



**HEADINGTON**  
SCHOOL · OXFORD



**Rye St Antony**  
OXFORD

# Headington and Rye St Antony Merger Announcement Stronger Together

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Academic Questions</b>           | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Pastoral Questions</b>           | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Boarding</b>                     | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Co-curricular Activities</b>     | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Religious ethos and teaching</b> | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Admissions</b>                   | <b>11</b> |

## Frequently Asked Questions

The purpose of these Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) is to help answer any queries you may have regarding the merger of Headington School Oxford Limited (Headington) and Rye St Antony School Limited (Rye).

### 1.1 What is being announced today?

The Governors of both Headington and Rye are pleased to announce they have today entered into a legal commitment to merge both schools to form a single, all-through school for pupils aged from 3 to 18 years.

The merger will take place over a two-year period. When complete, the new combined school will operate a single-sex senior school for girls from Year 7 to Year 13 which will operate on the current Headington senior school site. A prep school, for both boys and girls from Nursery to Year 6, will operate from the current Rye St Antony site.

### 1.2 Why have the Governors of both schools decided to make these changes?

Merging will allow us to bring together the best of Headington and Rye to create an even better school with teaching, pastoral care and a range of subjects and facilities which will aim to be the best on offer in Oxfordshire. Maintaining and expanding the quality of education we offer all our pupils has been our primary concern when considering this exciting opportunity.

This is a carefully thought-through decision, after much discussion, consultation with Senior Leaders and consideration of detailed legal and financial advice. The close proximity of both schools and the shared vision and values makes the merger compelling, both educationally and financially. The pace of change will be careful and gradual over a two-year period, ensuring current pupils will continue to receive an excellent education surrounded by friends and teachers they know and trust.

At the same time, it is a prudent and forward-looking plan which considers society-wide changes such as the declining birth rate, increased cost of living and growing political threats. The Governors and Senior Leadership are determined to protect the long-term future of both schools whilst keeping fees as low as possible. By merging we are also able to protect the charitable foundations of our schools and ensure that any surpluses can be reinvested back into the schools.

### **1.3 What are the potential benefits of the merger?**

By merging the schools, sharing the expertise and experience of staff, making best use of the sites and facilities, pupils will have access to an even greater range of high-quality education, pastoral care and co-curricular activities which will be the envy of schools across Oxfordshire.

Joining together will enable us to continue to offer a broad and deep education which values every child and encourages each one to flourish in a culture which is kind and caring.

In time, after both Prep schools are settled on the Rye site, the Governors also have the option of exploring new uses for the current Headington Prep School site to generate additional income that can be reinvested back into the School.

### **1.4 What is the timeframe for the merger?**

The Governors have today entered into a legal agreement committing to the merger, although formal completion will not take place for a few months. There will be a transition period of two years to allow the merger to proceed gradually and sensitively.

A smooth transition for all pupils and continuity of provision for exam classes will be our priority. We will seek to carefully support our pupils and staff during this period.

All academic classes will continue unchanged at both Headington and Rye throughout this academic year (2023/24). Pupils will remain in their current classes, in their current school, taught by their existing teachers. Where practicable, pupils from both schools will be able to benefit from joint co-curricular activities and events as soon as reasonably possible.

From September 2024, pupils and staff from Headington Prep School will move to the Rye site to join their peers and colleagues to form the new combined Prep School. Pupils from Year 7 and above from Rye, along with the Senior School staff, will move to join their peers and colleagues to form the new combined Senior School on the Headington site.

The Governors are keen to maximise the benefits of merging the support functions of both schools as soon as possible. As a result, following legal completion, non-teaching staff will begin to merge teams incrementally where it makes sense to combine functions early.

### **1.5 What will be the name of the merged school?**

Both Governing bodies have agreed to call the merged school 'Headington Rye Oxford' to acknowledge the history of both schools and to reflect the joint nature of the merger. The charity

name will be Headington Rye Oxford Limited. No decisions have yet been taken about a new logo.

### **1.6 Are the schools in financial trouble?**

All independent schools have faced and continue to face political, financial, societal and economic threats and it is important to plan ahead to ensure schools have the resilience to withstand such pressures. In common with many successful schools, our Governors are acting jointly now to secure a sustainable long-term future in which educational choice is offered to local families at an affordable cost. By acting strategically in a timely manner, the Governors from both schools believe that they have protected affordable independent education in Oxford at Headington Rye Oxford for current pupils and for future generations.

