

THE SCOTSMAN
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INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



STEPPING OUT
WHAT THE FEE-PAYING EDUCATION
SECTOR CAN OFFER IN SCOTLAND

Independent schools hold steady in time of downturn

Pupil numbers are buoyant right across Scotland's fee-paying schools after a summer in which exam results hit a five-year high, writes Julia Horton

THE past few years have been a turbulent time for Scottish independent schools both politically and economically. But while times are even tougher as the latest academic year gets underway, the sector retains confidence that it will ride out the storm.

Its positive attitude is borne out by the latest exam results, which have produced the best figures in five years, and an ongoing steady demand for places. But there is no escaping the reality that funding is increasingly hard to find, both for parents and the schools themselves, as the continuing global economic crisis persists in piling pressure on all organisations and individuals.

Meanwhile, next month is the deadline when four more independent schools in Scotland must satisfy the charities regulator that they meet the public benefit requirements of the now notorious "charity test".

In 2009 the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) gave the four schools – Hutchesons' Grammar, Lomond, Merchiston Castle and St Leonards – two years to implement their plans to meet the criteria.

The OSCR still categorises independent schools as "high-risk" charities, raising the prospect that they may fail – losing a vital source of funding and support.

The Scottish Council for Independent Schools (SCIS), which represents more than 70 private schools nationwide, believes that all four schools will join the seven which have already been reviewed and which have passed the controversial test.

The council's view is based on the changes which the schools have introduced, including increasing financial assistance so that more pupils can benefit, and by greater amounts.

John Edward, SCIS director, said: "In terms of the charities legislation, the schools have to demonstrate that they exist for a charitable purpose, namely

the advancement of education, and that they provide benefit.

"OSCR has to determine whether the fees charged constitute an unduly restrictive condition – the schools aim to keep their fees as low as possible, while maintaining standards, and are as generous as their funds will allow in extending financial assistance to those who cannot afford the full fee.

"The schools appreciate their responsibilities as charities and should be well prepared to meet the charity test."

Many independent schools are built on charitable foundations and make a significant contribution to the education, economy and social fabric of Scotland. This August, exam results showed that independent schools are continuing to improve, with a five-year record high. It is such successes which persuade

"Schools appreciate their charitable responsibilities and should be well able to meet the charity test"

SCIS director John Edward

parents that the benefits still outweigh the costs. At some schools, admissions work and entrance testing continued over the summer with a flurry of late applicants for this academic year.

In Edinburgh, where one in four pupils are educated at independent schools, demand for places is still so high that several are full and have waiting lists for the key entry stages.

Overall, the number of pupils going to independent schools in Scotland has remained stable over the past few years despite the economic downturn, suggesting again that the SCIS's confidence may be well placed.

Early signs from the annual SCIS statistics on student numbers, collected every September, suggest that the pic-



ture looks much the same as last year, when there were 31,540 pupils attending SCIS member schools. That is a small decline on 2009, when total student numbers at SCIS schools were 31,713, and on 2008 when the total stood at 31,840.

The statistics are all the more impressive when set against a decrease in Scotland's total pupil population, which is due to the falling birth rate.

That said, there are understandable concerns that the private sector cannot

buck the trend forever. And investment in many independent schools is pretty much on hold at the moment. As one education insider said: "Whenever there has been a recession in the past, student numbers at independent schools have remained the same, but it would be a big surprise if there wasn't a bit of a dip this year. Investment isn't about growth now, it's about keeping it together."

Some schools have remained buoyant, however, for example the Cedars

Christian School in Greenock which is reportedly the first in the world where all lessons are now taught using iPads.

And the SCIS has a positive message for parents and pupils. Sarah Randell, SCIS deputy director, said: "Overall, at the start of a new school year, the independent school sector in Scotland is in good heart, boosted by the best exam performance in five years, and encouraged by the commitment of parents to their children's education."

Open days a window on the world of a school at work, rest, and play

JOAN MCFADDEN

OPEN days are an excellent way of getting a feel for a particular school, its facilities, pupils and staff, but they are also a slightly unreal presentation of life in the school and can get very busy.

Most independent schools have open days in September

and October which tend to be specially organised to showcase different departments and relevant projects, but using them as a general information-gathering exercise is the best approach.

