

Head

Candidate Information





Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the position of Head of St John's School Leatherhead.

On behalf of the Governing Council, I am delighted to introduce this opportunity to lead a school with a strong sense of purpose, a clear strategic direction and an unwavering commitment to the young people in our care.

St John's has been shaping education for 175 years, combining academic ambition with a genuine emphasis on kindness, respect, service and belonging. It is a school where pupils are encouraged to achieve their very best while developing the character, confidence and judgement needed to flourish in an increasingly complex world. The strength of our community, rooted in enduring values and enriched by a vibrant co-curricular programme, is something of which we are immensely proud.

Following our current Head's emigration at the end of this

academic year, we are seeking a successor who will build upon the many strengths of the School and lead its next phase of development. This is not a school in need of reinvention; rather, it is a successful and forward-looking community with a clear strategy, a talented and committed staff body, and a culture that values continuous improvement and thoughtful innovation.

The next Head will join St John's at an exciting moment in its history. As we continue to strengthen our educational offering, invest in our facilities and develop initiatives such as our Quad Life Skills curriculum and Sixth Form provision, we are looking for a leader who combines educational vision with warmth, integrity and sound judgement. The successful candidate will be someone who inspires confidence, values collaboration and understands how to balance ambition with care for individuals. They will have the strategic vision and financial acumen to lead an efficient,

modern, commercial educational establishment that is fine-tuned to offer the greatest value to our parents and their children.

The Governing Council is committed to supporting the Head and the wider leadership team in ensuring that St John's remains a distinctive and thriving school. We are looking for a leader who will embrace our values, champion our pupils and staff, and guide the School with clarity and confidence through the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

I hope this information gives you a sense of both the scale of the opportunity and the special character of St John's. We look forward to learning more about those who feel inspired to contribute to the future success of our school.

Sara Lipscombe

Chair of Council
St John's School Leatherhead

The opportunity

St John's is a thriving and ambitious school with a strong sense of purpose and a clear view of what education should offer young people. Its next Head will inherit a flourishing community, strong academic outcomes and a clear direction for the future, together with the opportunity to lead the School through an important phase of its development.

A co-educational day and flexible boarding school for pupils aged 11 to 18, St John's now educates just under 950 pupils. Academic ambition sits alongside an exceptional breadth of opportunity. More than 250 activities support

pupils' interests and talents across sport, the performing arts, adventure and service, while the house system creates a strong sense of belonging within a school that proudly retains a boarding heart.

Recent years have seen continued growth in pupil numbers, strong academic outcomes and significant investment in the wider pupil experience. The School is now taking the next steps in how it prepares young people for life beyond school. The development of the Sixth Form and the introduction of the Quad Life Skills curriculum reflect a determination

to help pupils leave St John's not only with excellent qualifications but with the confidence, character and judgement to flourish in the world beyond it.

Following Alex Tate's appointment to St George's School, Canada, the Governing Council is seeking a successor who will build on the School's many strengths and continue to implement its agreed strategy. Working with an experienced Senior Leadership Team and Governing Council, the successful candidate will sustain momentum, maintain high expectations and guide the School through its next chapter.





St John's at a glance

Founded in 1851, so in our 175th year, St John's is a co-educational day and flexible boarding school for pupils aged 11 to 18. Its Christian heritage is reflected in a continuing commitment to kindness, respect, service and widening access. We recognise the traditions that our history brings us and balance this with a modern outlook that is appropriate for today's world.

The Lower School provides a distinct setting for Years 7 and 8, known as Lower and Upper Third. From Year 9, or Fourth Form, pupils join a day or boarding house, where tutors, matrons and house staff provide continuity of care. The Sixth Form completes an education in which growing independence is supported by close relationships. This is a day school with a boarding heart, drawing families from Surrey, the A3 corridor and south-west London.

Academic strength

Academic outcomes are strong and have continued to improve over time. In 2026, 81% of GCSE grades were 9–7, including 64% at grades 9–8. At A level, 60% of grades were A*–A and 85% were A*–B. Value added has strengthened over time, reflecting the School's determination to combine academic ambition with a close understanding of each pupil and the progress they can make.

Recent inspection

St John's was inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in September 2025. The School met all the relevant Standards across leadership and governance, quality of education, pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing, social and economic education and safeguarding.

Inspectors found that the School's emphasis on kindness was evident throughout school life. They highlighted the pride, belonging and security fostered by the house system and flexible boarding, the expertise and enthusiasm of teachers, the strong progress pupils make and the breadth of the co-curricular programme.

An education with breadth

A significant programme of activities gives school life exceptional breadth. More than 85% of pupils participate in sport across 17 sports, while half are involved in performing arts. Music, drama and dance sit alongside a growing Combined Cadet Force, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and an extensive programme of trips and expeditions.

