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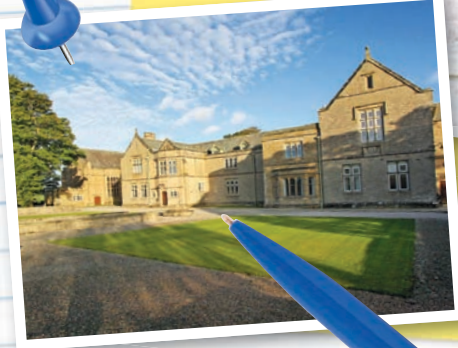
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Above: North Bridge House, London. Right: Farringtons, in Kent



Left: Farringtons adopts a holistic approach



Above and left: Sedbergh and pupils, Cumbria

Playing to their STRENGTHS

How do parents pick the right place for their children? Vanessa Berridge talks to the heads of several schools to find out what makes them special

The reputation of some schools precedes them: Millfield is sporty, Wells Cathedral School musical, Sevenoaks an International Baccalaureate pioneer. Most independent schools emphasise their breadth and depth, but how do parents distinguish between seemingly similar schools with much the same academic results to identify which will be right for their child?

'Choosing a particular strength could be a mistake because children develop in a variety of ways,' says Dan Connolly, assistant head (pastoral) at Lancing College in West Sussex. 'Lancing is about self-exploration and giving pupils the opportunity to explore enthusiasms.' He cites the example of Mason Crane, a former pupil who made the England Under-19 cricket squad. 'Who knows? At Millfield, such a boy might have got lost against sporting stars.'

Connolly is a passionate believer in a smaller school where every individual is recognised. 'It's about



'We know them... We don't assume that just because they look like an adult, they think in the same way'

growing a competitive talent but also developing the mental ability to support it.'

Other schools cited the advantages of being small. There are only 290 pupils at co-ed Saint Felix School, Southwold, Suffolk, from the first year to the upper sixth. 'All the pupils know one another, we have assemblies with pupils from age four to 19,' says James Harrison, head designate. A third of the pupils are boarders, of many different nationalities. 'We meet the needs of modern pupils but maintain older values.'

Set in a 16th-century Grade II listed building in Canonbury, London, Ofsted 'outstanding' North Bridge House Senior School and Sixth Form combines Tudor architecture with state-of-the-art facilities. 'Thanks to smaller classes, we really get to know our pupils,' says head Jonathan Taylor. 'We provide individualised teaching that

both challenges and inspires. We take into account their body clocks (with sixth-formers starting later in the day) as well as the different phases of their brain and social development. We don't assume that just because they look like an adult, they think in the same way.'

A strength of Forest School, Snaresbrook, is its location. Close to Tube stations on the Victoria and Central lines, with magnificent views of London, it has a 100-acre site on the edge of Epping Forest. Even more distinctive is its 'diamond' structure, the only ▷



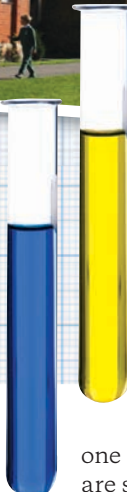
Left: St Andrew's, Pangbourne, a co-ed prep in Berkshire



Left: Saint Felix and (below) one of its under-13 matches



Right: Pupils at Saint Felix School, Southold



one in London: girls and boys are separated into single-sex classes at the age of seven and join a co-ed sixth-form at 16. 'The school offers the best of both worlds,' says Antony Faccinello, warden since September 2015. 'Breaks, lunches, clubs are all co-educational, so stereotypes dissolve.'

The pupils use the same facilities, such as the science labs. The school has a large catchment area, from Essex across to north London, and is culturally diverse. 'It's a proper microcosm of London,' Faccinello says. 'It's a melting pot of cultures that the pupils all celebrate, and

'We're not far from the M4, but, with acres of woodland and playing fields, the school has a magical, country feel'

a festival of inclusivity which is one of the school's values.'

Location is also important for St Andrew's, Pangbourne, a co-ed prep school. 'We're not far from the M4 and Reading, but, with 54 acres of Berkshire woodland and playing fields, the school has a magical, country feel,' says headmaster Jonathan Bartlett. 'There are birds of prey and deer on site.' It is smaller than its rivals Cheam, Elstree and Moulsholme, with only a two-form entry. Informal, friendly and with a family feel, it nevertheless achieves high standards, sending pupils to Wellington, Marlborough, Bradfield College, Downe House and Radley. 'Unusually, we don't have Saturday school,' says Bartlett, 'and parents pick us for that.'

