

‘If your child can pass our exams, we can help you with the sums’

Vivienne Durham, Headmistress of Francis Holland School, Regent’s Park, which participates in the London Schools Fee Assistance Campaign, explains the fee remissions available in independent schools



“If your child can pass our exams, we can help you with the sums.” This prominent advertisement, seen on the capital’s underground trains in the early autumn in recent years – and sponsored by the London Schools Fee Assistance Campaign – emphasises the importance given to fee remissions by many leading independent schools in London.

“What are the fees?” is a dominant question in the mind of every parent contemplating sending his or her child to an independent school. As any Head will tell you, the question is rarely, if ever, voiced in public.

However, independent schools work in the real world. The hallmarks of independent education today – superlative academic standards; a very high teacher/pupil ratio; outstanding standards of teaching; excellent facilities and exceptional extracurricular provision – do not come cheap. Few Heads will have any doubt of the sacrifices made by many parents in order to afford independent school fees, which in 2013/4 typically average £15,000 per annum for London day schools and are often in excess of £30,000 for boarding education. Yet the quality of education achieved by independent schools speaks for itself. This country’s leading independent schools are amongst the very best in the world – and in the minds of many

employers and universities, the best in the world. It is no accident that ‘public school’ education, especially in London, has never been more buoyant.

Fee assistance comes in many shapes and sizes. Scholarships and bursaries can both result in reduced fees for parents, but they are qualitatively distinct and many parents are confused by the difference between bursaries and scholarships.

Scholarships are offered by many independent schools to candidates who excel in academically selective entrance examinations, normally held for pupils aged 11, 13 or 16. Scholarships will also be available for designated areas of talent or potential, in addition to those scholarships which recognise academic excellence. Typically, many London independent schools offer scholarships for pupils who have outstanding ability in music, sport, drama or art. The Admissions Registrars or the Bursary department of all London independent schools will normally be happy to provide full details of the scholarships they currently have available. Above all, do not be afraid to ask!

A bursary is means-assessed on a financial basis and will require a parent or guardian to fill out a declaration to establish whether you are eligible for fee assistance. Application for a bursary must be made at the same time as registering your child to sit a school’s entrance examinations. Parents may be offered a bursary if they meet the criteria specified by an independent school’s bursary policy. Many London independent schools have recently increased their provision of bursaries, especially for pupils aged 11 or older.

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There is often less obvious assistance with school fees available via charitable trusts and grant organisations. Thanks to its eponymous Anglican founder, for example, the two Francis Holland schools in London (Regent’s Park and Sloane Square) both offer 50% fee remissions for daughters of the clergy. The Educational Grants Advice Service – 01932 865619 (9am-11am Mon-Friday) – can offer useful information. Invaluable advice for parents regarding school fees can also be found via the excellent ISC (Independent Schools’ Council) website: www.isc.co.uk

A particularly innovative way in which London independent schools are seeking to help parents with the complexities of school fee remissions can be found in the London Schools Fee Assistance Campaign. Established in 2007, the Fee Assistance campaign is currently sponsored by 23 of the most prominent independent schools in and around London. There is a dedicated website – which you can find at www.feeassistancelondonschools.org.uk – which offers parents details of the bursaries and scholarships available in all the campaign’s contributing schools. Almost 15,000 London parents took advantage of the information provided by this website last year. The campaign itself has also attracted world-wide interest from media services such as *The International Herald Tribune*, *The New York Times* and the *German Public Broadcasting service*: all of whom are surprised and impressed that so many London schools are seeking to widen access to superlative education.

London’s public schools are motivated not by a desire to enshrine privilege but to broaden educational opportunity to highly talented children. The anachronistic image of Tom Brown’s school days and P.G. Wodehouse has been replaced by the reality of London’s outstanding independent academic schools, firmly rooted in the 21st century, opening their doors to the brightest and the best candidates.



Francis Holland School, Regent's Park, is one of the schools participating in the London Schools Fee Assistance Campaign. For more information about the school, see page 47.