Some schools offer personalised taster days and you can always make an appointment for a more detailed visit when staff

will have time to give undivided attention. But open days can be a very useful tool in deciding which school to choose. Some advance planning will help, as will taking your child along and finding out their reaction to the school.

Start with the website and either download or request a

prospectus so you have some idea of what you want to ask or focus on, including your children's questions and concerns.

Make this first visit a fairly leisurely one so you get a full impression of everything going on, especially if there are guided tours. Older pupils will often be involved as guides or in provid-

ing hospitality, and they may offer a clearer picture of the reality of life at the school and their experience of it. Parents who are part of the PTA or similar school organisation are often available and happy to answer questions.

If this is your first experience of choosing a school, it can be a fairly nerve-racking experience,

but it makes sense to ensure you're completely comfortable with the environment and whether hours and activities dovetail with your domestic arrangements.

Draw up a rough idea of what you're looking for and ask all the questions you want before making such an important decision.



Admissions work and entrance testing continued in the summer with a flurry of late applicants

A little bit of planning helps prevent bills from piling up

JULIA HORTON

"THE financial climate is an enormous challenge for families, teachers and schools – but one that, to date, our sector has met with confidence, pragmatism and innovation."

Those were the words of John Edward, director of the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), spoken just before May's Holyrood election.

Almost five months on, and the economy remains in bad shape, making it increasingly difficult for parents in Scotland to afford to send their children to private school.

Independent schools north of the border are well aware of the issues and say they are all doing what they can to help. Fees have still risen however, to meet the growing cost of salaries and school utility bills, with average increases in 2010 of 4 per cent for day schools and 3 per cent for boarding schools, roughly in line with the previous year.

The total amount of financial assistance which schools give to pupils' families has been substantially increased recently in mitigation, up from £24 million in 2009 to £32m last year.

With the situation worsening, parents arguably need more help than ever. Independent financial advisors can draw up a plan for parents designed to generate sufficient funds to meet the cost of school fees over the period of a child's schooling, taking into account current and future commitments and expenditure.

However, though there are numerous ways of reducing the cost, few parents take the time to plan how to pay for their children's education.

Specialist independent financial advisory firm, Independent School Fees Advice, warns: "The vast majority of parents pay their school fees out of income without any significant school fee planning.

"Regardless of your financial situation, there are always good reasons why you should plan

Schools can offer financial assistance to families



school fees. Whether the fees are readily affordable or not, this is unlikely to be the most efficient way to pay school fees. Whatever your circumstances are, school fees planning will reduce the cost of private education."

Independent schools all now offer a range of options to parents to reduce the burden on many families who sacrifice other spending to pay for their children's educational costs.

Most private schools offer parents the option of spreading the cost of school fees over the year by setting up a direct debit or standing order.

Family discounts are available at the vast majority of independents, making it cheaper for parents who send two or more of their children to a private school.

Means-tested financial support is increasingly provided at most independent schools and has become more common at junior levels now as well as for senior pupils.

Parents on lower incomes are actively encouraged to apply for assistance so that children from families which may not have considered independent education before can benefit from the opportunities which it provides.

With contributions to fees for eligible families ranging from 20 per cent of the annual fees to 100

per cent – a free place in other words – such financial assistance is well worth applying for.

Most schools ask parents to complete a questionnaire giving details of family income and assets in order to assess those in greatest need.

The SCIS advises parents to explain the talents that their children have to offer as well as what they think their children will gain from being pupils at the school. Deadlines for applications are usually from late November to early January and most schools consider applications in February or March, typically informing parents of their decision in March for places at the start of the next school year.

Schools normally commit to supporting the whole of a child's education if an award is made.

Meanwhile families often receive help from other relatives, with grandparents frequently providing financial support.

SCIS, an independent educational charity representing more than 70 private schools in Scotland, produces a directory of schools including a table showing which schools offer means-tested assistance and which age groups of children are eligible.

