

TOP INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

FINANCIAL TIMES **SPECIAL REPORT** | Saturday September 12 2009

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Top Independent Schools

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A practical approach

VOCATIONAL TRAINING Some schools are beginning to recognise the value of acquiring life-skills, reports Jane Bird **Page 8**

Corner of a British field

FOREIGN PUPILS

Boarders from overseas have become critical to the financial health of many independent schools, writes Ross Tieman **Page 10**



Front page: St Paul's Girls' School in west London came second. Westminster was top again

Daniel Jones

A boycott may have helped lift female representation, says **David Turner**

Any teenage girl trying to persuade her parents to let her switch from single-sex to co-ed would be well advised to hide today's copy of the Financial Times – unless she lives in London and is clever enough to get into Westminster.

Girls' schools dominate the highest reaches of this year's Financial Times A-level league tables for private schools, although not the top slot.

Westminster School, a boys' school with a co-educational sixth form, is first for the third year running.

But it is a rare exception within the top 10, which is dominated by girls' schools, led by St Paul's Girls' School in London.

The victory of girls' schools has been exaggerated by the continuing league table rebellion. Only a minority of the schools in the highest academic echelons have boycotted this autumn's league tables, but a disproportionate number of them – such as Eton Col-



lege and St Paul's School – are boys' schools.

However, even allowing for this, the performance of girls' schools in the FT's A-level tables is impressive. Clarissa Farr, high mis-

tress of St Paul's Girls', was a reluctant cheerleader for private girls' schools as a whole, preferring to limit her comments to her own institution. Ms Farr said girls who were struggling in

a particular A-level were given a "bespoke programme", including "individual tutorials" at the school.

However, "we never see the exam result as the cen-

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Jump for joy: the upper echelons of the FT rankings are dominated by single-sex establishments PA

tral purpose of everything.” Instead, a good grade was “almost a by-product” of a good education.

Parents should be wary of succumbing to a small sense of triumph or disaster at a minor rise or fall in their child’s school. A disastrous performance by a single child can affect an institution’s exact placing. Moreover, some variation in results from year to year is normal, given that the average level of talent in each year’s upper sixth will vary, even if the teaching remains the same.

But a consistent rising or falling trend over a few years is more telling.

Westminster School, however, has remained in the same place for the past three years: top.

Stephen Spurr, headmaster, echoed the sentiments of his counterparts at other schools near or at the top of the tables, in saying he was looking beyond ensuring students met their triple-A conditional offers, to the higher ambition of “what level of knowledge” was needed to thrive at “the top universities to which our pupils go”.

The FT’s separate table of International Baccalaureate

Top 10

- 1 Westminster
- 2 St Paul’s Girls
- 3 North London Collegiate
- 4 Magdalen Collegiate
- 5 Wycombe Abbey
- 6 Winchester College
- 7= James Allen’s Girls
- 7= Withington Girls
- 9 Oxford High S for Girls
- 10= City of London School for Girls
- 10= South Hampstead High

results provides clearer victors, because the number of schools offering them is still quite small. North London Collegiate, the girls’ school, comes top with 65 per cent of entries at Grade 7, although only about a quarter of the girls take it. The highest-ranked school that offers only IB in the sixth form is King’s College School, Wimbledon, with 47 per cent at Grade 7. KCS is currently boys-only, but will become co-ed in the sixth form from next year.

For some schools, the question is whether there should be league tables at all. The trend not to show results continues to gain favour in a modest way, with about 50 choosing not to have their exam results in the public domain last year and another 30 or so joining them this year. But 15 of last year’s rebels have decided to show their results this year.

When Eton withdrew from the tables last year, Tony Little, headmaster, told the FT: “There is an argument that the fashion for examination league tables, a refreshing and revealing exercise at its inception some 15 years ago, has become more a constraint on teaching and learning than an aid to improvement.”

In reality, schools can merely stay the process of judgment by league table by six months. The FT’s annual March survey of the top 1,000 schools, both private and state, is able to use data from all schools provided by the government. But altruistic heads are still able to take a moral stand by withdrawing from the rankings, and their counterparts who are motivated more by a fear of slipping down the tables are at least able to halve the bad publicity.

Critics of league tables say they do not reveal very much about how good a school is because the big-

gest single factor behind each school’s performance is the quality of the pupils.

Only a small number of England’s private schools are highly academically selective – rejecting more candidates than they accept. One head puts this number at about 25, saying most are in London and the Home Counties. The top of the rankings are dominated by these schools. KCS, Wimbledon, typically has about 300 applicants for 65 places at the age of 13, according to headmaster Andrew Halls.

The head of a similarly selective school that has withdrawn from the league tables explained his decision by setting out the stark contrast with another school: “The headmaster of an inner-city London comprehensive told me he had seven pupils who only turned up at the school to sign in and receive their Education Maintenance Allowances. That’s all he saw of them. They didn’t go to any lessons, but they’d still show up in the league tables as ‘fails’.”

Even the harshest critics of league tables have to acknowledge that the highest-ranking schools are effective at doing what their parent body expects of the institution – to teach very clever children well enough to allow them to fulfil their academic potential.

But this point does not quite solve the problem of whether it is fair that one school is ranked a few places higher than another. Parents should exercise common sense: one school a mere few slots below its

rival is not providing an education that is radically different in quality. But if it is consistently more than 100 places below, it is either teaching its pupils to pass national exams less effectively or taking a very different type of pupil.

The FT’s league tables will, hopefully, at least make it easier for parents to probe for answers to such questions on open day, confident in the knowledge that anecdotal evidence is easier to brush off than numbers in a table.



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Top Independent Schools

It all seems to come down to bursaries

CHARITABLE STATUS

Schools feel they lack guidance about 'public benefit' spending, writes **David Turner**

Private schools in England and Wales waited with bated breath for the July announcement by the Charity Commission naming the schools that failed to meet tough new requirements to show they provide a "public benefit".

The charity watchdog gave its verdict on the first five schools: three passes and two fails. But after analysing the assessments, the rest of the sector feels only a little wiser as to what is required.

To justify charitable status, private schools must make sure that "people in poverty" can use their services, despite the fees. Most big private schools are registered as charities, although many smaller schools are not.

The Commission's guidance on what schools need to do to aid the poor has fomented discontent among heads: it gives many examples of activities that schools could do, such as giving lessons at local state schools, but it has

declined to quantify the aid that schools must give – most particularly the value of bursary assistance.

Schools say the Commission is being unhelpful and that its approach is best summarised as, "We can't describe what public benefit is, but we know it when we see it". The Commission argues that there are so many routes to passing the public benefit test that quantification is impossible.

And, it adds, if schools fail their first inspection, they can retry before a sanction would be imposed. Rosie Chapman, executive director of policy and effectiveness, says the Commission "can remove trustees and freeze bank accounts" if a school "keeps failing to meet the targets and doesn't want to work with us". The watchdog also emphasises that only schools that refuse to co-operate risk such an outcome.

Despite the Commission's assertion that there are many routes to providing public benefit, the first five rulings appear to support the suspicion that the key factor is the amount spent on bursaries.

The three schools passed by the Commission have devoted a substantial proportion of their income to means-tested bursaries: Manchester Grammar School

(MGS) spends 14 per cent, or almost £1.7m; Pangbourne College in Berkshire, almost 10 per cent; and Moyles Court School in Hampshire, 5 per cent.

The two that failed spent the least: St Anselm's School in Derbyshire uses less than 1 per cent of income, and Highfield Priory School in Lancashire spends none. Both schools were judged not "to provide sufficient opportunity to benefit those who cannot afford the fees".

One of the points made by the Commission is easily addressed. In the case of St Anselm's, it judged that the advertised maximum fee remission of 90 per cent, rather than 100 per cent, "may exclude those in poverty".

But even the successful private schools remain unhappy that the Commission concentrated on how much money schools give in bursaries rather than other activities.

Christopher Ray, high master of MGS, complains: "The amount of space that they have devoted to their findings on bursaries has been disproportionate given the other things that we do." MGS, for example, helps local state sixth form colleges trying to get pupils into Oxbridge.

Where does this leave charitable private schools? Confused. If bur-



An option open to all? Boys at Harrow School

Alamy

saries are what govern success or failure in the public benefit test, they ask, why can't the Commission be explicit about how much schools need to spend?

The Commission's five rulings suggest the figure is somewhere between 1 and 5 per cent of income. But given that a huge proportion of private schools spend between 1 and 5 per cent of their income on bursaries, the rulings leave many schools unsure whether they are spending enough to meet the test.

One solution is for those schools that do not have fundraising offices to set them up to procure the money for bursaries. For grander schools that have many rich alumni, this could prove fruitful. For smaller prep schools

whose link to alumni is weaker, this may not be possible.

Simon Northcott, headmaster of St Anselm's, says attempts by the school last year to raise money for bursaries from donors was unsuccessful. For such schools, fee increases may be necessary. Critics point out that this may squeeze out relatively poorer members of the parent body already struggling to pay.

Mr Northcott says he would find an increase in fees to pay for more bursaries "difficult to justify to parents in the current economic climate". Defenders of the rules say they will increase the opportunity to go to private school for children whose families could not pay the full fees even after much scrimping and saving.

