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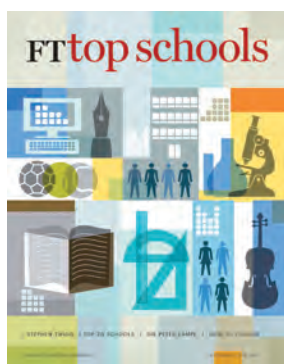
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Special reports editor
Michael Skapinker
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Design Sheila Jack
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Intern Judit Szilak

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Head of business education
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Advertising sales
Pierre Abouchahla
Publishing systems manager
Andrea Frias-Andrade
Advertising production
Denise Macklin



ILLUSTRATIONS
BY PAUL WEARING

CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Cook is the FT's education correspondent
Peter Lampl is chairman of the Sutton Trust and chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation
Adam Palin is the FT's business education researcher
Jill Parkin is a freelance journalist
Judith Pizer is a database consultant at Jeff Head Associates
Janette Wallis is a senior editor on *The Good Schools Guide*



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INTRODUCTION REFORMS

Rebuilding continues

England has only ever had one education reformer who has been willing to rip up and rebuild the system from top to bottom.

For the past century, education secretaries have toiled in the shadow of Arthur Balfour, a patrician Conservative who served as prime minister from 1902 to 1905.

Michael Gove, education secretary, is the most ambitious reformer since. Indeed, his aim appears to be the reversal of much of Balfour's work. The greatest uncertainty in English schooling is how much of Balfour's structure he will unpick.

At the root of Balfour's reform was the local education authority. Until his Education Act, in 1902, schools answered to one of a patchwork of school boards and governing bodies. In its place, he introduced countywide standard-setters and overseers.

Introducing his bill, he said: "Our reform must... establish one authority for education – technical, secondary, primary." Since it would spend considerable sums of money, he said it needed

BY CHRIS COOK

to be tied to the local tax-collecting unit – the local authority.

Even Balfour did not iron out all the wrinkles. Church schools, the oldest part of the school system, became a messy feature, answering to masters both spiritual and temporal. But the lines of Balfour's model were relatively sharp.

Since the 1980s, however, they have been progressively blurred. Today, all schools control their own budgets, hiring and curriculums. The local authority's main role is providing back-office support and insurance, and monitoring school standards.

In 1988, Kenneth, now Lord, Baker introduced CTCs – city technology colleges – outside the local authority system. There

“CRITICS OF GOVE DISMISS FREE SCHOOLS AS SOMETHING OF A SIDESHOW”

were only ever 15 such schools, but they set the direction of travel: eroding the local authorities.

In 2002, Labour opened “sponsor academies”. Where LAs had failed to turn a school around, the government would put them under new management. By 2010, there were around 200 such schools.

Since 2010, Gove's “converter academies” programme has allowed other state schools to drift outside the local authorities. Instead of being funded via local authorities (which take a slice of the cash), academies receive funding from the Department for Education (DfE).

Since they are also exempt from paying staff according to national teaching salary scales,

Gove says academies “enjoy all the freedoms of private schools – the freedom to pay good staff more, the freedom to innovate with the curriculum, the freedom to insist on tougher discipline”.

As more schools leave the local authorities, with no one co-ordinating their growth and pupil admissions, Gove also believes they will compete with one another. Good schools will expand, while bad ones will be forced to improve or face shrinkage.

The converter academies programme has been marred by a significant blunder: schools were accidentally given too much money if they converted. As a result, the National Audit Office qualified the DfE's accounts in 2011-12 for, among other things, overspending.

Turbocharged by the cash incentives – which reached £700,000 a year for some schools – the policy has been much more popular than expected. Rather than the predicted 200 conversions a year, 1,590 schools have now left their local authorities.

The government is allowing a smattering of new schools to open each year under non-local-authority management – the so-called free schools. But critics dismiss these relatively few institutions as “something of a sideshow”.

So where does this leave us? We do not yet know. Some moving parts are still veiled. A pilot on the future of special education needs provision, for example, is only starting up now. We do not know how many schools will become academies.

As the overpayments fall back, the pace of reform is likely to slow. If the situation remains as it is today, it will leave some boroughs, particularly in central London, roughly as they are.



“PARENTS NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE NOW-MORE-POWERFUL ACADEMY HEADS”

This might owe much to the spectacular success of these local authorities in driving up standards: in Islington, for example, councillors report they are attracting parents back from the private sector.

Meanwhile, in other areas, such as Rutland, there are now no local authority secondary schools.

In the short term, the reforms signal some clear changes for parents, most obviously a proliferation of types of school.

Until 2010, most schools in England were conventional local authority comprehensives, which took children of any ability. The system also had voluntary aided faith schools, where children could be selected for admission by religion, or voluntary controlled faith schools, where the religious organisation exercised less control. In a few areas, academically selective schools – the grammars – remained.

All of these sorts of schools may become academies, but does it matter to parents whether a school is an academy? It does not change the institutions' essential characteristics, but it does mean parents need to know more about the heads, who have more power, particularly over curriculums and staffing.

In the past few years, we have also been introduced to University Technical Colleges, which are neither universities nor colleges. Studio schools are another newcomer.

Both are forms of academy that focus on technical skills and are

devoted to technical and employer-led education.

Does all of this mean there will be more good schools? We cannot know. Simon Burgess, professor of economics and director of the Centre for Market and Public Organisation at the University of Bristol, reflects the academic consensus when he says: “I don't see any major benefit or harm in these reforms.”

He continues: “The degree of local authority control that they are now free from was overdone. I suspect that, in short order,

academies will band together into groups – some into national chains, some into local conglomerates.”

There is evidence that the old sponsored academies improved results, introducing a new management to failing schools, but they were not like converter academies.

There is also some evidence of weak positive effects from competition in some circumstances, though not much.

All we know for sure is that Balfour's structure is being disassembled and English schools remain a work in progress. ●

FT TOP 10 SCHOOLS*

- 1 Westminster School
- 2 Magdalen College School
- 3 Colchester Royal Grammar Sch
- 4 St Paul's School
- 5 St Paul's Girls' School
- 6 Concord College
- 7 Henrietta Barnett School
- 8 Queen Elizabeth's School
- 9= Lady Eleanor Holles School
- 9= Winchester College

*For the top 20 schools, see page 11

Anti-chaos theory

BY CHRIS COOK

Stephen Twigg's career as a national politician is still best known for its first moments: he was the fresh-faced 30-year-old who took the Enfield Southgate seat of Michael Portillo, then defence secretary, at the 1997 landslide that swept Tony Blair to power.