For a free copy of the directory, e-mail sarah@scis.org.uk or visit www.scis.org.uk

Clifton Hall School
Nursery, Junior & Senior
Friday 14 October
1.00pm – 3.00pm
0131 333 1359

The Edinburgh Academy
Junior School
Saturday 8 October
10.00am – 12.30pm
0131 552 3690

Senior School
Saturday 8 October
11.00am – 2.00pm
0131 556 4603

Fettes College
Prep & Senior
Sunday 2 October
1.30pm – 4.00pm
0131 311 6744

George Heriot's School
Junior & Senior
Saturday 1 October
9.45am – 1.00pm
0131 221 6709

George Watson's College
Junior & Senior
Saturday 8 October
9.30am – 12.30pm
0131 446 6007

Loretto School
Junior School
Saturday 1 October
10.30am – 12.30pm
0131 653 4570

Senior School
Saturday 8 October
9.45am – 1.30pm
0131 653 4455

★ **The Mary Erskine School**
Saturday 24 September
10.00am – 1.00pm
0131 347 5700

The Mary Erskine and Stewart's Melville Junior School
Saturday 24 September
10.00am – 1.00pm
0131 311 1111

◆ **Merchiston Castle School**
Junior & Senior
Saturday 17 September
10.00am – 1.00pm
0131 312 2200

★ **St George's School for Girls**
Junior & Senior
Saturday 29 October
10.00am – 12noon
0131 311 8000

Junior & Senior
Wednesday 9 November
9.30am – 12noon
0131 311 8000

St Mary's Music School
Saturday 8 October
2.30pm – 5.00pm
0131 538 7766

◆ **Stewart's Melville College**
Saturday 24 September
10.00am – 1.00pm
0131 311 1000

◆ Boys only
★ Girls only

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Independent schools are upfront about fees – all parents need to do is check what's included in the price, writes Martin Hannan

Figures are big, but it's easy to see how it all adds up



A GREAT deal of fuss has been made over the issue of fees in higher education of late, and one of the talking points has been a perceived lack of transparency over the actual costs.

That is not the case with Scotland's independent schools. In what might seem a remarkable exercise in transparency, given that independent schools compete with each other to attract pupils, every member school in the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) states its fees openly on the SCIS website.

In the current school year, there are more than 31,000 pupils aged from three to 18 in the 70-plus independent schools which are members of SCIS.

A good measure of the fees which the schools charge is the "indicative average fee level" which is monitored regularly by SCIS, and which has been updated recently to take account of increased fees for 2011-2012 – increases which were mostly below the rate of inflation.

This school year, the average fee per term for a pupil at a SCIS nursery is £2,009, while the average fee per term for a junior pupil at day school is £2,676. For senior pupils at day school, the average fee per term is £3,318. For boarders, the average fee per term for a junior

is £6,231 and £8,693 for a senior boarder, or £26,079 per year.

John Edward, director of SCIS, says: "Independent, fee-paying schools in Scotland work to keep fees as low as possible so that the education they provide is accessible to many. As most independent schools are charitable foundations, fees are set at a level to cover running costs and generate a small surplus, which is reinvested into facilities and resources.

"Scotland's independent schools are

"Independent schools have kept fee increases as low as possible to ease the burden on parents"

John Edward, director of SCIS

sensitive to the pressures that parents face, particularly in the current economic climate, and they have kept fee increases as low as possible to ease the burden on parents."

The price range is considerable across Scotland, which makes it worth checking out the many options available at independent schools. For just as no two

schools have the same uniform, so no two schools are alike in what they offer a pupil.

It mostly follows that the more educational facilities and better tuition offered by a school, the higher goes the price, but there are certainly some schools where fees are not as expensive as might be expected.

Parents and potential pupils are probably looking for high scholastic achievement, but they may want a better all-round experience with sport and culture as important as exam results – it very much is a case of paying your money and taking your choice.

It is also very important that parents check out exactly what is included in the fee they will be charged, for there are variations between schools.

Edward explains: "Fees do vary considerably between different types of mainstream independent school, dependent on whether they are day, boarding, junior or senior. Some schools make an additional charge for 'extras' such

as lunches, books and curricular related travel while others charge an all-inclusive fee."

The kind of thing which parents should ask about and which they should presume are NOT included in the fees – unless the school specifically says so

– include the following: art materials, personal accident insurance, curricular travel and sport-related travel; text books, jotters and classroom stationery; exam entry fees; laundry for Boarders; lunches, one-to-one learning support, and outdoor activities.