### **1.7 Why is it necessary for the schools to merge? Couldn't both schools merge their support functions, but continue to operate separate schools?**

The Governors of both schools considered a wide range of options before concluding that a full merger was in the best interests of both schools. Creating Headington Rye Oxford will allow us to offer families a truly outstanding education, range of subjects, facilities and co-curricular activities which a simple support function merger just would not provide. We will continue to respect each other's differences and learn from each other; for example, the unusually wide range of subjects and extra-curricular activities on offer will allow pupils from both schools to thrive in their own way.

At the same time, this is a practical decision. We currently operate on three separate school sites at a time of increased costs. Owing to declining birth rates, there are unlikely to be enough pupils attending independent schools in Oxfordshire to ensure that all of the existing local schools remain economically viable without increasing fees to a potentially unsustainable level. After extensive research and assessment, the Governors concluded that merging the schools and consolidating onto two sites would offer both educational and financial sustainability, as well as allowing more opportunities for all pupils on the two larger sites.

### **1.8 What will happen to the Headington Prep School Site?**

No decisions have yet been taken by the Governors and all options remain under consideration; however, the site will continue to operate fully as a prep school until September 2024.

### **1.9 Who will lead the new school?**

The Governors are pleased to announce that Mrs Caroline Jordan will lead Headington Rye Oxford when the schools are merged. However, during the current academic year, the Heads of both senior and prep schools for Headington and Rye will remain unchanged. Mrs Jordan, supported by Mrs Sarah Davis and senior staff from both schools, will oversee the merger plans and be responsible for the recruitment of pupils for September 2024.

### **1.10 How will the merged schools be Governed?**

The Governing Boards from both schools will combine to form a new unified Governing Body led by Mrs Carol Oster Warriner. Ms Carla Stanley from Rye St Antony, will become one of the new Joint Vice Chairs, alongside Dr Kate Ringham from Headington. All of the current Governors of Rye will become Governors of the new Governing Body, together with all of the current Governors of Headington. Current Governors from Rye will also be represented on all of the sub-committees, according to their expertise. This is a truly collaborative exercise.

### **1.11 Has the Department of Education and Charity Commission been consulted?**

Legal representatives are currently taking the necessary action to formalise the merger with the relevant regulators. We would expect to receive formal approval within a matter of months and well before any significant changes take place.

### **1.12 Why did the Governors and Senior leaders not consult with parents and staff before deciding to merge?**

You will understand that, for legal reasons, Governors and Senior Leaders were unable to share information about the proposed merger ahead of the announcement. However, this decision was taken following extensive research, debate and due diligence by the Governors of both schools. Senior Leaders of both schools were consulted and legal and financial advice was sought before Governors of both Schools unanimously reached the decision to merge believing it to be in the best interests of both schools. At each stage, Governors and Senior Staff have always put pupils at the heart of their decision making.

In this next phase, we will be delighted to listen to staff, parents, pupils and alumnae from both schools as much as possible to help us shape the future of Headington Rye Oxford. Once this stage of the legal process is complete, we will be able to explain what areas we are able to consult about. The Governors and senior leadership are very keen to work closely with our communities to ensure that the transition is smooth and that the future school captures the best of both Headington and Rye.

### **1.13 Will the new School still be a charity?**

Yes - Headington Rye Oxford will be registered as a charity in the same way as the current schools are. Unlike an increasing number of for-profit schools in the region, it will be able to reinvest surpluses generated for the benefit of its pupils.

### **1.14 Will the merger mean that both schools get larger?**

No - Headington Rye Oxford will remain within the existing approved registered capacities for the combined schools and thus the total number of pupils across all sites will not increase. Whilst pupils from Rye will clearly be joining a larger year group, class sizes will remain within the existing norms currently found at Headington.

