches, plus squash and tennis courts, modern boarding houses, a pool, a two-floor library and the superb Queen Elizabeth Theatre; not to mention the pretty Rutland-stone town of Oakham just beyond the perimeter. (We're told the local Tesco is particularly popular with students.) With almost 1,000 pupils

– about half of whom board – there's no denying it's a 'big' school, but there's a distinctly warm and welcoming atmosphere that ensures it doesn't feel daunting. Parents are particularly grateful to the 'amazing' house masters and mistresses who go 'above and beyond' to help children settle in and feel like part of the family. And one Oakhamian goes so far as to call his house a 'sanctuary where I can truly be myself and revel in the freedom it offers'. Pastoral care is a key strength of the school, but so, too, is its authentically holistic approach to education. Balancing academic, co-curricular and pastoral learning, the newly launched Connected Curriculum helps prepare students not just for exams, but to rise to the challenges they will encounter later in life. Pupils love the way that they are 'encouraged to participate in multiple activities' and have more than 125 to choose from, including CCF, sailing on Rutland Water and discussing issues affecting gender equality in the Matthews Society.

OUNDLE SCHOOL ●●

*The Great Hall, New Street,**Oundle PE8 4GH**Website oundleschool.org.uk**Head Sarah Kerr-Dineen, since**2015; previously warden of Forest**School Pupils 1,120. Day: 155**boys, 155 girls; boarding: 480 boys,**330 girls**Ages 4–18 Term Fees**Day: £10,475; boarding: £16,055**Bursaries 13% of pupils, up to**100%+ Alumni Conservationist**Sir Peter Scott, biologist Richard**Dawkins, rugby player Tom Curry*

There's concern among those who have long been in the know that the cat is out of the bag: Oundle is becoming more and more popular, with even the Prince and Princess of Wales having looked around it for Prince George. Why? Because, thanks to its lack of pomp and circumstance, this steady Midlands-based co-ed has the reputation of being a hidden gem that shapes grounded, down-to-earth young adults. And they soon discover that the senior boarding houses and classroom buildings are scattered around a pretty market town, where the sight of girls sporting their signature culottes is common. (The enormously flared garments are popular on cold days, when it's easy to put on a pair of cosy pyjama bottoms underneath.) The school being so woven into Oundle's diurnal life, there's a strong emphasis on contributing to the community. Thus, the Yarrow Art Gallery is open to the public, as is the Stahl Theatre, which hosts plays from both the pupils' and professional theatre companies, while the Oscar radio station beams across the local area. Wednesday afternoons are dedicated to Community Action, which sees hundreds of youngsters volunteering with the elderly and helping in local schools. Oundle is big, and focuses on providing more of an all-round education than on slaving over results. Still, grades are consistently good and about 10 per cent of leavers head to Oxbridge. From September 2025, Dominic Oliver, previously head of co-ed Lancing College, will take over from the retiring Sarah Kerr-Dineen.

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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 1,703 day: 899 boys, 804 girls **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** £7,450

Bursaries 5.6% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Philosopher John Polkinghorne, founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company Sir Peter Hall, GB hockey player Tess Howard Roughly three applicants vie for each prized place at this historic Cambridge co-ed, which is structured like an upside-down pyramid. (Year groups grow in size as you move up, although the class sizes do not increase.) And those who are lucky enough to be accepted can enjoy the delights of a raft of new facilities, including a sports centre, climbing academy, 25-metre pool and state-of-the-art science labs. Grades are consistently impressive – 86 per cent of all GCSE entries came in at 9–7, while three pupils received special exam-board recognition for obtaining the highest

marks in the country in their GCSE subjects – and lucky musicians have the chance to perform at such stunning Cambridge venues as St John's College Chapel. As for dramatic types, they can tread the boards in the Peter Hall Performing Arts Centre, where a recent staging of *Mary Poppins JR* brought the house down; and the Technical Theatre Company teaches such crucial skills as lighting, sound and set design. Among other extracurriculars are the filmmaking and volleyball clubs; and particularly popular is the '42' visiting speaker programme, which attracts a range of business leaders, academics, sportspeople and politicians. In the Upper Sixth, students volunteer at local primary schools – where they deliver lessons in maths, languages, drama and computer science – while a team of students headed to India over the summer to volunteer. Other trips abroad take in such destinations as Sweden and Iceland; and plans are ongoing for the grand opening of The Perse School in Muscat, Oman.

Given the proximity to the River Stour, it's no surprise that Royal Hospital students are an aquatic bunch, with cabinets of trophies consistently being won for sailing

REPTON SCHOOL ●●

Repton, Derbyshire DE65 6FH

Website repton.org.uk

Head Mark Semmence, since 2019; previously head of Mount Kelly

Pupils 1,035. Day: 288 boys, 284 girls; boarding: 253 boys, 210 girls

Ages 3–18 **Term Fees** Day:

£11,450; boarding: £15,440

Bursaries 16% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Athlete Harold Abrahams, author Roald Dahl, actor George Rainsford

Parents repeatedly talk about the 'feel' of Repton and mention that, on first inspection, it was clear the pupils were 'polite, well-rounded and above all, happy'. The exemplary facilities also mean that every child has plenty of opportunities to find their niche here, whether on the fives courts, camping in the Lake District or making a hockey tour of South Africa. The school prides itself on its balance between academic, sports and extracurricular activities. (One recent leaver scored 4 A*s at A-level while also representing Great Britain U21s in hockey.) 'Wonderful' head Mark Semmence is credited with Repton's spirit going 'from strength to strength, with pupil experience at its centre', says one mother. Academics are on the up: last year saw 67 per cent of leavers offered places at their first-choice universities, and a number heading to top US colleges.

ROYAL HOSPITAL SCHOOL ●●

Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 2RX

Website royalhospitalschool.org

Head Irfan Latif, since 2024; previously head of DLD College

London Pupils 670. Day: 163 boys, 145 girls; boarding: 192

boys, 170 girls **Ages** 11–18

Term Fees Day: £7,413; boarding:

£14,455 **Bursaries** 60% of pupils,

up to 95% **Alumni** Consultant

gynaecologist Professor John Studd,

sailor Hannah Stodel, England

cricketer Reece Topley

'What I love most is the sense of community. There's a group for everyone,' says one busy-sounding pupil, who fills their days with choir practice, musical rehearsals, hockey and more. 'Each one of these small communities gives me a chance to get to know many different people and to participate in something fun, too!' Parents are equally impressed by the 'extensive range of extracurricular activities', the 100 on offer every week spanning bake-offs, coding challenges, fitness programmes and *Dragons' Den* and *Taskmaster* competitions. Given the proximity of the River Stour, it's no surprise that the children here are an aquatic bunch. Sailing is a big deal, cabinets of trophies are consistently being won and, for the first time, a pupil – who represents the USA in sailing – has just been offered a place at Yale. But the cricket team also has a formidable reputation – bolstered by all-weather nets – and music thrives. A performance to celebrate the King's coronation is still talked about, and singing at the annual National Service for Seafarers at St Paul's Cathedral is a highlight. This year, metacognition – the ability of an individual to reflect on their thought process and choose an effective strategy – has been woven into the curriculum to support independent learning; and an innovative new RHS Diploma will foster such life skills as citizenship and leadership. Arriving after more than five years at DLD London, incoming head Irfan Latif inherits a happy, successful seat of learning.

RUGBY SCHOOL ●●**Rugby, Warwickshire
CV22 5EH****Website** rugbyschool.co.uk**Head** Gareth Parker-Jones, since 2020; previously deputy head academic **Pupils** 865. **Day:** 114 boys, 97 girls; **boarding:** 363 boys, 291 girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £10,400; **boarding:** £16,400 **Bursaries** 41% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Author Lewis Carroll, writer Dolly Alderton, *Deliciously Ella* founder Ella Mills

Every parent we spoke to confirmed that Rugby's catchphrase – 'The Whole Person is the Whole Point' – is 'truly the lived ethos of the school'. Said one: 'The pastoral care, and commitment to making our children the best people they can be, has been quite phenomenal.' And another was particularly impressed by the 'balanced mix' of academics, sports, arts and co-curriculars. There are more than 200 activities and clubs to choose from – so every existing or soon-to-be-discovered passion is well catered for – while 'engaging' staff are experts at 'finding something that enables each child to stand that little bit taller'. Unsurprisingly, sport is a big part of the Rugbeian experience: everyone takes part in at least one physical activity every day; there are teams and fixtures for all levels; and the most talented receive one-to-one mentoring through the Aspiring Athletics Performer Programme. Parents are quick to point out, however, that these exertions don't dominate: 'Even the best athlete has to ensure they're accomplished at their studies, when it would be so easy for the school to look the other way.' Results are duly impressive: Rugby's first IB cohort secured an average of 38 points, with 14 receiving Oxbridge offers, and more than 50 per cent of GCSEs taken were awarded grades 9–8. The school has invested £6 million in fee assistance to help widen access. It shares facilities with 100 primary pupils a week. And thanks to the Rugby 360 community programme, it ensures its charges are instilled with a sense of service to the wider world.

SHREWSBURY SCHOOL ●●**Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY3 7BA
Website** shrewsbury.org.uk**Head** Leo Winkley, since 2018; previously head of St Peter's School, York **Pupils** 837. **Day:** 145 boys, 74 girls; **boarding:** 376 boys, 242 girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £10,697; **boarding:** £15,598 **Bursaries** 46% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Naturalist Charles Darwin, actor Sir Michael Palin, politician Lord Heseltine

When asked to review Shrewsbury in one phrase, 'outstanding' (as described by one mother) head Leo Winkley summed it up as: 'serious fun'. This has become the school's unofficial motto – although the original Latin one, *intus si recte, ne labora* ('If all is right within, trouble not'), still holds – and it's one that both parents and pupils love. It also feels very apt. Shrewsbury's academic results are consistently strong: 50 of last year's cohort achieved A*–As at A-level; and that's coupled

with vibrant extracurriculars, time spent playing sport, trips to the likes of Kenya, Argentina and South Africa, and expeditions organised by the dedicated head of adventure. 'My children are so busy and settled that I rarely hear from them,' one parent reports. It helps that a 'no coasting allowed' rule applies, and this goes some way to explaining why Salopians excel at every turn. Of last year's leavers, 30 per cent enrolled in the world's top 50 universities – 11 received offers from Oxbridge and Harvard – and one was selected for the England Lambs Rugby squad. In the past, other destinations have included such institutions as Sciences Po, Duke and RADA; and two girls made school history last year by winning gold medals at the U19 world rowing championship. Parents, however, are most delighted to find their children emerge as 'kind, communicative and thoughtful' people, ready to take on the world.

Uppingham Cairo welcomes the first cohort of students to its 10-acre campus overlooking the Great Pyramids of Giza



Rugby School

UPPINGHAM ●●**Uppingham, Rutland
LE15 9QE****Website** uppingham.co.uk**Head** Dr Richard Maloney, since 2016; previously head of Bede's School **Pupils** 844. **Day:** 35 boys, 30 girls; **boarding:** 445 boys, 334 girls **Ages** 13–18 **Term Fees** **Day:** £9,790; **boarding:** £15,993 **Bursaries** 9.2% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Actor and writer Stephen Fry, musician Harry Judd, chef and restaurateur Rick Stein

It might be a time-hallowed public school, but Uppingham is constantly evolving; thus, by popular demand, it has thrown open the doors of its new Li Kwok Po house, accepting day pupils at the previously full-boarding establishment for the first time. In other developments, fresh directors of sport and theatre have been appointed, the fashion and textile studio expanded, and a StartUPP entrepreneurship programme introduced. (Further afield, in September Uppingham Cairo welcomes the first cohort of students to its striking 10-acre campus, which overlooks the Great Pyramids of Giza.) However, the school's fundamental belief in the importance of a holistic education and broad curriculum remains unchanged, with its vast enrichment offering setting it apart from lesser schools. This means Friday afternoons are dedicated to learning beyond the classroom in the Up&Out Programme – which spans CCF, DofE and community service – while there are enough clubs and societies to pique even the most niche of interests: flight simulator training, robotics and crochet, to name a few. Music is also integral here, with 480 individual lessons every week and more than 70 performances a year. Meanwhile, in the Leonardo Centre, students get stuck into everything from sculpture and photography to sound engineering in its studios. University destinations are just as varied: 82 per cent of last year's A-levels were graded A*–B before pupils headed off to the likes of Oxbridge, Durham, MetFilm and Leeds Conservatoire. □



PUBLIC

Fettes College

North & Scotland

FETTES COLLEGE ●●

*Carrington Road, Edinburgh
EH4 1QX*

Website fettes.com

*Head Helen Harrison, since 2019;
previously deputy head Pupils 750.*

*Day: 147 boys, 131 girls; boarding:
241 boys, 231 girls Ages 7–18*

*Term Fees Day: £13,150;
boarding: £15,660 Bursaries
10.7% of pupils, up to 100%+*

*Alumni Former prime minister Sir
Tony Blair, athlete Jake Wightman,
author Elizabeth Macneal*

First-time and seasoned visitors alike are dazzled by picturesque Fettes, surrounded by 100 acres of grounds in a well-heeled Edinburgh suburb. Not only is the school visually inspiring – the main building is a turreted fairytale-gothic mansion – but it's warm and inviting, too. Once accepted, new pupils are

assigned a 'godparent', a senior Fettesian who writes to them in the holidays before they start, providing advice and support. The tight-knit community is 'surprisingly diverse': around a quarter hail from all corners of the globe; and while there are some day pupils, 72 per cent of seniors choose to board. Parents are generally delighted that the stand-alone Upper-sixth boarding house has boys and girls under one roof; one saying that 'it provides an excellent stepping stone to independent student living'. In the past year, Fettesians devoted 10,000 hours to volunteering, secured an average of 37 IB points – making Fettes the best IB school in Scotland – and were accepted to the likes of Harvard, Yale and Oxbridge. They also won national titles in netball, hockey, cricket and lacrosse.

GIGGLESWICK SCHOOL ●●

*Giggleswick, Settle, North
Yorkshire BD24 0DE*

Website giggleswick.org.uk

*Head Sam Hart, since 2022;
previously housemaster at
Winchester College Pupils 410.*

*Day: 107 boys, 79 girls; boarding:
121 boys, 103 girls Ages 4–18*

*Term Fees Day: £9,030; boarding:
£13,970 Bursaries 11% of pupils,
up to 87.5% Alumni TV presenter*

*Richard Whiteley, actor Anthony
Daniels, golfer Gary Wolstenholme*
Giggleswick's setting in the Ribble Valley is the core of its identity. A huge emphasis is placed on physical activity, adventure and resilience; and pupils are encouraged to whizz around its purpose-built mountain-biking track, traverse its 3.5 miles of cross-country trails and get stuck into its thrilling white-water run. While outdoor education is fun, it also serves a higher purpose in developing problem-solving skills and teamwork. From Year 10, applications are welcomed to the Elite Sports Programme, which offers tailored training and specialist coaching. Meanwhile, the Theatre Tech Club is involved in rigging and operating lights for school productions – most recently a performance of *We Will Rock You* – and musicians have lots of opportunities to join choirs and ensembles. The most deafeningly popular musical highlight is The Gigg, an annual concert that sees students perform covers of bands such as The Clash. With the facilities being expanded, the Assembly Hall has been restored to its former glory; and next up is a brand new Sixth-form centre.

GLENALMOND COLLEGE ●●

*Glenalmond, Perthshire
PH1 3RY*

Website glenalmondcollege.co.uk

*Head Mark Mortimer, since 2023;
previously head at Bryanston*

*Pupils 339. Day: 55 boys, 44 girls;
boarding: 125 boys, 115 girls*

*Ages 12–18 Term Fees Day:
£9,100; boarding: £14,935*

*Bursaries 28% of pupils, up to
100%+ Alumni Actor Robbie
Coltrane, rugby player Rob*

Waimurright, politician Alister Jack
Founded by Lord Gladstone in 1847, Glenalmond used to have a rather refined reputation but it has moved with the times. 'Coll', as it's known, works hard to draw in the local community, granting scholarships to gifted rugby players and pupils displaying outstanding leadership potential, and has expanded the range of Scottish Highers it offers alongside A-levels. With one of its USPs being a 300-acre campus in rural Perthshire, a big plus is the school's Outdoor Learning Programme – separate from, but encompassing the DofE Award – which spans conservation, rock climbing, mountain biking, fishing and walking up nearby munros. Pupils also tell us that Glenalmond's isolated location fosters both a 'unique culture' and a strong sense of community in which 'everyone knows everyone'; and even as OGs, they remain a 'tight-knit bunch'. Exam results are on the up, with 43 per cent of GCSEs in 2023 graded 9–7, and 85 per cent of A-levels A*–B; and destinations – often Caledonian – include such Russell Groups as Edinburgh and Glasgow.



GORDONSTOUN ●●**Elgin, Moray IV30 5RF****Website** gordonstoun.org.uk**Head** Peter Green, since 2024;

previously executive head of Rugby

School Group **Pupils** 546. **Day:** 81boys, 91 girls; **boarding:** 224 boys,150 girls **Ages** 4½–18 **Term Fees****Day:** £11,760; **boarding:** £16,585**Bursaries** 33% of pupils, up to100%+ **Alumni** Prince Philip,

Duke of Edinburgh, King Charles III,

Olympic rower Heather Stanning

Nestling beside the Highlands on

the Moray Firth coast, surrounded

by 200 acres of woodland grounds,

Gordonstoun is about as remote as

schools come. 'It felt as though we

had reached the end of the world,'

one mother recalls of her first visit.

'The air was crisp and clean, and

there were dolphins in the bay.' But

any initial trepidation – including

the realisation that sports days

would be more 'Barbour jackets and

wellies' than 'heels and a big hat' –

was soon replaced with delight:

'Throughout the school, there was

an air of determination, grit and

confidence. The children seemed

to glow with energy and enthusi-

asm. They would take on the world,

it seemed.' The fact so many go on

to do exactly that is thanks to the

uniquely outdoor-focused 'character

education' they receive here. Pupils

undertake multi-day sailing voyages

on the school's own yacht, embark

on far-flung expeditions and train

to support local community and

rescue services as part of their cur-

riculum; all 'healthy challenges

tackled with cooperation and perse-

verance', as one current pupil puts

it. But this doesn't come at the cost

of academic success: last year, the

number of GCSE grade 9s were up

by 36 per cent, A*–As at A-level

increased by 30 per cent and 45 per

cent of BTECs were awarded dis-

tinctions. Sports, drama and music

are also strong: everyone learns an

instrument and the award-winning

pipe band performed at the Hong

Kong Rugby Sevens in April. Next

on the agenda is taking this winning

formula further afield, with interna-

tional schools in China and Abu

Dhabi opening soon.

**KILGRASTON ●●****Bridge of Earn, Perth PH2 9BQ****Website** kilgraston.com**Head** Tanya Davie, since 2022,

previously deputy head (academic)

at St Bede's College, Manchester

Pupils 252. **Day:** 8 boys, 192 girls;**boarding:** 52 girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term****Fees Day:** £8,127; **boarding:**£13,878 **Bursaries** 18% of pupils,up to 80% **Alumni** Author Linda

Strachan, GB hockey players Emily

Dark and Katie Robertson

Asked to describe head Tanya

Davie, one parent responds: 'Small,

neat, but packs a massive punch.

Her enthusiasm is infectious and

her energy knows no bounds.' She

sounds like a personification of

Kilgraston, whose mere 200 pupils

seem to be constantly engaged in

activities. At the only school in

Scotland to boast an on-site eque-

strian facility, the girls can while

away hours grooming, cleaning tack

and hacking in the spectacular

countryside, either on their own

ponies or the school's. And inevita-

bly, they can be found jumping

round competitions across the

country, from novice to national

level. There are more than 70 extra-

curricular clubs; and lately, the girls

have been kept busy by the newly

launched beekeeping society, which

has thus far produced two sell-out

seasons of delicious Kilgraston

honey. There's plenty in the pipeline

to be excited about at this Catholic

school, not least boarding being

extended to boys up to 12 years of

age. A pre-school is also launching,

providing access to the brilliant

campus from a younger age.

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** 1,152**day:** 702 boys, 450 girls **Ages** 3–18**Term Fees** £5,518 **Bursaries** 8%of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni**

Financial expert Martin Lewis,

former GB rower Olivia Whitlam,

broadcaster Jonathan Samuels

When asked what they loved most

about King's Chester, nearly all its

pupils cited the opportunities on

offer. As for the one child who

didn't cite the array of extracurricu-

lars, they said their favourite aspect

was the teachers and, in fact, the

entire staff body: 'They're the beat-

ing heart of this wondrous organism

and every single one of them puts

so much into us students, ensuring

that we get the very most out of our

adolescent lives.' Praise indeed. But

it's the selective day school's strong

results and stellar reputation that

swing it for parents, and rightfully

so: 86 per cent of students secured

their first-choice university places,

with 20 per cent of A-levels graded

A*. Noted one recent visitor: 'Pupils

appear to be on a mission to do

something big with their lives.' This

exceptionally bright bunch are not

afraid to think globally, whether

setting their sights on the Ivy

League or heading to the weekly

careers breakfasts. Head George

Hartley is adept at maintaining this

atmosphere and is proud to provide

'almost all that a boarding school

might offer, but in a day school'.

LORETTO ●●**Linkfield Road, Musselburgh,****East Lothian EH21 7RE****Website** loretto.com**Head** Dr Graham Hawley, since

2014; previously head of Kelly

College **Pupils** 370. **Day:** 95 boys,77 girls; **boarding:** 109 boys, 89girls **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees Day:**£9,636; **boarding:** £14,140**Bursaries** Variable % of pupils, upto 100%+ **Alumni** F1 champion

Jim Clark, journalist Andrew Marr,

politician Alistair Darling

Located in the tiny coastal town of

Musselburgh, Loretto is admittedly

a bit off the beaten track, but all

the better for it. Parents love that it

offers their children the opportu-

nity to grow up somewhere that

'isn't too urban' – where 'the air is

clear' – and appreciate its 'practical

down-to-earthness'. The area's sur-

roundings are made the most of,

with regular outdoor expeditions

and Adventure School trips to the

Highlands, while Musselburgh Old

Course (aka 'the cradle of golf') being

right next door has lent the school

a unique legacy. Parents say

they suspect Loretto is 'slightly

hiding its light under a bushel' –

but that this allows it to retain its

diminutive size. And that's precisely

what makes it so special, with one

mother telling us: 'Its smallness

means everyone has a chance to try

everything and everyone knows

each other.' As a result, 'the attention

is so detailed that your children

grow and improve in abundance'

and 'raw talent naturally grows'. Saturday

lessons have been replaced by an

enrichment programme, enabling

pupils to freely 'develop talents

they didn't even know they had', be

they sailing, coding, engi-

neering or even hip-hop dancing.

Sport is an important part of

Lorettonian life: hockey, rugby,

lacrosse and cricket are particularly

strong, everyone takes part in at

least three games sessions a week

and the famous 'Red Wall' of sup-

porters dressed in the school's col-

ours provides constant motivation

to its teams. Plus, 99 per cent of last

year's leavers went on to their first-

choice destinations.

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** £5,310 **Bursaries** 12.5% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Actor Sir Ben Kingsley, cricket journalist Michael Atherton, author and TV presenter Dr Rangan Chatterjee When he was 16, head Dr Martin Boulton won a transformational bursary here; now the Manchester Grammar School is on a focused mission to educate the brightest minds in the north of England, regardless of their backgrounds. Consequently, it has a pioneering bursary programme – 14 per cent of the senior school is fully supported – and glories in a thriving pupil body that celebrates diversity. (Sixth-formers run five assemblies a

week and boys are encouraged to attend those that offer different perspectives from their own.) Ties to the wider community are cherished: MGS not only has links with schools in Manchester, but with others in Africa, China and India. And it's no secret that the boys here are bright and inquiring. Of course, exam results are consistently top-notch: recently, 106 boys were awarded a clean sweep of A* and A grades at A-level; and over the last five years, the number of Oxbridge offers has hovered at around 30. The school's cricket tradition is strong, and there are plenty of opportunities for students to enjoy the great outdoors. MGS owns the Owl's Nest in the Peak District, where the youngsters go hiking and orienteering. 'You spend a week with your mates in a dirty field, not showering, and doing all sorts of sport activities such as mountain biking and sailing,' enthuses one. 'It's a big selling point for me.'

