



**MOULSFORD**

CHOOSING A SENIOR SCHOOL  
AFTER MOULSFORD 2023/24

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## This information booklet is designed to help parents negotiate the path which leads to life beyond Moulsoford for their boys.

For many parents, knowledge of senior schools is drawn from their own experience. However, both senior schools themselves, and the admissions process to them have changed markedly over a generation with very rapid change having taken place in the last few years. There is a wealth of experience in this field at Moulsoford, and one of my key roles is advising parents on this next stage. This booklet is very much a guide, and parents are encouraged to book an individual appointment with me from January onwards during Year 5 to discuss their child's senior school options in more detail.

It is important that parents come to the right decision based on informed knowledge, first-hand experience (through visits/open days) and a very clear understanding of the ethos of the senior school - above all else, my advice would be that a boy will not thrive in a school unless he is happy. What is also important is that boys are signed up to their parents' choice. Boys' views should certainly be taken into account, but it is unrealistic to expect 10/11 year olds to have an informed and objective view of what will be the best senior school option for them - the process and decision-making needs to be driven by parents.

There will be many different options available to you and the final decision can be extremely difficult to make. It is worth remembering that most of the schools which you will consider are extremely good and that there is a danger in being too analytical about the process, which can lead to your decision-making going round in circles. If you need to visit a school more than twice to confirm its suitability, it's probably not the right place. Often your gut reaction can be a very useful criterion for you, and it should certainly not be ignored. Remember also that every school will have its critics and that all parents will have a view on the Head! Don't take too much notice of negative gossip unless it becomes a recurring theme.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Ben Beardmore-Gray". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Ben Beardmore-Gray**  
Headmaster



## SENIOR SCHOOL PRE-TESTS

Over the last decade the admissions landscape for entry to senior schools has gradually but steadily shifted in favour of Pre-Tests. Historically, pupils sat Common Entrance to senior schools at 13+ in June of Year 8, and this was a competitive exam. More recently, Common Entrance has become a qualifying exam whereby the senior schools have the right number of candidates for the places they have available - hence all pupils are expected to pass. However, to get to this stage, senior schools need to have some form of filtering process well in advance of June of Year 8 and this is where the Pre-Tests come in.

Pre-Tests are now the key for entry to senior schools – while there may still be a place for Common Entrance, many senior schools now use it largely for setting purposes only, and do not insist on it for all subjects. Indeed, a number of schools no longer require boys to sit Common Entrance. Once a boy has been accepted through the Pre-Test route, it is now highly unusual for them to fail at the final Common Entrance hurdle.

## TIMINGS FOR PARENTS IN THE SENIOR SCHOOL SELECTION PROCESS

### Birth to Year 3

Parents who are interested in Radley for their sons are advised to register them as early as possible to be placed on the 'Radley List'. Radley also has an 'Open Entry' process for boys who are not on the 'Radley List'. However, being registered early is still advantageous, as entry via the 'Radley List' is generally less competitive.

### Year 4

Parents should begin the debate at home on what type of school might suit their boys/children:

- Day or boarding?
- Co-Ed or single sex?
- Finding a school to suit several children?

### Year 5

- Book an individual meeting with Mr Beardmore–Gray to discuss senior school options. Ideally this should take place in the Spring or Summer terms.
- Visit some schools, initially by parents and later by children once you have narrowed down the choices.
- By registering at a school, you are making a formal statement of interest, and keeping your options open to enter the Pre-Test process.
- For some schools which hold their Pre-Tests in Year 6 (e.g. Eton, Radley, Harrow, Wellington, Winchester and Magdalen College School) you are likely to need to register at some stage during Year 5 – please see the spreadsheet at the end of this document.