Service is equally tangible. Pupils volunteer in local primary schools,

care homes and the Link Centre, while the Eagle Community Holiday brings present and former pupils together to support young people with disabilities. Last year, nearly 400 pupils participated in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, contributing almost 6,000 hours of volunteering.

A setting for the future

The well-maintained, 50-acre campus lies within walking distance of Leatherhead, with convenient road links and rail connections to London. Victorian buildings around the Quad give St John's its distinctive character, complemented by contemporary spaces for teaching, performance and sport. The estate includes dedicated Lower School, science and performing arts facilities. A modern sports centre houses a 25-metre swimming pool, fitness suite and dance studio, alongside extensive playing fields and two all-weather hockey pitches.

The new Sixth Form centre will bring existing buildings into fresh use, creating spaces for independent study and social life alongside careers and futures guidance and Quad Life Skills teaching. It is an investment in the experience of the School's oldest pupils and their preparation for the choices ahead.



The next phase

St John's has an agreed strategy and a clear direction for its continued development. The next Head will work with the Governing Council and senior colleagues to maintain momentum, translate the School's ambitions into clear priorities and ensure that progress is sustained. This will be an evolutionary phase requiring thoughtful implementation, sound judgement and an understanding of what should be preserved, as well as what should continue to develop.

Preparation for life

Preparation for life is central to that direction. Launched in September 2026 for Lower School and Fourth Form pupils, the Quad Life Skills curriculum develops critical thinking, ethical decision-making and adaptability alongside financial understanding and artificial intelligence literacy. The next Head will lead its continued development, connecting it with teaching, pastoral

care and the wider experiences through which pupils learn. The development of the Sixth Form will provide a complementary focus on growing independence, future choices and confident progression beyond school.

Sustaining the School's ambitions

St John's is well placed to build on its strengths within a changing independent-school landscape. The next Head will bring a clear understanding of evolving parental expectations, affordability and the factors influencing the choices families and staff make. Working with senior colleagues and governors, they will ensure that decisions about recruitment and retention, staffing, fees, bursaries and investment support the School's ambitions and reinforce the distinctive value of a St John's education.

Financial context

St John's is a substantial charitable organisation. Its continued educational success depends on sound financial planning, careful stewardship of resources and informed decisions about staffing, fees, bursaries, the estate and future investment. The School's income in 2025–2026 was £25.27m. It enjoys a healthy financial position and a strong cash balance.

Widening access has been at the heart of St John's since its foundation in 1851. The School continues to offer means-tested support to children of clergy and families who could not otherwise afford a St John's education. In 2025/26, bursarial assistance supported 25 pupils, including one child of clergy and two non-clergy pupils with fully funded awards. This support totalled £375,989, covering fees and associated educational costs. Total fee remissions funded by the School amounted to £1.5 million, representing 6.4% of gross fees.





Leadership & governance

The Head will lead the Senior Leadership Team, whose responsibilities span academic provision, pupil care and safeguarding, co-curricular life and professional services. They will give clear direction, draw on colleagues' expertise and create the conditions in which senior leaders can exercise real responsibility. Effective leadership at St John's will depend on strong

relationships across educational and professional services.

St John's is a Corporation founded by Royal Charter, and the Governing Council is its governing body. The Head is accountable to the Governing Council and will work closely with the Chair and governors in continuing to implement the agreed strategy, agreeing priorities, assessing progress and identifying risk.

The School appointed a new Chair of Council in August 2025, bringing new rigour to governance. Five new governors have been appointed over the past year, and a new committee structure has been implemented. The Council meets quarterly and operates with four committees: Education and Safeguarding, Finance and Resources, Nominations, and Remuneration.



The leader we are seeking

St John's seeks a leader of warmth, judgement and ambition who will build on the School's many strengths and work with colleagues and governors to lead its next phase of development.

The successful candidate will be an educational leader who combines high expectations with a strong understanding of people. They will bring a strong record of educational leadership, strategic vision and financial understanding.

Visible and approachable, they will be comfortable engaging with pupils, staff, parents and governors and will inspire confidence through their judgement, integrity and clarity of purpose.

They will inherit a strong school and an agreed strategy. Their task will not be to impose change for its own sake but to build on what is successful, maintain momentum and ensure that the School continues to develop in ways that are consistent

with its values and ambitions.

There may be several routes to that combination of experience. Current Heads and senior leaders ready for a first headship are welcome to apply. Candidates will be assessed through the quality of their judgement, the decisions they have made, the teams they have built and the outcomes they have achieved rather than by title alone.