Fifteen years on, he is back in parliament, representing a Liverpool constituency, and has a seat in the shadow cabinet covering education. This puts him up against Michael Gove, education secretary, a self-avowed follower of Blair.

Twigg would beg to differ: "The problem with [Gove's] approach is that he has an ideological hostility to local government." Twigg, a former schools minister, wants to repudiate the education secretary's Blairite credentials.

The ruling coalition's biggest reform drive has been to turn 1,590 schools into academies, up from 200 in May 2010. These schools are overseen not by local authorities but directly by the Department for Education.

This process used a modified version of the Blair era "academies" legislation. But asked whether he thinks the current regulatory system is near to a finished product, Twigg says: "We're a thousand miles away."

He adds: "We have to have an effective middle tier. We cannot have a position where two, three or four thousand schools are directly

accountable to central government. We will have local accountability, which is vital."

Twigg is conducting a review into this issue. "We will have academies and free schools that fail," he says, "and it is not desirable or feasible for [responsibility for] spotting that to lie in Sanctuary Buildings [the Department for Education office in London]."

The former Islington councillor sees an important role for local authorities in accountability, particularly in spotting early signs of failure. "Quality in local government in education is higher now than it was 20 years ago," he says.

But while he may defend local authorities, Twigg is distinctly

that wish to start a school. He says they are "an unguided missile – they are not part of any planned system".

"What we did with the London Challenge [which provided training for teachers and school improvement across the capital] and the Labour Academies programme was a combination of greater school autonomy and diversity, but in a planned system."

Citing the success of London, which now has some of the most effective state schools in England, Twigg says: "The fundamentals of that I think are still right. They provide an intelligent alternative to the chaos and dogma of Gove's approach."

Reflecting on the government's drift towards regionalised pay, the shadow education secretary is also sceptical: "Moving to regional pay will lead to greater recruitment difficulties in areas of high social and economic need, and would lead to an increase in the overall pay bill."

Twigg also suggests Gove's tone is counterproductive: "I do think there is a serious issue about teacher morale. The language of 'enemies of promise' and headteachers as whingers – it seems particularly visceral from Gove."

He continues: "It really does undermine their confidence. Yes, there are some teachers who shouldn't be teaching, but the majority of teachers are good, and that should be constantly celebrated." ●

“
WE NEED AN EFFECTIVE
MIDDLE TIER – LOCAL
ACCOUNTABILITY IS VITAL
”

Blairite on allowing private provision: "I am relaxed about different providers. That is what we did with our academies programme."

He continues: "I am not at the Gove end of the system that says 'Let's have chaos' – I completely reject that. But I am also not someone who thinks everything has to be directly provided by the local authority."

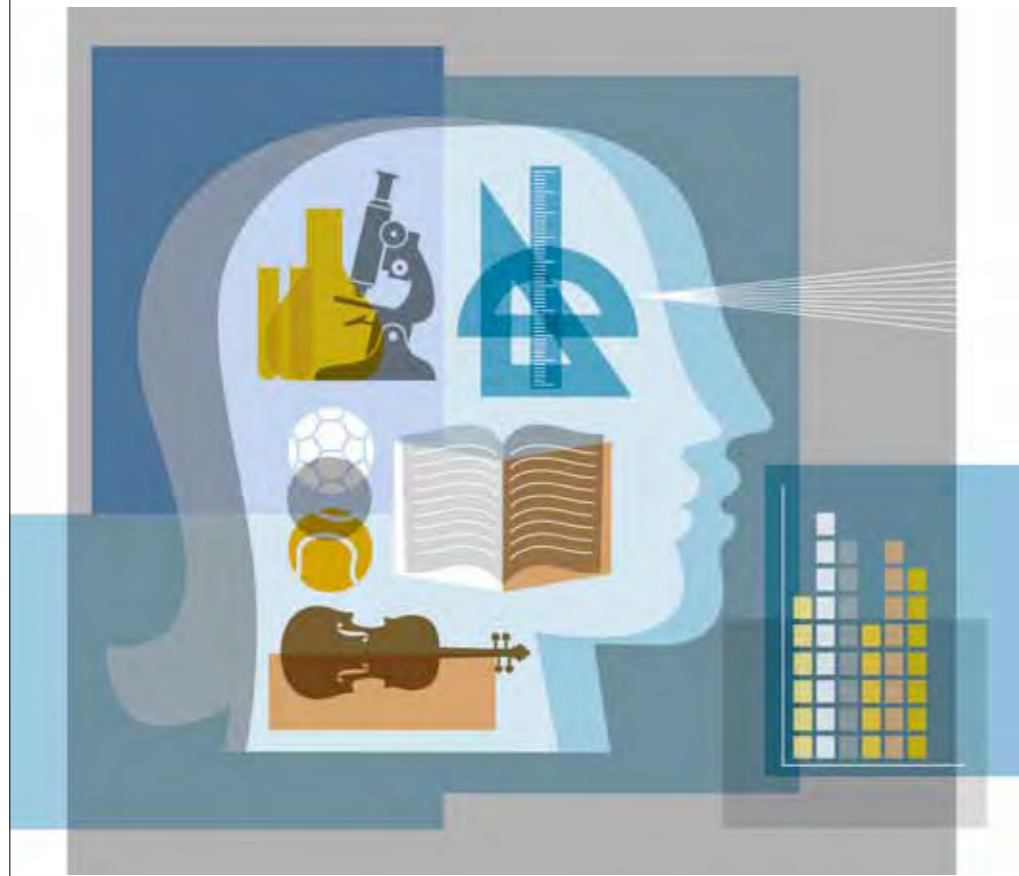
Twigg is also wary about free schools – new academies established from scratch by groups

“
FREE SCHOOLS
ARE AN UNGUIDED
MISSILE, NOT PART
OF ANY PLANNED
SYSTEM
”

”

PHOTO: FELIX CLAY

Turning the tables



With schools competing to sell their curricular and extra-curricular programmes to prospective parents, choosing an institution is a challenge. While objective information, such as fees and facilities, is often used to compare schools, many question the capacity of league tables and inspection reports to capture accurately their qualities and character.

