



Francis Holland NW1

St Paul's and co in his sights but he also emphasises that Dulwich has 'less machismo' than some other all-boys' schools; collaboration with JAGS and Alleyn's keeps these boys' feet on the ground. Dr Spence's master plan for the buildings continues to unfold, to be completed in time for the school's 400th anniversary in 2019. The new science building opens its doors next year. Rugby is taken very seriously (they won the NatWest Schools Cup for the third consecutive year) and football is on the up. And Dr Spence reports 'a real buzz about drama this year' – old boy Chiwetel Ejifor was nominated for an Oscar for his performance in *12 Years a Slave*. Debating is sensationally strong too. Boarding is relaxed and mainly for the international set. We'd heard rumours that Dr Spence's name was in the frame for a little job at a certain school near Slough. Dulwich must be relieved that he's staying put.

EMANUEL SCHOOL

Battersea Rise, SW11 1HS ● ●
Website emanuel.org.uk **Head Mark Hanley-Browne, MA, since 2004; previously deputy head of Highgate School Pupils 760 day: 440 boys, 320 girls Faith C of E Ages 10–18 Term fees £5,468 Oxbridge 8% Registration At least a year before entry; £125 fee Admission School's own exam and interview; at least seven Bs**

and two Cs at GCSE for sixth form

Alumni Michael Aspel, Peter Hain, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Michel Roux

Emanuel wasn't always on the radar for central London parents, but – ping! – it's now a destination school. They offer more co-curricular scholarships than anyone else, so it's a great pick if your little one is particularly sporty, arty or musical but still wants academic heft (71 per cent A*–B at A-level last year). Take drama: the school has a new, super-professional performing-arts centre (yes, the stage revolves and, yes, Ralph Fiennes did open it), and recent productions include *Art* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. They took two plays to the Edinburgh Fringe (which sold out) and many of the drama scholars have agents. The U13 netball girls won silver at the Independent Schools Netball Cup and the boys coxed four were runners-up at the National Schools' Regatta. Emanuel has impressive facilities on its green campus right by Wandsworth Common, and we love headmaster Mark Hanley-Browne. 'A straight-talker, he sticks to his guns,' says a parent. 'But he's someone you'd enjoy having lunch with too.' The admissions list is long (they have registrations in place up to 2022) but they interview everyone at 10+ and 11+ and nearly every teacher is involved. The school run is soon to become a lot easier: Emanuel is building a second entrance, via a two-lane road, over four railway tracks. Bold stuff.

FRANCIS HOLLAND NW1

Clarence Gate, NW1 6XR ●
Website francisholland.org.uk
Head Vivienne Durham, MA, since 2004; previously deputy head at South Hampstead High School Pupils 464 day girls Faith C of E Ages 11–18 Term fees £5,560 Oxbridge 10% Registration By November of year before entry; £100 fee Admission London Girls' Schools' Consortium exam and interview; at least As at GCSE in proposed A-level subjects for sixth form Alumnae Joan and Jackie Collins, Amanda Donohoe
 The academic bar just keeps on rising – 86.7 per cent A*–B grades at A-level last year. Laments our spy: 'It's harder to get in than ever.' Head Vivienne Durham is an absolute delight (as are her shoes; Miu Miu, when we visited), passionate about her school and women's education in general. The international jet set head for FH's Sloane Square sibling; Mrs Durham describes her school as having a 'very English catchment'. Celeb status doesn't cut it around here. She interviews every applicant – 'A confirming process,' she says. There's a wonderfully traditional feel – lots of wood-panelling – and, in Mrs Durham's words, 'a kind of warm energy'. This is a friendly place, with strong pastoral care; our pupil guide commented that there was less competition here than at her friends'

schools. We're told girls are 'really, really musical'; activities are on offer from 8am til 8pm, and there are 70-plus clubs. 'Boarding-school opportunities in a London day environment,' says our contact. We like the sensible mix of freedom and responsibility (they've reintroduced uniform for Years 10 and 11), and the hilarious 'man board' in the sixth-form zone. Our pupil mole confides that the central item on the school council agenda was whether to get a pet fish. We take this as an excellent sign.

FRANCIS HOLLAND SW1

39 Graham Terrace, SW1W 8JF ●
Website francisholland.org.uk
Head Lucy Elphinstone, MA, since 2012; previously senior leader and head of sixth form at Downe House Pupils 490 day girls Faith C of E Ages 4–11 Term fees £5,790 Oxbridge 5% Registration By end of November of year before entry; £100 fee Admission London Girls' Schools' Consortium exam and interview; school's own exam and interview for sixth form Alumnae Jemima Khan, Vanessa Mae, Sienna Miller

Great things were expected of head Lucy Elphinstone and Chelsea parents can breathe easy: she's more than exceeded expectations. A mother says, 'She's lifted the roof off'; another remarks, 'I am enthralled.' All admire her grit-and-grades approach, which teaches girls to be flexible. Brainboxes are very welcome but creative and emotional acumen must be up there too. Traditionally a glossier, sleeper choice, Francis Holland is no longer a safety school and it's now tough to get a place. Results had been sliding but we're expecting a huge leap upward this year; they've introduced the EPQ, and politics and business studies at A-level to stretch minds. Ballet has always been exceptional, with strong links to the Royal Ballet, and girls learn to curtsy in the junior school and shake hands with the headmistress each day, so manners are immaculate. There is now an almost invincible debating society (topics range from the environment to the danger of the internet), and the U13 netballers are the best in London. 'Building

resilience', both physical and mental, is another Elphinstone favourite, so girls are packed off for survival-skills lessons in Battersea Park, kayaking on the Norfolk Broads and bivouacking in Sweden. A refurbishment plan is in place for some of the rather utilitarian old buildings, particularly the sixth-form area. Mrs Elphinstone believes that raising standards at sixth form will raise them throughout the school. She leads by example herself.