MERCHISTON CASTLE SCHOOL ●

Colinton Road, Edinburgh EH13 0PU

Website *merchiston.co.uk*

Head Jonathan Anderson, since 2018; previously deputy head of Workshop College **Pupils** 392 boys: 142 day, 250 boarding **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,530; boarding: £14,520 **Bursaries** 24.7% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Sportsman William Lovat Fraser, former Governor of the Bank of Scotland Sir Peter Burt, architect John Honeyman

Only four miles from Edinburgh city centre, Merchiston's 100-acre campus feels like it's buried in the countryside. (Hence the wide range of activities undertaken in the nearby Pentland Hills.) And while the academics are impressive – with about two thirds of boys Russell Group-bound – the sports offering is stellar. There are elite and development squads in both tennis and golf. The Academy for the former is Scotland's sole example, while the latter regularly sees players whisked to the US on scholarships. Acres of blue Merchiston tartan carpet mean you will never forget you're in Caledonia here. But the school also maintains strong worldwide ties, which have led to an award from the British Council. Twenty-five per cent of pupils hail from overseas; each year, the International Prefects organise a week when their cultures and cuisines are explored and the East Lothian institution has won a Unicef Gold Award for 'rights respecting'. The smart young men it turns out hone their sense of responsibility in Sixth Form, when boarders occupy individual en-suite rooms (and take six Masterchef lessons). Although it's Scotland's only all-boys boarding school, there are frequent socials with all-girls St George's Edinburgh and Kilgraston; and since women comprise 50 per cent of the staff, there's always plenty of feminine influence at work. See for yourself, thanks to a flexible application process that makes reconnaissance visits as easy as possible for parents.

QUEEN MARGARET'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS ●

Escrick Park, York YO19 6EU

Website *queenmargarets.com*

Head Nicola Dudley, since 2024; previously principal of Surval Montreux School, Switzerland **Pupils** 218 girls: 36 day; 182 boarding **Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** Day: £8,220; boarding: £14,560 **Bursaries** 15% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Novelist Winifred Holtby, business executive Amanda Staveley, mezzo-soprano Dame Sarah Connolly

'Committed' is the word one pupil uses in her description of the popular, apparently very fun-loving chaplain, 'whose commitment to dancing for five minutes straight to Bonnie Tyler's "Holding Out for a Hero" – for an assembly video – certainly makes him one of my top teachers!' Parents also pick up on the 'vibrancy that seems to promote happy girls' and are particular fans of the school's delightfully small size: 'No one gets lost in the crowd here,' confides one. Queen Margaret's 'caters for everyone, whether sporty, academic or artistic, and lets every pupil shine in whatever field they excel in'. There's definitely a lot for the 218 pupils to try their hand at. Keen equestrians benefit from the on-site riding school. (These girls know about horse power, with one pupil currently ranked China's number-one International FEI Endurance Rider and another recently winning the Pony Club National Intermediate Dressage Championships.) And thespians thrive at such events as the annual junior Drama Picnic, where parents watch an eclectic array of dramatic and musical performances on the croquet lawn. Turning to bricks and mortar, a new boarding house brings the junior years under one roof, meaning that, while girls still board horizontally – that is, with children of the same age – they have more chances to socialise with other year groups. Elsewhere, the Sixth-formers have been enjoying their sparkling new centre, where they meet to brainstorm, chat and study.

Queen Margaret's School for Girls



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 675. Day: 6 boys, 639 girls; boarding: 30 girls **Ages** 3–18 **Term Fees** Day: £6,566; boarding: £13,464 **Bursaries** 9% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Annie 'Spitfire' Penrose, women's rights campaigner Marie Stopes, racehorse trainer Lucinda Russell

The leafy campus of St George's is a thriving institution where girls are empowered to be the best versions of themselves. Head since 2022, Carol Chandler-Thompson is called a 'remarkable individual' by parents, and one praises her creation of 'a sense of belonging, unity and camaraderie among students and staff'; she is, they say, dedicated to bringing her charges a 'modern context to their education, so that they can find their voice in the workplace'. Another remembers that, when she first scoped the school, she was immediately struck by its warmth, as well as by the smaller-than-usual class sizes, which help the girls to build confidence. Take the new Design Technology space, which provides budding engineers with an innovative workshop, contributing to their ongoing success as UK Space Design Competition finalists. The sense of community here is strong, too, and the children constantly lift each other up – one Speech Day surprise being the Good Friend Award. With 150 clubs to choose from, there's something for everyone; so youngsters can all find their niche. Meanwhile, staff are quick to notice if pupils are not themselves, so issues can be dealt with before they escalate. Academic standards are high – St George's actively promotes STEM subjects and has strong links with industry, offering creative partnerships and opportunities – and in 2023, 99 per cent of leavers achieved their first-choice university places, with destinations including UCL, Edinburgh and Bristol.



Sedbergh School

ST LEONARDS SCHOOL ●● St Andrews, Fife KY16 9QJ

Website stleonards-fife.org

Head Simon Brian, since 2021; previously deputy head of Charterhouse **Pupils** 573. Day: 197 boys, 221 girls; boarding: 77 boys, 78 girls **Ages** 5–18 **Term Fees** Day: £6,568; boarding: £15,482 **Bursaries** Variable % of pupils, on application **Alumni** Former Vogue editor Audrey Withers, tennis player Kitty McKane Godfree, suffragette Margaret Haig Thomas

By all accounts, it's the 'tight-knit' community at St Leonards that really sets it apart. Pupils point to 'the warm relationship between teachers and students' as being particularly special. St Leonards' location in St Andrews is also a big draw, which parents say make it 'a wonderful place to learn and grow up'. Its whereabouts also mean budding golfers have direct access to some of the best facilities and training that money can buy, thanks to the school's partnership with the world-famous St Andrews Links Golf Academy. But when pupils aren't practising their putting, they can be found performing in weekly concerts, playing lacrosse or rugby, taking part in fundraising projects, making the most of their 50-plus clubs and activities – Model United Nations being exceptionally popular – and somehow, amid all that, securing excellent grades. Last year's IB and GCSE results were some of the school's highest on record, and 90 per cent of students were offered their first-choice universities.

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** 1,297. Day: 618 boys, 531 girls; boarding: 75 boys, 73 girls **Ages** 2–18 **Term Fees** Day: £7,735; boarding: £13,250 **Bursaries** 4% of pupils, up to 100% **Alumni** Gunpowder plotter Guy Fawkes, composer John Barry, cricketer Jonny Bairstow

The word used most commonly to describe this historic seat of learning is 'busy'. More than 200 performers play for an audience of 700 at the annual Whole Foundation Concert, while 230 pupils are involved in sport fixtures every week. Despite the fast pace, pupils feel supported – 'The wellbeing hub is a massive step in the right direction,' says one – and there is a system for self-referral for one-to-one sessions. Founded in 627, St Peter's may be the third oldest school in the world, but it doesn't rest on its laurels, and change is afoot as it moves to a two-school mode: junior for ages two to 11, and a senior for 11 to 18-year-olds. There are plans in place to increase the number of pupils on bursaries from 50 to 80 by 2027. The school is also a member of the York Independent State School Partnership (with head Jeremy Walker as this year's chair) and offers masterclasses, summer schools and GCSEs in Latin and astronomy to children who could not otherwise access them.

SEDBERGH SCHOOL ●● Sedbergh, Cumbria LA10 5HG

Website sedberghschool.org

Head Dan Harrison, since 2018; previously second master **Pupils** 800. Day: 72 boys, 59 girls; boarding: 375 boys, 294 girls **Ages** 4–18 **Term Fees** Day: £10,845; boarding: £15,010 **Bursaries** 71.5% of pupils, up to 100%+ **Alumni** Screenwriter Simon Beaufoy, cricketer Harry Brook, rugby player Abbie Ward

Head Dan Harrison, who hails from Yorkshire himself, has been at Sedbergh for 30 years – teaching here was his first job after graduating from Cambridge – and perhaps because of his storied association with the school, he's very focused on creating memories for his charges. Sixth-formers surely won't forget the annual Wilson Run of 10.5 miles through some serious countryside; nor the annual occasion when normal chapel is transplanted to a different location. (Last year, the 600-strong congregation could be seen gathered round a piano on the hillside.) Another ritual is the Year 11 trip to First World War battlefields, where they research Old Sedberghians from their houses who fell in combat. Given the glorious setting, it's little wonder that students enjoy getting stuck into their surroundings, and they are eager volunteers across the Yorkshire Dales National Park, planting trees, restoring natural habitats and supporting conservation programmes. Extracurriculars run the gamut from the Investment Club and Pride Alliance to the Brantwood literary society, and such adventure sports as mountain biking are wildly popular. Unsurprisingly, these hardy teens are also good at most other sports; and their goal-scoring has been turbo-charged by the opening of new AstroTurf pitches. Fear not, though: life here is not all robust runs and rugby. House drama is popular, especially among the lower years, while everyone participates in the Big Draw, in which all pupils and staff are encouraged to submit an individual drawing for display in a whole-school exhibition.

**STONYHURST ●●****Stonyhurst, Lancashire BB7 9PZ****Website** stonyhurst.ac.uk**Head** John Browne, since 2016;

previously head of St Aloysius'

College, Glasgow **Pupils** 726. **Day:**178 boys, 131 girls; **boarding:** 242boys, 175 girls **Ages** 3–18**Term Fees** **Day:** £8,333; **boarding:**£14,180 **Bursaries** 34% of pupils,up to 100%+ **Alumni** Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle, former New York

Times CEO Mark Thompson,

rugby player Iain Balshaw

Perhaps surprisingly for a 431-year-old Jesuit school in rural Lancashire, Stonyhurst boasts an incredibly diverse community. Pupils hail from 26 different countries and practise all faiths, or none (though 60 per cent are Catholic). Parents choose Stonyhurst for its offering of 'tradition grounded in excellence', strong values and 'mission to prepare men and women for the world'. Results are impressive, particularly given the non-selective application process: two-thirds of last year's A-levels were graded A*–B, and pupils headed to Russell Group universities, continued their studies abroad or chose Higher Level Degree Apprenticeships at the likes of Rolls-Royce and Airbus. But not before they'd enjoyed their fair share of fun. Between all the inter-house competitions, quirky clubs, sports tours and 'formals' – when they dress up for dinner – not to mention rugby sevens tournaments, a Year 13 ski trip to Canada, weekly matches and 'hilarious' staff pantomimes, 'you will never find yourself bored', according to one child.

STRATHALLAN ●●**Forgandenny, Perth PH2 9EG****Website** strathallan.co.uk**Head** Mark Lauder, since 2017;

previously head of Ashville College

Pupils 603. **Day:** 161 boys, 132girls; **boarding:** 169 boys, 140 girls**Ages** 5–18 **Term Fees** **Day:**£9,760; **boarding:** £14,920**Bursaries** 23% of pupils, up to100% **Alumni** Invictus Games

medallist JJ Chalmers, rugby player

Zander Fagerson, Emmy-winning

musical supervisor Ciara Elwis

Set in the Perthshire hills, 'Strath' lives and breathes its strapline opportunities 'for all to excel'. Sport is notably strong – in rugby alone it fields more than 40 national age-grade players, while its alumni boast 11 full-time professionals and nine who've represented their countries – and the department has recently unveiled a golf simulator that allows pupils to tee off on virtual courses around the globe. There's no notion of standing still here: Strath has been awarded the Bronze LGBT Charter by LGBT Youth Scotland for its commitment to inclusivity. And the whole community has pitched in to reduce waste, conserve resources and enhance biodiversity around the grounds. Parents are pleased with the improvements in pastoral care in recent years and describe head Mark Lauder as 'engaging' and 'grounded'. He's also well-respected by pupils, who like the fact that 'he's not just sitting behind a chair in an office'. One mother declares: 'It's so reassuring that the future of the school is in his very capable hands.'

WITHINGTON GIRLS' SCHOOL ●**Wellington Road, Manchester****M14 6BL****Website** wgs.org**Head** Sarah Haslam, since 2016;previously deputy head **Pupils** 744day girls **Ages** 7–18 **Term Fees**£5,186 **Bursaries** 16% of pupils,up to 100%+ **Alumni** Designer

Sarah Burton, director Joanna

Natasegara, founder of

neuropsychology Brenda Milner

In 1890 a liberal group, supported

by the editor of the *Manchester**Guardian*, founded WGS with the

admirable aspiration to inspire and

empower young women, and to

equip them for the future. They'd

surely be proud of their legacy. The

children here place great store on

engaging with and giving back to

their wider community, and last

year spent approximately 17,730

hours on outreach activities. (These

have included welcoming pupils

from local state schools to their

Futures Convention, which show-

cased the opportunities available to

youngsters and was attended by

spokespeople from such global busi-

nesses as Barclays and Bentley.)

Meanwhile, Citizenship Day, held

every June, sees teams of girls

engaged in neighbourhood projects

that range from mural-painting and

gardening to litter-picking. Proud

of its physical prowess, the school

has recently appointed the former

Lionesses defender Lindsay Johnson

as director of sport; but netball and

hockey are also popular, and the

prospect of an upcoming lacrosse

tour of the US sounds like a great

way to persuade the squad to aim

high. Off the pitch, the academic

results are brilliant – 95 per cent of

A-levels are A*–B – and the per-

forming arts flourish, with major

productions involving the whole

school. Budding musicians can play

at such events as Manchester Sings,

which sees hundreds of Mancunian

children give voice at the cathedral

– as well as at Withington's annual

Christmas tea party for senior citi-

zens – and if their tastes are a bit

niche, the school has an impressive

collection of harps to choose from.

YARM SCHOOL ●●**The Friarage, Yarm TS15 9EJ****Website** yarmschool.org**Head** Dr Huw Williams, since

2019; previously second master of

Tonbridge School **Pupils** 1,165**day:** 588 boys, 577 girls**Ages** 11–18 **Term Fees** £5,671**Bursaries** 7.6% of pupils, up to100%+ **Alumni** Rower Katherine

Copeland, Conservative politician

Simon Clarke, actor and singer

Yazdan Qafouri

At rowing races around the country, you're bound to hear a heartfelt cry from the towpath: 'Yeah, Yarm!' Spectators shout it at school, and continue after leaving if one of their number is crewing for a university. While they take their considerable talents to Oxbridge, Russell Group universities and competitive medical, dental and veterinary courses, they never forget their time at this Teesside institution. 'Sometimes I struggle to believe this is actually where I go to school,' says one happy pupil, praising the RIBA award-winning Princess Alexandra Auditorium and beautiful boathouse. But it's people who make a place, of course, and the 'warm and quietly purposeful atmosphere, in which everyone is respected for who they are' is what said pupil will miss even more than the idyllic, manicured, riverside setting. Yarm takes sport seriously – no surprise, with an alumni group that includes a number of professional athletes – and has forged a partnership with Yarm Rugby Club to enhance the local area's sporting provision. But the children also get involved in music, drama, debating and coding; and 2023's exam results placed them top of the league in Teesside and County Durham, with more than 50 per cent of A-levels graded A*–A. Yarm has a wide catchment area in the North East but parents praise its useful coach links and, as it were, its rich extended family. 'It's a lovely, diverse community to be part of,' says one. And philanthropic, too: it spends just shy of £500,000 a year on means-tested bursaries, and has a Hardship Fund for unforeseen circumstances. □

It starts at home

This London development is your ticket to a happier family life



The stylish Holland Park Gate development has been designed with parenting in mind

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT children are happiest when they live in a safe, settled home – but, more than that, they also perform best at school under such circumstances. As a result, when it comes to buying a house for your family, finding a safe, happy and thriving neighbourhood is likely to be top of the list, as is access to the best possible schools.

One development that combines all this is Holland Park Gate, the third development from Lodha, the prime London residential property group behind Mayfair's iconic No.1 Grosvenor Square. Located in the sought-after neighbourhood of Kensington, with access to nearby Holland Park, this new development is fast becoming the favoured family destination for west London buyers.

But it's the education elements that truly set Holland Park Gate's properties apart. It's been specially designed by parents to suit the needs of modern families, promising to reduce the considerable stress that can come with planning your child's academic future. How? Firstly, it's ideally located for many of the UK's top schools, from nursery to A-levels and International Baccalaureate, and even London's leading universities. There's also easy access to the M4, the fast-track to some of the most famous schools in the world, including Eton and Marlborough.

Holland Park Gate has been specially designed by parents to reduce the stress that can come with planning your child's academic future



Furthermore, Lodha works closely with an educational consultancy that can provide additional support. There's also an in-house concierge, Saint Amand, which relieves further pressure with services such as a house car available for school runs, a music practice room and weekly school laundry service – which, frankly, sounds invaluable.

Special events are easy to organise from the fully equipped kids club in the basement, which can be used for play dates, birthday parties, or even educational purposes if so desired. A happier, healthier family life awaits.

For more information and to book a viewing, please visit hollandparkgate.com

STREWN ACROSS THE EAST

Coast states of America are its prestigious 'preps' – akin to our 'public schools' – which have combined boarding with top-class education for generations, accepting children from the age of 14 and steering them over the next four years to the world's top universities.

It's easy to look at them from across the pond with a certain bewilderment. They're renowned for expansive campuses, engaged alumni associations, enviable staff-to-pupil ratios and eye-wateringly large endowments (which not only finance magnificent facilities but also allow them to be need-blind, frequently subsidising all fees).

What's more, the academic offerings, freed from the restrictions of A-levels and GCSEs, feel more bespoke and less exam-focused; students are placed into maths, science, foreign language and music classes entirely dependent on their abilities; and they are given autonomy over their learning, choosing either in-depth electives or wider remits via hundreds of enlivening options. Originally built to emulate their historical British counterparts, the US preps have developed and grown into phenomenal establishments, each with its own unique identity and learning environment.

PHILLIPS ACADEMY

Andover, Massachusetts

It may be considered America's most eminent boarding school. 'But if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change,' says the visionary head of Phillips Academy (or 'Andover', as it is colloquially known), quoting Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. With the institution approaching its 250th anniversary, Dr Raynard Kington – its first African-American and first openly gay head – embodies this maxim.

However, it is the school's 2007 decision to be need-blind, admitting students purely on merit, regardless of their family's ability to pay full tuition, that has been truly transformational. Respecting the school's original mission statement – to

admit youth with requisite skills 'from every quarter' – 46 per cent of students currently receive financial aid, and its 1,150 students come from 44 states and 40 overseas countries. Jim Ventre, Andover's assistant head of school for admission and financial aid, notes with understandable pride that 'our values are very appealing to families who understand that if you come here and you work hard, you're going to do well and you'll get into a great college'. With more than 3,000 applicants a year and a 13 per cent admittance rate, Andover is exceptionally appealing.

Reminiscent of the Harvard campus, Andover is the very picture of scholarly learning. Its Georgian red-brick quads comprise dorms, recreational spaces and classrooms; not to mention the incredible Paresky Commons, where students gather to eat in one of four dining areas, choosing from hearth-cooked pizza and flatbreads or a seemingly never-ending list of alternatives.

The 500-acre campus has every facility imaginable. To name just a few: the breathtaking Pan Athletic Center, with its 13-lane swimming pool; the dance studios and dedicated wrestling space; the Snyder Center, with a 200-metre, four-lane indoor athletics track and indoor courts for basketball and tennis; the two indoor ice rinks; and the nearby Brown Boathouse for 'crew' (rowing). Drama, music and the arts are equally well provided for, with the Addison Gallery of American Arts housing nearly 20,000 works.

The students choose from more than 300 courses; but with 59 per cent being people of colour – as well as 35 per cent of the faculty – the Empathy, Balance and Inclusion course is studied by every year group. 'We have to change,' repeats Dr Kington. 'But it's incredibly hard when we're doing so well.' With a \$1.326 billion endowment pot and \$26 million-plus spent annually on financial aid, it's fair to say Andover is doing very well indeed. ▷

Summer school For ages 12–18
Postgraduate year Yes

CLASS ACTS

Inspired by British public schools, the historic US preparatory colleges are ultra-modern powerhouses of learning



DORM *in the USA*

With presidents as alumni, billion-dollar endowment pots and architecture reminiscent of prestigious Ivy League colleges, the US 'preps' are private establishments that steer students into the world's elite universities. How do they compare to Britain's public schools? Tori Cadogan investigates

Phillips Academy, also known as Andover, was established in 1778

The Arts Center at Choate Rosemary Hall was funded by, and named after, alumnus Paul Mellon

CHOATE ROSEMARY HALL Wallingford, Connecticut

The alma mater of JFK, Choate Rosemary Hall, tucked in the small town of Wallingford in Connecticut, aspires to teach its students to appreciate the beauty and grace in their lives. And within moments of arriving on its 458-acre campus – so emboldened by world-class architecture – it is evident this will occur by aesthetic conditioning. (It boasts not one but two buildings designed by IM Pei of Louvre Pyramid fame.)

However, this vibrant, engaging and inclusive school stands out in more ways than one. Led by the dynamic and charming head Dr Alex Curtis, who has a PhD from Princeton in architectural history, it is a place that's always reaching for new heights. The combination of stellar academics with the option to specialise in signature programmes, ranging from advanced robotics to an environmental immersion programme – which sees 24 students move into the award-winning, net-zero Kohler Environmental Center for a year-long curriculum on 250 protected acres next to the main campus – ensures the mid-size institution is seriously in demand. There are 860 pupils, and only 10 per cent of applicants gain admission.

As Jeff Beaton, chief enrolment manager, explains: 'We offer more than 300 different courses. We have an 80-person orchestra. We have over 32 varsity sports teams. We have study-abroad in more than 10 different countries. You name it, we have it – because there are enough kids to fulfil those opportunities –

but at the same time, we're still small enough to be a supportive place.'

Possessing a half-billion dollar endowment, Choate has a \$16 million annual budget for needs-based financial aid; but, like many top-ranking US preps, it subsidises all students (supplementing annual full-boarding fees of \$70,000 by about 20 per cent). Thus, as elsewhere, the assiduously courted alumni association is key to fundraising; and generous benefactors are remembered in the buildings' names: from the Ann and George Colony Hall, whose world-standard auditorium can seat the entire school community, to the adjacent Paul Mellon Arts Center or the nearby Cameron and Edward Lanphier Center for Mathematics and Computer Science. Light and modern, this latter edifice has a central Lanphier café overlooking an expanse of water; and according to Dr Curtis, it makes 'maths cool and this the place to hang out'.

The overarching aim at Choate is to ensure it's 'home' to all its diverse student body. There's a purposeful sense of teenagers being allowed to be themselves, free from such petty restrictions as where they can take a drink. There's a relaxed approach to how students decorate and tidy their rooms and, adds Dr Curtis: 'We have a very relaxed dress code – which is representative of being comfortable on campus. We looked at a lot of studies and there wasn't one that said, "You learn better if you're wearing a tie."'

Summer school Yes
Postgraduate year Yes



Groton School was founded by Endicott Peabody, who was educated in the UK, at Cheltenham College

GROTON SCHOOL Groton, Massachusetts

As soon as you approach Groton, the Anglophile touches of founder Endicott Peabody are apparent. The neo-gothic St John's Chapel was designed by Henry Vaughan, and is eerily reminiscent of the founder's alma mater of Cheltenham College. And like its British counterparts, Groton has a 13+ entry and a five-year study programme (though most students enter at 14+). With only 378 students, it is a noticeably intimate community but its magnificent 480-acre campus still offers such facilities as the 1899 red-brick Schoolhouse – including a recent 45,000-square-foot STEM extension – and the McCormick Library, containing more than 200,000 print volumes and eBooks.

At Groton, 'small, bespoke and personal' are integral. Traditions dating back to 1884, such as nightly handshaking, are still embraced. Teachers and Sixth-formers line up

and shake hands with, or hug, juniors, to 'encourage connectivity'. But as the ebullient and charismatic head Temba Maqubela observes: 'This is a school in equilibrium, but in dynamic equilibrium. I love it because we really hold on to our traditions; but in order for us to remain relevant we have to be dynamic and change. The best example of our dynamism is them hiring a black man [himself, 12 years ago]. And suddenly, schools like Concord Academy and Andover think this can be done.'

Another example is the GRAIN initiative – Groton Affordability and Inclusion – which ensures the admissions department never turns away a suitable candidate for financial reasons. It has increased under-represented minorities by 50 per cent in the last eight years, with full-pay students being admitted at approximately the same rate as those on bursaries. What sets GRAIN apart is the focus on the 'talented

ST PAUL'S SCHOOL Concord, New Hampshire

It truly stretches the imagination: a 2,000-acre campus with three ponds, a stretch of the Turkey River and more than 25 miles of trails as well as a Nordic ski course. But such are the bucolic environs in which the 540 students of this Episcopal haven thrive. St Paul's School pupils are seriously bright and talented, with the school's leaders now bringing a myopic focus on compassion and inclusivity to their community, while the 100 per cent boarding policy ensures unity and equity.

