

INDEPENDENT SENIOR & PREPARATORY SCHOOLS



# CATHOLIC

## GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE 2023

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# Introduction



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**T**his year, having got more than the all-clear from Ofsted, Ampleforth is back in the top ten along with two new additions: girls' school The Laurels and its brother school The Cedars. Based in South London's Upper Norwood, near Croydon, on a large campus which they share with Oakwood prep school, both schools have impressed us with their uncompromising Catholic vision and increasingly high academic standards.

Boarding schools St Mary's Ascot, Stonyhurst, Mayfield, New Hall, Downside and Worth remain in the top ten from last year, as does day school St George's Weybridge for its commitment to its Josephite roots – unique in the UK – which teach the values of “Politesse and Douceur, Honesty and Compassion, Zeal and Happiness”.

Four of the five top prep schools remain the same, with one addition, St Philip's in South Kensington, a small boys' school which inspired *Herald* contributor Ysenda Maxtone Graham's book *Mr Tibbits's Catholic School*. While not as eccentric as it was when it was first founded in 1934 (as late as the 1960s the school had no classes in biology or chemistry because, Mr Tibbits said, “Gentlemen do not study science”), the fearless spirit of the school, which has strong connections to the Brompton Oratory, endures, turning out confident boys and sending them on to the likes of Ampleforth, Eton and Winchester.

Alongside the Catholic Good Schools Guide are four feature articles, including my interview with Peter Roberts, the new headmaster of Ampleforth. We also have Katherine Bennett's take on a new American-style Catholic home-schooling-hybrid academy in Warrington, Gertrude Clarke on how Catholic schools must stop employing the services of charities with no Catholic ethos, and Louise Kirk on Alive to the World, a relationships education curriculum which teaches children about modesty.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

*Oleńka Hamilton*

# Doing the right thing the wrong way

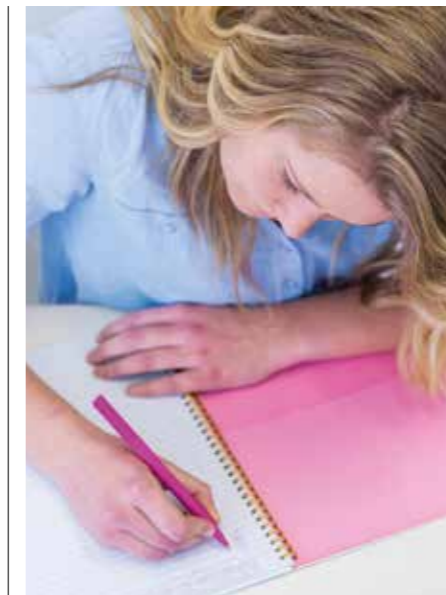
Schools should make sure the charities they work with share the same values, says *Gertrude Clarke*

**T**his new term is something of a milestone. For my 16-year-old daughter, after five years in a Catholic state girls' school, she'll be joining a Catholic state boys' school that's coeducational in sixth form. She's already talking darkly about institutional misogyny and sexism, her view having been well and truly coloured by the website Everyone's Invited, which rattled practically every well-known school that takes in girls, by publishing accounts of alleged catcalling, assault and discrimination.

As far as I could see, much of the trouble it alleged took place outside school, and there's not much teachers can do to police private parties except to discuss the issue of consent without – tough one – wholly compromising Catholic teaching on chastity. And the mindset behind the site was that of vindictive victimhood; I took a dim view of it. So I told my daughter that most of the boys will be perfectly harmless and, like spiders, more scared of her than she of them. She's also complained that they're very plain (there would be war if a boy said that), but tough; handsome is as handsome does.

My son, will, I hope, be going to university. He attended the school that my daughter may be going to (I'm writing before exam results come out, so it's all in the hands of God), and his approach to the girls was to avoid them, with the exception of those he went to primary school with.

My daughter's school is one of many that was formerly run by nuns, and since their departure has lacked any discernible Catholic ethos. Attendance at Mass is about once a term. The de facto chaplain is lay and pleasant, but there's no regular involvement by a priest. The school is terrifically keen on mental health, having a centre specifically dedicated for this purpose, but spiritual



“My daughter's school is one of many that was formerly run by nuns, and since their departure has lacked any discernible Catholic ethos

health doesn't really feature. Actually, there are no team sports apart from basketball, so the benefits of that discipline are lacking too. The school, admittedly, is in a diverse urban area, with all the associated problems, and the head's ultimate aspiration is to make sure, as she says, that the street does not enter the school. Its formidable former head, an ex-nun, who preserved the discipline and mindset of the convent, had, I think, very different intentions, like turning out good Christians.

But the point at which I really despaired of the place was when my daughter got

involved with a group of girls who did drugs and got into trouble herself. I was furious with her and entirely supportive of a robust approach by the school. What I got was an invitation for her to attend a series of one-to-one sessions with an organisation called Turning Point, which, I was told, “specialises in drugs education. They will be able to advise and support her to understand the short- and long-term consequences of engaging in drugs”. Fine, I said. Whatever helps.

But the online meetings began badly. She had a preliminary 40-minute interview with one counsellor. In the course of it, the woman did ask my daughter about drugs, but many of the questions were about sex. She was asked about her sexual orientation, whether she had had sex, what kind of sex (vaginal, oral, manual) and what she would do if a condom broke. She was taken aback.

All these, I felt, were not questions that 15-year-old girls should have been asked, based as they were on the presupposition of sexual experience, and they seemed egregiously wrong for girls from a Catholic school. The school did get in touch with the organisation to ask them to stick to the drugs issue, but it was troubling that a Catholic school should be using the services of a charity which is so alien to the thinking of the Church.

Indeed, it seems many schools are resorting to what are euphemistically called “specialist providers”, to offer the social and personal education that is now required by the curriculum. And these charities have an agenda of their own, one the school itself wouldn't necessarily profess. But on this really important element of the curriculum, they subcontract some of the tough issues to outsiders.

One solution might be for the Church to establish an organisation of its own, which would help deal with these sensitive issues in a way that's compatible with a Catholic ethos. No one is pretending it would be easy. But we should at least try.

It's one reason I'm relieved my daughter is going to a very different school, which has its own priest-chaplain, whom everyone likes. Religious education is taught robustly there; the younger boys are taken to church on feast days. This isn't to say that the pupils all practise the faith; most don't. But at least it's trying to turn out good Catholics – and that's something. CH

# ‘The past is the past – this is a new chapter’

Ampleforth headmaster Peter Roberts speaks to **Oleńka Hamilton** about his new mission

I was looking forward to speaking to Peter Roberts, the new headmaster of Ampleforth. Having left The King’s School, Canterbury, just six years before he took over as headmaster, a position he held from 2011 until his retirement in 2022, I had heard a bit about him already and knew that he had been popular there; I can tell why. Affable, warm and erudite, knowing that I have Polish links, he immediately tells me how interested he is in Polish history and how much he admires the work of one of my favourite writers, Ryszard Kapuściński.

Had he loved King’s as much as I had, I ask. He had. And does it have any similarities to Ampleforth? Both, he says, have a culture which encourages “the sharing of your gifts” between staff and pupils alike. Having benefitted from this myself over five years, I know exactly what he means.

Originally an Anglican, Roberts has since 1990 been married to Marie, a French Catholic with whom he has three daughters. His journey to the Catholic faith has been lifelong, he explains. The family has two bases in France – in the Charente, where they worship with a community of Benedictine sisters, and in Lannion, Brittany, where his wife’s uncle is a priest.

When teaching at Winchester College at the beginning of his career (Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was one of his pupils), he and his family attended St Peter’s Church there, moving on to Douai Abbey when he became headmaster of Bradfield College. While he was headmaster of The King’s School, Canterbury, they attended St Thomas’s in Canterbury, where ultimately Roberts converted to the faith.

“It is important to give you this background,” he explains, “to give you

a sense of what it means to us to end up at Ampleforth.” For not only is Ampleforth the most famous Catholic school in Britain, it has also always had, and continues to have, strong European connections, with pupils coming from France, Spain, Poland and other Catholic countries on the continent.

Like previous headmaster Robin Dyer, Roberts was pulled out of retirement to take on the role of headmaster of Ampleforth. “There has been a real sense of mission about it, but it is also a joy,” he says, describing it as the pinnacle of his career, a homecoming.

He joins following a turbulent period for the school which involved a high turnover of headmasters, but Dyer did a stellar job of

**“ Outstanding pastoral care is what’s different about Ampleforth on a day-to-day basis. You can see among the support staff that they fundamentally believe each pupil is a God-given gift**

steadying the ship and Ampleforth is now completely out of the woods as regards any safeguarding concerns.

“I have been hugely impressed by the supportive, positive working relationship which we have with Ofsted and North Yorkshire social services,” he says. “The past is the past. We came here because we don’t see that as part of Ampleforth, not because it didn’t happen – it has been an important thing for the school to come to terms with – but because for us this is a new chapter.”

In fact, Roberts considers the pastoral care to be particularly good. “Outstanding pastoral care is what’s different about Ampleforth on a day-to-day basis,” he

explains. “You can see among the support staff that they fundamentally believe each pupil is a God-given gift. It’s inspiring the way the teaching and boarding staff are really dedicated.”

Roberts is passionate about the Benedictine mission, which is “inclusive, welcoming and not selective”, and encourages “a very strong sense of community” among the pupils, staff and monks. “We are so much stronger together on our individual pathways,” he says, adding how much he has enjoyed getting to know the monastic community, all of whom, formed as they have been in the Benedictine tradition, are “full of knowledge and show us a love of learning and the power of education”. In terms of the modern school, while only Fr Ambrose Henley – “a very inspiring figure” – actually teaches, many of the other monks continue to be involved in school life.

Music is another aspect of life at Ampleforth which has impressed Roberts, not just the level of talent and dedication that is apparent, but also how clearly it helps the pupils in their own spiritual development. The school has its own *Schola Cantorum*, which recently sang in St Peter’s Basilica in Rome during Passiontide.

“It was a wonderful experience for them,” he says. “The people who happened to be there when they were singing were very taken with them, by the standard of their polyphony, and their passion for it. Cardinal Roche came to listen and wrote them a letter afterwards.”

This sense of mission for any headmaster of Ampleforth extends beyond and into the diocese as a whole, where the school is part of a wider network of Catholic schools. “I am working with heads running 3,000-strong schools in the middle of Hull and I have learnt so much from them,” says Roberts,



who relishes this element of his job and feels strongly that Ampleforth should play an active role in, and give back to, the local area by, for example, sharing its facilities and expertise with state schools whenever possible. Another community which the school has very close ties to is the Manque movement from Chile, which offers the school an international perspective on Catholic education as well.

I ask how the school gets pupils to focus on the importance of Christian morality when they are inevitably so exposed to a secular world where almost everything goes. There has been much in the press about national RSE programmes which clearly don’t cut it.

He points to the school’s “Christian living” programme, which is compulsory to pupils all the way through the school and is unique to Ampleforth. “The point of it is to explain and help the pupils’ understanding of how to grow up within the Catholic Church and live good, Christian lives,” he says. “We also teach them about the importance of ritual and rhythm, about helping people, and trying to instil in them a sense of service – service to the Lord.” Alongside this programme, pupils participate in the Benedictine practice of *Lectio Divina* within their houses, each of which has a chapel which pupils can access as well as the abbey itself.

My final question is about school fees and

who on earth is going to be able to afford this wonderful-sounding school once Labour gets into power and puts VAT on school fees, which are already rising by about five per cent every year.

“Any prudent school like Ampleforth is looking to see how it can navigate these tricky waters and not pass on everything to the parents,” he explains.

“Any future Labour government will struggle to implement some of their policy documents. A particular issue with taking away charitable status from schools like Ampleforth, for example, is that we are so committed to the other schools in the area. It would be crazy to put an end to that.” CH

**H**ow do you teach marriage and family life to children? This is key to social renewal and was urged at the Synod of the Family in 2015. The bishops specifically asked schools to begin the preparation.

Matrimony is not unvalued in the Catholic Church: it is one of our seven Sacraments. From it flow the family life, children and vocations on which the Church depends. Civil marriage is also critical. Sir Paul Coleridge, president of the Marriage Foundation, is calling for intervention as the gap between those who marry and those who do not widens. Among the parents of newborns in 2021, 71 per cent of high-earners were married compared with only 34 per cent of low-earners, and no more than 18 per cent of the “not classified”. And yet nine in 10 young people aspire to marry, regardless of income.

Education in family values was behind Christine Vollmer’s creation of the Alive to the World programme, of which I am UK coordinator. She was working among the street children and gangs of Caracas, in Venezuela, and longed to intervene before young people got into trouble. She then noticed something common to boys and girls everywhere: their desire to achieve something noble in life, to enjoy lasting love, and to become good mothers and fathers. She decided that, guided by her own faith, she would create an educational programme that would be accessible to children everywhere. “For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 11)

She began to organise major international congresses, inviting inspiring speakers. Those who particularly influenced her project included Dr Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and founder of logotherapy, which connects the search for life’s meaning with human motivation; Dr Allan Shore, whose study of the limbic system revolutionised the science of mother-child attachment; Dr Patrick Fagan, an adviser to the American government on family policy; and Dr Thomas Lickona, regarded as the “father” of character education. For 20 years, Vollmer also sat on the Pontifical Council for the Family, where the urgency of providing comprehensive sex education was a first priority.

## A Catholic way to teach about relationships

Alive to the World helps children learn about family values, says Louise Kirk

Alive to the World is now available in the UK from ages five to 13. It builds children up with beautifully presented resources to develop their self-awareness, self-esteem and critical thinking skills. These give kudos to good behaviour and encourage children to develop warm relationships at school and at home. Charts matching Alive to the World to the Department for Education’s statutory guidance for relationships and health education are available on request. To have a wholesome programme which also meets government criteria is invaluable.

Typical and familiar situations are explored in an accessible and approachable manner. This is done through a mix of story, dialogue and general knowledge so that children want to turn the page. Accompanying teacher guides set out the lesson objectives, lesson plans, activities and plenaries, and there are online resources, follow-ups for parents, progress forms, printable worksheets and video links. The books, published by Gracewing, are also available online.

Children’s modesty is sacrosanct: the framework for understanding sexuality is given but the intimacy of sex is left to parents. This follows the Vatican’s guidance for sex education, which explains why parents have a right and also a duty to teach their own children. “Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.” (St John Paul). My book, *Sexuality Explained: a Guide for Parents and Children*, assists in this regard. I was particularly pleased when a social worker told me how much her single-mother clients value it.

Alive to the World is designed as a complete relationships programme, but it can also be used by parents to supplement what their children receive at school, and by teachers as school readers, for assembly work or to teach good sportsmanship. As a programme grounded in truth, solidarity, sacrifice and love, it builds up freedom of thought and behaviour.

Alive to the World is now in some 25 countries on four continents and is used extensively in Latin America. A UK teacher said of her recent experience: “It is a fabulous programme, loved by pupils for its realism and optimism. It is unafraid to address the issues that matter most. Its content and style are captivating for every child, whatever their faith or circumstances.”

In 2019, Vollmer was presented with the C-Fam Maximilian Kolbe Award at the UN for her long-time pro-family advocacy. Her guiding star is St John Paul II and his conviction that the wellbeing of society is bound up in the good of the family. Alive to the World helps the young to perceive this. It gives them the human values which support good religious education, and, in the words of *Familiaris Consortio*, it thus contributes to the renewal of society and to the furtherance of the People of God. **CH**

Visit [alivetotheworld.co.uk](http://alivetotheworld.co.uk) for more details. *Alive to the World* is offering schools through the Catholic Herald a term’s free subscription to the electronic edition of the programme, running from September to December 2023. To take up this offer, please email [info@alivetotheworld.co.uk](mailto:info@alivetotheworld.co.uk) with the name of your school and quoting “Catholic Herald Education Supplement”.



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Shortly before Easter 2020, we, like everybody else, found ourselves locked down with enough loo roll to see us through the apocalypse. The kids were not at school or university, and we were not at work. We were blessed to be in a house with a reasonably sized garden and, after a couple of unsettled weeks, found a new rhythm and began to enjoy the gift of enforced time together.

We invented and played our own games, did talent shows, created different menus, with each of the five children designing and making a three-course meal once a week – who knew that tomato on a bed of squirry cream could be so nice?

Any tasks coming in from school were limited or ignored. We got the microscope out and examined grains of salt, leaves, bugs and peppercorns (that’s a good one). There was a 1,000-piece puzzle on the go, too, which everyone would add bits to when passing by.

Our kids prepared and delivered Teams lessons for our friends’ younger children via computer screen. They were able to undertake long projects about flags, Romans, metals and saints. The discarded rock polisher came out to make jewellery. We read *Lord of the Rings* to one another, something that we had always put off due to lack of time, and as we emerged from lockdown in June, my children declared that it had been the best time in their short but busy lives.

It came as no surprise that following Covid there was a sharp increase in the number of children being home-educated. Many parents recognised the need for greater flexibility in their working hours to allow more time with family.