Arguably the most visible assessment measures in England are school league tables, which rank institutions annually according to

BY ADAM PALIN

exam results. They are controversial, however, and similar tables are not published in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

"I'm not anti-league tables," says Barnaby Lenon, chairman of the Independent Schools Commission, which represents more than 1,200 independent schools, "[but] they are given undue attention by parents and the media."

He cites concerns – outlined in the 2011 Wolf Report of vocational education – that schools face "perverse incentives" to steer students towards taking less challenging subjects – such as leisure and tourism – that count equally towards league table performance. The problem for students, he adds,

is that "these subjects are simply not respected by employers".

John Franklin, head of Christ's Hospital School in Horsham, West Sussex, shares Lenon's additional concerns that league tables take no account of how student admissions are streamed towards more able pupils, and therefore of the value the schools add. "Schools face the temptation to positively select the most academically capable students," he says. They thereby ensure strong performance in subsequent league tables, he adds.

As well as overlooking non-academic performance, he says, the tables have led to schools placing increasing and undue emphasis on academic aspects at the expense of extra-curricular activities. "There are important elements of an education, like character-building and entrepreneurship, that cannot be incorporated into a table," he says.

While acknowledging the limitations of league tables, Sir David Bell, vice-chancellor of the University of Reading and former permanent secretary at the Department for Education, says he despairs of the debate over their publication. He says that while tables may distort school behaviour, such dangers arise inevitably from freedom of information and are a price worth paying for accountability. "Why should education be different to other public services in providing parents and taxpayers with transparency?" he says.

It was a belief in the need for greater transparency in the education system that informed Sir David's earlier tenure as chief inspector of schools in England. School inspections, conducted by Ofsted, the school inspectorate, and other approved bodies, including the Independent Schools Inspectorate, form another core

element of school assessment. The stated objective of inspections, which normally last two days, is to independently evaluate a school's effectiveness – on the basis of exam results, teaching quality, student behaviour and school management – and to recommend ways of raising standards. Inspection reports are published by Ofsted and on school websites.

"The reports are a very useful tool for parents as they are fully available and accountable," says Lenon, citing the importance of parents being invited to complete surveys as part of inspections.

In 2005, notice given to schools before inspection was reduced from up to 10 weeks to two days. "Parents were concerned about the long notice period and, perhaps unsurprisingly, schools didn't like sitting on death row awaiting inspection," says Sir David. Schools today are only notified by Ofsted the working day before the inspection starts.

Despite broad support for inspections, they are not universally popular. "While inspections have moved beyond their early obsession with compliance, they are not particularly strong at capturing the essence of schools," says Franklin. This conclusion is echoed by Janette Wallis, senior editor of *The Good Schools Guide*, an independent guide to a selection of state and independent institutions. Wallis decries the inspection process as mechanistic.

Prospective parents should complement inspection reports with their own impressions. "Parents can't beat visiting the school and asking questions," says Wallis, "especially ones that may feel awkward." Franklin advises parents to "be suspicious of any school where it is not the pupils showing you around". ●

METHODOLOGY

The FT school league table for 2012 includes the top 1,000 secondary schools in England, measured by performance in A-level, International Baccalaureate Higher and Pre-U (an alternative to A-levels) qualifications. Based on results in 2011, the analysis focuses on core academic subjects, as defined by the University of Cambridge.

Of the 3,000 or so schools in England, just under 2,180 qualified for the FT ranking. The criteria for inclusion were straightforward: schools must have had at least 20 students registered for A-levels, IBs or Pre-U exams in 2011, with an average of two or more exam entries

exam results in 2011, alongside the inclusion of IB Higher exam results for the first time in our table, make comparisons with data for previous years difficult. Overall, the average number of core points per candidate has increased slightly compared with results for 2010.

The ranking itself is derived from *The Good Schools Guide* research, using Department for Education pupil-level data. Two measurements have been devised to rank the schools: the points per candidate and points per entry, in terms of core subjects only. Using these two measures gives an assessment of the quality and quantity of exam passes in 2011.

An FT score has been calculated for each school. First, Z-scores were calculated for both ranking measures – these are a mathematical formula that creates numbers reflecting the range of the points. These were combined, to give a total. A positive score indicates a performance above the average for qualifying schools in England; a negative score equates to a below-average rating.

The left part of the table deals with the core A-level results, the FT score and subsequent ranking. Performance for two earlier rankings is also shown.

Given the closeness of many schools in the league table, and the volatility of the underlying measures, only large changes in rank are likely to be significant. Additional variables are shown for information, including the proportion of entries in core subjects graded at A or A* level (or Pre-U/IB equivalent).

In addition, the fees data are collated from the ISC census that was conducted in 2012. ●

Judith Pizer

“INSPECTIONS ARE NOT VERY STRONG AT CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF SCHOOLS”

per candidate, and an average of at least one core subject per candidate.

Due to the lack of consistent information for the devolved administrations, which have control over education, schools in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are not included in the analysis, but the independent Scottish results can be seen in a table elsewhere in this publication.

Like the government's own performance tables, which include information on results in all exams, the FT has used the Qualification and Curriculum Development Agency's tariff to assign points to grades obtained by students. For example, an A at A-level is worth 270 points, while an E scores 150 points.

The introduction of the A* grade at A-level in 2010 and of Pre-U

TOP 20 SCHOOLS

Independents ahead

BY HUGO GREENHALGH

Westminster School has held the top position ever since the FT started ranking schools after the 2005-06 exam results. This year, then, it is no surprise to find it in the number one spot again.

This year's supplement combines last year's Top 1,000 Schools and Top Independent Schools reports. Many schools had yet to declare their results when this report went to press, so, for the sake of being comprehensive, we have based the results – other than the independent Scottish schools table on page 14 and school fees on page 21 – on 2011 data.

Independent schools dominate (see panel opposite). Just two grammar schools and one converter academy make it into the top 20 – an indication of how the results parents can expect by educating their children in the independent sector.

Two of the non-independents – Colchester Royal Grammar School (ranked third) and Henrietta Barnett School in Hampstead, north London (seventh) have improved markedly on the previous year's ranking, while the third, Queen Elizabeth's School in Barnet, north London, retains its eighth position overall.