Sedburgh in Cumbria is England's most northerly boarding school. It's co-ed, and without being pushy gets good results. 'There's a full weekend programme and 15 academic societies in the evening,' says headmaster Andrew Fleck. 'That's where the breadth kicks in.' He considers too many schools remain wedded to a 20th-century academic education. 'The best

schools develop skills relevant to the workplace: public speaking, leadership and teamwork, punctuality, presentation and report-writing.' Sedburgh, he suggests, goes further, blending vocational with academic study. 'Aspirant vets at Sedburgh study agriculture alongside A-levels in maths, chemistry, biology and physics, while courses in maths, economics and psychology coupled with a business course opens up the practical as well as the theoretical elements of marketing.'

At Farringtons, a Methodist school in Kent, a holistic approach is adopted, underpinned by Christian values. 'Every child will be noticed and appreciated,' says headmistress Dorothy Nancekievill.

Formerly an all-girls school, it went co-ed seven years ago. 'We have a strong sense of community,' Nancekievill says. 'We have an excellent child-focused pastoral system, with an open-door policy to parents.'

'Who do you want to be?' is the tagline on the website of Malvern St James, Worcestershire, which, according to headmistress Patricia Woodhouse, offers its girls a bespoke education. 'We create confident, articulate and assured young women by developing academic programmes to support their particular interests or talents,' she says. One of her sixth-formers is becoming an international golfer; her academic curriculum was tailored to enable her both to gain five A*s and 4 As at GCSE, and to take part in Nick Faldo's golf championship in the United States. 'We stretch our girls sideways as well as forward,' Woodhouse says. 'The girls are encouraged to play to their strengths, supported by full-time careers advisers.'

Of course a school with a strong specialism can offer an enriched education to other pupils. Christ Church Cathedral School, Oxford, educates choristers for the college's world-renowned choir. Their professionalism rubs off on their fellow pupils, says headmaster Richard Murray. 'Every pupil has contact with music, and many not in the choir sing and play an instrument. It allows non-musical children to have that experience and to realise the value of hard work and practice.'

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Right: Pupils
at Felsted.
Below:
Cranleigh



Left and
below:
Ampleforth
College



The brighter SIDE



Pastoral care is increasingly important as children feel the pressures of modern life and parental expectation. How can they be helped to cope?

A recent Children's Society survey revealed that children in England are less happy than their peers in 14 other countries, including Ethiopia and Algeria.

David Lambon, the first lay headmaster of the Catholic co-ed Ampleforth College in Yorkshire, is clear where the problem lies: 'The biggest pressure on young people is to grow up too quickly. They are distracted, overstimulated and overexposed; they don't have the mechanisms to cope with adult life.'

Established within the Benedictine order, the school has a particular way of dealing with these issues. 'We try to achieve balance through a Christian living programme and support from tutors, housemasters, counsellors, chaplains and independent listeners,' Lambon explains. 'We encourage pupils to listen carefully to other people, but also to their own needs.' Older children are expected to look after younger ones. 'It's actually like parental training for these senior pupils,' he says. A network within the school aims to spot problems early: 'Children who are struggling are given an individual care plan. If we can't meet the child's needs, we might then approach outside agencies.'

The strength of a school such as Ampleforth - 85 per cent boarding and set in Yorkshire countryside - is

that pupils are removed from city pressures. Alice Phillips, headmistress of St Catherine's, Bramley, Surrey, is trenchant about another source of pressure: 'Challenges are heaped on young people by politicians, often against the advice of educators. GCSEs are now too important, too early.'

She also mentions 'high-achieving parents' who don't mean to pressurise their children, 'but the unspoken expectation is that they will make Oxford or Bristol at least. And girls especially worry about

'They are distracted, overstimulated and overexposed; they don't have the mechanisms to cope with adult life'

letting people down.' St Catherine's has a designated pastoral team, and Phillips tries to help girls develop a sense of proportion: on a recent mufti day, all sixth-formers and staff came in wearing onesies. The girls are exhorted to fit their work round extracurricular activities, rather than vice versa.