“The most precious thing you can give to someone you love is time,” says Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft. “Where you choose to spend it is the surest indicator of what and whom you love. No matter how important your job is, it’s not a person.”

Though there are undoubted benefits to feminism, there have been unintended but devastating consequences to family life. This, coupled with economic policies that disincentivise family formation, has torn families apart and distanced parents from their children’s education. Two parents very often must work outside the home in



## Giving children the best of both worlds

At St Mary’s Academy in Warrington, pupils learn at school and at home. By Katherine Bennett

order to keep a roof over their heads, and it is not unusual for young women to either forgo having children altogether or return to work soon after giving birth, outsourcing both care and education to others.

But there is a sizeable and increasing number who hope for a different, dare I say better, way of life for their growing families, and are willing to take the risks to bring it about, including upping sticks and moving into areas offering the chance of a well-balanced relationship between home, parish and school.

I spoke recently with Raymond Cilia, the headmaster of St Mary’s Academy in Warrington, a hybrid school based on the American Regina Caeli model of two days schooling, with the curriculum directed by teachers, and two days in the home, directed by parents. Friday is left open to undertake educational trips or visits, or simply to work, rest and play together in the domestic sphere.

St Mary’s takes seriously the words from the Code of Canon Law on education that state, “there must be the closest cooperation between parents and teachers” (Can 796). It recognises that education is about much more than schooling. As the daughter of an unschooled but well-educated man with a love of learning and a depth of wisdom, this recognition of the broad remit of education appealed to me.

“At St Mary’s Academy,” Cilia said, “we are not trying to do something new or innovative with the curriculum. In fact, quite the opposite: we are doing something old. The reason modern schools have lost their way is because they have lost sight of what education is for. It’s as if the value of the student is only recognised through what they achieve or how productive they will be for the economy. This is not what the classical thinkers taught us.”

I asked him how being at St Mary’s compared with his experience of teaching

in much larger Catholic comprehensives. “I’ve taught in many schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted,” he explains, “and can honestly say that, despite some of the good exam results, these are not words I would use about them.

“Soon into my teaching career, I began to notice something was fundamentally wrong with modern schools. I’m not saying that the teachers weren’t good; in fact some of them were outstanding, virtuous and inspirational. It was not for lack of effort – many would work 50-hour weeks and still take work home – but, having lost sight of what education was for, many of the young people in our charge failed to flourish outside of a narrow idea of success related to exam results, wealth and prestige.”

I enquired how St Mary’s (which prepares children for GCSE) was able to offer anything different. “Our Academy,” Cilia said, “operates in a far more balanced way

with parents, who together recognise both the natural and supernatural end of man, thus seeking not only excellence in learning but also an orthodox Christian formation achieved primarily through regular exposure to grace in the sacraments and through developing an interior life, even from a young age.”

When I suggested that this would be a difficult task in the modern age, he responded: “It may surprise some that small children like to be still, as everything in the modern world vies for their attention and screams at their senses. Teaching a child to

“The most precious thing you can give to someone you love is time. Where you choose to spend it is the surest indicator of what and whom you love

enjoy stillness is one of the most important things educators can do, because it is the first step in learning to hear the still small voice of God. Children of all ages have appreciated being led in *Lectio Divina* and many have requested we do it regularly.”

The return to classical education, the involvement of parents, the development of virtue, though admirable, were all things I had witnessed in other schools. As I spoke to Cilia and watched him interact with young people, guide them in *Lectio* and listen attentively to their questions, as I saw in him and the children a peace that the world cannot offer, I was reminded that education is always about people. Get the “who” right and the “how” will follow. St Mary’s Academy Warrington may be embryonic, with a lot of how to work out, but it has all the ingredients to become something at once deeply familiar and yet refreshingly new. CH





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# Independent Catholic Schools 2023

The *Herald's* comprehensive guide to preparatory and senior Catholic schools in the UK

## Top Ten Senior Schools

Alphabetical

### Ampleforth College

North Yorks

**Headmaster:** Peter Roberts

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 13-18

Originally founded for 70 boys by the Benedictine monks at Ampleforth Abbey in 1802, Ampleforth has around 500 pupils today, of whom 70 per cent are Catholic. Pupils come from all over the UK, some from as far as Dundee and Plymouth. Day pupils remain under 20 per cent. The school is popular with Brits who live abroad and international students. Exam results are consistently good with approximately 70 per cent going on to Russell Group universities although the school welcomes pupils of all abilities.

Although the monastery is not involved with school governance, the Benedictine ethos remains strong. A monastic chaplain is attached to every house, and there are prayers, retreats, student-led *Lectio Divina*, Mass at least weekly and many Chaplaincy activities.

Pupils can choose from many activities after lessons and at weekends with Friday afternoons devoted to extra-curricular pursuits. The choice of musical ensembles is broad (including a bagpipe band), plus drama, art, sports, dance, CCF, numerous academic societies from model United Nations to eco-engineering, community work, charity fundraising, countryside pursuits, jewellery-making, gardening, canoeing and cooking.

Facilities include shooting ranges, an equestrian school, a dance studio, the school's own shoot, and fishing lakes.

The school's headmaster Peter Roberts, a convert to Catholicism, took over in 2023.

**Boarding fees:** £14,430 per term

**Day fees:** £10,040 per term

### Downside School

Somerset

**Headmaster:** Andrew Hobbs

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 13-18

Approximately three-quarters of the pupils at Downside are boarders and more than 70 per cent are Catholic. The school is proud to nurture a wide range of abilities. Headmaster Andrew Hobbs has been in the role since 2018 having previously been deputy head for 10 years. He is popular with pupils all of whom he knows by name. Staff and pupils, including the headmaster himself, all sit together at meal times in the school's grand and historic dining room, which serves excellent food (the beef stroganoff is especially good).

Art, drama, design and technology as well as music are popular; concerts take place in the abbey church while pupils act in plays in a 450-seat theatre. The full range of sports is available and the surrounding sports fields are beautifully maintained.

Now the monks have left for Buckfast, the Chaplaincy team, headed by the young and approachable Fr Michael Patey, who previously taught maths at the school, is assisted by a lay Benedictine community, the Manquehue community, who are based close to the school and offer support by leading *Lectio Divina* groups and assisting with the pastoral side of things.

**Boarding fees:** £10,100 to £13,550 per term

**Day fees:** £6,850 to £8,130 per term.

### Mayfield

West Sussex

**Headmistress:** Antonia Beary

**Takes:** girls, aged 11-18

Founded by Mother Cornelia Connelly just over 150 years ago, Mayfield is one of the UK's oldest and most prestigious all-girls senior schools. Based in the Sussex countryside, it welcomes day girls and boarders aged 11-18, from the UK and abroad. Mother Cornelia's vision for the school, educating girls to respond to the needs of the age, is still very much alive today. She wanted the girls to use their talents in order to move society forward, to reach out to those less fortunate than themselves.

The School's "Actions not Words" programme, run by Lay Chaplain Ron-an Lavery, encourages community service and provides opportunities for girls to help both locally and further afield. Outreach work includes hosting lunches and teas for the elderly and plenty of charity fundraising activities.

Mayfield does well academically and last year achieved 84 per cent A\*-B grades at A level, with over 10 per cent achieving Oxbridge places. Three Lower Sixth students were recently placed second (out of 140 entrants) in a nationwide engineering competition, with their innovative plan to reduce carbon emissions across the school and local community.

While maths and science are among the most popular subjects at A level, the School is also known for its creative side, with art, ceramics, music and drama all proving popular. "This is very much by design as these are all subjects that allow room for experimentation and making mistakes. The importance of allowing girls the time and space to make mistakes at School is seen as key to learning fundamental life skills such as resilience, adaptability and teamwork," the school explains.



New Hall School, Chelmsford

The riding facilities, which include indoor and outdoor arenas, are a major draw, and girls may bring their horse to School. Mayfield has won more equestrian titles than any other school and is the current holder of the National Schools Inter-County Team Dressage title. Mayfield girls progress to prestigious

universities including Oxford and Cambridge, and increasingly to the US and Europe, to study a wide range of subjects, with a regular stream of engineers, medics, vets, lawyers, economists and architects.

**Day fees:** £9,100 per term

**Boarding fees:** £14,100 per term

### New Hall School

Boreham, Chelmsford

**Headmistress:** Katherine Jeffrey

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 1-18

New Hall School is a large day and boarding school for students aged 1 to 18. It is housed in Henry VIII's Palace of Beaulieu and set in 70 acres. There are five divisions within New Hall's 1,300+ student community: nursery, pre-preparatory, preparatory, girls' and boys', and sixth form. This, the school explains, ensures that students quickly feel at home in their smaller community while being an integral part of the whole school. This year, New Hall was shortlisted for the "Independent Prep School of the Year" award at the Independent Schools of the Year Awards.

Students meet every week in the historic and beautiful chapel, which has been a place for daily prayer for over 200 years. They participate in planning liturgies and take an active role in various ministries as servers, readers and musicians. In addition, the chaplaincy team holds Masses every Sunday and Wednesday, and at the start and end of each term. A smaller chapel in the preparatory school introduces the younger children to the Faith.

A distinctive aspect of New Hall is its "Diamond Model" where from ages 1 to 11 and in the Sixth Form, lessons are co-educational, whilst from age 12 to 16, students have single-sex lessons. The school believes that a key benefit of this style of education is the ability to tailor the pastoral and academic provisions to meet the needs of young people more sensitively during the natural progression of adolescence.

Outside the classroom students mix socially and in co-curricular clubs and activities. New Hall has more than three hundred clubs between the Preparatory and Senior Divisions across a variety of interests, including sport, performing arts, and even cookery with its own Leiths Cookery Academy programme. The school is dedicated to instilling the Christian values of service to others, with many volunteering through the New Hall Voluntary Service, which has hosted lunches for the elderly in the community for 45 years.

Girls and boys can board from Year 3 either as full or flexible boarders, the latter staying overnight for one to six days a week. The school attracts both international boarders and those who live within the UK, whether locally or slightly further afield. An unusual but highly successful aspect of New Hall School is its on-site farm, home to goats, sheep, ponies,

pigs, ferrets, ducks, geese, rabbits, guinea pigs, peafowl, quail and a host of mini beasts. Students are encouraged to observe, hold and care for the animals as part of lessons, after-school clubs or the Duke of Edinburgh Award. **Prep school day fees:** up to £4,878 per term; **Boarding fees:** £7,818 **Senior school day fees:** up to £7,539 per term; **Boarding fees:** £11,991 per term

**St George's School**  
Weybridge

**Headmistress (Senior):** Rachel Owens  
**Headmaster (Junior):** Antony Hudson

St George's Weybridge is an ISI excellent, academically ambitious co-educational day school in Surrey. As the only Josephite Catholic school in the UK, St George's has a unique ethos that infuses pastoral care with academic and charitable achievement. Built on this ethos, including the values of Politesse and Douceur, Honesty and Compassion, Zeal and Happiness, the school supports a strong sense of family, where all students are valued and encouraged to fulfil their potential.

The school achieves outstanding results in public exams yet purposefully doesn't take part in national league tables, and is passionate about "Value Added", a measure of a student's progress, and the difference brilliant teaching and learning can make to the raw ability of a student. St George's Value Added is in the top 5 per cent of schools nationwide, helping students achieve grades at GCSE and A-level beyond those expected.

St George's Weybridge has two sites, with the Junior School set in the heart of Weybridge on 70 acres and the College on the outskirts of town on a campus of 100 acres. There is also a St George's boat house on the Thames at Walton. There is an Early Years building, swimming pool, Forest School and astro hockey pitch at the Junior School; and a state of the art Activity Centre, Tennis Centre, theatre and new science labs at the College. There over 100 co-curricular activities each week at both the Junior School and the College, including "Myths and Legends" and Lego Robotics, debating and chamber choir, ballet and football.

Headmistress Rachel Owens describes a perfect prospective student as "sparkly-eyed" at the opportunities available at St George's. Students are active in the local community, supporting charities and state schools including two weeks of Georgian Outreach each summer,

in which they take part in projects such as conservation of local green spaces, providing company and entertainment for care home residents, and helping the Salvation Army's food bank. Sixth Form students run a year-round weekly club that provides fun, games and companionship for vulnerable displaced young people living in the local community. **Fees: Juniors:** up to £5,970 per term; **College:** £8,055

**St Mary's School**  
Ascot

**Headmistress:** Danuta Staunton  
**Takes:** girls, aged 11-18

One of the foremost Catholic girls' schools in the country, St Mary's Ascot has long been in the top drawer of independent schools and attracts the ambitious and socially well connected. It regularly tops the league tables in both GCSEs and A-levels. Of the 390 girls, 98 per cent are Catholic; admissions favour daughters, sisters and early registrations (they suggest you apply at least two years in advance).

The chaplain, Father Dermot, is an important part of daily life and girls enjoy Mass in the school's private chapel. Headmistress Danuta Staunton has made her mark with impressive results – she is now in her fourth year. Most pupils are full-boarders so weekends are packed with activity and the school is regarded as one of the best traditional boarding schools in the country, attracting international girls as well as from around Britain.

**Day boarding fees:** £10,155 per term  
**Full boarding fees:** £14,260 per term

**Stonyhurst College and Stonyhurst St Mary's Hall**  
Lancashire

**Headmaster:** John Browne  
**Takes:** boys and girls aged 3 to 18

The Jesuit college educates close to 530 boys and girls, with around two-thirds boarding. At Stonyhurst St Mary's Hall, the adjacent dedicated preparatory school, there are around 280 pupils aged 3 to 13 (boarding starts from the age of 9). Stonyhurst is set on a 1,000-acre estate in the Ribble Valley, Lancashire, and is the oldest continuously active Jesuit school in the world. It was founded in St Omer, northern France (then the Spanish Netherlands) in 1593, and moved to its present site in Lancashire in 1794. Throughout the years of religious persecution in England, Stonyhurst educated

the boys of the English Catholic aristocracy and gentry. Stonyhurst's Jesuit mission and identity, and its sense of family, seem to set it apart from other schools. Pupils are urged to do as much as they can for others, following the example of Jesus Christ and the spirit and charism of the Jesuits, living by the school motto *Quant Je Puis* (As Much as I Can). The school achieves high academic results and offers an extensive range of co-curricular activities.

The Sixth Form offers three options for study: A-level, International Baccalaureate Diploma and the Cambridge Technical Diploma. Each route provides a wide range of subjects to choose from and a pathway to suit different learners. "At the centre of the educational mission is the Jesuit ideal of finding God in all things, where young people develop the habit of reflection and grow in their personal relationship with God," the school explains. "Pupils are helped to appreciate what they have and learn to make the most of their talents. They are actively encouraged to do their best in everything and to celebrate the successes of others through a spirit of gratitude and generosity." The structure for pastoral care is designed to ensure each pupil feels emotionally secure and knows whom to turn to for support. Pupils in Stonyhurst's care are given the individual attention, resources and space in which to grow intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. Supported by world-class facilities, Stonyhurst has a strong reputation for rugby, tennis, hockey, netball and cricket. Facilities include a nine-hole golf course, swimming pool, an all-weather pitch and a Grand Slam standard indoor tennis facility. The school's co-curricular offer is rich and varied with over 70 activities taking place each year; as well as sport, music and drama, these include dance, fencing, debating, social enterprise, scuba diving and astronomy.

**Full boarding fees:** from £10,345 per term  
**Day fees:** £5,185 per term

**The Cedars**  
Croydon

**Headmaster:** Dominic Rose  
**Takes:** boys aged 11 to 18

The Cedars is one of three schools founded by a group of Catholic parents and educators seeking to work in partnership to help each pupil acquire moral, intellectual and social virtues within a framework of Catholic principles.

Parents looking for a single sex education are being drawn to The Cedars, now in its 11th year,

where an understanding of what motivates young men and a recognition of their unique purpose informs both curricular and pastoral decisions. The development of the four core human virtues of personal responsibility, good judgment, resilience and self-control are pivotal to the success of The Cedars.

The school, whose ethos is inspired by Opus Dei, draws pupils from across its local area and there is a clear sense of an ethnically diverse but socially united school. Though there are currently fewer than 300 students on roll, the number continues to grow. The most recent ISI report highlighted the excellent personal development of the students, who demonstrate an outstanding sense of community. The school motto *In Gaudio Serviamus* (May we serve joyfully) is inspired by the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* which expresses that we only find ourselves through making a sincere gift of ourselves.

The school has a strong music department; despite being small, it is developing a steady reputation in sport as the boys compete against some of the best local schools.

Mass is available throughout the week and there are regular opportunities for Confession and adoration; the school chaplain is Fr George Boronat. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of The Cedars is the tutorial system, the goal of which is to help each pupil, through fortnightly meetings, to reach his potential in every area of his life. In line with the PACT vision which sees parents as primary educators, tutors stay in close contact with parents throughout the year so as to provide an effective reinforcement of the values at home.

**Fees:** £5,650 to £5,950 per term

**The Laurels**  
Croydon

**Head:** Linda Sanders  
**Takes:** girls aged 11 to 18

In 2021, the Laurels moved to its current location in south-east London which it shares with its brother school The Cedars. The school building was originally an orphanage set up in 1857 by an order of French nuns named The Lady of Fidelity. There are a number of ambitious plans afoot as the school grows into the new site, including a new Robotics programme. STEM subjects are popular at the school, with a number of girls going on to study in the various related fields.