What is it about Westminster that ensures its dominance year after year? Pass rates are high – but then so too are they at all the schools in the top 20. Last year, Stephen Spurr, headmaster, said the key was that the school was not a "hothouse". He added: "The results come out of the love of the learning and the love of the teaching." ●

FT TOP 20 SCHOOLS

FT API Rank 11	FT AP Rank 10	FT A Rank 09	School	Town	School type	FT score	Core entries/candidate	Points/core entry	Points/candidate (core exams)	All entries/candidate	Number of candidates (all exams)	Government rank (points/candidate)	Points/candidate (all exams)	% A*/A grade/entry (core subjects)	No A*/A/candidate (core subjects)	% girls (candidates)	Day fees 000's £pa	Board fees 000's £pa	% boarders	World-ranked university rank	Average entrants per annum (2005-09)	% World-ranked university	% Oxbridge/UCL
1	1	1	Westminster School (PU)	Westminster	Ind	6.74	3.8	280.9	1067	3.9	189	42	1136	91	3.7	34	22.9	30.4	25	1	177	98	48
2	4	3	Magdalen College School	Oxford	Ind	6.50	3.6	281.9	1025	3.7	91	51	1123	92	3.6	2	13.4		0	16	77	94	30
3	11	7	Colchester Royal Gram School	Colchester	Gram	6.19	3.8	273.4	1039	4.0	154	1	1477	82	3.7	26				32	133	91	24
4	3	6	St Paul's School	Barnes	Ind	6.01	3.4	281.3	957	3.5	166	54	1117	89	3.3	0	18.8	27.9	2	3	155	96	41
5	6	2	St Paul's Girls' School	Hammersmith	Ind	5.83	3.3	282.4	923	3.4	112	89	1064	93	3.2	100	18.8		0	4	93	96	52
6	10	9	Concord College	Shrewsbury	Ind	5.82	3.6	273.1	986	3.7	118	43	1133	79	3.3	49	11.7	26.6	90	34	118	91	17
7	15	33	Henrietta Barnett School (PU)	Hampstead	Gram	5.80	3.4	279.6	939	3.5	114	62	1098	91	3.3	100				54	116	88	19
8	8	22	Queen Elizabeth's School	Barnet	ACC	5.73	3.4	277.3	944	3.7	134	36	1140	85	3.3	0				23	135	92	23
9=	17	16	Lady Eleanor Holles School	Hampton	Ind	5.69	3.5	274.2	958	3.6	89	5	1281	83	3.4	100	14.7		0	19	85	93	18
9=	7	9	Winchester College (PU)	Winchester	Ind	5.69	3.6	270.5	986	3.7	132	153	1020	75	3.4	0	29.8	31.4	99	7	140	95	37
11	2	5	Wycombe Abbey School	High Wycombe	Ind	5.66	3.3	278.8	923	3.4	87	29	1163	87	3.3	100	23.0	30.6	93	2	77	98	37
12	29	13	South Hampstead High School	Camden	Ind	5.59	3.3	277	925	3.6	50	83	1074	83	3.2	100	13.0		0	32	76	91	24
13	21	18	Oxford High School GDST	Oxford	Ind	5.47	3.1	280.9	880	3.3	67	120	1038	89	3.0	100	10.7		0	11	73	95	35
14	23	12	Radley College	Abingdon	Ind	5.34	3.7	265	972	3.9	135	73	1083	67	3.4	0	29.2	100	19	105	93	17	
15	32	15	Royal Grammar School	Guildford	Ind	5.30	3.2	276.2	888	3.3	134	157	1017	83	3.1	0	13.9		0	22	130	93	25
16	16	24	Guildford High School	Guildford	Ind	5.29	3.1	279.3	865	3.2	83	99	1055	87	3.0	100	13.5		0	8	80	95	22
17	13	9	Eton College (PU)	Eton	Ind	5.25	3.2	275.2	887	3.3	263	165	1013	83	3.1	0	31.0	100	8	237	95	34	
18	9	19	Tonbridge School	Tonbridge	Ind	5.22	3.3	273.1	898	3.6	163	154	1019	78	3.1	0	23.3	31.3	58	38	141	91	24
19	32	17	Withington Girls' School	Fallowfield	Ind	5.17	3.1	277.1	863	3.2	79	14	1231	87	3.0	100	9.3		0	12	77	94	22
20	20	27	Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' S	Elstree	Ind	5.11	3.1	276.9	855	3.2	158	209	987	84	3.0	0	14.7		0	10	163	95	24

See "How to read the tables", page 12

“ WESTMINSTER'S RESULTS COME OUT OF THE LOVE OF THE LEARNING ”



Westminster School

Westminster School, which adjoins Westminster Abbey and has a view of the Palace of Westminster, tops our UK schools ranking.

A boarding school since it received its charter in 1560 from Elizabeth I, Westminster educates boys aged 13-18, but has been accepting girls to its sixth form since 1973.

Day boys and girls come predominantly from London, but boarders still make up about

a quarter of the student body.

Around 720 students attend Westminster, with 120 joining at age 13 (year nine) and some 60 at age 16 (year 12). There is also a day preparatory "under school" that admits children at age seven.

Means-tested bursaries are available for up to 100 per cent of fees, although there are no bursaries available in the sixth form.

Boys are expected to take 10 or 11 GCSEs, including English language, English literature, maths, French and

at least two science subjects.

The school had a 100 per cent pass rate in 2011, with 98 per cent of students receiving A* or A, including 88 per cent who achieved A*.

In the sixth form, students usually take four A-level courses. The most popular subjects are maths, history, economics and physics. Ninety-one per cent of pupils in 2011 achieved A* or A, including 53 per cent who scored A*.

Judit Szalik

TOP 10 STATE SCHOOLS

History lessons

It is telling perhaps that the leading state school in our ranking has a pedigree far more in keeping with the country's leading public schools. Colchester Royal Grammar School (see panel, right) has been the top-performing school in the official Department for Education A-level tables, which are based on average points per student, for the last six years.

The school's origins go back to the 16th century, but Henrietta Barnett School (ranked second) has more modern roots. It may have been founded in 1911 in Hampstead Garden Suburb in north London, but the students do have the pleasure of studying in a beautiful Edwin Lutyens-designed listed building. Perhaps there is a separate report to be written about the influence of history – and architecture – on exam results.