Martin Reader, headmaster of co-ed Cranleigh, Surrey, says 'There's a temptation to slap on a happiness lesson and think it solves a problem.' He is clearly referencing Anthony Seldon, who attracted satire by introducing happiness classes at Wellington College.

The Cranleigh day is structured round activities to develop character, so pupils learn to win,

lose and work collectively. Reader doesn't pre-test applicants at 11 as many schools do. 'I select our pupils from reports from their preparatory heads, and attempt whenever possible to keep families together.'

Pupils are encouraged to be outward-looking. A charity initiative, Beyond Cranleigh, involves pupils with a school in Zambia. Tutors encourage not just academic success, but kindness to and awareness of others.

Problems start young, as Jenny Burrett, headmistress of Felsted

Preparatory School in Essex, is only too aware: 'Families struggle to find time to talk.' Burrett aims to teach her pupils to be positive about themselves, to look at what's going well. 'I did an assembly with a jar of shells, which reminded me of a happy holiday. I asked them about the things they were grateful for, to encourage positive thinking.'

Children can't always rely on other people for rewards; pupils are encouraged to pick out what's been done well in a piece of work, even if it has been criticised. 'We don't talk about ability, but about working at a different pace,' she says. 'They need to develop a sense of self and of self-reliance.'

Vanessa Berridge

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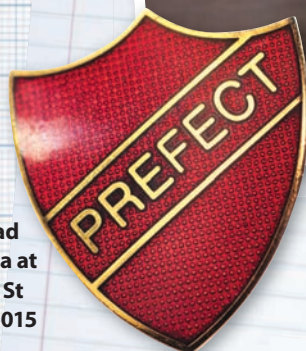


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Left: Head girl Elysia at Malvern St James, 2015



Below: Teamwork at Malvern St James



Leaders of the FUTURE



Employers these days want to know if applicants have leadership qualities, so having been a prefect or head of house will boost a CV

The deal-breaker question that prospective employers often throw at young candidates is to ask how they've shown leadership in a difficult situation. So, somewhere along the line - most probably at school - these aspiring employees need to have led.

Alice Phillips, headmistress of all-girls St Catherine's, Bramley, Surrey, is in no doubt about her high-flying pupils. 'Everyone who comes to a school like this will be a leader,' she says emphatically. 'It's a privilege they are born to.'

Training for leadership starts early. Jonathan Bartlett, headmaster at co-ed pre-prep and preparatory St Andrew's, Pangbourne, Berkshire, believes that the top year should be memorable: 'In year 8, the pupils are told that they are leaders. We expect them all to set the tone for younger pupils and help to create a caring, thoughtful environment.' The head boy and girl are currently voted for by a confidential staff vote, although Bartlett will allow year 8 a vote in the autumn term this year.

Bartlett meets the head boy and girl every week. 'I ask them to be the staff's eyes and ears and to let me know about pastoral issues.'

They lead parents' visits, sit next to visitors at lunch and speak at speech day.

Similar responsibilities are given to the top year of the junior school at all-girls Malvern St James, Worcestershire. 'We have a ship rather than house system in the senior school, with prefects called captains,' explains headmistress Patricia Woodhouse. 'The 10-year-olds elect their skippers in year 6.' Similarly, at co-ed Saint Felix, Southwold, Suffolk, the senior positions at the top of the senior school are duplicated in year 6 in

'We expect them all to set the tone for younger pupils and help to create a caring, thoughtful environment'

the junior school, with even the pre-prep school having a pupil playground monitor. At co-ed Farringtons in Kent, the junior school council asked to present a petition to their headmistress, Dorothy Nancekievill, asking for new football nets.

All this feeds into the final four or five years at school, when pupils will be expected to show more initiative. 'They are encouraged from the start,' says Phillips. 'There are roles from year 8 and 9 in the chapel, art, music and the library, and in our six houses at every level.'

By the time pupils reach the sixth

form, the number and range of leadership roles is much greater in most independent schools. Key positions are head boy and girl, but, interestingly, schools approach their selection very differently.

At The Mount, York, the UK's only all-girls Quaker school, the head girl is selected through a nomination process, giving equal weight to the views of students and staff. 'This process selects the girls who will debate on the year's behalf,' says the principal, Adrienne Richmond, 'and which girls are put forward to be the new head girl and

her team of three deputies.'

Nancekievill at Farringtons tries to involve as many people as possible in the decision-making process: 'At the top, you can miss the modest and the well-behaved.'