## Year 6

- Some further visits to senior schools and perhaps to see boarding houses. A number of Pre-Tests will take place during this year.
- Firm places are offered on the results of Pre-Tests and parents will need to give a deposit (this can be £1,500+) to secure a place. Some schools will still make offers conditional on Common Entrance but increasingly this is less the case – the reality is that it is highly unusual for a boy to be turned down once an offer at Pre-Test has been made.

## Year 7

- Pre-Tests continue at various schools.
- As in Year 6, places will be offered after Pre-Test results and deposits will need to be paid to secure a place.
- Most parents only need to hold one place and hence pay one deposit. It is generally not good practice to hold multiple places as this can stall the process for other candidates, which can impact on other Moultsford boys. However, there may be good reasons for holding more than one place at different schools e.g. if families are undecided whether a boarding or day school is right for their son, or if your preferred choice of schools runs its Pre-Test process later than other schools.
- The very significant majority of boys will know their senior school by the end of Year 7, and have been offered a firm place.
- The Academic Scholarship courses start at the beginning of Year 7, and potential scholars will have been identified in the years prior to this in consultation with parents. However, it is still possible to have movement of boys in and out of this scholarship class going into Year 8. The scholarship syllabus is different from Common Entrance (see below), although Moultsford's new curriculum (introduced in September 2017) has brought the two closer together.



## Year 8

- Most boys know where they are going by now so that they can enjoy their last year of prep school.
- Prep schools must register boys with the Independent Schools Exam Board (ISEB) to sit Common Entrance for a specific school by 1st March of Year 8. Boys cannot be registered with ISEB for more than one school.
- Boys sit the Common Entrance exams in early June at Moultsford. Papers are sent to senior schools and marked by them.
- Moultsford boys sit Common Entrance exams in Maths, English and Science only. Boys entering Eton & Harrow will also take Common Entrance French. We will send details of boys' progress in the other subjects to senior schools in the Summer term of Year 8.
- Common Entrance results are released normally 10 days after the exams.



## WHAT ARE PRE-TESTS?

Virtually every senior school now operates a Pre-Test either in Year 6 or Year 7. There is no common system across all of the schools, although a critical mass of schools are now gravitating towards the ISEB Common Pre-Test. A Pre-Test usually consists of some of the following elements:

- A comprehensive reference sent from Moultsford.
- An interview – sometimes multiple. In some cases, being called for interview is conditional on how boys have performed in the Pre-Tests.
- IQ/Aptitude tests, often computerised e.g. devised by Durham University and/or Cognitive Ability Tests (CAT) – verbal and non-verbal reasoning.
- Written tests in Maths and English.
- Some schools will be heavily over-subscribed and operate a two stage Pre-Test (e.g. Eton, Harrow and Radley for Open Entry), with boys being invited back for Round Two depending on their performance in Round One. These processes are described in more detail in the spreadsheet on p.13-16.
- ISEB operate a Common Pre-Test. Boys may take this Pre-Test at Moultsford just once during an academic year - the results can be accessed by the senior schools which recognise the test. More schools are signing up to the ISEB Common Pre-Test e.g. Wellington, Eton, Harrow, Stowe, Bradfield, Marlborough, Radley, Pangbourne, St. Edward's, The Oratory and Winchester.
- Boys can take Pre-Tests to several different schools.

The outcome of Pre-Tests tends to fall into three categories:

- An offer of an “unconditional” or a “conditional” place – senior schools may state that this is subject to Common Entrance, but the reality is that this is normally a firm offer. It is highly unusual for boys to be turned down by a senior school, once they have been offered a place at the Pre-Test stage.
- A place on the waiting list – please note that this is extremely common, as some schools will be heavily over-subscribed. While there are no guarantees, there tends to be significant movement on most waiting lists.
- No place or waiting list place offered

By the end of the Pre-Test process, senior schools will aim to have the correct number of pupils for the places they have available. In the past, some popular schools found themselves oversubscribed at Common Entrance and hence had to fail a number of boys at this very late stage – this is clearly undesirable for all parties: boys, parents, senior schools and prep schools. The introduction of Pre-Tests is designed to avoid such a situation.