Both these schools have become converter academies since the 2011 results. ● HG



Colchester Royal Grammar School

Colchester Royal Grammar School dates back to 1539, when revenues from the dissolution of the monasteries were granted for the foundation of a school in the Essex town.

The school had a student body of 840 in 2011 and is for boys aged 11-18, with girls admitted to the sixth form. Boarding facilities are offered for sixth-form boys, but not for girls.

Students are admitted at ages 11, 13 and 16 through an entrance exam. About 65 external candidates gain admission to the sixth form annually – the school expects 350 students to start their sixth-form studies in September 2012.

Students take GCSEs in 10 subjects and at A-level the school specialises in sciences and languages.

As well as academic excellence, the school emphasises its focus on personal growth, in accordance with Christian values. JS

HOW TO READ THE TABLES

The FT school league table for 2012 details the top secondary schools in England, measured by performance in A-level, Pre-U and International Baccalaureate (IB) qualifications. Based on results in 2011, the analysis focuses on "core" academic subjects, as defined by the University of Cambridge.

Key to the table

FT API Rank 11: position of the school, compared with its peers, calculated by the FT (based on the FT score for core points at A-level, Pre-U and IB).

FT AP Rank 10: equivalent position in 2010 (based on the FT score for core points at A-level and Pre-U only).

FT A Rank 09: equivalent position in 2009 (based on the FT score for core points at A-level only).

School type: type of secondary school (6th = sixth form college, AC = academy, ACC = academy converter, Comp = comprehensive, Gram = grammar, Ind = independent and other).



FT score: total score assigned using the FT's ranking methodology. This combines the points per candidate in core subjects (to measure quantity of work), and points per entry in core subjects (to measure the quality).

Core entries/candidate: average number of entries per candidate in core subjects.

Points per core entry: average number of QCDA points scored per entry in core subjects.

Points per candidate (core exams): average number of QCDA points scored per candidate in core subjects.

All entries per candidate: average number of entries per candidate in all subjects and all exam types.

Number of candidates (all exams): total number of students taking exams in all subjects and all exam types.

Government rank (points per candidate): government ranking for

the school, based on the average number of points per candidate in all subjects and all exam types.

Points per candidate (all exams): average number of points scored per candidate in all subjects and exam types.

% A*/A grade per entry (core subjects): proportion of entries in core subjects graded A* or A (or equivalent at Pre-U/IB).

Number of A*AB grades per candidate (core subjects): average number of entries per candidate that achieved A*, A or B (or Pre-U/IB equivalent) in core subjects.

% girls: proportion of female candidates.

Day fees (£000s): cost per annum for non-boarders.

Board fees (£000s): cost per annum for students who board.

% boarders: proportion of students who board.

World-ranked university rank: position of the school compared with peers, calculated using the proportion of students entering an ARWU ranked university.

Average entrants/annum (2005-09): average number of students entering a British university per year, between 2005 and 2009.

% world-ranked university: percentage of students entering a British university between 2005 and 2009 who went to a British university ranked among the top 500 universities in the world, according to the 2011 Academic ranking of world universities.

% Oxbridge/UCL: percentage of students entering a British university between 2005 and 2009 who went to Oxford, Cambridge or University College London.

Additional research by Judith Pizer, database consultant, Jeff Head Associates

FT TOP 10 STATE SCHOOLS

FT API Rank 11	FT AP Rank 10	FT A Rank 09	School	Town	School type	FT score	All entries/candidate	Core entries/candidate	Points/core entry	Points/candidate (core exams)	Number of candidates (all exams)	Points/candidate (all exams)	Government rank (points/cand)	% A*/A grade/entry (core subjects)	No A*AB/candidate (core subjects)	% girls (candidates)	World-ranked university rank	Average entrants per annum (2005-09)	% World-ranked university	% Oxbridge/UCL
3	11	7	Colchester Royal Gram School	Colchester	Gram	6.19	4.0	3.8	273	1039	154	1477	1	82	3.7	26	32	133	91	24
7	15	33	Henrietta Barnett School (PU)	Hampstead	Gram	5.80	3.5	3.4	280	939	114	1098	62	91	3.3	100	54	116	88	19
8	8	22	Queen Elizabeth's School	Barnet	ACC	5.73	3.7	3.4	277	944	134	1140	36	85	3.3	0	23	135	92	23
27	17	46	St Olave's & St Saviour's GS	Orpington	Gram	4.83	3.4	3.3	267	880	173	1132	44	71	3.1	31	58	150	87	16
31	12	49	King Edward VI Grammar School	Chelmsford	Gram	4.67	3.9	3.5	259	916	163	1270	7	62	3.1	27	65	139	86	16
34	120	66	King Edw'd VI Camp Hill, Boys	Kings Heath	Gram	4.65	3.3	3.2	268	848	116	1269	8	73	2.9	0	90	105	82	12
35	67	85	Dr Challoner's Grammar School	Amersham	Gram	4.64	3.6	3.4	263	884	187	1136	40	65	3.0	0	132	167	78	13
38	58	93	Wilson's School	Wallington	Gram	4.62	3.3	3.1	269	839	149	1139	37	76	2.9	0	95	129	82	12
43	50	120	Colyton Grammar School	Colyford	Gram	4.56	3.3	3.1	270	825	102	1262	10	73	2.9	56	105	101	80	15
49	80	131	Judd School	Tonbridge	Gram	4.47	3.4	3.2	264	849	160	1078	78	67	3.0	29	105	135	81	11

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TOP 10 SCOTTISH INDEPENDENTS



Academic aces

Scotland has a long history of strong academic success. Within the independent school sector, it can claim at least one recent prime minister – Tony Blair, who attended Edinburgh's Fettes Col-



lege, which does not make this year's top 10 ranking. Two schools for girls dominate the ranking, for which we have the complete data for 2012: St George's School for Girls in Edinburgh and St Margaret's School for Girls in Aberdeen.

But before we suggest single-sex schools may be more conducive to academic success, the third-ranked school, Robert Gordon's College in Aberdeen, has been co-educational since 1989.

Scotland's capital city has a strong showing in the top 10, claiming three positions, while Aberdeen and Glasgow each hold two.