NO EXTRA COST

HERE is a quick guide to what some of Scotland's leading independent schools include in their fees:

Dollar Academy: Exam entry fees, text books, jotters, art materials, personal accident insurance, learning support, laundry for boarders

George Watson's College: exam entry fees and personal accident insurance

Stewart's Melville

College: exam entry fees and personal accident insurance

Glenalmond College: lunches, text books, personal accident insurance, laundry for boarders

Gordonstoun: lunches, text books, jotters, art materials, curriculum-related outdoor activities, laundry for boarders

High School of Dundee: exam entry fees, text books and

jotters (junior only), art materials, personal accident insurance, learning support

Morrison's Academy: exam entry fees, text books, jotters, art materials, personal accident insurance, learning support, curricular-related and representational sport travel

St Leonards: lunches, personal accident insurance, textbooks and jotters (junior only)

Dish up a way to raise funds and learn business skills simultaneously

JOAN MCFADDEN

FUNDRAISING at independent school is a fact of life, but the quality of it varies enormously. Firework displays, Christmas fetes, ceilidhs, race nights and concerts all help pull in the cash, either to provide much-needed school equipment, fund sporting events, trips abroad or help local charities. Parents give their time,

money and everything they can find in their attics, while at one school every year a fresh batch of sixth-year pupils tackle the enormous challenge of coming up with something new and exciting to separate friends and relatives from their money.

The challenge for pupils coming into their final year at the Edinburgh Steiner School is to maintain and hone an already successful project which

has been running for the last 15 years and funds a cultural trip abroad with their teacher. They do this by preparing the lunches for the rest of the student body with support from their parents and form teacher. It started small – suggested by two pupils – with pupils making and selling toasts. The canteen now serves up to 60 lunches to staff and pupils on a busy day. This is a business and that's exactly how

it is run, with pupils receiving in-depth training at the start of the year to cover food preparation and handling, hygiene, storage and health and safety. They learn about food provenance as well as teamwork, marketing, budgeting and organisational skills, sourcing quality local and organic ingredients. Pupils have to organise their own system to ensure that the canteen runs successfully, which includes a

staffing rota, menu planning, sourcing and ordering food, budgeting, preparation, serving and promoting the meals, as well as planning for any illnesses or absences from school. They also have to serve, clear and wash up, and be ready on time for their next class. This is a fundraising exercise which also encompasses a number of life skills which stand them in very good stead for the future.



Whether you favour single-sex education, a fully co-ed system, or a mixture of the two, the choice is available, says Joan McFadden

Individuals at the heart of the boy/girl debate



WHEN deciding on mixed or single-sex schools, the individual rather than the principles should be at the heart of the decision. Advocates of both systems tend to be passionate on the subject, and there is plenty of research to support both views.

Single sex supporters claim that boys and girls learn differently and that these differences can best be responded to by differentiating their instruction and learning environment, that co-education encourages gender stereotypes, and that teachers may treat girls differently from boys in maths, science, and computer-related classes, giving them less attention and fewer learning opportunities.

Some studies have shown that both male and female students who have been educated in single sex environments have a stronger preference for subjects that are stereotypically aligned with the opposite sex. Since girls mature earlier than boys, in a class by themselves they may feel relieved not to be subject to social pressures and are free to concentrate on learning instead.

On the other hand, co-education can give students the opportunity to learn from each other's approaches and understand how to collaborate, bringing different styles to bear in working for common goals. Co-educational schools are microcosms of society, providing an environment in which gender differences come to be understood, better preparing students for life.

Ultimately, the best school is the one that is a good match for a particular child at a particular time in his or her life, which is the principle Erskine Stewart Melville Schools adheres to, with their diamond structure approach to learning. From age 3 to 12, children are educated together in the Mary Erskine and Stewart's Melville

Junior School. In adolescence the school follows the belief that their learning styles differ and they need the chance to develop their individual talents, so girls go into the Mary Erskine School and boys into Stewart Melville's College until age 17, when they come together again for 6th form in the co-educational Erskine Stewart's Melville. "The education we offer is focused to ensure that each boy and girl has the opportunity to discover his or her talents," explains Principal David Gray.

Many originally single sex schools now open their doors to the opposite sex or merge with other schools to provide that experience, but that is not an issue with Dollar Academy, which is thought to be the oldest co-educational boarding school in the world and now seeks to combine traditional values with modern facilities.