## PREPARATION FOR PRE-TESTS

Pre-Tests are designed to identify potential as well as attainment. Examples and practice questions are provided during the testing period so that candidates understand what they have to do. For the ISEB Common Pre-Test, the ISEB website ([www.iseb.co.uk](http://www.iseb.co.uk)) gives information and also a demonstration of the style of question to be expected - there are no practice papers available for the ISEB Pre-Test.

One of the reasons that senior schools have moved to using the Pre-Tests is because they are intended to test a child's ability to understand and reason, and are a test of skill, rather than of learned knowledge. The theory is that they allow the examining body to build a picture of a child's potential for critical thinking, problem-solving and ultimately intelligence. Although children can practise this style of question, there is very little evidence to suggest that specific verbal and non-verbal reasoning lessons will add value, but instead merely ensure that the child is familiar with the nature of the test.

At Moultsford, the boys sit CEM (Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring) Baseline Tests at the start of each year. One aspect of these tests is called 'Developed Ability' which comprises verbal and non-verbal reasoning and so the boys are very familiar with this type of test - the boys make good year on year progress as they go through the school. Children who read widely, and who have good general knowledge perform better than those who do not.

The Moultsford curriculum routinely covers all aspects of English and Maths which boys will come across at the Pre-Test stage. Reading

and close attention to the Moultsford curriculum are by far the best ways to prepare.

Senior Schools specifically request that Prep Schools do not try and coach boys for the Pre-Tests – Moultsford is confident that boys will be very well prepared by the time they are in Year 6. That said, it is important the boys are familiar with the format of Pre-Tests. As mentioned, annual CEM testing at Moultsford goes a long way to achieving this. For further familiarisation, Moultsford sets up online accounts with 'ATOM Learning' and 'BOFA' for all Year 5 boys, so they can practise themselves with Verbal and Non-Verbal Reasoning questions. The school also has a supply of VR and NVR books for boys to borrow and take home.

In the Summer term of Year 5, the boys have a senior school preparation day which covers interview technique, 'ATOM Learning' and 'BOFA' tests, verbal and non-verbal reasoning, and their 'CV' which links to their references.

### Parents may also wish to visit:

[www.pretestplus.co.uk](http://www.pretestplus.co.uk)

[www.lumosity.com](http://www.lumosity.com)

The ISEB Pre-Test is standardised by a boy's age at the time they take the test. Therefore a boy should not be disadvantaged if he takes the test early in the academic year but has a late birthday. Schools which run their own Pre-Tests should operate the same system.





## INTERVIEWS

In order to help prepare the boys for interview, we use an external interviewer who is very familiar with the schools we feed. The boys take part in an initial group session before having a half hour individual session. Following feedback from these sessions, we may decide to give boys additional practice. Each senior school carries out interviews in their own way, but one common desire they have is to speak to boys who are passionate, engaged and interested in a topic of conversation. Those boys who regularly engage with the news, current and world affairs will have a wealth of general knowledge to draw upon.

Senior schools are very clear to us that they can easily spot boys who have been over-coached, and that they find it difficult to engage with the “real boy”. Senior schools want boys to be natural, relaxed and just chat – they are not looking to catch boys out. Hence our preparation focuses on ensuring boys will be familiar with the interview process and environment.

Parents can help by encouraging conversation around the dinner table and in the car. It is particularly useful for boys to engage in conversations with adults other than their parents. In preparing for an interview, boys may want to think carefully about the following:

- Their strengths at school
- Their weaknesses at school (but try and present them in a positive fashion)
- Their passions/interests in and outside of school
- Any achievements of which they are especially proud
- What book they are reading
- Current affairs – but stick to what interests them, not the stories parents would like them to be knowledgeable about
- Details of the school they are visiting, through website and/or prospectus research
- At least two questions they would like to pose to their interviewer

Tiffany Squire (Deputy Head Academic) and Grant Smart (Senior Schools Coordinator) work very closely with the boys and parents in preparing boys for both the Pre-Tests and interviews. Enquiries regarding the process should be directed to one of them.