That's further fostered, for example, by daily morning Chapel in a Henry Vaughan-designed, red-brick gothic masterpiece, when pupils take to the pulpit to lead prayers or share their thoughts. And very striking they are, too. Take the boy who referenced the wisdom of a *Dr Who* episode he had watched: 'Fear is a super-power. Fear can make you faster and cleverer and stronger. Fear doesn't have to make you cruel or cowardly. Fear can make you kind.' He followed with a witty talk, combining vulnerability and bravery, which caused every member of the congregation to leap to its feet with roaring applause.

St Paul's School is led by rector Kathy Giles, who – holding three Harvard degrees and having been a Division One hockey player – is a steadying and well-respected influence. 'I'm proud of the kids' stamina,' she says. 'Six days a week [of lessons] is quite a thing in the US. We have kids functioning at every elite level you can think of, from music to academics to athletics to ballet. And, you know, they just keep going. They learn early how to do hard things well.'

With average class-sizes of 10, the strong community ensures there's always support to help the children fulfil their ambitions; and key sports include ice hockey and 'crew' (which has notched up some notable past successes at Henley Royal Regatta). Then there's ballet,



*Students at
St Paul's School
(below) in the
2022 spring
dance show*



its most eminent dancers being invited to join the St Paul's School Ballet Company, a year-round programme of daily rehearsals and four annual performances.

Leadership and character development are integral to an SPS education. Hence the Sixth Form Officers, elected to be 'the link between student body and administration, working closely with rector Giles, the deans and other student leaders'. With one SFO – a future Harvard graduate – excitedly preparing for Eton College and its two-week Mayflower Exchange, learning is also at the heart of SPS. However, as dean of admissions Dana Anselmi explains, it's more

complex than that: 'There's this really self-selecting process,' she says. Although 'two-thirds of the applications we read are from straight-A students or the truly talented academically', St Paul's wants more than classroom gifts: 'We look really closely for kindness, involvement and some level of perseverance. We love when kids really push themselves.'

And when courses range from 'the science of mindfulness and meditative practice' to 'galactic astronomy', there's room for all sorts of intelligence here. ▷

Summer school Only for New Hampshire residents
Postgraduate year No



*Tori Cadogan meets
Groton School head
Temba Maqubela*

missing middle', as Mr Maqubela explains: 'Doctors, dentists and STEM professors don't get paid as much as some parents. They can't afford to pay this amount of money after taxes [annual boarding currently costs \$60,895] and still be able to save money for college. So tuition [fees were] frozen for three years.' And having a \$475 million endowment – that's \$1.24 million per student – its ability to do so is tangible, with one pupil proudly commenting, 'Groton has transitioned from elitist to elite.'

This close-knit school's magnificent buildings surround a Frederick Law Olmsted-designed grass 'circle', where in summer months students gather and play games. Inside, they relish average class sizes of 11 and a pupil-to-faculty ratio of 4:1. The admission rate of only nine per cent reflects the preciousness of a place here. Its small size means the 'Maqs', as the head and his wife Vuyelwa are fondly known, host year groups every Thursday night to play board games and enjoy milk and cookies. As Mr Maqubela explains, 'I know every kid. I know when they're tired, I know when they're sick, I know what kind of cookie they like. Small things like that go a long way.' At a boarding school, surely this level of pastoral care is priceless?

Summer school Only for Groton School students
Postgraduate year No

CONCORD ACADEMY Concord, Massachusetts

Based in the small town of Concord, Massachusetts – site of the War of Independence's first battle – this is the school Jackie Kennedy chose for her daughter Caroline. Previously all girls, it now welcomes students of all genders – and is an amazing learning environment. As is its head, Henry Fairfax, whose unusual greeting includes an apology for not wearing Jordans. (He is a former Division One basketball player.) Of his academy, he says: 'They're super-curious kids. So you form these incredible bonds between teachers, advisors, coaches, mentors and students, and that is a transformational experience.' And with a pupil-to-faculty ratio of 6:1 and few classes numbering more than 12, you can see why these bonds develop.

The style of the school buildings is clapperboard, a mix of ancient and modern; and the enormous dining hall has a mezzanine level where the kids hang out. They are free to go into town for lunch or even jump on a train to Boston, but why bother when the food is of such quality and variety? And while Chapel often begins the day, it's secular, student-led and permissive. Destination colleges range from Brown to Dartmouth, so it appears Concord's pledge to 'honour the individual' is paying dividends.

Summer school No, but hosts a summer camp

Postgraduate year No

Middlesex School students play baseball on 'the circle' in front of the Chapel

MIDDLESEX SCHOOL Concord, Massachusetts

Middlesex is centred around a circle designed by brothers Frederick Law Olmsted Jr and John Charles Olmsted. Overlooking the collection of buildings, housed in the white-colonnaded Eliot Hall, is the office of Bessie Speers, now on her third headship. On arrival, she says, she immediately felt at home: 'I was so impressed by the intellect and ambition for high-level learning, which was mingled with a great warmth and down-to-earth sense of not taking oneself too seriously.'

The trust that comes from having a 4:1 pupil-to-faculty ratio is impressive. As it would be with 26-acre Bateman's Pond on-site; and pupils proudly tell how they're allowed to swim there in spring and skate when it has frozen over. The pond also makes a serene vista for

the mindfulness curriculum, whose director gives every new student a 10-week course. Middlesex still honours a beautiful custom – begun by its first graduating class in 1904 – whereby every senior hand-carves a wooden tile, which is then displayed alongside their predecessors' efforts. (As a result, much of the school is panelled!) This tranquil and meditative tradition is reflective of the energy on campus. Even the busy and deliciously appointed dining hall has a sense of orderly calm. And thoughtful of teens' circadian rhythms, it serves breakfast until 10.30am every school day (brunch is served until 1pm on Sundays), with an array of choices that would make a five-star hotel quail. □

Summer school No
Postgraduate year No

SUMMER SCHOOLS & POSTGRAD YEARS

Luckily for pupils happily ensconced in their UK schools, it's possible to dip toes into the US prep system. One option is a residential summer course: Choate, for example, offers two- and five-week options for pupils aged 11 years up with a spread of opportunities, including academic enrichment and several signature programmes.

Alternatively, school-leavers can apply for a 'postgraduate' year when they have finished their A-levels. Originally designed for athletes needing extra time to secure sports scholarships, these are now an ideal way for British students to apply to US universities with the very best support and counselling services on hand (as well as an incredible array of courses, specialisms and sports to enrol in). For those not backpacking on their gap year, this parent-friendly option allows them to really enjoy their time in public-school Upper Sixth without trying to combine exams, playing for the 1st XV and being a prefect with the time-consuming American university application process.



Concord Academy, whose head is a former Division One basketball player, offers 15 varsity team sports

PHOTOGRAPHS: © 2018 PETER AARON/OTTO; ADAM RICHINS PHOTOGRAPHY; COURTESY OF PHILLIPS ACADEMY/NEIL EVANS; LIZA VOLL; ST PAULS SCHOOL; SUSANNA HOWE/TRUNK ARCHIVE

VINCENT SQUARE SW1

CITY OF WESTMINSTER

The mother wears jacket, £3,800, and skirt, £1,950, **DIOR**. Shoes, POA, **GINA**. Bag, £548, **VERONICA BEARD**. Watch, £429, **SEIKO**. Vintage earrings, £125, **SUSAN CAPLAN**. Vintage necklace and bracelet, to hire, **4ELEMENT**. Ring, £30, **GILLIAN HORSUP AT ALFIES ANTIQUES**. From left, Buddy wears blazer, £105, **AMAIA LONDON**. Shirt, £54, **RACHEL RILEY**. Shorts

(pack of 3), £10, and socks (pack of 7), £7, **MARKS & SPENCER**. Bag, £240, **CAMBRIDGE SATCHEL**. Otis wears blazer, £105, **AMAIA LONDON**. Shirt, £54, **RACHEL RILEY**. Shoes, £50, **HUSH PUPPIES**. Bag, £500, **DOLCE & GABBANA**. Shorts and socks, as above. Amelie wears coat, £195, dress, £58, and tights, £13, **AMAIA LONDON**. Shoes, £59, **LA COQUETA**. Hat, £46, **C'ERA UNA VOLTA**



BEST FOOT FORWARD

Take the runway to the school run and get top marks at drop-off and pick-up. Here come the first family of fashion

*Photographs by Luc Braquet
Styling by Lydie Harrison*



The mother wears coat, £4,610, **HERMÈS**. Boots, £750, **DEAR FRANCES**. Watch, as before. Vintage earrings, £55, bracelet, £78, and ring, £30, **GILLIAN HORSUP AT ALFIES ANTIQUES**. Buddy and Otis wear cricket gear from Westminster School and their own shoes.



The teacher wears gown, to hire, **THE COSTUME STUDIO**. Suit, £695, shirt, £185, waistcoat, £175, and tie, £49, **OLIVER BROWN**. Shoes, £875, **MANOLO BLAHNIK**. Cufflinks, stylist's own. The mother wears coat, £3,405, **MAX MARA**. Jacket, £2,770, and leggings, £435, **VERSACE**. Shoes, £520, **PARIS TEXAS**. Bag, £9,070, **HERMÈS**. Watch and jewellery, as on opening page



Teacher, as before.
The mother wears jacket,
£5,110, and shoes, £1,100,
GUCCI. Top, £605,
EMILIA WICKSTEAD.
Trousers, £840,
ERMANNO SCERVINO.
Bag, £895, **MALONE**
SOUILIERS. Vintage
earrings, necklace and
bracelet, to hire,
4ELEMENT. Rings (left),
middle finger, £3,750,
and ring finger, £7,000,
LYLIE JEWELLERY. Ring
(right), as before. Buddy
wears coat, £265,
DOLCE & GABBANA at
kidswearcollective.com.
Shirt, £54, and trousers,
£65, **RACHEL RILEY**.
Shoes, stylist's own. Amelie
wears jumper, £55,
RACHEL RILEY. Skirt,
£23, **JACADI** at
kidswearcollective.com.
Shoes, POA, **OKAA**. Tights,
£13, **AMAIA LONDON**.
Otis wears blazer, £105,
AMAIA LONDON. Shirt,
£54, and shorts, £55,
RACHEL RILEY. Shoes,
socks and bag, as before

The mother wears jacket,
POA, **TOMMY
HILFINGER**. Skirt, £180,
SELF PORTRAIT.
Boots, £1,740,
GIANVITO ROSSI.
Bag, £1,755,
ROBERTO CAVALLI.
Sunglasses, £210,
CARRERA. Vintage
earrings, £55, **GILLIAN
HORSUP AT ALFIES
ANTIQUES**. Watch
and other jewellery, as
before. Amelie wears
jacket from Westminster
School. Dress, £115,
**EMPORIO ARMANI
JUNIOR**. Shoes, £75,
NEW BALANCE at
schuh.com. Socks,
£14, **MARKS &
SPENCER**



The mother wears top, £620, and coat, £4,610, **HERMÈS**. Jeans, £356, **MOTHER**. Boots, £750, **DEAR FRANCES**. Belt, stylist's own. Watch, as before. Vintage earrings, £55, bracelet, £78, and ring, £30, **GILLIAN HORSUP AT ALFIES ANTIQUES**. Buddy and Otis wear cricket gear from Westminster School







The mother wears jacket, £880, and skirt, £550, **GIUSEPPE DI MORABITO**. Jumper and tights, stylist's own. Vintage earrings, £45, **SUSAN CAPLAN**.

Necklace, to hire, **4ELEMENT**. Ring, as before. Amelie wears cardigan, £109, **RACHEL RILEY**. Skirt, £53, **IL GUFO** at kidswearcollective.com.

Shoes, £58, **OSCAR DE LA RENTA** at kidswearcollective.com.

Tights, £13, **AMAIA LONDON**. Otis wears blazer, £320, **EMPORIO ARMANI JUNIOR**. Jumper, £22, **AMAIA LONDON**.

Shorts, £55, **RACHEL RILEY**. Shirt (pack of 3), £12, **MARKS & SPENCER**. Shoes and socks, as before

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is captured in motion, running across a vast, green grassy field. She is wearing a grey textured blazer over a black top, a wide tan skirt with a gold belt, and a gold necklace. Her hair is blowing in the wind, and she is looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a row of white and red brick houses with many windows, partially obscured by trees. The overall scene is bright and airy, with a soft focus on the background.

The mother wears
blazer, £2,790,
MICHAEL KORS
COLLECTION.
Jumper, £149, **GOBI**
CASHMERE. Skirt,
£570, **DAWEI**
STUDIO. Belt,
stylist's own. Jewellery,
as before





ADDRESS BOOK

4Element 4element.co.uk
Amia London
 amialondon.com
Cambridge Satchel
 cambridgesatchel.com
Carrera
 at sunglasshut.com
Casadei casadei.com
C'era Una Volta at kidding.fr
Dawei Studio
 daweistudio.com
Dear Frances
 dearfrances.com
Dior dior.com
Dolce & Gabbana
 dolcegabbana.com
Emilia Wickstead
 emiliawickstead.com
Emporio Armani Junior
 armani.com
Ermanno Scervino
 ermannoscervino.com
Gianvito Rossi
 gianvitorossi.com
Gillian Horsup
 at Alfies Antiques
 gillianhorsup.com
Gina gina.com
Giuseppe di Morabito
 giuseppedimorabito.com
Gobi Cashmere
 gobicashmere.com
Gucci gucci.com
Hermès hermes.com
Hush Puppies
 hushpuppies.co.uk
Il Gufo
 at kidswearcollective.com
La Coqueta
 lacoquetakids.com
Lylie Jewellery lylies.com
Malone Souliers
 malonesouliers.com
Manolo Blahnik
 manoloblahnik.com
Marks & Spencer
 marksandspencer.com
Max Mara maxmara.com
Michael Kors Collection
 michaelkors.co.uk
Minka minkajewels.com
Mipounet at kidding.fr
Mother motherdenim.com
Oliver Brown
 oliverbrown.org.uk
Paris Texas
 paristexasbrand.com
Prada prada.com
Rachel Riley rachelriley.co.uk
Roberto Cavalli
 robertocavalli.com
Schuh schuh.co.uk
Seiko seikoboutique.co.uk
Self Portrait
 self-portrait.com
Stella McCartney
 stellamccartney.com
Susan Caplan
 susan.caplan.co.uk
The Costume Studio
 costumestudio.co.uk
Tommy Hilfiger
 uktommy.com
Veronica Beard
 veronicabeard.com
Versace versace.com

The mother wears jacket, £6,100, **PRADA**. Jumper, £149, **GOBI CASHMERE**. Skirt, £1,670, **EMILIA WICKSTEAD**. Shoes, £685, **CASADEI**. Bag, £500, **DOLCE & GABBANA**. Coat (in hand), £195, **AMIA LONDON**. Vintage earrings, £40, necklace (lower), £88, and ring, £30, **GILLIAN HORSUP AT ALFIES ANTIQUES**. Vintage necklace, £325, **SUSAN CAPLAN**. Amelie wears jumper, £83, **MIPOUNET** at kidding.fr. Skirt, £375, **DOLCE & GABBANA**. Shoes, £59, **LA COQUETA**. Tights, £13, **AMIA LONDON**. Buddy wears jumper, £126, **STELLA MCCARTNEY**. Shirt, £12, **TOMMY**

HILFIGER and trousers, £36, **RALPH LAUREN** at kidswearcollective.com. Trainers, £23, **MARKS & SPENCER**. Bag, £240, **CAMBRIDGE SATCHEL**.
 Hair: Daniel Dyer. Make-up: Jesse Walker using By Terry. Grooming: Amy Sachon using NARS Cosmetics. Styling assistants: Susie Lethbridge and Cecylia Swietlik. Models: Madison Rhain at M+P Models; Amelie Twisleton, Buddy Allen and Otis Carr at Kids London. Photography assistant: Klaudija Avotina. Bookings editor: Laura Nicholson. Producer: Lottie Rand at One Production. With thanks to Westminster School



PREP

Brighton College Prep Kensington

London

BASSETT HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

60 Bassett Road W10 6JP

Website bassetths.org.uk

Head Chris Woodward Pupils

150 day: 80 boys, 70 girls Ages

3–11 Term Fees £7,980

From the smallest pupils in the Scandi-inspired nursery to the Year 6 leavers, 'amBASSETTors' are renowned for being 'courteous to a fault'. That's according to head Chris Woodward. He himself is called 'warm and approachable' by

one mother. Bassett House prides itself on its 'family feel'. Lunch is freshly prepared on-site and teachers eat alongside pupils. (Who can resist delicious chicken enchiladas?) While there are two therapy dogs, some children head to the local stables for riding, tacking-up and mucking-out. Arts and music are central to life here – 70 per cent of pupils play an instrument or take singing lessons – and the boys' barbershop-style singing group, The Bassettones, raises the roof.

BRIGHTON COLLEGE PREP KENSINGTON ●●

10–13 Prince's Gardens

SW7 1ND

Website brightoncollegeprep.kensington.co.uk

Head Lois Gaffney Pupils 283

day: 157 boys, 126 girls Ages 2–13

Term Fees £10,294

This is the jackpot, as far as central London locations go, and Brighton College Prep has hit it: moments from South Kensington's museum hub, it doesn't just benefit from proximity to cultural and scientific gems; it also has what the head of its PTA calls a 'priceless' two acres of gardens, as well as an early-years playground onto which the reception classroom's vast ceiling-height

windows open directly. Nearby, Imperial College provides a four-lane pool and enormous gym; and the Royal College of Music, visiting instrumental teachers of the highest calibre. Oh, and Hyde Park is a two-minute walk away for lunchtime football and after-school netball. Understandably, numbers at this thriving prep are booming under the kind leadership of head Lois Gaffney and her stellar team, who ensure the academics are top-notch. No wonder there are up to five applications per place here. This new prep's first 13+ leavers will depart in 2025, and while they do not have an automatic place at Brighton College, the curriculum and ethos match well.

BROOMWOOD ●●

68–74 Nightingale Lane
SW12 3TE

Website broomwood.com

Heads Michael Hodge (principal and boys), Louisa McCafferty (girls), Caron Mackay (pre-prep)

Pupils 629 day: 309 boys, 320 girls
Ages 3–13 *Term Fees* £8,680

More than 40 scholarships were won by leavers last year. And here, in Wandsworth's 'Nappy Valley', the great metropolis inspires the learning. A recent re-enactment of the Great Fire of London saw artists create the buildings in the playground and scientists monitor the flames' spread. Previously three separate schools, now amalgamated, Broomwood offers co-ed until Year 2, then single-sex until Year 8. However, pupils join together for sports, clubs – including karate, golf and shooting – and drama, which has delivered stand-out performances of *Oliver!* and outdoor Shakespeare. Seasonally sourced lunches are cooked on-site – the beetroot brownies are a favourite.

BUTE HOUSE ●

Luxemburg Gardens W6 7EA

Website butehouse.co.uk

Head Sian Bradshaw *Pupils* 324 day girls *Ages* 4–11 *Term Fees* £7,998

'One would be hard-pressed to think of ways to improve Bute House, which achieves its goals without sacrificing the deeply entrenched nurturing and warm environment in which everyone thrives,' says a recent visitor. Guided by the motto 'Each girl runs her own best race', it neither ranks its pupils nor streams its classes. And despite its non-competitive approach, leavers depart for such decidedly academic destinations as St Paul's Girls' School, Wycombe Abbey and Godolphin & Latymer. Enhancing both atmosphere and ethos, there's a sibling-priority policy here; and coming soon is a wellbeing hub, featuring a therapy room and reflection terrace. The children can throw themselves into myriad activities, including gymnastics, musical theatre and football; and Year 6 enjoy ski trips to France.



Dulwich Prep London

CONNAUGHT HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

47 Connaught Square W2 2HL

Website connaughthouseschool.co.uk

Head Victoria Hampton

Pupils 76 day: 33 boys, 43 girls

Ages 4–11 *Term Fees* £7,410

Head teacher Victoria Hampton – who's 'incredible', according to our researcher – can be found at the school gates every morning, greeting her charges as they arrive at Connaught's townhouse, tucked just behind Marble Arch. (Its small size means there's no chance of your child getting lost in the crowd.) The teachers here are all described as

'outstanding', showing a commitment to each pupil's development and wellbeing; pastoral care is remarkably strong; and a 'calm, quiet and peaceful' vibe is aided by a 'constant emphasis on the children having respect for each other, good manners and being inclusive'. Indeed, the school says last year it was most proud of its 'work within the local and national community'. Strong friendships are built here and last well beyond prep life, more often than not at such top London destinations as St Paul's Girls', Wetherby Senior and Dulwich College.

DULWICH PREP LONDON ●●

38–42 Alleyn Park SE21 7AA

Website dulwichpreplondon.org

Head Louise Davidson

Pupils 813 day and boarding:

798 boys, 15 girls *Ages* 2–13

Term Fees £8,185

All you need is love at Dulwich Prep, and the school says its boys 'are unafraid of talking about it, in all its forms, at any age'. By way of illustration, a recent ball raised £50,000 for a local hospital; and children from more than 35 different nationalities happily mix here. What's more, they can let off steam in 29 acres of grounds – amazing for a London day prep – of which 25 are given over to sports fields. Off the pitch, DT workshops boast 3D printers; 90 per cent of pupils play an instrument; and, says the school, 'some of our best rugby players can be found making their way excitedly to cookery club'. Currently, 40 per cent of leavers head to nearby Dulwich College after Year 8, but it was recently announced that Dulwich Prep will be opening its own senior school from September 2025, extending its age range from two to 16.



Broomwood

**EATON HOUSE THE
MANOR SCHOOL ●●**

58 Clapham Common North
Side SW4 9RU

Website eatonhouseschools.com

Head Sarah Segrave (boys), Claire Fildes (girls) Pupils 644 day: 427 boys, 217 girls Ages 4–13 (boys), 4–11 (girls) Term Fees £8,760 (boys), £8,525 (girls)

Parents who value the benefits of a single-sex education are flocking here. (Boys and girls are educated on the same site, sharing various facilities, specialist subject teachers and activities.) And one says they're delighted with the improvements they've seen in their daughter's confidence: 'Girls are simply made to stand up in front of their peers from the very earliest age [...] everyone is involved, and that's that.' Sarah Segrave – who's called 'nothing short of extraordinary' – and the 'dynamic' and 'exceptionally competent' Claire Fildes are the heads here, but the entire teaching body is fantastic; we're told that 'each has brought a different sparkle' to their pupils' lives.

**EATON SQUARE
SCHOOL ●●**

55–57 Eccleston Square
SW1V 1PH

Website eatonsquareschools.com

Head Trish Watt Pupils 260 day: 133 boys, 127 girls Ages 2–11 Term Fees £9,465

Prospective parents are delighted when visiting Eaton Square School, and their interactions with its children often convince them this is the right place for their own. The pupils have a 'polite and welcoming demeanour', we're informed, and are 'happy, confident, and able to pursue their interests and passions' alongside traditional academic subjects. And there's constant improvement. Last year saw the openings of STEAM centre The Launch Pad and new nursery The Nest (whose charges are given priority admission to the prep). And sparky leavers bound on to such top London schools as Francis Holland, Dulwich College and, of course, Eaton Square Senior.


L'ÉCOLE DE BATTERSEA ●●

Trott Street SW11 3DS

Website lecoledebattersea.co.uk

Head Laurent Balerdi Principal Frédérique Brisset Pupils 242 day: 128 boys, 114 girls Ages 3–11 Term Fees £5,625

A parent calls L'École de Battersea, which is full of joyful children flitting effortlessly between the French and English tongues, 'as diverse as it gets'. However, they say, for all the open-minded internationalism, it still exudes a warm and nurturing atmosphere, and practises a culture which 'centres on the overall well-being of pupils'. And as for head Laurent Balerdi – 'one of the best educators [they've met]' – their description is echoed by one of his charges ('The best!'). With 2024 marking the 120th anniversary of the Entente Cordiale, which cemented the enduring friendship between France and Britain, it's been a busy year. But this hasn't impeded academic excellence: as ever, a number of pupils move on to Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle, while popular schools in the English system include St Paul's and Francis Holland.

FAIRLEY HOUSE ●●

218–220 Lambeth Road
SE1 7JY

Website fairleyhouse.org.uk

Head Michael Taylor Pupils 212 day: 134 boys, 78 girls Ages 6–16 Term Fees £12,910

There's no better place in London for youngsters with dyslexia, dyscalculia and/or dyspraxia; hence, our researcher heard 'time and time again from once-desperate parents that it had saved their struggling children and transformed lives'. Families have emigrated from as far as the US and Australia to take places here; and thanks to the small class sizes, warm environment and specialised support, pupils soon find themselves thriving. Having Michael Taylor, himself a dyslexic, at the helm is important – 'He understands what the children are going through,' parents explain – and the boost to their offspring's confidence is notable. One youngster was delighted to tell us they'd gone 'from bottom set to top set' after coming to Fairley House; and with frequent prize-giving ceremonies, there are plenty more winners – besides, everyone is a winner here.