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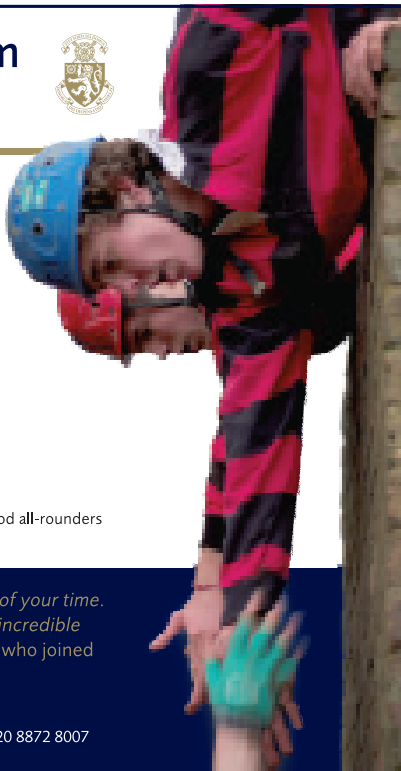
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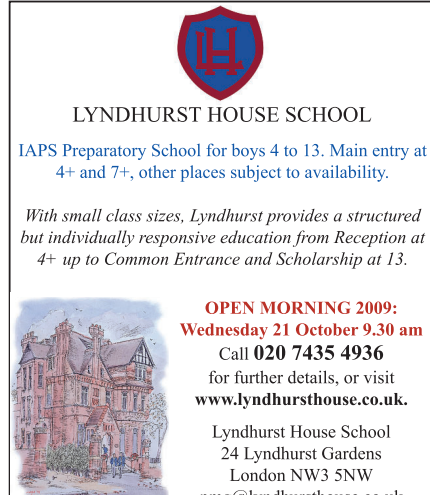
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Top Independent Schools

Animal spirits that give guidance to headteachers

GOVERNORS

The relationship with the chairman of the board is crucial, writes **Liz Lightfoot**

When the headmaster shakes hands with the chairman of the governors what does his body language tell you?

Is this a person he would welcome into the bosom of his family? Or is the shake perfunctory, the smile forced and the eyes anywhere but in contact?

Love them or hate them, governors of independent schools have considerable power over the way things are run – and control of the purse strings.

Heads invariably claim to have an excellent working relationship with the governors who appoint them, but what do they really think of them?

When senior school headteachers were asked this year to select the most appropriate animal comparison for the chairman of their governing bodies, nearly half picked a Labrador.

But according to Anthony Seldon, the Master of Wellington College who carried out the study, by

no means all saw their governors as loyal and dependable. Nearly one in five likened their chairman to a tiger, 3 per cent picked an anaconda and one likened his chairman to a falcon.

Mr Seldon, who transformed Brighton College and is shaking up Wellington, says that, given his active style of leadership, he has been fortunate to have enjoyed “overwhelmingly positive relationships” with the chairmen and governing bodies of all three schools he has headed.

But he admits not everyone is so fortunate. He relates a story told to him by a fellow head: “When his chairman arrived for the annual school play, he asked: ‘Are boys playing the girls’ parts?’ No, replied the head, girls are playing girls’ parts. ‘Oh splendid, splendid. So they are coming in from the local girls’ school, are they Charles?’ he asked of the head, whose name was James.

“No, Chairman, they are our own girls. We’ve been co-ed for 10 years,” he told him.”

Governors are unpaid and vary widely in the amount of time they are prepared to devote, especially when their day job is running the country, a huge corporation or the armed services. Heads liken some

to sleeping partners and others to hostile witnesses.

A head of a prep school says the chairman phones his private line every morning and evening for reports and another complains of one with a non-education background who insists on carrying out spot checks on teachers in the classroom.

Mr Seldon’s survey in advance of this year’s annual meeting of the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS), found more than two-

Wise owls, cunning foxes and donkeys who make Eeyore sounds about things being better in the old days

thirds of heads thought they spent the right amount of time with their governors, just over one in 10 thought it was not enough and nearly two in 10 said tellingly that the time they spent with the chairs and governing bodies was “absolutely enough”.

Disputes between the head and governors are rare, but when they happen they create a stir because



It is important to get the balance right

dreamstime

a good relationship is crucial, says Shane Rutter-Jerome, the outgoing general secretary of AGBIS. “The line between interfering and being too remote is a fine one and a matter which governing bodies should keep under review,” he says.

The governing body of Eton College, which goes by the historic title of “The Provost and Fellows”, is one of the oldest in the country but faced with the proliferating rules and regulations that apply to the independent sector, it has invited an outside consultant to review the way it undertakes its responsibilities.

“It is certainly possible to imagine governors interfering too much or being too remote and it is important to get the balance right,” says Michael Proudfoot, the philosopher and Eton Fellow.

“Broadly speaking, the governors set or approve the direction and strategy of the school and the headmaster and other staff execute these policies, so the governors certainly make a huge differ-

ence. One should never be complacent, but I think Eton does get the balance right.”

Mr Proudfoot was elected to Eton’s governing body in 2001, after he acted as the examiner for an annual prize based on examinations on religious, moral and philosophical questions.

“Eton is a world-famous institution and I was honoured to be invited to become a Fellow,” he says. Of course, having been elected, I wondered what sort of a group I was joining, but I was encouraged at my first meeting by the imaginative and progressive forward-thinking.

“At that first meeting, we agreed on the ambition to extend the reach of Eton’s bursaries and I have not been disappointed.”

Wise owls, cunning foxes and donkeys who make Eeyore sounds about things being better in the old days – heads may have seen them all, but say the experience governors bring from the world outside is what helps to mark out their schools as independent.



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Charles Batchelor
 on the quest for the elusive rounded education

An education that builds character as well as teaching the three Rs has long been regarded as an essential preparation for success in later life.

It was the Duke of Wellington who was credited with observing that "the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton". But it was also Wellington who had earlier observed of his troops: "I don't know what effect these men will have upon the enemy but, by God, they terrify me." The common soldiery had, presumably, not enjoyed the benefits of an officer's education.

Is there a similar divide, in the early 21st century, between the approach to character building that is adopted by state and independent schools?

But what is meant by "character building"? Hilary Moriarty, national director of the Boarding Schools' Association, describes a situation requiring character as "anything that requires you to give more than you think you can give".

Far from being out of step with the times, this is the theme of many of the reality TV shows that fill the schedules, she notes.

In practice this means "staying in the classroom until you get Act II of the play right; practising until you perfect a piece of music because a dud note makes the whole orchestra sound silly; thinking of others more than yourself."

"Scholarship is a solitary business," explains David Levin, headmaster of the City of London School. "But when you go out into the big world, you work in teams and you have to work together to solve problems. The best way to prepare for that is through extra-curricular activities such as orchestras, team games or societies."

Mr Levin cites the case of a boy who approached him with the idea of establishing a cheese appreciation society. At first it seemed a hoax. "But in three months, it was the most popular society in the school and we had experts coming in to give talks. Having been a shy, unassuming chap, he became a character."

"You are trying to build self-confidence and self-esteem. That comes from making a project happen."

But this approach is not the preserve of the independent sector. Melvyn

Roffe, principal of Wymondham College, a state boarding school in Norfolk, says "We have set up a regime that we think builds character. What that implies is a moral background, a degree of independence and a sense of social responsibility."

A boarding school means pupils are away from their parents, so they need to demonstrate resilience. At the same time, they must adapt to a highly social environment with students of a similar age.

Providing these advantages is harder in a day school, where pupils are free to return home as soon as the closing bell rings.

"Boarders are more involved because they spend

'Kids learn more about themselves when cold and wet and five goals down than with a hard physics problem'

more time at school," says Mr Roffe. "But it is not about where they sleep, it is the ethos of the place. It is a wrap-around life that involves relationships with teachers and peers."

Schools in both the independent and state sectors



Follow me: there are many ways to foster leadership qualities

dreamstime

emphasise the character-building elements that they offer. Wymondham College calls itself "a community that places a strong emphasis on consideration for others, good manners, smart appearance and hard work".

Harrow School, which counts Winston Churchill, Pandit Nehru and 19 holders of the Victoria Cross among its old boys, places "a particular emphasis on the development of qualities of leadership and teamwork".

"It is a sort of given in the independent sector," says Bernard Trafford, headmaster of Newcastle's Royal Grammar School. "Kids learn more about themselves when they are cold and wet and five goals down than with a hard physics problem. Sometimes, parents want their children to drop out of activities when they are coming up to A-levels. We have to battle that."

Because character outcomes are so uncertain, schools frequently promote extra-curricular activities as a proxy for the character-building process. Gyms, swimming pools, music rooms and playing fields are all provided to offer a more challenging education.

The better-endowed independent schools have enjoyed an advantage, although the government's ambitious Building Schools for the Future programme aims to improve facilities at state secondary schools.

But this comes after a tough time for state education in the 1980s and early 1990s, when spending cuts, a focus on the national curriculum and industrial action by teachers reduced the availability of extra-curricular activities in many schools.

John Bangs, head of education at the National Union

of Teachers, acknowledges state schools had a narrower focus in the 1990s, but says this is now past.

"The vast majority of maintained [state] schools do a range of extra-curricular activities. But there is no room for complacency." The range of activities that can be offered in the state sector is "constrained by the high-stakes demands of the exam system and testing".

The government has implicitly acknowledged the greater resources available to the independent sector in a number of recent initiatives.

Independent schools are being encouraged to open up their cadet forces to neighbouring state schools, while the Charity Commission is putting on pressure for them to provide more tangible evidence of "public benefit" by working more closely with state schools.

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Top Independent Schools

Ways to foster qualities that are vital at work

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Some establishments are beginning to cater for practical skills, reports **Jane Bird**

Society needs workers with a wide range of practical and interpersonal skills. Yet students with such abilities have little opportunity to demonstrate them through the GCSE and A-level system.

Vocational training provides a chance for them to succeed and show what they are good at.

Fee-paying schools say they are good at educating every kind of pupil regardless of ability or proclivity, but only a few offer vocational qualifications. Moreover, the number is shrinking because of excessive bureaucracy and regulation surrounding the new flagship diplomas.

Among those bucking the trend is St Bede's School in East Sussex, which offers its 900 pupils the chance to study BTecs, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and diplomas in vocational subjects alongside GCSEs and A-levels. Such qualifications focus on practical skills with minimal written work.

Subjects available at St Bede's include culinary skills, horse care and riding, sport, music performance and music technology. Richard Maloney, the school's headmaster, says the aim is to give all pupils a sense of achievement, enable them to explore their tal-

ents, and make them confident, with a sense of their worth.

"If they feel they are not top-of-the-tree academically, they often lack self-esteem, and those pushed into unsuitable disciplines often feel they have failed," he says.

One former St Bede's pupil became a trainee chef with Jamie Oliver and another has been recruited to the junior GB show-jumping team for the 2012 Olympic Games.

Last year's head boy completed the BTec National Certificate in sport and now has a professional contract playing rugby with the Harlequins.

