



LEWESTON
SHERBORNE

Why Choose an Independent School?

A comprehensive guide to **why** independent school might be right for your family and **how** to choose the right one.



What is an independent school?

Independent schools, private schools or public schools are all fee-paying schools that operate independently of Local Authority or government control.

The term 'public school' is typically used to refer to the older, most prestigious independent schools, for example Eton, Harrow and Winchester but independent schools vary from small prep schools to large secondaries with everything in between.

Independent schools tend to follow this structure:

- **Pre-preparatory (pre-prep)** schools cater for children aged four to seven, although there are a few standalone pre-preps the majority are part of a prep school.
- **Preparatory (prep)** schools admit children at the age of eight, and prepare them for senior school. Some finish at Year 6 and others continue to Year 8.
- **Senior schools** admit children at age 11 or 13 and generally continue through to Upper Sixth, or Year 13.
- **All-through schools** take children from the start of their education through to A Levels.
- **Boarding schools** provide a home from home. Pupils can board on a termly, weekly or flexible basis. There are a few schools which are exclusively for boarders but most boarding schools also have day pupils.

Independent schools are free to set their own curriculum, school hours, and term dates, and to choose which exam qualifications students take.



Why choose an independent school?

There are lots of different reasons that families choose an independent school. For some it's a journey they went on themselves which they want to continue for their children. Others are coming to the sector of the first time.

For most, the main reason for choosing an independent school is **academic**. Independent schools are consistently the best performing in the UK, and at A Level, 51 percent of independent school pupils gain at least one A* or A grade, compared to 26 percent nationally.

The **pupil-teacher ratio** is much smaller than in state schools which means that teachers get to know the individual children better, and can tailor their approach to suit them. Smaller classes also give pupils more access to resources, such as computers, science equipment or musical instruments, or increased opportunities to play sport or take on positions of responsibility.

Independent schools are able to **teach freely** of the National Curriculum, and can be broader in their educational provision. Pupils at many Prep Schools **do not take SATs**. This means that there are a wider range of subjects on offer at an earlier stage, such as languages, Latin, psychology, history or art, classics and photography.

This freedom also allows independent schools to nurture curiosity, encourage critical thinking and promote a love of learning that results in more pupils enrolling in advanced courses.

One of the most attractive benefits of independent schools is the high levels of **pastoral care** or focus on the wellbeing of pupils.

Not all independent schools have the same facilities however they usually provide **lots of outdoor space** and frequently beautiful and inspirational surroundings. Independent prep schools often have the **resources** you would only find in a state secondary school, such as dedicated science and art rooms or IT suites. Along with sports pitches, there will be properly equipped performance spaces and many schools have dedicated Forest School sessions.

There are also significantly more **extra-curricular** opportunities particularly in music and sport, with high quality coaching and regular performances and matches with other schools. **Swimming** lessons are pretty standard, as well as less common sporting activities such as Shooting and Fencing.

On a practical level, independent schools offer **convenience**. A longer school day which is often combined with wrap-around care, this can be a great help to families where both parents are working.

Contrary to popular belief, independent schools are **inclusive** communities made up of a mix of abilities and backgrounds as varied as the pupils' personalities.

What is important to you?

Although independent schools have a lot in common, each one is unique and there is a school that meets every families' needs. When making the decision about which school is right for you, think carefully about what matters to your family. Are there practical considerations that need to be met? What values do you have? What aspirations do you have for your children? What interests and talents do your children have?

Below are some of aspects you may like to consider.

Pastoral care

The most important thing for many parents is their child's happiness. They are looking for an environment where the whole family will be supported. Whilst excellent tutoring comes as standard, pastoral care is about the whole community knowing how to get the most from each pupil both academically and emotionally. High standards of pastoral care should be at the centre of everything. Consider how personal development is fostered, the relationships between staff and pupils and how far pupils are treated as individuals.