FALKNER HOUSE ●●

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

Website falknerhouse.co.uk

Head Eleanor Dixon (boys), Flavia Rogers (girls) Pupils 354 day: 172 boys, 182 girls Ages 4–11 Term Fees Boys: £8,246; girls: £8,110

Family-run Falkner House, which has separate sites for boys and girls, believes that its charges can have it all: a proper childhood and a prime education. Thus, a delectable mess is made at cooking club; street dance is over-subscribed; and the mixed-sex musical was a smash hit. Technology is woven through classroom learning, and a particular point of pride is the virtual art galleries, which showcase a range of pupils' creations, from Giacometti-inspired sculpture to Dalí-style surrealism. iPads are in common use, one parent tells us; but the children still scribble away with Apple pens, so traditional handwriting hasn't fallen by the wayside. Best of all, homework is minimal – and the school devotes considerable time to help Year 6 leavers feel happy about their next schools.

FULHAM PREP SCHOOL ●●
200 Greyhound Road W14 9SD
Website fulham.school
Head Thomas Lewis **Pupils** 590
day: 371 boys, 219 girls **Ages** 3–13
Term Fees £7,817

Founded in 1996, the original prep has now expanded into a local hub for all-through education. However, the school has prospered in the transition, retaining its character while embracing the future. (It's one of five schools trialling a form of AI-assisted learning.) What's more, parents are confident new head Tom Lewis is a safe pair of hands for the legacy left by the esteemed Neill Lunn. Kindness is central to Fulham Prep's ethos, as is personal attention. Year 3 children are taught wholly in forms; but thereafter, all pupils begin and end their days with their class tutors. While sport and music are strong, the purpose-built library – featuring a model tree representing knowledge – gets a big tick. And though there are always vegetarian options for lunch, the traditional Fishy Friday is still a mainstay – by order of the pupils' School Council. 'For years my children have run into school and never looked back. That's all I could hope for,' says one mother.

Virtual art galleries showcase pupils' work – from Giacometti-inspired sculpture to Dalí-style surrealism – at Falkner House

GARDEN HOUSE SCHOOL ●●
Turks Row SW3 4TW
Website gardenhouseschool.co.uk
Head Dan Jameson (boys), Emma Studd (girls) **Pupils** 486
day: 202 boys, 284 girls
Ages 3–11 **Term Fees** £9,200

One mother says this Chelsea institution 'plants a huge amount of confidence in all the children'. Another, whose daughter has come to the end of her time there, adds: 'Our biggest concern is finding somewhere that'll live up to the standard we've come to expect from GHS.' The 74-year-old school is family-owned and has some deep local ties (particularly with the Royal Hospital's pensioners). There are three applications for every admission, and one teacher for every three pupils. And while the school excels in every area, its youngsters are fond of two of its annual events in particular: the Gardiversity Challenge quiz and the ebullient House Shout musical competition.

GLENDOWER PREP SCHOOL ●
86–87 Queen's Gate SW7 5JX
Website glendowerprep.org
Head Claire Boyd **Pupils** 290 **day girls** **Ages** 3–11 **Term Fees** £8,600
 'A dynamic, purposeful learning environment,' says our researcher. 'Stylish, too,' she says, commending everything from the presentation of food to the grey-and-purple uniforms. And talk about modern: the immersive Hawk-Eye room permits virtual travel through time and space – from the rainforest to the ancient Colosseum – by means of 270° projection screens. Though this is a delightfully small school, Glendower puts mighty efforts into outreach and inclusivity – it aims to increase full bursaries from three to 14 by September 2029 – and mental wellbeing is nurtured in myriad ways. However, so is fun: ask Year 3 about the Silent Movies project, with its Starry Nights premiere; and several children give honourable mention to the jokes cracked by maths head Miss Broughton.

THE HALL SCHOOL ●
23 Crossfield Road NW3 4NU
Website hallschool.co.uk
Head Carl Rycroft
Pupils 460 **day boys** **Ages** 4–13
Term Fees £8,642

The whole community here was sad to see the departure of head Chris Godwin, who retired at the end of the last academic year. His 'vision to educate kind, considerate and curious boys', as one parent puts it, had been consistently praised over his 11-year tenure. So what next for this north London day school, which welcomes some of the capital's brightest and has a three-to-one application-to-place ratio? (After an hour's assessment during a group 'play date', around 50 are selected for reception every year.) Well, Carl Rycroft – who joins after nine years as head of Buckinghamshire prep Davenies School – will no doubt be inspired to reach for the stars by the school's motto of *hinc in altiora*, or 'from here to higher things'.

HORNSBY HOUSE SCHOOL ●●
Hearnville Road SW12 8RS
Website hornsbyhouse.org.uk
Head Edward Rees **Pupils** 440
day: 225 boys, 215 girls **Ages** 4–11
Term Fees £6,935

'HHS' by abbreviation and by ethos – non-selective Hornsby's core values are called 'head, heart and spirit' by charming head Edward Rees. Founded in 1988 as a tiny school paying special attention to dyslexia, it has expanded. Why? It has 'outstanding 11-plus results', says Rees. Furthermore, adds one parent, 'There's a real community feel, with many interactions between children in different years.' And since 80 per cent live within walking distance, those interactions often continue beyond the school gates. There's a wealth of clubs from taekwondo to Minecraft. Music, too, is among Hornsby's many strengths – two lessons per pupil per week – and performance is embraced by the staff: 'The teachers' pantomime was the funniest thing,' recalls one pupil.



Garden House School

PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL WILSON



KENSINGTON PREP SCHOOL ●●

596 Fulham Road SW6 5PA

Website kensingtonprep.gdst.net

Head Caroline Hulme-McKibbin

Pupils 295 day girls Ages 4–11

Term Fees £7,476

This prep feeds to top senior schools, bagging 30 scholarships and awards in 2023. But this 'is not a hothouse', says one mother, citing how the girls actually skip their way between classes. The latter are often held in the generous grounds that KPS has occupied since moving to Fulham from Kensington in 1997, and they in turn account for its prowess in sports, particularly in netball. Head Caroline Hulme-McKibbin wants the best for every pupil (and, says one, for 'magic manners' from them). They are given superb facilities – check out the hi-tech Explore Floor – and can even opt to be guided through writing a 2,000-word specialist dissertation, post 11-plus. But who would want to leave, when the next Holly Jolly Day might feature a surprise herd of alpacas, organised by the Parents' Association?

KNIGHTSBRIDGE SCHOOL ●●

67 Pont Street SW1X 0BD

Website knightsbridgeschool.com

Head Shona Colaço Pupils 399

day: 207 boys, 192 girls Ages 3–16

Term Fees £9,080

The passion of dynamic head Shona Colaço shines through here. Parents are thrilled that she 'tackles problems head on', and say she is 'very visible, attending all events for all age groups'. Knightsbridge approaches learning by nurturing children's curiosity and sense of fun and – whether at assembly or on the sports field – gives every pupil a chance to shine. We're also told that 'it's rare to see such confidence, even in the younger ones'; that the 'warm and inclusive' parent community is 'a huge plus'; and that pastoral care is 'excellent'. Founder, principal and perennial favourite Magoo Giles is described as 'the heart and soul of the school' and is held in high esteem by anyone who deals with him: one parent was 'blown away' by their first meeting, and cites Giles as the reason why so many choose this establishment.

NEWTON PREP SCHOOL ●●

149 Battersea Park Road

SW8 4BX

Website newtonprepschool.co.uk

Head Alison Fleming Pupils 655

day: 351 boys, 304 girls Ages 4–13

Term Fees £8,575

Newton is a modern, diverse prep bursting with energy and full of confident and engaged students who seize every opportunity. While sensational on-site facilities include a vast all-weather pitch and three sports halls, one member of staff remarks that the children are 'aware of their privilege but not entitled'. Recently, a Year 4 pupil asked head Alison Fleming if they could organise a book-swap with a nearby state primary – and it happened. 'You don't choose a school for the headteacher,' one parent says: 'But if you did, you'd choose Alison.' They call her 'absolutely outstanding' and cite her desire that her charges are 'excited about coming to school [and] enthusiastic about everything they do'. And our researcher confirmed this is certainly the case.

NORLAND PLACE SCHOOL ●●

162–166 Holland Park Avenue

W11 4UH

Website norlandplace.com

Head Patrick Mattar Pupils 224

day: 88 boys, 136 girls Ages 4–11

Term Fees £7,582

When a recent visitor toured Norland, they reported that 'the atmosphere was relaxed and the pupils confident', and praised its 'lovely local, community feel'. Perhaps the latter derives from most of its families living within 'scooting distance' – according to Norland – though new mini-bus services from Chiswick and Parsons Green will likely lure fans from further afield. Equally, it could be down to the diversity and individuality championed by the school: almost one in three of its pupils are bilingual or trilingual; classical music sits alongside rock, pop and rap; and yoga and mindfulness are ever-popular. The introduction of a breakfast club and after-hours programme will have working parents rejoicing. Leavers move on to the Francis Hollands, Queen's College and Putney High.

NOTTING HILL PREP SCHOOL ●●

95 Lancaster Road W11 1QQ

Website nottinghillprep.com

Head Maxine Shaw Pupils 446

day: 206 boys, 240 girls Ages 4–13

Term Fees £8,784

Non-selective at reception, Notting Hill Prep is situated on three leafy sites just off Ladbroke Grove. One parent says that 'fun is genuinely part of NHP life'. With such traditions as Bonkers and Dressing Up Days – as well as a number of activities and societies to keep curious young minds stimulated – who could disagree? Despite it being in the centre of London, there's a forest school with its own woodland area, as well as a chicken coop and beehive. Outgoing head Sarah Knollys has 'built a strong and skilled senior management team around her', so her successor Maxine Shaw should be able to hit the ground running.

ORCHARD HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

16 Newton Grove W4 1LB

Website orchardhs.org.uk

Head Henrietta Adams **Pupils**

305 day: 145 boys, 160 girls

Ages 3–11 **Term Fees** £7,867

'Exceptional': that's what a parent calls the pastoral care at Orchard House, where a love of learning is established from a young age. The children, they continue, 'don't realise they're working hard because they enjoy it so much'. This 'kind, caring environment' will persist when the school completes its merger with Chiswick & Bedford Park Preparatory School. (From September, the expanded institution will come under the leadership of Henrietta Adams, already head at the aforementioned conjoined preps.) These sporty children saw national success in netball and football, and three pupils received sports scholarships to their secondary schools of choice. Meanwhile, the new STEAM centre is receiving rave reviews; and a reimaged curriculum, kicking off this year, should breathe even more life into lessons. Exciting times ahead.

PARKGATE HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

80 Clapham Common North

Side SW4 9SD

Website parkgate-school.co.uk

Head Malcolm McKinlay

Pupils 150 day: 76 boys, 74 girls

Ages 2½–11 **Term Fees** £6,753

Just off the north edge of Clapham Common, Parkgate House quietly turns out 'incredibly happy and articulate' pupils who are 'renowned for treating each other well across different year groups'. So say parents, who describe the youngsters as 'being kind at school as well as in the real world'. Meanwhile, the watchful eye of head Malcolm McKinlay doesn't miss a trick. During the pandemic, he noticed that his charges' confidence when presenting in assembly had been hampered, so he has put a big focus on this in recent years. One current parent praises Parkgate's small size, and calls the individual support received by its children 'extraordinary'. The majority head on to London day schools, with a healthy dose of scholarships to a range of destinations, including JAGS and Dulwich College.

PEMBRIDGE HALL SCHOOL ●

18 Pembridge Square W2 4EH

Website pembridgehall.co.uk

Head Sophie Banks **Pupils** 460 day

girls Ages 4–11 **Term Fees** £9,175

'She is amazing,' declares one parent of head Sophie Banks – who has been in situ since 2022 – and goes on to call her 'progressive, energetic, dynamic and independent'. Pembridge Hall isn't afraid to look ahead, and Banks's pupils are not only encouraged to reach for the stars, but equipped with the tools to get there. Thus, the new addition to the curriculum of Thinking, Enterprise & Design will address the skills required for the future workplace; and every year the timetable is relaxed for a week, when the girls undertake an entrepreneurial project linked to UN Sustainability Goals. The netball squads see fierce competition, but the girls don't shy away from the stage either. Leavers with a love of learning head on to a mix of boarding and day schools, with last year's destinations including the Francis Hollands, Downe House and Wycombe Abbey.

PROSPECT HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

75 Putney Hill SW15 3NT

Website prospecths.org.uk

Head Kelly Gray **Pupils** 290 day:

157 boys, 133 girls Ages 3–11

Term Fees £7,895

There are moments in this school's day when everyone – children and staff – have to stop whatever they're doing, pick up a book and read for five minutes; just for 300 seconds of downtime, which are understandably needed when there's so much going on. To name a selection: a thriving outdoor learning programme, which takes place on Putney Heath; such annual theatrical productions as 2023's smash hit *Matilda the Musical*; the hugely popular DIY club; and last year's inaugural ski trip, which proved a roaring success. That's not to say results aren't important here, and the most recent cohort of leavers departed with 21 scholarships, of which 13 were academic. Outgoing head Michael Hodge will be much missed, but his successor, Kelly Gray, who arrives from Bassett House School, will be taking on a well-oiled machine.



Pembridge Hall School

RAVENS COURT PARK PREP SCHOOL ●●

16 Ravenscourt Avenue W6 0SL

Website rpps.co.uk

Head Carl Howes Pupils 415

day: 205 boys, 210 girls Ages 4–11

Term Fees £7,380

This is a school where youngsters are encouraged to challenge themselves and to develop a positive approach to learning in classrooms, where mistakes aren't frowned on. Sport is very much for all: there are co-ed rugby and netball teams, and 2023's football and netball tour of Jersey is still being talked about. A current parent tells us the pastoral care is 'excellent', with approachable teaching staff who foster an inclusive educational environment 'while simultaneously building resilience within the children'. And Ravenscourt delivers on leavers' destinations: last year, they won 28 scholarships between them.

ST CHRISTOPHER'S SCHOOL ●

32 Belsize Lane NW3 5AE

Website stchristophers.london

Acting head Mark Maddocks

Pupils 265 day girls Ages 4–11

Term Fees £6,950

'Girls are kind at St Christopher's,' says one parent with two children here. 'I've never heard of anyone being bullied or teased, and my autistic daughter's classmates understand and celebrate her difference.' A nurturing atmosphere is evident across the board at this north London prep, with art therapy, emotional literacy support, a forest school element and the newly introduced Solutions Studio – which aims to solve problems through counselling and wellbeing workshops. Parents take over teaching one day a year: 'a lovely event', says a mother. There are around 220 applications for 40 reception places every year, but be warned: the school prefers those with 'potential' to those who are 'prepped'. On the sad news front, St Christopher's is bidding a fond farewell to head Sandrine Paillasse, with her deputy Mark Maddocks stepping up until a permanent replacement is found.

St James Prep School



ST JAMES PREP SCHOOL ●●

Earsby Street W14 8SH

Website stjamesprep.co.uk

Head Hilary Wyatt Pupils 186

day: 79 boys, 107 girls Ages 2–11

Term Fees £7,325

The start and end of every lesson at St James is marked by The Pause, a quiet moment of reflection that aims to connect the children with a stillness that is hard to capture in our hectic world. Meanwhile, Fridays – or Feel Good Fridays, as they are known – have timetabled

activities based around themes like Calm and Unity. Mindfulness and philosophy are woven through many aspects of life here; and the curriculum boasts activities as wide-ranging as cookery, forest school, silk printing and, impressively, Sanskrit. 'The annual Shakespeare Festival and the Sanskrit Speech Competition are always highlights,' reveals one parent, who clearly believes this prep's unique approach works. St James, they say, 'turns out confident, happy, well-balanced and friendly tweens'.



Ravenscourt Park Prep School

ST PAUL'S JUNIORS ●

Lonsdale Road SW13 9JT

Website stpaulsschool.org.uk

Head Oliver Snowball

Pupils 506 day boys Ages 7–13

Term Fees £8,306

The outstanding reputation of St Paul's Juniors is more than deserved and parents are impressed by the combination of strong academic performance and a 'vast provision of extracurricular facilities'. But, according to one visitor, it's not just about being highly intelligent at this school; pupils 'really need to love learning'. As for the site, yes, it's idyllic – by the Thames in Barnes, with heaps of space – but it's the people who really make SPJ. The children are 'curious, hard-working, engaging and friendly', says one mother, while the staff are remarkably professional, involved and excited to be here. Every lunchtime, the youngsters have 100 minutes to enjoy one of 80 clubs and societies; and the superb amenities mean sport is unsurprisingly strong. It's generally expected that leavers will move up to the senior school, and a number sail on to this next stage with scholarships under their belts.

ST PHILIP'S SCHOOL ●**6 Wetherby Place SW7 4NE***Website* stpschool.co.uk*Head* Alexander Thomas*Pupils* 70 day boys *Ages* 4–13*Term Fees* £7,825

Though situated in well-heeled South Ken, 'absolutely charming' St Philip's is routinely described as 'down-to-earth' by visitors – with one reporting the boys are 'amazingly polite and engaged'. Pupils are not without wide horizons, though: one trip took boys to Rome, Pompeii and Herculaneum. Nor lacking in arcane knowledge: the youngsters enjoy a game involving a ping-pong ball whose rules seem beyond adults but both clear and dear to players. At the bottom of the school, September 2024 welcomes an inaugural reception class; at the top, half the leavers head to such boarding schools as Harrow and Tonbridge, while the remainder become day pupils at the likes of Westminster. And not a term passes without an old boy dropping in on his alma mater to say hello.

SUSSEX HOUSE SCHOOL ●**68 Cadogan Square****SW1X 0EA***Website* sussexbouseschool.co.uk*Head* Nicholas Kaye*Pupils* 185 day boys *Ages* 8–13*Term Fees* £9,250

Arriving at this buzzy boys' prep, visitors are ushered in by much-loved and respected school marshal Sergeant Khim, a former Gurkha, while its happy pupils – renowned for a broad spectrum of interests – skip through into the Victorian building. They 'love to learn', say parents (though one is keen to point out there is emphasis not only on academics but on music, art, sport and more, from debating and theatre productions to fencing and chess). Head Nicholas Kaye is revered by all, and boys look forward to being taught by him and inspired by his lessons. They then put all they've learned to good use at top destinations; in any one year, 70-plus per cent go on to St Paul's, King's College School Wimbledon, Winchester and Westminster.

*St Philip's School***THOMAS'S BATTERSEA ●●****28–40 Battersea High Street****SW11 3JB***Website* thomas-s.co.uk*Head* Rupert Hawkins *Pupils* 590*day:* 320 boys, 270 girls *Ages* 4–13*Term Fees* £9,281

One parent describes a feeling of 'omnipresent happiness' at this school, where in September former senior deputy Rupert Hawkins succeeds Ben Thomas (now principal of the group) as head. Kindness is king here, with pupil ambassadors for equity, diversity and inclusion. Elsewhere, they present their own podcasts and a cricket and netball tour of Barbados is in the pipeline. Calm and confident youngsters currently go on to such excellent secondaries as Wellington and Alleyn's, but they will soon have their very own senior destination. Thomas's College in Richmond will open in the autumn of 2025; extending the educational provision up to the age of 18, this will replace Thomas's Putney Vale, which has only taken pupils as far as GCSEs.

THOMAS'S CLAPHAM ●●**Broomwood Road SW11 6JZ***Website* thomas-s.co.uk*Head* Nathan Boller *Pupils* 655*day:* 338 boys, 317 girls *Ages* 4–13*Term Fees* £8,675

'There's a strong work-hard, play-hard attitude, but at the same time it's a very warm and nurturing school,' says one parent. 'If you get the opportunity to send your kids here, do it!' Get in early, though: there are three applicants for every place, Thomas's Clapham believing its allure stems from its contemporary yet intellectually demanding curriculum. There's a focus on connecting with nature: a collaboration with the Eden Project is kicking off, and the 30th year of the school will see the donation of 30 mature trees to the Friends of Clapham Common. Plus, children are rewarded with much-coveted golden unicorn stickers. All this is overseen by a head who is widely popular. 'Mr Boller is very good,' says one pupil. 'He has lots of new ideas and is very active in the school, which is nice.'

THOMAS'S FULHAM ●●**49 Hugon Road SW6 3ES***Website* thomas-s.co.uk*Head* Annette Dobson *Pupils* 439*day:* 228 boys, 211 girls *Ages* 4–11*Term Fees* £8,896

Parents here love how their children can run around the neighbouring South Park, have plenty of outdoor learning on Wimbledon Common and join in activities during the holidays. (Think camping, sailing, even skiing.) 'It's the closest thing I could find to a country school in Fulham,' confides one. 'And to me, this is far more important than pure academics.' The result? 'They come out as confident, kind and well-rounded children.' Drama is seen as a real strength at Thomas's Fulham: a couple of years ago, Year 6 made a film – and held a premiere – of *Great Expectations*; and dancers get to perform at the likes of Cadogan Hall. More than 70 per cent learn instruments and participate in a number of concerts. Sport is for all, and pupils compete in national and IAPS competitions.

THOMAS'S KENSINGTON ●●**17–19 Cottesmore Gardens****W8 5PR***Website* thomas-s.co.uk*Head* Kelly Miller *Pupils* 347 *day:**166 boys, 181 girls* *Ages* 4–11*Term Fees* £9,682

With a sibling priority policy, the majority of pupils living within a 15-minute walk, and a Yale Ruler approach to monitoring and regulating emotions, it's no wonder the pupils at Thomas's Kensington are so grounded. The nurturing pays off academically, with leavers moving on to St Paul's, City of London and Francis Holland SW1. The family feel will be further consolidated when the lower and prep schools move together under one roof at a new site on St Alban's Grove in September 2025. More and more girls here are playing football; 37 different nationalities are represented; and neurodiversity is truly celebrated. Music is also strong, with children participating in Young Voices at The O2.

TOWER HOUSE ●**188 Sheen Lane SW14 8LF****Website** thsboys.org.uk**Head** Neill Lunnon **Pupils** 180**day boys** **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** £6,350

New head Neill Lunnon believes there's a special magic within the walls of Tower House. Perhaps this stems from its close proximity to Richmond Park or the author-in-residence, who helps boys develop their love of storytelling. Or maybe it comes from the regular parents' drop-in coffee mornings; or the building works, which will see the unveiling of four new classrooms and a multi-purpose hall. Drama is big here – alumni include Tom Hardy and Robert Pattinson – so the children are given plenty of chances to tread the boards and even appear on film. In fact, one boy is so passionate about performing that he suggested to us that it might be worth trading in dreaded double maths for drama!

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR SCHOOL ●**Ambrosden Avenue SW1P 1QH****Website** choirschool.com**Head** Neil McLaughlan **Pupils****285 day and boarding boys** **Ages****4–13** **Term Fees** **Day:** £8,180;**boarding (choristers only):** £3,777

Applications are on the rise at this Catholic boys' prep, founded in 1902 to educate the choristers who sung the daily liturgy at the newly built Westminster Cathedral. And music remains part of the school's fabric; 70 per cent of the boys play two instruments, and the choristers performed at Cologne and Bonn cathedrals last year. But it's not all clefs and quavers: in 2023, the Year 8s were unbeaten in both football and rugby, and the crater in the playground left by a Second World War bomb is used as a vegetable garden. Head Neil McLaughlan describes his ideal pupils as 'diligent, interested and modest'; and these traits in them are recognised by such top-notch destinations as Westminster, Eton and Harrow, to which a healthy number of leavers win music scholarships.

*Westminster Cathedral Choir School***WESTMINSTER UNDER SCHOOL ●****27 Vincent Square SW1P 2NN****Website** westminsterunder.org.uk**Head** Kate Jefferson**Pupils** 286 **day boys** **Ages** 7–13**Term Fees** £8,841

Boys who flourish here are 'intellectually curious' and 'question what they see', says the school. The day starts at 8am sharp, and the timetable is packed, thanks to a busy curriculum and a vast array of extracurriculars and sports. 'My son is bubbling at the end of the day with new facts and discoveries,' says a current parent. The small size means nobody gets left behind; the children find like-minded friends for life; and parents love the 'constant dialogue' with staff. 'Dynamic and bright' head Kate Jefferson says she wants to 'make a Westminster education available to as many children as possible'. 2026 will see the school turn co-ed – welcoming girls as well as boys from the age of four – an exciting expansion next door and an increase in bursaries.

