

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1: Why has the school decided to make these changes, and why now?

For some time, the school has been aware that its market has been changing and that prospective families are considering a broader range of educational options for their sons, with many families actively seeking continuity in schooling from age four through to thirteen. Similarly, since 2013 the Independent Schools Council annual census has reported an annual increase in demand, across the country, for day places for boys. At the same time, our boarding parents have been actively seeking greater freedom of choice in our boarding model for some time.

Summer Fields is a thriving and successful school, with a healthy demand for places. We are in a strong financial position, with healthy reserves, a strong balance sheet and no borrowings. We are, therefore, taking this decision from a position of strength. Far from being forced on us, these changes are being proposed after extensive research and consultation. It has been decided that now is the right time for a bold move.

Q2: Who has taken this decision and how was it made?

Stimulated by the school's 150th anniversary celebrations in 2014 and building on a recent, particularly successful period in the school's history, the governors and senior leadership team have carried out an in-depth strategic review.

This review focused on strengthening the school's current provision whilst simultaneously considering its long-term future. The school invested in significant market and parental research with leading external school consultants. An analysis of the market demand and of the Summer Fields community was prepared prior to making any decisions.

The governors looked at all possible options for the future, including no change at all, and, after considerable analysis and reflection, unanimously agreed that these changes are the right ones to make in order to ensure that the school continues to deliver the highest standards of education for its pupils, and to guarantee its position for generations to come.

Q3: Will this change the school's aims, ethos and values?

The school's aims, ethos and values have been established for more than 150 years and will remain unchanged. The school will continue to nurture boys academically, morally, spiritually and culturally, in order to develop their confidence and sense of independence.

In extending the provision to younger pupils and more day boys, a greater number of boys will now benefit from the school's academically ambitious education and outstanding pastoral care and the community will be strengthened too.

Q4: What are the benefits of extending the educational provision down to age four?

For some time, prospective and current parents have been requesting places for younger boys, often siblings; extending the provision down to Reception will enable the school to meet these requests. Importantly, it will also ensure a seamless progression for families looking for one school for their boys from age 4-13.



Boys in the pre-prep school will receive an excellent start to their education. They will be fully embedded within the school community, ready and prepared to take advantage of their prep education from Year 4 onwards. This will ensure greater educational continuity and will bring significant academic advantages.

Summer Fields is also renowned for its extraordinary co-curriculum. It offers boys the best opportunities in sport, music, drama and many other areas. From age four, all pupils will have access to specialist sport and music teaching, and will benefit from the school's unrivalled facilities and extensive grounds, meaning children will arrive in the prep school ready to participate in the full range of team sports, musical groups and other activities, at all levels.

We believe that the combination of the prep school's existing, outstanding facilities, and a modern, well-resourced pre-prep school, will ensure that Summer Fields delivers an experience for younger pupils that will be unrivalled locally.

Q5: How will current pupils be affected?

The prep and pre-prep schools will work seamlessly together, as two parts of a single school. Current pupils will benefit from the sharing of good teaching practice throughout all parts of the school.

The proximity of the pre-prep will also enable our prep school pupils to take on greater responsibility as peer mentors to pre-prep pupils. In almost all other respects, current pupils will be aware of very little change to their daily routine.

Q6: Did the school consider moving to co-education?

Yes, it was one of the options under consideration. However, Summer Fields is recognised as one of the leading all-boys schools in the country, at any level, and we remain committed in our belief that, at this age, boys flourish in an all-boys environment and it provides the best possible preparation for the next stage of their education.

Q7: Are any other changes planned?

With these changes confirmed, the school now enters the first phase of implementation of a five-year development plan, realising a vision for the school from 2017-2022. By extending the school's provision to ages 4-13, one of the primary goals outlined in the plan will be achieved.

The next steps will be further to increase current levels of bursary provision, and to enhance the school's existing academic and boarding facilities. The initial focus will be on upgrading the facilities in all lodges and, subject to approval, investment in a further boarding lodge to meet demand for boarding places.



THE PRE-PREP SCHOOL

Q8: Where will the pre-prep be situated?

Situated in Newton, one of the school's oldest and most famous buildings, the pre-prep will be at the very heart of the school site, but with its own external access from Mayfield Road.

It will be a secure, self-contained site with its own parking, gardens and playground; the children will enjoy full access to the school's 70-acre site and all existing prep school facilities, including the sports hall, swimming pool, astro, tennis courts and playing fields. The pre-prep children will have their own lunch in the main school dining hall.

Newton will be sympathetically redeveloped and extended, led by the award-winning team at *Oxford Architects*. The development will also include major planting and landscaping work, leading to a complete refurbishment of the Mayfield end of the school, vastly improving the whole area and opening up the view of Mayfield itself, probably the oldest and certainly one of the most historic buildings in Summertown.

Q9: How and when will the facilities be developed?

Subject to planning permission, enabling work will begin at Newton in July 2017, at the start of the summer holidays, and the new pre-prep school will open to its first pupils in September 2018.