Academic Results

Good exam results should be a given at an independent school. However, you may still want to do your research. There are a number of league tables online that may or may not be of use. The Times Parent Power is a well known one, as is The Telegraph's version but both require subscriptions. However, league tables come with a health warning, the comparative data is often fatally flawed as the smaller cohorts in independent schools and the fact that they accept pupils out of age group can have a significant impact on the outcomes.

The government's comparison table also does not match data across state and independent schools, therefore you will find much of the information for the independent sector is missing. The best way to check how your preferred school is doing is to ask them directly.

Value-Added

For many independent schools a more important statistic is valued-added. This calculation is designed to provide a measure of the contribution the school has made to an individual child's results, literally the value that is added to the pupil's progress by studying at the school. [Click here to find out more.](#)

Subject choice

If certain subjects or courses matter to you or your child, make sure a school offers them at GCSE or A Level. If your child wants to take a BTEC or IB Diploma not all independent schools will offer this. Check on the website and see what is listed or download the school's [GCSE](#) and [Sixth Form](#) options booklet.

Your values

Many independent schools talk about welcoming the family not just the pupil. They are often smaller, close knit communities so you need to be confident the school is aligned with your moral, professional and personal values.

You should definitely book a meeting with the Head and tour the school on a 'normal' day so you can see the school in action. A good school will also give you an opportunity to meet pupils and speak to other parents so you can get honest feedback from them.

Following the school's social media channels will also give you a good idea of the voice and persona of the school as well as the activities that the pupils participate in.

Your child's interests

For a keen athlete, excellent sports opportunities and facilities will be a big draw. A future doctor will want laboratories and an emphasis on STEM subjects, and those that dream of a life on the stage will want a strong drama department. These areas tend to be very good at every independent school but there may be a particular emphasis or specialist facilities at some.

You may also want to consider what opportunities the school offers beyond the grounds. Do pupils get involved in regional and national events or competitions? Will they get to visit museums and art galleries? What overseas trips does the school offer? You might consider what educational opportunities the school provides that you would not be able to.

The most important question when you look around a school and meet the pupils is do you see your child sitting amongst them?

The Future

For some, the appeal of independent school is belonging to something for life. The majority will have active alumni networks which provide opportunities for advice and support long into the future.



Practical Matters

Location

When it comes to location different families will have different needs. For some, an inner-city school is preferable as it might be closer to work. However, for others going into the centre of town at rush hour is not appealing. Or you may prefer your children to access the fresh air and space of the countryside.

Schools usually list transport on their website and many provide comprehensive daily options. At Leweston the school runs eleven different bus routes covering a wide area with buses in both the mornings and evenings. [Click here to visit our transport page.](#)

Remember over the course of your children's school life you may move jobs or house so what works now could change in the future. Schools that offer [flexible boarding](#) or a wide range of transport options could be a future-proof option.

Size

The Independent Schools Council give the average size of an independent school in the UK as 393. The size of all-through schools, those offering primary and senior education, can range from just under 500 to nearly 1500 pupils.

The size of the school you choose may be an important factor to you. Larger schools can feel intimidating to some pupils who would prefer a smaller cohort. However, smaller schools might not be able to offer the same range of subjects or have such extensive facilities. The [size of campus](#) can also make a difference, 600 pupils spread over 46 acres will feel different to the same number on a smaller site.

Another question is the [maximum class size](#), as this is often a huge point of difference between state and independent schools.

Single sex versus co-educational

Some people feel very strongly that they want a single-sex or co-ed environment for their child, whereas for others it may be less important. Some feel co-ed is more reflective of wider society and is therefore a better option, whereas others feel that a single-sex environment offers children an environment uninhibited by the expectations and stereotypes placed upon their gender. One practical advantage of [co-educational through-schools](#) can be the convenience of having all your children in one place at the same time.

Saturday School

Many independent schools, particularly those with boarders, have school on Saturday mornings. You may, or may not, want this for your family so find out what a typical week looks like at your chosen school. Leweston does not have Saturday school with lessons running Monday to Friday, however there are matches and [activities over the weekend](#) which pupils may be invited to join.

