

Head of Pre-Prep

Candidate Information

RS ACADEMICS

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the position of Head of Pre-Prep at Dragon School.

This appointment comes at an exciting and important moment in the life of the School. The Dragon has long been recognised as one of the most distinctive and respected preparatory schools in the United Kingdom, combining academic ambition with creativity, kindness and a genuine celebration of childhood.

As the School develops its vision for the future, we are seeking an outstanding educational leader to guide and inspire our Pre-Prep community. The Head of Pre-Prep will shape the earliest stages of each child's Dragon journey, ensuring an exceptional educational experience from the outset.

We are looking for a leader who combines educational expertise with warmth, strategic vision, energy and a deep understanding of what enables young children to flourish. This is an opportunity to lead a thriving and successful Pre-Prep whilst contributing meaningfully to the wider leadership and future direction of the School.

We look forward to meeting candidates who share our commitment to educational excellence, pupil wellbeing and the values that define a Dragon education.

Emma Goldsmith
Head, The Dragon





Introduction

Few schools occupy such a distinctive place within British independent education as Dragon School.

Founded in 1877 and located in the heart of Oxford, Dragon has built an international reputation for educational excellence, intellectual curiosity, creativity and character development. Originally established to educate the children of Oxford academics, the School has remained true to its progressive roots whilst continually evolving to meet the needs of successive generations of pupils.

Today, Dragon educates boys and girls aged 4 to 13 and offers a vibrant, ambitious and nurturing educational experience. The School is known for its ability to combine high expectations with a genuine belief that childhood should be joyful, adventurous and full of discovery. Pupils are encouraged to think independently, embrace challenge and develop the confidence to pursue their interests with enthusiasm and purpose.

The School's recently launched strategic vision for 2027 and beyond reflects an institution that is ambitious about its future whilst remaining firmly rooted in its founding values. Innovation, creativity and educational excellence continue to sit at the heart of Dragon's approach.

Against this backdrop, the appointment of Head of Pre-Prep represents a significant opportunity to lead one of the most important areas of the School and to influence the educational experience of Dragon pupils from the very beginning of their journey.

The School

Dragon School is one of Britain's leading independent preparatory schools, providing day and boarding education for children aged 4 to 13. Situated in North Oxford, the School combines outstanding educational provision with extensive facilities and a vibrant, diverse community.

The Pre-Prep, located in nearby Summertown, provides a nurturing and stimulating environment for the School's youngest pupils. It is here that children begin their Dragon journey, developing the confidence, curiosity and love of learning that characterise a Dragon education.

Today, Dragon Pre-Prep educates over 200 children and welcomes more than 40 new pupils into Reception each year. It enjoys an excellent reputation for the quality of its educational and pastoral provision and is supported by a highly engaged and loyal parent community. Almost all pupils progress from the Pre-Prep into the Prep, creating a coherent and well-established educational journey from the earliest years through to senior school transition.

The Pre-Prep is fully integrated into the life of the wider School. Children benefit from access to specialist facilities and opportunities across the Dragon, including the swimming pool, theatre and music school, helping to create an educational experience that is unusually rich and broad for this age group.

Academic continuity is a particular strength. The School has developed strong links between the Pre-Prep and Prep phases, ensuring that pupils experience a seamless transition and benefit from a coherent educational philosophy throughout their time at Dragon.

The wider School benefits from exceptional facilities, including extensive playing fields, specialist teaching spaces, music and performing arts facilities, science laboratories, art studios and boarding houses. The cultural and intellectual opportunities offered by Oxford itself further enrich pupils' educational experiences.

Dragon is proudly co-educational, inclusive and internationally minded. Pupils and families represent a wide range of nationalities and backgrounds, contributing to a dynamic and outward-looking community. The School's diversity is regarded as one of its great strengths, helping pupils to develop confidence in themselves and understanding of others.





Ethos and Values

The Dragon's ethos is rooted in a belief that education should inspire wonder, curiosity and a lifelong love of learning.