Unusually for a day school, each girl has her own personal tutor who offers advice





and formation on the path to adulthood. The philosophy of education is based on a “character first” approach, inspired by Opus Dei. The Arete programme overarches every aspect of school life. It is not just another set of lessons, but a way of learning, studying, thinking and living that takes seriously the interconnectedness of knowledge; its personal and civic aspect helps the girls to flourish.

The recent ISI report was excellent and highlighted as particular strengths the level of maturity in personal relationships, the strong sense of self-understanding and the high level of responsibility that the girls have for their own behaviour. The school attracts pupils from a wide geographical area across south London and Surrey, and pupils of all faiths and none are comfortable in The Laurels where Christian values form the basis of school life.

The Laurels is truly a family school where the educational rights of the family come first. Of particular note is the partnership with parents. A number of events held throughout the school year are aimed at strengthening the bond between home and school. Mass is available throughout the week for those who wish to attend and there are regular opportunities for Confession and adoration.

**Fees:** from £5,650 to £5,950 per term

### Worth School

West Sussex

**Headmaster:** Stuart McPherson

**Takes:** girls and boys, aged 11-18

Some 500 acres of pretty Sussex countryside are the backdrop to Worth, which has for over 60 years been a top choice among affluent Catholic families. Originally boys only, Worth became fully co-ed in 2012. Small yet sophisticated, the school is in the grounds of the Benedictine Worth Abbey and its ethos is rooted in the Benedictine educational tradition. Eight monks in the chaplaincy team teach the importance of *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading), liturgical worship and community living and services. Pupils regularly teach English and IT skills at the refugee detention centre at nearby Gatwick airport, and pilgrimages are arranged to Lourdes, Taizé and the Camino to Compostella. Worth offers IB and A-levels and was described as academically “outstanding” in a recent inspection report. The abbey choir has sung at a Mass in St Peter’s in Rome attended by the pope and in the Sistine Chapel.

**Day fees:** £9,800 per term

**Boarding fees:** £14,390 per term

## Top Five Prep Schools

Alphabetical

### All Hallows

East Cranmore, Somerset

**Headmaster:** Trevor Richards

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-13

Home to 400 pupils, All Hallows has good academic results and impressive art and music departments. Individual interests are nurtured and children are encouraged to enjoy every aspect of school life, including the faith element, with Holy Communion preparation timetabled for those who want it. Headmaster Trevor Richards is an educational psychologist and has been at the school in various roles for over three decades. Parental involvement is an important element of the school’s ethos which is to create an intimate, familial environment for students.

**Day fees:** up to £6,545 per term

**Full boarding fees:** £9,900 per term

### Moor Park

Ludlow

**Headmaster:** Brendan Brady

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3 months-13

Moor Park is a co-ed, Catholic independent boarding and day school with 85 rolling acres just outside Ludlow on the Shropshire and Herefordshire border. The school was the former red-brick country house of the Salwey family and was started in 1964 by Derek Henderson and Hugh Watts, friends from Downside before the war. The ethos of the founders still resonates today. That is about “finding the best in every child” and the idea that “it is our job to discover the very best in every pupil”. Unusually for a prep school, Moor Park is independent of any senior school. It attracts locals as well as pupils from all over the country, including boarders from France and Spain because of the Catholic link.

The most recent ISI inspection report rated the school as excellent in all areas, stating: “the moral awareness of the pupils, underpinned by the school’s Catholic ethos, is extremely well-developed”. All pupils attend Mass in the school chapel on a Sunday, although the majority these days are not Catholic.

**Day fees:** £2,385 to £6,610 per term

(Reception to Year 8)

**Boarder fees:** £8,185 to £9,805 per term

### St Philip’s

South Kensington

**Headmaster:** Alexander Thomas

**Takes:** boys, aged 7-11

A school for only 110 boys, St Philip’s offers a “traditional, Catholic, liberal education that combines the very best of the world in the pursuit of timeless excellence”, according to headmaster Alexander Thomas, who is also keen on good manners and tidy uniforms.

Parents are delighted with the school which, though small, caters for individuals with distinctive interests; the boys recently set up an ornithology club.

Although based in central London, boys have access to several acres of sports fields where they play football, rugby, hockey and cricket. The most popular schools for leavers since 2010 have been Harrow, Ampleforth, Dulwich, Eton, St Paul’s, Wetherby Senior, Winchester and Westminster.

**Day fees:** £7,450 per term

### The Oratory Prep School

Oxfordshire

**Headmaster:** Andrew De Silva

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 2 to 13

Rated excellent in its most recent ISI inspection, this independent day and boarding school is based in the Oxfordshire countryside in 65 acres, with top-end facilities and its own extensive woodland, ponds and adventure playgrounds.

Catholic values are central to school life. The school is also rightly proud of its scholarship and leadership programmes which help students to secure consistently high grades and impressive scholarship awards to some of the country’s top senior schools.

Outdoor learning, including a dedicated forest school with weekly lessons for every age group, is an important part of life at the school. There are also many performing arts opportunities, including Lamda from Year 1, instrument and vocal tuition and musical and drama productions.

The co-curricular programme covers everything from fencing to cookery, and there is also a diverse Saturday enrichment programme for children in Year 5 upwards, including modules in debating, interview



The Oratory Prep

and presentation skills, orienteering and beekeeping. Sports facilities include a learner pool, a 25-metre heated indoor swimming pool, full-size 3G pitch, four tennis courts and multiple pitches.

In September 2022, the school welcomed a new headmaster, Andrew De Silva, who was previously headmaster of the Junior School at St Edmund’s School, Canterbury. In addition to this role, Mr De Silva is also chair of IAPS (Independent Association of Preparatory Schools) District 2 and of the newly-formed IAPs EDI group (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion).

“Andrew brings with him a wealth of experience, honing his skills through headships in both the state maintained and independent sectors, in addition to a master’s degree in Educational Leadership and Management and the NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship),” says the school.

“Our curriculum is centred around building an interconnected approach to learning that develops pupils’ key knowledge and understanding of the world around them, whilst

being meaningful and relevant to their everyday experiences.”

**Boarding fees** £9,910 per term

**Day fees:** up to £6,635 per term

### Winterfold House

Kidderminster

**Headmistress:** Denise Toms

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3 months-13 years

Winterfold House School is an outstanding smaller prep school with a long and peripatetic Catholic heritage, set in 40 acres of grounds. The main building is a Georgian mansion with views of the Malvern Hills. The Catholic headmistress Denise Toms is a charismatic and focused history teacher who has been at the school for 20 years. She is assisted by her affable deputy Ross Mitchell, whose own children are at the school.

The main cricket pitch boasts a pavilion that could be a royal beach hut in Brighton. The school has its own golf course and a new £1-million-plus multi-weather sports field. This

is thanks to the resources that go with being part of the Bromsgrove School family. There is also a school radio studio, a dedicated chapel (around 20 per cent of the school are Catholic), a cookery school and vegetable garden.

There is also a new Forest School where older pupils camp and children can sit in hides and develop their photography skills whilst researching Latin names of birds on their iPads. School adventure trips are taken to Dorset, the Wye Valley and Snowdon. There’s even a Scalextric track room.

Religious education is taken seriously along with academic excellence and special needs. The honour boards tell the story of how the school has evolved since being founded in 1928. After the war, it was a feeder to Downside, Ampleforth and Stonhurst but now it is more Malvern and Midland schools. Mass is celebrated every Thursday and there is a grotto dedicated to Our Lady in the grounds. No boarding, although there has been talk that this may change with flexi-boarding being introduced.

**Day fees:** Up to £5,155 per term

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# A-Z of Independent schools

**Alton School**  
Hampshire  
**Headmaster:** Andrew Reeve  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 1-18

Alton School is a day school in an old manor house on a 19-acre site on the outskirts of Alton. It was established in 1938 by the Sisters of Our Lady of Providence. Parents note how well pupils were looked after when schools closed during Covid. Excellent exam results are testament to this, with 100 per cent of students having been accepted to their first choice universities. New headmaster Andrew Reeve, who has also taught Economics and Business Studies, will take up his role in September 2023.  
**Day fees:** £3,855 to £4,995 per term

**Austin Friars School**  
Carlisle  
**Headmaster:** Matt Harris  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Founded by the Augustinian Friars in 1951, Austin Friars is part of a global network of Augustinian schools and welcomes pupils of all denominations. Pupils from Cumbria and south-west Scotland attend.  
**Day fees:** from £3,250 (infants) to £6,300 (6th form) per term



**Beechwood Sacred Heart School**  
Tunbridge Wells  
**Headmaster:** Justin Foster-Gandey  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Situated on a 23-acre campus in Tunbridge Wells, Beechwood School comprises a nursery, preparatory school and senior school, with weekly and full boarding available for children aged 11 to 18. Founded by the Society of the Sacred Heart in 1915, Beechwood retains its founders' traditions but today welcomes pupils of all faiths.  
**Boarding fees:** £10,710 per term  
**Day fees:** up to £6,237 per term

**Bishop Challoner School**  
Bromley  
**Headmaster:** Mr Mark Wallace  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Based in the town of Shortlands in Bromley, which is a 20-minute train ride from Victoria station, and a short bus journey from Croydon and Crystal Palace, the school attracts students from Kent and greater and central London. The school has its own chaplain and chapel as well as strong links with St Edmund's, the local parish. A major plus is the small class sizes, with some A-level classes having as few as three students.  
**Day fees:** from £3,644 (infants) to £5,208 (seniors) per term

**Blanchelande College**  
Guernsey  
**Headmaster:** Robert O'Brien  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 2½-18



Bishop Challoner School, Crackley Hall

Blanchelande College was established in 1902 by an order of French nuns and is the only fully mixed independent school in Guernsey. With 460 pupils in attendance, the school offers a rural setting where children can roam free in safety, and where their talents can be nurtured in a relaxed atmosphere. In its most recent ISI report, the college was rated "excellent" in all categories, including pupil achievement and personal development.  
**Day fees:** £4,250 per term

**Carleton House Preparatory School**  
Liverpool  
**Headmistress:** Sandy Coleman  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

Carleton House is an inclusive Catholic school welcoming all denominations. Their most recent external ISI Educational Quality inspection judged both the achievement of their pupils, including their academic development and the personal development of the pupils to be "excellent".  
**Day fees:** £9,660 per annum

**Cokethorpe School**  
Oxfordshire  
**Headmaster:** Damian Ettinger  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 4-18

Cokethorpe School is a day school of about 660 pupils in Hardwick, founded in 1957 by Francis Brown. At the heart of the school is an early-18th-century Grade II Queen Anne-style country house on a 150-acre site. There is also a chapel in the grounds. The school has a reputation for its sporting excellence with pupils representing England in rugby and hockey in recent years.  
**Day fees:** £4,835 to £7,365 per term

**Crackley Hall**  
Warwickshire  
**Headmaster:** Robert Duigan  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 4-11

Crackley Hall is a coeducational day school in Kenilworth, Warwickshire, with some 240 pupils. The school has its own on-site day nursery, Little Crackers, which takes children from 2 years



Holy Cross Prep School

old. Central to the school is its strong Christian ethos, high standard of care and a feeling of community, as both staff and parents work together for the good of all the children.

"We place Christ at the centre of our lives, sharing core values that instil dignity and respect," they say. Crackley Hall benefits from sharing the Christian ethos, resources and approach to learning of its nearby senior school, Princethorpe College, which many pupils move to later.  
**Fees:** £3,586 to £3,991 per term

**Donhead Preparatory School**  
Wimbledon  
**Headmaster:** Philip Barr  
**Takes:** boys, aged 4-11

Donhead is an all-boys Roman Catholic preparatory day school located in Wimbledon, London. The school is under the governance of the Jesuits. In September 2018, the school's 10-year £8m facilities development plan was completed. The school had a new chapel built that has capacity for 50 pupils.  
**Day fees:** £4,275 to £4,440 per term

**Farleigh School**  
Hampshire  
**Headmaster:** Fr Simon Everson  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-13

Farleigh School, founded in 1953, is a Catholic preparatory day and boarding school in a rural village outside Andover. Surrounded by 70 acres of park and woodland, the main school building is a Georgian house, with capacity for over 460 pupils. The old ballroom

has been converted to a chapel. The school has over 100 boarders and 50 flexi-boarders. Headmaster Fr Simon Everson is a former Anglican who converted to Catholicism and is adored by parents and children alike. Parents describe Farleigh as a "magical" school which "lets children be children".  
**Boarding fees:** £8,525 to £10,875 per term  
**Day fees:** £4,510 to £8,210 per term

**Farnborough Hill School**  
Hampshire  
**Headmistress:** Zoe Ireland  
**Takes:** girls, aged 11-18

Farnborough Hill was bought in 1927 by the Sisters of the Religious of Christian Education, an existing convent school in Farnborough established in 1889. The chapel was added in the 1930s. A 25-minute train ride from Clapham Junction, the school is proud to teach "proper" subjects like Latin and Greek, with not too many new-fangled "studies" on the curriculum. The school is proud of its very own radio station, F'Hill, which is run by the Year 11 pupils and staff.  
**Day fees:** £17,985 per annum

**Holy Cross Preparatory School**  
Kingston-upon-Thames  
**Headmistress:** Sarah Hair  
**Takes:** girls, aged 3-11

Holy Cross Preparatory School is an independent school for girls aged 3-11 in Kingston with a strong Christian ethos, founded by the Sisters of the Holy Cross, an international teaching order since 1844. The school includes a pre-school, Little Sparks, for girls aged 3-4 and continues with pre-prep and prep all located on eight acres of grounds off Kingston Hill.  
Head Sarah Hair is much admired by staff, parents and pupils. "We ignite the spark that shapes the life at Holy Cross Prep, nurturing our girls to develop their curiosity, discover a love of learning and aspire to be the best they can be academically, spiritually, personally and physically so they can be ready to live a fulfilling life in the modern world," she says.

The school's two-form entry means class sizes are small, providing a warm, nurturing and stimulating environment for girls. The school promotes a growth mindset in STEAM subjects, empowering girls to be responsible citizens who are confident, independent, well-rounded and prepared to face the challenges of any selective senior school. High academic standards are upheld across every subject, as well as the many specialist subjects, which include sport, music, drama, computing, art and French.

Mrs Hair states: "It is of great importance to me to maintain the balance between the goal-orientated side and the formation of character and development of those life skills that do indeed last a lifetime. We recognise that the signposts for travelling along the journey of life are clearly visible even in early childhood. At Holy Cross Prep we identify strengths and talents from the very start. In short, we ignite a spark; the spark that will shape the life of your daughter."  
**Day fees:** £2,407 to £5,037 per term

**Kilgraston School**  
Perth  
**Headmistress:** Tanya Davie  
**Takes:** boys, aged 5-12 and girls, aged 5-18

Kilgraston School is a boarding and day school offering primary school education for boys and girls, and secondary education for girls only. The school is centred around a mansion set in 72 acres of parkland, three miles south of Perth. It is the only Catholic boarding secondary school in Scotland. Kilgraston has thriving music and arts departments, hockey, tennis and swimming academies, and is Scotland's only school with an on-site equestrian centre. In 2015, Kilgraston was named as the *Sunday Times's* top performing independent school for Highers and Advanced Highers. In 2023, the school was saved from closure after parents managed to raise £1.2 million in only 48 hours.  
**Boarding fees:** £9,910 to £12,970 per term  
**Day fees:** £4,470 to £7,595 per term ▶

## Leweston School, Dorset

**John Paget-Tomlinson**, Head of Leweston School

**How often do you offer Mass, Benediction, etc, and where? Do pupils attend Confession?** Mass for the whole school takes place on Wednesday morning in the School Chapel. Boarders' Mass takes place once a week at St Ald-helms in Sherborne (we have moved this because we want to create a sense of community with the parish). We offer Confession for pupils with our local parish priest.

**Do you offer any interesting or unusual subjects?** We offer a wide range of different subjects beyond the traditional curriculum. Pupils take Home Economics up to Year 9 and then as an option at GCSE. Sixth Formers can study for their Leiths Certificate. Pupils can also study Ancient Greek, Italian, German, Polish and Russian. All Sixth Formers take a general RS course in Catholic Values and Ethics.

**What sort of pastoral care do you offer?** Leweston is known for its pastoral care which is focused on individual approach with layers of engagement with tutors and heads of year, a deputy head pastoral, counsellors, coaches and Sixth Form mentors as well as the care expected from boarding and our Well-Being Centre. From September we have introduced a new role of Pastoral Lead, a non-teaching position. In addition to this our Chaplain is pastoral leader in her own right.

**How many pupils are at the school and what percentage is Catholic?** Leweston is a through school from 3 months to 18 years. The nursery has 90 children, prep school 171 and the senior school 363. Approximately 25 per cent of the pupils are Catholic but all pupils participate in religious life. Many parents choose Leweston because of our strong sense of values and community even though they are not Catholic.