Entrance Criteria and Assessments

Some schools are more selective than others and some will award places based on academic results, musical or sporting talent. An entrance assessment of some kind is common but it may be simply used to understand an individual's ability once they enter the school. Many schools will be happy to provide past papers and the admissions staff will be able to provide clear guidance on the requirements and expectations.

Day versus Boarding

For many parents the idea of sending their children away to school is not something they would consider however, modern boarding can offer a practical solution for busy, working families as well as supporting a pupil's personal and social development.

Boarding positives

- Boarding offers a round the clock education with access to academic staff, extra-curricular activities and facilities all week
- There is a built-in social life, pupils are living with their friends and learning to get on with others
- Boarding fosters independence as pupils learn to look after themselves and prepare for life away from school
- There is no school run which reduces the amount of time pupils spend travelling each week
- Your child will have a team of people around them 24 hours a day to provide support
- Boarding can improve family relationships by ensuring time spent together is quality time

Boarding negatives

- Some parents feel less involved in their child's upbringing as the pastoral team will be looking after them on a daily basis
- Homesickness is likely to happen at some point and some children find it hard to adjust to boarding routines
- All of a pupil's academic and extra-curricular life is focused on one place
- Boarding costs more

Day school positives

- You get to see your children every night and take more responsibility for their daily routine and support
- It may be easier for your child to make local friends as pupils are likely to live in the same area
- Pupils get to live in two worlds; 'home' and 'school' with separation between them
- Day school is cheaper

Day school negatives

- Day schools can be more academically selective
- Day schools cram a huge amount into the period between 8.30 and 4.30pm which can be too much for some
- The school day may not fit with parents' working patterns necessitating extra child-care
- Day school is more demanding on family time and requires parents to transport their children, supervise their homework and take them to extra-curricular activities

What type of boarding?

If boarding is something you are considering there are now lots of different options. Whilst a very small number of schools are 100% full boarding, most offer flexible packages which suit different families' needs. These typically include:

- Full boarding - boarders stay at school seven nights a week returning home for the holidays
- Weekly boarding - boarders stay at school for five, or even six nights a week returning home for a break at weekends
- Flexi boarding - boarders stay one, two or three nights a week on a regular basis
- B&B - pupils can stay overnight on an occasional basis

[Click here for more information on different types of boarding.](#)

Finances

Many families assume that a private education is out of reach, and it is true that some independent schools can charge upwards of £40,000 per term per child. However, independent schooling can offer good value for money, particularly if a significant range of sports, music, art and drama are included. Independent schools can provide a 'one-stop shop' for all your child's interests and hobbies and remove the need to attend evening and weekend clubs and activities.

Currently, within a 50 mile radius of Leweston you can expect to pay between £2,499 - £7,135 a term for primary age, and between £6,062 and £11,317 per term at senior school age for day places. So, per annum you will pay between £7,497 and £33,951. This is obviously quite a spectrum, so make sure your chosen school falls within your budget. All up to date fees should be clearly displayed on the school website.

The listed termly fees may not include everything you need to pay for. Many day schools charge for meals and schools may also require additional funds for after-school care, SEN provision, public examination entry and more so be sure to make yourself aware of these additional charges.

Extra costs can vary by school so it pays to do some research. [Click here for Leweston's fee information.](#)

If you want to get down to the financial security of a school, you can look up their latest data set through the Charity Commission website. It will show income and expenditure and typically have a governors' report.



When should we join a school?

Natural joining points tend to be at the start of the different key stages of education. For example, at Reception, Year 3, Year 11, Year 13 or Sixth Form.

However, pupils move at other times too. Some join a school before GCSEs in Year 10 or move into Years 5 or 6 ahead of the transition to Senior School.

Whilst there are options for all ages and stages choosing an independent school at one point doesn't commit you to your child's entire education. Some families believe a thorough grounding in early years will give their children an advantage in secondary school whereas others may invest in the critical A Level years.

As long as there is space in your chosen year group most independent schools will accept pupils at almost any time and a good school will make the settling-in period a smooth and seamless transition whenever you join.