For almost 150 years, the School has encouraged pupils to think independently, take intellectual risks and engage enthusiastically with the world around them. The Dragon's progressive outlook remains one of its defining characteristics and continues to shape both the curriculum and the wider educational experience.

The School's values of Kindness, Courage and Respect underpin every aspect of community life. These values are evident in relationships between pupils and colleagues, in the School's commitment to service and philanthropy, and in its determination to create an environment where every child feels known, valued and supported.

The Dragon's motto, Arduus ad Solem ("Reach for the Sun"), reflects its aspiration that every pupil should develop the confidence, resilience and character needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

A Dragon education seeks to develop young people who are:

- Curious and intellectually adventurous.
- Kind, respectful and inclusive.
- Confident and resilient.
- Creative and imaginative.
- Ambitious without losing sight of the importance of community and service.
- Prepared for future opportunities and challenges.

The Opportunity

The appointment follows the decision of the current Head of Pre-Prep to step away and concentrate on the development of the Dragon Nursery Group after 14 years of exceptional leadership. She leaves behind a thriving and respected school with a strong reputation, talented colleagues and an engaged parent community. Governors and senior leaders see this transition as a natural opportunity to build upon these strengths whilst considering how the Pre-Prep should evolve in the years ahead.

The next Head will build on what makes the Pre-Prep special while shaping its future development. The remit extends beyond maintaining current provision: it includes scope to review structures, refine curriculum delivery and contribute to the School's longer-term strategic direction.

The successful candidate will lead a flourishing, highly successful Pre-Prep while helping to shape its next phase of development. The role combines responsibility for children's daily experience with participation in the wider educational debates that will influence the School's future.

The School is interested in leaders who can assess what an increasingly digital world means for young children's education. This includes considering the implications of artificial intelligence and digital literacy and identifying the skills children will need as they grow.

The School is also investing significantly in its early years provision. A new nursery is due to open shortly; further nursery developments are planned, and the possibility of additional on-site provision is being explored. Whilst responsibility for nursery management will not form part of this role, these developments reinforce the School's commitment to investing in the earliest stages of children's education.

The Head of Pre-Prep will also play a leading role in admissions, recruitment and retention. With families joining the School at different stages and more than 40 children joining Reception each year, the ability to engage authentically with prospective and current families is central to the role's success.

Strategic Priorities

The priorities for the next Head of Pre-Prep are likely to include:

- Continuing to deliver an exceptional educational experience for every child.
- Maintaining the warmth, creativity and sense of childhood that define the Dragon experience.
- Supporting innovation in teaching, learning and curriculum development.
- Considering the implications of artificial intelligence and digital literacy for young learners.
- Strengthening admissions, recruitment and retention activity.
- Building outstanding partnerships with parents and families.
- Supporting seamless progression throughout the Dragon journey.
- Contributing actively to whole-school strategy and development.





Governance & Leadership

The Head of Pre-Prep reports directly to the Head and holds overall leadership responsibility for Dragon Pre-Prep.

The Head of Pre-Prep is a fully integrated member of the School's senior leadership team, attending all senior leadership meetings and contributing actively to whole-school strategy and decision-making.

The role also involves regular engagement with governors, including termly reporting to the full Board and participation in Education and Marketing and Admissions Committees. This level of involvement reflects both the strategic importance of the Pre-Prep and the significance of the role within the wider School.

The role requires close collaboration with senior colleagues across the School and a commitment to ensuring continuity, coherence and excellence throughout the Dragon journey.

The Role

The Head of Pre-Prep provides inspirational, strategic and operational leadership for Dragon Pre-Prep, ensuring that every child benefits from an outstanding education and a happy, ambitious and nurturing start to their Dragon journey.

The Head is responsible for educational quality, pastoral care, supporting a safeguarding culture and day-to-day leadership of the Pre-Prep, working closely with colleagues across the wider School to ensure coherence, continuity and consistently high standards.