Note that this ranking is based on Scottish Advanced Highers only, ranked primarily on the percentage of A grades achieved, and schools had to have at least 10 candidates and an average of two or more subjects per candidate to qualify. **HG**



St George's School for Girls

St George's School for Girls in Edinburgh was founded in 1888 by a group of women who had been denied access to university but wanted equal provision in education for girls and women.

It takes children from as young as 18 months, in its early years nursery, all the way to sixth form.

The school is open for admissions throughout the year, provided there are places available. Tuition fees for 2012-13 range up to £3,820 a term for the upper school. Boarding fees, which are in addition to tuition fees, are £3,935 per term.

Bursaries are available on a means-tested basis, usually in the range of 20-40 per cent of tuition fees, and occasionally up to 100 per cent.

Sixth-form students have the option to follow either the English or the Scottish system when it comes to choosing their subjects, and usually choose five subjects. **JS**

TOP 10 FASTEST RISING

Conversion benefits

What determines a fast riser among the schools ranked here? Torpoint Community College in Cornwall (see panel, right) has leapt an impressive 1,337 places since the ranking was last compiled, to pull itself into the country's top 1,000 schools.

But then jumps of almost 1,000 places are a feature of all the top 10 fastest risers. Academic improvements must surely be the reason behind these advancements, and it is predominantly comprehensive schools that have achieved the most spectacular leaps in the rankings.

It will be interesting in a few years' time to determine the success or otherwise of many schools' decisions to transform themselves into academies.

It will then take another few years before we are able to analyse the results with a more scientific eye.

Note that some school names in the table below may have changed since 2011 with the conversion to academy status. **HG**



Torpoint Community College

Torpoint Community College in Cornwall was founded in 1963 and draws students from the Torpoint and Rame peninsula and over the river Tamar from Plymouth.

There are around 850 students on the roll currently, both boys and girls, aged 11-19.

The school follows the National Curriculum, with special emphasis on the humanities – Torpoint has been a humanities specialist college since 2004.

In 2011, all students passed their A-levels, with 35.5 per cent achieving A*-A and 59.8 per cent A*-B. On GCSEs, 17 per cent of students received an A*-A, and the school had a 99 per cent pass rate.

Year 10 students complete a one-week work experience scheme to introduce them to different career options, and some students receive job offers at the end of their placement. **JS**



FT TOP 10 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN SCOTLAND 2012

Rank	School	Town	Notes*	Candidates	Entries	% A grades	% A or B grades	Subjects/candidate	Total pupils	% girls	% boarders	Day fees '000s £pa	Board fees '000s £pa	Pupils 17+	Average entrants per annum (2005-09)	World ranked university %	Oxbridge/UCL %
1	St George's School for Girls	Edinburgh		72	147	65	87	2.0	852	99	7	12.0	22.6	91	65	78	5
2	St Margaret's School for Girls	Aberdeen		27	59	58	86	2.2									
3	Robert Gordon's College	Aberdeen		137	302	57	81	2.2							141	55	5
4	The High School of Glasgow	Glasgow		81	170	56	82	2.1							63	85	9
5	The Glasgow Academy	Glasgow	AL	74	162	56	76	2.2	1330	45	0	10.1		79	41	79	8
6	Wellington School	Ayr		21	42	55	88	2.0							14	55	1
7	Kilgraston	Perth	AL	24	53	53	81	2.2	339	97	46	14.1	24.0	48	19	61	4
8	George Watson's College	Edinburgh	AL	163	395	52	78	2.4	2325	46	0	9.6		201	161	69	6
9	Dollar Academy	Dollar		114	295	51	73	2.6	1224	49	6	10.1	22.9	151	86	66	4
10	George Heriot's School	Edinburgh	AL	138	324	50	77	2.3							104	62	5

*AL denotes the school also offers A-levels

FT TOP 10 FASTEST RISING

Up	FT AP1 Rank 11	FT AP Rank 10	School	Town	School type	Number of candidates (All exams)
1337	641	1978	Torpoint Community College	Torpoint	Comp	58
997	413	1410	Guru Nanak Sikh School	Hayes	Comp	31
969	322	1291	Buckswood School	Hastings	Ind	23
959	1105	2064	St Augustine's CofE High Sch	London	Comp	45
952	557	1509	Wallingford School	Wallingford	Comp	93
924	1171	2095	Eston Park School	Middlesbrough	Comp	32
911	934	1845	Shire Oak School	Walsall	Comp	67
896	1082	1978	Westgate School	Slough	Other	37
881	993	1874	Downend Comprehensive School	Bristol	Comp	93
856	825	1681	William Parker Sports College	Hastings	Comp	60

HOW TO CHOOSE

A-level alternatives

You left school, did a few things – a degree, a career, a family – and the next time you looked at schools everything had changed. You have a child to educate in a world of shrinking job prospects, you don't know your IB from your AS and you are having nostalgia trips about O-levels.

Gloomy economic predictions and a tightening jobs market mean the choice made at 16 is more important than ever. There are now far more post-14 and post-16 courses and qualifications and they are not all available in every school.

Along with Highers in Scotland,

BY JILL PARKIN



A-levels are still the most common option for those heading for university but are now split into two parts: the AS, taken at the end of lower sixth (year 12), and the A2, taken a year later. Universities still ask for only three A-levels – although sometimes with an extra AS – so many students start off taking four for AS and drop one after a year. The idea is that it broadens the mind to have an extra subject and keeps options open when choosing a degree subject.

But beware: not all A-levels are equal in the eyes of the top research universities, known

as the Russell Group. These are deemed “non-facilitating subjects” and the Russell Group stresses that what facilitates for one course may not do so for another.

There is also a basic rule that anyone intent on a good university should not take a soft subject as an extra at the expense of three more demanding subjects. Subjects less likely to count for top university entrance – unless they are directly connected to the course you want to study – include media studies, business studies, film studies, theatre studies, art and design, critical thinking and photography.

There are two newer kids on the block for university entrance: the

“ THE CHOICE MADE AT 16 IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER ”

Cambridge Pre-U and the International/English Baccalaureate. When the Pre-U was launched in 2008 it was taken up mainly by schools at the top end of the independent sector that felt A-levels had been devalued. There are 27 subjects, of which students are encouraged to take three. Pre-Us are non-modular, which means they cannot be taken piecemeal with resits on the way, so they may not be the right option for pupils who do not perform well in exams. Unlike the IB, there are no compulsory principal subjects.