The election of the head girl also involves staff and girls at Malvern St James, with years 11, 12 and 13 all voting for a long list of candidates. A short list of six will then be drawn up to make a brief presentation to the headmistress and senior management team.

'We give them quite a grilling,' says Woodhouse, 'but it's a very good exercise for the girls. We >



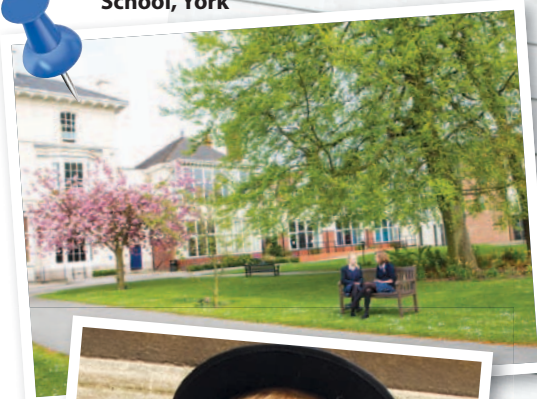
Left: Becoming a prefect teaches responsibility



**Above: Malvern St James
Right: St Catherine's head girl**



Below: Mount School, York



then select prefects from the other nominees.'

At Lancing, West Sussex, choosing the head boy and girl is a two-year process, says Hilary Dugdale, senior deputy head. 'The lower sixth is a very rich year for leadership. Eighteen peer supporters are trained by school counsellors in listening skills, mentoring younger pupils, pastoral care and spotting early warning signs. People often show their colours there.'

Although the headmaster canvasses staff and current school

should encourage a culture of aspiration, and that those who don't become head girls are given genuine leadership roles. 'Girls see through tokenism. The staff step back and let bright girls get on with leading house meetings and running the lunch queue.'

Phillips increases her prefect portfolio each year. 'One girl persuaded me that we needed a technology prefect and came up with a job description. The alumnae team has two associate prefects, learning to work with

'Girls see through tokenism. The staff step back and let bright girls lead house meetings and run the lunch queue'

leaders, it's not a democratic election, but the headmaster's appointment. Potential head pupils are written a private letter and given 48 hours to see whether they want to be appointed. 'It's not for everyone,' says Dugdale.

'I'm rather old-fashioned about this,' says Phillips at St Catherine's. 'We don't have a democratic vote here, because young people are not mature enough to consider what good leadership is - they are distracted by the superficial.' Potential candidates speak to the whole sixth form at the beginning of the process. 'Some will be disappointed, but I hope to turn it into a rewarding challenge.'

What is important, Phillips believes, is that the school leaders

adults.' Prefects at St Catherine's operate in pairs and there are two head girls. 'It teaches them that responsibility need not be lonely and pressured, and also fosters co-operation.'

It is, says Dugdale at Lancing, about spotting potential and honouring different skills. There, each house has a pupil head of house and a vice-head.

'It's a quite distinct role from that of a prefect,' she says. 'Some prefects have the authority to deal with 200 adolescents queuing for lunch, but a head of house might be better at steering younger pupils, and building up a closer, deeper relationships with 60 people whom they get to know well.'

Vanessa Berridge

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Above: Queen Anne's
Centre: Forest School
Below: St Catherine's

Left: Queen Anne's
Below: Choir at Forest School

Music MATTERS

Playing an instrument or singing in a choir teaches skill sets which can be transferred to academic work



It's no coincidence that the four musicians who make up Mumford & Sons were educated at two London schools where music is first class: King's College, Wimbledon, and St Paul's.

'A strong music department is an indicator of a really academic school,' says Alice Phillips, headmistress of St Catherine's, Surrey. 'Music is challenging, a blend of the auditory, visual and the physical. It requires a refined skills set. Many of our classical instrumentalists often play other instruments, such as bass guitar.'

'Music is central to what we do,' says Martin Reader, headmaster of co-ed Cranleigh in Surrey. 'It helps nurture a deep sense of personal and spiritual development.' Pupils do music, art and drama four afternoons a week at 2pm, rather than when tired at the end of the day. There are ensembles, several choirs, and 60 per cent of pupils have formal music lessons. 'It breeds habits of discipline, organisation, structure - all skills transferable to academic work.' Professionals help too: recently the Swingle Singers worked for a day with the junior and senior choirs.

