

STRATEGY 120

SENIOR SCHOOL EXPANSION – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

On 10th June we made the announcement that St Hugh's would be adding three extra senior year groups, extending its provision to Year 11 and teaching GCSEs, thereby creating a Senior School. Following the announcement and the meetings on 13th and 16th June, we have collated frequently asked questions from current and prospective parents, the most common of which are included below. We hope that you will find the answers to those questions of interest and that they will help to paint an exciting picture of the future of St Hugh's.

Why was this decision made?

Over the last few years, our parents have increasingly expressed a desire for more day co-educational senior school choice, including the wish for St Hugh's to offer such a school. We are well placed, with the staff and facilities that we have, to offer a compelling senior co-educational option for families.

As a school, we need to adapt and evolve to reflect the changing needs of modern education, and we feel it is educationally and structurally the right thing to do. It gives our young people the opportunity to continue to be nurtured and supported through adolescence and beyond, within our very strong and supportive community.

This option gives families the opportunity to progress from prep to senior without the pressure on children to pass high-stakes exams with the negative effects on their wellbeing that can be associated with that pressure. Additionally, it will support continuous educational momentum without the need to navigate new environments and institutional cultures in a significantly wider age range.

The extension to 16 will provide an extension to childhood. St Hugh's will remain a relatively small and nurturing school where every child is known and given the pastoral support they need. As a school without mobile phones that focuses on values and supporting character development, we will be able to help children achieve wonderful GCSE results in a safe environment, before moving to a pre-university experience. Every child will benefit from their own Academic Tutor, which is a continuation of our Upper School provision.

The final decision was made taking into account parent surveys and staff feedback over the last two years, consultation with several specialists and other schools, extensive market research over a period of 18 months and an increase in prospective parents looking for a nurturing, smaller, co-educational all-through school in our locality. We are making this strategic decision from a position of financial strength. It is a sign of our confidence at a time when other schools are closing or merging and losing their independence.

Is this being done for financial reasons?

There is a financial incentive for embarking on this project. The Baines Cutler benchmarking survey (Independent Schools) has reported on national pupil numbers dropping at 5x the rate of government predictions when projecting £1.5bn VAT tax income from parents. The whole sector is under pressure to adapt. For weaker schools, this means merging with a larger entity or closure. All remaining schools are flexing their business models to maximise competitive market share (Boarding to Day, Single sex to Co-ed, and various extensions of age range).

In addition to VAT, there is no doubt that the sector has faced a series of significant challenges from further cost increases; the removal of business rates relief, employer NI increases, and inflationary challenges. St Hugh's has planned for each of these challenges and made prudent savings and structural changes while protecting the high-quality provision that we offer.

There has been significant disruption in the sector, although other schools have suffered far worse which has led to a series of closures and multiple mergers. In the past two years, the number of standalone prep schools outside of London has halved. Such schools have lost their autonomy and often have less ability to meet the specific needs of their local area. We forecast that in five years' time there will be few, if any, standalone prep schools remaining.

While St Hugh's is in a strong position at present, we do see long-term trends of parents choosing day schools or flexible boarding environments. The additional year groups will give parents greater choice and naturally, more children on roll will make the School even more financially robust and create a structure that will meet market demand for many years to come.

We exist as a school to provide the best education possible to children and being financially healthy enables us to provide better facilities, as well as enhancing staff provision.

What does going to age 16 (GCSEs) mean in practical terms?

It means adding three more Year groups at the senior end of the school, from age 13 (Year 9) to age 16 (Year 11). We will be doing this one year at a time and growing it organically.

What will remain the same?

Almost everything will remain the same, but certainly everything that is important to us about the ethos, culture, and the values that make St Hugh's such a special place.

One of the core principles that will underpin the decisions made as we plan for Seniors, is to protect what currently works so well for us. The Pre-Prep, Middle School, and Upper School phases of the school will remain central to our provision and is a structure that will not change.

Academic excellence and outstanding pastoral care will continue; our staff will remain accessible in all parts of the School, and we will continue to develop confident pupils educated within the scope of our school values. Importantly, parental involvement and partnership will remain core to our Senior School.

In terms of facilities, we believe that we are well-catered for, and therefore able to extend our year groups with the Rushey Cottage development. However, as the Senior School grows organically year by year and our numbers increase, we will need new additional areas.

There are prepared plans that include a new Dining Room, plus additional Science Labs. These will likely be created by the provision of a new teaching block behind the Cannon Building. This will allow for more space for Art, Design, and IT. These facilities will be available for use by our younger children too.

We will only undertake such projects when numbers and finances allow. We may borrow to fund such projects but will only do so prudently and without significant risk. We have the financial support to do so.

When will this happen?