Q10: When and how will boys enter Reception in the pre-prep?

Boys will join Reception in the September following their fourth birthdays.

Our priority is to ensure that every boy will thrive and be happy at the school. Once registered, boys will be invited to attend a taster day where they will complete play-based activities in small groups during which an informal assessment will be completed.

Q11: How many pupils will there be in the pre-prep?

In September 2018 there will be a single-form entry respectively into both Reception and Year 3. Years 1 and Year 2 will be introduced in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

It is anticipated that the school will grow initially to a full pre-prep of 80 pupils over the next two years. However, there is capacity for further growth should that become necessary.

Q12: How will the pre-prep be staffed?

The first step will be to recruit a Head of Pre-Prep of the very highest calibre. The recruitment will take place over the summer term 2017, with a view to the successful candidate being in place well in advance of the school's opening. Once appointed, the new Head of Pre-Prep will be heavily involved in all further pre-prep staff recruitment.

Q13: Will the pre-prep take girls?

No, we are committed to providing an outstanding all-boys education for the reasons given above, and the same model will be reflected throughout the school.



Q14: Has a pre-prep uniform been designed?

The current school uniform will be used for all school years, from Reception to Year 8, with pre-prep boys joining one of the four Leagues (houses) for the duration of their time at the school.

Q15: How will this affect the school's relationships with existing pre-prep feeder schools?

Summer Fields has always enjoyed a strong relationship with a wide variety of feeder schools at 8+ and beyond – locally, in London, nationally and even internationally. These strong and much valued relationships will continue.

Q16: What is the process for transition to the prep school?

We are committed to maintaining high academic standards. During the course of Year 2, boys will complete an internal assessment to judge whether they would benefit from the demands of our curriculum in the prep school.

THE PREP SCHOOL

Q17: Will the changes affect the prep school's system of entry and academic standards?

Entry into the prep school will continue exactly as it has always been, with the same number of boarding places available. It will continue to be selective at 8+, and for the few places that traditionally become available at 9+, 10+ and 11+. The current system of registration and assessment, leading to a formal offer, will remain exactly as it is now. Academic standards within the prep school will be maintained, if not strengthened.

Summer Fields is very proud of its outstanding reputation for preparing boys for entry to the country's leading public schools. These changes will ensure that the school's first-class education will become available to even more boys in future, successfully preparing them for the next stage of their education.

Q18: How many pupils will there be in the prep school?

The planned growth will see the prep school gradually enlarge from 240 to around 300 pupils, a relatively modest change, which will ensure that Summer Fields will retain the much-valued ethos of a small school, where every child is known by name and understood according to character, by every teacher.

Q19: Will class sizes increase?

Existing class size caps will remain as they are, to ensure that our high standards of teaching are maintained across the school.

It is likely that, as at the moment, there will continue to be smaller classes in Years 7 and 8, depending on the breakdown of senior schools for which the boys are being prepared in a specific year.

Q20: Will there be fewer places available for boarders to join, either in Year 4 at 8+ or in later year groups?

Absolutely not. The additional day places are exactly that – additional to the existing roll. Boarders will continue to join the school, at all the appropriate age joining points from Year 4 onwards, in exactly the same numbers as they currently do.



Q21: Will day boys still be able to convert to boarding?

Yes. Summer Fields has always made its first offer annually to its own day boys to convert to boarding. This option will remain and it is anticipated that the situation will remain as it is – that many day boys choose to board before leaving Summer Fields, but that some do not.

Q22: Are any changes planned to the school day?

We will be making some small changes to the school day from September 2017.

In order to divide the morning lessons more appropriately, break will take place after lesson 3 (at 10.30am). In the afternoon, there will be no junior teaching after 4.30pm. This time will be dedicated to clubs, activities and prep. In the senior part of the school, there will still be lessons and prep, but further time will be allocated for activities.

There will be no prep after supper and boarders will have the option to return to lodge slightly earlier than they currently do.

It is already the case that almost all academic teaching for Years 4-6 is finished by Little Tea. We will formalise this in September 2017 so that subsequent periods are allocated exclusively to prep and to an expanded activities programme. Parents of younger boys may wish to take them home at 4.30pm, while those who stay will be free to leave at 6.00pm.

PASTORAL CARE

Q23: How will this move improve the school's standards of care?

Summer Fields is well known for the very high level of pastoral care afforded to its pupils, both boarders and day boys alike. Boys benefit from the triple care system of having tutors, form takers and lodge parents all involved in their daily life. The school sets the standard of pastoral care at the highest level and these high standards will remain in place.

As is the case currently, day boys will continue to benefit from the same high level of care as boarders, with access to the school's matrons, medical team and, of course, teaching staff. There will, in due course, be a new appointment made, creating a dedicated role with oversight of day boys.

Q24: What is the school's wrap-around care model for day pupils?

