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Our indispensable guide to private schools and what they can offer your children. By Vanessa Berridge



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# Building confidence

Preparing students for later life is about more than lessons and exams

**T**he notion of running a Failure Week might seem a strange one for a high-achieving girls' school. It doesn't sound like a concept that fee-paying parents would buy into with much gusto, for surely the aim of an expensive education is to train young people to succeed, not to fail? But that would be missing the point entirely, argues Heather Hanbury, headmistress of Wimbledon High School, where the week took place last year. 'We could have called it Resilience Week because that's what it's really about,' she laughs. 'But that wouldn't have caught the headlines.'

The week, which consisted of assemblies, workshops on assessing failure and keynote speakers, did catch the headlines, and a year on, she's still receiving requests for interviews and for advice from other school heads and deputies. It's a subject Heather Hanbury, a former management consultant, feels strongly about. 'It wasn't a one-week wonder or an idea that came from

nowhere,' she emphasises. 'When I talk to prospective parents, I say, "We will teach your daughters to fail, to get over it, learn from it and pick themselves up, and be tough, robust and resilient".'

## TAKING RISKS

Role models are a crucial part of Hanbury's programme. 'I encourage our visiting speakers to talk to the girls about their failures, as well as their triumphs, because I challenge a single successful person to say that they've never failed at anything. Young people are inclined to think they are just parachuted into success, with no disasters along the way.'

Part of the problem is that girls like to get things right, says Helen Fraser, chief executive of the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). 'That's why an initiative such as Failure Week is so important, as it shows girls they can fail and rise above it.'

Building girls' confidence and preparing them to take risks is often easier in a girls' school. 'It's easy for ▶



Mary Beard



**Bettany Hughes**

boys to take airtime, but in our schools, the girls can find their own voices. We try to give them a sense of their own importance and entitlement.'

**SHINING ROLE MODELS**

Hilary French, headmistress of Central Newcastle High School and president of the Girls' Schools Association, believes it's crucial to create an environment in which girls are encouraged to do their best but are not criticised for a stumble. 'We will rejoice as much with hard-won Bs and Cs as with easily achieved As and A\*s,' she says. 'We also have to educate the parents, who get so wrapped up with their children and want to take the hurt away when their daughters meet reverses. They need to learn that they should give them space to make mistakes.'

Historian Bettany Hughes and classicist Mary Beard are both products of GDST high schools (Notting Hill & Ealing and Shrewsbury respectively). The two women provide shining role models for young girls as they have combined motherhood with high-profile careers.

'I was a bursary girl,' says Hughes. 'My parents were out-of-work actors who wouldn't have been able to afford the fees. I'm immensely grateful for my school, which taught us confidence. We were led to believe all the girls were capable of fulfilling

forms. At Moreton Hall in Shropshire, sixth-form girls have been managing their own businesses since the 1980s when they campaigned to keep the local railway station open, and ran it themselves for five years. Girls are interviewed in the upper fifth for roles as directors and junior managers for businesses that have included selling Christmas puddings made by the school chef to the retail trade. At a recent lunch, girls spoke about their business projects to 240 business people from Shropshire, Cheshire and North Wales. 'Being involved with these businesses makes girls think about their careers in a wider way,' says Alexandra Hankinson, the school's marketing director. 'It encourages them to do things that might seem scary.'

The success of Moreton's enterprise is proven. Now in her early 30s, Fiona Marshall is head of brand marketing at online fashion retailer Asos, having cut her teeth as director of the tuck shop while at Moreton Hall. Another ex-Moreton pupil, Miranda Ballard, who runs organic meat company Muddy Boots Real Foods, came back to the school recently to give a one-hour tutorial on a retail pitch the girls are planning. 'What we teach them at Moreton is that it's all right to try, and fail, but it's important to have a go.'

There are opportunities for girls in boys' schools, too, of course, which is why they can now join the sixth form of Magdalen College School, Oxford. 'Admitting girls and making everything available to them is a good preparation for professional life,' says master Dr Timothy Hands. 'It's an equalising force in gender matters.'

The ceremonial funeral earlier this month of the UK's first woman prime minister is a reminder of how women can overcome obstacles. 'Women need to shout about their achievements in the workplace – as men do,' concludes Helen Fraser.

*'What we teach them at Moreton is that it's all right to try, and fail, but it's important to have a go'*

themselves.' She also grew up at a time when the two leading people in the country (the Queen and Margaret Thatcher) were women. 'Whatever you might have thought of Thatcher, she did show us that women could get to the very top.'