### **1.15 Won't this merger mean that Rye loses its character as a small school which knows every child and nurtures everyone regardless of ability?**

Headington Rye Oxford will have excellent pastoral care, built on the strong commitment of both schools to care for every individual child. The existing pastoral care teams will stay in place and will benefit from working together and sharing best practice. The policies and practices of Headington Rye Oxford will adopt the best of both schools and it is anticipated that all teaching staff will remain in place to provide continuity and care. The pace of change will be gradual and younger children, those with SEND and exam students will have additional arrangements put in place to support them through the transition.

### **1.16 What is the cost of the merger?**

Whilst there are inevitably some direct costs associated with the merger process, such as professional fees for legal support etc, these are necessary and prudent to ensure that the best advice was obtained before the merger was finalised and have been fully budgeted. Notwithstanding these merger costs, we are still able to continue delivering the best education and support possible for our pupils during the transition period.

This merger makes financial sense; both schools are combining all of their assets and liabilities to form a unified charity, giving the new entity access to more resources. In the longer term, the merger secures the financial wellbeing of the School for future generations.

**1.17 Will the merger result in more traffic around both schools at the start and end of the school day?**

The existing close proximity of our schools means that there should not be an increase in traffic as a result of this merger. Indeed, the Governors are well aware of local traffic issues and have, in collaboration with Magdalen College School (MCS), recently invested heavily in a new subsidised bus network. Additionally, this service will operate a number of late buses to allow pupils to access a wider range of after school activities. In parallel, the school is promoting a number of active travel initiatives for both pupils and staff. We hope that these initiatives will actually lead to a decrease in the number of pupils and staff travelling to school by car.

By relocating the Prep School to the Rye site, the Governors are also taking positive action to improve the safety of its youngest pupils by avoiding traffic on the busy London Road. Prep School pupils will no longer have to cross the London Road when accessing the Senior school facilities.

**1.18 Will there be an opportunity for pupils and parents to visit their new School and meet staff?**

Yes - the School will arrange a series of events for pupils and parents to visit each site to meet with staff and discuss the integration plans. More details will be published over the next few weeks.

**1.19 Why did you let me apply to Headington/Rye knowing this was likely to happen?**

You will understand that during the legal process, the Governors and Senior Leadership of both schools were obliged to keep the negotiations confidential. As soon as we were able to inform you, we have done so. We have thought hard about our new parents and are willing to answer any questions you may have. We genuinely believe that Headington Rye Oxford will bring the best of both schools together and will be a wonderful and exciting school with a range of subjects, co-curricular activities and facilities which will be second to none in Oxford.

## **Academic Questions**

**2.1 If Headington and Rye have different academic profiles, how will the two schools support current pupils and merge successfully?**

Both Headington and Rye are selective schools. Whilst it is acknowledged that the threshold for entry in each school is slightly different, the academic teams in both schools are confident that they will be able to provide the appropriate support for all current pupils.

**2.2 How will the merged school ensure academic standards remain high?**

Headington Rye Oxford will continue to have an excellent academic reputation. Over the last three years, Headington has invested in a greater range of A Level subjects in order to ensure pupils have greater choice when deciding on the most appropriate academic pathway through to

university or apprenticeships. We will introduce even more subjects, giving pupils exceptional choice and ensuring that those with different abilities and interests can achieve excellent results in more accessible subjects without any material impact on the academic reputation of the new school.

### **2.3 My daughter has already started her GCSE, BTEC or A Level course – how will the new merged school ensure that her learning is not disrupted?**

The schools recognise that many pupils studying for exams will have commenced a two-year curriculum and thus we remain committed to supporting all of the pupils through their current curriculum courses. Where possible, pupils will be taught in their current classes by their existing teachers for the remainder of the two-year course to ensure continuity of support throughout these important years.

### **2.4 Will pupils from both schools be integrated into new classes?**

With the exception of those year groups studying for public exams where classes will remain unchanged, it is the intention of the academic teams to fully integrate pupils from both schools into new classes from September 2024.

Pupils progressing up from the Prep School are already mixed with new pupils joining the school at both 11+ and 13+ and thus a similar process will be followed for those joining from Rye and Headington in Years 7, 8 and 9. This will be carried out in small groups so that no pupil feels isolated from their existing friendship group.

### **2.5 Will pupils transferring to the new senior school have to complete some form of academic assessment?**

No – all current pupils at both Headington and Rye will transfer automatically to the combined senior school in September 2024 without having to sit any form of entry assessment. Routine assessments for SEND and some 'subject setting' will continue, but these assessments are not linked to entry.