WETHERBY PREPARATORY SCHOOL ●**Bryanston Square W1H 2EA****Website** wetherbyprep.co.uk**Head** Nina Kingsmill Moore**Pupils** 380 **day boys** **Ages** 7–13**Term Fees** £9,505

Selective Wetherby has made excellent use of the space at its inner-city Marylebone site (so its peerless sports facilities are a coach journey away in Acton). Mark White, who joined as head in September 2022, handed over to Nina Kingsmill Moore at the start of the 2024/25 year, with parents assured the school is in excellent hands and that he 'has made a significant impact, while retaining its core values'. And these values remain at the forefront of everything this unashamedly pragmatic boys' prep does; keeping its pupils grounded and humble. Every week, the teachers at Wetherby Prep give a Citizen of the Week award and present a Kindness Cup, illustrating the quality that is most important here. □

LITTLE SIBLINGS**Publics with preps:**
see page 12

Alley'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 ●●

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 ●



PREP

Brambletye

South East

ALDRO ●●

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

Head Chris Carlier **Pupils** 232
day and boarding: 159 boys, 73 girls **Ages** 7–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,384; boarding: £11,400

A recent visitor described Aldro as 'a lovely, special little school, with so much for the boys and girls to do'. Within its 30 acres on the edge of a charming Surrey village just an hour's drive from London, childhood is sacred: den-making, fishing and cooking are all on offer; and no activities are uncool,

with even the oldest pupils hunting for conkers come autumn. Overseen by head Chris Carlier and his wife Nicky – who are described as 'the benevolent parents at the head of this happy family' – Aldro is the biggest it's ever been, and girls now make up 31 per cent of the pupil body. (The school went co-ed in 2021.) Day pupils can come for breakfast and join in early morning gym and swimming. Last year, leavers won scholarships to Wycombe Abbey, Charterhouse and Radley, and Old Aldronians are known for their maturity and self-confidence.

For Cumnor House leavers, Race the Sun is a rite of passage as they navigate the South Downs with a map and a Mars bar

BRAMBLETYE ●●

Lewes Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3PD
Website brambletye.co.uk

Head William Brooks **Pupils** 325
day and boarding: 164 boys, 161 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,690; boarding: £10,950

'Will Brooks is a fantastic head and we have nothing but positive remarks,' says one smitten parent. 'Very nice and also funny,' chimes in one pupil; 'humorous', concludes another concisely. The popular leader certainly presides over a happy school imbued with a sense of fun for pupils (and for parents, who have their own choir and hold a variety of dinners and events). While prioritising traditional values of good manners and kindness, Brambletye is also focused on innovation and looking to the future. The pre-prep is being extended to meet growing demand, AI is being woven into the syllabus, and a new head of the environmental, social and governance department will drive the sustainability agenda.

BRUERN ABBEY SCHOOL ●

Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 1UY
Website bruernabbey.org

Head John Floyd **Pupils** 156
day and boarding boys

Ages 8–13 **Term Fees** Day: £11,012; boarding: £13,248

'Learning difficulties should not preclude academic success,' they say at Bruern Abbey, where there's a positive attitude towards children with dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. With chickens called Scruffy and Speedy-Do, haggis and kilts on Burns Night and a delightful head who teaches woodwork, this is a place of miracles for boys who have previously struggled in mainstream education. Creativity is encouraged: 60 per cent learn a musical instrument; and the drama department quivered with excitement at a visit from Charithra Chandran of *Alex Rider* television fame. But it was the arrival of Wallace and Gromit (aka Aardman Animations) for a modelling and film-making workshop that caused the biggest stir.

CALDICOTT ●

Crown Lane, Farnham Royal, Buckinghamshire SL2 3SL
Website caldicott.com

Head Jeremy Banks **Pupils** 245
day and boarding boys

Ages 7–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,412; boarding: £14,061

At his interview, head Jeremy Banks was told that Caldicott was looking for a 'radical traditionalist'. And since joining in 2018, that's what he has been: making a good old boys' prep work for modern families. (He has dropped Saturday school for lower years, and introduced flexi-boarding, whereby boys can opt to stay two nights a week.) 'Mr Banks is very inspiring,' one parent tells us, 'and has great leadership skills.' And you see his effect outside the classroom, with children participating in a hive of activities, from archery, golf and judo to model-making and playwriting. Rugby is big, but there is also a sports-for-all philosophy, which sees the department's director (also the U18 England rugby coach) work with teams of varying abilities.

CHEAM SCHOOL ●●

*Headley, Newbury,
Berkshire RG19 8LD*

Website cheamschool.com

Head William Phelps **Pupils** 380 day and boarding; 218 boys, 162 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,985; weekly boarding: £11,515

Both non-selective and extremely impressive, this institution has a popular helmsman in Will Phelps – whose wife was *Tatler Schools Guide* Prep School Head of the Year during her tenure at Godstowe – and parents describe him as ‘kind’, ‘charming’, and brimful of ‘exciting ideas’. He has launched the Cheam Diploma, which rewards politeness and good behaviour; but he’s also ensured that exams aren’t only about results – feedback sessions are just as important – and he’s tried to enforce proper free time, so break means play, not homework. His is a forward-looking vision, but old traditions abound: ‘Diges’ is a 30-minute period after lunch for silent reading; and ‘congers’ brings everyone together for singing practice.

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL SCHOOL ●●

Brewer Street, Oxford OX1 1QW

Website cccs.org.uk

Head Richard Murray

Pupils 150 day and boarding; 140 boys, 10 girls **Ages** 3–13

Term Fees Day: £7,370; boarding (choristers only): £4,350

‘It’s not just for elite musicians, all abilities do well,’ says one parent. Nonetheless, at this beautiful choir school established by Henry VIII, the melodically minded do excel. There are more individual music lessons each week than there are pupils, and it’s the only school in the UK to boast three professional boys’ choirs. (One highlight was a performance of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* in partnership with the Antigua and Barbuda youth symphony orchestra and the Kanneh-Masons.) There is plenty else on offer, too: theatre trips to Stratford-upon-Avon and visits to the museums in Oxford. Next up are plans for a new library, and a new sports pavilion opposite Christ Church Meadow.

COTHILL HOUSE ●

Cothill, Oxfordshire OX13 6JL

Website cothillpst.org

Head George May **Pupils** 170 day and boarding boys **Ages** 7–13

Term Fees Day: £7,775;

boarding: £11,950

‘A small school, but a big family.’ That is how this boys’ prep near Oxford describes itself; and from September 2025, that family will also include girls in Years 3 to 5. They’ll discover ‘a happy place that embraces and celebrates the wonder and joys of childhood’, according to one delighted parent. It’s busy, too: with so many boarders – more than 85 per cent full-time – Cothill goes out of its way to lay on plenty of clubs and activities for boys to pursue interests or discover new ones, including fly tying (for budding fishermen), Lego and cooking. And the sports offering is extensive, too: there’s a polo team, the oldest golf course in Oxfordshire in the grounds, and a new sports hall that’s reportedly in constant use. Everyone loves match teas, served in head George May’s sitting room.

COTTESMORE SCHOOL ●●

*Buchan Hill, Pease Pottage,
West Sussex RH11 9AU*

Website cottesmoreschool.com

Head Tom Rogerson **Pupils** 200

day and boarding; 113 boys, 87

girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£7,595; boarding: £11,160

Head Tom Rogerson – whose father and grandfather ran the school before him – is described by parents as an inspiration and a role model. ‘He knows each and every pupil,’ they say. ‘He *is* Cottesmore.’ And it’s thriving under his leadership, with a record number of children enrolled. Loved traditions include the Great Pancake Throwdown – which involves lobbing pancakes on Shrove Tuesday – but don’t let the high jinks distract you: there’s also a focus on innovation here. The school recently convened a free AI conference that was open to all in the education industry, state or private; and an upcoming charity concert to celebrate 50 years since it first admitted girls will support female education globally.

CUMNOR HOUSE

SUSSEX ●●

*Danehill, Haywards Heath,
West Sussex RH17 7HT*

Website cumnor.co.uk

Head Fergus Llewellyn **Pupils** 347

day and boarding; 193 boys, 154

girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£8,100; boarding: £9,530

Non-selective Cumnor recently started its Kudos programme for Years 7 and 8, aiming to foster a sense of curiosity and wonder and to cultivate diverse interests and talents. The school has also just instituted its first performing arts scholarship, which was launched with a Get Up & Dance Day in collaboration with dance company ZooNation and Bollywood Vibes. For leavers, Race the Sun is a rite of passage that involves navigating the South Downs armed with little more than a map and a Mars bar; and this proves good training for life at such senior schools as Worth, Tonbridge and Wellington. Pupils go to them equipped with a letter from the head, reminding them of their qualities and potential.

Cottesmore School



DORSET HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

*Church Lane, Bury, Pulborough,
West Sussex RH20 1PB*

Website dorsethouseschool.com

Head Matt Thomas **Pupils** 140
day and boarding: 72 boys, 68 girls
Age 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,560;
boarding: an additional £140 for
four nights per week

Dorset House describes itself as a greenhouse rather than a hot-house, and parents certainly praise the ‘calm, friendly and approachable head’, as well as the support given to pupils: ‘They feel safe here, cared for and encouraged by all elements of the school.’ Eschewing the traditional Common Entrance, this school has a bespoke curriculum developed in conjunction with the senior schools it feeds – the aim being to encourage independent thinking – and a major aspect of this is the Year 7 business enterprise scheme, which hones early entrepreneurial potential. The introduction of financial education to the prep classroom is incredibly useful as is the simply titled Stuff You Need to Know club, which imparts knowledge on everything from rewiring plugs to servicing lawnmowers.

DRAGON SCHOOL ●●

*Bardwell Road, Oxford
OX2 6SS*

Website dragonschool.org

Head Emma Goldsmith **Pupils**
810 day and boarding: 446 boys,
364 girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees**
Day: £9,190; boarding: £13,700

There’s lots going on at the reputed biggest prep school in the country. Sporting types are occupied by a multitude of pitches and nets; rowers have their own purpose-built boathouse; and thespians will flourish even further when the new £12 million music and performing arts centre is unveiled. Meanwhile, a busy extracurricular programme offers everything from playing in rock groups to roller skating; and on Saturdays, parents even join in Scottish dancing, football and yoga. There are trips aplenty – think hockey in the Netherlands and art in St Ives – but those who like home comforts can avail themselves of the brilliant flexi-boarding system. About 50 per cent of pupils head to boarding school and, impressively, the same proportion leaves armed with scholarships. *Arduus ad solem* – ‘reaching for the sun’ – is indeed an apt motto.

EAGLE HOUSE SCHOOL ●●

*(Now Wellington College Prep)
Crowthorne Lane, Sandhurst,
Berkshire GU47 8PH*

Website eaglehouseschool.com

Head Ed Venables **Pupils** 360 day
and boarding: 198 boys, 162 girls
Ages 2–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£7,855; boarding: £10,555

Eagle House, owned by Wellington College since 1975, has been renamed, thus formalising the close relationship it has always benefitted from – making use of the brilliant facilities, picking the brains of the big school’s staff and sending plenty of leavers there. Head Ed Venables, previously head of admissions at Wellington, is overseeing an ambitious plan to grow the school and update the curriculum to accommodate such subjects as AI. The teaching block and boarding house are being revamped, and a modern library will soon join the new well-being hubs. But traditions persist amid the innovation: no child can leave lunch until four others on their table have also finished (which fosters time for conversation), while pupils past and present have mixed memories of the cross-country run over ‘Killer Hill’.

EDGE GROVE ●●

*Aldenham Village,
Hertfordshire WD25 8NL*

Website edgegrove.com

Head Ed Balfour **Pupils** 428 day:
264 boys, 164 girls **Ages** 2–13
Term Fees Day: £7,410

A recent visitor was greeted by the sight of 20 children huddled round a fire, after planting seeds in forest school. They were looking forward to the resultant rainbow chard – and the seed supply that would be bought with the proceeds from selling excess produce to parents after school. This is country schooling at its finest, based in the house once owned by American plutocrat JP Morgan. Our reviewer found the art ‘off-the-wall brilliant’, while the DT facilities rival those of public schools. Leavers move on to top destinations, but not before the Monopoly Trip to London, when they vie to locate as many of the game’s iconic landmarks as possible.

ELSTREE SCHOOL ●●

*Woolhampton Hill,
Berkshire RG7 5TD*

Website elstreeschool.org.uk

Head Sid Inglis **Pupils** 295 day
and boarding: 175 boys, 120 girls
Ages 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£8,300; boarding: £10,680

Head Sid Inglis is called ‘superb’ and ‘kind’ by parents, with one saying: ‘The children respect and listen to him, and mine tell me about the important messages he gives during his weekly assemblies.’ Among the most fundamental of these is the importance of enjoying the fun and innocence of childhood, and they certainly do here. With 150 acres, the youngsters spend a lot of time in the open air, playing the esoteric bat room cricket during break and enjoying myriad activities outside the classrooms, from canoeing and yoga to wilderness photography and bike maintenance. Sport is strong – not a surprise, given the 15 tennis courts, two all-weather pitches and multiple lakes – and all performers thrive at the wonderful Elstree Declamations, an annual literary performance at which pupils recite some of their own poetry.

Dorset House School





When Godstowe students aren't battling on the lacrosse pitch, they might be in the art studio making Salvador Dalí-themed clocks

FARLEIGH ●●

**Red Rice, Andover,
Hampshire SP11 7PW**

Website farleighschool.com

Head Fr Simon Everson **Pupils**

468 day and boarding: 240 boys,

228 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees**

Day: £8,695; boarding: £11,520

Parents love this charming prep in Hampshire for its 'outstanding' pastoral provision and the 'supportive and rounded environment' that 'breeds kindness, manners and humility, and finds that special something in all children'. Practising Catholics are given admission preference, but youngsters of all faiths (or none) are also warmly welcomed into the fold – and, in fact, make up about half the pupil body. Whatever their background, children here are instilled with a 'rich interest in the world and sense of purpose', according to an insider, and this is best exemplified by community service being one of the most popular extracurriculars. Despite not being academically selective, Farleigh has an excellent track record of sending leavers to a wide range of major public schools, and about a third also do so with impressive awards.

FELTONFLEET SCHOOL ●●

**Byfleet Road, Cobham,
Surrey KT11 1DR**

Website feltonfleet.co.uk

Head Shelley Lance

Pupils 494 day and boarding:

272 boys, 222 girls **Ages** 3–13

Term Fees Day: £7,487;

boarding: £8,880

The annual Knighting ceremony is a momentous occasion, an opportunity to formally welcome the new heads of boarding and recognise that boarding (in flexi-form) lies at the heart of the community. Lots of exciting plans are in the pipeline here: the school is acquiring the road that bisects its campus, which will lead to a once-in-a-generation redevelopment opportunity; and a fresh co-curricular programme is inspiring new interests across a wide range of clubs. A STEM centre is being planned, as is a literary centre. All this innovation is overseen by popular head Shelley Lance, about whom one parent comments: 'The children are simultaneously inspired and comforted by her. One day, my elder daughter said to me, "As soon as Mrs Lance walks into assembly, I feel like good things will happen."'

GODSTOWE ●●

**Shrubbery Road, High Wycombe,
Buckinghamshire HP13 6PR**

Website godstowe.org

Head Kate Bailey **Pupils** 400 day

and boarding: 8 boys, 392 girls

Ages 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£7,250; boarding: £10,875

According to one happy parent, 'Godstowe doesn't have a whiff of "corporate" about it.' And keen to correct any preconceptions that England's first all-girls prep is a little old-fashioned, they went on: '[It's] "traditional" with respect to its values, but progressive in the way it identifies and prepares its girls for the big themes of the future.' When students aren't battling on the lacrosse pitch, they might be found in the art studio making Salvador Dalí-themed clocks; or in one of the countless music practice rooms where they tune up for regular recitals and performances. Ambitious head Kate Bailey is adding a fifth bus from central London to the local Buckinghamshire routes, and leads a community that is not only inclusive and approachable but has a contemporary global perspective.

HANDCROSS PARK ●●

**London Road, Haywards Heath,
West Sussex RH17 6HF**

Website handcrossparkschool.co.uk

Head Jonathan Besley **Pupils** 411

day and boarding: 196 boys, 215

girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£8,190; boarding: £10,670

With a rock band called Too Cool for School, choirs that include rock and gospel, and a Year 8 music production syllabus that takes in dubstep and house, you'd imagine this corner of Sussex is constantly buzzing; and though you'd be right, it's not just the music that makes it so. At Handcross Park, you see, the pupils are keen apiarists. They also relax in the wellbeing garden and eat delicious meals produced under the guidance of a catering manager who once worked at The Ritz. Stellar academics have been boosted by an ultra-modern new English block, whose interactive walls and floors bring learning to life. And boarders are in for a treat with new dorms and a common room in the offing.

HEATH MOUNT SCHOOL ●●

**Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone,
Hertfordshire SG14 3NG**

Website heathmount.org

Head Chris Gillam **Pupils** 508

day and boarding: 272 boys, 236

girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£7,845; flexi-boarding: £10,345

'The children are supported by teachers who are also carers, friends and mentors,' says one contented parent, who goes on to say that Heath Mount's 'greatest strength is its positive environment, along with its head teacher'. His charges also hold Chris Gillam in high regard, noting that he's 'always around school, especially in the mornings, greeting everyone and welcoming us all'. Fun, activities and games start young here, thanks to the pre-prep's new adventure playground and forest-school sessions that are regularly available. Meanwhile, the girls' rugby club is proving popular, and lucky Year 8s are travelling to Zambia to visit the school's charity partner. Last year every single leaver got into their first-choice senior school.

HIGHFIELD AND BROOKHAM SCHOOLS ●●**Highfield Lane, Lipbook, Hampshire GU30 7LQ****Website** highfieldandbrookham.co.uk**Head** Suzannah Cryer **Pupils** 474 day and boarding: 246 boys, 228 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £9,125; boarding: £11,500

Recently, one parent was talking to her Year 5 daughter about H&B's head: 'She stopped and sighed, "Mummy, Mrs Cryer is really just like a best friend." It was such a heartfelt and genuine comment.' Certainly, the pre-prep and prep are in fine fettle. Recently opened is The Beehive, a dedicated wellbeing hub whose name reflects the ethos of cooperation that imbues the school; and a new Keys Diploma requires children to uphold such core values as kindness and to master a range of eight skills including teamwork and problem solving. In other news, a boarding-house renovation is drawing to a close, so it seems certain that optional sleeping over will continue to prosper.

HOLMEWOOD HOUSE SCHOOL ●●**Barrow Lane, Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0EB****Website** holmewoodhouse.co.uk**Head** Ruth O'Sullivan **Pupils** 472 day and boarding: 267 boys, 205 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,555; boarding: £10,260

Pupils come here from as far afield as Kenya and America; 13 per cent of the total are non-British; 17 per cent speak a second language; and ties with local schools and charities are strong. Holmewood clearly has its sights firmly set on producing accomplished global citizens of the future and its first female head, Ruth O'Sullivan, is integral to that aim. (She champions the voices of the Green Council representatives or the speakers in the Mini Model UN.) No wonder its leavers are awarded a plethora of scholarships by Sevenoaks, Brighton College and Tonbridge. Still, there's plenty of time for the youngsters to enjoy being children, with trips to the beach and a veggie patch to tend.

**LAMBROOK SCHOOL ●●****Winkfield Row, Nr Ascot, Berkshire RG42 6LU****Website** lambrookschool.co.uk**Head** Jonathan Perry **Pupils** 632 day and boarding: 353 boys, 279 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,650; boarding: £42 per night

Set in 52 acres of rural Berkshire, Lambrook embodies the bliss of a childhood spent in the great outdoors. Whether the boys and girls are pressing apple juice in the orchard, collecting eggs from their chickens or playing on the nine-hole golf course, it can sound like they're at an upscale country retreat rather than a prep school with weekly and flexi-boarding. (There is even a new resident therapy dog, who sits in when pupils read in the library.) But as well as a wholesome atmosphere, this school offers excellent teaching and a high teacher-to-pupil ratio. Its extensive facilities mean the school's well-known sporting record continues to impress, while one of the most popular provisions – with parents, at least – remains the on-site laundry, which means no muddy kit coming home.

LOCKERS PARK ●**Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 1TL****Website** lockerspark.co.uk**Head** Gavin Taylor **Pupils** 206 day and boarding boys **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,238; boarding: £10,133

One parent says that head Gavin Taylor 'strikes the perfect balance between letting the boys have fun and enjoy school, but at the same time instilling the importance of good manners, respect for all and being a positive contributor to your community'. This balance is maintained by the Hertfordshire school's purposely small size, which reinforces its family feel, and exciting, individualised education. The boys are encouraged to construct dens and explore the woodland. (Dark Tower night is always enjoyed, and sees children with torches chasing each other around the grounds.) Saturday school is optional – but over 75 per cent attend – while the sports facilities are about to have a big make-over, and a new Lockers Park Learner profile is developing thinking and questioning skills.

LUDGROVE SCHOOL ●**Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3AB****Website** ludgrove.net**Head** Simon Barber **Pupils** 186 boarding boys **Ages** 8–13 **Term Fees** £11,766

During their first two weeks at this Berkshire prep, boys' names are painted on the dining-room boards, giving them a sense of belonging – and pride – straight away. Meanwhile, the boarding system (with an exeat every other weekend) gives a sense that 'everyone is in it together', according to one parent, and helps nurture the happy, supportive atmosphere. This school is academically ambitious but says it aims for 'excellence not perfection' and looks for children with 'inquiring minds'. It has a strong cricketing heritage and recently forged a link with Downe House for study days and academic enrichment in Years 7 and 8. As for the food, pupils rave about the scampi and pizza. One mother confides: 'I'm told it's better than at home!' It might even be sweet-strewn birthday ice-cream cakes shared with friends.

MILBOURNE LODGE SCHOOL ●●**Arbrook Lane, Esher, Surrey KT10 9EG****Website** milbournelodge.co.uk**Head** Judy Waite **Pupils** 271 day: 211 boys, 60 girls **Ages** 4–13**Term Fees** £6,960

A 'can-do' spirit permeates this small prep in Esher, whose woodland setting belies its proximity to London; and this is in no small part down to the 'candid and immensely likeable' head Judy Waite. (A former Milbourne parent herself, her sons went on to St Paul's, then Oxford.) With three outdoor classrooms – used for bushcraft, art, drama and IT – pupils make the most of their surroundings. A specialist senior school curriculum has been developed to enhance leadership skills, and a 'buddy' reading scheme sees older children mentor younger ones. The careers provision is top-notch, with talks ranging from shoemaking and art restoration to virology and surgery. Future West End stars recently raised the roof with a fabulous performance of *The Wizard of Oz*.

MOON HALL SCHOOL ●●**Flanchford Road, Leigh, Reigate, Surrey RH2 8RE**
Website moonhallschoolreigate.co.uk**Head** Michelle Catterson**Pupils** 193 day: 106 boys, 87 girls **Ages** 7–16 **Term Fees** Day: £9,144

Truly extraordinary things are afoot behind the doors of this red-brick gothic edifice in Surrey, a specialist centre where every pupil has a dyslexia diagnosis and the houses are named after such famous dyslexics as Lewis Hamilton and Keira Knightley. Which is why its children will travel daily up to 90 minutes each way to attend. Many have been let down by their previous experiences of education but go on to flourish with the support they receive here. (One who joined in Year 7, unable to read, went on to university.) And for that, much credit is due to head Michelle Catterson, who is also the chair of the British Dyslexia Association. The school also has its own means-testing assessment centre and pharmacy – open to all, not just Moon Hall families – and hosts free SENCo workshops.



Moulsford

Children at Moulsford, which sits on the banks of the Thames, enjoy outdoor lessons while in-class CO₂ regulators advise teachers when they should open the windows to let in more oxygen



Ludgrove School

MOULSFORD ●●**Moulsford-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 9HR****Website** moulsford.com**Head** Ben Beardmore-Gray**Pupils** 370 day and boarding:365 boys, 5 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,350; boarding: £9,195

Sitting on the banks of the Thames – perfect for kayaking, canoeing and sailing – this nursery-to-prep school recently added a smart new £4 million pre-prep building; so now the younger children can enjoy outdoor lessons, interactive whiteboards and in-class CO₂ regulators that advise teachers when they should open the windows to let in more oxygen. Last year, girls from the ages of 3 to 7 were admitted. And though there's demand to keep the older years exclusively male, one parent clarifies: 'It's not a "boys-will-be-boys" environment. It caters for all types and rewards all successes – in the classroom, in music, on the sporting fields, you name it.'

NEW COLLEGE SCHOOL ●**Savile Road, Oxford OX1 3UA****Website** newcollegeschool.org**Head** Dr Matthew Jenkinson**Pupils** 169 day boys **Ages** 4–13**Term Fees** Day: £7,535

The 'new' in its name is somewhat oxymoronic when you consider that this school was founded in 1379. (There can't be many where building works uncover not just a Roman coin and kiln, but two actual Romans.) That notwithstanding, this small-but-dynamic prep is forging ahead, with numbers the highest they have been in 645 years and the new classrooms, assembly hall and dining hall in the Grade I-listed quads offering breadth and space for academic enrichment. The prep is attached to the eponymous Oxford college and choristers sing in the mother-school's medieval chapel five mornings a week. But it's not all dreaming spires: watch out for Artemis, the gecko who lives in the science lab and can be taken home by boys to look after in the holidays.

