FALKNER HOUSE
LONDON

Boys Moving On From Falkner House

2026 - 2027



Boys

20 Penywern Road, London SW5 9SU

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Falkner House prepares boys for leaving at 11+ which is the main entry level for the secondary schools. Some junior schools have entry points at 7+ or 8+ but we do not prepare for these tests as ultimately, we believe that we will give all boys the best education possible until Year 6 and that there is no gain in a voluntary move to another school at an earlier stage.
During the years at Falkner House we will discuss your son's progress and thoughts as to their next school. There are meetings for all parents well ahead to discuss the details of the various exams and deadlines. Our job is to help you navigate what can (but needn't) feel like a complex process in a stress-free fashion for both you and your son. Further information is available to parents with detailed guidance on each school.

All parents are also always welcome to meet individually with Mrs Griggs and Mrs Dixon to consider their son's options. In general boys will leave Falkner House after the 11+ in Year 6.

Creating a Short-List

We recommend that you apply to a range of schools for your son: top end, safe-bet and insurance. (Please do not EVER refer to any school as 'fall back' or 'insurance' in front of the children. Remember, they will all be good schools). The number of schools applied for will depend on how undecided you are and how many exams you feel are appropriate. In our experience, once the children are in 'exam mode', they tend to take exams pretty much in their stride, but there is definitely a limit – too many in one week can be too much. The most important thing is to keep an open mind and ensure that the children do so too. They must not be given the impression that some schools are for the 'clever' children and others are not. Once set, it is very difficult to dispel this negative impression.

Large numbers of children apply for the most prestigious London schools and you will see vast numbers turning up for all the exams. However, in the end, each child can only go to one school. It is worth noting that the number of boys sitting an exam for a school is not necessarily reflective of how competitive a place at that school is.

When making your short list, take advice from Falkner House as to the chances of success. Do not be tempted to put your son in for an exam for a very academic school, 'just to see', or because he has insisted. You are the adults with the foresight and experience to anticipate success or failure (which are, within reason, relatively predictable). It is not a lottery! Although your child (and you) might think they will not mind if they fail, the truth is that a rejection letter is a painful thing; if it comes at the beginning of the exam period it can have a very deleterious effect.

Geography is key. There is no point applying for a school, however appealing, if it is logistically out of reach. It is essential to take account of the journey time for your child to get to school by school bus or public transport, bearing in mind that most secondary school children will wish to travel independently, and it may also be quicker.

All schools offer open days or evenings (zoom or in person) when you can visit and get a flavour of the school. They will also all have, to varying degrees, representative and informative websites. There is a huge amount for your son to gain from simply perusing a school website. In contrast, we would suggest that it is unhelpful to take your son along on a physical tour to day schools as they can become overwhelmed or fixated on a school that is inappropriate for them and it is unlikely to benefit your child to spend hours listening to headteachers saying largely the same thing as each other each time! . This is not the case with boarding schools, which will want to have met your son and you well in advance of the exams– it is much more of a match making process. You may wish to take your son to visit a school once you know what offers he has.

When visiting in person, or when looking at their website, it is advisable to take notes to help you remember which school was which – they all have wonderful art, science labs, IT rooms etc. so it is worth trying to make a note of anything really distinctive. This also helps you and the children when they go for an interview, to answer the 'What do you particularly like about our school?' question.

Registration

Each school has its own registration system; some have a very narrow window, some require early registration, and some do not allow early registration! Registration is always done by parents – not Falkner House. There is a very wide variation in deadlines with boarding schools generally preferring interest to be expressed earlier (many have June in Year 5 as the last date for registration for the 11+) as they like to try and get to know families. Parents considering such schools for their child should thus get in touch with them in good time. London day schools generally allow registration up until varied dates in the autumn of the previous year with each school having a different closing date. Boys can sit exams for boarding as well as day schools, so your choices can include both types of schools. Boys can sit exams for an unlimited number of schools but: logic should prevail - it makes no sense to have a boy sit for a school that, for whatever reason, you would never send him to!

11/13+ All schools with entry at 13+ have the key exams at 11+.