## ANXIETY ABOUT THE PROCESS

One other piece of advice: parents' anxiety about the process (whether it be about the test or interview) will almost certainly be picked up by boys, who may in turn become stressed, and then underperform. My advice would be to "underplay" the whole process for boys – they are being tested at a relatively young age and it is not in the best interests of boys to be put under pressure. They will give a much better account of themselves if they are relaxed and at ease. Moultsford is very experienced in "preparing" boys for entry to senior schools, so please trust us. Experience also suggests that boys open up and talk more when their parents are not present.



## SCHOLARSHIPS

Most senior schools offer a number of different scholarships at 13+ (Year 9 entry). Generally boys who enter their senior schools via a scholarship route must still gain a place at the Pre-Test stage. If for some reason boys have missed the Pre-Test process, they may still enter the senior school through sitting a scholarship. However, depending on the senior school, this can be a high-risk route, as entry is likely to rely on a successful scholarship attempt.

The majority of scholarships take place at some stage in Year 8. Most schools have reduced the financial value of scholarships in order to provide more funding for means tested bursaries. Many scholarships are now worth a maximum of 10% of fees. Hence scholarships are not necessarily the way to help fund children through senior schools in the way they used to be. However for some schools, scholarships can be the key to unlock bursarial assistance through a means tested route.

There are various different types of scholarships, as listed below.

### Academic Scholarships

- Boys study an alternative academic syllabus, which starts at the beginning of Year 7. However, it is perfectly possible for boys to move into the scholarship set at the beginning of Year 8. Likewise boys can move out of the scholarship set at any stage if it is felt that they are more suited to following the non-scholarship syllabus. The decision as to which boys should sit an academic scholarship is taken jointly after dialogue between the school and parents. A firm decision as to whether a boy will sit an academic scholarship is normally taken at the very end of Year 7.

- Most senior schools choose to set their own academic scholarship papers and so effectively set their own syllabus. Accordingly, it is not uncommon for the scholarship class to have boys studying up to four different syllabi. However, there is a lot of crossover, and the Moultsford staff are very experienced in dealing with this. There is a Common Academic Scholarship set by ISEB but most schools which Moultsford “feeds” to, do not follow this.
- The scholarship papers are trying to test the ability to apply knowledge rather than simply remember facts. They test the capability for lateral thinking and the ability to deconstruct and investigate questions and concepts.
- The scholarship exams are usually sat either in February, March or May of Year 8 with candidates normally sitting the papers at their senior school over a period of 2/3 days.

### **Other sorts of Scholarships – Art, Design & Technology, Drama, Music, Sports, All-rounder**

The range of awards offered varies widely from school to school. The decision to enter a boy for a scholarship is taken after dialogue between Moultsford and parents. With the exception of Art and Design & Technology (see below), a firm decision does not need to be taken until the beginning of Year 8.

Plenty of dialogue takes place between Moultsford and the senior schools in relation to specific candidates and their strengths. In addition to this, formal references are sent from Moultsford from both the Head, and the relevant Head of Department. Most of these scholarships are assessed in the Spring Term of Year 8, although some scholarships can be in the Autumn term.