**Are you selective or non-selective? What kind of pupil thrives at Leweston?** At Leweston we celebrate



individual achievement which means that while we have to be selective due to the limited number of places available, this selectivity is not wholly based on academic performance. The type of pupil that thrives here is one that is willing to take advantage of the many opportunities on offer, they think on their feet, take chances and put others before themselves. We are very conscious of having a broad socio-economic community within the school and our fee model is designed to embrace as wide a group as possible whilst offering excellent value. In the recent *Telegraph* Money League table, we were the only school in Dorset to achieve a "good" rating for pupil performance versus fees.

**How do you prepare students for life after school?** We employ a dedicated Careers Adviser who works with children as young as Year 5 on interests and skills development. She works with older pupils supporting applications to universities, degree apprenticeships and jobs. Our Oxbridge and medical school applicants have a specific programme they can access which provides interview practice, individualised action plans and one-to-one advice on personal statements. We also provide pupils with skills to help them navigate everything from car maintenance to cooking, using a credit card to working in a team. Most importantly we instil in our pupils an appreciation of responsibility they will hold to others, by embedding Catholic social teaching through our schemes of work.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?** Leweston has occupied a top 10 position for value-added for many years and is known for helping its pupils to achieve their best whether that be academically or outside of the classroom. The school has a strong reputation for science and the creative arts. Its sporting achievements are impressive. Leweston is one of only nine Pentathlon GB training hubs in the country with pupils who compete for Team GB including some current World Champions. The school's equestrian team has won the NSEA Regional Points League for six years running gaining the most points of any competing school in the country for the past two.

**Do pupils get involved in any charitable ventures/ community service or participate in any pilgrimages?** The four houses organise and run their own charitable activities throughout the year and the Sixth Form lead a dedicated student-led charities week. We also work with a school in Nepal where we have contributed towards new buildings, educational equipment and scholarships for local children. The Sixth Form Leweston Enrichment and Development programme is designed to develop Sixth Formers as the senior student leaders of our community. This can involve membership of a committee, house or council, supporting a younger tutor group, being a prefect, subject ambassador, peer mentor or guardian as well as visiting members of the Sherborne Parish, and taking their individual talents into local old people's homes or children's groups. Pre-Covid, pupils used to travel to Rome and/or Lourdes, something we are hoping to restart next year.



### ◀ Laleham Lea School Purley

**Headmistress:** Karen Barry  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

Laleham Lea achieves high academic standards and was classified as "excellent" in its most recent ISI inspection in 2022. The school is a feeder for top public schools, but parents note that it is a caring environment not a "hot house" obsessed by statistics and results. The majority of pupils are Catholic.  
**Day fees:** £7,244 to £10,245 per annum

### Leweston School Dorset

**Headmaster:** John Paget-Tomlinson  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 1-18

Leweston School is a day and boarding school near Sherborne, half an hour from the Jurassic coast. It was originally founded as a girls' boarding school by Belgian nuns in 1891. It moved to the beautiful Leweston Manor estate in 1948 and has since grown to comprise a nursery, prep school, senior school and sixth form. The school is not a hot-house, but more of a relaxed environment where pupils are encouraged to find their "thing", says a parent. It is a Catholic foundation but welcomes pupils of all denominations and none, with a strong focus on the development of the spiritual life. Mass takes place every Wednesday and Sunday evening for boarders in the school chapel of St Antony. Catholic actress Kristin Scott Thomas is an alumna.

**Boarding fees:** £6,728 to £10,930 per term  
**Day fees:** £2,499 to £6,062 per term

### Loreto Preparatory School Altrincham, Cheshire

**Headmistress:** Anne Roberts  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

Loreto Preparatory School was established in 1909 and continues under the trusteeship of the Loreto Sisters, a worldwide network with five schools in England and over 150 worldwide. Facilities are modest and parents say the school is more

"nurturing" than academic. There is stiff competition from nearby prep and primary schools for places at the next-door school Loreto Grammar.  
**Day fees:** £2,750 per term

### Loughborough Amherst School Leicestershire

**Headmaster:** Julian Murphy  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 4-18

Loughborough Amherst School was founded in 1841 on traditional Christian principles and was run by the Rosminian order until 2015. A small school with small class sizes, it is not academically selective but has been growing in popularity in recent years and now operating a waiting list for certain year groups.  
**Day fees:** £4,040 to £5,270 per term

### Loyola Preparatory School Essex

**Headmistress:** Kirsty Anthony  
**Takes:** boys, aged 3-11

Loyola Preparatory School is a Catholic School for boys aged 3 to 11 in Buckhurst Hill, Essex. It has been educating boys for more than a century. Parents praise the kindness and professionalism of the staff. It has an excellent multi-sports programme. The boys can participate in a wide range of physical education activities. In addition to the onsite all-weather sports pitch, facilities include a dedicated library, computer suite, art room and science room.  
**Day fees:** £4,237 per term

### Marymount International School Kingston upon Thames

**Headmistress:** Margaret Giblin  
**Takes:** girls, aged 11-18

Around 12 miles from central London, Marymount International School is a small school of 240 girls, a third of whom are boarders. Students, who come from around 35 different nationalities (46 per cent are British), are drawn to the school by its well-established IB programme, which has been running for over 40 years. Another attraction is the small class sizes of around 12 pupils.



Marymount International School

Founded in 1955 by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM), the school is part of the RSHM global network of Catholic schools. Mass is celebrated weekly, and prayer life includes assemblies, daily reflections in class and the celebration of important feast days and festivals. Around 25 per cent of students are Catholic but all participate.

Marymount is a top performing IB school. In 2020, the school's average IB score was 38 and, in 2019 (the last year that students sat exams) it was 37. In 2019, 41 per cent of students achieved a Bilingual Diploma. University destinations include Durham, UCL, Manchester, Warwick, Edinburgh, St. Andrews, King's College London, and UCLA and Emory in the USA, as well as top universities in Japan, Europe, South Korea and Canada. Marymount accepts applications throughout the school year, which is helpful to families relocating mid-academic year. The admissions process is not as strict or selective as many schools in the London area, but includes English and maths tests, and crucially an interview with the head-teacher to establish if the child is a good fit for the school and the IB programme.

Marymount offers five-day, seven-day and flexi-boarding options. There are around 50 international students who full-board and sleep in rooms of two or three. The school is proud to encourage independent living, with students doing their own laundry, for example.

There are plenty of activities at weekends to keep boarders busy. The school describes itself as "a garden campus", where beautiful grounds surround a combination of modern classrooms and older buildings

# Marymount International School

**Margaret Giblin**, Head of Marymount International School

**How often do you offer Mass, Benediction, etc, and where? Do pupils attend confession?** All significant events in the school year are marked by whole school Mass where the community gather together. We have wonderful participation by our students who serve, are ministers of the Word and contribute to the liturgical prayers and music.

In addition, we have Grade Masses and Mass at the weekend for our boarders. We are delighted to have a Priest Chaplain at Marymount who ensures the sacramental life of the school is being nourished. Our Director of Spiritual Life creates a wide range of opportunities for all of our community, staff, students and parents to deepen their faith. We have a vibrant and engaged student Campus Ministry group and each Grade has a prayer leader.

**Do you offer any interesting or unusual subjects?** As an IB school we offer a broad range of subjects. In the Middle Years Programme, students study up to 14 subjects including Dance, Design, Music, with elements of Religious Education and Service embedded in the curriculum. At Diploma Level students take six subjects and in addition study the Theory of Knowledge, complete an Extended Essay and complete the required number of Creativity, Action and Service hours.

We have a mother tongue policy which means students can take examinations in their mother tongue. Currently we offer 13 languages! We have also for many years dedicated time to STEAM, linking the Arts to STEM, demonstrating to our students the inter-relatedness of these areas.

**What sort of pastoral care do you offer?** Our pastoral care is excellent. Each student is assigned to a very small Advisor (tutor) group of approximately 10-12 students. They meet daily and as such our students are known as individuals by their advisor. Each grade has a Head of Year. We



have a Deputy Head Pastoral, a DSL team, a full-time nurse and a school counsellor.

As a small school we know our students very well and create a culture of trust, support and genuine care. We work in close partnership with parents and offer many parent talks pertaining to teenagers and their wellbeing.

**Are you selective or non-selective? What kind of pupil thrives at Marymount?** Some schools think solely about the 11+ academic ability but we like to think differently. Students who flourish within our environment are curious, comfortable with discovering the answers, students who demonstrate the IB Learner profile attributes of Inquirer, Thinker, Caring, Balanced, Knowledgeable, Open Minded, Risk taker, Communicator, Reflective and Principled and who are aligned with our mission and ethos.

**How do you prepare students for life after school?** Throughout their education with us, our students are not only educated with knowledge, but they know where this knowledge fits in to the world. The curriculum is broad and balanced, conceptual and contextualised. In addition, our students learn how attributes such as their sense of agency, self-advocacy, balance and curiosity can contribute meaningfully to the world in which we live. They go to university and beyond assured in their ability to discover, to embrace lifelong learning, to recognise their agency and to use their gifts and talents for the service of others.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extra-curricular?** We provide an excellent academic education (achieving results well above the global average in IB scores), without neglecting the other facets of our being. Our students are knowledgeable but know how to use this knowledge. They are committed to making a difference and developing their many gifts and talents to the full. Our extra-curricular programme facilitates this well.

**Do you offer A-Levels/IB? What percentage of students go on to university and which universities do they favour?** We are solely an IB school offering both the MYP and DP. We were the first all girls' school in the UK to offer the IB diploma, and the only all-girls' school to continue to focus on this singular curriculum. Our students attend universities such as Oxbridge and other Russell Group universities. For us it is about finding the most suitable course for our students with some going to Art College or Conservatoire. As an international school we have students gaining entry across the globe including America, Canada, Asia – eg Japan and South Korea – Europe and beyond.

From our recent cohort of graduates, one of our students received a full scholarship for her tertiary education. Another received full marks making her one of only 25 to achieve this in the United Kingdom. So much achievement has led to ever so much choice for our students.



including a chapel. Facilities include a STEAM Hub, science labs, art studios, a dance studio, auditorium, sports hall, tennis court and sports pitch, and chalet-style garden rooms.  
**Day fees:** £28,830 per annum  
**Boarding fees:** £46,740 to £48,810 per annum

**More House School**  
Knightsbridge  
**Headmistress:** Faith Hagerty  
**Takes:** girls, aged 11-18

More House School promotes core Catholic values of commitment, integrity and compassion which are evident in the students' academic and co-curricular achievements. Its central London location provides a launchpad for access to London's best sporting venues, galleries, museums and theatres.

It was founded in 1952, by a group of parents seeking a better Catholic education for girls in London. The school boasts its own chapel where regular services are held. The music department shares music and liturgy all over the world from small local churches to Notre Dame and the Vatican. "Its secret is the warm relationship between pupils and staff," says a parent.  
**Day fees:** £8,275 per term

**Mount St Mary's College**  
Derbyshire  
**Headmaster:** Dan Wright  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Mount St Mary's College, which includes prep school Balborough Hill School, is a Jesuit school in the

countryside near Sheffield with about 600 pupils. It has a reputation for high academic performance.  
**Boarding fees:** £7,650 to £12,270 per term  
**Day fees:** £3,150 to £5,590 per term

**Mylnhurst Preparatory School and Nursery**  
Sheffield  
**Headmaster:** Michael Hibbert  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 4-11

Mylnhurst is the highest-ranking prep school in the south Yorkshire and Derbyshire region, placed 22nd in the *Sunday Times* Parent Power Top 100 prep schools in the UK. Situated within a private and secluded campus, it has a swimming pool, forest school, sports centre, games field, library and dance studio all on-site.  
**Day fees:** £11,250 per annum

**Notre Dame School**  
Cobham, Surrey  
**Headmistresses:** Anna King and Amélie Morgan  
**Takes:** girls, aged 2-18, boys, aged 2-7

Notre Dame School is a Catholic girls day school which also takes boys from age 2 to 7. The school is one of more than 300 schools, educational foundations and projects (and the only one in the UK) associated with the Company of Mary Our Lady, an educational order founded in Bordeaux to educate girls in 1607. It was recognised as "excellent" across the board in the latest ISI inspection report.  
**Day fees:** £4,336 to £6,702 per term

More House, Oakhill Prep, Notre Dame School

**Oakhill School**  
Lancashire  
**Headmistress:** Jane Buttery  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 0-16

Oakhill School is a small school in rural Lancashire which excels academically partly because it can offer small class sizes. It also has over 50 sports and activities helped by a county-standard sports hall and leisure facility with a fully equipped Technogym fitness suite and spin studio, a new 3G sports pitch and extensive playing fields.  
**Day fees:** £2,985 to £4,586 per term

**Oakwood School**  
Croydon  
**Head:** Linda Sanders  
**Takes:** Boys and girls aged 3-11

In August 2023 Oakwood relocated to its current location in South East London in order to be on the same site as the boys senior school, The Cedars and the girls senior school The Laurels. Families choosing Oakwood can therefore almost be guaranteed an education from 4-18 at the PACT schools on one site.

In its new location the prep school children can now benefit from the facilities on offer to the older students such as modern science laboratories, a large gym, playing fields and an Oratory where parents are welcome to attend Mass with their children. French and Spanish are taught throughout, while Latin is introduced in year 5. There are a number of extra-curricular offerings in sport, performing arts, music, gardening, chess and many more as can meet demand. ▶

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# Marymount

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LONDON

An International Catholic Day and Boarding School  
for Girls aged 11-18 years



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◀ As with The Cedars and The Laurels, virtues education is at the heart of Oakwood's vision. The children have their own personal tutor from year 3, who maintains close links with the parents. The basis of this partnership is a loyal and mutual understanding of each other's complementary roles.

The most recent ISI report found that the pupils espouse and apply the virtues that are explored within the character development programme, collaborate well and display mutual respect.

Fr George Boronat from the Prelature of Opus Dei regularly comes to the school to provide children with the opportunity to attend Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He also provides talks and other means of spiritual formation for staff and parents.

**Fees:** Infants £3,600 per term, Juniors £3,900 per term

### The Oratory School Reading

**Headmaster:** Joe Smith

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 13-18

Founded in 1859 by St John Henry Newman, The Oratory has been providing pupils with a Catholic education for over 160 years. The school says the move to co-education in 2020 has been a great success, both in terms of girl numbers and the experience for both sexes in the new environment. In the academic year 2021-22, The Oratory received the highest grade of excellent in the Independent Schools Inspectorate for both categories of "pupils' academic and other achievements" and "pupils' personal development".

Inspectors described Oratory pupils as showing high levels of understanding for their age. "They show self-confidence in many areas of school life, are resilient and adapt well to new situations. They are self-reflective and have a strong awareness of their strengths and weaknesses." They also commented on how the founder's motto and school's motto, *Cor ad Cor Loquitur* (Heart Speaks to Heart), is "enacted daily".

*The Good Schools Guide* also revisited the school for the first time since it became co-educational, describing The Oratory as "an active choice for

families looking for a nurturing environment" and commenting on the "excellent leadership". The school has once again secured its place in *The Good Schools Guide's* best boarding schools 2022: "Parents love the ability to 'dip in and out of boarding' – truly flexible." Day, weekly and flexi-boarding is available. The Catholic faith and two chapels are central to the school's life, ethos and identity. Mass is offered regularly for those who wish to attend. Most days of the week, the school also holds a second, different act of worship from the Church's wide traditions. On Sundays and Days of Obligation, Mass is celebrated in the main chapel with the whole school community present, with pupils serving as sacristans, servers and readers. Oratory pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds: Catholic families, families from other Christian denominations and other world faiths, and families with no religious background. The majority of pupils gain entry to their first choice of university, including many Russell Group universities.

**Day fees:** £7,155 to £9,920 per term

**Boarding fees:** £9,878 to £14,437 per term

### Our Lady's Abingdon Oxfordshire

**Headmaster:** Daniel Gibbons

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 7-18

Headmaster Daniel Gibbons has just completed his second year, having joined the school from Downside where he was previously deputy head and helped develop boarding provision. Gibbons is said to have improved academic performance at all his prior schools, specialising in maximising "value-added". He has already been praised for having brought in a new academic leadership structure to OLA, with clearly defined middle-level heads of faculty to complement the pastoral heads of section. The school was founded in 1866 for pupils in the area but also as a boarding school by Sister Clare Moore of the Sisters of Mercy at Our Lady's Convent.

The Catholic faith continues to be an important part of school life, with Mass and feast days attended and

celebrated by pupils, parents and visitors. The school, which is eight miles from Oxford, is within the parish of Our Lady and St Edmund and is regularly visited by the parish priest, who is also on the board of governors. It accepts children of all faiths who are sympathetic to its ethos. Our Lady's Abingdon does well academically. In 2020, 75 per cent of students achieved A\* to B grades at A-level, while 99 per cent passed. Although the school has only been co-ed since 2013, there is now a 50/50 split of boys and girls. The school prides itself on remaining small and maintaining small class sizes so that pupils are known by staff and therefore get all the attention they need. There is an entrance exam and interview for prospective pupils. The school is especially proud of its "value-added" achievements, which assess what pupils achieve against baseline expectations. The Department for Education ranked OLA in the top five per cent of the country for value-added – "an exceptional achievement".