Our successful Years 7-8 programme will continue to operate as it has always done, with those children currently in Year 7 having the opportunity to stay as our first Year 9 cohort in September 2026. Therefore, from September 2025, all children at St Hugh's will have the opportunity to stay with us through to the age of 16 and to study for their GCSEs here.

For our current Year 7s, and with new children joining, we are aiming to have at least one class when they reach Year 9 in September 2026. These places will be allocated on a first come first served basis with priority given to our current pupils. We will be adding a year group at a time, incrementally until we have Years 9, 10, and 11 by September 2028.

What are the entry requirements for the senior provision?

We want to remain loyal to our current families. Therefore, we will be offering automatic entry, without formal academic assessment, to current pupils who have shown the following attributes during their time at St Hugh's:

- positively lived our school values and ethos
- the potential to keep improving
- excellent behaviour and adherence to our values

Current Year 7 and Year 6 parents will be offered the opportunity to preferentially register for Year 9 before places are offered to external candidates.

Scholarships will also be available for entry into Year 9 and these will involve assessments. Scholarships will be available for internal and external applicants. We will be sending out a new scholarship brochure in early October 2025 so that parents can find out what is on offer and how to apply. The first Scholarship awards will be made in the Spring Term 2026.

We will be monitoring demand for places very closely and if we need to adjust this admissions policy, we will do so and inform all stakeholders.

During the course of the academic year 2025/2026, we will issue new parent contracts so that the default point for a child to leave St Hugh's is at the end of Year 11. Of course, parents will still be able to choose for their child to leave at the end of Year 8 and will be advised and supported at every step in doing so.

Will parents have any input into the planning of the senior provision?

We want this to be as successful as possible, of course, and parent feedback and ideas will be sought as we move through the plans. Parent focus groups will be organised for next term and parents will be welcome to meet with the Headmaster or other members of SLT, from this point forth to discuss the launch of the Senior School.

We appreciate that this opportunity might cause parents to reconsider pre-existing plans, and we welcome conversations. For parents who do decide they would like their children to be amongst our first cohorts of seniors, we want to make sure that you and your children have a strong voice. This includes informing choices on a new uniform for seniors and the facilities in Rushey Cottage.

The questions in this document have been mostly provided by our parents in recent days.

Future feedback will come predominantly from those who register for the senior provision, as well as those parents from younger years who are curious. The opinions of staff and children will also be sought.

Do you have an idea of how many pupils you would like to have in each year group? Do you have a limit in mind?

Initially, for September 2026, we are looking at one class of approximately twelve to fourteen students in Year 9, although we could provide two classes if there is sufficient demand. It is our aim to expand this to two classes in each year group in the following years. We will monitor demand carefully and reevaluate this model regularly. We are keen to ensure that the overall size of our

school remains manageable from an infrastructural perspective, and that we remain small enough to maintain low staff to pupil ratios as well as our family ethos.

In time we expect Senior School year groups of 40-50 children, thereby increasing the total number of children on role to over 450. We expect this to happen over a period of five years from launch.

Will you still support 13+?

Yes. We pride ourselves on the academic achievements of our pupils at 13+ and will continue to offer advice that is right for families and their circumstances. For many families, a move at 13 will still be right and we will be fully supportive in preparing children for such a move. This will be particularly true for families seeking a boarding environment.

We will support applications elsewhere with absolute integrity. It does not serve any child well to recommend they stay at St Hugh's, when a move is in their best interests.

We are already seeing significant interest from families outside of the St Hugh's community, so we are very confident in our anticipated numbers.

We will continue to fully celebrate the achievements of those who do leave, on Scholarship boards and at Speech Day, which will continue to have a focus on Year 8 whether leaving or graduating.

Will Year 8 still have the responsibilities and leadership opportunities that they have now?

We have worked incredibly hard to make Years 7&8 the flagship years at St Hugh's and we want to retain this 'Top of Prep School' feel. Heads of School and the prefect systems will remain, whilst also ensuring that the additional senior pupils will have leadership opportunities of their own.

The Leavers' Programme will continue in exactly the same format as it has in recent years, although we will rename it a Graduation Programme, to reflect that there will be children who continue. We make a firm commitment that it will not change or erode over time.

Speech Day will continue to be a celebration of the children who are graduating from Upper School. For those who choose to stay, there will be a separate celebratory event as they complete their GCSEs. This will take place at a different time, aligned to the completion of their GCSE examinations, which finish before the first weekend in July when our Speech Day is usually held.

Will Sport change?

We are very happy with our *Sport for All* approach that provides a breadth of competitive experience for all, with entries for top teams into a range of IAPS and other prestigious events. We will be creating a new fixture list for U14s, U15s and U16s.

As always, we will provide a programme that meets the needs of the size of the cohort. It may be that in the first year, we offer more individually focused sports, and social sports. We are already in conversation with Heads of smaller schools who may be willing to co-operate with us on creating hybrid teams. However, by the second year of the Senior School we expect to be able to offer competitive team Sport as the first two year groups play together.