Strategic Leadership

- Provide clear, ambitious and values-led leadership for the Pre-Prep.
- Develop and communicate a compelling vision for children's education and experience.
- Translate whole-school priorities into meaningful objectives for the Pre-Prep.
- Lead continuous improvement informed by evidence and professional judgement.
- Contribute actively to the strategic development of Dragon School.

Educational Leadership

- Promote a broad, balanced and developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- Establish high expectations for teaching, learning and pupil progress.
- Champion excellent classroom practice.
- Ensure effective assessment and tracking.
- Support children with learning differences.
- Encourage innovation whilst retaining the best of Dragon practice.

Pastoral Leadership and Wellbeing

- Place children's happiness and wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.
- Foster an inclusive culture where every child feels known, valued and safe.
- Ensure excellent pastoral systems and support.
- Promote resilience, independence and positive relationships.

People Leadership

- Lead, inspire and develop teaching and operational colleagues.
- Foster a collaborative and professionally ambitious culture.
- Support recruitment, induction, professional reviews and professional development.
- Develop leadership capacity across the team.

Parents, Community and Admissions

- Build warm, trusting and professional relationships with families.
- Ensure communication is timely, clear and effective.
- Be visible and accessible to parents.
- Foster a strong sense of belonging and community.
- Lead on pupil recruitment and retention.
- Meet prospective families and act as a compelling ambassador for the School.
- Contribute actively to Open Days, tours and admissions events.

Compliance and Operational Leadership

- Ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Maintain inspection readiness.
- Manage budgets and resources responsibly.
- Maintain oversight of health and safety and risk management.

Safeguarding

- Support the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead in ensuring that the School's safeguarding policies and processes are up to date, thorough and rigorous, that they are implemented and understood by all and that the culture of the School is one that leads to a safe and secure environment for all.
- Ensure safeguarding is embedded within the culture and everyday practice of the School.
- Maintain the highest standards of child protection and safeguarding practice.
- Ensure colleagues understand and fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities.





Person Specification

Essential

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

- Substantial successful leadership experience within a high-quality primary, prep or pre-prep setting.
- The ability to build and maintain strong operational and educational partnerships across the Pre-Prep and Prep Schools, ensuring effective communication, continuity and the smooth running of both sites as part of a cohesive whole-school community.
- A deep understanding of early years and primary education.
- Experience of leading a pre-prep, primary school or preparatory school with a significant pre-prep element.
- An excellent understanding of teaching, learning and child development.
- The ability to articulate an ambitious and compelling educational vision.
- A deep commitment to safeguarding and children's wellbeing.
- Excellent leadership and people-management skills.
- Experience of leading improvement and managing change.
- Strong communication and relationship-building skills.
- The ability to build authentic and trusted partnerships with parents.
- An understanding of pupil admissions, recruitment and retention.
- Strong organisational and administrative capability.
- The ability to think strategically whilst retaining close attention to children's everyday experience.
- Integrity, emotional intelligence, discretion and warmth.
- Commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and the skills required to lead an inclusive school community.
- Intellectual curiosity regarding the future of education and the implications of technological change for young learners.

Desirable

- Senior leadership experience within the independent sector.
- Experience across EYFS and Key Stage 1 and early Key Stage 2.
- Experience of inspection and regulatory compliance.
- Experience of managing budgets and resources.
- Experience of admissions and parent engagement.
- Experience of working as part of a whole-school senior leadership team.

Personal Qualities

The successful candidate is likely to be:

- Warm and approachable.
- Child-centred and values-led.
- Ambitious for every child.
- Authentic and approachable.
- Energetic and engaging.
- Collaborative and inclusive.
- Curious, adaptable and eager to learn.
- Comfortable operating in a highly relational and parent-facing environment.
- Emotionally intelligent.
- Possessed of warmth, charisma and natural presence.
- Committed to continuous improvement.
- Possessed of integrity, humility and sound judgement.

Location

Dragon School is situated in Oxford, one of the world's most celebrated centres of learning and culture. The School benefits from a unique combination of outstanding facilities, beautiful surroundings and access to the academic, cultural and sporting opportunities associated with the city.