**Day fees:** £4,145 to £6,175 per term

### Our Lady's Preparatory School Crowthorne, Berkshire

**Headmaster:** Michael Stone

**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 0-11

Our Lady's was founded in 1961 by Father Daniel Boyle, priest of Crowthorne. It is a small school with only 240 pupils, with a family atmosphere and a highly rated nursery department. The school was rated "satisfactory" in its most recent inspection.

**Day fees:** £8,748 per annum

The Oratory School



## The Oratory School, Reading

**Joe Smith, Head of the Oratory School**

**What did you do prior to becoming headmaster of The Oratory School and how long have you been in the role?** Prior to becoming Head at The Oratory, I was Head of Loughborough Amherst School, a Catholic co-ed day and boarding school in Leicestershire, for seven years. Before that, I was Director of Studies at Woldingham School in Surrey for eight years.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** My subject is RE. I have not formally taught a class for a few years, but I still lead spiritual life and General RE sessions, help with Debating Society, and help teach one or two topics in A-level Philosophy of Religion.

**What attracted you to the school?** I initially applied because The Oratory was a Catholic co-ed School that was closer to our permanent family home than my previous post. However, what really sold me when I visited was the atmosphere and how friendly everyone was – staff, students, and parents.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** I have barely started yet. I'll be able to answer this question in a year or two.

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** The School motto is *Cor ad cor loquitur*. That really encapsulates the Catholic ethos of the School. That phrase reminds us that our job is much more than helping students to achieve good examination results and university destinations. Our real task is to help nurture a lifelong relationship between each pupil and God. That sounds ambitious (to say the least), and no school is as important in shaping character as a child's family, but nevertheless it is our mission.

**How do you incorporate the Catholic Faith into school life?** In a formal sense, there is weekly Mass and also an optional



daily early morning Mass, and we encourage all members of the School community, whatever their faith background, to feel a part of this collective worship. In addition, the musical life of the School, in which many students are involved, is centred on our Catholic faith, as are the charitable activities of the community. Beneath all this, however, in a less tangible but more crucial way, spiritual and moral reflection and discussion is constantly nurtured so that it becomes a habit for everyone – students and staff. In this way, each of us is being drawn into a deeper communion with each other and with God.

**What makes The Oratory School different and sets it apart from others in the area?** The main difference is the Catholic ethos we have just discussed. However, a more secular way of expressing this is that we really are a family school. Again, I don't know the school yet as well as most of the people here, but a common thread in the testimony of all the students I meet is their sense that this is somewhere in which they are really known and really know others. Its atmosphere is very much that of a "second home" rather than a mere place of learning. It is that atmosphere which empowers each student, whatever their personality and gifts, to develop the confidence to be themselves and to find their own flourishing and satisfaction.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** For a school of our size there really is a wealth of enrichment opportunities. By my calculation, there are 60

different clubs and activities currently being offered. The most obvious area is sport, where the School has a long-standing reputation for excellence. What pleases me, however, is that there is just as strong an emphasis on "sport for all" as on fielding impressive teams for tournaments. Art and music are also obvious areas of excellence and opportunity, but what is striking is the sheer diversity of opportunity, ranging from debating and computing through to conservation and ballroom dancing. There are also a wide range of trips offered, whether academic, sporting or musical and, as you would expect, CCF is very popular.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?** As I've already mentioned, sport is an area of excellence, both in terms of competitiveness and diversity of opportunity for all. Art stands out as an unusually high achieving area and, given the nature of the subject, this is immediately obvious to anyone visiting our site. In academic terms, because I have only just arrived, I have not yet had time to spend months observing lessons and joining department meetings, but – based on recent public exam results and the lessons I have sat in on so far – English is a particular strength, and maths and sciences are also very strong. As already discussed, the major strength underpinning everything else is our pastoral ethos.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** We hold open mornings in early October and again in March. We also hold a special Sixth Form open event in late October. However, the key thing to stress is that we welcome prospective families visiting us at any time. We strongly encourage families to visit us for a tour and a chat with me, and, most importantly, to arrange at least one taster day for their child. There is no substitute for actually experiencing the feel of the school on an ordinary working day.

Our reputation is such that we have a wide range of feeder schools across the South Oxfordshire and Berkshire region, with no particular dominant feeder schools.

11+ entry is through an assessment day in the January before the year of entry. This involves assessments in English and Maths.

# The Laurels and Oakwood, Croydon

**Linda Sanders**, Head of The Laurels and Oakwood Schools

**What did you do prior to becoming headmistress of The Laurels and Oakwood and how long have you been in the role?** I am the founding head of The Laurels School and have just been appointed Head of Oakwood Prep School. I have been in senior management for over 20 years and founded The Laurels 10 years ago – the most intense and rewarding of my professional life. To see an educational vision take shape and be lived out in the staff, pupils and parents, is one of the most satisfying and inspirational experiences imaginable.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** I am a Hispanist and until this year have been teaching A-level Spanish. I think it is key for a head to know all of her students and have the opportunity to interact with them in a classroom setting. I am passionate about learning foreign languages and our school is very proud to be able to offer two exchange programmes to excellent schools in Paris and Madrid.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** There are so many it is difficult to single out one. We began in the basement of a Prep School with 10 pupils. We are now based on a beautiful site with facilities we could only have dreamt of back then. I am so proud of my staff and their professionalism and resilience through all the challenges of the first 10 foundational years – this year we achieved “excellent in all areas” in our ISI inspection.

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** The school's ethos is based on the Catholic vision of what it means to be human: each person is a unique, beloved child of God and, as such, should be nourished, supported, loved and challenged to give of their best for the good of themselves and in the service of others. We believe that parents are the prime educators of their children and, therefore, education is a shared enterprise, based on trust and honesty. Our Arete programme seeks to help each child to



reach for excellence through striving to live virtue in their everyday lives.

**How do you incorporate the Catholic faith into school life?**

Mass is offered daily and is optional, except for Holy Days of Obligation. We have regular Benediction and celebrate Corpus Christi, the Crowning of Our Lady. We offer retreats and all of our pupils are given the opportunity to go to Confession as often as they wish. We are blessed to have a chaplain who gives regular talks to our pupils on spiritual matters. Our most popular club is The Bethany Club, which seeks to bring children into a closer relationship with Our Lord. It organises regular prayer in the morning and rosary in the months of May and October.

**What makes The Laurels School different and sets it apart from others in the area?**

Each pupil is assigned a personal tutor with whom she meets once a month. The tutor is akin to a personal coach or mentor and helps each pupil to forge their own identity. She is helped not only in academics, but more importantly, in her own personal development, becoming more self-aware. The tutor meets with the pupil's parents once a term reinforcing the vital parental-school partnership.

**Are you selective or non-selective? What kind of pupil thrives at The Laurels?**

There is a selection process which includes a parent interview in which both parents and head discuss the ethos of the school to make sure that the school is a

right fit and the unique ethos of the school is understood.

All pupils thrive at the school because of its personalised Arete programme which seeks to ensure that all pupils develop in a holistic, harmonious way.

The pupil who is predicted straight 9s at GCSEs will need to work on different aspects of her character just as much as the pupil who may need support in some subjects. All human beings can be helped to understand what it means to live a life well lived, based on living virtues such as self-mastery, courage, humility and compassion. Part of the problem in today's educational world is that there has been a dichotomy between pastoral and academic – as if it is impossible to do both well. This is clearly not true and our recent inspection results were a clear reflection of this and a validation of our educational vision.

**How do you prepare students for life after school?**

All pupils are expected to practice “service-leadership”. This takes many forms but it is a way of using their talents and strengths to serve their community. We also have a very strong careers programme which enables all of our pupils to take part in work experience. We draw on many professionals to provide talks, workshops and off-timetable events such as “Wonderful Women's Day” when they have the opportunity to meet and talk to women who are involved in a myriad of professions ranging from air pilot, master tailor and engineers to CEOs. We also always invite a mother to speak about motherhood. Sixth Formers follow a life skills course which introduces them to areas such as personal finance.

**Do you offer A-Levels/IB? What percentage of students go on to university and which universities do they favour?**

We offer A levels. Over 90 per cent of our pupils go on to Russell Group universities such as York, Exeter, Leeds, Liverpool, UCL, King's College, London and Cambridge. They have opted to study a huge variety of degrees such as nursing, veterinary science and archeology,

## ◀ Our Lady of Sion School Worthing

**Headteacher:** Steven Jeffery  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Our Lady of Sion is a co-educational school in the centre of Worthing near local sports and leisure facilities, which the school uses. Fees are reasonable compared to other independents in the area and the school is not obsessed with building new facilities and multi-million pound athletics tracks. Co-curricular activities include helping out at the next-door nursing home. It is described as a “personality-filled school” with a flexible curriculum which encourages pupils to think for themselves. Pupils do well in exams and go on to top universities including Oxbridge.

**Day fees:** £3,355 to £5,240 per term

## Princethorpe College Rugby

**Headmaster:** Grove du Toit  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 11-18

Princethorpe College, which has around 930 pupils, was established in 1966 by the Catholic missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC). The school draws inspiration for its ethos from the MSC's founder, Jules Chevalier, and the college motto *Christus regnet*. Princethorpe College received the highest possible ratings across all criteria from the Independent Schools Inspectorate following an inspection in April 2022.

During the inspection, the ISI observed that “pupils have very positive attitudes towards their work and are highly focused in lessons”, that they “achieve a high level of results, exceeding predictions at every level” and they “benefit significantly from an atmosphere in school which is positive and one where learning and trying one's best are celebrated”.

Referencing the extensive co-curricular programme, the inspectors commented that “pupils embrace wholeheartedly the many opportunities to participate in a myriad of activities and many enjoy substantial success” and are able to “find their own unique passions and relish taking part in them,

broadening their perspective on life”.  
**Day fees:** £4,912 per term

## Prior Park College Bath

**Headmaster:** Ben Horan  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 11-18

Originally run by Clifton Diocese and then by the Christian Brothers, the school has been under lay management since 1980 but remains strongly bound to its Catholic values. Set in 57 acres and overlooking the city of Bath, Prior Park is listed by the Oxford Royale Academy as one of the most beautiful boarding schools in the UK.

Alongside the day houses, there are two boarding houses, each with a dedicated live-in house parent and team of residential tutors, who work hard to create a home-from-home environment.

The College boasts impressive on-site facilities including a 150-seat theatre, dance studio, Sixth Form Centre, swimming pool, state-of-the-art sports centre and fitness suite, music studio and Sixth Form D&T workshop. The co-curricular programme is extensive, with a wide range of clubs per week, including astronomy, chess, metalwork and yoga. Their Saturday Active programme, optional for day students, is varied and includes sailing, golf, and archery.

Our Lady's Abingdon, Princethorpe



The beautiful Our Lady of the Snows Chapel is the focus of the school's spiritual life. It is the venue for weekly all-school assemblies, musical performances, religious prayer and a peaceful place where anyone can sit and contemplate in the middle of a busy campus. The College also has a Health and Wellbeing Centre, which provides proactive and holistic care for pupils' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Many parents enjoy the structure and stability that boarding offers and up to 150 British and international full, weekly and flexi boarders can enjoy the home-from-home environment provided by Prior's dedicated house parents. Next Open Door Morning takes place on Saturday September 30, 2023, 9:30am-12:30pm.  
**Boarding fees:** £9,990 to £12,878 per term  
**Day fees:** £5,874 to £6,483 per term

## Ratcliffe College Leicestershire

**Headmaster:** Jon Reddin  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

A co-ed day and boarding school based in Leicestershire, Ratcliffe College was founded in 1847 by the Rosminian Fathers, who still live within the campus grounds and gave the school its motto, *Legis plenitudo charitas* (charity is the fulfilment of the law).

The Father President, rector of the college, celebrates Mass daily in the college chapel, which also hosts senior school assemblies twice a week. Students enjoy a range of state-of-the-art facilities including a £1.3 million industry-standard fitness suite, and an additional £2.3 million sports hall near the preparatory school, with a new English block due to be completed in the autumn term of this academic year.

Ratcliffe is steeped in history and tradition, and surrounded by 200 acres of beautiful grounds situated in Leicestershire. The school teaches children aged 3 to 18, and is proud of its strong Catholic values and ethos. Ratcliffe is inclusive of all, with a real sense of community, offering exceptional teaching and outstanding pastoral care with small class sizes. ▶





Ratcliffe College, Rye St Anthony

Students aged 11 and above can choose from full, weekly, flexi and casual boarding and become part of a diverse boarding community, which includes many individuals from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. "Our close-knit, family-orientated community is something the school is very proud of and many of its students regard the school as a home-from-home," they say. "Ratcliffe College has always encouraged big ideas, helping young people to achieve their greatest potential, both inside and outside the classroom."

**Boarding fees:** £7,785 to £11,697 per term

**Day fees:** £3,500 to £6,074 per term

**Rydes Hill Preparatory School**  
Guildford

**Headmistress:** Sarah Norville  
**Takes:** boys, aged 3-7, and girls, aged 3-11

Rydes Hill is a non-selective Catholic school educating girls from 3 to 11 and boys from 3 to 7. It welcomes families of all faiths and beliefs. The school is consistently awarded the top-rated "excellent" by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. It prides itself on the breadth of education offered and the array of academic, sporting, performing arts and art scholarships achieved by its leavers.

**Day fees:** £3,256 to £4,987 per term

**Rye St Antony**  
Oxford

**Headmistress:** Joanne Croft  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Just a mile from the centre of Oxford, Rye St Antony offers students all the

perks that come with being so close to this university city full of world-class libraries, museums, galleries and theatres. The school takes boys until the age of 11 and girls, who may board from the age of 9, through to 18. The school is home to St Teresa's chapel, where Mass is held for pupils once a week. Rye, as it is known, is unusual for a Catholic school in that it was founded by two women rather than a religious order, and is named after the church of St Antony in Rye, East Sussex.

**Boarding fees:** £9,435 to £12,000 per term  
**Day fees:** up to £6,750

**Sacred Heart School**  
Wadhurst, East Sussex

**Headmistress:** Johanna Collyer  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 2-11

Sacred Heart School was established in 1938 by the Sisters of the Order of Notre Dame. It is a small community of only 100 pupils so each child gets maximum attention. Fees are affordable as the school is owned by the local diocese. Parents praise the school for its high academic standard.

**Day fees:** £3,220 to £3,310 per term

**Salesian College**  
Farnborough

**Headmaster:** Gerard Owens  
**Takes:** boys, aged 11-18, and girls in Sixth Form

The Salesian tradition follows the example and guidance of St John Bosco. Before Covid, each Easter boys and girls from the lower Sixth Form would go on pilgrimage to Lourdes.

The school is acclaimed for its high levels of academic, cultural, spiritual

and physical achievements, student behaviour and its caring ethos. It boasts a 100 per cent pass rate at GCSE and A-level and has also broken into the top 25 schools for sport in the UK.

**Day fees:** £14,703 per annum

**St Aloysius' College**  
Glasgow

**Headmaster:** Patrick Doyle  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

The school was founded in 1859 by the Jesuits who previously staffed the college. It is Scotland's only Jesuit school and has a good reputation among locals who know it as an all-round nurturing school with good transport links around Glasgow. An £8 million state-of-the-art sports facility opened in 2017. It regularly sends pupils to Oxbridge though most go on to Scottish universities.

**Day fees:** £11,421 to £14,976 per annum

**St Ambrose Preparatory School**  
Cheshire

**Headmistress:** Sara Heron  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

St Ambrose Preparatory School is a top independent, Catholic, co-educational school in Altrincham in the Cheshire countryside, with a high academic standard. The most recent ISI report rated the pupils' academics as "excellent" and their understanding of spiritual life as "outstanding". The school is a modern building, with extensive grounds and impressive facilities including a large playing field, AstroTurf pitches and a swimming pool.

**Day fees:** £6,325 to £8,400 per annum ▶



# Prior Park College, Bath

**Ben Horan, Head of**  
Prior Park College

**What did you do prior to becoming headmaster of Prior Park College and how long have you been in the role?**

I joined Prior as Head in 2019. Before that I was at Merchant Taylors' School in London, where I was the senior deputy head for five years. I was head of History at Eton between 2004 and 2014. My first teaching role was at St Benedict's School in Ealing.

**What is your subject, and do you still teach at all?**

I'm a History teacher and yes, I still teach. I take one Lower Sixth and one Upper Sixth class for a paper on the Crusades. Being in the classroom is the best part of my day!

**What attracted you to the school?**

I had heard of Prior before I came, but I didn't know it all that well. When I first visited, I was blown away by the sense of community that existed here. The way the young people here spoke about each other and about the school was unlike anything I'd seen at a school.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?**

Probably not losing that sense of community through the pandemic.

**What makes Prior Park College different and sets it apart from others in the area?**

I don't know of any other school that talks of love in such frank terms as we do here. It really does sit at the centre of school life, informing all our decisions.