Day boys at Summer Fields already benefit from the boarding ethos and structure, as described above; this applies throughout the boarding school day. By agreement with the school and as a chargeable extra, day boys will be able to sign up termly to arrive early for breakfast or to leave after supper.



BOARDING (Weekend Leave)

Q25: How will the new weekend boarding system work?

The new system will better meet the needs of modern family life and allow greater freedom of choice for parents and boys.

Except on closed weekends, Weekend Leave will be allowed from the end of school commitments on Saturday (usually after games or matches) until Sunday evening.

Boys and parents will be free to make as much or as little use as they wish of the new arrangements. The school expects that leave will vary depending on individual circumstances and commitments.

Q26: Why is the Credit System being abolished?

The Credit System was introduced over twenty years ago, at a time when families were looking for a different type of boarding model. It has served its purpose well during the intervening years, but is now widely perceived as unwieldy, complicated and, at times, unfair. It is extremely time-consuming to administer, the rules are widely flouted and many parents still find it fiendishly difficult to understand even after many years' experience! We believe that the system is no longer fit for purpose.

In particular, the new system should hugely diminish the need for parents to request special permission to take children out on some weekends.

Q27: Will the school function as normal at weekends?

Absolutely. Summer Fields will continue to be a full-boarding school and will function as normal every weekend.

A substantial number of boarders will continue to stay at school for most or all weekends. Others may make occasional use of Weekend Leave, and some more frequent use.

All the facilities of the school will be open each weekend, with a full and enjoyable range of activities and Sunday matches planned on a termly basis. The dates and timings of Chapel services will also be determined in advance to fit in with (and in some cases determine) each weekend's schedule.

A calendar of weekend events will be published at the start of every term to enable the boys and their parents to make informed choices about the weekends they would like to stay in or go home.

Q28: Will the school continue to hold matches and other sporting and cultural events on a Sunday?

Yes. Some matches and sporting events are held or attended by boys on a Sunday: fives, squash, tennis, golf, cross country, rugby sevens, cricket etc. are all events that spring to mind. Boys are currently expected to honour these commitments, even on a Credit weekend, often leading to a curtailed weekend and a 'lost' Credit.

Boys will be expected to continue to honour these commitments, as they will other in-school commitments that may take place on a Sunday – for instance, concerts and play rehearsals. However, as alternative options for a weekend away from school will no longer be rationed, boys will find it easier to enjoy these activities knowing they still have the opportunity for 'home time' the following weekend.



Q29: How will overseas pupils be affected?

In the past, we have been aware of not being able to be flexible enough for parents visiting from overseas. Parents will now have far greater access to their sons at a weekend when they are visiting, should they wish, and will no longer need to work around the intricacies of the Credit System.

Q30: Will there be weekends when boys can't come home?

Yes. There will be a maximum of three 'closed weekends' per term, more generally two. These are likely to be the first and last weekend of each term plus a day such as Remembrance Sunday in the Michaelmas term.

Q31: What will happen to current Newton boarders?

As Newton will house the new pre-prep school from September 2018, the existing Newton boarders will need to be housed elsewhere from September 2017. This will be done by taking up spare capacity in other lodges.

FEES AND BURSARIES

Q32: What will the fees be in the pre-prep?

For September 2018, the Reception fees will be £4,000 and fees for Year 3 will be £5,200.

Q33: Will the prep day fees change?

Yes, from 2018 a day fee reduction of around 15% of the current level will be applied. The reduction is specifically designed to make a Summer Fields education accessible to a greater number of families.

However, and as is normal in independent schools, there will continue to be an annual school fee review after 2018 and parents will be notified annually in March of fee levels for the year ahead.

Q34: Will bursaries or scholarships be available?

In addition to the life-changing opportunities provided for over twenty years by the Maclaren Foundation, the school is fortunate to have an existing endowment policy that allows us to offer a range of bursaries to pupils and their families. It is the stated intention of the governors that this level of assistance should increase still further, both for day and boarding pupils in the prep school.

While these bursaries will be means tested, any family that wishes to apply, or to find out more initially, is welcome to do so. The school has a proud tradition of supporting boys from all backgrounds and, as the school grows, one of the school's stated strategic aims is to increase the number of bursaries available.



FURTHER QUESTIONS

Q35: As a current parent, how can I find out more and to whom can I talk about the changes?

David Faber, Headmaster, and James Aldred, Head of Pastoral Care, will be happy to answer further questions you may have regarding the changes. Please contact them via the Headmaster's PA, Mrs Beth McLaughlin on 01865 454433 or via email hm.pa@summerfields.com.

Q36: As a prospective parent who can I talk to and when can I visit?

Please contact Mrs Christine Berry, Registrar. She can be contacted on 01865 405204 or at admissions@summerfields.com. She will be delighted to answer any questions you have and to arrange a visit in due course.

We would also be delighted to welcome you to one of our Open Days; the next event is on Saturday 29th April. An Open House will also be held on Friday 9th and Saturday 10th June 2017 when plans for the new pre-prep development will be available for parents to view.