Initial Sports will include access to the new Padel and Pickleball courts, as well as Tennis, 5-a-side Football, an enhanced gym area, as well as off-site opportunities in Rock climbing, Fishing, Horse riding, and Golf.

As a day school, we will be attractive to those children who wish to maintain other team sport commitments outside of school hours.

With regards to moving on to A-Levels, what would be the options for the children after their GCSEs?

The options are extensive. We have great relationships with other senior schools and the response to our strategic shift has been positive from them. All senior schools that St Hugh's sends children to have an intake at A-Level. Some of these schools see year groups grow by as much as 40% with new children entering Year 12.

With parents increasingly delaying boarding until the A-Level years begin and increasing numbers of children moving at the end of GCSE, we see this as an additional opportunity for a later transition for children. They can continue to grow and learn in a safe and familiar environment until 16, and then begin their A-Level studies, often finding a school which is more closely matched to their burgeoning interests. At that point it is far easier to align a sixth form of choice to interests, or university or career aspirations.

We have no intention of moving to A-Levels. We are committed to supporting our families to help them make the best choice for their child after Year 11. We are fortunate to have many outstanding sixth forms in the area. We will work with families to ensure that each pupil has the best chance possible of heading to a setting where they will thrive.

Senior Heads that we have spoken to so far have been positive about our initiative and are keen that we continue to work with them for entry at 13+, and for a new opportunity to enter at 16+.

What subjects will you offer at GCSE?

Planning for this is well underway. We have sought advice from senior school colleagues, as well as examination boards, and will continue to do so. We have reviewed the GCSE options of all schools to which we send children, and we will offer a range of subjects that is competitive.

Our aim is to provide the core subjects as well as a range of foundation options for the children to select from. In our planning, we are continuing to help children prepare for their futures by creating a GCSE offering which allows our pupils the best chance of success and the widest variety of opportunities after Year 11.

We are currently working on a GCSE options booklet for parents which will be available next term. We are planning for children at the School to gain at least one GCSE qualification earlier than Year 11.

We will expect children to study for the separate Sciences and to take at least one language option.

What extracurricular activities will be available?

We firmly believe that learning extends beyond the classroom and our thriving and popular St Hugh's provision will remain in place. Extra-curricular activities widen the children's experiences at St Hugh's and are an important component in the development of confidence. Examples of the activities that will likely further complement the senior provision are Duke of Edinburgh, Young Enterprise, and Sports Leadership awards.

A range of trips will be introduced to the Senior School. We have wonderful opportunities on our doorstep and there will be further opportunity for international travel. We will be planning an Ypres Salient Battlefields tour for the first Year 9 cohort.

Will you need new staff?

High quality secondary trained teachers are essential and there will be investment in this area as the School grows. However, we have experienced and qualified secondary practitioners in all core subjects and most tertiary subjects already. These staff are experienced in teaching GCSE and A-Level. We have a high degree of confidence in the academic staff at St Hugh's who prepare children for scholarship standards that are often above GCSE.

Staff will be given the opportunity to teach further up in the school; where necessary additional training will be provided and senior subject specialists will be recruited throughout the process. We expect a wider range of candidates for academic posts that we will advertise in the years to come, and this will benefit all children across the School.

The number of staff at the School will increase as the number of children rises. We will not add distraction or to the workload of teachers who deliver so well for your children.

Will the Board of Governors change?

The existing Board benefits from a range of experienced professionals who volunteer to support the Executive, scrutinise performance and compliance, and give strategic direction. The Board membership includes finance, estates, legal, medical, educational, and entrepreneurial backgrounds. The Board has expanded its membership to include Mr Ed Trelinski who is the Second Master at Reading Blue Coats, and previously a House Master at Rugby School. He is now involved directly with this project and will support the Executive in successful delivery.

With the introduction of GCSEs, does this mean the school will become all about exam results?

We already achieve brilliant results at Year 8 with our current ethos. There is no reason that we cannot continue to do so to Year 11.

This question is essentially challenging whether the culture of St Hugh's will change. When parents visit us for the first time, it is the feel of the school that really attracts them. Our ethos is around being family-friendly, knowing one another, valuing the abilities of all, and the children conducting themselves modestly and positively. St Hugh's children are happy, caring, energetic, and enjoy the environment of the school. We do not envisage diluting or changing this at all. Of course, we acknowledge that the pastoral care and various policies to support engagement, participation, and behaviour are very different when considering the needs of a 15-year-old, to those of a 7-year-old, and again to a 3-year-old.