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?**

Our values are Curiosity, Generosity, and Courage – which we try to incorporate throughout the day-to-day of our school life. Our mission talks of a school "with love for the young people it serves at its heart".

**How do you incorporate the Catholic Faith into school life?**

The Catholic faith is central to our school life. Every student gets some time each day to pray and reflect upon the day ahead of them. We have regular chapel services, congregational practices and whole school masses in our beautiful chapel. It is the heart of our school.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?**

I'm always slightly wary of this question, as it can often lead to a school being pigeonholed as "sporty" or "musical". I think Prior's greatest strength is in giving students the opportunities, the challenge and the love to develop into the person they were meant to be.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?**

Applicants complete assessments and interviews. Many of our 11+ candidates come from the Paragon School, which is our idyllic prep school a few minutes away from us. We have a range of academic and special talent scholarships available, and means tested bursaries are available.



ISI Inspection  
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every area!

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Neil McCollin, Assistant Head – Co-Curricular.



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## The Cedars School, Croydon

**Dominic Rose**, Head of The Cedars School

**What did you do prior to becoming headmaster of the Cedars and how long have you been in the role?** Prior to taking up my post as Headmaster of The Cedars School this September, I was Head of Sixth Form at St Bede's College, Manchester, for two years and a member of the Senior Leadership Team. At St Bede's, I worked to develop a culture of academic curiosity and independent learning in the Sixth Form and improved recruitment and retention. Before this, I was a Head of Year and head of PSHE at Manchester High School for Girls.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** My subject is English Literature; I hold Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Kent as well as the PGCE from Cambridge. My academic interests include the late Victorian novel, the poets of Dostoevsky, the early Romantics and Christopher Marlowe. I have taught English for 26 years and have been Head of English in three independent schools. I do not currently

teach English lessons at The Cedars, but I use my skills to prepare and deliver thought-provoking assemblies and provide enrichment opportunities to assist with the development of student oracy and critical thinking.

**What attracted you to the school? I was attracted by the school's mission to help students to acquire the moral, intellectual and social virtues essential for a happy and fulfilling life, and to give glory to God through the pursuit of excellence.**

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** The school's vision is that every Cedars boy grows into a fine young man, fulfilling his academic potential and also acquiring the qualities that will serve him and the wider community well in later life. We believe (in the words of St John Henry Newman) that God has created us "to do Him some definite service".

**How do you incorporate the Catholic faith into school life?** The school chapel is always open and boys have regular interaction with our school chaplain. We are proud of our Catholic ethos: there is

opportunity for daily Mass and daily prayer, while character formation is guided through the tutorial system.

**What makes The Cedars different and sets it apart from others in the area?** The personalised tutorial system makes The Cedars a truly unique school for boys in the United Kingdom. Through the fortnightly meeting between tutor and tutee, a strong partnership is fostered with the aim that the young man reaches his full potential in every area of his life. A strong and well-established connection between a boy's parents and his tutor, enables the school to fully support parents as prime educators of their child.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** Pupils find opportunities for enrichment through the Eudaimonia Programme and the Co-Curricular Programme. The Eudaimonia programme seeks to enhance boys' cultural literacy by encouraging them to explore big ideas in science, mathematics, philosophy, art, literature and much more. The Co-Curricular programme provides many opportunities for boys to participate in and excel at sport, music, drama and the arts, debating and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** Admission to The Cedars School is by entrance examination and interview. Boys may apply for admission in Year 7, Year 9 and the Sixth Form. Academic scholarships are available, as are scholarships for music, sport and the arts. There is also a bursary scheme.

**How often do you offer Mass, Benediction, etc, and where? Do pupils attend Confession?** Mass is celebrated in the school chapel every day and boys and staff are welcome to attend on a voluntary basis. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is made available frequently.

**How do you prepare students for life after school?** In the one-to-one tutorial system, the focus is on leading each pupil to think for himself and to work on acquiring the balanced strengths that he will need for adult life. Through his rapport with the pupil, the tutor provides an effective service of personal example, guidance and advice.

### ◀ St Anthony's School for Boys Hampstead, London Headmaster: Richard Berlie Takes: boys, aged 2.5-13

St Anthony's Boys prides itself on academic excellence with boys going on to top schools often with scholarships. Using an educational model which they describe as a "fusion of traditional and modern methods", the school teaches facts ("memorising facts and rote learning are essential for examination success and as life skills"), but also to "think outside the box" ("presenting topics through the prism of problem solving and asking pupils to think creatively").

"Encouraging boys to question and challenge is critical in testing the validity of arguments. Boys quickly learn that in the 'free-market of ideas' carefully constructed propositions will hold their own while flimsy assertions will sink without a trace," the school explains.

"With no topics considered 'off limits' children acquire a number of key life skills. These include coming prepared to a discussion, literally having done their homework. It also builds resilience and humility because pupils may well have to concede to opposing principles. And perhaps most important of all is the promotion of tolerance and respect towards those who hold dear, different beliefs or principles."

Founded in 1952, St Anthony's now has capacity for around 300 boys and there is an associated nursery. The music department is particularly impressive, offering digital music composition, a jazz band and numerous orchestras and choirs. Coding, chess, arts and crafts, theatre, swimming, and many sporting activities are also on offer.

**Day fees: £7,555 to £7,795 per term**

### St Anthony's School for Girls Golders Green, London Headmaster: Donal Brennan Takes: girls, aged 4-11

St Anthony's School for Girls opened in 2016 as the sister school to highly-esteemed St Anthony's Boys in Hampstead. With only 85 girls, it

St Anthony's School for Boys, St Ambrose Prep

offers small class sizes. It has a co-educational nursery on-site feeding into the girls' and boys' schools.  
**Day fees: £6,600 per term**

### St Augustine's Priory Ealing Headteacher: Sarah Raffray Takes: girls, aged 3-18 (boys in nursery)

Set in 13 acres, St Augustine's Priory is a day school for girls aged 3-18, with boys in the nursery. Rated as excellent by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, it is a unique community with superb sports facilities and a working farm. Educating girls since 1634, the school has close ties with Ealing Abbey and welcomes students of all faiths to share their deeply rooted values to prepare for the future. The school hosts a beautiful chapel, with students regularly playing an active role in the celebration of Mass. From nursery to Year 13, St Augustine's focuses on the whole child with the belief that happy and secure children learn best and achieve their full potential. According to *The Good Schools Guide*, pupils say their school is "loving", "caring" and "friendly". The school's mission statement – "Our girls will change the world" – is at the heart of school life and students' academic success. "Pupils are equipped with an outstanding education for the future, alongside a focus on building confidence, collaborative skills, emotional intelligence and self-awareness," they say. "As a result

students embrace all higher education and life after school offers, with girls going to the best universities in the world." For the diary: Nursery, Pre-Preps and Preps open day is on September 20. Senior School open day is on September 4.  
**Fees: From £1,797 to £6,042 per term (Nursery to Seniors)**

### St Bede's College Manchester Headmistress: Maria Kemp Takes: boys and girls, aged 3-18

Founded in 1875 by the then Bishop of Salford, Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, St Bede's College performs well across the board. The main building, called the Vaughan building, is the former Manchester aquarium, with additions. Today it is decorated with ceramic mouldings by George Tinworth and leads into an imposing corridor adorned with mosaics and marble. The college motto *Numquam otio torpebat* (Never rest in idleness) – derives from the prayer of St Bede. The esteemed pianist Stephen Hough is an alumnus.  
**Day fees: £9,072 to £15,175 per annum**

### St Benedict's School Ealing Headmaster: Andrew Johnson Takes: boys and girls, aged 3-18

Opened in 1902, St Benedict's Ealing caters for a wide range of abilities but has become more academic since the arrival of headmaster Andrew Johnson





in 2016. Alumni include the journalist and author Douglas Murray, historian Peter Hennessy, writer Peter Ackroyd and Lord Patten.  
**Day fees:** £3,850 to £6,969 per term

### St Bernard's Preparatory School

**Berkshire**  
**Headmistress:** Asha Verma  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 2½-11

St Bernard's was ranked the seventh best prep school of 2022 in the *Sunday Times* Parent Power list. A recent inspection, delivered in March 2023, described "Pupils' spiritual understanding" as "excellent for their age" and explained that "Pupils of all ages achieve high academic standards." In this last academic year other highlights have included achieving the Live Simply Award and being placed joint first in the National SATIPS Handwriting Competition.

The past few years have seen many innovations including the introduction of a Children's Leadership Team and a focus on developing a whole school approach to STEM. St Bernard's reports that it has introduced the Junior Duke Award with 70 children having already achieved their certificates and badges.

"We focus on the holistic development of all the children in our care... to encourage them to become the very best that they can be – academically, spiritually, emotionally and socially," they say.

Pupils go on to top grammar schools and public schools.

**Day fees:** £3,690 to £4,395 per term

St Bede's Prep School; St Catherine's School, Twickenham



### St Catherine's School Twickenham

**Headmistress:** Johnneen McPherson  
**Takes:** girls, aged 5-18

St Catherine's is the only independent Catholic girls' school in the Richmond area, located on the River Thames. It was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1914. Visitors often comment on the friendly atmosphere at the school which prides itself on its welcoming Christian ethos.

**Day fees:** £4,670 to £5,970 per term

### St Christina's School North London

**Headmaster:** Alastair Gloag  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3 to 11

St Christina's school in St John's Wood, London, was founded in 1949 by the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. While the co-ed school stresses the importance of developing the whole person, academic standards are also excellent. Classes are small, between 12 and 21 pupils, most of whom go on to top London day schools. There is a strong focus on STEM subjects and popular extracurricular activities include robotics, judo and chess. Sixty per cent of pupils are Catholic and children of all faiths take part in the religious life of the school, which includes Mass every Friday in the convent chapel adjoining the school. Catholic children in Year 3 are prepared for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist which also happen on-site. Nuns from the adjoining convent are involved in school life.

**Fees:** £5,350 per term

### St Columba's College St Albans

**Headmaster:** David Shannon-Little  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 4-18

St Columba's was founded in 1939 and since 1955 it has been a member of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart's global community of schools. It is unique in being the only such school in the UK. The self-defined goal of the college is to provide a moral and religious education based on the charism of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, teaching pupils the Columban values of courage, courtesy and compassion "to enable them to become confident and well-rounded individuals who aim to leave people and places better than they find them".

In 2021, girls joined each year group in lower prep (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2) and the lower Sixth Form (Year 12) From September, girls will be welcomed into Form 1/Year 7. A phased transition will eventually see St Columba's being open to both boys and girls from ages 4 to 18.

"At St Columba's, we pride ourselves on providing an education of the head and heart, placing academic success, happiness, and confidence at the centre of our mission," they say. "Throughout each phase of education, prep, senior and Sixth Form, the curriculum is ambitious and varied, rooted in a long tradition of academic excellence. Through small classes, our passionate and inspirational teachers provide students with high-quality learning opportunities." There is also a broad range of extracurricular activities and service opportunities on offer: "it is

## St Anthony's School for Boys

**Richard Berlie**, Head of St Anthony's Boys, Hampstead

**How do you incorporate the Catholic faith into school life?** Whole school Mass is celebrated at least once a term usually on a Holy day of Obligation and on Ash Wednesday. The school's assistant chaplain intends to offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the new academic year.

Year group Masses are celebrated in the school hall on a rotational basis through the year. The school has recently purchased an elegant altar and cloths and candlesticks to enhance the celebration of the liturgy. The school purchased a new organ last academic year to accompany singing.

**What provision do you offer for pupils who want to take their first Holy Communion?** First Holy Communion classes are offered at school starting in the second half of the autumn term. The catechist, a former parent, is also the parish administrator at St Mary's, Hampstead.

**Do you offer any interesting or unusual subjects?** We teach French from nursery all the way up to Year 8. Latin is taught to all boys from Year 6 up. Coding, robotics, and debating are examples of after school clubs and societies that are popular with boys.

**What sort of pastoral care do you offer?** The link person between home and school is the form teacher. The key to excellent pastoral care is regular and



meaningful communication. At the first sign of unhappiness (or under-performance) the form teacher will reach out to the parent. The sooner a problem is identified and discussed then the faster a solution can be found. The school takes a proactive and transparent approach – the child is at the centre of all decisions made.

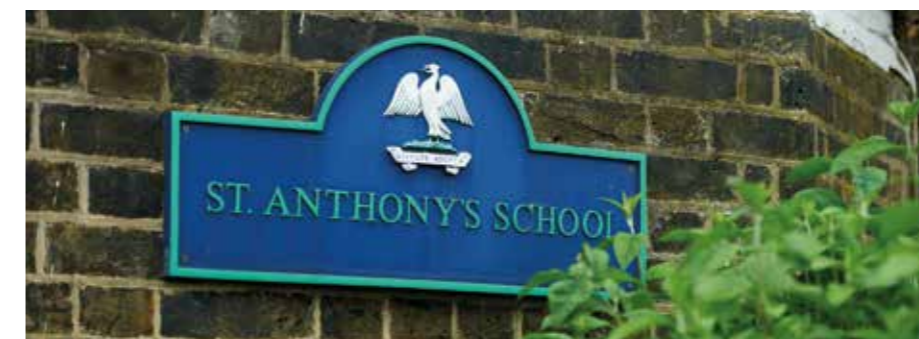
**How many pupils are at the school and what percentage are Catholic?** We have 280 pupils of whom just under 40 per cent are Catholic.

**Are you selective or non-selective? What kind of pupil thrives at St Anthony's?** The school looks for boys with academic potential. The teaching and learning bar is set high. Boys who are curious and questioning will succeed at St Anthony's.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** The PSHEE programme helps pupils to think about their role as citizens (taking responsibility for others) and also to be responsible for themselves in terms of health and economic autonomy. There is a vibrant careers programme as well as regular visiting speakers from the world of science, the arts and technology.

**What makes St Anthony's different and sets it apart from others in the area?** The school offers a holistic (perhaps a truly Catholic) education. The aim is to instil knowledge and cultivate a love of learning. Questioning is at the heart of the academic curriculum. The recent increase in boys winning places at some of the UK's most selective academic schools suggests the approach is bearing fruit.

**Do pupils get involved in any charitable ventures/community service or participate in any pilgrimages?** Charitable fundraising is a very important part of life at St Anthony's and the boys raise thousands of pounds each term for school charities such as Mary's Meals and the Passage. The school council, chaired and run by boys, discusses and plans specific fund-raising events. They are assisted by a Charities and Outreach coordinator (a member of staff).





# Rye St Antony

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## St Catherine's, Twickenham

**Johneen McPherson**, Head of St Catherine's, Twickenham

**What did you do prior to becoming Headmistress of St Catherine's and how long have you been in the role?** I have been Headmistress for five years and prior to that I was deputy head academic at St Mary's Ascot.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** Teaching English has always been my great privilege and pleasure; prior to leadership I loved being head of department. I am very glad that I still do some teaching – generally Year 9, and also some A-level. My pupils are probably not really aware that being with them in the classroom, enjoying literature and language, is usually the best part of my week.

**What attracted you to the school?** I wanted to lead a faith school, and also feel passionately about the benefits of all-girls' education. I also saw that the size of St Catherine's promotes relationships, self-confidence and belonging.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** Strengthening and supporting an excellent staff

body who are committed to the pupils they teach and care for; developing the school's faith life and chaplaincy programmes which sit perfectly alongside an improved commitment to pastoral care; the school's stronger academic provision and changes in reporting and tracking to ensure progress for each pupil; and further success and excellence in sport, music, art and drama programmes, as shown by the many national prizes and awards, and special activities like the school production at the Edinburgh Fringe.

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** Pupils are inspired by the words of St Catherine: "Be who God wants you to be, and you will set the world on fire" – this informs our commitment to forming young women of confidence and compassion, ready to lead and serve as they find their place in the world. We have five central values which help us to live out this vision: Community, Faith, Courage, Scholarship, Service.

**How do you incorporate the Catholic Faith into school life?** At St Catherine's we take faith seriously, though we treat it lightly. This means that faith is there in form prayers, school Mass, Wednesday worship and feast days, and that it also sits gently and

naturally, as part of our everyday school life. Faith life at St Catherine's is not didactic, it lives in our community and there is a spirit of friendship and inclusivity that ensures girls of all faiths understand that each person is valued and that the school is a home, where they can belong and flourish.

**What makes St Catherine's different and sets it apart from others in the area?** Visitors always comment on the authenticity and friendliness of St Catherine's girls and the school spirit is a very special one. Excellent and intentional pastoral care and safeguarding help each girl to know she is valued, and to grow in her understanding of others and of the world. What sets us apart from other schools is our success in this nurturing and the way this creates confidence in individual pupils, which in turn leads to academic success, ambition and resilience, as well as personal growth and happiness.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** The co-curricular and enrichment programmes are extensive, including a wide range of sporting options, swimming, creative activities, debating, music, dance, Duke of Edinburgh and academic competitions. There is something for everyone and Sixth Form girls take a role in leading clubs and activities.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?** Within our rich academic and cocurricular programmes, Art, History, Maths and Science are particularly strong, and the girls are also especially successful at drama, athletics, swimming, debating and netball.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** All applicants are interviewed by the Headmistress. The procedure for Year 7 includes an interview in the Autumn Term and exams in early December; applications for other year groups are processed throughout the year and enquiries are always welcome. There are no feeder schools and St Catherine's is pleased to welcome girls from a very large number of state and independent schools. Scholarships or bursaries are available.