[Click here for more advice about moving schools.](#)

What next?

Having considered what is important to your family make an honest list about what you want in your ideal school. Be realistic and think about the environment where your child would thrive. Make sure you note down practical considerations such as location, setting or whether you need boarding, and, most importantly, have a clear idea of your budget.

Websites are a good place to start. Most schools offer comprehensive online information but you won't get a feel for a school until you visit. Either join an Open Day or book a personal meeting and tour with the Head.

Choosing a school is a significant decision. It is often likened to choosing a house, and financially may be even more of a commitment. In the same way that all houses have kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms many schools will offer similar facilities or curriculum but when you visit you will know. It is often the intangible 'feel' of a school that will excite you... the personality of the Head, the honesty and enthusiasm of the pupils, the abilities and empathy of the staff.

This information has been brought to you by Leweston School. If you would like to find out more about any aspect of our provision please visit www.leweston.co.uk or call our Registrar, Mrs June Smith, on 01963 211015.

Leweston Dictionary

Every school has its own ‘language’ and these words and expressions can be a little bewildering to those joining, or thinking of joining. Below is a guide to some of the most common used both at Leweston and in the wider independent school world.



Assembly

/ə'sembli/

A gathering of all or part of a school to communicate information. Whole school assemblies usually take place on Monday and Friday mornings but smaller year group assemblies will be led by the Heads of Year as and when required.

Boarder

/'bɔːdə/

A student who stays overnight in school. Boarders can be flexi (stays between one and three nights), weekly (stays in Monday to Friday) or full (stays in for whole week).

Bounds

/bəʊnd/

Areas on the school campus where students are permitted to go. Different year groups will be allowed to go to different parts of the site. Areas which are not permitted are called Out of Bounds.

Bursary

/'bɜːsəri/

(1) the Finance and Operations Department
(2) a financial award, usually in the form of reduction in fees, which is given to enable a pupil to attend school

Bursar

/'bɜːsə/

The person responsible for the financial and operational management of the school.

Co-curricular

/,kəʊkə'ɪkʃjələ/

Refers to activities, trips and learning experiences that complement, in some way, what students are learning in their academic curriculum e.g. field trips, lectures, concerts and drama productions.

Common Entrance

/kɒmən'entrəns/

An examination taken by some children as part of the admissions process for academically selective schools. There are two versions at either 11 or 13 years old. Common Entrance is not an entry requirement for Leweston but the school can mark papers if required.

Dorm

/dɔːm/

Short for dormitory, a room where boarders sleep. At Leweston boarders are in dormitories from Years 4 to 10 after this point they move into double or single rooms.

EAL

/iː/ə,eɪ/

Abbreviation for English as an Additional Language. EAL is offered to students for whom English is not their first language.

Exeat

/'eksɪət/

A 'rest' weekend when the boarders are encouraged to leave school and take a break. Whilst UK boarders return home, international boarders are able to stay in school or travel to guardians. There are five exeat weekends in the year.

Extra - curricular

/ˈɛkstrəkə'ɪkʃjələ/

Refers to activities that happen at school but are outside of the academic programme e.g. sports clubs, Duke of Edinburgh or community service.

Florin

/'flɒrɪn/

A boarding tutor. Florins are teachers who spend one night a week in the boarding house supporting extra academic and pastoral support to boarders.

Gaudere et Bene Facere

Leweston's school motto, translates from Latin to 'Rejoice and Do Well.'

Independent School

/ɪndɪ'pend(ə)nt//sku:l/

These are schools that are independent in governance and funding, relying on tuition fees paid by parents rather than government. Independent, public and private schools are fundamentally the same.

ISI

/AI/Es/AI/

Abbreviation for Independent School Inspectorate. An organisation responsible for the inspection of independent schools in England. Ofsted carries out the same role in the maintained sector.

