

# Candidate Information CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER



*"You have an astonishing school. I have never seen anything like it."*

Sir David Attenborough  
Broadcaster and Natural Historian

# WELCOME

WHITGIFT



*Welcome to Whitgift  
and thank you for your  
interest in this  
astounding school.*

I am delighted that you are considering the role of Chief Operating Officer at Whitgift School. This is a hugely exciting moment in the School's long and distinguished history. With a new strategic vision and plan about to be launched, our next COO will play a pivotal role in shaping the future direction of Whitgift, helping us build on our considerable strengths and ensuring we continue to deliver an education that enriches and enhances the lives of the boys in our care.

Whitgift is an exceptional school: purposeful, ambitious and full of energy. We are fortunate to enjoy a remarkably strong platform - from academic excellence and a rich co-curricular offering to a warm, committed, and highly professional community of staff. Our most recent parents' survey highlights the deep sense of trust and satisfaction families feel, while our latest ISI report affirms the exceptionally high standards we strive for each day. This combination

of achievement, character and care is what makes Whitgift such a special place in which to live, work and learn.

Yet we are far from complacent. The sense of opportunity, breadth and possibility that defines Whitgift means there is still much we want to accomplish. Whether deepening our role within our local community in Croydon or expanding our international footprint, the work of the COO will be central to how we make these choices and turn ambition into reality. Whitgift has long embraced bold thinking and innovation, and we intend to continue in that spirit as we look to the future.

Thank you again for your interest. I hope you will be inspired by what you learn about our School, and I look forward to the possibility of welcoming you to join us on this exciting journey.

**Toby Seth**  
*Headmaster*



# ABOUT WHITGIFT

Whitgift is a leading independent day and boarding school, offering world-class education to boys aged 10 to 18. With over 1,500 students on roll, Whitgift is one of the largest independent schools in the UK. Located in South Croydon, London, the School was opened in 1600 by John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury and is part of the [John Whitgift Foundation](#). The School is committed to providing an excellent all-around education, with a strong focus on academic achievement, personal development and co-curricular involvement. Full, weekly and flexi boarding is offered from 13+.

Set within 45 acres of magnificent parkland within its vibrant South London context, and with easy access to the myriad of opportunities across the capital and beyond for stimulating young minds, Whitgift offers a unique and inspirational learning environment. Distinguished by its commitment to holistic endeavour, Whitgift enjoys an unparalleled reputation for delivering a genuine combination of academic excellence and all-round achievement.

Whitgift consistently achieves excellent GCSE, A-level and International Baccalaureate (IB) results. In 2025, 89% of A-levels grades were at A\*-B and at IB, over half the cohort achieved 40 points or more putting them in the top 2% in the world. 84% of leavers progressed to Russell Group universities including 11 gaining Oxbridge places. At GCSE, 87% of grades were at 7-9.

The co-curricular programme - which provides every one of its students with an exceptional range of clubs and societies across academic departments and beyond - was recognised by ISI in the 2025 inspection as a "significant strength". Whitgift believes in breadth and depth of opportunity, high aspiration, and a "can-do" and engaged attitude: key ingredients for preparing the young people in the School's care for the rest of their lives.

Whitgift also has a strong reputation for sports, underpinned by sector leading facilities. Participation is at the heart of the sporting offering with over 40 sports available throughout the School week and at weekends.

Whitgift School is a diverse community culturally, economically, ethnically, geographically, and in many other ways too: its diversity is a feature held particularly dear by many of its members and one which makes it an especially stimulating place to teach and work.

## Location, Campus and Facilities

Whitgift School is located in Haling Park, South Croydon. It benefits from excellent road, rail and air transport links. South Croydon station is within walking distance and East Croydon station is 1.5 miles to the north of the School. There are regular fast trains into London and easy connections to Gatwick Airport and the south coast.

The School site was acquired by the John Whitgift Foundation during the 1920's. All the buildings were designed and purpose built for the School providing an impressive and extensive range of facilities within landscaped grounds, open green spaces, and tree-lined avenues. The teaching and learning spaces are first-class and there are specialist music and theatre spaces including a concert hall and performing arts centre. The state-of-the-art sports and conference centre was opened in 2005 and includes a multi-use hall with moveable walls capable of seating 2,000, an eight-lane swimming-pool, squash courts and fitness suite. Founder's House was opened in 2013 and provides ensuite study bedrooms for over 100 boarders. There are multiple sports pitches - grass, synthetic-hybrid and all weather, an athletics track, tennis courts, and golf driving range.