← equally important in our overall aim of preparing young people to 'not just to make a living but to make a life', says the school. It runs a distinctive so-called "SHAPE" programme in the senior school and the Sixth Form, which includes service activities such as student ministry and fundraising for charities such as Cafod, homeless shelters and foodbank; house activities such as inter-house music, sport and public speaking competitions; academic clubs such as lunchtime and after-school subject sessions and specialist exam groups workshops. It also includes practical activities such as college sport, drama, and music. Extracurricular activities include clubs such as mindfulness, scrabble and chess club, as well as CCF and the Duke of Edinburgh awards. **Day fees:** £12,714 to £19,338 per annum

**St Dominic's Priory School**  
Stone, Staffordshire  
**Headmistress:** Rebecca Harrison  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3 to 16

Officially opened in 1934 by the English Dominican Sisters, the school shares its site in Stone with the convent. A recent inspection from 2022 stated that "Pupils throughout the school make rapid progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding." It also praised the "self-confidence and a strong awareness of personal growth over time". The new senior-school building, which opened in 2020, houses new science laboratories, performing arts studios and peripatetic music rooms alongside high-tech classrooms. **Day fees:** £7,938 to £12,012 per annum



## St Edmund's College and Prep School

Ware, Hertfordshire  
**Headteacher:** Matthew Mostyn  
**Takes:** boys and girls (aged 3-18)

St Edmund's College, founded by Cardinal William Allen in 1568 as a seminary, is the oldest continuously operating and oldest post-Reformation Catholic school in the country. Located in 400 acres of Hertfordshire countryside with a chapel in its grounds, it is often over-subscribed, so parents are encouraged to get applications in early. The school takes pupils with a real mix of abilities and nurtures their talents, with an equal emphasis placed on academic, pastoral, co-curricular and spiritual growth. Above all, the school strives to mould well-rounded, community-minded individuals. Pupils do well in exams with 36 per cent of the 2022 cohort achieving A\*-A grades A-level and leavers going on to top universities. Music is important and the school's Schola Cantorum regularly performs in Britain's most splendid sacred buildings, including the cathedrals of Canterbury and Westminster. The school has a vibrant boarding community for pupils aged 11 to 18.

Priding itself on being a "modern, forward-thinking school", St Edmund's approach is underpinned by two key pillars: the college's Catholic ethos and its High Performance Learning (HPL) framework. Employed by many of the world's leading independent schools, HPL mixes academic confidence and attainment with the development of robust personal values, attitudes and attributes. Lessons at St Edmund's are taught in small class sizes, with



scholarships available in art, music and sports. From a pastoral perspective, life at St Edmund's revolves around five houses that help support students' physical, emotional, and spiritual development.

Pupils have an hour timetabled during every day for co-curricular activities from fencing and golf to debating and cooking. There is a thriving music department and a range of sports on offer. St Edmund's students can also take part in the Combined Cadet Force, the St Edmund's Award and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. **Day fees:** £6,164 - £7,245  
**Boarding fees:** (full boarding) £10,255 - £12,821

**St Edward's School**  
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire  
**Headmaster:** Matthew Burke  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 1-18

St Edward's School offers a kindergarten, prep and senior school for children aged from one to 18. The school site, Charlton Park, was a hunting lodge that belonged to Edward the Confessor (1003-1066), the only English monarch to have been canonised. Parents praise the school for its small class sizes and "beautiful private setting". **Day fees:** £7,980 to £18,915 per annum

**St John's Beaumont**  
Windsor  
**Headmaster:** Dr Deneal Smith  
**Takes:** boys, aged 3-13

St John's Beaumont is a day and boarding Jesuit preparatory school

St Edward's School, St Columba's College, St Edmund's College



# St George's School, Weybridge



**Rachel Owens,**  
Head of St  
George's Senior  
School/College

**What did you do prior to becoming head of St George's and how long have you been in the role?** I was Head of St George's, Ascot from 2011 to 2016, then here from 2016.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** History and Politics – no I don't, except for some Oxbridge prep.

**What attracted you to the school?** Its liberal Catholicism and Josephite ethos. And the fact it is the biggest RC independent school in England!

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** Consistently being in the top 5 per cent in the UK for value added at GCSE and A-level. Enabling each child to be "the best version of themselves".

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** Our Josephite "spirit of family". We have ten key aspects – politesse and douceur being the main ones. The others are honesty, mercy, hospitality, pastoral care, zeal, happiness, inclusiveness and collaboration.

**How do you incorporate the Catholic Faith into school life?** It is inherent in everything we do. We expect everyone to live by Gospel values, treating others as they would wish to be treated themselves.

**What makes St George's different and sets it apart from others in the area?** Our commitment to social justice in the community. Outreach is a vital part of what we do – teaching English to refugees, keeping the local foodbank afloat, our Sixth

Formers teaching RS in the local primary schools.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** Too many to mention! There are over 180 clubs on offer here every week from Climbing to Greek! Many of them have an "ethos" element, such as Kennedy club, where Sixth Formers entertain young refugees who are housed nearby.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?** Our strength is our strapline – "Perfectly Balanced" – we genuinely encourage everyone to get involved in everything. Our academic subjects are also perfectly balanced – we expect all of them to be of the highest standard.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** We have an annual cycle of admissions for entry at 11+, 13+ and 16+. A large number of schools, both independent and maintained, feed into the College from surrounding areas. Bursaries are available on entry at 11+ and 16+, and Scholarships are available on entry at 11+, 13+ and 16+.

Entry into other year groups (except Fifth Year and Upper Sixth Form) is sometimes possible.



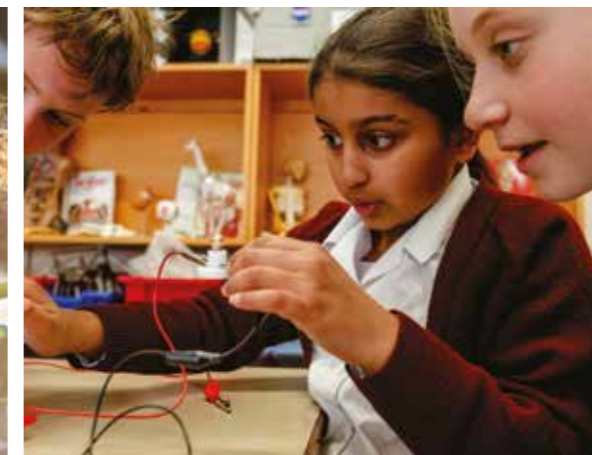
**Antony Hudson,** Head  
of St George's  
Junior School

I am, therefore, just completing 20 years in office.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** I'm a History graduate, but in recent years have been teaching Religious Studies.

**What did you do prior to becoming head of St George's and how long have you been in the role?** I was Deputy Head of Prior's Field School, Godalming for 3 years before being appointed Head of St George's Junior School in September 2003;

**What attracted you to the school?** I had a strong sense of wanting to be a Head and was beginning to look for secondary school openings; however, deep down, I had always been aware that my happiest school days were in the primary sector – and St



George's Junior School was at a fascinating juncture which felt like a good fit. I wanted to get back into Catholic education, and my brief time at the English College in Rome had given me a strong sense of the importance of Religious Community spirit – all of which helped my application as the first lay Head.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** The genuine happiness of the children "coming home to school" each day! In terms of facilities, the Lower Years' building – The Ark – which encompasses Lower Nursery-Year 2, and was opened and blessed by Cardinal Cormac in April 2016; and the acquisition and development of around 80 acres of land adjoining the School which has transformed the sports provision as well as other educational opportunities such as Forest School which was a long-held ambition. Finally, the fact that this academic year, every single one of the 88 Year 6 pupils was offered a place by The College – a long-cherished dream!

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** We are co-educational, 3-18, Catholic & Josephite, and the aim of the School is to inspire all in our Josephite, Georgian Family to be the very best version of themselves, "learning to live and love to the full like Jesus".

**How do you incorporate the Catholic Faith into school life?** Overseen by a full-time Lay Chaplain, the daily Collective Worship Programme in classrooms is based on the preceding Sunday's Gospel reading; Mass is celebrated each week by one of the Josephite priests – mostly, class Masses but,

occasionally, for all the children in Years 3-6 for major Feast Days. The RE Curriculum is "The Way, The Truth and The Life", and there are strong links with the local Catholic parish of Christ The Prince of Peace where annual Retreats are held for pupils in Year 6.

**What makes St George's different and sets it apart from others in the area?** The sheer size of the School; it is unusually large with 640 pupils based on four form entry with superb facilities on a 50 acre site; it is also unusual that the Head of the College and the Junior School Head are autonomous, but each School has a very strong sense of Georgian Family Spirit with huge Value-Added.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** We offer something in the region of 200+ Lunchtime and After-School Clubs in the course of a typical week.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?** Academically, the School is strong across the board – the challenge is more one of trying to achieve a perfectly balanced curriculum. Sport (regularly Regional Championships in Hockey), Art, Music and Drama are all very strong, with many scholarships being awarded across all four areas at 11+.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** Pupils normally join the Junior School, aged 4+ or at the start of Year 3, aged 7+. Offers are made if there is available space, following a successful assessment; entry into other years is occasionally possible where spaces become available – assessments are arranged on application. For entry at 5+ and above, a confidential report is sought from the candidate's current school. Offers of admission at 7+ or above are only made if the candidate's academic performance in the entrance assessment indicates that they are likely to meet the requirements for entry to the College at 11+.

There aren't any scholarships awarded to the Junior School but there are two Bursaries (up to 100 per cent if required, subject to financial circumstances) available from Year 3 to Year 6, up to a maximum of eight across those Year Groups.



St Mary's School  
CAMBRIDGE



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**Open Events**

<b>AUTUMN</b>	Sixth Form	<b>14 Sept</b>	5.00pm-6.30pm
	Preschool & Junior School	<b>30 Sept</b>	10.00am-12.00pm
	Senior School	<b>07 Oct</b>	9.30am-12.30pm

stmaryscambridge.co.uk/visit




St George's  
WEYBRIDGE



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**Open Morning Dates:**  
Junior School: SATURDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER  
College: SATURDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER

**BOOK ONLINE**

Inspiring all in our Josephite, Georgian family to be the very best version of themselves.

St George's Weybridge is a co-educational day school for children aged 3-18, and is the largest independent Catholic school in England.

[stgeorgesweybridge.com](http://stgeorgesweybridge.com)






UPCOMING OPEN EVENTS:



Senior Phase Open Evening  
Thursday 21 September 2023

VI Form Open Evening  
Thursday 12 October 2023

Prep Phase Open Morning  
Friday 3 November 2023

Register here



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Private  
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Best Independent Girls' School 2023  
- South East England

Feet on the ground. Reaching for the stars.



◀ founded by the Society of Jesus in 1888. It is situated between Englefield Green and Old Windsor on Priest Hill, with the school building in Surrey and the sports fields in Berkshire. The oldest purpose-built preparatory school in the UK, it is now owned by Stonyhurst College, where many boys progress. Eton and Radley are also popular destinations.

**Boarding fees:** £7,190 to £11,877 per term

**Day fees:** £4,200 to £7,877 per term

### St John's College Cardiff

**Headmaster:** Shaun Moody  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Established in 1987, St John's College is the choir school of Wales's national Catholic cathedral, Cardiff Metropolitan Cathedral. It takes children from nursery upwards, and provides male and female choristers aged from 8 to 18. The core values and Catholic ethos of the school continue to prosper and it prides itself on its outstanding academic results and exemplary pastoral care. In 2022, St John's was ranked first for academic results in Wales. St John's College has average class sizes of fewer than 16 pupils, small year groups and a stable, committed staff.

**Day fees:** £3,575 to £5,295 per term

### St Joseph's Park Hill School Burnley

**Headmistress:** Maria Whitehead  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

St Joseph's Park Hill is owned by the

Institute of Our Lady of Mercy. Learning opportunities at Park Hill are broad, balanced and exciting as it promotes academic success but also believes in the education of the whole child.

Following the example of both their foundress Catherine McAuley and also St Joseph, they place importance on the need for tolerance and understanding and concern for others.

**Day fees:** £8,055 per annum

### St Joseph's Preparatory School Stoke-on-Trent

**Headmaster:** Daniel Hood  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

St Joseph's Preparatory School is built on the tradition of its founders, the Christian Brothers, who own the school. A recent inspection report comments on the happiness and confidence of the pupils, and on how they pray calmly during assemblies.

**Day fees:** £3,235 to £3,415 per term

### St Joseph's College Reading

**Headmistress:** Laura Stotesbury  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

St Joseph's was founded in 1894 by the Sisters of St Marie-Madeleine Postel. Parents comment on the nurturing and detailed attention received by their children in a wholesome community environment. It won the TES Independent School of the Year award in November 2015.

A wide range of clubs are open to all pupils, including string and

brass groups, wind bands, choir, theatre studies, science club and a variety of sports.

**Day fees:** £8,335 to £14,289 per annum

### St Mary's College Crosby, Liverpool

**Headmaster:** Michael Kennedy  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 0-18

St Mary's College is a co-educational school with a Christian ethos. The college was established in 1919 by the Christian Brothers, a clerical order founded by Blessed Edmund Rice. It provides high-quality education, encouraging achievement in many fields via its rich programme of extracurricular activities.

The college has its own multi-gym and sports hall. There are seven laboratories, two workshops and a library. Twenty acres of playing fields are sited nearby on Little Crosby Road.

**Day fees:** £9,132 to £13,263 per annum

### St Mary's Hare Park Catholic School and Nursery Romford

**Headmaster:** Ludovic Bernard  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 2½-11

St Mary's Hare Park was established to provide education for Catholic children but will consider applications from any family which is willing to support the ethos of the school. It was rated "good" overall by Ofsted in 2018, with pupils' behaviour deemed "outstanding".

**Day fees:** £3,135 to £3,370 per term

St Mary's School, Cambridge, St John's Beaumont



## St Mary's School, Cambridge

**Charlotte Avery**, Head of St Mary's School, Cambridge, discusses what attracted her to what is now the only single-sex school in Cambridgeshire



**What did you do prior to becoming headmistress of St Mary's School, Cambridge?** I was the first female deputy head in Highgate School's 400+ year history. My role was to oversee the introduction of girls into the school. My whole career has been spent in education including both the state and independent sectors.

**What attracted you to the school?** There are many different aspects of life at St Mary's which remain as attractive and important 16 years later as they were for me on appointment! As a passionate feminist, teaching in an all-girls' space was, and is, deeply important. As a Christian, teaching in a Christian school in the Catholic tradition is equally important. Cambridge as a location was also a draw. Intellectual life in the city affords our young women so many experiences and events. The remarkable legacy of Mary Ward was also key.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** The balance we strike between achieving outstanding academic results and delivering equally exceptional pastoral care. Our teaching is based on the philosophy of High Performance Learning (HPL) and we are a designated HPL World Class School. Our pastoral work is based on gospel values and reinforcing the unique importance of every individual.

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** We've adopted the vision and values of Mary Ward, who said that "by God's grace, women in time will do much". She was correct, of course, but the challenge for women is not over. Our values are Freedom, Joy, Justice, Love and Truth. In terms of our ethos, we've recently introduced a HEART acronym, which helps us live our values and develop curious, creative, and

compassionate young women: **Hard work:** We show perseverance and sustain focus. **Empathy:** We are kind, joyful, generous, value friendship and celebrate diversity. **Adaptability:** We adjust to difficult situations, are open minded, discerning and take calculated risks. **Responsibility:** We act justly and strive to uphold truth and lead by example. **Thoughtfulness:** We are creative, reflective, attentive, show gratitude, hear others, and disagree well.

**How do you incorporate the Catholic Faith into school life?** At St Mary's, pupils embrace the demands of being part of a Catholic school with understanding and confidence. Moral, spiritual, ethical and theological development is carefully planned for and embedded in the learning opportunities and ethos of the school. All pupils are called to live out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and take a leading role in making a difference locally and globally, seeking justice and fairness for everyone. They have an excellent understanding of vocation and are passionate about using their gifts in the service of others. These principles permeate through the school and were praised in our most recent Diocesan inspection report (2022), which judged us as outstanding in all areas of Catholic Life, Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship.

**What makes St Mary's School, Cambridge different and sets it apart from others in the area?** St Mary's is now the only single-sex school in Cambridgeshire. All other former boys' and girls' schools in the local area have gone co-ed. Our faith also sets

us apart and the fact that we accept students across a wide ability range. This is an important part of our ethos and reflects our belief in the value of each individual. Every girl invited to join our community has access to excellent, dedicated teachers, who help ensure she will achieve her aspirations and can pursue her university and career ambitions. Another wonderful and unique feature is our international "boarding" element which enables us to welcome girls from across the globe to complement the local and international families who constitute our "day" provision.