Scholarships normally adopt a variation of the following pattern:

- **Art and Design & Technology:** A portfolio put together over a period of one to two years is submitted. Boys are also likely to have a practical exam and interview which tests drawing ability etc. Identifying scholars early is important so that a portfolio can be built up. Due to the commitment required over a long period of time, it is essential that boys have a genuine passion for Art and/or Design & Technology.
- **Drama:** Assessed through a combination of prepared pieces and tests of improvisation. Candidates can submit a portfolio.
- **Music:** Many schools will require candidates to offer two instruments with at least one at Grade 5/6. Most Directors of Music will be looking for natural musical talent rather than purely a level of achievement as defined by music exams. Boys are likely to have a practical assessment and interview.
- **Sports:** Many schools expect candidates to have county/regional/national representation. Boys are likely to have a practical assessment. Senior schools often try to observe candidate’s performance in matches at their Prep School.
- **All-Rounder or General Scholarships:** The precise format varies from school to school. Boys generally need to offer two or more disciplines (e.g. sport and music) to a very good (but not exceptional) standard. Some schools also stipulate that boys must have strong academic credentials and may test them in Maths and English - they do not necessarily need to be of scholarship standard. Sometimes there is a test of leadership skills. All-Rounder Scholarships are becoming less common.
- Some schools have more obscure awards e.g. for sons/daughters of clergy, service families etc. It is also becoming more common for senior schools to award scholarships once children are in Year 9 (e.g. after they’ve left Prep School).



## WHAT NEXT?

- Good communication with me, Ben Beardmore-Gray and Tiffany Squire (Deputy Head – Academic). We are both in a very good position to give advice on senior schools and the process. As a Head, I have been advising parents for 17 years. Both I and the school have very close links with Heads and Registrars of senior schools. I also have the added advantage of my own children having recently gone through the process.
- Talk to your friends and other parents of children in senior schools but do not rely on gossip.
- Look at websites, prospectuses, schools guides e.g. The Good Schools Guide etc.
- Book in to attend Open Days or individual visits. Remember it can be worth doing both for a different visit experience.
- Trust your judgement and instinct and think what is right for your child - don't worry too much about where other children are going.
- There is no perfect school!

## 13+ SENIOR SCHOOLS

Please note that all dates for 2020/2021 are subject to delay because of the pandemic, as are dates for 2021/22.

School	Registration Deadline	Pre-Test Details	Scholarships and Awards	Notes
<b>Abingdon</b>	By May of Year 6	October of Year 7 Abingdon Test - English, Maths, Reasoning Interview	Academic Art & Design Technology Music Drama Sport	All boys 1000 boys Predominantly day, 15% boarding No Saturday school
<b>Bradfield</b>	By 1 Nov of Year 6	November of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test November to March of Year 6 - Interview and team problem solving	Academic Art/Design Music Drama Sport All Rounder	Co-ed 439 boys, 253 girls Predominantly boarding No rugby
<b>Cheltenham College</b>	By November of Year 6	November of Year 6 Cheltenham Pre-Test - English, Maths, Interview, Leadership tasks	Academic Art Drama Music Sport	Co-educational 720 pupils 382 boys 338 girls 81% boarding
<b>Cokethorpe</b>	By end of Year 7	During Year 7 or 8 - Cokethorpe Test - Maths & English, a group activity and interview	Academic Art Drama Music Sport	Co-ed 500 in senior school 300 boys, 200 girls Day school No Saturday school
<b>Eton</b>	By 30 June of Year 5	<b>Stage 1:</b> October/November of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test <b>Stage 2:</b> Spring or Summer Term of Year 6 - Eton Test (predictive test on ability). Interview and group activity	Academic Music	All boys 1317 boys Boarding