"He's been able to make the fact that he's an outstanding sportsman relevant to his working life," says Dr Maloney. "Vocational qualifications enable students to feel good about themselves and provide a head-start with employers by showing they have a formal qualification in a subject in addition to an interest."

Jonathan Hughes-D'Aeth, headmaster of Milton Abbey School in Dorset, agrees it is important for pupils with skills that are valuable to employers to have a formal qualification that recognises this.

Traditional academic examinations cannot measure interpersonal skills such as leadership, yet these can be very useful for people working in a wide range of jobs, he says.

"An individual might have a top A in maths, yet not be the kind of person you'd follow through the jungle. These skills can be developed by giving pupils the chance to practise them." Milton Abbey

offers its students BTecs or City and Guilds qualifications in subjects such as sports and exercise management, and countryside and environmental science management.

Also available is hospitality management, for which a typical assignment might be laying on a shoot lunch for 40. This would involve conducting a health and safety risk assessment, budgeting, liaising with the customer, managing the team and arranging the cooking.

Vocational courses are not just for less academically able pupils. One girl at Milton Abbey recently did A-levels in English, French and Religious Education alongside her BTec in hospitality management. She is now reading philosophy at Manchester University.

A fellow pupil studied French, Geography, Business Studies and Hospitality Management, and is now at the Swiss Hotel Management School in Lucerne.

But although a surprising variety of vocational courses was on offer in private schools just a few years ago, their number is declining, says Geoff Lucas, secretary of the Headmasters' & Headmistresses' Conference.

A perceived lack of academic rigour has put some schools off, while causing regulators to make vocational qualifications more like conventional exams, removing many of the advantages for less academic pupils.

"GNVQs have become almost clones of academic qualifications, where previously they had been more applied," says Mr Lucas.



Hands-on experience can prove invaluable

Alamy

Enlisting the support of teachers can also be a problem. Vocational courses require different skills and considerable flexibility from staff who normally teach standard examination subjects.

"You need teachers who are practical and prepared to turn their hand to something different," says Mr Hughes-D'Aeth.

Milton Abbey uses some of its academic staff in combination with professionals who work at the school such as the catering team, equine manager and sailing instructors.

The other problem is that the new-style diplomas, designed to replace GNVQs, are so complex in design and delivery that there is no way an independent school can provide them, says Mr Lucas.

Participating schools and colleges must collaborate with each other and with employers to provide work experience which

is an essential part of diplomas. Parents paying school fees might object to their sons or daughters spending a large amount of time off-site, which the courses require. And, unlike applied A-levels, some universities have said they may be unwilling to consider diplomas as entry for courses.

Diplomas has also been dogged with bad publicity focused on poor student take-up, disappointing results, and problems with logistics and transport. Mr Lucas believes this situation will continue, as other types of vocational qualification are phased out in favour of diplomas. Parents seeking a less academic focus for their children will be forced into the state sector.

"Government policy has accentuated the divide between independent and state sectors," he says.

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PREPARATORY SCHOOLS

Many parents think delaying entry can help ease the financial strain, says **Liz Lightfoot**

Consumers in a recession can switch supermarkets and cut back on luxuries but there are few low-cost alternatives for parents paying school fees.

The average price of private education last year was £10,296 for a day place and more than £23,000 for boarding and the costs are still rising.

A survey for the Financial Times last June found families facing even more demands on their cash, as the leading schools put up their prices by an average 4 per cent this month.

Unable to shop around – even the “no-frills” chains charge anything from £7,000 to £11,000 a year plus extras – an increasing number of families are thinking tactically and keeping costs down by dipping in and out of the sector.

But if you can afford to pay for only one part of the 14 or 15 years that children spend from nursery to sixth form, which should it be?

Is it better to pay for a private nursery and prep school to provide a firm foundation? Or to use the state primary system followed by a senior independent school to guide them through public examinations?

So far, it has been the prep schools feeling the pinch says Sue Fieldman, an



The local primary school can be a good bet NTI

Of the 650 pupils who sat entrance tests for some 180 places at Hampton this year, four in five who gained places to start at 11 were from state primaries in Richmond and the surrounding boroughs.

“When they come in at 11, we don’t notice a huge difference between those who were educated in state schools and those from prep schools,” he says.

“In this area, the primary schools are excellent and parents who want to provide extras have a wide choice of out of school clubs and activities.”

However, David Hanson, the chief executive of the Independent Association of Prep Schools, says there is little evidence that parents are pulling out of the association’s schools, which represent about half the private schools for the age group.

“Our numbers don’t reflect that at all. We have carried out a survey to be released this month that shows that in the quality prep school market the schools are weathering the recession very well.”

Busy parents value the longer hours and range of extra-curricular activities which means they do not have to ferry children to clubs in the evening, he says.

“There appears to be a rush to quality. The smaller, non-association schools are more vulnerable. Parents seem to be looking for the security of well-established schools they feel have a long-term future.”

“They want more for less and expect the good schools to have the capacity and resources to provide not only a first-class academic education and specialist teaching in small classes, but the best possible experience of the arts and sport that makes up the all-round education which is the mark of a good prep school.”

editor of *The Good Schools Guide*. “The top state primary schools are very, very good indeed and if you have one near where you live, it can make sense to save the money and have your children tutored for entrance or scholarship exams to a state grammar or senior independent school,” she says.

The trend is borne out by the figures: the 2009 annual census carried out by the Independent Schools’ Council shows the number of six-year-olds down by 3.3 per cent, seven-year-olds by 2.6 per cent and eight-year-olds by 2.5 per cent.

The number joining senior schools at 11 and 17 was up,

however, by 1.9 and 2.7 per cent respectively.

Two of the missing children were the sons of Louise Pretty. She took them out of a prestigious prep school last Christmas when her child-care business started to run into difficulties.

With no sign of a let-up in the recession, she was losing clients and though her husband was still in work in the IT industry, she worried about the security of his job if the economy worsened.

The headmaster offered a short-term fee reduction for the youngest child, but she had an excellent state primary on her doorstep that could accommodate the seven- and nine-year-olds.

Eight months after the children joined the John Moore Primary school near their home in Tewkesbury, she has no doubt it was the right decision. “There has been no drop in standards and they are very happy

there and more relaxed,” she says.

But now her business has started to pick up and her eldest son enters year six, she is wondering whether he would be happier and more successful at a smaller independent senior school than a large comprehensive.

“Moving them to the state primary school has given them back their childhood, but I want them to work hard at secondary school and take good-quality A-levels and go on to do sensible courses at university which will help them get jobs,” she says.

“With the benefit of hindsight, I wish we had used a state primary from the outset, as I feel the £60,000 we have spent hasn’t actually given my children an edge. Secondary school is where they will sit their GCSEs and A levels and will ultimately determine their choice of university.”

One reason for choosing a prep school is to prepare children for entry to secondary schools at 13, especially the large, sought-after boarding schools.

If they are transferring at 11 to a day school, there is no particular advantage

‘With the benefit of hindsight, I wish we had used a state primary from the outset’

says Barry Martin, the headmaster of Hampton School, the high-achieving boys’ day school in Richmond upon Thames.

Although he was expecting a slightly gloomier application round this year, numbers have gone up and an extra form is being added to meet demand.

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Top Independent Schools

A corner of a British field

FOREIGN PUPILS

The contribution of fee-paying overseas parents has become enormous, writes **Ross Tieman**

The inflow of foreign boarders has become critical to the financial health of many of Britain's independent schools. A census in January showed that of the 628,000 children in schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council, 21,533 were offspring of non-British parents residing abroad.

In addition, nearly all are boarders, not day pupils. So it seems likely that of the 68,131 boarders at UK independent schools, getting on for 31 per cent – nearly one in three – are from overseas.

The contribution of fee-paying foreign parents to the UK independent education sector has become enormous.

Martin Webber, managing director of Academic Asia International, which helps parents in Hong Kong and China find places in UK schools, reckons on average they pay annual fees of £25,000 per child. A back-of-envelope sum therefore suggests foreign students generate annual revenues to the sector approaching £540m.

Numbers of overseas students had been pretty constant for the past five or six years, but Hilary Moriarty, National Director of the Boarding Schools' Association, sees

signs of a shift. Picking through the census, she reckons both the number of boarders and the number of foreign students rose by about 1,000 between January 2008 and January 2009.

Whether more complex visa requirements introduced by the UK Border Agency during 2009 have since reduced the success of foreign students in taking up places at UK independent schools will become clear this month, as enrolment data for the new school year is collected.

But Mr Webber is convinced the weakness of sterling is contributing to strong demand from Hong Kong and China, which together provide 37 per cent of foreign pupils. "It has been an enormous help," he says. "Parents who were a bit scared off by the price are coming back into the market this year."

Sterling weakness is a blessing for heads determined to maintain enrolments at a time when many UK parents feel the effect of recession, even if some of the latter benefit from lower interest rates.

For despite the strength of Britain's school and university "brands", head teachers and industry representatives say competition, particularly from high quality schools in Australia, New Zealand and Canada modelled on UK peers continues to intensify.

Leading British independent schools have responded energetically to that challenge. As Ms Moriarty points out, the ISC's census shows member schools' capital spending on facilities for boarders



Nearly one in three boarders is from outside the UK

Alamy

totalled £98.5m last year, bringing the total invested to almost £200m in just two years.

"Many UK parents used to think drafty dormitories and cold showers were part of the experience," says Mr Webber. "Their attitudes have evolved." But more significantly: "Overseas parents who are spending £25,000 a year just will not accept that kind of thing for

The challenge is to meet overseas demand without compromising what gave rise to it

their children." Many sixth-form boarders now get a single room, with en-suite bathroom and internet access – just as they would at home.

Some seem also to have changed their curriculums in ways that attract more overseas applicants. Anthony Seldon, master of Wellington College, says: "The introduction of the International Baccalaureate has made Wellington more attractive to pupils from

continental Europe, notably Germany."

For it is important to note that foreign pupils are most common in the sixth form, often studying in Britain in the hope of winning a place at a UK or US university. Increasingly, some come at age 13 to study for GCSEs, and now, at Wellington, IB courses, as well.

David Lyscom, a former diplomat who now heads the Independent Schools Council, notes that foreign scholars are part of a pipeline that delivers some of the most successful students at Britain's universities.

He says: "These pupils come to our schools and go on to our universities and build long-term links with the UK," he says. "It strengthens our political and economic influence for the future."

Vicky Tuck, principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College, says that of her 865 pupils, 20 per cent have overseas addresses, including British parents working abroad. Though girls from Hong Kong, China and Germany are among the most numerous, pupils come to the school from around the world, and she sees quickening

interest from Nigeria, Thailand and India.

Why so? Mr Lyscom says the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment puts UK independents in the top tier worldwide for academic achievement, while studying in Britain adds flawless English.

Many heads say academic league tables and A-level results count more than music, arts and sport in attracting overseas pupils.

Overseas demand for places at many schools exceeds supply. Both Mr Seldon and Mrs Tuck say their priority is to achieve a "desirable" international balance that reflects globalisation, without diluting the "Britishness" of the education they offer.

Cheap telephony and airline tickets, the internet, and cultural convergence have reduced the pain of separation between teenagers and their parents. The challenge for Britain's independent schools is to accommodate overseas demand without compromising the quality – and qualities – that give rise to it. And to overcome the disincentives created by an inappropriate visa regime.



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What the rankings show

ANALYSIS

Simon Briscoe tells the story behind the data

The following pages list more than 500 independent schools arranged by county to act as an aid to parents looking at schools. The accompanying notes (see *box right*) explain the detail in the table, but the heart of the information is the latest A-level exam results.

About 20 per cent of the entries lack this year's results.

Roughly half of those were omitted because fewer than 20 pupils did the exams (which means results can be particularly erratic from year to year), while the others choose not to have their results published. Gaps for earlier years' data reflect similar factors.

The reasons for schools not showing results are many and varied. Some have very publicly withdrawn in principle, often citing (the obvious point) that exams do not fully encapsulate what the school does. Others slip quietly away.

In many respects, the protest is a weak one, as the pupil-level data of all schools, not just the independents, is released in due course by the government and published in aggregated form by the FT each March.

The eventual publication of the results means we can say something about the academic performance of the schools that choose not to list – see the final column of the table for the results in 2008's Top 1,000 Report.

We think this is a vital

piece of information for prospective parents and others.

The main difference between the data for this summer's exams that are available now and those available in a few months is that re-marks and appeals are not yet counted. This means the schools that have not released data now might, despite their protestations, actually be among the most obsessed about the results, as they are awaiting re-marks before putting figures in the public domain.

Those schools that chose not to show results last year were pretty evenly spread across the spectrum of academic achievement. There were five in the top 100 of our full survey of all schools – Eton, St Paul's boys, Tonbridge, Manchester Grammar and Radley.

The majority of "rebels", however, were not in the upper half of March's Top 1,000 Schools Report, which is based on the analysis of A-level results of 2,000 state and independent schools. This means that the majority of those withholding results had less success to proclaim.

Many of those not participating say that their results are available to prospective parents and that summaries are on school websites.

However, results often appear in highly summarised form and are not usually comparable between schools.

This makes life harder for parents seeking an honest and open set of data before choosing where to invest £100,000 or more in a child's education.

There is some evidence that the schools that have chosen not to show for this

International Baccalaureate School results

School	Town	Candidates	IB Higher Level Results					Candidates at A level
			% at Grade 7	% at Grade 6	% at Grade 5	% at 7 + half of 6 #	% at 7, 6 or 5 #	
ACS Cobham IS	Cobham	59	13	38	36	32	87	
ACS Egham IS	Egham	23	9	32	45	25	86	
ACS Hillingdon IS	Uxbridge	22	18	22	43	29	83	
Ardingly College*	Haywards Heath	45	24	44	23	46	91	
Bedford High Girls*	Bedford	25	28	39	22	47	89	
Bedford School*	Bedford	48	39	21	23	56	96	
Brentwood School*	Brentwood	37	12	37	31	30	80	
Ellesmere College*	Ellesmere	29	3	18	48	12	69	
Felsted School*	Felsted	29	11	33	32	28	77	
Fettes College*	Edinburgh	44	40	25	19	53	84	
Gresham's School*	Holt	11	15	38	29	34	82	
Haileybury*	Hertford	47	18	45	23	40	86	
King William's College	Isle of Man	62	na	na	na	38	85	
King's College	Wimbledon	135	47	38	11	66	96	
Malvern College*	Malvern	80	29	42	17	50	88	
Marlymorn School	Kingston	44	10	32	38	26	79	
N London College*	Edgware	32	65	32	2	81	99	
Oakham School*	Oakham	60	39	38	17	58	136	
Rossall School*	Fleetwood	32	14	21	28	24	62	
Rydal Penrhos*	Colwyn Bay	49	7	34	43	24	84	
Sherborne Girls*	Sherborne	8	25	46	21	48	92	
Sidcot School*	Winscombe	14	12	43	17	33	71	
SouthBank IS	London	50	11	28	38	25	77	
St Dunstan's College*	Catford	15	21	28	36	35	85	
St Helen's School*	Northwood	3	11	56	33	39	100	
St Leonard's	St Andrews	52	14	32	30	30	76	
Taunton School*	Taunton	15	20	43	15	41	78	
Godolphin & Lalymer*	Hammersmith	25	43	33	20	60	96	
Warminster School*	Warminster	18	13	22	39	24	74	
Whitgift School*	S Croydon	31	41	39	14	61	113	
Wind're St Anne's	Wimdermere	37	5	23	34	16	62	
Worth School*	Crawley	27	26	32	37	42	95	

These marks are deemed by some schools to be the equivalent of A level grade A and A/B respectively. * Also offers A Levels. Data collated from figures supplied by ISC, Malvern College and FT research. Schools that offer the IB (according to the ISC) but have not submitted results to either the ISC or Malvern College: The Bolitho School, Manchester Grammar School, North London International School, Westbourne School, Stanborough Secondary School, Liverpool College, Cheltenham Ladies' College, Red Maids' School, King Edward's School, Queen Ethelburga's College, Perse School for Girls, St Clare's, Leighton Park School, Pangbourne College, St Edward's School, The Stephen Perse Sixth Form College, Sherborne School, The Abbey School, Box Hill School, Wellington College, Plymouth College, Scarborough College, The Grammar School at Leeds, Sevenoaks School, The Royal High School GDST, Cobham Hall School.

first time this year are biased towards those with less than glowing exam results – a disproportionate number appear in the academic lower half of the nation's schools.

Schools feature in the lower ranks of exam performance for several reasons, such as lower quality intake, a rise in students for whom English is not the native tongue, or a focus on special needs pupils. It is mistaken to assume that

fewer grade As point to poor teaching or some other school failing, but until we have decent measures of a school's value-added – not something that is on the horizon – the tables we present will have to suffice.

They do at least give a strong indication about the academic environment in a school and whether a child is likely to be able to handle the pace – or get over the entry hurdles in the first place.

How the tables are put together

The tables featured on the following four pages show the A-level exam results for most independent schools in England, Wales and Scotland, organised geographical area, writes **Simon Briscoe**.

They aim to help parents make an informed decision on where to send their children. It can also help schools benchmark their own performance.

We also show some data on Highers for Scottish schools and a separate table of International Baccalaureate (IB) results.

The general studies A-level has been excluded (except for the majority of Scottish schools where we are unable to confirm that this is the case). Candidates are those who have sat A-levels or IB at the school.

We use the UCAS points system to calculate both the average points achieved by candidates and the average points achieved "per entry". A-levels are awarded UCAS points as follows: A=120 points, B=100, C=80, D=60 and E=40 points. Points per candidate measures the quantity of work done and points per entry, the quality.

The difference between, and value of the two measures, can be seen in an example: take the case of two candidates, A who sits five exams and achieves an A, B, D and two Es; and B, who takes three and achieves three As. Both candidates score a total of 360 points but A achieves only 72 per exam or "entry", whereas B achieves 120.

The two measurements are z-scored (a formula that creates numbers reflecting the range of the points). We then take three times the points-per-entry z-score (a measure of the quality) and add to one times the points-

per-candidate z-score (a measure of the quantity). This final number, the "FT score", is used to rank the schools.

No rank is shown for schools with fewer than 20 candidates as the scores can be particularly volatile in such cases.

We also list the FT rank from the three previous years, along with some previous years' data. Due to the boycott of the tables by some schools, others will see their rank improve without any absolute improvement in results.

We show the percentage of A and AB grades and the average number of A-levels sat by pupils, as well as the pupil numbers, fees and boarder and gender split.

Most of the data is supplied by the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and is supplemented by figures from Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) and FT research based on the schools' own data. The fees are from the ISC census conducted during August 2009 where available, otherwise from their January 2009 census.

An asterisk (*) after a school's name denotes that it also features in our table of IB results, a hash (#) signifies the school chose to withhold its A-level results. Most other unranked schools had fewer than 20 candidates. An exclamation mark (!) denotes that the data was retrieved from the school or its web site.

An at sign (@) denotes that results were from the SCIS and may include General Studies, a plus (+) denotes that the school also offers Scottish Highers.

Data compiled by Judith Pizer of Jeff Head Associates



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Top Independent Schools

Rank 09	School name	Town	Rank 08	Rank 07	Rank 06	Points/entry 09	Points/entry 08	Points/candidate 09	Points/candidate 08	Candidates	Pupils 11+	% A grades	Subjects/candidate	Total pupils	% boys	% board	Day fees 000's £pa	Board fees 000's £pa	FT 1000 Rank 08		
Bedfordshire																					
221	Bedford High School Girls	Bedford	171	155	102	100	329	344	80	127	47	70	3.3	751	0	18	10.6	19.9	229		
157	Bedford Modern School	Bedford	216	222	295	105	102	321	306	139	141	46	81	3.1	1166	79	0	10.0	407		
221	Bedford School * 1	Bedford			101		329				91	154	44	73	3.3	675	100	36	14.4	22.6	219
178	Dame Alice Harpur School	Bedford	276	212	239	103	97	327	291	92	92	49	75	3.2	852	0	0	10.0	593		
Berkshire																					
	Bearwood College #	Wokingham	381				84	241		34				486	71	16	15.1	26.0			
215	Bradfield College	Reading	234	254	239	101	100	325	313	122	145	41	73	3.2	706	66	84	21.9	27.4	449	
	Brigids School Windsor	Windsor			423	101	88	224	228	9	11	45	70	2.2	241	6	0	12.5			
361	Clares Court Schools	Maidenhead	376	398	423	84	84	233	244	50	57	17	38	2.8	790	59	0	10.9			
33	Downe House	Thatcham	42	44	28	113	110	370	375	81	82	68	95	3.3	568	0	96	20.2	28.0	146	
	Elvian School	Reading			477									178	80	0	9.5				
	Eton College #	Windsor			6					262				1311	100	100		28.1	10		
	Heathfield St Mary's #	Ascot	302	74	120	95		286		34				195	0	100		27.0	880		
	Hurst Lodge School	Ascot			389	114	267			3	9	71	100	2.3	213	10	5	12.1	19.7		
268	Leighton Park School	Reading	249	287	347	99	100	294	301	67	83	46	69	3.0	483	65	32	16.7	25.4	363	
335	Licensed Victuallers'	Ascot	380	391	382	92	84	247	245	83	96	29	60	2.7	890	58	19	13.0	22.8		
212	Luckley - Oakfield School	Wokingham	217	122	202	102	101	307	317	24	27	47	72	3.0	287	0	7	12.7	21.7	359	
	Padworth College	Reading	332		105	92	349	277	16	54	57	81	3.3	107	59	78	9.0	20.8	460		
	Pangbourne College #	Reading	348	408	389	90	264			65				406	70	44	17.5	25.0	978		
173	Queen Anne's School	Reading	260	238	202	103	99	340	307	54	55	44	79	3.3	316	0	43	17.1	25.2	239	
245	Reading Blue Coat School	Reading	231	290	183	100	101	300	303	106	108	38	75	3.0	676	91	0	11.3	293		
119	St Gabriel's	Newbury	123	224	106	106	332	328	32	30	59	80	3.1	478	0	0	11.5	250			
178	St George's School	Ascot	101	145	34	103	108	334	334	48	54	45	81	3.2	268	0	43	17.2	26.6	237	
	St Joseph's Convent	Reading	289	417	98	96	293	294	18	18	28	67	3.0	284	1	0	10.5	345			
	St Mary's School Ascot	Ascot	15	34	11	114	114	366	374	48	47	77	94	3.2	366	0	97	18.9	26.6	35	
137	The Abbey School	Reading	106	61	38	105	107	331	335	79	75	56	81	3.1	1034	0	0	11.5	148		
271	The Marist Senior School	Ascot	112		38	108	104	313	311	24	25	44	69	3.2	328	0	0	9.7			
64	Wellington College	Crowthorne	115	105	183	111	107	353	329	188	195	62	92	3.2	888	72	81	23.5	27.7	193	
Buckinghamshire																					
	Bury Lawn School	Milton Keynes			456					1				236	66	0	9.2				
	Pipers Corner School #	High Wycombe	302	295						47				516	0	6	12.2	20.1	939		
	St Mary's School	Gerrards Cross	202	99	98	298	306	8	8	33	75	3.0	333	0	0	11.8					
	Stowe School #	Buckingham	271	338						183				719	69	86	19.9	26.8	679		
	Wycombe Abbey School	High Wycombe	4	3	1	117	117	408	420	85	83	90	97	3.5	556	0	94	20.5	27.3	3	
Cambridge and Peterborough																					
	Cambridge Cent 6th Fm #	Cambridge	384	373	347		84	216		142				204	55	59	16.6	26.1	952		
	CATS Cambridge #	Cambridge								315				433	50	88	21.6	29.8			
237	Kimbolton School	Huntingdon	222	178	166	100	101	312	314	83	90	46	71	3.1	945	52	6	11.3	18.7	358	
	Perse School for Girls #	Cambridge	3	8	6	116	456	40		69	1	0	12.7	2							
	Peterborough High Sch #	Peterborough	345	403						428	30	6	10.9	20.2	493						
171	St Mary's School	Cambridge	106	81	268	103	106	337	359	41	53	48	77	3.3	623	0	9	12.1	25.6	82	
259	The King's School Ely	Ely	305	325	295	98	95	318	284	64	72	44	70	3.2	445	60	37	15.6	22.5	616	
145	The Leys School	Cambridge	260	193	87	104	99	341	306	90	104	49	80	3.3	542	62	48	18.5	24.7	449	
39	The Perse School	Cambridge	28	49	34	112	113	365	369	112	113	73	91	3.2	701	88	0	12.9	41		
	Stephen Perse 6th FC #	Cambridge								94	4	0	12.6								
237	Wisbech Grammar	Wisbech	319	314	309	100	93	324	285	68	69	43	70	3.2	687	53	0	9.6	719		
Channel Islands																					
	Elizabeth College #	Guernsey								62				824	92	0	7.4				
205	Ladies' College	Guernsey	188	176	151	102	103	327	317	47	47	51	71	3.2	544	0	0	6.0			
254	Victoria College	St Helier	224	191		99	101	315	313	78	175	42	72	3.2	704	100	0	4.1			
Cheshire																					
339	Abbey Gate College	Chester	328	423	92		235			27	28	25	57	2.6	467	55	0	9.1			
295	Alderley Edge Girls	Alderley Edge	220	370	357	97	101	279	312	53	57	37	63	2.9	604	0	0	8.3	260		
	Hammond School	Chester			463	76	113			6	56	0	33	1.5	225	31	33	10.0	21.1		
76	King's School	Chester	167	116	120	110	103	348	336	98	98	98	98	3.3	948	72	0	9.6	137		
	Mostyn House School	Neston			473		87	222		11				151	67	0	10.9				
73	The Grange School	Northwich	55	103	53	110	110	341	355	101	106	64	91	3.1	1177	55	0	8.5	124		
185	The King's School	Macclesfield	234	203	224	103	100	317	309	122	128	45	76	3.1	1508	56	0	8.4	321		
62	The Queen's School	Chester	199	98	166	111	103	344	299	53	51	66	91	3.1	587	0	0	9.4	219		
Cornwall																					
245	Truro High School Girls	Truro	154	246	253	99	104	323	331	30	29	34	67	3.3	405	1	8	9.8	18.4	187	
149	Truro School	Truro	209	221	183	105	102	324	310	100	104	54	80	3.1	813	64	4	10.5	20.0	330	
Cumbria																					
300	Abbot's Priory St Monica's	Carlisle	309	275	357	95	94	291	283	42	43	36	61	3.1	544	56	0	10.6	466		
93	Casterton School I	Kirkby Lons	24	183	136	107	112	363	392	26	32	57	82	3.4	326	9	39	14.1	23.6	25	
182	Chetwynde School	Barrow-in-F	273		103	97	322	306	33	34	54	78	3.1	369	52	0	7.0	323			
	Lime House School	Carlisle			389	96	91	376	295	15	40	39	64	3.9	209	60	53	7.4	16.5	942	
	Sedburgh School #	Sedburgh			306	309				113				536	73	86	18.8	25.5	505		
334	St Bees School	St Bees	282	290	278	89	97	293	300	45	69	32	60	3.3	304	58	39	13.9	23.1	297	
Derbyshire																					
	Abbotsholme School #	Uttoxeter	331	406	461		93	273		41				334	62	43	16.4	24.0	862		
231	Derby Grammar School	Derby	202	316	403	101	102	303	318	24	27	43	72	3.0	307	96	0	9.9	166		
129	Derby High School	Derby	170	296	166	106	105	322	314	40	41	54	83	3.0	583	16	0	8.9	237		
	Mount St Mary's College #	Sheffield	365	377	357		88	257		37				383	59	14	10.4	20.0			
	Ockbrook School	Ockbrook	60	83	202	99	110	329	362	15	17	48	68	3.3	410	8	7	9.1	16.8	116	
113	Repton School	Derby	97	81	120	106	107	344	352	143	157	53	83	3.2	635	56	73	18.6	25.1	233	
	Trent College #	Nottingham	245	311	309		100	294		111				1155	59	13	13.0	16			

Top Independent Schools

Rank 09	School name	Town	Rank 08	Rank 07	Rank 06	Points/entry 09	Points/entry 08	Points/candidate 09	Points/candidate 08	Candidates	Pupils 17+	% A or B grades	Subjects/candidate	Total pupils	% boys	% board	Day fees 000's £pa	Board fees 000's £pa	FT1000 Rank 08		
291	Felsted School * 1	Dunmow	304	242	268	96	95	288	291	68	108	36	64	3.0	483	58	84	18.7	23.4	561	
285	Friends' School	Saffron W			372	97	92	292	251	20	28	35	68	3.0	392	58	15	13.7	21.3		
	Gosfield School	Halstead															199	55	3	11.0	14.8
141	New Hall School	Chelmsford	171	259	239	104	100	349	385	62	79	50	80	3.4	954	34	20	14.9	22.4	527	
	Peniel Academy	Brentwood			102	109	111	408	411	8	9	63	80	3.8	141	43	0	5.8			
Gloucestershire																					
	Cheltenham College #	Cheltenham	181	235	183	103	103	325	325	139	119	79	94	3.6	867	0	74	20.3	29.9	39	
16	Cheltenham Ladies' Coll	Cheltenham	18	11	15	114	113	407	389	141	159	79	94	3.6	867	0	74	20.3	29.9	39	
196	Dean Close School	Cheltenham	154	107	224	102	103	333	355	102	125	46	77	3.3	488	57	58	19.9	26.2	179	
335	King's School	Gloucester	327	368	434	90	94	268	260	24	26	24	24	3.0	485	56	0	14.8	656		
323	Randscomb College	Cirencester	337	331	309	92	91	283	286	23	34	30	59	3.1	418	53	24	17.9	24.0	716	
221	St Edward's School	Cheltenham	285	349	338	101	96	314	302	63	65	47	74	3.1	486	54	0	11.2	584		
279	Westonbirt School	Tetbury	184	368	166	97	103	307	318	30	42	42	64	3.2	246	0	67	17.5	26.1	302	
	Wycliffe College #	Stonehouse	345	323	382			90		284	104				415	68	57	15.9	28.8	700	
Hampshire																					
	Alton Convent School	Alton	118		183	111	105	384	352	11	11	71	87	3.5	485	14	0	9.5		168	
278	Bedales School	Petersfield	316	298	253	97	93	306	289	88	93	35	67	3.1	457	48	70	21.8	27.7	457	
159	Burder's College	Petersfield	127	151	183	105	106	321	332	82	82	48	83	3.1	980	57	0	10.7	209		
129	Farnborough Hill	Farnborough	64	48	338	106	110	323	349	25	27	54	84	3.0	523	0	0	10.3	111		
	Romsey		364	404	467			88		258	27				764	52	8	12.6	22.4		
105	King Edward VI School	Southampton	92	35	102	107	108	332	333	133	131	62	83	3.1	972	62	0	10.9		104	
196	Lord Wandsworth College	Hook	237	306	338	103	100	316	312	71	76	47	77	3.1	543	69	44	17.6	23.6	316	
133	Portsmouth High GDST	Southsea	268	146	151	105	99	340	298	41	41	58	80	3.2	542	0	0	8.9	354		
254	Ryde School	Ryde	316	254	268	99	94	308	280	67	77	41	71	3.1	525	51	8	9.6	20.5	535	
260	Salesian College	Farnborough	327	333	253	99	92	301	296	45	45	43	74	3.0	595	98	0	8.2	416		
	Sherfield	Hook								7					465	59	0	12.3			
322	St John's College	Southsea	346	345	372	91	89	301	286	49	66	30	58	3.3	689	66	18	8.6	20.0	577	
49	St Swithun's School	Winchester	37	26	28	112	112	352	361	60	67	72	92	3.2	477	0	48	14.4	23.7	39	
	Stanbridge Earls School	Romsey			479	62	51	76	69	9	22	9	1.2	181	82	81	17.9	24.0			
84	Portsmouth Grammar Sch	Portsmouth	88	79	87	109	108	361	348	143	142	59	88	3.3	1146	60	0	11.8		114	
6	Winchester College !	Winchester	2		6	114	114	445	515	144	145	78	94	3.9	684	100	99	27.4	28.8	7	
Hereford and Worcester																					
	Bredon School	Tewkesbury			480	60				2	17	0	1.0	244	76	41	14.7	23.0			
98	Bromsgrove School	Bromsgrove	63	125	87	107	109	351	370	160	219	58	84	3.3	805	55	43	11.8	25.4	167	
138	Hereford Cathedral School	Hereford	264	310	239	105	99	337	305	60	64	57	78	3.2	522	50	0	10.5	382		
	Luton School	Leominster								21					288	57	25	9.5	19.6		
	Malvern College * #	Malvern								82	182				632	57	81	18.6	29.9	354	
73	Malvern St James	Great Malvern	142	79	63	108	104	386	353	57	78	64	83	3.6	357	51	18	12.9	28.3	182	
208	RGS W & The Alice Ottley	Worcester	280	203	224	102	97	321	294	134	135	45	77	3.2	1386	57	0	9.2	460		
	St Mary's Convent School	Worcester			382	93	85	320	229	9	9	23	55	3.4	366	17	0	9.3			
	St Michael's College	Terbury Wells			90	84	234	234	18	44	26	43	2.6	104	64	99		19.4			
187	The King's School	Worcester	165	162	202	103	105	314	320	129	130	48	78	3.0	923	54	0	10.2		307	
Hertfordshire																					
	Aldenham School #	Borehamwood			375	443				79					697	79	18	16.8	24.4		
110	Berkhamsted School	Berkhamsted	124	127	136	107	106	338	329	155	167	52	85	3.2	1522	56	2	15.6	24.8	233	
79	Bishop of Stortford Coll	Bishop of Stort	68	89	202	110	109	350	353	90	100	64	88	3.2	508	58	32	14.8	19.8	172	
25	Haber Aske's Sch Boys'	Borehamwood	31	29	28	114	113	363	353	156	158	78	95	3.2	1114	100	0	12.9	30		
27	Haber Aske's Sch Girls	Borehamwood	19	12	20	114	115	355	355	137	136	80	95	3.1	1132	0	0	10.7	27		
161	Halleybury * #	Hertford	129		104	106	332	336	92	149	54	78	3.2	748	59	69	19.0	25.3	134		
73	Immanuel College	Bushey	161	237	136	111	105	328	317	60	62	67	90	3.0	490	52	0	12.4	221		
17	Mercantile Tailors' School	Northwood	35	18	20	112	112	372	360	139	138	78	94	3.3	842	100	0	14.7	54		
269	Purcell School of Music	Watford	231	85	166	99	101	293	307	30	31	46	71	3.0	175	35	75	23.1	29.6	302	
100	Queenswood	Hatfield	53	58	87	107	110	359	371	47	55	57	84	3.4	411	0	50	20.2	26.1	89	
	Sherrardswood School	Welwyn			456	98	81	232	189	8	9	26	74	2.4	409	54	0	12.1			
40	St Albans High for Girls	St Albans	32	67	75	112	113	367	353	77	76	73	90	3.3	956	0	0	11.5	61		
57	St Albans School	St Albans	71	53	53	111	108	355	359	126	122	64	91	3.2	764	96	0	12.9	80		
	St Christopher School #	Letchworth			357	309				47					537	62	9	14.0	24.6	363	
313	St Columba's College	St Albans	314	233	389	94	94	288	289	79	79	26	63	3.1	857	100	0	10.4	360		
347	St Edmund's College	Ware	302	334	326	87	94	280	301	74	91	21	53	3.2	818	63	16	13.4	21.7	418	
97	St Francis' College	Letchworth	103	334	136	107	106	359	354	42	48	60	84	3.4	456	0	6	10.8	21.2	89	
50	St Margaret's School	Bushey	190	216	151	111	102	369	323	51	63	64	92	3.3	438	0	13	12.2	22.0	239	
354	Princess Helena College	Hitchin	309	372	87	95	248	271	28	31	19	48	2.9	194	0	31	15.2	22.0			
154	Royal Masonic Sch Girls	Rickmans' th	190	203	183	105	103	322	310	71	79	52	79	3.1	786	0	16	13.4	21.4	497	
302	Tring Park for Perf Arts	Tring	345	309	98		221			41	63	35	71	2.2	286	26	71	19.7	27.5		
Kent																					
215	Ashford School	Ashford	134	254	224	100	105	339	347	63	86	49	73	3.4	857	42	14	13.4	24.3	307	
	Beechwood Sacred Heart	Tunbridge W	357	352	166	98	88	326	275	16	22	38	74	3.3	357	28	13	13.6	22.5	672	
41	Benenden School	Cranbrook	40	109	34	112	111	366	370	90	95	73	91	3.3	522	0	100	27	27.5	60	
339	Bethany School !	Cranbrook	372	402	434	90	87	270	239	54	75	23	56	3.0	427	68	26	15.7	23.6		
	Cobham Hall School #	Gravesend			183	372									175	0	42	16.5	24.9		
	Combe Bank School	Sundridge			417	68	95	193	280	18	20	12	29	2.8	390	3	0	13.4			
	Dover College #	Dover	357	383	456		91	231		55											

Top Independent Schools

Rank 09	School name	Town	Rank 08	Rank 07	Rank 06	Pts/entry 09	Pts/entry 08	Pts/candidate 09	Pts/candidate 08	Candidates	Pupils 17+	% A or B grades	Subjects/candidate	Total pupils	% boys	% board	Day fees 000's £pa	Board fees 000's £pa	FT 1000 Rank 08	
242	Northwood College	Northwood	149	155	151	100	105	309	318	53	53	45	70	31	820	0	0	12.0	163	
36	Notting Hill & Ealing High	Ealing	38	100	53	113	113	353	348	70	71	76	94	31	876	0	0	11.7	47	
44	Queen's Gate School	South Ken	114	74	120	112	108	351	313	33	33	73	91	31	433	0	0	14.0	263	
292	Saint Augustine's Priory	Ealing				96	291			34		39	65	30				10.3	265	
231	St Benedict's School *	Ealing	262	284	309	101	99	314	304	93	98	41	73	31	954	86	0	12.1	311	
56	St Helen's School *	Northwood	48	38	112	111	344	355	86	93	67	92	3.1	1132	0	0	11.5	150		
345	St James Senior Girls'	Hammersmith	82	183	110	109	322	323	17	18	52	96	2.9	264	0	0	11.5	150		
2	St Paul's Girls' School	Hammersmith	5	2	4	118	118	429	414	108	108	93	98	3.6	714	0	0	15.6	6	
37	Arts Educational Sch #	Hounslow	204	326	102	102	312	323	24	22	74	56	82	3.2	998	12	0	8.0	212	
37	Godolphin and Latimer *	Hammersmith	29	38	113	113	364	368	65	90	72	92	3.2	721	0	0	14.3	52		
158	The John Lyon School	Harrow	82	134	63	105	108	322	349	67	72	49	82	3.1	584	100	0	13.1	80	
3	N London Collegiate *	Edgware	5	4	118	118	411	406	85	114	91	99	3.5	1071	0	0	11.9	8		
3	Swaminarayan School	Neasden	403	91	93	333	280	6	6	8	36	59	3.7	448	57	0	9.0			
Manchester (Greater)																				
	Abbey College #	Manchester									94			140	66	0	9.6	763		
243	Bolton School Boys'	Bolton	161	141	87	100	105	307	324	122	120	48	72	31	1068	100	0	9.2	140	
86	Bolton School Girls'	Bolton	129	69	120	109	106	341	329	96	102	64	88	31	1289	12	0	9.2	174	
345	Bridgewater School	Manchester				309	89	94	253	298	21	20	52	2.9	521	56	0	8.4		
251	Bury Grammar Boys	Bury	245	356	239	99	99	314	321	57	62	40	71	3.2	704	100	0	8.0	215	
127	Bury Grammar Girls	Bury	104	161	63	106	107	335	342	73	72	56	82	3.2	998	12	0	8.0	122	
106	Cheadle Hulme School	Cheadle	165	151	183	107	104	334	325	133	134	58	84	3.1	1355	54	0	8.9	179	
167	Chetham's Music	Manchester	231	142	166	105	102	297	281	57	64	56	81	2.8	289	51	0	23.3	301	
	Culcheth Hall	Altrincham									198			156	6	0	7.6			
	Manchester Grammar #	Manchester				16	28				198			147	100	0	9.2	15		
28	Manchester High Girls	Manchester	32	23	38	114	113	360	353	94	95	75	96	3.2	964	0	0	8.9	76	
370	North Cestrian Grammar	Altrincham				419	474	78	238	23	28	13	41	3.0	312	91	0	7.7		
260	Oldham Hulme Gram	Oldham	376	373	347	99	84	311	252	99	98	38	71	3.2	1156	51	0	8.2	827	
245	St Bede's College	Manchester	280	286	295	100	97	302	290	120	129	45	71	3.0	1078	53	0	8.5	414	
132	Stockport Grammar	Stockport	129	170	253	106	106	327	333	126	129	54	81	3.1	1033	55	0	8.5	140	
7	Whitington Girls'	Manchester	13	9	3	118	116	370	363	76	75	90	98	3.1	650	0	0	8.9	25	
Merseyside																				
188	Birkenhead High GDST	Prenton	296	180	136	103	96	312	284	39	51	76	30					9.0	169	
231	Birkenhead School	Wirral	217	166	224	100	100	320	327	51	51	40	72	3.2	755	82	0	9.0	431	
307	Liverpool College	Liverpool	359	370	183	96	90	263	237	55	59	36	65	2.7	795	58	0	8.6	74	
119	Merchant Taylors' Sch	Liverpool	245	271	166	106	99	340	311	68	73	52	83	3.2	778	50	0	8.2	193	
196	Merchant Taylors' Girls	Liverpool	149	162	151	103	105	320	333	76	79	46	77	3.1	893	8	0	8.4	182	
	St Mary's College #	Liverpool	342	354	357						66			813	53	0	8.4	741		
Norfolk																				
201	Gresham School *	Holt	234	258	183	102	100	330	317	77	99	48	74	3.2	477	55	56	18.5	24.2	390
	Hethersett Old Hall	Norwich				456					19			194	8	5	10.6	19.8		
349	Langley School !	Norwich	350	360	434	87	88	263	295	58	65	24	51	3.0	441	69	20	10.3	21.0	
188	Norwich High Girls	Norwich	79	94	166	103	109	314	338	71	76	49	77	3.0	876	0	0	8.9	113	
68	Norwich School	Norwich	82	120	110	109	345	339	139	139	66	89	3.1	727	82	0	10.5	127		
	Theford Grammar	Theford				268	98	104	295	319	15	16	38	71	303	59	0	9.5		
North east (Northumberland, Tyne-side, Teeside and Durham)																				
266	Barnard Castle School	Barnard Castle	330	353	389	99	92	303	283	67	81	43	68	3.1	752	63	25	10.2	17.3	468
91	Central Newcastle High	Newcastle	88	158	120	109	108	339	341	77	85	60	88	3.1	916	0	0	9.3	191	
275	Dame Allan's Boys'	Newcastle	319	266	253	98	94	300	281	59	61	36	71	3.1	531	100	0	8.7	437	
231	Dame Allan's Girls'	Newcastle	209	134	120	101	102	308	317	52	53	40	74	3.1	413	0	0	8.7	196	
225	Durham High Girls	Durham	179	261	224	102	104	303	313	50	52	50	74	3.0	600	0	0	9.3	209	
331	Durham School	Durham	369	389	423	92	89	263	250	59	61	30	55	2.9	431	71	18	14.0	20.0	805
368	Longside Towers Sch	Berwick	390	357	81	76	211	182	22	24	19	51	2.6	272	56	10	10.3	21.7		
293	Newcastle Church High	Newcastle	295	323	278	101	96	298	279	56	60	49	75	2.9	525	0	0	9.2	491	
290	Palam Hall School	Darlington	368	349	326	95	87	318	262	32	42	64	3.3	1258	2	10.6	20.6	726		
62	Royal Grammar School	Newcastle	93	39	63	111	109	347	328	175	179	70	90	3.1	356	79	0	9.3	116	
320	Sunderland High	Sunderland	351	396	443	93	89	275	265	30	30	29	63	3.0	516	56	0	8.0	702	
310	Teesdale High School	Stockton	288	142	347	94	96	293	301	33	40	43	66	3.1	368	14	0	10.1	319	
	The King's School #	Tynemouth				347					99			820	65	0	9.3	534		
	Westfield School	Newcastle	375	367	372	98	86	246	216	14	18	54	66	2.5	319	0	0	9.7		
188	Yarm School	Yarm	144	266	202	103	105	324	337	103	108	43	77	3.2	1003	62	0	9.9	157	
Northamptonshire																				
137	Northampton High	Northampton	134	173	53	106	106	316	324	45	45	54	84	3.0	731	0	0	9.5	257	
	Northampton Gram	Pitsford	312	290	434	107	94	340	285	16	30	63	84	3.2	271	61	0	10.6	330	
42	Dundle School	Peterborough	49	39	75	109	110	411	376	187	210	62	88	3.8	1067	60	79	16.9	26.0	44
203	Wellingborough !	Wellingb'gh	298	309	103		300			70	75	41	72	2.9	904	56	0	11.3	437	
Nottinghamshire																				
124	Nottingham Girls' High	Nottingham	54	54	28	106	111	333	340	110	110	58	82	3.1	1092	0	0	9.3	78	
115	Nottingham Coll	Nottingham	82	93	53	106	108	339	346	108	108	53	83	3.2	1011	100	0	10.5	58	
154	Welbeck Defence Coll	Loughborough	134	242	326	105	106	319	324	199	254	54	79	3.0	315	77	100	8.6	8.6	
	Worsop College #	Worsop	298	340	253		96			277		86		406	61	45	15.0	22.2	577	
Oxfordshire																				
52	Abingdon School	Abingdon	43	20	38	110	109	371	393	133	140	66	90	3.4	1120	100	0	13.4	27.4	38
	Bloxham School #	Banbury									72			422	65	51	19.6	25.5	632	
321	Cokehorpe School	Witney	324	408	417	93	90	270	274	52	63	27	59	2.9	664	68	0	13.5	652	
101	D'Overbroeck's College	Oxford	176	266	136	107	103	346	332	110	157	61	84	3.2	400	56	38	18.3	26.9	396
31	Headington School	Oxford	39	31	46	112	111	396	371	114	135									

Top Independent Schools

Rank 09	School name	Town	Rank 08	Rank 07	Rank 06	Pts/entry 09	Pts/entry 08	Pts/candidate 09	Pts/candidate 08	Candidates	Pupils 17+	% A or B grades	Subjects/candidate	Total pupils	% boys	% board	Day fees 000's £/p	Board fees 000's £/p	FT 1000 Rank 08	
326	St Teresa's School	Dorking	249	166	166	90	99	303	322	39	47	25	56	3.4	371	0	20	12.9	21.9	286
286	The Royal School	Haslemere	278	239	97	103	301	321	28	37	43	69	3.1	396	5	14	13.5	25.5		
71	Tormead School	Guildford	76	74	111	110	109	345	344	56	57	62	90	3.1	746	0	11.2		92	
86	Woldingham School	Caterham	64	65	53	109	109	355	364	82	94	57	88	3.3	513	0	62	15.4	25.3	157
	Yehudi Menuhin School	Cobham				326	101	192	229	10	16	58	68	1.9	67	45	81	37.1	38.1	
Sussex																				
280	Ardingly College * 1	Hayward H'th				357	97	312		52	103	37	63	3.2	791	60	31	18.9	25.2	368
151	Battle Abbey School	Battle	152	423	105	105	333	328	33	35	50	83	3.2	379	48	9	12.6	20.8	382	
192	Brighton and Hove High	Brighton	137	168	166	103	104	313	354	28	31	56	73	3.0	655	0	8.9		187	
32	Brighton College	Brighton	21	66	151	113	113	377	387	153	174	69	95	3.4	731	62	25	16.5	25.6	54
111	Burgess Hill Sch Girls	Burgess Hill	115	158	87	106	106	354	344	49	70	57	81	3.3	714	5	8	12.4	21.6	293
192	Christ's Hospital	Horsham	249	186	151	103	99	317	308	125	127	48	75	3.1	827	50	100	20.4	297	
	Eastbourne College #	Eastbourne				129	183			148					630	61	50	16.3	24.6	404
115	Farlington School	Horsham	296	289	224	107	95	329	295	24	27	54	85	3.1	455	0	6	13.0	20.6	539
	Greenfields School	Forest Row				183				105					131	60	21	10.2	17.6	
	Hurstpierpoint College #	Hassocks				283				105					545	59	17.9	24.4	489	
92	Lancing College	Lancing	71	44	102	107	107	369	376	107	118	57	85	3.4	690	65	18.7	26.8	73	
	Lavant House	Chichester				309	103	91	340	280	7	11	52	7.8	3.1	159	0	11.2	19.8	
	Lewes Old Grammar #	Lewes	189	410	101	101	340			24					409	65	0	14.6	280	
327	Moir House Girls	Eastbourne	289	358	309	91	94	294	329	41	58	35	62	3.2	349	1	24	13.6	23.6	283
	Newlands School	Seaford				80	133			3	9	20	40	1.7	297	57	6	10.0	22.5	
	Our Lady of Sion	Worthing	272	277	102	100	99	300	285	15	18	40	69	3.0	530	48	0	9.2	338	
	Roedean School #	Brighton	74	85	38		106	385		114					380	0	17	16.4	30.4	51
359	Seaford College	Petworth	378	397	461	84	85	245	235	64	75	19	45	2.9	548	67	25	14.8	22.7	
	Slindon College	Slindon								1					90	100	37	14.5	23.1	
323	St Bede's Senior	Halsham				309	372	93	265	153	198	35	63	2.9	906	63	36	14.4	23.3	
127	St Leonards-Mayfield	Mayfield	181	162	75	106	103	344	316	39	49	53	84	3.3	411	0	39	15.0	22.6	257
	Worth School * #	Turners Hill	301			94	302			95					468	93	65	18.3	24.8	424
Warwickshire																				
98	King's High School	Warwick	108	129	63	109	107	326	333	64	64	67	86	3.0	611	0	0	9.4		169
342	Kingsley School	Leamington Spa	249	306	224	89	100	273	306	34	34	21	53	3.1	420	0	0	9.9		505
351	Princeshoppe College	Rugby	353	394	357	87	89	257	268	72	73	23	46	3.0	750	54	0	8.4		656
34	Rugby School	Rugby	40	57	46	112	110	375	380	172	177	72	92	3.3	793	55	82	10.7	27.2	71
101	Warwick School	Warwick	97	72	87	106	106	364	373	118	132	54	85	3.4	1110	100	5	9.9	21.2	124
West Midlands																				
140	Bablake School	Coventry	140	134	75	105	106	329	327	131	131	53	80	3.1	876	53	0	8.6		184
218	Edbaston High Girls	Birmingham	212	200	136	102	102	307	302	71	74	45	77	3.0	987	0	0	8.4		418
369	Elmhurst Dance	Birmingham	398		85	88	146	168	22	52	21	50	1.7	190	43	83	17.1	22.8		
	Highclare School	Birmingham			278	98	79	256	193	10	11	38	73	2.6	700	32	0	9.3		
19	King Ed VI High Girls	Birmingham	9	25	6	114	116	373	383	85	86	78	93	3.3	552	0	0	8.8		23
34	King Edward's School	Birmingham	32	72	25	113	113	359	352	123	125	77	93	3.2	842	100	0	9.0		58
218	King Henry VIII	Coventry	124	180	268	101	106	317	330	98	101	45	75	3.1	855	55	0	8.6		161
	Royal Wolverhampton #	Wolverhampton				387	410			73					416	56	25	11.2	22.3	
141	Saint Martin's	Solihull	314	183	105	94	925	282	24	24	53	78	3.1	477	0	0	9.3		360	
145	Solihull School	Solihull	93	139	87	105	106	327	364	156	155	54	50	3.1	1013	70	0	9.5		209
34	St George's - Edbaston	Birmingham	382	454	84	83	252	236	17	29	20	43	3.0	350	77	0	9.3		836	
335	Tettenhall College	Wolverhampton	371	414	423	90	86	276	263	28	36	31	53	3.1	460	60	14	11.5	20.1	
172	Wolverhampton Grammar	Wolverhampton	177	188	268	104	103	324	323	89	90	44	77	3.1	664	59	0	10.3		268
Wiltshire																				
173	Dauntsey's School	Deves	129	114	87	103	105	328	339	137	153	48	77	3.2	791	54	38	16.6	24.5	217
	Marlborough College #	Marlborough				58	102			195					872	63	96	20.8	27.7	114
83	St Mary's School	Shaftesbury	144	242	166	110	106	335	313	44	44	68	3.0	311	0	59	20.2	21.8		
25	St Mary's School Calne	Calne	23	39	46	114	114	374	366	48	49	75	94	3.3	305	0	79	15.0	27.9	49
281	Stonor School	Melksham	319	388	295	97	93	301	285	30	37	34	66	3.1	384	7	36	11.7	20.6	
229	The Godolphin School	Salisbury	118	284	75	101	106	310	342	66	77	40	75	3.1	437	0	36	15.9	22.9	160
341	Warminster School *	Warminster	352	376	417	89	87	274	303	42	80	22	53	3.1	615	60	30	12.3	21.4	896
Yorkshire north and east																				
188	Ampleforth College	York	194	226	202	103	103	315	315	126	137	47	77	3.1	626	73	84	16.5	26.4	204
317	Ashville College	Harrogate	316	345	309	92	93	306	302	69	87	34	56	3.3	803	60	14	10.3	20.3	472
164	Bootham School	York	104	134	102	103	105	338	362	77	87	50	77	3.3	642	59	18	14.2	23.0	199
	Fyling Hall School	Whitby				448				8					170	48	56	6.8	15.6	
	Giggleswick School #	Settle				250	357			93					388	62	60	16.8	24.6	491
182	Harrogate Ladies' Coll 1	Harrogate	184	180	102	102	101	346	348	70	105	53	77	3.4	620	16	25	12.7	25.6	176
298	Hull Collegiate School	Hull	353	386	309	95	89	292	262	60	65	36	61	3.1	849	47	0	9.0		
151	Hymers College	Hull	245	254	75	105	99	333	315	96	100	52	77	3.2	966	52	0	7.9		289
235	Pocklington School	York	199	281	295	101	102	311	319	101	104	44	71	3.1	847	56	16	10.9	19.5	382
124	Queen Ethelburga's Coll	York	115	238	253	103	104	384	374	69	116	55	74	3.7	634	48	9.6	33.0	134	
165	Queen Margaret's	York	184	107	102	104	103	315	321	64	73	57	78	3.0	341	0	42	14.7	23.2	327
	Read School	Selby				434	91	84	264	265	17	28	24	5.7	378	60	0	8.2	17.7	
66	St Peter's School	York	137	91	87	110	106	352	324	116	115	68	3.2	532	54	30	13.7	22.0	172	
82	The Mount School	York	141	149	151	108	105	369	342	35	52	62	87	3.4	384	8	16	13.4	24.0	199
Yorkshire south																				
192	Birkdale School	Sheffield	240	226	202	103	99	322	316	93	100	51	76	3.1	796	95	0	9.9		323

Top Independent Schools

Where best to send young Average?

STATE VERSUS PRIVATE

What is the right place for pupils in the middle range, asks David Turner

Oscar and Lucinda, a middle-income couple much like thousands of others, have three children: gifted Germaine, middle-ability Martin and Special Educational Need Simon. Being middle-income, they can afford only to send one child to private school. Which should it be?

This is a conundrum whose answer depends very heavily on one's view of how well state schools cater to different ability ranges.

Sue Fieldman of *The Good Schools Guide* worries about how someone like Martin would fare in a maintained school. She argues: "A child of average intelligence is far more

likely to get lost in the state secondary system, becoming almost invisible by not being a troublemaker at the bottom of the class or excelling at the top. It is too easy to become just another mediocre pupil and fade into educational oblivion."

But Phil Revell, chief executive of the National Governors' Association,

argues that government targets create an artificial distortion in England's state schools that favours middle-ability pupils – children with an IQ of about 100.

Mr Revell, who represents state school governors, says that assessments by schools inspector Ofsted and other parts of government concentrate on two statistics: how many pupils reach Level Four in national Sats tests at the age of 11, and how many earn five A*'s to C's at GCSE.

"Children just below Level Four get a lot of investment to make sure they get it, and equally in secondary school the children who might get a C instead of a D at GCSE get a lot of investment."

This means, says Mr Revell, that pupils "at either end of the spectrum" – the "very able" and those with Special Educational Need (SEN) – receive fewer resources than they should. Government officials say the state devotes a lot of effort to SEN pupils, but Mr Revell says much of this is relatively lowly-qualified teaching assistants.

Following this logic, the single private school place should go to Germaine or Simon.

Many experts would opt for Germaine, because private schools account for a disproportionately high share of undergraduates at the top universities.

But other experts say Simon should get the place because the independent sector has become much better over the past 20 years at catering to those with special needs. Schools such as Milton Abbey have developed a name as SEN specialists, while still catering to other pupils.

Meanwhile, some observers put a spirited case for putting Martin into private school. They argue that although state schools devote much effort turning GCSE D's into C's, this is a rather limited aspiration for middle-ability pupils, since they could do still better if given the right help.

Richard Cairns, headmaster of Brighton College, a co-educational independent school, thinks middle-ability pupils can achieve much more than middling results if taught in the right way. Mr Cairns claims he can take children of average aptitude, educate them to the point where they can get A's and B's at A-Level, and get them into leading universities.

His optimism is based on a sense that ability is a changeable concept. "I think you can make a child more intelligent. It all comes down to the quality of teaching."

Mr Cairns says: "A child needs to be with other children who are slightly better than themselves" – providing a model of how to succeed, and a source of positive competition.

Some argue middle-ability pupils can achieve much more than middling results if taught in the right way

How far can this logic be pushed? Brighton College is mildly academically selective. King's College School, Wimbledon, is highly so, taking little more than a fifth of the boys who apply for entrance to the senior school at 13.

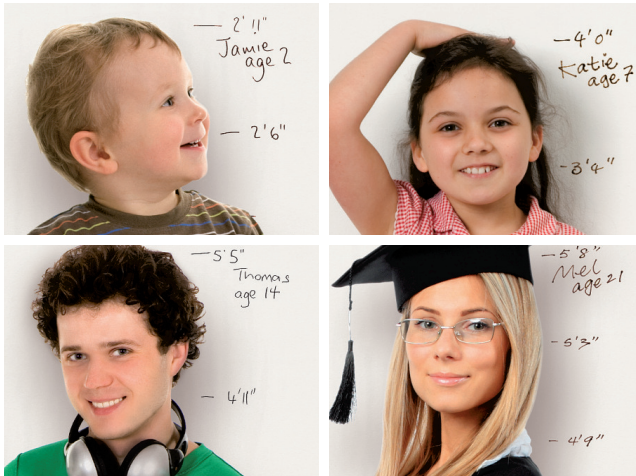
An obvious answer to this puzzle, when it comes to King's, is that a middle-ability child would not get in. But despite this, King's, like other schools, has a wide ability range.

This leaves parents with the same choice: would a boy who would be in the top half at a normal school be better surrounded by brighter boys whom he could emulate, even if he remained squarely in the school's second division?

Andrew Halls, headmaster of King's, thinks such boys will not feel disheartened, if treated with care and imagination

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