

What are we looking for in our Academic Scholars?

With all our awards the most important thing we seek is a sense of what the future holds. An ability to rise to the occasion counts and, while we do all we can to create a welcoming atmosphere that will allow candidates to give their best, seizing opportunities is critical. While current schools' references and other information they supply are an important touchstone for our judgements, this is firmly balanced by an individual's ability to make an impact while they are with us. On occasions, the two sets of information do not coincide. In such instances we adopt a measured and holistic approach in reaching our judgements, but what we see when candidates are here is a critical factor in our decision making.

A great deal of care goes into designing papers and structuring the assessments candidates face while they are with us, whether written or otherwise, and the scrutiny of outcomes is intense. Depth of insight, signs of real intellectual maturity and flair are key indicators. Those with a secure all round strength in many subjects, yet who reach those heights in none, will not convince as much as those who do so in specific areas. Excellence in some aspects will often trump great proficiency in many, though the performance of the very best will demonstrate both power *and* range.

In written papers knowledge is important, but understanding, skill and the ability to deploy it, more so. Logic, relevance and incisiveness impress, as does a willingness to contend with the unfamiliar and an independence of thought. We want scholars to lead so that they enliven classrooms, stimulate those around them and set an example to their peers. Thus in the group exercises and discussions we look for influence. Though loudness and a propensity to dominate win no credit, subtler skills of social intelligence and sensitive persuasion do. Command is rare at this age but will occasionally shine through. Teamwork and collaborative skills count. At interview, the ability to pick up new concepts quickly, to think on one's feet, and to develop lines of enquiry into unexplored territory carry weight, as does the ability to make connections, to dispute and to stand one's ground. While few thirteen year olds will yet have a majority of these qualities, we consider those we see as important marks of potential.

In a large field, competition can be fierce. Current Heads can often give good advice on the suitability of an application, although no one can foresee the quality of competition when the field is drawn from a wide range of schools. Even for those from the same school expectations may at times be overturned, as performance in an unfamiliar context may not run true to past form when the going is new.

The most impressive win Scholarships. However, we may also offer smaller Exhibitions to those whose strengths, while less complete, yet show particular areas of real excellence and potential. The lop-sided expert may thus outshine the generalist.

We want the experience of the scholarship to be valuable and enjoyable for all. The time spent at the school can help greatly to familiarise and create a sense of belonging in advance of arrival in September. We are thus delighted to see all comers at the event, although only a minority can win awards and it is important for parents to manage expectations carefully. Most candidates will nonetheless receive the offer of an unconditional place without the need for further tests, and thereafter have the chance to share in the culture of intellectual enquiry and adventure that our education seeks to achieve.