Mary Beard believes that girls 'need role models and a good injection of confidence. The most important thing is that they find a voice they can own as theirs. As soon as you start telling girls they should aim high, you raise the possibility that they might choose to aim low'.

Encouragement can take different



**Wimbledon High School**

**EDUCATION ORGANISATIONS**

- ◆ **Gabbitas** (educational consultancy) 020-7734 0161, [www.gabbitas.co.uk](http://www.gabbitas.co.uk)
- ◆ **Girls' Day School Trust** 020-7393 6666, [www.gdst.net](http://www.gdst.net)
- ◆ **Girls' Schools Association** 0116-254 1619, [www.gsa.uk.com](http://www.gsa.uk.com)
- ◆ **Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference** 01858-469059/465260, [www.hmc.org.uk](http://www.hmc.org.uk)
- ◆ **Independent Schools Council** 020-7766 7070, [www.isc.co.uk](http://www.isc.co.uk)
- ◆ **The Good Schools Guide** 020-3286 6824, [www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk](http://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk)

**SCHOOLS**

- ◆ **Belvedere Academy, Liverpool** 0151-727 1284, [www.belvedereacademy.net](http://www.belvedereacademy.net)
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- ◆ **Cheltenham Ladies' College** 01242-520691, [www.cheltladiescollege.org](http://www.cheltladiescollege.org)
- ◆ **Croydon High School** 020-8260 7500, [www.croydonhigh.gdst.net](http://www.croydonhigh.gdst.net)
- ◆ **Eaton Square School, Belgravia** 020-7931 9469, [www.eatonsquareschool.com](http://www.eatonsquareschool.com)
- ◆ **Magdalen College School, Oxford** 01865-253430, [www.mcsoxford.org](http://www.mcsoxford.org)
- ◆ **Moira House School, Eastbourne** 01323-644144, [www.moirahouse.co.uk](http://www.moirahouse.co.uk)
- ◆ **Moreton Hall, Shropshire** 01691-773671, [www.moretonhallschool.com](http://www.moretonhallschool.com)
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- ◆ **Roedean, Brighton** 01273-667500, [www.roedean.co.uk](http://www.roedean.co.uk)
- ◆ **St Helen & St Katharine, Abingdon, Oxon** 01235-520173, [www.shsk.org.uk](http://www.shsk.org.uk)
- ◆ **St Swithun's, Winchester** 01962-835700, [www.stswithuns.com](http://www.stswithuns.com)
- ◆ **Sheffield High School** 0114-266 0324, [www.sheffieldhighschool.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldhighschool.org.uk)
- ◆ **Shrewsbury High School** 01743-494000, [www.shrewsburyhigh.gdst.net](http://www.shrewsburyhigh.gdst.net)
- ◆ **Wellington College, Berkshire** 01344-444000, [www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk](http://www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk)
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St Swithun's has a strong lacrosse tradition



# GOOD SPORT

After Britain's bumper Olympic year, independent schools are capitalising on the sporting success

**M**ore than a third of British Olympic medal winners in 2012 came from the independent sector, with a particular dominance in rowing, where more than half of our gold medallists had been educated at private schools. Not everyone will turn out to be an Olympian, but independent schools clearly offer a massive advantage in terms of the breadth and depth of sports education.

'For many parents, the quality of the sports is a defining factor when choosing a school,' says Janette Wallis, a senior editor at The Good Schools Guide.

Many different options, a longer school day and a generally more coherent approach, are reasons sport tends to be better in independent schools, suggests Ian Hunt, managing director of the educational consultancy Gabbitas. 'These schools also attract a disproportionate number of former professionals as coaches, which means that their sports will have glamour for the pupils and be taken very seriously.'

Hunt believes that resistance to

Kenneth Baker's educational reforms in the 1980s adversely affected sports education in the maintained sector. 'Teachers withdrew their goodwill and stopped taking sports out of school hours,' he says. 'In the independent sector, taking sport is part of every teacher's job. And heads will appoint a good coach over a pure teacher if everything else is equal in their CVs.'

## THRIVING ON COMPETITION

Sports teaching has become much more professional in the independent sector, claims Hunt, as, alongside professional coaches, schools are employing sports nutritionists and physios, and have magnificent modern facilities. 'There is more emphasis now on inclusion, and sport has improved without jeopardising the star,' says Janette Wallis.