Key Stage

/kiː/ /stedʒ/

These are divisions in the national curriculum set by the UK government. There are five Key Stages:

- Key Stage 1 (KS1) Years 1 to 2 (age 5 to 7)
- Key Stage 2 (KS2) Years 3 – 6 (age 8-11)
- Key Stage 3 (KS3) Years 7 – 9 (age 11-14)
- Key Stage 4 (KS4) Years 10 – 11 (age 14-16)
- Key Stage 5 (KS5) Years 12 – 13 (age 16-18)

Gated

/'geɪtɪd/

A penalty for a serious break of the school rules. A boarding student who is gated is not allowed to leave school for a given period of time and experiences a loss of privileges.

Guardian

/'gɑːdiən/

(1) all new pupils are given a guardian in their own year group to look after them for the first week
(2) students whose families live overseas are required to have an adult guardian in the UK who can look after them should the need arise.

House

/haʊs/

(1) each pupil belongs to one of four academic houses
(2) boarders live in one of four Houses which are situated upstairs in the school building. The different Houses are: Martha (girls Years 4 to 8), Cecilia (girls Years 9 and 10), Eleanor (girls Years 11 to 13) Antony (boys Years 4 to 13).

Little Break

/'lɪt(ə)l/ /breɪk/

The short break time in the morning, it runs from 10.45am to 11.05am and is an opportunity to buy tuck.

Lower Sixth

/'ləʊθ/ /sɪksθ/

An alternative term for Year 12 often used in independent schools.

Period

/'pɪərɪəd/

An alternative word for lesson. The school day at Leweston is divided into six periods in the Senior School and seven in the Prep.

Pre-Prep

/'priː-/ /preɪp/

The first years of Prep School including Reception, Year One and Year Two.

Prep

/preɪp/

(1) short for Preparatory, an independent school which teaches younger children. Prep Schools typically take children from age 5 to either 11 or 13 depending on the school structure.
(2) an alternative word for homework as well as the period of time when homework is done.

Public Schools

/'pʌblɪk//sku:l/

The first independent schools, called public because anyone could join as long as they could pay the fees. In modern times the term is used to describe the oldest and most famous independent schools such as Eton and Harrow.

Registration

/rɛdʒɪ'streɪʃ(ə)n/

1) Part of the admissions process, completing the registration form and paying the registration fee holds a place in the prospective pupil's year group
2) A legal requirement, pupils are registered twice a day to check who is and is not in school. Registration happens on arrival at 8.15am and again at lunchtime. Pupils are registered in their form groups.

Scholarship

/'skɒləʃɪp/

An award made by the school to recognise the achievements, talent or potential of a pupil in a given field. At Leweston scholarships are offered for Academic Excellence, Art and Design, Drama, Equestrian, Music, Pentathlon and Sport.

SEN

/sɛn/

Abbreviation for Special Educational Needs, at Leweston this Department is called Individual Needs and supports those students who may need extra help with an aspect of their learning.

Study

/'stʌdi/

(1) a single or double student bedroom
(2) a period in the day when a student does not have a lesson but expected to work independently.

Tea

/tiː/

A cake and hot drink provided to pupils when lessons finish and before after-school activities.

Tuck

/tʌk/

An alternative word for snacks. Pupils are allowed to bring tuck into school to eat at break time. Boarders can bring a tuck box to school at the start of term to store their own tuck.

Tuck Shop

/tʌk//ʃɒp/

Internal school shop where you can buy tuck at break time. Run by Sixth Form the money raised goes to charity.

Tutor

/'tjuːtə/

The teacher or teachers who leads the tutor group.

Tutor Group

/'tjuːtə//gruːp/

Every pupil belongs to a tutor group, also known as form, made up of other students in their year. Most years have either two or three tutor groups. Pupils spend time with their tutor group in the mornings and are registered in these groups at the beginning and middle of the day.

UCAS

/'juːkas/

UCAS or the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the central admissions service for all UK university courses. Everyone (including students based overseas) who wants to apply for a place at a UK university must do so through UCAS.

Upper Sixth

/'ʌpə//sɪksθ/

An alternative term for Year 13 often used in independent schools.



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