PAPPLEWICK ●**Windsor Road, Ascot,****Berkshire SL5 7LH****Website** papplewick.org.uk**Head** Tom Bunbury **Pupils**

223 day and boarding boys

Ages 6–13 **Term Fees** Day£9,290; **boarding:** £12,095

Boys flock to join the herpetology club, where they can look after their own pet snakes and bearded dragons. But when not tending to their reptiles, they might be found playing polo, cooking or running cross-country. Plans are in progress for a new art, DT and maths block; and two stunning new science labs have recently been unveiled as well as staged seating for drama productions. Kindness is cherished and the weekly Golden Moment award rewards those who have performed random acts of it. Boarding starts in Year 5 and is required to be full-time from the summer term of Year 6. Saturday school is compulsory for all except Year 3 and is followed by a family chapel service, after which kith-and-kin stay on for lunch.



St Andrew's School, Berkshire

The 'new' in New College School is somewhat oxymoronic — there can't be many schools where building works uncover not just a Roman coin and kiln, but two actual Romans

THE PILGRIMS' SCHOOL ●**Inner Close, Winchester,****Hampshire SO23 9LT****Website** thepilgrims-school.co.uk**Acting head** Tim Butcher**Pupils** 235 day and boarding boys**Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** Day:£8,043; **boarding:** £10,224

'It exudes warmth, friendliness and positivity, and we knew it would be an environment in which our son would thrive,' says one mother. 'He wakes up excited to be going to school.' New head Tim Butcher has made an excellent impression and is now focused on innovation. (A partnership with the University of Winchester is being explored, and a new head of digital learning and AI has been brought in to generate fresh thinking.) But tradition runs deep. The school has been associated with Winchester Cathedral's choristry since the 7th century; thus, 94 per cent of boys sing in a choir while 87 per cent learn instruments. Recent leavers celebrated a record-breaking 15 music awards to the likes of Eton and St Paul's.

PRINCE'S MEAD ●●**Kings Worthy, Winchester,****Hampshire SO21 1AN****Website** princesmeadschool.org.uk**Head** Adam King **Pupils** 297 day:161 boys, 136 girls **Ages** 3–11**Term Fees** £6,900

Prince's Mead has been enjoying its grand new outdoor amphitheatre, with views over the South Downs National Park; and it has so far hosted everything from fireworks displays to star-gazing sessions. But then, spectacular drama is part of this school's make-up. Creativity abounds in other areas, too: thanks to an on-site kiln, budding ceramicists can experiment with a range of pottery techniques; and singers can join the competition-winning chamber choir. Meanwhile, concern for the environment has seen fundraising for endangered species and a reduction in the use of plastics, while Bob the rescue tortoise has joined the ranks as school pet. Asked what they would change, one pupil was most emphatic: 'We would like more slides!'

ST ANDREW'S SCHOOL, BERKSHIRE ●●**Pangbourne, Berkshire****RG8 8QA****Website** standreusberkshire.co.uk**Head** Ed Graham **Pupils** 315 day

and boarding: 157 boys, 158 girls

Ages 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,820;**boarding:** £140 for four nights

'You know you're going to have a good time at St Andrew's when you pass the digital sign displaying the head's Riddle of the Day. We just cannot speak highly enough of Ed Graham,' says one parent, who reckons he has 'managed to manipulate the time-space continuum' to be present at every school match, production and event. The launch of the pre-senior baccalaureate has gone down well, providing a framework that celebrates progress in all areas of school life, while plans are in the works for a dazzling new performing arts centre. Still, learning through nature is prized here: the nursery has its own woodland headquarters and the little ones venture outside come rain or shine.

**ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL
WINDSOR CASTLE ●●**
Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1QF
Website stgwindsor.org

Head Emma Károlyi **Pupils** 326
day and boarding: 210 boys, 116
girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£7,270; boarding: £9,026

Set against the imposing backdrop of Windsor Castle, St George's is near completely non-selective, with only a few places awarded to choristers by the Dean and Canons of Windsor. But those singers make a heavenly sound and are responsible for the annual gala concert in St George's Chapel and a Christmas carol service at St James's Church in Bayswater. However, drama is also noteworthy, with several productions entirely led by pupils. (They create everything from programme covers to scene-change music.) The only standalone UK prep to offer the IB primary years programme from pre-school through to the end of Year 6, St George's will surely lead with many more novel ideas from new head Emma Károlyi.

ST HUGH'S SCHOOL ●●
*Carswell Manor, Faringdon,
Oxfordshire SN7 8PT*
Website st-hughs.co.uk

Head David Griffiths **Pupils** 349
day and boarding: 189 boys, 160
girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£8,860; boarding: £10,850

With 40 acres of fields and outdoor classrooms, this traditional country prep is proud of its mud-and-wellies approach. But there's also plenty to do inside, with facilities including a 20-metre indoor pool – lessons are available from nursery upwards – and the cosy Dovecote Library. Music is a strength, too: more than 220 lessons are given every week; the Christmas carols are hosted in the Radley College chapel; and the biennial picnic concert sees pupils and staff rocking the night away. New head David Griffiths is praised by one mother for being 'committed, full of energy and proactive'. For those who need extra help, the learning support department dog, the much-loved Enzo, greets children with a wag of his tail.

ST JOHN'S BEAUMONT ●●
*Priest Hill, Old Windsor,
Berkshire SL4 2JN*
Website sjbwindsor.uk

Head Philip Barr **Pupils** 250 day
and boarding: 230 boys, 20 girls
Ages 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£8,192; boarding: £12,352

A recent visitor said these pupils were some of the nicest they had ever encountered: 'charming, well-mannered, chatty and with a good sense of fun'. It's still known as a traditional (and mainly) boys' school, but the refurbishment of the pre-prep building and thorough preparations to welcome more girls mean it's well on its way to co-ed status. Meanwhile, parents praise the balance of academics and outdoor play, with youngsters given a daily chance to romp in the 75-acre grounds – though that can be a little tough on the laundry, one jokingly confides. Previous deputy Philip Barr has now returned as head, and he has three golden rules: children should come to school happy, go home happy and come back the next day happy.

SAINT RONAN'S ●●
*Water Lane, Hawkhurst,
Kent TN18 5DJ*
Website sainttronans.co.uk

Head Joe Lewis **Pupils** 450 day
and boarding: 248 boys, 202 girls
Ages 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£7,772; weekly boarding: £9,392

School life here is dictated by Saint Ronan's views on what it means to enjoy your childhood. So think grazed knees, hot chocolate and lots of laughter. The youngsters have a forest school – enter past a monster-shaped clay oven, built by pupils – as well as outdoor lessons on the beach and a farm-menagerie (boasting mini devil goats and peacocks). But when they aren't carting each other around on sledges, playing conkers and enjoying the great outdoors, they're learning the value of conservation, working with their animals and rewilding the land. Nor is it all games. Academics are strong, and pupils were recently awarded the highest ever number of scholarships to senior schools. Incoming head Joe Lewis inherits a happy and wholesome environment where his charges can blossom.

**SHREWSBURY HOUSE
SCHOOL ●**
*Ditton Road, Surbiton,
Surrey KT6 6RL*
Website shrewsburyhouse.net

Head Joanna Hubbard
Pupils 320 day boys **Ages** 7–13
Term Fees £7,785

Established in 1865, Shrewsbury House is one of England's oldest boys' preps, but it keeps a steady eye on the future. Thus, it recently appointed a head of digital learning and innovation – to devise its approach to AI – and is proud of its discovery programme, which allows pupils to study topics as diverse as battle strategies, Ancient Greece and maths in the world. Many victories have been scored in the competitive maths matches against other schools and this competitive drive extends into physical pursuits. Cricket is strong, and a new athlete development programme allows children to work on their specific talents alongside existing team commitments. 'Sport is big here and the boys get lots of it,' says one mother. 'There's no "namby pamby": if it's raining, you still go out.'



St George's School Windsor Castle

SUMMER FIELDS ●

*Mayfield Road, Oxford
OX2 7EN*

Website summerfields.com

*Head David Faber Pupils 331
day and boarding boys*

*Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day:
£9,260; boarding: £13,290*

You'd be forgiven for confusing this school with a private sports club: there are two pools, a spread of courts and a nine-hole golf course; not to mention clay pigeon shooting. But then, its motto is *mens sana in corpore sano* ('a healthy mind in a healthy body'). Every day children participate in physical activity and compete in national athletics and inter-school cross-country. Rivalry is fierce off the pitch, too. Boys are split into four 'leagues' – Old Boys' sons are placed in the same league their father belonged to – and battle for points awarded by staff throughout the year. The winners are rewarded with a feast on the penultimate day of the summer term.

SUNNINGDALE SCHOOL ●

*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:
£8,517; boarding: £10,896*

At Sunningdale, everybody wants to stay the night. In fact, a recent visitor noted that, 'by Year 8, even day boys who live closest manage to talk their parents into full boarding'. That might be because it feels so much like home. The school has been owned by the Dawsons for more than 50 years and remains a family affair. It's reportedly 'impossible not to love' current head Tom

Dawson; nor his wife Elisabeth, who teaches French; nor his sister Amy in the art room; and don't forget their dogs roaming about. One quirk is the school's special lingo ('Bust-up' for the Christmas party). And fun fact: Ian Fleming, whose nephew attended the school in the early 1960s, chose names for two of the 'baddies' in his James Bond books – Scaramanga and Blofeld – from the Old Boys board. When pupils have to leave this welcoming embrace, they go on to top public schools and achieve impressive scholarships. Next year, Sunningdale will have its 150th anniversary, and there are big celebration plans on the horizon.

Fun fact: Ian Fleming chose names for two of the 'baddies' in his James Bond novels – Scaramanga and Blofeld – from the Old Boys board at Sunningdale School

SWANBOURNE HOUSE ●●

*Swanbourne, Milton Keynes,
Buckinghamshire MK17 0HZ*

Website swanbourne.org

Head Nick Holloway Pupils 299

day and boarding: 170 boys, 129

*girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:
£7,727; boarding: £10,532*

When head Nick Holloway began his tenure last year, he asked his charges to set him some challenges that would help him get to know the school better. The resulting list included being a pupil for a day, building a den in the woods, serving lunch and spending a night as a boarder. And what reforms did those tasks lead to? Well, Holloway is keen to emphasise that change takes time. 'What you see is what you'll get, but we'll turbocharge it,' he says. Life here is varied and busy and as part of the Stowe Group, the school benefits from sharing Stowe's facilities. Pupils who progress are exempt from entrance exams and eligible for modest fee reductions.



Swanbourne House

TWYFORD SCHOOL ●●

*Twyford, Winchester,
Hampshire SO21 2AA*

Website twyfordschool.com

Head Andrew Harvey Pupils 433
day and boarding: 251 boys, 182
girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£8,315; boarding: £10,495

'Undeniably academically ambitious... with a certain ruggedness, and down-to-earth.' So says one parent, who adds that Twyford isn't too 'Londony', and so swerves the 'pressure-cooker environment you hear about in some other schools'. Children here look after rabbits and chickens, and extracurricular clubs include scuba diving and vexillology (the study of flags). The stone step up to the drama department is 200 years old; and the Old Twyfordian Hubert Parry – the composer of 'Jerusalem' – is said to have performed his first school concert in the Old Dining Room in 1858. A new boarding house was recently opened with bespoke academic and social spaces to allow older years to prepare for senior destinations.

WALHAMPTON ●●

*School Lane, Lymington,
Hampshire SO41 5ZG*

Website walhampton.com

Head Jonathan Timms Pupils
370 day and boarding: 213 boys,
157 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees**
Day: £7,465; boarding: £10,490

With its sweeping drive, Grade II-listed buildings and setting on an estate recorded in the Domesday Book, Walhampton certainly has the wow factor. Here, outdoor opportunities abound: two lakes come furnished with canoes and fishing rods; honey is gathered from the beehives; riding lessons are on offer; and Glade-iators is a favourite game, in which the children must use cunning to avoid being captured by teachers. 'The lakes, the glade, the woods, the pitches, the front lawn, the Astro, Faraway Tree, the zip-wire, the paddocks: it just goes on and on,' says one pupil. To open up the school to more lucky youngsters, a Foundation Trust has been launched with the aim of providing transformational bursaries.



Twyford School

WESTBOURNE HOUSE ●●

*Coach Road, Chichester,
West Sussex PO20 2BH*

Website westbournehouse.org

Head Martin Barker Pupils 349
day and boarding: 201 boys, 148
girls **Ages** 2½–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£7,650; boarding: £10,350

This school hopes that, by the time they're ready to leave for such destinations as Sherborne, Brighton College and Canford, its charges are 'opportunity grabbers', thirsting to acquire new skills and investigate different topics. The children certainly have ample chances to become so, with extracurriculars

that include coding, judo, chess and canoeing; and trial lessons are offered on a range of instruments, from the cornet to the cello. So there's plenty of scope to fulfil the school motto, 'All that I am, everything I can be'. The sports facilities are having an upgrade, the chapel choir has recorded several albums, and a recent full-scale performance of *Guys and Dolls* was organised in just 10 days by post-exam Year 8s. Robotics forms part of the curriculum from Year 3 up – the pupils use programmable Lego – and every day begins with either a pastoral or Learning4Life session.



Walhampton

WINDLESHAM HOUSE ●●

*London Road, Washington,
West Sussex RH20 4AY*

Website windlesham.com

Head Ben Evans Pupils 333 day
and boarding: 200 boys, 133 girls
Ages 4–13 **Term Fees** Day:
£9,360; boarding: £12,055

'It's like the greatest gift we could give my son,' swoons one parent: 'lovely and happy kids, teachers and parents.' This gently selective school sends people into raptures for good reason. The tight-knit community vibe is reflected in family camping weekends – think picnics, laser shooting and inflatables, alongside tents and campfires – and its inaugural Windlesham House literature festival. Students are prepared for senior destinations by means of the bespoke, two-year Windlesham Diploma; and on average, 25 per cent score scholarships to the likes of Rugby, Winchester and Oundle. □

LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 24

Abingdon School ●

Ardingly College ●●

Bedales School ●●

Berford School ●

Berkhamsted ●●

Bradfield College ●●

Brighton College ●●

Caterham 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 ●

Tudor Hall ●

Wellington College ●●

Worth School ●●



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: £6,741; boarding: £10,500

All Hallows says its ideal pupil might be one who understands that it's all right to knock on the head's study door to share a good idea – in the confidence they will be listened to. And judging by the intelligence *Tatler* has received, such pupils abound. One describes Dr Trevor Richards as 'seriously

clever', another as 'kind'; and, chimes a third: 'You can always go up for a chat with him at all points in the day.' Although the admirable leavers' scholarship record may suggest otherwise, this is a proudly non-selective establishment, where an emphasis is placed on a broad and creative curriculum. Music, art and forest school are all prized activities, while the Saturday enrichment programme offers older year groups a wide array of fun extracurricular activities, from paddle-boarding to axe-throwing.

BEAUDESERT PARK SCHOOL ●●

Minchinhampton,

Gloucestershire GL6 9AF

Website beaudesert.gloucs.sch.uk

Head Chris Searson Pupils 398

day and boarding: 209 boys, 189

girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:

£7,640; boarding: £9,450

You cannot get much more rural than this Cotswolds prep, next to a National Trust common. Muddy knees and climbing trees are common sights here; and parents love that 'children are allowed to be children', while being 'challenged academically and given a broad range of opportunities'. These include at least four hours of sports per week and more than 30 extra-curricular activities, ranging from circus skills to fashion illustration, as well as accomplished drama productions, concerts and fundraising events. And clearly, it's a winning formula: one pupil told us the only thing they would change is the lack of a senior school 'because then I would never have to leave'.

CHAFYN GROVE ●●

Bourne Avenue, Salisbury,

Wiltshire SP1 1LR

Website chafyngrove.co.uk

Head Simon Head Pupils 196

day and boarding: 106 boys, 90

girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:

£7,263; boarding: £9,793

It's rare for a place to be just as well known for its sporting prowess as its emphasis on kindness. Chafyn Grove nails this balance beautifully, putting great stock by experience on the pitch – 'a wonderful vehicle for life lessons', according to the head, the aptonymic Simon Head – while also rewarding strong moral values with prizes for Good Eggs and Stars of the Week. Head even jokes that his ideal pupil is 'someone who is nice to dogs'. Parents feel confident 'every child taken under the school's wing will flourish to their full potential'; and their offspring agree that there are so many activities on offer – from cartography and Quidditch to parkour and Masterchef – 'you'll always find something you like'.

HANFORD SCHOOL ●●*Child Okeford, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8HN**Website* hanfordschool.co.uk**Head** Hilary Phillips **Pupils** 100 day and boarding girls **Ages** 7–13**Term Fees** Day: £6,825; boarding: £8,904

Surrounded by lush woodlands and grazing school ponies, Hanford is understated and relaxed, with a nice focus on freedom. There's no uniform; and all senior girls serve on committees that help with running the school. (One is charged with finding out if anyone feels unhappy and then putting remedies in place where needed.) Since much time is spent riding the aforementioned ponies, the showjumping team is particularly strong. But so too is the musical output: every Christmas, the girls perform a unique nativity play featuring choral music written for the school's founder in 1960. And interestingly, the first girl ever to take the role of Mary was Emma Kirkby – who later became the acclaimed soprano, Dame Emma.

HAZLEGROVE PREPARATORY SCHOOL ●●*Sparkford, Somerset BA22 7JA**Website* hazlegrove.co.uk**Head** Ed Benbow **Pupils** 390 day and boarding: 207 boys, 183 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,287; boarding: £10,786

It's the people at Hazlegrove that make it so special. A visitor gushed about the 'super, genuinely caring staff', parents call the pastoral support 'phenomenal', and pupils love the feeling of 'one friendly community'. Its children thrive, whether winning scholarships (in the last four years, 114 were awarded to more than 20 seniors) or celebrating their musical skills in weekly concerts. No matter their aptitude, they will be cheered on every step of the way. ('It's what Hazlegrove children do best!' one pupil tells us.) Add to this the spectacular Somerset setting, full boarding provision and, say parents, 'good moral ethos', and you can understand why they consider this prep to have 'a winning formula that's hard to beat'.

KITEBROOK ●●*Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire GL56 0RP**Website* kitebrookpst.org**Head** Bennjamyn Smith **Pupils** 308 day and boarding: 136 boys, 172 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,250; boarding: £65 a night

It can only be a good sign when children 'demand to be dropped off at the earliest possible time on a school day and cry when they're off sick', as one parent reports. And it's not surprising. Cows and sheep greet arrivals at the playground fence; there are acres of rolling countryside to explore and endless activities to sample; underpinning everything is a 'nurturing family feel' – and it doesn't hurt that Kitebrook is a mere 10-minute drive from the Daylesford farm shop. Praising head Bennjamyn Smith for doing 'an outstanding job', parents are impressed by his new Rural Crafts Programme – whereby children learn the likes of willow-weaving and dry-stone-walling from locals – and are excited to welcome more international students when full boarding is introduced in September.

PERROTT HILL ●●*North Perrott, Somerset TA18 7SL**Website* perrotthill.com**Head** Alex McCullough **Pupils** 134 day and boarding: 92 boys, 92 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,995; boarding: £10,010

In the heart of sylvan Somerset, with 28 acres of grounds, Perrott Hill's nurturing, family-focused environment really gives its charges the room they need to grow; and the abundance of outdoor space is understandably incorporated into its timetable at every opportunity. There's swimming in the open-air pool, a wide range of sports on the extensive pitches, golf on the four-hole course – and Friday's Woods club, which sees youngsters race forth excitedly to build dens and clamber up trees. But that's not to say that the more creatively inclined pupils are overlooked, with weaving, pom-pom crafts and textiles also on offer. Boarding is ever-popular and a recent immersion programme, which saw 15 Chinese children arrive for two terms, proved testament to the community's welcoming ethos.

PINEWOOD SCHOOL ●●*Bourton, Shrivenham, Wiltshire SN6 8HZ**Website* pinewoodschool.co.uk**Head** Neal Bailey **Pupils** 405 day and boarding: 223 boys, 182 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,865; boarding: £9,965

A cosy, country-house atmosphere, sprawling grounds, 'happy, kind and polite' children and impressive facilities: parents say Pinewood is 'difficult to resist'. And, reports one, many even 'specifically move to the area' so they can send their offspring to this 'magical' co-ed prep (with help from Emily the registrar, who will happily source local properties to ease the transition). It's well worth the effort, since a childhood spent here is of the most idyllic kind, whether learning from top-tier teachers, playing sports or exploring all manner of exciting activities through the new Pinewood Skills enrichment programme. Even the food is excellent: meals are designed in close collaboration with a renowned paediatric nutritionist and some produce comes from the pupil-tended kitchen garden.

With prizes for Good Eggs, Chafyn Grove's head even jokes that his ideal pupil is 'someone who's nice to dogs'



**PORT REGIS ●●**

*Motcombe Park, Shaftesbury,
Dorset SP7 9QA*

Website portregis.com

Head Titus Mills Pupils 303 day and boarding: 162 boys, 141 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,775; boarding: £11,800

It's not just the sense of community that sets this rural Dorset prep apart; it's the diversity. Apart from local children and those domiciled in the UK, 20 per cent of boarders come from peripatetic military families, 20 per cent from overseas; and on top of that, a host of new full bursaries have been introduced for those who wouldn't otherwise be able to access a prized Port Regis education. Meanwhile, at this future-facing prep, Saturdays have been enhanced by the popular enrichment programme PR Plus, whose volunteer instructors – including parents – teach anything from raft-building and cheese-making to the art of leadership. This year, it's full 'STEAM' ahead, with a shiny new learning centre; not to mention an ambitious Green Vision to become carbon-net-zero by 2030. Clearly, this place is embracing its motto of *altiora peto* ('I seek higher things').

SANDROYD SCHOOL ●●

*Rushmore, Tollard Royal,
Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5QD*

Website sandroyd.org

Head Alastair Speers Pupils 211 day and boarding: 104 boys, 107 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £8,995; boarding: £11,045

Gloriously, proudly outdoorsy, Sandroyd is described by one pupil's mother as a 'wholesome childhood environment that one hankers after in today's modern, tech-driven world'. Prospective parents fall in love with the chickens, rabbits and guinea pigs in the pet pavilion – as well as the dogs wandering round with the teachers – but it's not all about Enid Blyton moments. The school is looking for eager, open-minded pupils who are willing to give everything a go, and the close-knit community is paired with academic excellence. Every student now has one-to-one mentoring with their form tutor, and sport is on the timetable every day of the week. Post-lesson activities include archery, fencing and riding – there's a stable with 30 ponies – and crucially, homework is now done after lunch in a focused session, leaving the evenings free to pursue clubs and extracurriculars.

SHERBORNE PREP ●●

*Acreman Street, Sherborne,
Dorset DT9 3NY*

Website sherborneprep.org

Head Annie Gent Pupils 208 day and boarding: 123 boys, 85 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,600; boarding: £9,495

New head Annie Gent seems to have gone down well with parents, who describe her as 'hands-on', 'kind' and 'immensely approachable'. Says one mother: 'We get the impression the leadership structure is pretty flat, with a focus on teamwork.' And this encouragement of initiative is threaded throughout the non-selective school, which proudly focuses on developing the whole child, imparting life lessons both within and beyond the classroom. A Life Skills programme has been added to the curriculum, as have Mental Toughness lessons; and children continue with these studies in their spare time, when they might be found climbing trees or playing four square (a sport that is popular in Dorset, apparently). Their elders even get in on the action, as anyone who attended the school's 'simulacrum coronation' – complete with parental jousting in the lists – can testify.