'Fifteen years ago, many prep-school children would never have had a chance to represent their school at a sport. Now most do - although sometimes parents may need to push the school a bit on this one.'

Rowan Edbrooke, headmistress of the all-girls day school St Helen and St Katharine in Abingdon, is a



Croydon High School



member of the Girls' Schools Association (GSA) sports committee. 'It's a question of balancing participation with providing opportunities for pupils to take sports to the highest levels,' she says.

The committee has been meeting with representatives of sports' governing bodies to make them aware that across GSA member schools, 'there is a captive audience of girls who thrive on competition and want to excel'.

Many GSA schools have outstanding sports departments, and the sports committee is looking at how elite performers are supported and planning to share that expertise across the membership as a whole.

### KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE BALL

Even among independent schools, the playing fields are not level. So there are questions parents should ask about the quality of the sports education when considering a school for their child. First base is always to talk to current parents and pupils. Then start looking closely at what you're being shown: eg, the fixtures list. How many teams are put out? How well do those teams do? It's not an absolute clincher, but if the lower teams are routinely beaten, you may want to ask how many qualified sports teachers coach any other teams than the As and Bs. Are there extra fees for sports? And what kind of sporting trips are arranged?

Look, too, at the range of sports on offer, and how willing the school is to respond to children's and parents' suggestions. In many leading public schools, first-year boys are still given no choice but to play rugby in the winter and cricket in the summer, and girls hockey and tennis. 'This can be very hard on pupils who have hated those sports in their prep schools,' says Wallis. 'It's worth checking to see whether that first rugby year is imposed. Schools are making an effort – even a traditional rugby school like Wellington is now more flexible. That's important because a child will be wasting hours playing a sport they hate when they should be developing other interests.'

Lesley Watson is chair of the Girls' Schools Association sports committee and principal of Moira House, a girls' boarding and day school in Eastbourne. 'A lot of 14 year olds join as boarders,' she says. 'That's oldish to take up sports, so we encourage lifestyle sports, such as trampolining, judo, squash or netball for fun. A number of our girls are county swimmers, but we also offer lessons for non-swimmers, lifeguard training and training for swimming teachers. It's important to have a wide range of conventional sports.'



Hockey practice at Notting Hill and Ealing High School

*'What is most important is that girls have an exercise habit by the time they leave school'*

### LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Jane Gandee is in her third year as headmistress of St Swithun's, a girls' boarding and day school in Winchester. 'When I first started,' she recalls, 'there was a strong lacrosse tradition, but less emphasis on other sports. We've introduced a number of testers, including cheerleading, gymnastics, golf and cricket. We've recently played our first polo match, and we're starting archery in the summer. What is most important is that girls have an exercise habit by the time they leave school.'

She has also reviewed the sports kit. 'Teenage girls want kit that isn't old-fashioned,' she suggests. 'It should also be warm enough, with proper-fitting base layers, so being outside is a pleasurable experience.'

Gandee admits that her boarders do get more sport, and there's no doubt that a country boarding school, with long hours to fill and extensive playing fields, can provide a greater range of opportunities, even to weaker pupils. Nevertheless, there's

a surprising choice of sports in some city day schools, as the mixed pre-prep and preparatory Eaton Square School in London triumphantly proves. 'Because we're in the heart of London,' says headmaster Sebastian Hepher, 'we make an extra-special effort to give children as much sport as possible.' He reels off a list of what's on offer, which includes traditional sports, plus judo, karate, fencing, gymnastics and sailing in Docklands. 'We have our own on-site staff,' explains Hepher, 'but we also hire in specialists for the relevant sports, to ensure top-notch provision.'

Schools need to lead by example, believes Gandee, an active sportswoman, who captained the Cambridge University women's football team. 'The PE staff at St Swithun's are all very young and glamorous – and one has represented England in lacrosse. It's good for the staff to be seen playing sport, which is a lifelong activity, not just something cruel we inflict on adolescent girls.'