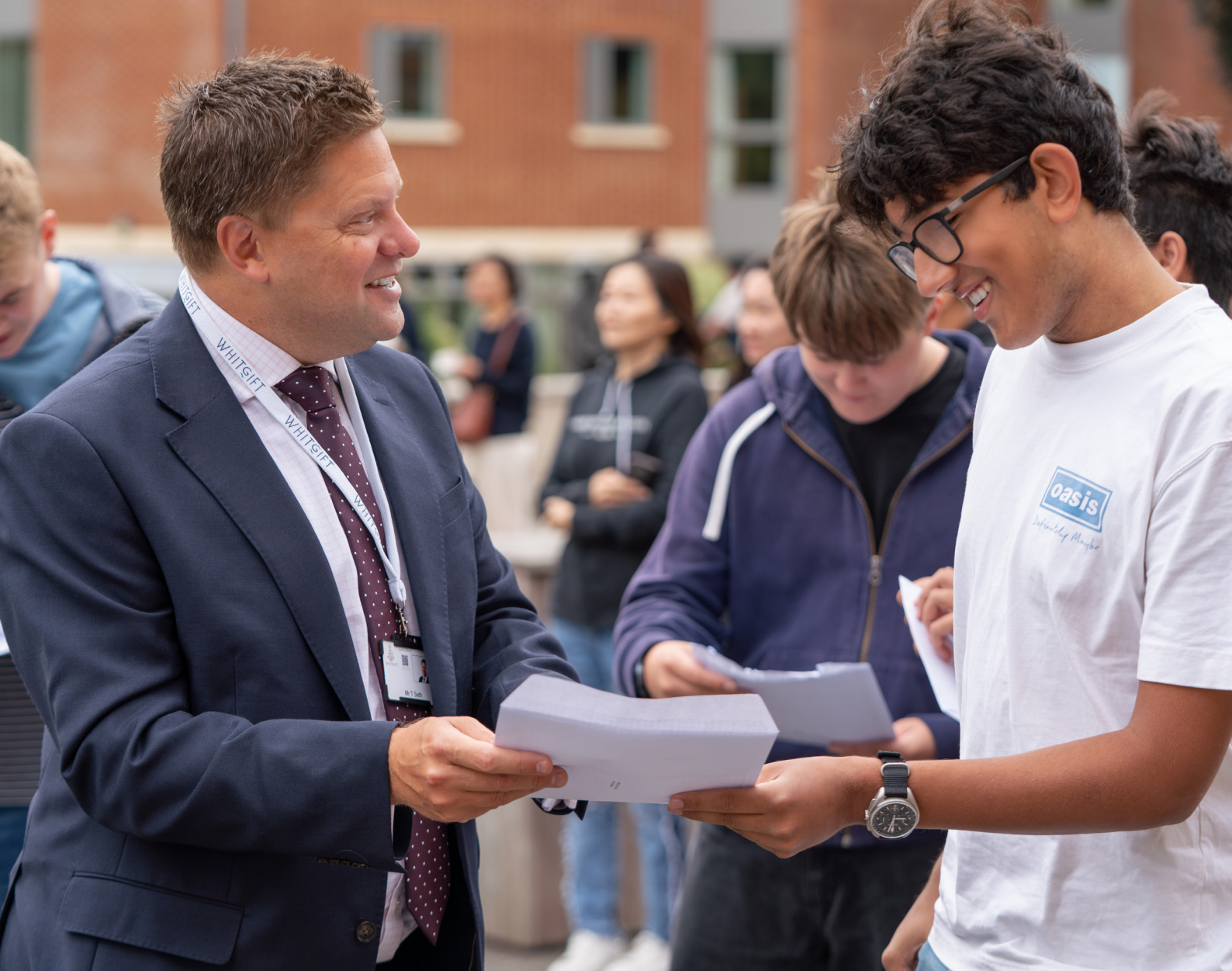
## International Schools

Whitgift is an international brand, both in terms of pupil recruitment and experience and is committed to international expansion in order to become a genuinely global player, enhancing its own pupils' experiences and pool of boarders, and making a financial contribution to the School.

Whitgift's first international school partnership is with a well-regarded school operator in India. Sagebrook International, a new international school for 2,500 students in West Hyderabad, is due to open by August 2026.

Whitgift is currently working with a number of overseas partners to consider other opportunities to develop a family of schools.





# GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Whitgift School is part of the Whitgift Foundation (known as the John Whitgift Foundation), a registered charity, number 312612.