Universities accept the Pre-U, with Warwick University saying three Pre-Us are usually enough for courses that normally require three A-levels plus an AS. Durham University says it “notes the academic

rigour of the linear approach, the retention of subject specialism and the expanded reporting scale at the top end of achievement”.

The baccalaureate, widely available in independent and state schools, takes a broader approach.

There is a choice between the IB and the AQA Bacc, also known as the English Baccalaureate. The workload for the AQA Bacc is large because students have to pass three A-levels, in any subjects, and an AS in general studies, critical thinking or citizenship. They also have to complete an extended project – an extra 30 hours' work – and “enrichment activities” outside the classroom, such as music or sport.

The IB is not based around A-levels, which makes it harder for state comprehensives to offer,



though it is strong in sixth-form colleges and independents. Students take six subjects of their choice and three core subjects, including an extended essay.

Internal assessment can count for up to 50 per cent of IB marks, so students do not have to risk everything on end-of-year exams.

The Advanced Diploma is another recent entry into the post-16 field but is mainly vocational and many universities will not consider it as an entrance qualification.

Applied A-levels (double award) and BTEC National Diplomas, which are work-related qualifications in subjects such as leisure and management, are often only accepted for university at the highest grades combined with a specified A-level or two. ●

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STATE VERSUS INDEPENDENT

Admissions game

Parents who want a top educational outcome for their children may need the tactics of Napoleon and the tenacity of Mo Farah.

Ducking in and out of the state and independent systems is on the increase. Money can be saved, and a good start gained for one's child, by taking advantage of nursery vouchers and low prep school fees in the early years. We see parents zigzagging between the systems: private to age seven, then state to age 11 (better still 13), private again to 16 and state to polish things off before the university admissions season.

BY JANETTE WALLIS

Grammar schools present an opportunity – but also a way to alienate your children, endanger your marriage and stockpile anti-anxiety medication. In Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Kent independent prep schools do a roaring business with parents aiming for the 11-plus. Prep schools such as Maltman's Green in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, send over half of their pupils to grammars. Buckinghamshire schools cannot coach pupils for the 11-plus but, says Joanna Pardon, headmistress of Maltman's Green, "a



“LONDON PARENTS OFTEN APPLY TO GRAMMARS IN COMPETING AUTHORITIES”

school like mine gives children confidence, a belief in themselves and a love of learning. Parents know it's not just 'getting in' that matters – it's doing well once they're there.”

Grammar schools are more commonly available than many people realise. If a parent's goal is a grammar, they can do no better than move to Northern Ireland where, for now, selection still rules. The region has 68 grammars, and independent schools barely get a look in.

Meanwhile, for an independent boarding school on the cheap, why not move to Holy Island (Lindisfarne), Northumberland? Here, all pupils aged nine and older are educated – at council expense – at

Longridge Towers School in Berwick-upon-Tweed. “We have 14 this year and they all board,” explains Stuart Bankier, the school's bursar. State boarding schools continue to boast some of the best academic results in the country.

Further north, state senior schools in much of Scotland have a good reputation, particularly in small towns. The trail to top-achieving schools in Scottish cities is paved with high property prices – a pocket of overpriced housing is a good indicator of a well-regarded school. Cheapish but highly ranked independent schools, such as George Watson's College in Edinburgh and Hutchesons' Grammar School in Glasgow, are oversubscribed, so most parents aim to get their children in early.

Wales does not publish school performance league tables, making it harder for the ambitious tactician. But recently introduced school banding tables give families a good steer. Earlier this year independent options looked wobbly, but parents saved Cognita's Ffynone House in Swansea from closure, and Llandovery College, Carmarthenshire, was robustly pulled back from the brink.

London's state schools are improving, but if you are aiming for a top prep or senior school, putting your children's names down as early as possible is imperative. The badge of honour goes to the parents who finesse the London grammar school route,

often applying to several schools in competing authorities and spending a fortune on tutors.

Faith schools can provide unique opportunities and many parents have decided childbirth

is a good time to rediscover their Roman Catholic or Church of England roots. Tactics may also be adapted to the sex of your child. *The Good Schools Guide* has found over a quarter of senior school age boys in Oxfordshire, Portsmouth, Bracknell, Bedford, Windsor and Surrey are independently schooled; the same is true of girls in Blackburn, Derbyshire, Rutland and Surrey. ● *Janette Wallis is a senior editor of The Good Schools Guide (www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk)*



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Those extraordinary stories of multiple-star pupils are far more likely to come from independents and grammars than from comprehensives and academies. But there are few state grammar schools – around 160 in England – and they are heavily oversubscribed.

Parents who opt for the independent sector need deep pockets. Yet many do fork out, and in increasing numbers. There is a north/south divide, but last year there was an overall rise of 0.1 per cent in independent pupils, to 505,000, in the UK.

Independent education is a large financial commitment, but it would be a mistake to lump all schools together. Rugby School, for example, charges around £30,000 a year for senior boarding and

£18,000 for day pupils. But most big cities have cheaper options, such as the Grammar School at Leeds. Senior fees are around £11,000 a year and it announced A* and A grades in 55 per cent of its A-levels this year. Nationally, pupils from all sectors passed 26.6 per cent at A and 7.9 per cent at A*.

State schools do produce many successful students, and maybe a firm parental hand would save a lot of money and get similar results. There is, however, more to the story.

“Exam results are a headline measure of a school’s efficiency, but you need to look behind the headline to see the true value of an independent school education,” says Kevin Stannard, director of innovation and learning for the Girls’ Day School Trust (GDST), a network of independent girls’ school that has 20,000 pupils in 24 schools.

“Schools like ours put great store by guidance and support. Having great results is not enough to get into the best universities; it has to be results in the ‘right’ subjects – such as sciences, languages, and maths,” he says. “The true value of pre-university education is in the development of the skills needed for more sustained success at university and beyond.”

Many independent schools offer scholarships and bursaries. Bursaries are usually means tested and may be for a considerable part of the fees. Scholarships are often linked to achievement. Twenty per cent of senior GDST girls hold a scholarship or bursary. Weekly boarding is available at many schools, while others will let your child board for occasional nights.