Responsibilities of the Head

The Head has overall responsibility for the educational leadership, safeguarding and effective operation of St John's. Working with the Governing Council and through the Senior Leadership Team, they will:

- **Safeguarding and welfare:** maintain a strong culture of safeguarding and ensure that the welfare and pastoral care of pupils remain central to the School's work.
- **Educational leadership:** sustain high expectations for teaching, learning and pupil progress within a broad and ambitious education.
- **Strategic vision and continued development:** continue to implement the agreed strategy with the Governing Council and senior colleagues, translating its ambitions into clear priorities and evaluating progress.
- **Financial stewardship:** work with governors, the COO and senior colleagues to maintain robust financial oversight, make well-informed choices about priorities and resources and support the School's long-term sustainability and capacity for appropriate investment.
- **Co-curricular life:** champion the breadth and quality of sport, the arts, activities and service, recognising their importance to pupils' development and to the character of the School.
- **People and leadership:** lead and develop the Senior Leadership Team, support the recruitment, development and retention of staff and create the conditions in which colleagues can exercise responsibility.
- **Resources and operations:** work closely with the COO and other professional services leaders to ensure that resources, operations and the estate support the School's educational priorities.
- **Pupil recruitment and access:** contribute actively to pupil recruitment and retention, represent the School to prospective families and support its commitment to bursaries and widening access.
- **Governance, compliance and community:** work constructively with the Governing Council, maintain appropriate oversight of compliance and risk and represent St John's with families, alumni, feeder schools and the wider community.

Person specification

Essential experience and capabilities

- Successful senior leadership in an educational setting serving pupils aged 11 to 18, with a substantial contribution to school-wide improvement.
- A strong understanding of teaching, learning and pupil progress, with evidence of improving educational outcomes while sustaining a broad and ambitious educational and co-curricular experience.
- An experienced strategic leader with financial acumen who can demonstrate the ability to lead an educational business as an efficient commercial entity.
- Sound safeguarding judgement and experience of promoting a culture in which concerns are heard, acted upon and appropriately escalated.
- Experience of implementing agreed priorities, leading significant initiatives and evaluating progress.
- Effective leadership of people, including developing senior colleagues, managing performance and creating the conditions in which others can exercise responsibility.
- Experience of engaging parents and other stakeholders and representing a school externally.

Organisational and financial judgement

- Sound financial understanding and judgement, with the ability to interpret key financial information, question assumptions and contribute confidently to decisions about priorities, resources and long-term sustainability.
- Experience of managing significant resources and making choices between competing priorities.
- A deep understanding of governance and how to work effectively with governors.
- An informed understanding of pupil recruitment, admissions and retention, including the factors influencing family choice.
- The confidence to work closely with the COO and other professional services leaders, drawing on specialist advice and providing constructive challenge.

Leadership qualities and values

- Warmth, credibility and the communication skills to relate to young people and earn the trust of staff, parents and governors.

- Integrity, empathy, resilience and sound judgement, including the confidence to make difficult decisions and explain them clearly.
- Educational authority and intellectual curiosity, combined with a willingness to listen and draw on the expertise of others.
- The ability to bring people together around a clear direction and lead with consistency and appropriate pace.
- A constructive approach to governance and a commitment to the School's charitable purposes, kindness, respect, Christian traditions and inclusive community.

Desirable experience and qualifications

Experience of co-education or boarding, bursary provision, fundraising, estate development and M&A would be valuable. A degree or equivalent is expected; further study or a leadership qualification would be an advantage.





About RSAcademics

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.



Because the world needs schools to **thrive**

Appointment & application

Terms of appointment

The anticipated start date is September 2027, subject to confirmation and agreement with the successful candidate. The remuneration package will reflect the responsibilities of the role and the experience of the person appointed.

How to apply

The search for the next Head of St John's is being led by RSAcademics. The successful candidate will be selected by a panel led by the Chair of Council.

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

- Sarah Glencross, Head of Senior School Search:
sarahglencross@rsacademics.com
- Richard Backhouse, Head of UK Appointments:
richardbackhouse@rsacademics.com

**Closing date: Monday
2 November 2026 at
10:00 (UK).**

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](#) for St John's.

Candidates should submit the following, both in PDF format:

- A completed application form, available alongside this candidate information on the [RSAcademics vacancies page](#).
- A covering letter addressed to Sara Lipscombe, Chair of Council. The letter should explain the candidate's reasons for applying and suitability for the role.

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

- Alison Hooper, Project Coordinator (Leadership Appointments):
applications@rsacademics.com
/ +44 (0)20 4626 9791

The selection process

- 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 **w/c 9 and 16 November 2026**.
- Longlist interviews with the selection panel will take place at the School **w/c 23 November 2026**.

- Shortlisted candidates will be invited to visit the School during **w/c 30 November 2026**.
- Shortlist interviews with the selection panel will take place at the School **w/c 7 December 2026**.

N.B. Safer recruitment checks will be undertaken at all stages of the recruitment process.

Safeguarding and equal opportunities

St John's School Leatherhead is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. The School expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. Applicants must be willing to undergo child protection screening appropriate to the post, including checks with past employers and the Disclosure and Barring Service.

This post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the amendments to the Exceptions Order 1975, 2013 and 2020.

The safeguarding responsibilities of this post are detailed in this candidate information pack.