The John Whitgift Foundation is based in Croydon and was established in 1596. Created to educate and care for the people of Croydon, the Foundation originally comprised Whitgift School and the Whitgift Almshouses. Over time, the Foundation expanded its work and now also includes Trinity School, sheltered housing and two residential care homes. It has a large property portfolio which has grown substantially over the years, and the rental income allows it to subsidise care services and to provide a substantial amount of bursary assistance to help local children access Whitgift and Trinity Schools.

The Foundation's Court members are the legal trustees of the Charity. They delegate to the Whitgift School Committee (Governors) the oversight of the strategic

direction of the School and its educational offering and success. The Whitgift Governors meet termly and also support the Executive Team through four sub-committees which are Education, Finance and Estates, Welfare and Safeguarding, and International Partnerships. The Chief Operating Officer attends the Governors and Finance and Estates and International Partnerships committee meetings; scope exists for them to attend other committees if and when appropriate.

Executive day to day management of the School is delegated to the Headmaster with the support of the Executive Team, of which the COO will be a member.

Whitgift is regularly inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate and the most recent report from April 2025 can be found [here](#).



# FINANCE AND BURSARIES

As part of the John Whitgift Foundation the School's accounts are administered by the Foundation but with the exception of bursary funding, the School is expected to fund its operations through income - both fee income and commercial activity. With a full roll, turnover of circa £40M and strong competition for places, Whitgift is in a robust position but is very mindful of the challenges which the independent education sector continues to face.

Whitgift School is committed to providing opportunities for boys from all backgrounds to thrive and offers bursaries up to 110% of the fee amount. John Whitgift Foundation provides £2.15 million to Whitgift each year,

which enables the school to offer means-tested bursarial support to around 10% of its 1,500 students. This support is something that the school is very proud of. Additional funding for bursaries is raised through Whitgift For All, a linked charity, number 312612-1, which enables Whitgift to fundraise, spend and invest money at its discretion.

The John Whitgift Foundation's published accounts can be found [here](#).

# THE OPPORTUNITY

This is an outstanding opportunity for an inspiring, collegiate and ambitious leader to drive the business functions of Whitgift School, building upon what is already excellent at a highly successful School within a strong and supportive charitable foundation. Working with the new Headmaster, the Governors and the Executive Team, the new COO will act as the School's commercial adviser, shaping and implementing the next phase of its strategic development including further international expansion, whilst ensuring its continued operational and financial success.

Reporting to the Headmaster and, through the Chair of the Finance and Estates Committee to the Governors, the COO will be responsible for the effective leadership and management of the School's finance, estates, operations, catering, cleaning and commercial activities.

The COO has overall responsibility for a large and diverse team of support staff, led and managed by a team of experienced and dedicated managers. The COO's direct reports are the Finance Manager, Director of Estates and Facilities, Head of IT, School Shop Manager, Catering Manager (contract) and the Finance Assistant/COO's PA. The COO will also work closely with the Senior Deputy who line manages HR to ensure high quality and consistent management of all staff in line with the policies and procedures of the Foundation which is the employer.

Candidates will have a proven track record of executive leadership, commercial success and financial control, balancing the needs and challenges of large complex

organisations, managing resources and projects, delivering results, thinking strategically, and inspiring, motivating and developing high functioning teams. The successful candidate will be an outstanding communicator, a sophisticated and diplomatic negotiator with the ability to navigate complex relationships as well as execute initiatives and deliver projects, including capital builds, that will drive the School's success. The role requires ambition, rigour, energy and resilience complemented by empathetic, inclusive and authentic leadership, exceptional interpersonal abilities, and a well-developed sense of humour. A strong skill set including finance (an accounting qualification is not necessary), strategic planning and execution, and operational delivery is required.

Prior experience in the education sector is not a prerequisite, and applications are encouraged from candidates from a diverse range of professional backgrounds who can evidence strong commercial and operational expertise and a demonstrable track record of successfully leading multi-disciplinary teams through a collaborative and enabling style. Candidates will demonstrate empathy with independent education and a proactive willingness to embrace wholeheartedly the many benefits of being part of the John Whitgift Foundation. A genuine resonance with both the Foundation and Whitgift's aims and ethos is essential.



# KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

## Strategy

- Develop, in association with the Headmaster, Executive Team and Governors, the strategic plan, including the estates strategy and master plan, for the next phase of the School's development.
- Work in close partnership with the Headmaster to implement the School's vision and strategic plan, particularly in respect of finance, infrastructure, commercial development, alternative revenue generation and operational delivery.
- Contribute beyond the core functions of the COO's finance and operational brief as a business planner and commercial thinker, ensuring that the School seizes commercial opportunities presented by the rapidly evolving external landscape.