In terms of exam pressure and the effect on children's wellbeing, this is an issue of which we are already acutely aware. The option of staying to Year 11 will see a significant reduction in exam pressure in the younger years but we will continue to challenge and stretch them as outlined in our aims and values. We will focus on allowing children to have the experience of a broad, creative curriculum, before starting to build the skills and resilience required for GCSEs, at the appropriate time.

How will the greater age range of pupils be managed?

Our plan for the senior provision is to create a separate purpose-built area for them to enjoy. Children in the Pre-Prep and Middle School are constantly supervised and already enjoy their own facilities and day-to-day separation from the Upper School. This will be even more the case with the Senior School which will be physically separated from the main campus.

We will also look at logistics, such as staggered break, lunch, and lesson times.

However, one of the great strengths of St Hugh's is the family atmosphere and this extension of our provision brings great opportunities for families to be together for longer.

This will also allow for additional learning opportunities, for both the younger and older children, to branch across the curriculum and grow together under the guidance of staff.

Importantly, we will know all of the children who continue into the Senior School. One of the main focuses of our admissions attention will be that a child joining the school will represent our values.

What will your mobile phones/personal devices policy be?

St Hugh's is a non-personal device school, and we will remain that up to and including the GCSE years. We believe it is better for children to spend their days talking to each other and their teachers, rather than being on mobile phones. Mobile phones will not be allowed in the Senior School.

All children in Year 9 and above will be given a Microsoft Surface device to use for their schoolwork in the Senior School. This will be locked into the school's network and filtering systems and will be returned to the School when the student leaves Year 11.

Will the uniform change?

The existing Prep school uniform will remain unchanged, although in response to parent feedback we are currently in discussion about streamlining some of the requirements for items that are rarely used.

We will look to introduce a new Senior School uniform that retains the St Hugh's identity and style. For this we will consult with children, parents, and staff, while also taking advice from our uniform supplier.

There will be a distinction between the uniform worn by the younger pupils and those joining the senior provision, whilst maintaining the heritage of our school. We will also be mindful of our desire to keep any additional costs to parents as low as possible.

Can the existing school site and facilities support the additional years?

As children move into the Seniors, we will expand our facilities so that they match the curriculum requirements as well as our ambition. The intention is for the older children to be initially based in Rushey Cottage for the majority of their teaching, learning, and social areas. There is space for some expansion on this site, and they will use specialist rooms timetabled as required.

We acknowledge that there will need to be additional facilities added through a planned programme. This is being explored with planners, but we can confirm that any additions will be on the current site, rather than a new location.

St Hugh's has a large site but one of the great joys of the school is the outdoor environment, the fields, and the woods. We do not want to reduce this freedom and so any future development will be concentrated around current buildings. There will be no reduction in the playground or Sports fields.

Whilst we will create mentoring and leadership opportunities for the older children, it is critically important to us that we maintain the integrity of other parts of the School, and this includes maintaining a very large degree of separation which will maintain the prep school feel.

We may look to purchase additional land if the opportunity arises.

What will the fees be for the Senior School?

The fees for Year 9 and above will be the same as they are for the Upper School (Years 5-8). We intend to offer increasingly competitive fees for all year groups, and the growth at the top end of the school will support that in the years ahead.

However, we are committed to recognising loyalty to all existing St Hugh's families. As such, we will be supporting a loyalty fee structure which will include a 10% reduction on the Senior School tuition fees for the duration (Years 9-11). More detail on how this will be structured will be shared next term.

For external joiners, we will apply an early adopter tuition fee reduction of 10% for the first two years of the Senior School. Any joiners in the first two years will receive the reduction for the duration of their time at the Senior school (Years 9-11).

How will this project be financed?

The financial budgets for both the current Prep School structure and the new Senior School, have been modelled separately and are sustainable on their independent fee income. Future growth in senior numbers will fund a modular expansion of facilities in line with available cashflow.

Market research from schools who have expanded to 16+, has seen pupil number growth in the prep school, with the additional attraction of a through school to GCSEs. This growth will enable improved provision and further suppression of fees for all St Hugh's parents.

Will the school access/drive be improved?

We continue to work hard on a solution to this issue, irrespective of our move to create a senior provision. We are currently investigating additional school transport opportunities. For example, additional bus routes to and from school, as well as more wrap-around care in the form of a Breakfast Club. There will be additional drop-off and pick-up parking at Rushey Cottage.

What will happen next?

Guiding St Hugh's in its evolution into an optional through school to 16 is now the key element of the school's future strategy. The launch documentation outlines our timeline for this development, and staff are now in the process of planning and preparing. Although there has been a lot of work already completed, there is a lot still to do as we plan the next phases of the project.

We have applied for the necessary planning permissions which are limited in nature.

Forums of children and parents will launch as we return in September so that your feedback and ideas can be built into the project.

We welcome individual conversations with parents now and in the months ahead. Please do not hesitate to contact any members of the Senior Leadership Team who will be pleased to discuss with you.