St. Egberts School  
Ascot

Dear Mummy and Daddy  
I hope you are well I am, and I came  
'second' in the French test. YEEAH!!  
How are Muffin and Pookie?  
Can you bring them if you are  
coming to the Match on Saturday?  
Sammy's brother goes to a fantastic  
School called Hurtwood House and I  
want to go there when I leave here.  
PLEEEEEASE! As well as all the boring  
things like Maths and Physics its got  
a film School and actor training  
and recording Studios and you can  
learn how to go into media or to  
be an actor or a singer and I  
really want to go there.  
Lots and Lots of love  
Charlie

Blyford Hall, Blyford

Dear Charlie.  
Daddy and I were thrilled to hear  
about the French test. I am sorry that  
we won't be back from Marrakech by  
Saturday. So we won't be coming to the  
match. I am sure you will do jolly well.  
Muffin got a chicken bone stuck in her  
throat, but is OK now. Thank goodness  
She must have got it out of the  
clustbin.  
I looked up Hurtwood House on the  
Internet and you're right - it looks  
absolutely wonderful and just right for  
you. It's fantastically creative and  
original and nice and small, and personal  
and Daddy says that its very high in the  
League tables too.  
But darling, you can't go there until  
you're 16!! It's a sixth-form only boarding  
school - the only one in the Country. I  
do hope that you won't be too disappointed  
stick it out for three years at Daddy's  
old school and then perhaps you can  
have your hearts desire and go to  
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# The Lady



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2 August	2013	Pets
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Juniors in the rose garden of Magdalen College School



A science lesson at Nottingham High School

# A question of charity

We take a look at how independent schools benefit the wider public

**T**he Independent Schools Council (ISC) won an important battle with the Charity Commission in October 2011 at a High Court tribunal. At the heart of the matter was a question of bursaries, with the Charity Commission having previously stipulated that independent schools, as educational charities, should provide a minimum number of bursaries to demonstrate their wider public benefit. The Charity Commission lost at law, and Matthew Burgess, a member of the ISC general counsel, commented: 'The ruling liberates schools to innovate and be creative in their charitable provision.'

'The Charity Commission was unfair to focus only on bursaries and ignore the many other things schools do,' says Dr Timothy Hands, master at Magdalen College School. 'But it made independent schools more aware of their role in society, which was a good thing.'

At Magdalen, the equivalent of one full-time member of staff oversees the pupils' community service, which includes language projects involving local schools and an afternoon club run for the elderly. And, going back to the school's medieval foundation, the annual Waynflete Studies course enables sixth formers to undertake an independent research project tutored by an academic from Magdalen College just across the bridge.

Ian Hunt, of educational consultancy Gabbitas, believes that schools should be looking at the local community as a whole. 'They should be opening doors to subjects such as Latin to the benefit of independent

and maintained-school pupils,' he says. 'Parents choosing independent schools are buying a culture, and an environment with discipline and structure. The more that is widened out, the better the school becomes.'

The Girls' Day School Trust (formerly the Girls' Public Day School Trust) has had a clear charitable ethos since its foundation in 1872. Just under four per cent of its fee income goes on bursaries, from which 1,046 families benefit, while 18.9 per cent of trust pupils receive some financial assistance. 'Our schools have a strong feeling of community engagement,' says Helen Fraser, the trust's chief executive. 'And all feel they must play their part.'

Among its 26 schools are now two academies, Birkenhead High School Academy and Belvedere Academy in Liverpool. Struggling to attract fee-paying pupils, they joined the

at GCSE, suggesting that the GDST ethos remains a potent force.

Several trust schools, including Sheffield, Croydon and Blackheath, are involved with the charity Shine (Support and Help in Education), which funds initiatives for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sheffield High School has won three awards since 2010 for its community outreach and links with local maintained schools. Shine operates a Saturday programme of learning with nine local primaries, to help prepare 45 children from Year 5 for their move to secondary school. The aim is to widen their educational horizons, and to build academic confidence.

Other initiatives include Aim Higher, which encourages pupils to apply for Oxbridge. Interview practice is given, and joint trips to the universities are arranged for pupils of both Sheffield High School and the

*'Independent schools have been liberated to innovate and be creative in their charitable provision'*

maintained sector a few years ago. According to Fraser, this decision has turned out to be a positive move both for the schools themselves and for the other independent trust schools that have been able to learn from the different teaching methods employed there.

'They have access to all GDST activities and are still part of the GDST family,' she says. The first non-selective cohort has just come through Belvedere, with 98 per cent of the girls achieving A\* to C grades

maintained schools. The project has been running for the last seven years and has resulted in a 50 per cent increase in the number of pupils reaching the interview stage, and a 30 per cent increase in offers.

Valerie Dunsford, the head at Sheffield High School, says: 'The school is part of the city, and needs to be out there as an exemplar and breaking down barriers. And these projects build the personal skills of our own girls. It's one of the most satisfying parts of my job'.