Educating boys and girls together has always been part of the ethos of the school, replicating what it sees as the norm both at home and in the workplace. "Dollar Academy has always been a popular choice for Scottish parents, and part of the reason for this is that we understand what families hope to achieve from a boarding school experience," says Rector David Knapman "Excellent teaching and a positive learning environment are important in choosing a child's education, but it is often about so much more. In terms of boarding accommodation, today's parents have high standards and we agree that they should expect excellence. To ensure a genuine family atmosphere we deliberately keep numbers in each house quite low. Our emphasis is on quality of experience rather than size."

Schools which favour single sex education tend to emphasise that this is about education, rather than socialising, and aim to provide a balance by ensuring they maintain strong links with other schools and activities which offer a mixed environment in extra-curricular activities.



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The route to academic excellence varies from school to school, but the end result – fulfilling potential – is the same, writes Martin Hannan

THE curriculum choices offered by Scotland's independent schools depend to a great degree on which form of further education pupils are being prepared for. It follows that schools trying to qualify pupils for Scottish universities and colleges will follow the Scottish Qualifications Authority syllabus in Scotland and put their charges through Highers and Advanced Highers. Those trying to dispatch pupils to Oxford, Cambridge and other institutions in England usually go down the A-level route. Some schools have taken up the International Baccalaureate, while other schools have a singular curriculum that might be described as outwith the norm.

One thing which independent schools do not like is league tables of exam results. When so many different schools follow so many different paths, comparisons are often impossible and certainly not meaningful.

It is worth noting, however, that official figures from the independent schools and the SQA show that pupils in schools which are members of the Scottish Council of Independent Schools recorded improvement in pass rates in 2011 for the third year running.

In Advanced Highers, for instance, independent schools have seen a 20 per cent increase

in the number of A grades, while in mainstream independent schools, more than half of all S5 Higher entries were awarded the top grade – a significant factor

now that universities more and more insist on better grades.

The Scottish school with arguably the most different curriculum is the Edinburgh Steiner School, which celebrated one of the highest A-C Higher pass rates in Scotland last month – an impressive 95.7 per cent. In keeping with the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, the Edinburgh school does not select on the basis of academic ability, but offers all its pupils the opportunity to sit nationally-recognised qualifications.

Alistair Pugh, upper school teacher and a member of the school's management team, explains what sets the school apart from other independent schools in Scotland. He says: "Our education differs from other schools from the moment our pupils join us at the age of three-and-a-half. Unlike other schools in Scotland, but in line with the rest of Europe, we delay the start of formal education until the age of six or even seven.

Our pupils spend longer in our kindergarten where they learn through stimulating play and imitation. Numeracy skills are built as they weigh and measure the ingredients to bake their snack while language skills are supported through stories, plays and songs.

"Imagination is nurtured through

the use of unformed toys and physical agility built through extensive outdoor play. Their years in kindergarten enable them to develop a strong and secure base on which later skills can grow. When they do start in Class 1, we find our pupils are responsive, willing and ready to learn.

"Steiner schools provide an educational environment where the young child's innate curiosity and ability to learn can be strengthened. Our approach has a long and well respected track record that shows that high-quality, but non-academic, early years education lays the foundations for good social and academic skills as well as a passion for life-long learning."

Perhaps controversially, the Steiner School limits the amount of screen exposure – television or computer monitor – its pupils receive. Pugh says: "We recognise that a limited use of television can enhance the learning experience for older pupils and we introduce ICT courses in our Upper School which allow our pupils to quickly reach the level of computer literacy shown by their peers in other schools. However, we recommend that screen exposure for pupils under the age of 14 is kept to a minimum and is absent entirely for those aged under seven."

Another difference at the Steiner School is the "Main Lesson" programme taught from Class 1 upwards and featuring a range of non-mainstream subjects. Pugh says:

"When so many different schools follow different paths, comparisons are often impossible and certainly not meaningful"

"While we teach the exam curriculum like other schools, we expand on this through Main Lessons, a technique which is only used in Steiner Schools. Main Lessons are topic blocks which are taught for up to two hours each day over a four-week period.

"While pupils at other schools become increasingly specialised as they move towards their final year, our pupils continue with the Main Lesson programme throughout their education."

