



# First-class facilities

We explore the ace amenities on offer to pupils at some of the country's top independent schools...

**W**HEN the inquisitiveness of youth takes hold, schools can play a major part in helping their pupils' interests to blossom.

Pristine swimming pools and perfect pitches nurture budding sports stars, theatres and auditoriums can propel those with an evolving enthusiasm for acting or music into the limelight and technology can transform lessons for those with a passion for a particular academic subject.

And while such amenities were once the preserve of a small number of elite schools, first-class facilities are becoming an increasingly common feature of the nation's educational landscape.

## PERFECT PACKAGE

In the north of England, students at Barnard Castle School enjoy access to cutting-edge assets across the establishment's 50-acre estate. Gardens, fields and pitches provide plenty of outdoor

space in which to let off steam, while constant investment has provided state-of-the-art fitness facilities, a dedicated science laboratory and, most recently, a brand-new sixth form centre.

For headmaster Alan Stevens, the facilities combine with Barnard Castle's stunning grounds and historic buildings – including its famous chapel – to create an excellent educational package.

He said: "An effective all-round education should be a rich combination of academic learning in fit-for-purpose classrooms balanced with equally fulfilling opportunities outside the classroom.

"Our facilities are conducive to both – our boys and girls benefit from plenty of time spent in the 'great outdoors' and an extensive extra-curricular programme of more than 100 activities each term as well as learning in purpose-built environments."

A mixture of out- and indoor investment is also evident at Salisbury's Chafyn Grove,

where a full-sized astro, smaller training pitch and even a low-ropes course are complemented by a performance hall and organ, capacious library, computer suites and much more.

Headmaster Simon Head said that the standard of facilities is a good marker of a school's health and aspirations, adding: "They reveal a school's priorities and strengths. Chafyn Grove is committed to breadth, depth and balance – therefore all of our departments are provisioned to the same high specifications."

## GREAT OUTDOORS

The challenge of integrating new amenities into an established setting has been well and truly mastered by Christ College Brecon. Sitting in the shadow of Pen-y-fan – well-known to many in the military – the college can trace its roots back to 1541 and its founding by Royal Charter by Henry VIII.

The beautiful site combines ancient buildings such as the Medieval Chapel of St Nicholas

with modern additions such as a science centre, the Y Neuadd Goffa performing arts centre and a new junior section, St Nicholas House.

Marketing and communications manager Rhion Johnston explained that the facilities go hand-in-hand with the college's excellent teaching to provide pupils with the best possible education. She added: "[They] really value the school's ancient history and find the beautiful campus and sense of openness gives the space to breathe and enhances the learning experience."

Wales' beautiful landscapes also provide the backdrop for a unique educational experience for pupils at Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools.

Based in an area of outstanding natural beauty, the schools offer ultra-modern facilities and lovingly-restored listed buildings in a setting that benefits from the proximity of the River Wye.

A spokesman said: "We have created an educational >>

### BARNARD CASTLE

#### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Sixth form centre
2. Outdoor sports facilities
3. Atkinson Hall multi-use venue

Online: [barnardcastleschool.org.uk](http://barnardcastleschool.org.uk)

### CHAFYN GROVE

#### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Astro pitch
2. Climbing frames
3. Library

Online: [chafyngrove.co.uk](http://chafyngrove.co.uk)

### CHRIST COLLEGE BRECON

#### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Y Neuadd Goffa Memorial Hall
2. Medieval Chapel and dining hall
3. Hubert Jones Science Centre

Online: [christcollegebrecon.com](http://christcollegebrecon.com)

### DAUNTSEY'S SCHOOL

#### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Memorial Hall
2. Tuck shop
3. New Pavilion

Online: [dauntseys.org](http://dauntseys.org)

environment where learning comes naturally. We make full use of the river for rowing and other water sports, we have 60 acres of pitches and space for two 25m pools, indoor sports halls and two theatres.”

A sense of history is apparent at Salisbury Cathedral School. Its Upper School’s Palace Campus has the 13th-century Bishop’s Palace at its heart, including the Bishop’s Drawing Room, a chapel and the Undercroft refectory, while the Lower School’s Leaden Hall Campus combines the architecture of Elias de Dereham with eco-built teaching spaces, a performance hall and a view over Harnham Water Meadows.

### SPORTING PRIDE

After exercising their grey matter in the classroom, youngsters benefit from letting off steam through physical activity – and schools are

increasingly well-equipped to allow that to happen.

Energetic pupils at Dauntsey’s School, on Salisbury Plain, can make use of facilities including eight rugby and football pitches, seven all-weather netball and tennis courts, an athletics track, sports hall and fitness suite, heated indoor swimming pool and two squash courts.

The school even has its own tall ship, *Jolie Brise*, as well as a full-time sailing master.

Such extensive provision is matched by a commitment from staff to serve students with ample opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors.

Headmaster Mark Lascelles said: “Pupils are encouraged to develop a strong spirit of adventure here and, with almost 150 acres of grounds, we have plenty of space for pupils to get outside and explore.

“Our rural surroundings provide the perfect setting

for many outdoor activities, including orienteering, camping, wide games – the list is endless.”

At Dover’s The Duke of York’s Royal Military School, sporting ambitions are facilitated by a host of specialist amenities.

Already enjoying the benefits of a 150-acre estate, the school recently gained a new sports centre built to Sports England specification as part of a wider £24.9 million investment that included new junior boarding houses and a sixth form block.