TRURO SCHOOL PREP ●●

*Treliske House, Highbertown,
Truro, Cornwall TR1 3QN*

Website truroschoo.com

Head Rob Morse Pupils 300 day: 180 boys, 120 girls **Ages** 4–13

Term Fees Day: £5,465

When one boy started in Truro Prep's nursery, his mother met another of her peers in the uniform shop: 'She stated simply, "You and your son are going to love this school, it's such a special place." She was right. We do, and it is!' Clearly, others are of the same mind. Families journey from all over the county, and some have even relocated from London and the Home Counties since the pandemic. Applications are on the rise, perhaps driven by such factors as the extensive programme of extra-curriculars on offer – think BMX to Bushcraft, Lego to language detectives – or the increasing focus on metacognition to develop children's independence, or the move towards net-zero, or the brilliant facilities (the sports centre is the county's premier sports amenity). This school makes the most of its Cornwall location, with walks and cycling, sailing and kayaking, and even surfing days. New head Rob Morse has also made a positive impression, greeting each child by their name first thing in the morning, come rain or shine. □

LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 40

Badminton ●●

Blundell's ●●●

Cheltenham College ●●●

Christ College Brecon ●●●

Clayesmore ●●●

Clifton College ●●●

Dean Close School ●●●

Godolphin School ●●

Haberdashers' Monmouth

Schools ●●●

Millfield ●●●

Monkton Combe ●●●

St Mary's Calne ●●●

Stonar School ●●●

Westonbirt ●●●



PREP

Beeston Hall School

Midlands & East Anglia

BEESTON HALL SCHOOL ●●

*West Runton, Cromer,
Norfolk NR27 9NQ*

Website beestonhall.co.uk

*Head Fred de Falbe Pupils 172 day
and boarding: 80 boys, 92 girls
Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day: £8,064;
boarding: £10,762*

'I want to stress the high-quality teaching; it's not all surfing and swimming,' one Beeston parent

declares. With the Norfolk coast only 500 metres away, pupils have the best of the natural world on their doorstep. Charming head Fred de Falbe 'is a huge asset to the school', becoming personally acquainted with all the pupils and their parents (30 per cent of whom are OBs themselves). While sport is for all, note the IAPS trophies for sailing, and the U13 boys' victories

in county cricket for three years running. We are reliably told their rendition of *The SpongeBob Musical* was not to be missed. As for the annual Beestival Festival – with tents, campfires and a party atmosphere – it's undeniably popular; but nothing beats the weekly arrival of the local ice-cream van. Should this ever stop, says de Falbe, 'it would be a resignation matter'.

BILTON GRANGE ●●

*Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 6QU
Website biltongrange.co.uk*

*Head Gareth Jones Pupils 389 day
and boarding: 232 boys, 157 girls*

Ages 4–13 Term Fees Day:

£8,650; boarding: £11,770

Bilton Grange is working on a new boarding house with hubs for games and music, while a high-ropes course is being built in its 90 acres of grounds. Little wonder that pupils here commend their 'action-packed' days which are 'filled with fun'. Opportunities to enrich education are rarely missed, so even ongoing works – revamps of the sports and performing arts facilities – have been used to give the children real-world insights into the construction industry. This future-forward outlook is enhanced by a focus on sustainability and reducing food waste. (An on-site wormery is being introduced.) But not at the expense of academics: recent leavers bagged 29 scholarships and headed to such destinations as Uppingham, Eton and its partner, Rugby.

THE ELMS ●●

*Colwall, Malvern,
Worcestershire WR13 6EF
Website elmsschool.co.uk*

*Head Ed Lyddon Pupils 171 day
and boarding: 96 boys, 75 girls
Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day:*

£7,900; boarding: £10,875

The vibe is more country house than corporate prep here. With facilities including stables and a riding area, children can bring their own ponies. Then there's the pig-pen and popular Greedy Trotters club, which sees the youngsters involved in the marketing and pricing aspects of producing and selling sausages. In any remaining spare time, pupils might be found competing in agricultural shows around the region – hence the farmyard being festooned with rosettes – and an annual highlight is the school's own show, at which every child from Year 3 up parades an animal. But, clarifies one parent: 'The Elms does not just teach farming and riding. Its academic and extra-curricular sides are phenomenal.'

**KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL,
CAMBRIDGE ●●**

West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DN
Website kcs.cambs.sch.uk

Head Yvette Day **Pupils** 413 day and boarding: 263 boys, 150 girls
Ages 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,720; boarding: £10,410; choristers: £3,435
‘The buzz is electric,’ reports one recent visitor. And there’s definitely something about King’s. Perhaps that’s down to ‘bright and bubbly’ head Yvette Day; or the school’s location, nestled among some of Cambridge’s most beautiful colleges; or to its choristers’ dulcet tones drifting through the corridors. The most likely cause is the feeling of kindness that permeates every facet of life here, making the children – in their distinctive purple uniforms – feel utterly at home. Macro-economics has been added to Year 8’s curriculum; the library is soon to be fully refurbished; and pickleball, fencing and climbing have been introduced alongside rowing to create a sports development pathway for older pupils.

MAIDWELL HALL ●●

Maidwell, Northamptonshire NN6 9JG

Website maidwellhall.co.uk
Head Anthony Rendall **Pupils** 150 day and boarding: 85 boys, 65 girls
Ages 4–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,268; boarding: £11,156

Founder Oliver Wyatt used to say his charges were the sort who, when invited to stay for the weekend, would be invited back. According to one recent visitor, this still holds true of the ‘exceptionally polite but chatty and smiling’ youngsters. And the school is just as charming as its occupants: the mansion’s original drawing room now houses an impressive library; the dorms, their common rooms and bathrooms have been redecorated; and classrooms have been relocated so that they overlook the picturesque gardens and lake. This academic year is Anthony Rendall’s third as head of this school, and he continues to cultivate an atmosphere in which every child is known and celebrated as an individual.



Maidwell Hall

MOOR PARK ●●

Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 4DZ

Website moorpark.org.uk

Head Brendan Brady **Pupils** 245 day and boarding: 128 boys, 117 girls
Ages 3 months–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,600; boarding: £11,275

With sports-mad Brendan Brady at the helm of this Shropshire gem, it’s no surprise he describes the pupils roaming its 85 acres as ‘free range’. In the summer term, they’re allotted their own plots to grow vegetables. As for activities on weekends, the

boarders are truly spoilt for choice: Fireball Hockey, Human Hungry Hippos, and cinema and paintballing excursions. Celebrating Moor Park’s 60th anniversary has been a year-long affair heralded by a fabulous ball. With learning support integral to teaching – as well as a respect for the Catholic tradition of the founders, and pastoral care made a priority – there’s naturally an abundance of scholarships to such destinations as Shrewsbury and Christ College Brecon.



Moor Park

OLD BUCKENHAM HALL ●●

Brettenham Park, Ipswich, Suffolk IP7 7PH

Website obh.co.uk

Head James Large **Pupils** 218 day and boarding: 112 boys, 106 girls
Ages 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £7,805; boarding: £10,956

Old Buckenham Hall describes its ideal pupil as possessing ‘a dollop of humour, a slice of creativity, a few tablespoons of determination, lashings of effort and a dash of individuality’. This all sounds quite Mary Poppins, and there is certainly a rather wonderful emphasis on childhood, innocence and fun. Taking shape is the school farm, where pupils will manage orchards, bee hives and chickens; and the pre-Christmas Fireside event is a popular evening of song and dance. While the ambience may be cosy, this is an establishment with an eye on new horizons. Cultural awareness is fostered through Wednesday pastoral assemblies. And annual ‘immersion visits’ enrich perspectives; last year, OBH welcomed a group from Shanghai, who shared in a truly wonderful celebration of Chinese New Year.

ORWELL PARK ●●

Nacton, Suffolk IP10 0ER
Website orwellpark.co.uk

Head Guy Musson *Pupils* 237 day and boarding; 140 boys, 97 girls

Ages 2½–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£7,638; boarding: £11,216

'Even I never dreamed of Magic like this!' wrote CS Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. When Orwell pupils walk for the first time into Mr Webb-Snowling's classroom, they must agree. 'It's decorated as if you were stepping through the wardrobe,' one parent says. 'Magical for the children, who are instantly hooked on the books!' As is the rest of this establishment, set in 110 acres. One old boy recalls his time here as 'halcyon days', and the recent addition of the 'absolutely marvellous' head-and-wife super-team of Guy and Milly Musson has only confirmed the place's stellar reputation; not just locally but internationally, with pupils arriving from such far-flung destinations as Hong Kong and Nigeria, to make the most of this bewitching school.

PACKWOOD HAUGH ●●

Ruyton XI Towns, Shrewsbury SY4 1HX

Website packwood-haugh.co.uk

Head William Goldsmith *Pupils*

216 day and boarding; 142 boys,

74 girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees**

Day: £7,795; boarding: £9,962

The dream child here is 'curious and enthusiastic', and there's much to be curious and enthusiastic about. A new £1.4 million science centre was recently unveiled, the Packwood Award programme sees youngsters take part in outdoor sculpture and camp craft every Thursday and the fencing club boasts 60 members. A partnership with Shrewsbury School sees 50 per cent of Year 8s move on there, with the remainder heading to the likes of Eton, Rugby and Oundle; and between them, last year's 45 leavers won 23 scholarships. In September, the school welcomes new head William Goldsmith – who joins from St George's, Windsor – and the whole Packwood community is excited to learn what's in store.



Orwell Park

S. ANSELM'S ●●

Stanedge Road, Bakewell DE45 1DP

Website sanselms.co.uk

Head Lisa Donnelly *Pupils* 135

day and boarding; 72 boys, 63 girls

Ages 3–13 **Term Fees** Day:

£8,245; boarding: £10,765

According to a visitor, 'the sweetest children' attend this collection of Victorian limestone buildings overlooking the pretty market town of Bakewell. Smart, too. Despite S. Anselm's being non-selective, its leavers go on to the likes of Harrow,

Eton and Shrewsbury, with all of last year's Year 8s gaining admission to their first choice. Following the introduction of engineering into the timetable, a Wheels in Motion event sees pupils showcase and race vehicles they've built themselves; and there's an upcoming parent-and-progeny trip to Galicia, to walk the famous Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route. This establishment recently became part of the Birkdale family of schools, heralding a meeting of both minds and resources.



S. Anselm's

ST FAITH'S ●●

Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 8AG

Website stfaiths.co.uk

Head Dr Crispin Hyde-Dunn

Pupils 576 day; 269 boys, 307 girls

Ages 4–13 **Term Fees** £6,935

As this prep's pupils busily move round their Cambridge campus – or pop across the road to its large stretch of sports pitches and facilities – you can't miss their trademark black-and-red-striped blazers. In summer, however, their sleeves are rolled up for gardening, and their active Eco Committee sees them championing such initiatives as food waste reduction and growing saplings for the local community. These clever children spend their spare time designing and constructing mini-racing cars which are entered into national competitions; and the science sleepover always sparks great excitement, with its evening of experiments and an outdoor treasure hunt. About half the leavers head to The Leys, but plenty go to such senior schools as Uppingham, Oundle and Eton, and last year 37 pupils won scholarships to senior schools.

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE SCHOOL ●●**Grange Road, Cambridge CB3 9AB****Website** sjcs.co.uk**Head** Neil Chippington **Pupils** 438 **day and boarding:** 247 boys, 191 girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** **Day:** £6,930; **boarding:** £10,920

This institution can trace its roots back to the 17th century, when it was founded to educate the choristers of St John's College. Today, girls' voices can be heard in the choir and female pupils make up over 40 per cent of the student body. Performance lies at the heart of this school, with informal lunch-time concerts complemented by such bigger events as the Service in Preparation for Christmas, held over two days in the college chapel. (Meanwhile, aside from being great for climbing, the school's landmark willow tree is a focal point in theatrical productions, among them its own Shakespeare in the Garden plays.) A buddy system encourages connections between different year groups; and efforts are underway to further develop pupils' empathy, and increase their emotional – as well as academic – intelligence.

St John's College School**WINCHESTER HOUSE SCHOOL ●●****High Street, Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7AZ****Website** winchester-house.org**Head** Antonia Lee **Pupils** 326 **day and boarding:** 182 boys, 144 girls **Ages** 3–14 **Term Fees** **Day:** £7,670; **weekly boarding:** £9,616

There's magic in the air at WHS: a Hogwarts-ish main dining room is illuminated by candles at Christmas time, while a 'secret' garden is given over to building dens and sitting around campfires. And providing outdoor experiences is a passion

project of head Antonia Lee, whose belief in 'free-range children' has seen her charges allowed to roam the 18-acre grounds ever since she joined in 2022. Lee's measure of success is 'happy and relaxed children' who are known by every teacher personally; but track-and-field events are also focused on, with access to Stowe's facilities supplementing this partner school's own impressive offering (which extends to polo and lacrosse). Everyone looks forward to sports day, when ice-cream vans and lavish picnics cover the lawns.

WITHAM HALL ●●**Witham on the Hill, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 0JJ****Website** withamhall.com**Head** William Austen **Pupils** 242 **day and boarding:** 132 boys, 110 girls **Ages** 4–13 **Term Fees** **Day:** £7,200; **boarding:** £9,725

Witham wants its students to be children for as long as possible. In reception, they can often be spotted aboard their playground's pirate ship. Even the top years enjoy hide-and-seek in the gorgeous grounds, where they're presumably whetting appetites for the Big Breakfasts that revered chef Steph whips up. Served every Friday before exams, half-term and end-of-term, they're so legendary that some pupils only board on the previous nights, just so they don't miss out on the gargantuan spread of a full fry-up, pancakes and waffles. In their free time, pupils can hone their entrepreneurial skills by selling sweets for charity at the Snack Shack. But it's not all about the food here. Art and music are strong and exercise amenities include a dance studio and a golf course. Drama is on the up, with the subject recently added to the timetabled curriculum, and three new junior plays on the agenda. 'There's always something going on,' reports one student. 'We've visited a chocolate factory and been to museums dressed up as Second World War evacuees!' □

LITTLE SIBLINGS**Publics with preps: see page 48****Ellesmere College ●●****Felsted School ●●****Gresham's ●●****King's High Warwick ●●****Moreton Hall ●●****New Hall School ●●****Norwich School ●●****Oundle School ●●****The Perse School ●●****Repton School ●●****Rugby School ●●****Shrewsbury School ●●****Uppingham ●●**

Belhaven Hill School



North & Scotland

ARDVRECK SCHOOL ●●

Crieff, Perthshire PH7 4EX

Website ardvreckschool.co.uk

Head Ali Kinge Pupils 148 day and boarding: 70 boys, 78 girls

Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £7,370; boarding: £11,060

The aesthetic at Ardvreck, whose taglines are 'Fiesty and Fantastic' and 'Academic and Adventurous', is exactly what you'd expect from a school in the centre of Scotland: here, it's all woollen jumpers, tartan curtains, cabinets stuffed with trophies and a wood-panelled hall that is used both for reeling practice and dinner dances. There's an annual

Sixth-form trip (for its 12- and 13-year-olds) to Ben Nevis, and pupils often spend their weekends on Barvicks (whole-school expeditions which embrace the Scottish wilderness). Meanwhile, the Ard Challenge is a hotly anticipated 12-mile yomp through a nearby glen, culminating in a huge carnival and feast on the shores of Loch Tay. This properly rural and raucously fun prep is overseen by head Ali Kinge – who has been at the school for 18 years, leading it for the last six – and is described by the children as 'caring', 'friendly' and 'incredibly enthusiastic'.

AYSGARTH SCHOOL ●

Newton-le-Willows, Bedale,

North Yorkshire DL8 1TF

Website aysgarthschool.com

Head Jonathon Anderson Pupils

208 day and boarding: 170 boys,

38 girls Ages 3–13 Term Fees

Day: £8,955; boarding: £11,650

Aysgarth has seen enquiries triple since the news broke that girls are being accepted from September; this change has not only prompted plans to expand the facilities, but also provided an opportunity to mix up the syllabus. Riding, gymnastics, dance and an expanded array of STEM activities will be offered alongside the debating, coding and shooting that already exist. Others of its extracurriculars are less conventional, including 'Cow' (aka 'cricket on the wall') and Spotlight, which sees pupils break out of school at night and make their way undetected to the cricket pavilion. 'Aysgarth has a positive and upbeat atmosphere,' says one parent. 'We could not have been happier with the choice we made.'

BELHAVEN HILL SCHOOL ●●

Dunbar, East Lothian EH42 1NN

Website belhavenhill.com

Head Oliver Langton Pupils 160

day and boarding: 94 boys, 66 girls

Ages 5–13 Term Fees Day:

£8,950; boarding: £11,250

Known for its fortnightly boarding system, Belhaven frames itself as a home with classrooms rather than a school with dormitories. According to one father: 'The atmosphere is very family-oriented and caring.' Wednesday Tuck and Saturday Sweets are highlights of the week, and a big treat is the twice-termly slap-up Sunday brunch. An exciting new curriculum is in the works, focusing on STEM and computer science, while the top year enjoys a leadership course held in partnership with an ethical adventure company. (This involves outdoorsy activities such as surfing and camping.) 'The children who come out of Belhaven are not arrogant or entitled,' concludes one mother. 'They are well-grounded people, excited about their next adventure.'

CARGILFIELD ●●

Gamekeeper's Road,

Edinburgh EH4 6HU

Website cargilfield.com

Head Rob Taylor Pupils 303 day

and boarding: 175 boys, 128 girls

Ages 3–13 Term Fees Day: £7,290;

weekly boarding: £8,945

Parents love the 'feel and ethos' of this prep on the western outskirts of Edinburgh, which we're told is undergoing a 'big push for excellence on all fronts'. Applications are on the up; and with such a small number of pupils per class – 18 max – availability is limited. Flexi boarding is an option; and surely popular with parents and pupils is the policy of no homework in the upper years. There's plenty to occupy students' free time: skiing, climbing and padel are popular, and the school shows real strength in rowing and cricket. Fettes is one popular destination, and the recent cohort of leavers scored a bumper crop of 31 scholarships to senior institutions – an impressive seven of them being music awards.

CUNDALL MANOR SCHOOL ●●

Cundall, York YO61 2RW

Website cundallmanorschool.com

Head Chris James-Roll **Pupils**

350 day and boarding: 180 boys, 170 girls **Ages** 2–16 **Term Fees** Day: £6,955; boarding: £8,455

'A bubble of wonderment in the countryside,' is how one mother describes the nursery-through-to-GCSE Cundall Manor. Alongside academics – pupils move on to the likes of Rugby, Uppingham and Oundle – there's axe-throwing, chicken-rearing and ski trips to Canada. Parents love the work-hard-play-hard philosophy led by head Chris James-Roll (who has been known to join in snowball fights). Staff are revered: Madame Bewell was recently crowned French teacher of the year by the Institut Français in London and head of music Sarah Reece is hailed as 'outstanding'. Each summer, the whole school enjoys a beach day, then refuels on fish and chips before heading home.

MOWDEN HALL SCHOOL ●●

Newton, Stocksfield,

Northumberland NE43 7TP

Website mowdenhallpst.org

Head Kate Martin **Pupils** 221

day and boarding: 96 boys, 125 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,995; boarding: £9,950

Surrounded by verdant rolling hills, a large lake and open fields filled with sheep, Mowden Hall is thriving under the leadership of popular head Kate Martin, who parents say is a 'wonderful role model', both motivated and compassionate. Says one: 'Our children admire and like her. But equally, they respect her and would do anything she told them to.' Pupils don't just head to such northern schools as Sedbergh but fan further afield, to the likes of Oundle and Eton. Extracurriculars range from girls' rugby to Nerf Gun War Club; works are about to start on transforming the theatre; and a unique, new, calming space called The Treehouse provides a dedicated area for taking time out from today's fast-paced world.

QUEEN MARY'S SCHOOL ●●

Baldersby Park, Topcliffe,

North Yorkshire YO7 3BZ

Website queenmarys.org

Head Carole Cameron

Pupils 227 day and boarding: 226 girls, 1 boy **Ages** 3–16 **Term Fees** Day: £7,168; boarding: £10,158

Queen Mary's excels in sports and outdoor pursuits and is particularly renowned for its equestrian prowess. However, its academics are a force to be reckoned with; and 2023 saw 100 per cent of leavers receive offers from their first choices for Sixth Form. Educating the girls until they're 16 (Queen Mary's only teaches boys up to 8) means that they can experience leadership roles at an earlier age than many of their peers, and also play in First sports teams when they're younger than they would be elsewhere. Still, there's a tremendous sense of fun alongside all the hard work, and traditions loved by the community include sliding on gym mats down the stairway into the Great Hall. A school memory to be cherished.

ST MARY'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL ●●

Abbey Park, Melrose,

Roxburghshire TD6 9LN

Website stmarysmelrose.org.uk

Head William Harvey **Pupils** 171 day and boarding: 86 boys, 85 girls **Ages** 2–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,909; boarding: £7,809

Spanning Warhammer and willow weaving, there is no shortage of extracurriculars at St Mary's. A new indoor sports facility is under construction, and the creative can get involved in brilliant projects: one recent trip to The Great Tapestry of Scotland saw pupils enjoy a drawing workshop with its presiding artist Andrew Crummy. From kayaking to surfing and building overnight shelters, there are also myriad activities in the great outdoors. 'I so wish I'd gone to St Mary's!' laments one parent, who praises the school's 'wholesome' attitude to education. 'Its greatest asset is how down-to-earth it is. Every child is encouraged to have a go at everything, no matter what their ability may be.'

TERRINGTON HALL ●●

Terrington, York YO60 6PR

Website terringtonhall.com

Head Huw Thomas **Pupils** 200

day: 99 boys, 101 girls **Ages** 3–13 **Term Fees** Day: £6,410; boarding: £8,530

The classrooms at rural Terrington have breathtaking views of the sweeping North Yorkshire scenery, so its mission of 'expanding horizons' seems eminently suitable. The end of the school day was recently pushed to the later time of 5.30pm, with the last hour dedicated to clubs and activities. (Prep has moved to earlier in the timetable, to the relief of tired children and their parents.) The introduction of Bikeability courses has seen pupils spinning round York's Solar System route, where they're joined by astrophysicists delivering lectures on the planets. Indeed, the pupils have such a thirst for knowledge that 'everyone looks forward to the house events such as the big quiz and spelling bee'. Dining is family-style and across age groups – pupils say the food 'is very tasty, especially since Billy and Alex, the chefs, joined' – and the tradition of thanking teachers at the end of lessons has been long ingrained. There's been a marked rise in applications, so make sure to put names down fast. □

Terrington Hall pupils cycle round York's Solar System route, where they're joined by astrophysicists delivering lectures on planets