Some schools and colleges in Scotland prefer the GCSE and A-level syllabus, and they are also recording better results. At Glenalmond College, for example, academic results in A-level exams continued to rise in 2011, with a 48 per cent increase in the proportion of A* grades attained by Glenalmond pupils.

Glenalmond says its results are particularly remarkable because they reflect the outstanding performance of the entire year group, the College ensuring that all of its pupils are strong enough to be entered for the demanding A-level qualifications.

Many schools are looking to a broader or different curriculum to attract pupils. St Leonards School in St Andrew in Fife, for instance, is the first school in Scotland to offer only the Interna-

Subject choice is tailored for a perfect fit

tional Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma to its students in the Upper Sixth Form (S6).

This all-IB approach has produced record results in the latest S6 who scored a record average of 34 points, equivalent to more than five Scottish Higher As and 479 UCAS points.

The IB Diploma is widely seen as the ideal preparation for university, with the curriculum including six subjects from groupings which ensure a breadth of education, a fully-researched 4,000-word extended essay, a theory of knowledge course and 150 hours of creativity, action and service.

More than 20 per cent of the 52 St Leonards pupils achieved the minimum entrance requirements for Oxford and Cambridge Universities of 38 points, and almost one third of the group – the fourth from St Leonards to complete the highly regarded two year qualification – also gained Bilingual Diplomas, indicating fluency in at least two languages.

Pupil Michael Overend from St Andrews scored 39 points and is now set to study Medicine at Dundee. He says: "The IB was challenging but it teaches you to think outside the box compared to other exams. I think it definitely helped with university entry."

Many independent schools have a



community awareness or international relations element in their curriculum. Pupils at Albyn in Aberdeen recently trekked across the plains of northern Tanzania to lay the foundations for a 5,000-litre water tank and kitchen for the village of Ndatu.

All Albyn pupils are involved with fundraising and charitable work for local, national and international causes, while academically the school has introduced new subjects including Higher PE, Higher Spanish, Higher Drama and Design and Technology to complement the broad array of arts, science

and social science subjects taught up to Advanced Higher level.

It will be difficult to top the curriculum item offered to a pupil at Lathallan School – Outer Space. Head girl Beth Woodford, 16, took part in a Space Camp at the University of Leicester. A week of lectures and workshops on everything from astronomy to human spaceflight saw Beth in the vertical wind tunnel at the Airkix facility, which simulates weightlessness.

A Lathallan girl to be the first Scotswoman in space? Why not? It could soon be part of the curriculum.

Facing up to – and not fearing – Facebook

JOAN MCFADDEN

SOCIAL media is here to stay. The majority of schools now embrace that concept to provide a safe social network for pupils to produce internet radio, podcasts and videos. Teachers and parents

can easily support children and check content, while recognising that digital literacy requires new skills and social-media experiences which are constantly developing. Rather than fearing the constantly changing face of IT, current policy aims to develop skills and ensure teachers use

social media for to educate and establish strong school communities and a sense of belonging.

Effective social media in schools is safe and controlled, which means staff can set limits on who can access it while teaching pupils how to upload video, podcasts, pictures, text and blogs as well as giving them their own web pages to showcase work. Keeping abreast of developments and using it effectively, rather than being left behind by technology, benefits everyone. "We set up a Facebook page just over a year ago," says Dr Michael

Carlsaw, headmaster of the St Andrews school. "It's a way for people to find out about the school and get in touch with us. For instance, it's a great way for our former pupils to stay connected with St Leonards and for parents to keep in touch with news from across the school and for prospective pupils it also offers a window into life at St Leonards. We still use other formal means of communication for more important matters but we realise that in today's world, Facebook is often people's first port of call for information."



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Curriculum choice reflects how a school prepares its pupils for university; Glenalmond, below, champions A-Levels
Picture: Getty Images

Pupils add another string to their bow

JESSICA FRASER

DRAMA and music play an important part in independent schools. Nowhere is this more true than at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh, which is Scotland's independent specialist music school, offering music and academic education to young musicians aged nine to 19.

It is one of nine Made (Music and Dance Excellence) schools throughout the UK, all of which are committed to the highest teaching standards in music and dance, alongside an excellent education.