School	Registration Deadline	Pre-Test Details	Scholarships and Awards	Notes
<b>Harrow</b>	Final deadline is 1 <sup>st</sup> May of Year 6, but earlier registration strongly advised. Ideally by end of Year 5.	<b>Stage 1:</b> Autumn term of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test <b>Stage 2:</b> September/October of Year 7 - Harrow Test (computerised English and Maths test, short composition, visual processing speed test) Interviews	Academic Music Art Outstanding Talent	All boys 820 boys Boarding
<b>Magdalen College School (MCS)</b>	By 31 October of Year 6	January of Year 6 MCS Test - Verbal reasoning, Maths, English Composition Interview	Academic Art Music Sport	All boys to GCSE Co-ed in 6 <sup>th</sup> Form 780 boys, 120 girls Day school No Saturday school
<b>Marlborough College</b>	By 30 <sup>th</sup> June of Year 5	December/January of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test Spring Term of Year 6 - Interview	Academic Art Design Technology Music Sport All Rounder	Co-ed 553 boys, 378 girls Boarding
<b>Millfield</b>	By end of Year 7	Year 7 or 8 - Millfield Assessment Interview	Academic Art Chess Design & Innovation Music Sport All Rounder	Co-ed 747 boys, 493 girls Predominantly boarding with a sizeable day community
<b>Pangbourne</b>	By 30 September of Year 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISEB Pre-test by November of Year 6</li> <li>• Interview &amp; activities in January of Year 6</li> </ul>	Academic Art Design Technology Drama Music Sport	Co-ed 271 boys, 146 girls Boarding, part-boarding and day



School	Registration Deadline	Pre-Test Details		Scholarships and Awards	Notes
<b>Radley</b>	As soon as possible but by 10 <sup>th</sup> October of Year 6 at latest	<i>Radley List</i> (Boys registered early) By 30 November of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test. Interview between Sept-Jan of Year 6.	<i>Open Entry</i> <b>Stage 1:</b> (Boys not on Radley List) By 30 November of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test <b>Stage 2:</b> Assessment Day Comprehension and free writing Interview in Spring Term	Academic Art Drama Music Sport All Rounder (Cannot specifically apply for the latter – the award is based on the performance in other scholarships)	All boys 770 boys Boarding
<b>Reading Blue Coat</b>	By 31st October of Year 7	Autumn term of Year 7 – RBC assessment and interview		Music	Co-ed from September 2023 760 pupils Day
<b>Rugby</b>	By January of Year 6	Interview and reference in Spring of Year 6		Academic Drama Sport Music Art Technology Computing	Co-ed 450 boys, 350 girls Predominantly full boarding
<b>Shiplake</b>	By Summer term of Year 6	Autumn Term of Year 7 - Shiplake Assessment Interview		Academic Art Music Drama Sport	Co-ed from September 2023 410 boys, 50 girls, Boarding, flexi-boarding and day No Saturday school

School	Registration Deadline	Pre-Test Details	Scholarships and Awards	Notes
<b>St Edward's Oxford</b>	By Autumn of Year 6	Autumn Year 6 – ISEB Pre-Test Spring term of Year 6 – Interview & activity session	Academic Art Music Dance Drama Design Technology Sport All Rounder	Co-ed 422 boys, 264 girls Predominantly boarding with some day children
<b>Stowe</b>	By Autumn term of Year 6	During Year 6 – Interview (as part of family visit) By November of Year 7 – ISEB Pre-Test	Academic Art Music Sport Outstanding Talent/Leadership	Co-ed 491 boys, 305 girls Predominantly full boarding, 18% day
<b>The Oratory</b>	By end of Year 6	Year 6 or 7 – ISEB Pre-Test & interview	Academic Music Sport	Co-ed 300+ Boarding and day Catholic ethos
<b>Uppingham</b>	By the end of Year 6	September of Year 7 - Uppingham Test Interview	Academic Art/Design Technology Music Sport Leadership/All Round	Co-ed 462 boys, 334 girls Boarding
<b>Wellington College</b>	By 30 June of Year 5	<b>Stage 1:</b> October/November of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test <b>Stage 2:</b> Spring Term - Assessment day with group activities Interview No further academic tests	Academic Music	Co-ed 635 boys, 405 girls Predominantly boarding
<b>Winchester College</b>	By the end of Year 5	By November of Year 6 - ISEB Pre-Test Spring Term of Year 6 - Interview	Academic Music Sport	All boys Plans to go Co-ed in 6th Form at some stage 670 boys Boarding





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