## Leadership and Management

- Lead and inspire the support staff and facilitate strong working relationships between all teaching and support staff.
- Manage the performance of direct reports.
- Oversee the training and professional development of direct reports and the wider support staff.
- Promote modern business practices and drive initiatives to ensure operations are consistent with a leading independent school whilst maintaining important and valuable traditions and consistent with the Foundation's policy and procedures.
- Develop and nurture effective relationships with key external service providers including insurers and legal advisers, the community, and the John Whitgift Foundation.

## Finance

- Manage the financial performance of the School, maintaining a sustainable, forward-looking strategic financial plan.
- Advise the Governors, Headmaster on all matters relating to financial strategy, including allocation of resources and the impact of their decisions on the School's financial position and commercial matters.
- Ensure that a robust system of financial planning and control operates across the School consistent with the Foundation's strategy, policy and procedures.

- Oversee the work of the Finance Manager and her team, including preparation and monitoring of budgets, forecasts, fee records, purchase ledger records and supplier payments.
- Provide clear financial reporting to the Headmaster, Governors and Executive Team.
- Work in partnership with the Foundation's Bursary and Fees Manager on debtor management consulting the Headmaster as appropriate, and contribute to the School's decision on bursary awards.
- Work with Whitgift for All trustees in support of their investment decisions and liaise with the Foundation about instructions.
- Analyse school fees and costs, including benchmarking, and work with the Governors and Headmaster to propose fee levels and salaries to the Foundation.
- Coordinate the preparation and presentation of business cases to the Governors and the Foundation.
- Ensure that the School secures best value from contracts and procurement arrangements.

## Estates and Facilities

- Develop and maintain an effective, forward-looking master plan that supports the strategic vision and estates strategy.
- Identify the School's infrastructure requirements in order of priority and drive the project programme from concept to delivery.
- Lead the delivery of capital projects to time, specification and budget with support from appointed project professionals and liaising with the Foundation as appropriate.
- Ensure the effective management of the School's estate in line with its objectives.
- Ensure delivery of a planned maintenance programme for all School buildings and grounds including amenity areas, gardens, sports pitches and all-weather pitches to the required standard and compliant with statutory regulations.
- Lead our drive towards integrated sustainable solutions and initiatives to reduce the School's environmental footprint and energy consumption.
- Ensure the effective and efficient delivery of transport systems and services.
- Lead and manage the School's arrangements for comprehensive security solutions.
- Ensure the delivery of a first-class catering and cleaning service for pupils, staff and visitors.



# KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

## IT

- Oversee the development, procurement, delivery and management of cost-effective IT infrastructure, data and services to support high-quality teaching and learning, appropriate online safety solutions, communications and administration for all areas of the School's operations.
- Facilitate the safety, security and integrity of the School's IT network and digital data.

## Commercial Activities

- Oversee the commercial operations including the School Shop, sports facilities and lettings to maximise income generation from the School's assets and infrastructure and expand into new markets to develop revenue-earning opportunities.
- Work in close partnership with the Headmaster, Deputy Head (Development) and Director of International Education to optimise the profitability of the international summer school and expand the network of overseas schools.

## Governance, Compliance and Risk Management

- Oversee the preparation of the agendas, papers and minutes for the Finance and Estates Committee.
- Oversee policy development and implementation in relevant areas.

- Ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, policies, and procedures, championing their application throughout the School.
- Oversee the School's Data Protection arrangements.
- Drive the identification, assessment, and management of business risk, including the management of the risk assessment process and Risk Register.
- Ensure that the School has appropriate insurance cover for all key insurable risks.
- Lead on business continuity planning to ensure that the School is well prepared for any emergency.
- Promote a positive health and safety culture throughout the School and fulfil all the COO's responsibilities in accordance with the School's Health and Safety Policy.

## Safeguarding and Welfare of Children

The successful candidate will be expected to promote a culture which prioritises safeguarding, setting a strong personal example. Whitgift School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and aims to create and expects all staff to share this commitment and to become familiar with policies and procedures for safeguarding child and protection which can be found [here](#).



# PERSON SPECIFICATION

The successful candidate will bring the following qualifications, skills and knowledge, leadership style and personal attributes.

## Qualifications and Experience

- Educated to degree level or equivalent.
- A strong track record of successful executive leadership experience in a complex organisation and working with a Board of Trustees or equivalent structure.
- Direct experience at the executive level of both finance strategy and operations.
- A proven capacity to contribute strategically to the wider development of an organisation while retaining a strong grasp of operational detail.
- Experience of leading and managing change in complex organisational settings with demonstrable success in building strong relationships with a range of stakeholders, effectively balancing needs and priorities
- Experience of working within a complex budgetary structure.
- Proven experience of leading and developing high-performing, multi-disciplinary teams.
- Working within a regulatory framework.