St Mary's Preparatory School in the Scottish Borders also has a strong interest in drama and music, with drama productions and musical recitals held regularly. These encompass a wide variety of performances allowing the children to gain confidence and self esteem and music is positively encouraged with a wide choice of instrumental tuition available.

Kilgraston School for Girls in Perthshire has a very strong drama department which is an important, popular and rewarding aspect of school life as well as featuring as part of the curriculum. Participating in drama activities is especially beneficial for developing communication and teamwork skills, while at the same time providing the girls with an enormous amount of fun.

The impressive and varied productions take place in the school's new state-of-the-art theatre and attract not only



Music practise at St Mary's Music School
Picture: Ian Rutherford

parents and friends, but also a wider audience drawn from the locality. Private Lamda (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) classes leading towards examinations and awards offer another popular choice for pupils at Kilgraston who wish to further their interest.

Loretto School just outside Edinburgh has music, drama and art at the centre of life with a strong reputation in instrumental and choral

music going back to Loretto's foundation in 1827.

More than 60 per cent of pupils take individual music lessons and the choirs have made a number of CD recordings and had considerable success in national music competitions, while its pipe band competes successfully at a national level. A broad fine art curriculum is offered to pupils at GCSE and A-Level with strong art examination results, and regular

entries to national and local art competitions.

Drama is heavily supported by the Douglas Hutchison Fund and plays an important role in life at Loretto and most pupils have opportunities to perform on stage. Drama and Theatre Studies are taught for GCSE, AS and A2 curriculums with very strong results and dancing is also very popular with many pupils participating in Highland, hip hop and jazz dancing.

Case Study Patrick Shannon

Breadth and balance



PATRICK Shannon can undoubtedly consider his schooling a success, especially when he graduated top of his class at Napier University in 2005 with a 1st Class Honours degree in Applied Physics and Electronics. That led to his current post as technical director for a sensor design and manufacturing company, SST Sensing, but there are other areas in his life which he believes were shaped by the 12 years he spent at the Edinburgh Steiner School.

Patrick met his wife-to-be Pauline there when he was 13. They now have three young children. Patrick credits the school with giving them the confidence and grounding to set up their own successful smallholding close to Biggar, though neither had previous experience raising livestock. "I think the balance of education at the school was a great benefit and the broad grounding has stayed with both of us," he explains.

"While I was always going to be strongly biased to the sciences, the more artistic subjects were beneficial, as were the crafts like woodwork, which I loved and still do. I found a mallet I made for my first woodwork project in our potting shed recently and I'm still proud of it - I carved it from a solid piece of wood."

The language programme

means he can still confidently practise German with customers at work and he also extols the Main Lesson system (where the whole class studies a subject together) for giving him a wide exposure of subjects he might otherwise have paid little attention to, such as history of art and philosophy, as well as a good grounding in subjects he later studied at much higher levels.

"I can still remember the details of Mr Reynold's excellent trigonometry Main Lesson which stood me in good stead when the hard stuff came along at university and another thing I got from the school was a confidence in my abilities and the willingness to try new things.

"I think the education provided me with a certain maturity in both my outlook and my demeanour. When I started my career in engineering, people automatically assumed I was older and more experienced than I was, so they gave me greater responsibility. This was very good from the perspective of rapidly gaining experience and did my career no harm at all."

His only regret is that they live too far away from a Steiner School for their children to attend, but they aim to apply the principles which shaped them to their own parenting.

GORDONSTOUN

Fully co-educational boarding for ages 8-18



Gordonstoun's SPRING AWAKENING received a 5* review at this year's Fringe

SCHOLARSHIP DATES FOR 2012 ENTRY

JUNIOR SCHOOL (8+)	12 NOVEMBER 2011
SIXTH FORM (16+)	20 & 21 JANUARY 2012
LOWER SCHOOL (13+)	20-22 FEBRUARY 2012

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The typical chill image of boarding school life is a thing of the past, and their benefits are greater than ever, says Joan McFadden

THE SUBJECT of boarding schools tends to elicit a passionate response, though both fans and critics agree that the chilly, bracing image so often associated with the system now belongs firmly in the past.

It may not be quite as magical as Harry Potter, but there can be major benefits in boarding. Children whose parents are in the services or in constantly-changing jobs can see boarding as a much more appealing prospect than moving schools every couple of years; those with a particular passion for music or sport can find an especially nurturing atmosphere for their skills; and a similar focus on structured study can be very useful in academic achievements.

Parents often find the separation far harder to bear than the children, especially since boarding schools now work extremely hard to make the transition from home to school as smooth as possible, acknowledging that homesick pupils need to be effectively supported rather than left to get on with it.

Younger children often have the comfort of sharing a large bedroom with others but have their own private space as well, while a buddy system provides companionship and helps them to settle in. A busy life in and out of the classroom encourages pupils to enjoy everything school life has to offer, with "houseparents" normally in overall charge, providing appropriate pastoral care which is supported by easy, regular contact with parents.

Access to school staff and facilities after the school day is a major benefit for boarding pupils, and homework for younger pupils is supervised, while clubs and activities offer opportunities to discover and nurture talents or explore occupations that may be life-changing.

The extended day gives children the time and opportunity to try something different, or pursue an established interest, while many boarding schools offer superb facilities which are greatly appreciated by children who live a distance from school. Boarding in sixth form can also be the perfect preparation for university life, as teenagers become more independent and take more responsibility for daily life and study.

Some boarding schools offer weekly and monthly boarding, but others maintain that the key to success lies in maintaining as full a boarding ethos as possible. "At Gordonstoun we have managed to do this, despite the fact that most other schools are changing the emphasis from full boarding to weekly/flexi and day," says the principal Simon Reid.

"Over 90 per cent of our students in the senior school are full boarders and a third of them are international, representing 40 nationalities. We do not offer weekly boarding at all in the senior school in order to maintain this ethos. As a result we are able to offer a

Full board and lodging for the old-school life



At Gordonstoun, over 90 per cent of senior school pupils are full boarders, a third from overseas

full programme of activities over the weekends which all students take part in – the small group of day students can opt into these and most do.

"Our parents appreciate their sons and daughters are genuinely busy during weekends and at times when they are not in the classroom. We have found that by sticking to this ethos of a full-boarding environment we have managed to maintain our school roll – in fact we are about to start the new school year with our highest ever intake."

"Homesick pupils are effectively supported rather than just left to get on with it"

St Leonards in St Andrews can point with some justification to its wide range of extra-curricular activities, including golf, rugby, lacrosse, tennis, cricket, hockey, ballet, chess, Scottish Country Dancing, Young Enterprise, art, various music bands and instruments, drama, judo, creative writing and the Duke of Edinburgh awards.

"Our boarding students really experience the best of St Leonards," says headmaster Dr Michael Carslaw.

"Our day pupils and weekly boarders certainly don't miss out, but full-time boarders get the chance to live full-time in the inspiring town of St Andrews. The students frequently comment on the friendly atmosphere in our three boarding houses and of how they have made friends for life.

"All of our students are encouraged to make the most of the wonderful opportunities they have, but our boarders have the greatest chance to do so."

More than just a sporting chance for independent school pupils

JESSICA FRASER

INDEPENDENT schools tend to take their sport very seriously indeed. They typically offer a wide range of sporting activities and often boast excellent facilities, with some boasting their own golf courses, swimming pools and access to equestrian activities.

Many of the UK's outstanding international sports stars learned their skills and were encouraged to aim for the top while at an in-

dependent school. Some schools offer scholarships or bursaries to talented young sports people as well as a timetable facilitating maximum practise and competing opportunities in their chosen field.

Irespective of their ability level, everyone is encouraged to take part in sport and enjoy the benefits of teamwork, regular exercise and personal development, as well as the thrill of competing against other schools in a wide range of events.

Individual events such as athletics are also given the attention needed to support commitment and ability, with many fee-paying schools boasting pupils who have competed not just nationally but internationally.

St Andrews recently also saw a magical sporting event, with St Leonards School staging what is believed to be the first ever organised quidditch game to be held in Scotland as broomsticks, snitches and bludgers took over the field.

Teams from St Leonards, Edinburgh University and Waid Academy contested the Harry Potter-inspired event on the school playing fields for the Wings of Hope charity Achievement Award, which challenges students to come up with creative ways of raising money for the education of poor and orphaned children in the developing world.

St Leonards thus made sporting history for the second time, as it was also the venue for the first ever girls' lacrosse match.



Harry Potter inspired a unique game of quidditch at St Leonards in St Andrews