LITTLE SIBLINGS

Publics with preps: see page 54

Fettes College ●●

Giggleswick School ●●

Gordonstoun ●●

Kilgraston ●

The King's School, Chester ●●

Loretto ●●

The Manchester

Grammar School ●

Merchiston Castle School ●

St George's School ●

St Leonards School ●●

St Peter's School, York ●●

Sedbergh School ●●

Stonyhurst ●●

Strathallan ●●

Withington Girls' School ●

Yarm School ●●

Public schools

- 24 **Abingdon School** Park Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1DE (abingdon.org.uk)
- 12 **Alleyn's School** Townley Road, London SE22 8SU (alleyns.org.uk)
- 24 **Ardingly College** College Road, Haywards Heath RH17 6SQ (ardingly.com)
- 40 **Badminton School** Westbury Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS9 3BA (badmintonschool.co.uk)
- 25 **Bedales School** Church Road, Steep, Petersfield GU32 2DG (bedales.org.uk)
- 25 **Bedford School** De Parys Avenue, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK40 2TU (bedfordschool.org.uk)
- 25 **Benenden School** Cranbrook, Kent TN17 4AA (benenden.school)
- 26 **Berkhamsted Schools Group** Overton House, High Street, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 2BB (berkhamsted.com)
- 40 **Blundell's School** Blundell's Road, Tiverton, Devon EX16 4DN (blundells.org)
- 26 **Bradfield College** Bradfield, Reading, Berkshire RG7 6AU (bradfieldcollege.org.uk)
- 26 **Brighton College** Eastern Road, Brighton BN2 0AL (brightoncollege.org.uk)
- 41 **Bryanston** Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0PX (bryanston.co.uk)
- 41 **Canford** Canford Magna, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 3AD (canford.com)
- 27 **Caterham School** Harestone Valley Road, Caterham, Surrey CR3 6YA (caterhamschool.co.uk)
- 27 **Charterhouse** Godalming, Surrey GU7 2DX (charterhouse.org.uk)
- 41 **Cheltenham College** Bath Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL53 7LD (cheltenhamcollege.org)
- 42 **Cheltenham Ladies' College** Bayshill Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 3EP (cheltladiescollege.org)
- 42 **Christ College Brecon** Bridge Street, Brecon, Powys LD3 8AF (christcollegebrecon.com)
- 27 **Christ's Hospital** Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0LJ (christs-hospital.org.uk)
- 13 **City of London School** Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 3AL (cityoflondonschool.org.uk)
- 13 **City of London School for Girls** St Giles' Terrace, London EC2Y 8BB (clsg.org.uk)
- 42 **Clayesmore** Iwerne Minster, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8LL (clayesmore.com)
- 43 **Clifton College** College Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 3JH (cliftoncollege.com)
- 28 **Cranleigh** Horseshoe Lane, Cranleigh, Surrey GU6 8QQ (cranleigh.org)
- 28 **Culford School** Culford, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP28 6TX (culford.co.uk)
- 43 **Dauntsey's** West Lavington, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 4HE (dauntseys.org)
- 43 **Dean Close School** Shelburne Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL51 6HE (deanclose.org.uk)
- 13 **DLD College London** Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7FX (dldcollege.co.uk)
- 28 **d'Overbroeck's** Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7PL (doverbroecks.com)
- 29 **Downe House** Thatcham, Berkshire RG18 9JJ (downehouse.net)
- 14 **Dulwich College** Dulwich Common, London SE21 7LD (dulwich.org.uk)
- 29 **Eastbourne College** Old Wish Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 4JX (eastbourne-college.co.uk)
- 48 **Ellesmere College** Ellesmere, Shropshire SY12 9AB (ellesmere.com)
- 14 **Emanuel School** Battersea Rise, London SW11 1HS (emanuel.org.uk)
- 29 **Epsom College** Epsom, Surrey KT17 4JQ (epsomcollege.org.uk)
- 29 **Eton College** Windsor, Berkshire SL4 6DW (etoncollege.com)
- 48 **Felsted School** Felsted, Essex CM6 3LL (felsted.org)
- 54 **Fettes College** Carrington Road, Edinburgh EH4 1QX (fettes.com)
- 14 **Francis Holland, Regent's Park** Ivor Place, London NW1 6XR (fhs-nw1.org.uk)
- 14 **Francis Holland, Sloane Square** Graham Terrace, London SW1W 8JF (fhs-sw1.org.uk)
- 54 **Giggleswick School** Settle, North Yorkshire BD24 0DE (giggleswick.org.uk)
- 54 **Glenalmond College** Glenalmond, Perthshire PH1 3RY (glenalmondcollege.co.uk)
- 44 **Godolphin School** Milford Hill, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 2RA (godolphin.org)
- 15 **Godolphin & Latymer** Iffley Road, London W6 0PG (godolphinandymer.com)
- 55 **Gordonstoun** Elgin, Moray IV30 5RF (gordonstoun.org.uk)
- 49 **Gresham's** Cromer Road, Holt, Norfolk NR25 6EA (greshams.com)
- 30 **Haileybury** Haileybury, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG13 7NU (haileybury.com)
- 15 **Hampton School** Hanworth Road, Hampton, Middlesex TW12 3HD (hamptonschool.org.uk)
- 15 **Harrow School** High Street, Harrow on the Hill HA1 3HP (harrowsschool.org.uk)
- 30 **Headington Rye Oxford** Headington Road, Oxford OX3 7TD (headington.org)
- 30 **Heathfield School** London Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 8BQ (heathfieldschool.net)
- 31 **Hurtwood House** Holmby Road, St Mary, Dorking, Surrey RH5 6NU (hurtwoodhouse.com)
- 16 **Ibstock Place School** Clarence Lane, Roehampton SW15 5PY (ibstockplaceschool.co.uk)
- 16 **James Allen's Girls' School** East Dulwich Grove, London SE22 8TE (jags.org.uk)
- 55 **Kilgraston** Bridge of Eam, Perth PH2 9BQ (kilgraston.com)
- 49 **King Edward's School, Birmingham** Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham B15 2UA (kes.org.uk)
- 18 **King's College School, Wimbledon** Wimbledon Common, London SW19 4TT (kcs.org.uk)
- 49 **King's High Warwick** Banbury Road, Warwick CV34 6YE (kingshighwarwick.co.uk)
- 55 **The King's School Wrexham** Road, Chester CH4 7QL (kingschester.co.uk)
- 31 **The King's School, Canterbury** Canterbury, Kent CT1 2ES (kings-school.co.uk)
- 18 **Latymer Upper** King Street, London W6 9LR (latymer-upper.org)
- 50 **The Leys** Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 7AD (theleys.net)
- 55 **Loretto** Linkfield Road, Musselburgh, East Lothian EH21 7RE (loretto.com)
- 31 **Magdalen College School** Cowley Place, Oxford OX4 1DZ (mcsoxford.org)
- 50 **Malvern College** College Road, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 3DF (malverncollege.org.uk)
- 56 **The Manchester Grammar School** Old Hall Lane, Manchester M13 0XT (mgs.org)
- 44 **Marlborough College** Bath Road, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 1PA (marlboroughcollege.org)
- 20 **Merchant Taylors' School** Sandy Lodge Lane, Northwood HA6 2HT (mtsn.org.uk)
- 56 **Merchiston Castle School** Colinton Road, Edinburgh EH13 0PU (merchiston.co.uk)
- 45 **Millfield** Butleigh Road, Street, Somerset BA16 0YD (millfieldschool.com)
- 45 **Milton Abbey** Milton Abbas, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0BZ (miltonabbey.co.uk)
- 45 **Monkton Combe** Church Lane, Monkton Combe, Bath BA2 7HG (monktoncombeschool.com)
- 50 **Moreton Hall** Weston Rhyn, Shropshire SY11 3EW (moretonhall.org)
- 50 **New Hall School** The Avenue, Boreham, Chelmsford CM3 3HS (newhallschool.co.uk)
- 20 **North London Collegiate School** Canons Drive, Edgware, London HA8 7RJ (nlcs.org.uk)
- 51 **Norwich School** The Close, Norwich NR1 4DD (norwich-school.org.uk)
- 51 **Oakham School** Chapel Close, Oakham, Rutland LE15 6DT (oakham.rutland.sch.uk)
- 51 **Oundle School** The Great Hall, New Street, Oundle, Northamptonshire PE8 4GH (oundleschool.org.uk)
- 32 **Oxford High School** Bellbroughton Road, Oxford OX2 6XA (oxfordhigh.gdst.net)
- 52 **The Perse School** Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8QF (perse.co.uk)
- 32 **Prior's Field** Priorsfield Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 2RH (priorsfieldschool.com)
- 21 **Putney High School** Putney Hill, London SW15 6BH (putneyhigh.gdst.net)
- 32 **Queen Anne's School** Henley Road, Caversham, Berkshire RG4 6DX (qas.org.uk)
- 56 **Queen Margaret's School for Girls** Escrick Park, York YO19 6EU (queenmargarets.com)
- 21 **Queen's College** Harley Street, London W1G 8BT (qc.org.uk)
- 32 **Queenswood** Brookmans Park, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL9 6NS (queenswood.org)
- 33 **Radley College** Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 2HR (radley.org.uk)
- 33 **Reigate Grammar School** Reigate Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 0QS (reigategrammar.org)
- 52 **Repton School** Repton, Derbyshire DE65 6FH (repton.org.uk)
- 33 **Roedean School** Roedean Way, Brighton BN2 5RQ (roedean.co.uk)
- 52 **Royal Hospital School** Holbrook, Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 2RX (royalhospitalschool.org)
- 53 **Rugby School** Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 5EH (rugbyschool.co.uk)
- 34 **St Catherine's, Bramley** Station Road, Bramley, Guildford, Surrey GU5 2AQ (stcatherines.info)
- 34 **St Edward's School** Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 7NN (stedwardsoxford.org)
- 34 **St George's School, Ascot** Wells Lane, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7DZ (stgeorges-ascot.org.uk)
- 57 **St George's School** Garscube Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6BG (stgeorge.org.uk)
- 57 **St Helen & St Katharine** Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1BE (shsk.org.uk)
- 57 **St Leonards School** St Andrews, Fife KY16 9QJ (stleonards-fife.org)
- 35 **St Mary's, Ascot** St Mary's Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 9JF (st-marys-ascot.co.uk)
- 46 **St Mary's Calne** Curzon Street, Calne, Wiltshire SN11 0DF (stmaryscalne.org)
- 22 **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)
- 57 **St Peter's School, York** Clifton, York YO30 6AB (stpetersyork.org.uk)
- 35 **St Swithun's** Alresford Road, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1HA (stswithuns.com)
- 57 **Sedbergh School** Sedbergh, Cumbria LA10 5HG (sedberghschool.org)
- 36 **Sevenoaks School** High Street, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HU (sevenoaksschool.org)
- 46 **Sherborne Girls** Bradford Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3QN (sherborne.com)
- 46 **Sherborne** Abbey Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3LF (sherborne.org)
- 53 **Shrewsbury School** Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY3 7BA (shrewsbury.org.uk)
- 21 **South Hampstead High School** Maresfield Gardens, London NW3 5SS (shhs.gdst.net)
- 47 **Stonar** Cottles Park, Atworth, Wiltshire SN12 8NT (stonarschool.com)
- 58 **Stonyhurst** Lancashire BB7 9PZ (stonyhurst.ac.uk)
- 36 **Stowe School** Stowe, Buckinghamshire MK18 5EH (stowe.co.uk)
- 58 **Strathallan** Forgandenny, Perth PH2 9EG (strathallan.co.uk)
- 36 **Tonbridge School** High Street, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9HA (tonbridge-school.co.uk)
- 37 **Tudor Hall** Wykham Park, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9UR (tudorhallschool.com)
- 22 **University College School** Frognal, Hampstead, London NW3 6XH (ucs.org.uk)
- 53 **Uppingham** Uppingham, Rutland LE15 9QE (uppingham.co.uk)
- 47 **UWC Atlantic College** St Donat's Castle, Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan CF61 1WF (atlanticcollege.org)
- 37 **Wellington College** Duke's Ride, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 7PU (wellingtoncollege.org.uk)
- 23 **Westminster School** Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3PB (westminster.org.uk)
- 47 **Westonbirt School** Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8QG (westonbirt.org)
- 23 **Whitgift** Haling Park, London CR2 6YT (whitgift.co.uk)
- 23 **Wimbledon High School** Mansel Road, London SW19 4AB (wimbledonhigh.gdst.net)
- 37 **Winchester College** College Street, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9NA (winchestercollege.org)
- 58 **Withington Girls' School** Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester M14 6BL (wgs.org)
- 38 **Woldingham School** Marden Park, Woldingham, Surrey CR3 7YA (woldinghamschool.co.uk)
- 38 **Worth School** Paddockhurst Road, Turners Hill, West Sussex RH10 4SD (worthschool.org.uk)
- 38 **Wycombe Abbey** High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP11 1PE (wycombeabbey.com)
- 58 **Yarm School** The Friarage, Yarm, North Yorkshire TS15 9EJ (yarmschool.org)

Prep schools

- 88 **Aldro** Lombard Street, Shackleford, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6AS (aldro.org)
- 100 **All Hallows School** Cranmore Hall, Somerset BA4 4SF (allhallowsschool.co.uk)
- 108 **Ardreck School** Crieff, Perthshire PH7 4EX (ardreckschool.co.uk)
- 108 **Aysgarth School** Newton-le-Willows, Bedale, North Yorkshire DL8 1TF (aysgarthschool.co.uk)
- 78 **Bassett House School** Bassett Road, London W10 6JP (bassetths.org.uk)
- 100 **Beaudesert Park School** Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire GL6 9AF (beaudesert.gloucs.sch.uk)
- 104 **Beeston Hall School** West Runton, Cromer, Norfolk NR27 9NQ (beestonhall.co.uk)
- 108 **Belhaven Hill School** Dunbar, East Lothian EH42 1NN (belhavenhill.com)
- 104 **Bilton Grange** Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 6QU (biltongrange.co.uk)
- 88 **Brambletye** Lewes Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3PD (brambletye.co.uk)
- 78 **Brighton College Prep Kensington** Prince's Gardens, London SW7 1ND (brightoncollegeprep Kensington.co.uk)
- 79 **Broomwood** Nightingale Lane, London SW12 3TE (broomwood.com)
- 88 **Bruern Abbey School** Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 1UY (bruernabbey.org)
- 79 **Bute House** Luxemburg Gardens, London W6 7EA (butehouse.co.uk)
- 88 **Caldicott** Crown Lane, Farnham Royal, Buckinghamshire SL2 3SL (caldicott.com)
- 108 **Cargilfield** Gamekeeper's Road, Edinburgh EH4 6HU (cargilfield.com)
- 100 **Chafyn Grove** Bourne Avenue, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 1LR (chafyngrove.co.uk)
- 89 **Cheam School** Headley, Newbury, Berkshire RG19 8LD (cheamschool.com)
- 89 **Christ Church Cathedral School** Brewer Street, Oxford OX1 1QW (cccs.org.uk)
- 79 **Connaught House School** Connaught Square, London W2 2HL (connaughthouseschool.co.uk)
- 89 **Cothill House** Cothill, Oxfordshire OX13 6JL (cothillpst.org)
- 89 **Cottesmore School** Buchan Hill, Pease Pottage, West Sussex RH11 9AU (cottesmoreschool.com)
- 89 **Cumnor House School** Danehill, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 7HT (cumnor.co.uk)
- 109 **Cundall Manor School** Cundall, York YO61 2RW (cundallmanorschool.com)
- 90 **Dorset House School** Church Lane, Bury, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 1PB (dorsethouseschool.com)
- 90 **Dragon School** Bardwell Road, Oxford OX2 6SS (dragonschool.org)
- 79 **Dulwich Prep London** Allyn Park, London SE21 7AA (dulwichpreplondon.org)
- 90 **Eagle House School (now Wellington College Prep)** Crowthorne Road, Sandhurst, Berkshire GU47 8PH (eaglehouseschool.com)
- 80 **Eaton House The Manor School** Clapham Common North Side, London SW4 9RU (eatonhouseschools.com)
- 80 **Eaton Square School** Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PH (eatonsquareschools.com)
- 90 **L'École de Battersea** Trott Street, London SW11 3DS (lecoledebattersea.co.uk)
- 90 **Edge Grove** Aldenham Village, Hertfordshire WD25 8NL (edgegrove.com)
- 104 **The Elms** Colwall, Malvern, Worcestershire WR13 6EF (elmsschool.co.uk)
- 90 **Elstree School** Woolhampton Hill, Berkshire RG7 5TD (elstreeschool.org.uk)
- 80 **Fairley House** Lambeth Road, London SE1 7JY (fairleyhouse.org.uk)
- 80 **Falkner House** Penywern Road, London SW5 9SU; Brechin Place, London SW7 4QB (falknerhouse.co.uk)
- 91 **Farleigh** Red Rice, Andover, Hampshire SP11 7PW (farleighschool.com)
- 91 **Feltonfleet School** Byfleet Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 1DR (feltonfleet.co.uk)
- 81 **Fulham Prep School** Greyhound Road, London W14 9SD (fulham.school)
- 81 **Garden House School** Turks Row, London SW3 4TW (gardenhouseschool.co.uk)
- 81 **Glendower Prep School** Queen's Gate, London SW7 5JX (glendowerprep.org)
- 91 **Godstowe** Shrubbery Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP13 6PR (godstowe.org)
- 81 **The Hall School** Crossfield Road, London NW3 4NU (hallschool.co.uk)
- 91 **Handcross Park** London Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 6HF (handcrossparkschool.co.uk)
- 101 **Hanford School** Child Okeford, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8HN (hanfordschool.co.uk)
- 101 **Hazlegrove Preparatory School** Sparkford, Somerset BA22 7JA (hazlegrove.co.uk)
- 91 **Heath Mount School** Woodhall Park, Watton-at-Stone, Hertfordshire SG14 3NG (heathmount.org)
- 92 **Highfield and Brookham Schools** Highfield Lane, Liphook, Hampshire GU30 7LQ (highfieldandbrookham.co.uk)
- 92 **Holmewood House School** Barrow Lane, Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0EB (holmewoodhouse.co.uk)
- 81 **Hornsby House School** Hearnville Road, London SW12 8RS (hornsbyhouse.org.uk)
- 82 **Kensington Prep School** Fulham Road, London SW6 5PA (kensingtonprep.gdst.net)
- 105 **King's College School, Cambridge** West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DN (kcs.cambs.sch.uk)
- 101 **Kitebrook** Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire GL56 0RP (kitebrookpst.org)
- 82 **Knightsbridge School** Pont Street, London SW1X 0BD (knightsbridgeschool.com)
- 92 **Lambrook School** Winkfield Row, Nr Ascot, Berkshire RG42 6LU (lambrookschool.co.uk)
- 92 **Lockers Park** Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP1 1TL (lockerspark.co.uk)
- 92 **Ludgrove School** Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3AB (ludgrove.net)
- 105 **Maidwell Hall** Maidwell, Northamptonshire NN6 9JG (maidwellhall.co.uk)
- 93 **Milbourne Lodge School** Arbrook Lane, Esher, Surrey KT10 9EG (milbournelodge.co.uk)
- 93 **Moon Hall School** Flanchford Road, Leigh, Reigate, Surrey RH2 8RE (moonshallschoolreigate.co.uk)
- 105 **Moor Park** Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 4DZ (moorpark.org.uk)
- 93 **Moulsford** Moulsford-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 9HR (moulsford.com)
- 109 **Mowden Hall School** Newton, Stocksfield, Northumberland NE43 7TP (mowdenhallpst.org)
- 94 **New College School** Savile Road, Oxford OX1 3UA (newcollegeschool.org)
- 82 **Newton Prep School** Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BX (newtonprepschool.co.uk)
- 82 **Norland Place School** Holland Park Avenue, London W11 4UH (norlandplace.com)
- 82 **Notting Hill Prep School** Lancaster Road, London W11 1QQ (nottinghillprep.com)
- 105 **Old Buckenham Hall** Brettenham Park, Ipswich, Suffolk IP7 7PH (obh.co.uk)
- 83 **Orchard House School** Newton Grove, London W4 1LB (orchards.org.uk)
- 106 **Orwell Park** Nacton, Ipswich, Suffolk IP10 0ER (orwellpark.co.uk)
- 106 **Packwood Haugh** Ruyton XI Towns, Shrewsbury SY4 1HX (packwood-haugh.co.uk)
- 94 **Papplewick** Windsor Road, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7LH (papplewick.org.uk)
- 83 **Parkgate House School** Clapham Common North Side, London SW4 9SD (parkgate-school.co.uk)
- 83 **Pembridge Hall School** Pembridge Square, London W2 4EH (pembridgehall.co.uk)
- 101 **Perrott Hill** North Perrott, Somerset TA18 7SL (perrotthill.com)
- 94 **The Pilgrims' School** Inner Close, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9LT (thepilgrims-school.co.uk)
- 101 **Pinewood School** Bourton, Shrivenham, Wiltshire SN6 8HZ (pinewoodschool.co.uk)
- 102 **Port Regis** Motcombe Park, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 9QA (portregis.com)
- 94 **Prince's Mead** Kings Worthy, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1AN (princesmeadschool.org.uk)
- 83 **Prospect House School** Putney Hill, London SW15 3NT (prospecths.org.uk)
- 109 **Queen Mary's School** Baldersby Park, Topcliffe, North Yorkshire YO7 3BZ (queenmarys.org)
- 84 **Ravenscourt Park Prep School** Ravenscourt Avenue, London W6 0SL (rpps.co.uk)
- 106 **S. Anselm's** Stanedge Road, Bakewell, Derbyshire DE45 1DP (sanselmss.co.uk)
- 94 **St Andrew's School, Berkshire** Pangbourne, Berkshire RG8 8QA (standrewsberkshire.co.uk)
- 84 **St Christopher's School** Belsize Lane, London NW3 5AE (stchristophers.london)
- 106 **St Faith's** Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 8AG (stfaiths.co.uk)
- 95 **St George's School Windsor Castle** Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1QF (stgwindsor.org)
- 95 **St Hugh's School** Carswell Manor, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8PT (st-hughs.co.uk)
- 84 **St James Prep School** Earsby Street, London W14 8SH (stjamesprep.org.uk)
- 95 **St John's Beaumont** Priest Hill, Old Windsor, Berkshire SL4 2JN (sjbwindsor.org)
- 107 **St John's College School** Grange Road, Cambridge CB3 9AB (sjcs.co.uk)
- 109 **St Mary's Preparatory School** Abbey Park, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9LN (stmarysmelrose.org.uk)
- 84 **St Paul's Juniors** Lonsdale Road, London SW13 9JT (stpaulsschool.org.uk)
- 85 **St Philip's School** Wetherby Place, London SW7 4NE (stpschool.co.uk)
- 95 **Saint Ronan's** Water Lane, Hawkhurst, Kent TN18 5DJ (saintronans.co.uk)
- 102 **Sandroyd School** Rushmore, Tollard Royal, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5OD (sandroyd.org)
- 102 **Sherborne Prep** Acreman Street, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3NY (sherborneprep.org)
- 95 **Shrewsbury House School** Ditton Road, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 6RL (shrewsburyhouse.net)
- 97 **Summer Fields** Mayfield Road, Oxford OX2 7EN (summerfields.com)
- 97 **Sunningdale School** Dry Arch Road, Sunningdale, Berkshire SL5 9PY (sunningdaleschool.co.uk)
- 85 **Sussex House School** Cadogan Square, London SW1X 0EA (sussexhouseschool.co.uk)
- 97 **Swanbourne House** Swanbourne, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK17 0HZ (swanbourne.org)
- 109 **Terrington Hall** Terrington, York YO60 6PR (terringtonhall.com)
- 85 **Thomas's Battersea** Battersea High Street, London SW11 3JB (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 85 **Thomas's Clapham** Broomwood Road, London SW11 6JZ (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 85 **Thomas's Fulham** Hugon Road, London SW6 3ES (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 85 **Thomas's Kensington** Cottesmore Gardens, London W8 5PR (thomas-s.co.uk)
- 86 **Tower House** Sheen Lane, London SW14 8LF (thsboys.org.uk)
- 102 **Truro School Prep** Trelliske House, Highertown, Truro, Cornwall TR1 3QN (trurosschool.com)
- 98 **Twyford School** Twyford, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 2AA (twyfordschool.com)
- 98 **Walhampton** School Lane, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 5ZG (walhampton.com)
- 98 **Westbourne House** Coach Road, Chichester, West Sussex PO20 2BH (westbournehouse.org)
- 86 **Westminster Cathedral Choir School** Ambrosden Avenue, London SW1P 1QH (choirschool.com)
- 86 **Westminster Under School** Vincent Square, London SW1P 2NN (westminsterunder.org.uk)
- 86 **Wetherby Preparatory School** Bryanston Square, London W1H 2EA (wetherbyprep.co.uk)
- 107 **Winchester House School** High Street, Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7AZ (winchester-house.org)
- 98 **Windlesham House** London Road, Washington, West Sussex RH20 4AY (windlesham.com)
- 107 **Witham Hall** Witham on the Hill, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 0JJ (withamhall.com)

And finally



Below, in 1989, Diana, Princess of Wales competed in the Mothers' Race at Wetherby Prep School, where both of her sons were educated

ETON TRIFLES

At Eton College's Fourth of June celebrations, oarsmen shake the flowers from their boaters into the water

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS

Glasses, £415,
LINDA FARROW



Bag,
£3,500,
DIOR



Dress,
£1,740,
EMILIA WICKSTEAD



Shoes, POA,
GIAMBATTISTA VALLI

HATS OFF!

It's the pinnacle of the parents' calendar: dress to impress at schools' summer celebrations

IF YOU'RE HEADING TO ETON FOR THE FOURTH of June celebrations, be sure to pack a panama hat – it's the must-have accessory for fathers in the leavers' tents. Men don chinos and blue shirts, while ladies keep it practical yet chic with wedges and dresses. All gather to watch the day's highlight – the Procession of Boats on the Thames – when rowers from all years are attired in the distinctive uniforms of 18th-century midshipmen with straw boaters decked in flowers.

Wellington College's Speech Day takes the glamour up a notch. 'The two [Eton and Wellington] are like chalk and cheese,' says one parent. Compared to Eton's traditions, Wellington kicks things off with an all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza in the Big Top, followed by cricket matches with past and present pupils, house lunches, real tennis and – reflecting its military heritage – the cavalry charge, the presentation of the Sword of Honour and the Corps of Drum display.

In the Wiltshire countryside, Marlborough's Prize Day is relatively understated – until pupils reach the Upper Sixth, when parents up the ante with beautifully decorated gazebos. Activities include cricket, Shell (first-year) tug-of-war on Polloi pitch, and exhibitions at the Art School and Mount House Gallery. Radley's Gaudy celebrations are cricket-centric and also feature a beagle parade. After parents visit their sons' Socials (houses) for prizes and speeches, the day concludes with families joining forces by sharing picnics around Bigside.

Which school took the title for last year's most enviable celebration? Stowe's Speech Day saw parents and pupils dance to a performance of 'Murder on the Dancefloor' by singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor. Looks like no one can kill Stowe's groove. □



PUTTING ON THE GLITZ

Hat, £460,
MAISON MICHEL



Cardigan,
£3,400,
SCHIAPARELLI



Bag,
£3,600,
ROGER VIVIER

Skirt,
£4,000,
SCHIAPARELLI



Former pupils in hats in the Old Westminster Race in Vincent Square in the 1930s



PHOTOGRAPHS: GLENN HARVEY; HOMER SYKES/ALAMY WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES