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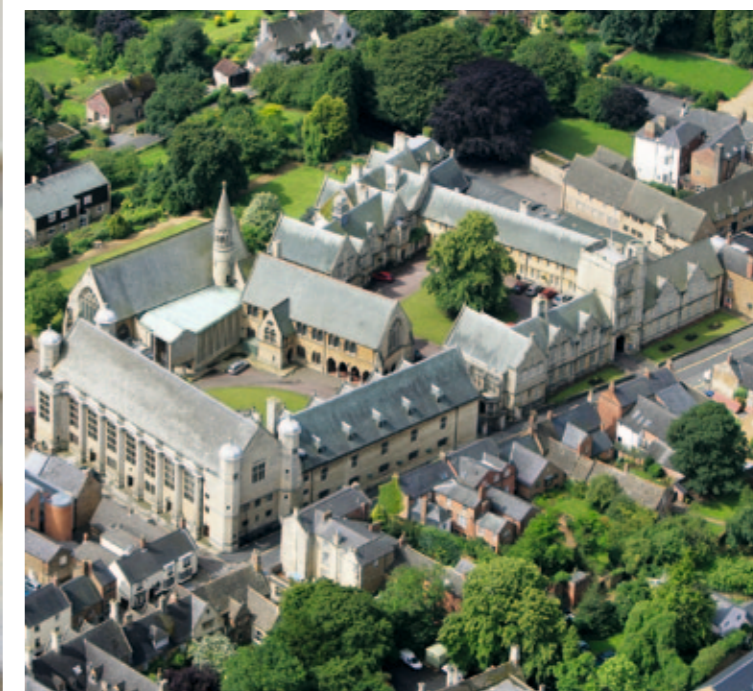
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Heathfield School, London Road, Ascot SL5 8BQ  
E: [registrar@heathfieldschool.net](mailto:registrar@heathfieldschool.net) [www.heathfieldschool.net](http://www.heathfieldschool.net)

Uppingham School pupils at a carol service in Peterborough Cathedral



## MORE THAN JUST EXAMS...

*Extracurricular activities form a vital part of school life, says Vanessa Berridge*

Look at most school prospectuses and you'll see anything from rugby to tiddlywinks. Indeed, the range of extracurricular activities, as much as academic opportunity, is often what motivates parents to opt for independent education. 'Any school claiming to educate the whole child can't do so without a good programme of extracurricular activities,' says Ian Hunt, managing director of educational consultants Gabbitas.

But how can parents be sure the reality is as glossy as the prospectus? Will their non-sporty son, for instance, be able to face more than three balls in a cricket season? Mine didn't at his highly competitive London day school; partly because there wasn't time.

Boarding does win out here because there are many more contact hours with children. 'It takes very committed staff to maintain enthusiasm past 4pm,' says Ian Edwards, assistant head of Tudor Hall School, near Banbury, where 80 per cent of the girls are boarders. 'Staff are accessible all day and every day to offer extra guidance.'

### INDIVIDUAL CHOICES

Day schools do aspire to offer similar opportunities to their pupils. The Royal High School, Bath, with 120 boarders out of a senior school of 550 pupils, is primarily a day school. Lunch is extended to an hour and 10 minutes to allow pupils time for both activities and the midday meal. Deputy head Emma

Ellison boasts a programme of 47 different lunchtime activities, a further 25 after school, and extra activities for the boarders on Sundays.

Can a school offer too much choice? 'It's a question of balance,' says Richard Harman, headmaster of co-educational boarding school Uppingham, in Rutland, and chair of the Boarding Schools Association. 'You can never have too many activities in a 24/7 boarding school. Breadth doesn't have to be at the expense of quality.'

However, Audrey Sime, director

of sports at co-ed Strathallan in Perthshire, believes diversity needs handling. 'If you're not careful, some pupils will want to do everything and won't get much out of anything.' At Strathallan, they sit down with each year group at the end of term to decide on activities for the next one. The under-14s, for instance, may choose no more than three extracurricular activities. 'This is followed up by the pupils' academic tutors, who are aware of each pupil as an individual,' she says.

St Swithuns, a girls' day and

*'If you're not careful, some pupils will want to do everything and won't get much out of anything'*



Learning butterfly at Heathfield School

## The Royal Masonic School for Girls...

### OPEN DAYS

Saturday 30th June, 10.00 am - 12.00 pm\*

Sunday 14th October, 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm

\*(Ruspini House and Cadogan House)



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Polo players at St Swithuns School



boarding school in Winchester, has a similar approach. Its programme includes up to 40 activities, including ballroom dancing, film appreciation, karate and judo. Development director Simon Mayes claims, 'We make sure that every girl does a certain number of activities, and her programme is discussed with her house mistress.'

Pupils are encouraged to suggest activities. Tudor Hall School held an archery club, while at Uppingham School, there was a Masterchef competition, along with an Apps development class, in response to pupil interest. At the Royal High School, Bath, both the student council and the sixth form have an input into the introduction of new activities. Girls can approach the activities coordinator, who also leads the school's Duke of Edinburgh programme.

The appointment of an activities coordinator is in itself an indication of the school's commitment to its extracurricular programme, rather than the job being delegated to a teacher. These pursuits are crucial, believes Kevin Stannard, Director of Innovation and Learning at the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). 'This is where our girls are given the opportunity to fly,' he says. 'Developing a portfolio of interests specific to them may ignite an enthusiasm for life.'

**ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS**

So what is really worth doing? Are team games the be-all and end-all? Is being rugby or tennis captain - proof of a pupil's competitive edge and ability to work with others - more likely to sing out on a university application?

It will help, teachers admit, but there are other issues, particularly in girls' schools, suggests Stannard. 'We're interested in getting our girls to focus on their wellbeing and get involved in non-competitive physical activities, such as yoga and keep-fit. These can help moderate pressure, which is a

major concern in high-achieving girls' schools.'

The challenge, then, is for parents making choices to assess the scope and value of extracurricular activities offered by schools. Parents at Uppingham are guided round by pupils, explains Harman. 'Parents talk to them, look at the facilities, and view activities, for themselves. It is important to see things in action, he continues, 'to drill down with the pupils and look at outcomes. How many concerts are put on each term? What are the sports

*'Parents are guided round by pupils and view activities - it is important to see things in action'*

results? What is the culture of the school? Is it cool to be involved?'

You should also ask about the number of sports teams and whether every pupil is involved. Tudor Hall, for instance, works with other schools to arrange fixtures for weaker teams. Who trains the lower teams? Are they sports professionals or history teachers? 'Bad experiences can be reinforced by poor teaching,' says Hunt.

Look at the range of music offered. Are jazz and popular music catered for, as well as classical music? How many music groups are there? On the drama side, as well as acting and producing, are there technical opportunities? Two recent pupils at Uppingham are taking the experience gained in the theatre into technical careers.

The Duke of Edinburgh and the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) are telling areas. In urban schools, in particular, parents should investigate the Outward-Bound activities through the Department of Environment. They should also ask which forces are represented, and about the qualifications of the contingent commander. 'A sharp question here

and there can reveal a lot,' says Hunt.

Extracurricular activities are not just add-ons, playing second fiddle to the academic training. 'This could be the beginning of something big for a child,' concludes Hunt. 'The important thing is that children are really challenged.'

**USEFUL CONTACTS**

- ◆ **Boarding Schools' Association**  
020-7798 1580, www.boarding.org.uk
- ◆ **Gabbitas (educational consultants)**  
020-7734 0161, www.gabbitas.co.uk
- ◆ **Girls' Day School Trust (GDST)**  
020-7393 6666, www.gdst.net



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*A personal statement can win or lose a place at university, so be sure to write a successful one, says Vanessa Berridge*

**PERSONALLY SPEAKING**

A friend of my son's wrote the personal statement for her university application in verse. She won a place to read English at Oxford, achieved a starred first and is now on a Fulbright Scholarship studying for her second post-graduate degree. But such bravura acts are not on the whole to be recommended. 'You're playing Russian roulette doing something like that,' says Ian Hunt, managing director of educational consultants Gabbitas. 'It might resonate with one tutor, but another could find it very off-putting.'

So how does a sixth-former write 47 lines that will attract a hard-pressed admissions tutor? 'The obvious truism,' says an Oxford student, 'is that you need to write something that is likely to make universities want to know themselves, so it takes several drafts to get them to talk about their passion. Often it's something seemingly irrelevant that will illustrate this.'

The personal statement should be just that – personal. 'Admissions tutors are not interested in generalised, vague statements,' says Kevin Stannard, director of Innovation and Learning at the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). He stresses that, as an academic application, at least two-thirds of the statement should be devoted to that.

Steve Roberts, a materials scientist and admissions tutor at Oxford University, says that tutors are looking for evidence of motivation. 'We want to see that applicants have really thought about their subject,' he says. 'They should be well read, have done work experience and been on extra courses, to prove their commitment.'

Remember the personal statement could come back to haunt you one day. One Oxford graduate recalls a leavers' dinner at which tutors read out the personal statements, to the students' embarrassment. 'Imagining you might have it read back to you one day might be a useful way to avoid sounding like too much of a prat,' he says.

**'The most successful personal statements reveal the genuine voice of the applicant'**

more about you. Which doesn't necessarily mean something contrived and too clever by half.' Jane Skinner, university applications adviser at St James Senior Girls' School in London, agrees (see her tips, right): 'The most successful personal statements reveal the genuine voice of the applicant.'

As so few universities now interview, the personal statement is the one-place applicants have to convey their enthusiasm for their intended subject of study. So it's a daunting process, particularly as few 17-year-olds will previously have written such a personal description. Elizabeth Clark, head of sixth form at Sutton High School, believes it is particularly hard for girls. 'Girls are not good at selling

**USEFUL WEBSITES**

- ◆ Studential: [www.studential.com](http://www.studential.com)
- The Student Room: 0800-999 3222, [www.thestudentroom.co.uk](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk)
- ◆ UCAS: 0871-468 0468, [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)
- ◆ University of Oxford: 01865-270000, [www.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ox.ac.uk)

- TOP TIPS ON WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT**
- ◆ Give it plenty of time and effort.
  - ◆ Work hard on the first sentence, otherwise the admissions tutor might not read the second.
  - ◆ State the reason for your choice of course clearly. Think very carefully, so you can express it in your own words.
  - ◆ Detail the intellectual and/or emotional insights that have inspired you to apply for the course.
  - ◆ Relate two-thirds of the statement to academic study. Refer to your other A-level subjects, plus relevant reading/courses/research/educational trips.
  - ◆ Say what you would bring to the course, but don't step over the line between confidence and arrogance.
  - ◆ Describe your extracurricular activities and positions of responsibility, but make sure you say what you have learned from them.
  - ◆ Remember that every sentence counts. Your personal statement could be the tie-breaker between you and another applicant with the same predicted grades.
  - ◆ Don't ask too many people for their opinions. You could lose the overall integrity of the statement if you incorporate different points of view.
  - ◆ Ask someone trustworthy who knows you well to go through your personal statement rigorously and ask you to explain or justify each sentence.
  - ◆ Never use sentences or paragraphs from 'helpful' personal-statement websites, and never buy a customised personal statement.
  - ◆ Absolutely never lie.
  - ◆ Make sure your spelling, grammar and punctuation are flawless.

# “Outstanding”

Ofsted Inspection Report for Boarding 2011

## Dragon School Open Mornings

Saturday 26 May 2012

Saturday 22 September 2012

Saturday 13 October 2012

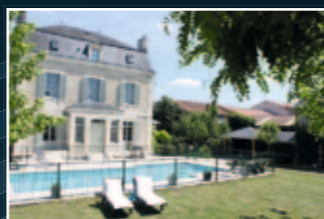
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## EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

*Houses within walking distance of top schools are selling at a premium, says Vanessa Berridge*

Good schools have a considerable effect on house prices in their area. This is particularly true of state schools, as revealed by recent research carried out by Hamptons International. The average asking price of property within half a mile of London's top 10 primary schools is £972,000, compared with £802,000 for property situated between half a mile and a mile away – a premium of 21 per cent.

But independent schools can also influence the market, according to estate agents in London, Manchester, Guildford, Winchester, Oxford and Shrewsbury. 'Schooling is very significant in Oxford,' says Giles Lawton, residential director of Savills, Oxford. 'It makes a big difference to the resilience of a difficult market. Competitive bidding for property within walking/cycling distance of Dragon School and Magdalen College School can push the price up by 10 to 20 per cent.'

Tim Smith, sales manager for Foxtons, Guildford, has a similar experience. 'The ideal properties are

large houses with well-proportioned bedrooms, good-sized gardens, off-street parking and within the school's catchment area. If you are looking to sell a property that ticks all these boxes, you can expect a premium.'

With these points in mind, we take a look at properties within easy striking distance of the top 20 independent schools in last year's A level/IB (International Baccalaureate Organisation) league tables, supplied by the Independent Schools Council.

### HARROW WEALD

Within two miles of North London Collegiate School in Edgware, is this Arts and Crafts house with a quarter of an acre of garden. The all-girls' school, taking pupils from four to 18, is a top London day school, founded in 1850 by Frances Mary Buss, a pioneer in girls' education. It now appears regularly in the top 20, last year at No5. Within reach by public transport are South Hampstead High School, Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School, University College School, Merchant Taylors' and Harrow.

◆ Elms Road, Harrow Weald, £1,250,000  
◆ Five bedrooms  
◆ Garage  
◆ Foxtons Pinner: 020-8429 6600, [www.foxtons.co.uk](http://www.foxtons.co.uk)

### GUILDFORD

There are two top-20 schools in Guildford. At No6 is **Guildford High School for Girls**, one of the United Church Schools Trust, with almost half the candidates achieving A\*s in the 2011 results. The all-boys' **Royal Grammar School**, which celebrated its 500th anniversary last year, is at No14. Prices hold their own within a 15-mile radius of Guildford, as the town is easily commutable from London. This handsome Edwardian house, with over 16 acres of land, including a tennis court, is also within reach of **St Catherine's in Bramley, Tormead (Guildford), Lanesborough Preparatory, Cranleigh and Charterhouse (in Godalming)**.

◆ Gravel Pits Farmhouse, Gomshall, Guildford, offers in excess of £1.5m  
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## The Lady



Our next independent schools guide will be published on

14th September 2012

For further details please contact

JAKE ORME

e-mail [jake.orme@lady.co.uk](mailto:jake.orme@lady.co.uk)

or telephone

020 7379 4717

Butler Road,  
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- ◆ Garage with studio flat
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### OXFORD

In north Oxford, expect to pay something akin to London prices for property, as is shown by this semi-detached house with a walled garden, close to the **Dragon** preparatory school and half a mile from the open spaces of Port Meadow. This Edwardian house is walkable from **Magdalen College School** and **Oxford High School for Girls**, second and third respectively in last year's league tables, as well as **St Edward's**, and slightly further afield, **Radley**. **Magdalen** takes boys only from seven to 16, but is co-ed in the sixth form.

- ◆ Banbury Road, Oxford, £2.75m
- ◆ 5 bedrooms (4 en suite)
- ◆ 4 reception rooms, off-street parking
- ◆ Savills Summertown: 01865-339700, [www.savills.co.uk](http://www.savills.co.uk)

### MANCHESTER

This detached family home is within walking distance of **Cheadle Hulme School**, a co-educational school with a broad curriculum, and a commitment to fostering community service in its pupils. But it's also commutable from **Withington Girls' School**, in Manchester, which last year appeared at No7 in the league tables. Also within range are **Manchester High School for Girls**, **St Bede's College** and **Manchester Grammar School**, which is the largest independent day school for boys from 7 to 18 in the UK, and with an impressive academic track record.

- ◆ Billy's Lane, Cheadle Hulme, £525,000
- ◆ 5 bedrooms, quiet location
- ◆ Andrew Snape, Cheadle Hulme Office: 0161-485 2244, [www.andrewsnape.com](http://www.andrewsnape.com)

### SHREWSBURY

The key residential areas in Shrewsbury are within walking distance of some fine schools, according to Ben Wilson, of Strutt & Parker in Shrewsbury. 'The demand for good quality family homes outstrips the supply.' Within half a mile of the town centre, this fine 19th-century detached house is convenient for **Shrewsbury School**, which although primarily a boarding school, has places for day pupils, and takes girls in the sixth form, and for **Shrewsbury High School for Girls**. Just outside Shrewsbury is the academic, international, co-ed **Concord College**, which was No19 in last year's league tables, 79 per cent of its pupils having achieved A\*/A at A level.

- ◆ Butler Road, Kingsland, Shrewsbury, £995,000
- ◆ Currently split into 2 apartments, with 7 bedrooms in total
- ◆ Landscaped gardens
- ◆ Double detached garage
- ◆ Strutt & Parker Shrewsbury: 01743-284200, [www.struttandparker.com](http://www.struttandparker.com)

### WINCHESTER

**St Swithun's School** takes girls from three to 11 and boys from three to seven as juniors, and girls only (to 18) as seniors. It was No18 in last year's tables. Given that people commute from Winchester to London, it's a popular place to buy property. This family home with a large garden is a short drive from prep schools **Prince's Mead**, **Twyford** and **The Pilgrims' School**, as well as all-boys' **Winchester College** and one of our leading sixth-form colleges, **Peter Symonds**.

- ◆ Andover Road North, Winchester, £800,000
- ◆ 4 bedrooms
- ◆ 4 reception rooms, off-street parking
- ◆ Charters: 01962-830880, [www.chartersestateagents.co.uk](http://www.chartersestateagents.co.uk)



Banbury Road, Oxford

### WIMBLEDON

This Victorian villa, with a southwest-facing garden, is across the road from **King's College School**, one of the country's leading IB schools, appearing at No17 in last year's league tables. Formerly an all-boys' school, it now takes girls in the sixth form, and will reintroduce A levels alongside IB in 2013. Also within easy commute are **Westminster**, **St Paul's** (girls and boys), **Upper Latymer** and **Wimbledon** and **Putney High Schools**. Buses also go from nearby to all-girls' **Lady Eleanor Holles**, Hampton (No11 in the tables) and to a number of preparatory schools, including **Shrewsbury House** and **Feltonfleet**.

- ◆ Lansdowne Road, Wimbledon, £2,950,000
- ◆ Six bedrooms
- ◆ Off-street parking
- ◆ Hamptons Wimbledon: 020-8261 7192, [www.hamptons.co.uk](http://www.hamptons.co.uk)

Lansdowne Road,  
Wimbledon