**What are the school's strengths – particular subject areas and extracurricular?** We are particularly strong in STEM subjects, our most popular A-level choice. We've recently opened a STEM Learning Lab in our Junior School that gives pupils everything they need to experiment, explore, design, test and perfect their innovation ideas. We are exceptional at creative and performing arts – with students regularly winning national awards and going on to prestigious art and drama schools and music conservatoires. Our sports are also growing. In partnership with Homerton College, part of the University of Cambridge, our Long Road sports site offers athletics facilities for track and field and astro turf pitches for hockey, rugby and football, plus cricket nets. This year our Rowing Club, which rows out of our superb boat-house on the River Cam, was officially recognised as British Rowing Affiliated.

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** Admissions are by assessment, interview and school reference. We have a wide range of feeder schools across the state and independent education sector. We also have international students who board with us. We offer a wide range of enrichment scholarships focused on art, creative writing, dance, design, drama, music and sport. We also have established high performance and community scholarships that are awarded once girls have joined the school. Bursaries are available for senior school day students and our Magnolia 125 fundraising campaign aims to enable us to provide a greater range of bursaries in the future.

◀ **St Mary's School**  
Cambridge

**Headmistress:** Charlotte Avery  
**Takes:** girls, aged 3-18

Based in central Cambridge, St Mary's is a Mary Ward school for around 650 boarders and day girls. It was established in 1898 and is guided by the vision of the nun Mary Ward, who championed education for girls and inspired them to "do much" not just academically but also in society.

An accredited World Class High Performance Learning (HPL) school, in 2022, St Mary's School received the highest grade of "excellent" for their Education Quality inspection and was deemed outstanding in all areas of Catholic Life, Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship in its most recent Diocesan inspection report (2022). It is the only single-sex school in its county.

Academic results are strong; girls can opt to take classical Greek and additional maths at GCSE on top of the core curriculum. In modern foreign languages pupils can choose from Mandarin Chinese, German, Spanish and French. Worship is an important part of daily life at the school. Every girl is expected to take religious education at GCSE and there is an optional Mass every Wednesday morning. There is daily prayer during Advent and year group assemblies take place in the Chapel.

**Day fees:** £4,221 to £6,093 per term  
**Full boarding:** £13,148 to £13,892 per term

St Pius X Catholic Prep School, St Winefride's



**St Mary's School**  
Hampstead

**Headmistress:** Harriet Connor-Earl  
**Takes:** girls, aged 2-11

St Mary's was established in 1871 in the heart of Hampstead as a Catholic convent boarding school for girls. The school has its own chapel with beautiful stained-glass windows, where Mass and weekly "Praying Together" sessions take place. St Mary's is proud of its chapel choir which performs annually at the Albert Hall. Girls are high-achievers and facilities are excellent.

The school has recently opened its Global Learning Centre which includes an engineering and robotics lab, virtual-reality launch pad, art and design studio as well as a green room.

**Day fees:** £3,345 to £6,180 per term

**St Philomena's Catholic School**  
Frinton, Essex

**Headmistress:** Philippa Mathews  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

St Philomena's is the only independent school in Tendring. It is a small and nurturing school with high academic standards. It was established by the Sisters of Mercy in September 1926. As a Catholic school, it promotes a Christian ethos, but children of all faiths are welcomed. It is a worshipping community, valuing prayer and praise, which enjoys close links with the parish of the Sacred Heart and St Francis in Frinton.

**Day fees:** £1,200 to £2,940 per term



**St Pius X Catholic Preparatory School**  
Lancashire

**Headmaster:** Charlie Long  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 2-11

St Pius X Catholic Preparatory School was founded in 1955 by a group of forward-looking Preston businessmen to provide local Catholic families with the best in private education. Academic standards are high with many pupils winning places at grammar schools and scholarships to top secondary schools.

**Day fees:** £8,269 to £8,898 per annum

**St Teresa's Effingham**

**Headmistress:** Claire McShane  
**Takes:** girls, aged 7-18

St Teresa's school in Effingham, established in 1928, is set in 48 acres in a designated area of outstanding beauty in the North Downs in Surrey. The school is gradually accepting boys with the co-ed Sixth Form due to open in 2025. Pupils are well-mannered and enjoy music and drama and the school is average academically compared to others in the area. Facilities include horse stables and a swimming pool complex as well as a multi-million pound, 750-seat technologically equipped performing arts theatre hall, with music and drama suites.

**Boarding fees:** £9,995 to £11,325 per term  
**Day fees:** £4,850 to £6,695 per term

**St Winefride's**  
Shrewsbury

**Headmistress:** Elizabeth Devey  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

St Winefride's is a small convent school for boys and girls aged three to 11, next to Pugin's Shrewsbury Cathedral. The school was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1868 and is described as a "hidden gem" in the area.

Having traditionally had a nun as headmistress (the last, Sister Felicity, retired in 2020 aged in her 90s), St Winefride's is now for the first time being led by a lay headmistress, Elizabeth



Devey, who joined the school from the state sector.

The curriculum includes French and Spanish from kindergarten and children can learn Mandarin in the older years. While the school does not have the most modern facilities, fees are extremely reasonable.

**Day fees:** up to £1,860 per term

**The Marist School**  
Ascot

**Headmistress:** Joanne Smith  
**Takes:** girls, aged 2-18

The Marist School is located in 55 acres of woodland on the outskirts of Ascot, providing a spacious learning environment with a variety of modern facilities for girls from nursery age through to A-Levels.

A-level results are consistently in the top 1 per cent of schools nationally and the schools' Sixth Form education programme consists of three strands: Academic Rigour, Employability and Leadership Skills, and Life Balance.

"Our ethos is rooted in our Catholic heritage where a strong moral compass and a rounded character are as important as the A's achieved by our students at A-level," they explain. "Every aspect of school life puts children firmly at its centre and builds meaningful, respectful and authentic relationships between everyone. Happiness and laughter combine with academic rigour; we work hard, and we play hard."

The school is proud to offer a variety of pedagogy styles to cater for all learning styles, often drawing upon its

The Marist School, The Ursuline Prep School, Brentwood



woodland setting. It is not unusual to see campfires in the woods, for example, and drama performances in the Walled Garden. Visits, trips, speakers, and special events are built into the curriculum along with an extensive co-curricular programme offering over 100 clubs per week from ice-skating to photography. Blended learning with touch-screen laptops enhance the traditional learning in classrooms.

**Fees:** from £3,950 to £6,195 per term

**The Priory School**  
Edgbaston

**Headmaster:** Jonathan Cramb  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 0-18

The Priory School Edgbaston was founded in 1936 on the Catholic values of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus to provide a Catholic education for young women. Now taking boys and girls all the way through, the school was rated "outstanding" by Ofsted for its early-years education provision.

**Day fees:** £3,600 to £5,450 per term

**Thornton College**  
Milton Keynes

**Headmistress:** Louise Shaw  
**Takes:** girls, aged 3-18

Thornton College Catholic day and boarding school for girls is located between Milton Keynes and Buckingham with 25 acres of grounds. The main school building is a manor house dating back to the 14th century and it became a school in 1917, founded by the Sisters of Jesus and Mary.

The school is part of an international family of J&M schools in 28 countries around the world meaning students can participate in international partnership programmes, celebrations, projects and exchanges. Boarding is "upstairs" in the main manor house and the school offers flexi, weekly and termly boarding for domestic and international students.

Woodland walks, cookery, ballet, French, music and movement, library time and a host of other weekly activities are on offer. As a Forest School, Thornton allows girls to excel inside and outside the classroom with prep school children enjoying an outdoor classroom in the woodlands and exploring and pond-dipping in the eco-habitat park.

**Full boarding fees:** £9,025 to £11,190 per term

**Day fees:** £4,050 to £6,450 per term

**Trinity School**  
Devon

**Headmaster:** Lawrence Coen  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-18

Trinity is a small day and boarding school praised for its excellent pastoral care. It is the best non-selective school in Devon according to the *Sunday Times* Top Independent Schools list. They have gained six Good School Guide Awards for performance in A-levels, and GCSE and Prep pupils' performance considerably exceeds expectations at KS1 and KS2. ISI rated all aspects of their early years provision as Outstanding in their most recent integrated inspection.

It was founded in 1979 as a joint Roman Catholic and Anglican school.  
**Boarding fees:** £7,710 to £11,150 per term

**Day fees:** £3,125 to £4,930 per term

**The Ursuline Preparatory School**  
Ilford

**Headmistress:** Lorraine Pereira  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

Part of the international network of Ursuline schools, the Ursuline Prep School in Ilford stands out for its high academic standards. The school was recently ranked the 29th best primary

◀ school in England by *The Times*. Masses for pupils take place throughout the year, as well as special celebrations on the feast days of St Angela (the order's founder) and St Ursula (its patron). Extracurricular activities are on offer such as Irish dancing, STEM and Mandarin.

**Day fees:** £11,004 per annum (£5,418 to £8,211 per annum for nursery)

### The Ursuline Preparatory School Brentwood, Essex

**Headmistress:** Pauline Wilson  
**Takes:** boys and girls, aged 3-11

The Ursuline Preparatory School is an independent, co-educational Catholic day school, described by the Diocese of Brentwood Inspectorate in 2022 as "an outstanding Catholic school at all levels". It has an excellent quality of both academic and co-curricular achievements, teaching a broad curriculum.

**Day fees:** £2,525 to £4,705 per term

### The Ursuline Preparatory School Wimbledon

**Headmistress:** Caroline Molina  
**Takes:** girls, aged 4-11 (co-ed nursery)

The Ursuline Preparatory School was founded in 1892 by the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union. In recent years the school has invested in dedicated facilities for art and music, together with a library. To support their extensive



sporting provision the school uses off-site facilities in addition to their floodlit AstroTurf sports surface.

**Day fees:** £2,865 to £4,660 per term

### Westminster Cathedral Choir School London

**Headmaster:** Neil McLaughlan  
**Takes:** boys, aged 4-13

WCCS is an academically selective boys prep school in Victoria, London. Boys, of whom there are around 265 aged 4 to 13, go on to some of Britain's best schools, including Eton, Winchester, Worth and St Paul's, often with scholarships. The school has 20 weekly boarding choristers who join in Year 4, all of whom must be baptised and practising Catholics.

Under headmaster Neil McLaughlan the school has developed its own modern liberal arts education, based upon the "three Cs" of curriculum, canon and character. Boys are taught Classics from Year 4 and the school has an outstanding English department; pupils are asked to memorise poetry by Shakespeare, Milton, Eliot and Keats as part of their studies.

**Day fees:** up to £7,564 per term;  
Choristers (boarders) £3,600 per term

### Woldingham Surrey

**Headmaster:** Dr James Whitehead  
**Takes:** girls, aged 11-18

The country's first Sacred Heart School, Woldingham has for decades been one



Westminster Cathedral Choir School, Woldingham

of the go-to girls' schools for wealthy and well-connected Catholics. It has not always had the reputation it had in the 1960s, but today reviews of the pastoral care are very positive.

Pupils seem well-adjusted and praise the school's beautiful and tranquil setting. The school is not too pushy academically, but nevertheless girls do well enough for Woldingham to make it into the league tables for exams. It was awarded "excellent" in all areas by the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

Woldingham's new headmaster, and its first male head, Dr James Whitehead, is into his third year. A former headmaster of both Rugby and Downside and an alumnus of Stonyhurst, he has been criticised by some parents and pupils for making the school "too Catholic" since his arrival. But the *Herald* is not concerned on this front as the school needed to be spiritually re-rooted.

Just 25 minutes from London – by train, not car – the school has a railway station in its grounds with a direct line to Clapham Junction, used by around one third of pupils many of whom are day girls (the school has heavily marketed itself in recent years to attract "London girls"). Over 80 extracurricular clubs take place each week. Woldingham typically spends around £1 million per annum on all forms of fee assistance.

**Day fees:** £8,250 per term

**Boarding fees:** £13,570 per term CH

## Cardinal Pole School

**Adam Hall**, Head of the Cardinal Pole School

**What did you do prior to becoming headmaster of Cardinal Pole Catholic School?** I started my career in 2007 teaching Religious Studies, before becoming Head of RE at the Ursuline Academy Ilford in 2009. In 2014 I moved to Cardinal Pole as an assistant headteacher, before becoming deputy headteacher two years later. I was appointed headteacher in September 2022.

**What is your subject and do you still teach at all?** As well as Religious Studies, I have also taught Philosophy at A-level. I still teach a small GCSE group in the final run up to public exams. Students are never sure if it's a good thing or not to be taught by the Head, however it really is the best part of the job!

**What attracted you to the school?** I've always wanted to work and lead in an inner-city Catholic school. I felt if I could make a difference here then I could do so almost anywhere. I was also drawn to how inclusive the school is, for example how welcoming it is to people of all faiths and none.

**What achievement are you proudest of since joining the school?** The school has been celebrated publicly in many ways in recent years. This has included being graded "Outstanding" in our recent CSI inspection, as well as being shortlisted for the TES Secondary School of the Year award. However, what I am most proud of is the young people the school produces who consistently leave us with a firm commitment not only to excellence in their own lives, but a deep desire to serve those around them. It's exactly why a Catholic education is so valuable.

**What are the school's key values, ethos and vision?** The school's mission is most accurately described by the acronym SOAR: Service, Opportunity, Aspiration and Reward. The idea is that service is rooted into the daily routine of school life. Not just by staff but also over time we expect students to give back and serve both the school and the local community. In service, all are then



offered opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom, such as our comprehensive extra-curricular programme. If students meet those opportunities with aspiration, then at the end of the journey they will get their reward. The word reward for us is not simply about money or a career but is rooted in scripture and asks students to consider reward in the context of what the Church teaches.

**How do you incorporate the Catholic faith into school life?** The Catholic life of the school is central to everything we do. The Catholic experience of the school is not simply an academic pursuit (all students study RE up to GCSE) but critically it must be a lived one also. Students will of course get an experience of prayer and the celebration of the sacraments as you would expect, but critically they will also develop a deep understanding of Catholic Social Teaching.

**What makes Cardinal Pole Catholic School different and sets it apart from others in the area?** The push for excellence is understood by all which is a powerful thing that not every school has. Alongside that, teaching is excellent, and all of this is underpinned by outstanding pastoral care. We have full time on-site provision for mental health counselling which is accessed by students in every year group. Additionally, alongside the traditional Head of Year model, we also have an extra non-teaching Pastoral Support Manager. This comes at significant

cost to the school's budget, but is an incredibly valuable investment and contributes in a positive way to our mission.

**What enrichment opportunities are there for all students?** "Opportunity" is one of our key values, meaning we must have a comprehensive range of enrichment activities on offer at all times. We have over 60 different clubs; all students must complete a set number of hours each year. Sport plays a big role in the life of the school, and we also have large numbers of students taking part in everything from learning how to code, philosophy debating club, advanced chess and even gardening! We also deliver local, national and international visits, such as theatre visits, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and even a visit to the Christmas Markets in Lille!

**What is the admissions procedure? Are there any feeder schools? Scholarship or bursary schemes?** We have several schools that serve as our feeder schools within the local community. However, students from a wide range of schools inside and outside of the borough continue to attend our school. Interested families are about to attend our open evening and open mornings and families can apply online via Hackney Admissions. We warmly welcome receiving applications from Catholics and those of another or no particular faith at all. Visits are always most welcome, please just get in touch.

## A snapshot of two outstanding state schools

### Cardinal Pole

Hackney, London

**Takes:** boys and girls aged 11-18

**Headmaster:** Adam Hall

Cardinal Pole Catholic School is a mixed, voluntary aided secondary school located in the Homerton area of Hackney in London. Named after Cardinal Reginald Pole, the last Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, the school admits pupils of all faiths and none, many of whom come in from outside the borough having sought out the school especially. It was rated "outstanding" in the recent CSI inspection and shortlisted for the TES Secondary School of the Year award out of thousands of schools nationally. The school is "effervescent" with Catholicism, the headmaster says, and a religious assembly attended

by staff and pupils is held once a week for each year group, along with occasional Masses. Every pupil is required to take RE at GCSE level, in keeping with the school's religious ethos. A non-examination Religious Education Programme is also followed by all Sixth Form students.

### La Retraite

Clapham Park, London

**Headmaster:** Dominic Malins

**Takes:** girls aged 11 to 18, mixed Sixth Form

Firmly rooted in its local community, La Retraite has been educating children for 140 years, and has become well-known thanks to its long history of academic excellence and strong traditional Catholic values. It is consistently rated as outstand-



Cardinal Pole, La Retraite

ing by Ofsted, with pupils achieving very good exam results. Being one of the top Catholic state schools in the London area, places are highly sought after not just by Catholics but also by those of other faiths and none. "High expectations permeate all that we do, and our track record of successful outcomes including impressive results, notable destinations and enabling our students onto incredible pathways post-education is a testament to this," the school explains. "As our guiding principle, we firmly believe that our offer of a Catholic all-girls education will positively impact every one of our learners, instilling self-confidence, promoting compassion, celebrating achievement and inspiring aspirations. CH

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