Within London only the highly selective St Paul's and Westminster have their principal entry at 13+ so if you do not want boarding, you should consider London day schools at 11+. However, if there is a strong likelihood that your son will be boarding at 13, all options remain open.

Preparation for Exams

As external exams loom, all the teachers will have been working hard with your son to prepare for the business of sitting exams.

The key determinants to success in these exams are grit, calm, speed and logic. The exams ask for relatively little recall of facts but instead there is the far harder challenge of applied logical thought.

How to prepare children for exams is a subtle art – it is not a matter of more is better. Instead, it is the right teaching at the right time in the right way for each boy. Staff are always ready to discuss your son's progress as well as their approach to their subject to ensure that children are helped with the same methods at home as at school.

Reasoning Test

All schools use reasoning tests such as Atom or ISEB as part of their testing process. Such tests may either be used as a pre- selection or as the exam itself. Most of the schools use the ISEB common pre-test produced by GL. These computerised multiple choice (mildly adaptive) tests last c. 2 ½ hours, are sat at Falkner House in November. These will include verbal and non-verbal reasoning (VR and NVR) as well as English and maths questions. Atom tests are generally sat at the relevant secondary school; the schools say these tests are specific and tailored to their needs - in reality they are all very similar and the first can be used as practice! If parents wish to practise online, make sure you are buying for the correct test e.g GL for ISEB and Atom for Atom. Don't get concerned as to the details of say adaptive v. non - adaptive, pencil and paper v. digital as the similarities will be more important than the differences.

English and maths

Most boys will also sit traditional English and maths papers.. There is constant flux as to what is included in the examination process as well as the individual nuance for each school. We keep abreast of these developments (and have information available for parents) and teach your son what he needs to know. We give the boys plenty of exam practice using papers of all different kinds so that they are prepared for virtually anything that might be put in front of them. Some schools post sample exam papers on their websites but we would request parents to resist using these (or any other) papers with their child as this will "spoil" our use of them.

Tutoring

Two key points worth noting in respect of tutoring are as follows:

- It often involves just 'doing more papers' or drilling rather than anything more constructive.
- Many schools are very good at spotting the 'tutored child' and in some cases are even able to identify a particular tutor's style. This will NOT add to your child's chances.

Many parents, who have wisely resisted the prevailing mood, panic when they hear that other boys are being tutored and it takes a strong character to hold firm. The belief that everyone else is being tutored seems to prevail even when this is not the case. Please believe that we are as ambitious as you and that, having been well taught at Falkner House, they do not need any additional teaching. If, despite all of the above, you engage a tutor, please let us know so that we can liaise with them.

Preparing for Interview

Interviews start in the Autumn Term and the boys are prepared for these. Many schools only interview boys who have achieved a certain mark in the examination. In many cases, the interview is, in essence, a second stage of the exam, with significant maths and English questions being asked.

The best way to prepare your child for an interview is to get him used to talking about what really interests HIM, not what we consider might be impressive. Schools interview hundreds of children every year and can spot the over-prepared ones a mile off. If you want to help, spend time discussing 'what if?' questions – stretch their imagination, show that it is good to make guesses and sometimes get them wrong. It is the willingness to have a go that is interesting. If asked about a favourite book, the idea is not to tell the story but to say WHY he likes it. Equally, not to say 'A Tale of Two Cities' because he thinks it sounds impressive. One-word answers are not helpful. They should aim to follow up with 'because...'. Successful interviews at this stage are about genuine enthusiasm (usually shown not only by tone of voice but also through depth of understanding), being able to go beyond the literal, being ready for the unexpected, having a question for the interviewer, firm handshake and good eye contact. Children need to be ready to deal with mundane questions such as "why do you want to go to this school" and "what is your first-choice school". To help prepare and also to help us write our reference, we will ask you for your child's interests, achievements and passions in and out of school. Please be honest and do not exaggerate. If a reference mentions a love of archery but in an interview your child clearly knows nothing about it, the effect will not be good. We will give the children as much interview practice as is necessary but over preparation is definitely counter-productive – being natural is key.