Independent schools often provide excellent facilities for drama and sport. Thirty-seven per cent of team GB Olympic medallists were

BY JILL PARKIN

educated privately. You are also far more likely to play rugby or cricket for England if you attended an independent.

Earlier this year, Michael Gove, the education secretary, declared the dominance of the independently educated in the nation’s positions of power was “morally indefensible”. The point of his speech was that something must be done about the state sector. Parents have to decide whether they can afford to wait. ●

TOP VALUE, BOARDING SCHOOLS

School	Town	Board fees 000's £pa	Points/candidate (core exams)	Core Pts/Cam/£100	Number of candidates (All exams)	% girls (candidates)	FT API Rank 11
Concord College	Shrewsbury	26.6	986	3.7	118	49	6
Radley College	Abingdon	29.2	972	3.3	135	0	14
Winchester College (PU)	Winchester	31.4	986	3.1	132	0	9
Wycombe Abbey School	High Wycombe	30.6	923	3.0	87	100	11
Oundle School (PU)	Oundle	28.6	829	2.9	213	40	73

TOP VALUE, DAY SCHOOLS

School	Town	Day fees 000's £pa	Points/candidate (core exams)	Core Pts/Cam/£100	Number of candidates (All exams)	% girls (candidates)	FT API Rank 11
Withington Girls' School	Fallowfield	9.3	863	9.3	79	100	19
Loughborough High School	Loughbor'gh	9.4	799	8.5	68	100	52
Bury Grammar School (Boys)	Bury	8.7	738	8.5	58	0	229
Manchester Gram'r Sch (IB)	Manchester	10.0	827	8.3	188	0	65
Oxford High School GDST	Oxford	10.7	880	8.2	67	100	13

* All fees listed in the tables are as of January 2012

No privilege required

Last month's A-level results may have been the first for 20 years to show a small decline in the highest grades, but the stark gap in performance between state and independent schools remains. Fifty per cent of A-level entries in the independent sector achieved an A* or A grade, compared with 23 per cent in state schools and colleges. This is in spite of the fact that virtually all students at independent schools go on to do A-levels after GCSEs, compared with only the brightest 40 per cent or so of state school students.

So, as with Olympic medal winners, the independent sector continues to produce a substantial proportion of those who will one day be the country's leaders – whether that be in law, business, media, medicine, politics or one of the other professional elites.

What is behind this success? Superior facilities and motivated and well-supported children are part of the story. But I believe the biggest single factor is teaching: not only do independent schools enjoy a pupil/teacher ratio almost half that of the state sector but the highest-qualified and the most effective teachers are found in independent schools. They are seven times as likely as their peers to have graduated from Oxbridge, five times more likely to hold a PhD, and are much more likely to have a degree from a Russell Group university in the subject they teach, particularly in shortage areas such as maths, physics and modern languages.

Recent research commissioned by the Sutton Trust, the

social mobility charity, shows that on average 3.1 per cent of students in the OECD reach the highest level in maths at age 15, but just 1.7 per cent of English pupils do – and the majority of these are in independent schools. One of the main priorities for the trust has been, and continues to be, to fund successful and cost-effective programmes that support highly able children in state schools.

Working with the state sector alone is not enough to open up top universities and the professional elites. Imagine a world in which children's chances of getting into the top independent day schools did not depend on the wealth of

“ UNTIL 1976, 70% OF LEADING INDEPENDENT DAY SCHOOLS WERE MAINLY STATE FUNDED

their parents, but on ability alone. Such a world did once exist.

Research by the trust has shown that until 1976, 70 per cent of leading independent day schools were principally state funded through the direct grant and other schemes. These schools have a tradition of educating bright youngsters from all backgrounds.

There is

a way to open up these schools once again. Through Open Access all places at leading independent schools would be awarded solely on merit, with parents paying a sliding scale of fees according to their means. The trust, together with the Girls' Day School Trust, trialled such a scheme at the Belvedere School in Liverpool over a seven-year period, and we know it works. The social mix of the school was transformed, with 30 per cent of pupils on free places, 40 per cent paying partial fees and 30 per cent paying full fees. Academic standards went up considerably and the school improved immeasurably.

Because fees were shared with parents, the cost per place to us as sponsors was less than a state school place. In other words, if the government stepped into our shoes they could have funded the highest-achieving school in Liverpool for less than they spend on a child in a state school. More than 80 leading independent day schools, almost half of the total, would be willing to adopt Open Access.

It is exactly this proposition that the trust discussed at an event in parliament on September 5, which brought together MPs, peers and opinion-formers with the heads of the more than 80 schools that have so far pledged their support for the programme, including Westminster, Manchester Grammar, King Edward's Birmingham, City of London Boys and Lady Eleanor Holles.

These schools want to educate the brightest young people from all backgrounds – which would enable them once again to be the engines of social mobility and the beacons of opportunity they once were. ●

Sir Peter Lampl is chairman of the Sutton Trust and chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation





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HABERDASHERS' MONMOUTH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

GIRLS 7 - 18
with boarding from 9

www.habs-monmouth.org Registered Charity number 525616



Queen's Gate

Independent Day School for Girls from 4 to 18 years

ENTRY SEPTEMBER 2013

For a prospectus, or to visit the School, please contact the Registrar, Janette Micklewright, on 0207 594 4982 or email registrar@queensgate.org.uk

Please see our website for details of Open Events for 2013 entry to the Senior and Junior Schools.

www.queensgate.org.uk
133 Queen's Gate, London SW7 5LE



Bancroft's School
A Tradition of Excellence



HMC day school • Fully co-educational • 7-18 • Founded 1737

Open Days For Entry September 2013

7+ Entry: 6 October 2012 • 10.00am - Midday
11+ Entry: 17 September 2012 • 7.00pm - 9.00pm
24 November 2012 • 10.00am - Midday
16+ Entry: 10 October 2012 • 8.00pm - 9.30pm

To discover the opportunities we can offer your child, please join us at one of our Open Days. On all occasions, the Head will speak first, followed by a chance to tour the School and talk to members of the teaching staff.

For more information, including details of academic, music and means tested scholarships, please telephone +44 (0)20 8505 4821, or go to www.bancrofts.org



Bancroft's School
Woodford Green
Essex IG8 0RF

"It offers an exceptional range and quality of opportunities for all pupils" ISI Report 2010
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