## Skills and Knowledge

- Strong financial literacy with first-class analytical skills and the ability to develop long-term financial plans.
- Demonstrable strategic abilities and organisational skills with the capacity to guide whole-organisational development.
- Strong financial and commercial acumen with the ability to easily assimilate, analyse, interpret and present data and assess risk.
- A strong track record of managing a range of support services to a high standard.
- Demonstrable knowledge of property, HR, IT, health and safety, legal and other issues.

- A naturally relational style with well-developed interpersonal skills and high levels of emotional intelligence.
- First-class communication and negotiation skills - able to balance robustness with constructive, positive discussion and diplomacy.
- Strong project management and operational delivery skills.
- Well-developed commercial skills with strong entrepreneurial instincts and the energy and drive to pursue new opportunities.
- An understanding of the commercial, economic and financial imperatives in the leadership and management of schools.
- An understanding of the School's responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and child protection issues and a clear commitment to delivering best practice in safeguarding.

## Leadership and Personal Attributes

- A highly visible, compassionate and charismatic leader who can work both independently and as a key team member to inspire confidence in all stakeholders and encourage and motivate staff.
- Excited by high expectations, creative thinking and achieving of ambitious targets in all areas of school life and strategy.
- Demonstrable energy, rigour and drive with attention to detail.
- High levels of self-awareness, humility and flexibility, as well as an open and collaborative leadership style.
- Personal integrity, loyalty, kindness, warmth and sound judgement.
- Dedicated, optimistic and resilient with good humour.
- A commitment to bursaries and partnerships, with a strong sense of social responsibility.
- Values and promotes diversity, equality and inclusion.



# TERMS OF APPOINTMENT



An attractive remuneration package is offered, reflecting the seniority and significance of the position. The salary offered will depend on skills and experience.

This is a full time 52-week post and some flexibility of working hours will be required in light of the role and responsibilities it entails.

**The main benefits are likely to include:**

- 5 weeks paid annual leave plus statutory bank holidays with the option by agreement to increase paid leave via salary exchange.
- Contributory pension scheme and life assurance.
- A generous fee remission for children at either Whitgift or Trinity who meet entrance criteria.
- Complimentary school lunch when the Dining Hall is operating.
- Free membership of gym and swimming pool.
- Annual professional membership subscriptions.

Whitgift is proud to be an inclusive equal opportunity employer. Whitgift employs and welcomes all

applicants regardless of race, religion, colour, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or other applicable legally protected characteristics. Whitgift actively looks to increase staff diversity in all appointments.

Whitgift School (part of the John Whitgift Foundation) is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. This post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Applicants must be willing to undergo safer recruitment checks, including child protection screening, checks with past employers, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and appropriate online searches of publicly available information. All appointments are subject to satisfactory references, DBS and other statutory checks, proof of identity and eligibility to work in the UK, completion of a medical questionnaire and proof of qualifications.

# THE APPLICATION PROCESS



Interested candidates are invited to contact RSAcademics in the first instance, to arrange a confidential discussion with Nina Lambert, Head of Professional Services  
Appointments: [ninalambert@rsacademics.com](mailto:ninalambert@rsacademics.com).

The deadline for receipt of applications is **10.00am on Monday 18th May 2026**.

Applications should be made electronically to RSAcademics. To submit your application please click on "Apply Now" on the [RSAcademics website](#) and follow the instructions provided.

As part of your online application you will be asked to upload a PDF version of your covering letter addressed to the Headmaster, Mr Toby Seth. The letter should be a maximum of two pages and should explain your reasons for applying and outline your suitability for the role.

If you have any questions about uploading your application documents, please contact Laura Cave, Project Coordinator (Appointments) at [applications@rsacademics.com](mailto:applications@rsacademics.com) Laura can also be reached by calling our Head Office on +44 (0) 204 6269 791.

The process is as follows:

All applications will be acknowledged by email. If you have not received acknowledgement that your application has been received within two working days of sending it, please contact our Head Office by telephone.

- Preliminary interviews will take place with RSAcademics via Microsoft Teams on 22nd and 26th May 2026.
- Longlist interviews will take place at the School in the week commencing 1st June 2026.
- Shortlist interviews will take place at the School on 11th June 2026

RS Academics is a global executive search and consultancy firm working exclusively with schools. For more than 20 years, we've 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 always current, practical and evidence led. Please visit [www.rsacademics.com](http://www.rsacademics.com) for more information.

RS Academics is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in schools.



Because the world needs schools to [thrive](#)