Scholarships

At 11+, most schools offer music and some also sport and art scholarships (art scholarships require a very significant sized portfolio requiring at least six months preparation). If you think that your son might qualify for an art, sport or music scholarship please discuss this well ahead so that proper preparation can be made. We would caution though that unless your son is seriously stellar and not just very good in school terms, not to go down the scholarship route as it merely adds to pressure and drama with, in reality, minimal chances of success. Furthermore, sitting for such scholarships does not increase the chances of academic acceptance. Parents, not Falkner House, enter children for these scholarships but it is crucial that you keep us informed.

Academic Scholarships

We do not operate separate 'scholarship classes' but prepare all to the maximum of their potential at every stage. Most of the 11+ London schools do not have separate scholarship exams or interviews and the 13+ schools scholarship exams are in Y8.

Scholarship v. Bursaries

Scholarships are merit based whilst bursaries are based on perceived financial need and will be means tested with a very high financial bar. Merit and need may, of course, coincide! The secondary school's registrar or website will be able to give further information.

Once The Exams Start

The time period for the examinations is somewhat tortuously drawn out. The 11+ exam season starts in November, finishes for the day schools generally in January, but for a few 13+ schools continues until May/June. Parents need to be aware of the timeline for their prospective schools so as to avoid the whole of Year 6 being a long drawn-out exam process.

At this point, what your son needs most from you is CALM. You may be feeling pressure – you love your child and want the best for him (though it will always be unknown as to which school is indeed the "best for him") – but he has a right not to have your concerns transmitted to him. Please do not let him overhear you discussing schools and fretting – he will be taking in every word and it is not beneficial. If humanly possible pretend you do not care! Provided he does the work set and has a regular, quiet, comfortable space to do homework, the job is done. We can be totally confident that he will try to do his very best. Irrespective of which school your son goes to, he will have a great future. It is essential to remain upbeat, to demonstrate that family life and fun go on regardless of what happens in the exams and that your love is unconditional.

The Results Process

The day schools will email results in mid-February with a common acceptance date early in March. Boarding school results are more strung out. We strongly recommend that parents should open the results letters/emails beforehand and not with their sons. It is helpful if parents are prepared to let us tell other parents the individual children's results – saves tiptoeing round and helps to make sure feelings are not hurt.

It is hugely helpful if parents can decide on their preferences in advance of the results. It is illogical and disconcerting for the boys if their parents are wavering for days.

Waiting Lists: 11+

If you are offered a waiting list place, this may or may not "clear" and be converted into a definite offer before the deadline for acceptances. Without such a definite offer, even if the waiting list place is at your first choice school, you will need to accept a place elsewhere before the deadline closes, pay a deposit and wait to see whether a firm place is later offered before September. Offers off the waiting list before the deadline will only be made at the 11th hour (i.e. at 11am before a noon deadline). Every year it varies wildly as to whether a school will go to their waiting list and how far down it they go. They will not tell you or us where your child is on the list.

13+ Confirmed offers only have to be accepted by the end of Y7, as a result Eton / Westminster / St Paul's / Winchester put many boys on a waiting list with potentially further exams to be sat in Year 8.

Deciding On A School

In the end, you are likely to finish by choosing between two or more schools. There are all manner of considerations: location, mixed or single-sex, general ethos and so on as well as 'gut instinct'. Although it may seem good to involve your child, in the end the decision should be yours. You have the life experience to bring to bear and you should use it. Do not be too influenced by where friends might be going – it can be a wonderful new start to be the only Falkner House child going to a given school. Think about where you could see him in about two or three years' time but equally realise that he could change schools for sixth form.

Particularly with boarding schools, it is crucial to understand the rhythm of the individual school's day/week/term. Is there Saturday school? What would your child be doing at 7.30 am or 4.00 pm or 6.00 pm or 9.00 pm? Which of the amazing facilities are freely open to the children and when? What are the weekend arrangements and will they suit your family? How many children go home at weekends? How easy will it be for you to visit? All these factors are as important as the academics when choosing a boarding school. Above all, the "fit" of a boarding school is key – there is much less of a margin for error than with a day school.

Email, Mumsnet, Twitter, WhatsApp and other methods of instant communication have put ever increasing pressure on parents, and consequently on your children. This can exacerbate the annual London parental panic regarding "next schools". Above all, please remember, we are here to help and support you and your child through the process.