The centre offers an external climbing wall and drama black box studio, while a floodlit astro hockey pitch and running track and floodlighting on the military-friendly school’s parade square add further opportunities for activity.

St Lawrence College, in Ramsgate, recently added an Olympic-standard, water-based hockey pitch to a recreational register already containing a

sports centre complete with squash courts, dance studio, fitness suite and a climbing wall.

Following the Olympic theme, there are fewer greater seals of approval than that of a Games champion, but that’s exactly what Andover’s Farleigh School received when Team GB hockey star and Rio gold medallist Maddie Hinch attended the opening of a new all-weather pitch.

The facility bolsters a 70-acre site which features an indoor swimming pool, sports pitches, tennis courts, an outdoor classroom, trim rail and extensive woodland, while those interested in the arts are well catered for thanks to a brand-new, purpose-built music school.

A school spokesman said: “Music has long been one of Farleigh’s strengths and after several years of planning, it was fantastic to see [it] open.

“It is a superb addition to

Picture credits (clockwise from top left): Barnard Castle School; Farleigh School; Dauntsey’s School; Christ College Brecon; Duke of York’s Royal Military School; Queen Victoria School



#### DUKE OF YORK’S ROYAL MILITARY SCHOOL

##### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Multi-use sports hall
2. Parade square
3. Nye Hall Performing Arts Centre

Online: doyrms.com

#### FARLEIGH SCHOOL

##### Top three most-used facilities:

1. The Chapel
2. Swimming pool
3. Sports pitches, theatre & music school

Online: farleighschool.com

#### HABERDASHERS MONMOUTH SCHOOLS

##### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Sports facilities
2. Performing arts centre
3. Classrooms and laboratories

Online: habs-monmouth.org

#### QUEEN VICTORIA SCHOOL

##### Top three most-used facilities:

1. Library
2. Sports facilities
3. Social and recreational areas

Online: qvs.org.uk



Picture credits (clockwise from top left): St Lawrence College; Christ College Brecon; Royal Alexandra & Albert School; St Lawrence College; Chafyn Grove; Duke of York's Royal Military School

Farleigh's facilities, providing the school with a stunning new recital hall, 12 practice rooms, dedicated classroom, recording studio and rock room."

A dedication to the arts is also evident at St Mary's Shaftesbury, which houses a bespoke art, photography and design and textiles building. St Mary's art department won the school's category and two pupils won individual honours at the 2016 Dorset Art Prize and headmistress Mary Arnal said that the facilities played a part in the success.

She explained: "Well-lit rooms and access to hi-tech facilities, as well as space to think big and stretch their creative muscles, allow our girls to excel.

"We are always deliberately going to be a relatively small school, but because we have the full range of quality, adaptable facilities, all our girls are able to discover and nurture their own

unique talents."

**HELPING HAND**

While the availability of first-class facilities is a welcome benefit, most schools are quick to point out that their sports pitches, hi-tech classrooms and beautiful boarding houses are just part of a wider package which is focused on providing an excellent education.

Dunblane's Queen Victoria School (QVS), for example, acknowledges the attraction of its swimming pool and multi-gym, dedicated piping and drumming complex and four fully-furnished boarding houses, but headteacher Donald Shaw pointed out that they are the foundation on which a child's education is built.

He said: "These facilities of course include school infrastructure, but QVS considers that other facilities are just as important – for example,

our high level of pastoral care for pupils. Pastoral care facilities at QVS include the allocation of tutors, experienced house masters and matrons as well as the entire school staff putting the wellbeing of the pupils first."

Mark Dixon, headmaster of Reigate's Royal Alexandra and Albert School, also emphasises the point that facilities provide additional opportunities to unlock pupils' potential.

The sprawling establishment houses everything from an eight-lane 100m sprint track and Bernard Sunley Sixth Form Centre to an equestrian centre with 20 horses and in- and outdoor sand schools on a 260-acre estate and Mr Dixon explained that the range and quality of such amenities is key.

"Not only are good teaching facilities, such as interactive white boards and iPads, required in the classroom to engage and support learning, the importance

of facilities that promote exercise and outdoor play cannot be underestimated," he said.

"Facilities that stimulate pupils to get out, join activities and socialise with their peers are fundamental. After all, healthy and happy children learn better in the classroom."

From landscaped grounds to professional-standard theatres and sports fields, the schools featured on these pages offer facilities which benefit children in and out of the classroom.

But should such admirable amenities be the basis on which parents pick a particular school for their child? According to Antony Spencer, principal of Ramsgate's St Lawrence College, the answer is no.

He said: "It's the people that make the school, but the facilities enrich the overall experience and make the environment a pleasurable place to learn." ■

**ROYAL ALEXANDRA & ALBERT SCHOOL**

**Top three most-used facilities:**

1. Swimming pool
2. Astro pitch
3. Fitness suite

**Online:** [raa-school.co.uk](http://raa-school.co.uk)

**SALISBURY CATHEDRAL SCHOOL**

**Top three most-used facilities:**

1. Contemporary & historic facilities
2. Stephenson Hall performance area
3. Extensive grounds

**Online:** [salisburycathedralschool.com](http://salisburycathedralschool.com)

**ST LAWRENCE COLLEGE**

**Top three most-used facilities:**

1. Theatre
2. Sports centre
3. Coffee shop

**Online:** [slcuk.com](http://slcuk.com)

**ST MARY'S SHAFTESBURY**

**Top three most-used facilities:**

1. Dance studio
2. Mary Ward boarding house
3. Swimming pool

**Online:** [stmarys.eu](http://stmarys.eu)