The Pre-Prep is located in Summertown, a vibrant and attractive area of North Oxford, providing an ideal setting for young children to begin their educational journey.



Terms and Conditions

- Start date: September 2027.
- Salary: Competitive and commensurate with the significance of the role.
- Pension: Royal London defined contribution pension scheme with employer contributions of 16.48% and employee contributions from 2%.
- Staff fee remission.
- Electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme.
- Cycle to Work scheme.
- Biennial health checks.
- Executive coaching programme.
- Death in service benefit of three times salary.
- Accommodation may be available for the successful candidate should this be required.



Why This Role?

This appointment combines leadership of the Pre-Prep with influence across the wider School: the chance to shape children's earliest educational experiences while contributing to whole-school strategy.

The successful candidate will lead a thriving Pre-Prep of more than 200 pupils, join the senior leadership of one of the country's leading independent schools and play a central role in shaping the educational experiences of children at the beginning of their Dragon journey.

This is a role with genuine strategic influence. The Head of Pre-Prep contributes directly to whole-school leadership, works closely with governors and plays an important role in admissions, parental engagement and the future direction of the School.

For an ambitious and thoughtful educational leader, this appointment offers the opportunity to preserve what is already exceptional whilst helping define the next chapter in the development of a remarkable school community.

Application Process

Working in partnership with Dragon School, RSAcademics is managing this appointment and welcomes enquiries from prospective candidates.

Applications are welcome from both those in leadership positions in pre-prep and prep schools.

Interested candidates are invited to contact RSAcademics to arrange a confidential discussion with one of the consultants handling this appointment:

- Angela Short, Head of Search: angelashort@rsacademics.com
- Andrew Nott, Senior Consultant: andrewnott@rsacademics.com

Closing date: Monday 7 December 2026 at 10.00am (UK time).

Applications should be made electronically to RSAcademics. To submit an application, candidates should upload their documents according to the instructions on the RSAcademics vacancies page found here.

Candidates should submit the following, both in PDF format:

- A completed application form (available here).
- A covering letter addressed to the Head, Emma Goldsmith.

The covering letter should explain:

- Why you are interested in the appointment.
- What attracts you to Dragon School.
- How your experience has prepared you for the role.

If you have any questions about uploading your application documents, please contact:

- Jonathan Barnes, Head of Operations (Leadership Appointments): applications@rsacademics.com / +44 (0)20 4626 9791

The selection process will be as follows:

- All applications will be acknowledged by email. If acknowledgement has not been received within two working days of submitting an application, please contact RSAcademics by telephone.
- Preliminary interviews will take place with RSAcademics via Teams from Monday 7 December 2026. Please note that preliminary interviews may be arranged during the advertising phase for some candidates.
- Longlist interviews with the selection panel will take place on Thursday 21 January 2027.
- Shortlist interviews with the selection panel will take place on Monday 1 February 2027.

NB: Recruitment arrangements may be refined, and candidates should refer to the final recruitment materials for confirmed dates and details.