Every pupil is also involved in chapel. 'Communal singing is very important,' Reader says. Dorothy Nancekieveill agrees. Previously head of music at Wells Cathedral School, Somerset, she takes music

seriously in her new role as headmistress of Farringtons in Kent. 'Recent research has shown that singing helps with stress,' she says. She has also ensured that every year 7 and 8 pupil at the Methodist school learns a brass or woodwind instrument.

Playing a musical instrument is important socially, says Iain McGregor, director of music at Forest School, Snaresbrook, where more than half of the 1,415 pupils have lessons. 'In our prep school, all children have specialist music

'These educationalists all highlight the connection between musical discipline and academic excellence'

lessons each week and sing in choirs. We offer free, compulsory instrumental lessons on strings (year 3) and woodwind (year 4).' In year 7, the school's 'endangered instrument scheme' gives free 20-minute lessons on instruments the school orchestra needs. 'There is always a waiting list for the 16 or 20 places.'

These educationalists all highlight the connection between musical discipline and academic excellence. BrainCanDo, a research project between all-girls Queen Anne's School, Caversham, Berkshire, and Goldsmiths, University of London, is studying the links. 'We shall be looking at the same group of girls over five years,'

explains Dr Amy Fancourt, head of psychology at Queen Anne's. 'We want to explore the relationship between music, intelligence and self-belief.' The first results, in June 2015, revealed that intelligence is linked to musical ability: those with good listening ability (being able to discriminate between different but similar pieces of music) scored high on intelligence.

Perhaps most interesting is the attitude of the non-musicians. 'Those who believed that it's worth persevering were more likely to be

high achievers than those who thought there was no point,' says Fancourt. 'If we can teach teenagers to adopt a positive approach to learning a musical instrument, and to recognise that musicians achieve brilliance through effort and hard work, then we can expect that positive growth mindset will transfer to attitudes to intelligence and learning more generally.'

'Music is a fundamental part of human nature,' says McGregor. 'Listening to music and, even more so, being involved in playing music, makes deep-seated connections in the brain. You're different when you come out of it. That's what education is all about.'

Vanessa Berridge

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THE RIGHT CHOICE

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A private education offers many benefits

The last thing that pops into your mind when you get that positive pregnancy test is: what nursery or school should I send my child to? But competition for schools - and, increasingly, nurseries - has become so fierce in London that parents are resorting to planning their child's school career before they've even been born.

The search for the most suitable school for a child, where they'll be able to flourish and fulfil their ambitions, can be daunting. The hunt can be carried out in an atmosphere of pressure, fuelled by alarmist headlines, magni-

committed staff, companionship, extended tuition and extra activities including sport, drama, art and music. However, a child will only flourish if the boarding philosophy of the chosen school matches their abilities, ambition, preferences and inclinations.

The academic advantages of independent schools with smaller classes and longer school days are well known - and were recently confirmed by researchers at Durham University, who found that privately educated pupils are two years ahead of those in state schools by the age of 16. However, independent schools provide a 'character education' too, imparting confi-

girls' boarding and day school, writes, 'A school which provides not only the sound basics of a good academic education, but also looks at and addresses the specific needs of, for example, a gender group is providing a better education.'

An independent consultant with a deep, objective knowledge of the independent-schools sector can be a calm, critical friend helping parents navigate through the dinner-party-circuit chatter. They can explain the implications of differing curricula, give balanced views of schools and detail the advantages and disadvantages of various routes and qualifications. They can present realistic options and alternative paths to enable you to make the very best choice for your child. Education is a major investment that is only made once, and the best advice should be sought.

◆ See page 75 for further information.

◆ To discuss this further, call Paul Kelly, Head of School & University Placement, Gabbitas Education Consultants, on 020-7734 0161.

'The academic advantages of independent schools are well known. However, they also provide a character education'

fied rumours, scare stories and quiet social competition. This is particularly the case in urban areas with a shortage of good places, ever rising entrance levels and an increasing array of curricula and exams.

Choosing a boarding school is difficult and the appeal of traditional full boarding is understandable, with its promise of access to excellent facilities,

dence, grit, emotional control and other 'soft skills', as reflected in the statistic that independently educated children are 6% more likely to work in top managerial positions than those with the same academic achievements who went to state schools.

They can also focus on specific needs. Bronwen Goulding, headmistress of St Francis' College, a leading

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