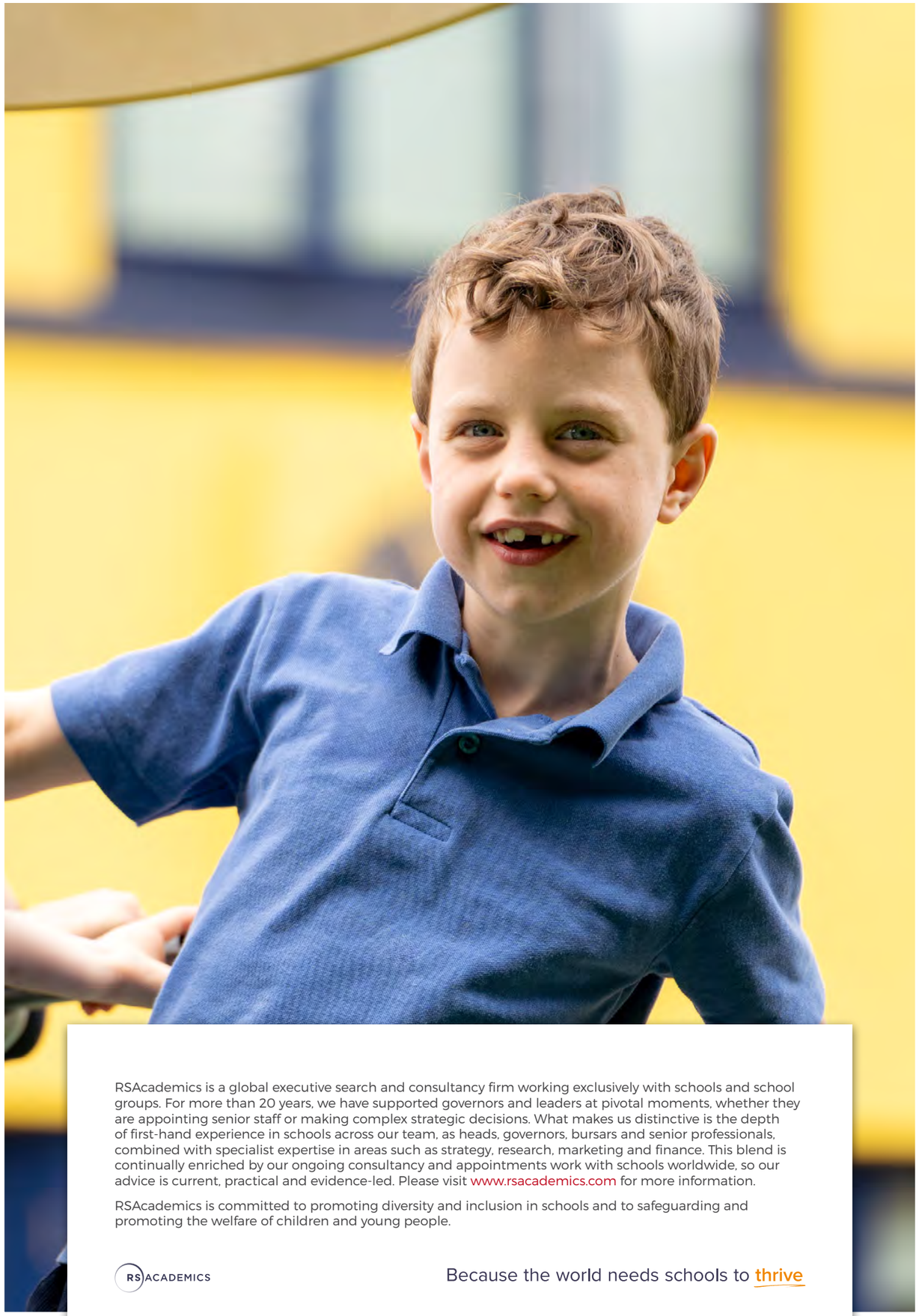
Safeguarding Statement

Dragon School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, governors and volunteers to share this commitment.

All appointments are subject to enhanced DBS checks and all other appropriate safeguarding and pre-employment checks in accordance with statutory guidance and safer recruitment procedures.

The successful candidate will be expected to uphold the School's safeguarding and child protection requirements and contribute actively to a culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Dragon School is committed to equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion and welcomes applications from all suitably qualified candidates.



RSAcademics is a global executive search and consultancy firm working exclusively with schools and school groups. For more than 20 years, we have supported governors and leaders at pivotal moments, whether they are appointing senior staff or making complex strategic decisions. What makes us distinctive is the depth of first-hand experience in schools across our team, as heads, governors, bursars and senior professionals, combined with specialist expertise in areas such as strategy, research, marketing and finance. This blend is continually enriched by our ongoing consultancy and appointments work with schools worldwide, so our advice is current, practical and evidence-led. Please visit www.rsacademics.com for more information.

RSAcademics is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in schools and to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

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Because the world needs schools to thrive