### **2.6 Is there an entry criteria for pupils wishing to progress to the Sixth Form?**

Yes – in line with the existing Admissions Policies of both schools, pupils must already achieve a minimum grade in their GCSEs in the subjects that they wish to study for A-Levels in order to progress to the Sixth Form at both Headington and Rye. During the Transition Phase, Governors will also ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged by the merger and that they receive the best support possible when selecting their Sixth Form programme of study.

### **2.7 Will the range of subjects on offer change as a result of the merger?**

One of the key advantages of the merger is that the new school will be able to offer a greater range of subjects for all pupils. It is our belief that the new Headington Rye Oxford will be able to offer pupils the greatest range of subject choices locally. The details of the Middle School and Sixth Form curriculums on offer to pupils in September 2024 will be made available during the usual options selection processes in this academic year (2023/24).

### **2.8 Will the new School continue to offer BTECs?**

Yes – whilst recognising nationally that BTECs are under review by the Department of Education, Headington Rye Oxford will continue to offer BTECs where there is sufficient demand.

## **2.9 Will Headington Rye Oxford continue to offer the Leiths Food and Wine Certificate?**

Yes – Headington Rye Oxford will offer the Leith's Food and Wine Certificate. Dame Prue Leith is a former Headington parent and recently opened the new Food Technology Centre on the Senior School site. We are proud to continue to offer this demanding course alongside the more traditional subjects.

## **2.10 Both schools currently offer different subject options. When will Headington and Rye pupils be able to take advantage of the wider range of subjects?**

Pupils from both schools will be able to access the full range of academic courses from September 2024, when the schools formally relocate and merge.

## **2.11 What if a pupil wants to access a different subject immediately?**

As timetables are planned significantly in advance of the start of the academic year, it is not usually feasible for pupils to switch subjects easily.

## **2.12 Will Headington Rye Oxford offer the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) in the Sixth Form and the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ) in Middle School?**

Yes – both the EPQ and HPQ courses are valued highly by both pupils and universities. Headington Rye Oxford will offer both courses.

## **2.13 Will pupils be taught in larger classes?**

Class sizes in the Prep School will vary between 12 to 20 pupils depending on demand. Each year group will be supported by a dedicated Learning Assistant in addition to the Form Teachers. Pupils will also benefit from specialist teaching as currently on offer.

The maximum class size in the Senior School will be 24, with average class sizes around 20. Classes in the Sixth Form will vary depending on subject and demand.

The Academic Teams believe that the proposed class sizes are academically robust, whilst also ensuring teachers can support individual learners.

## **2.14 Will pupils be taught by teachers from both schools?**

Yes – both Headington and Rye are fortunate to attract high quality and experienced educational practitioners. Teachers from both schools will be integrated into single subject departments and faculties from September 2024.

## **2.15 Can parents request that their child is taught by a particular teacher?**

No – the timetable is complex for a school offering such a wide range of subjects. It is not possible for parents to request that their child is taught by a particular teacher.

## **2.16 Does this mean that all children will have access to triple science or combined science at GCSE?**

The Academic Teams from both schools will work together to agree a common GCSE curriculum for those starting GCSE courses in September 2024. We anticipate that the flexibility inherent in Headington's current approach with regards to Science options would be maintained.

## **2.17 How will the new school support neurodiverse pupils?**

Both Headington and Rye already have experienced, and highly qualified Learning Development Teams. The staff and teams will work more closely together to ensure our pupils will benefit from the best support possible to support their educational journey.

# **Pastoral Questions**

## **3.1 Will the new Headington Rye Prep School admit boys?**

Yes – the new Headington Rye Prep will be fully co-educational from September 2024 operating from the current Rye site offering education to both boys and girls.

## **3.2 How will boys be integrated into the Prep School?**

The School has a capacity for 400 pupils and it is expected there will be a strong demand for places. The School will cater fully for boys from the outset to ensure that they receive an equally stimulating education and access to a wide range of appropriate co-curricular sports and activities.

## **3.3 What is the vision for the new Prep School?**

The Governors' vision is that the new Headington Rye Prep School will become the school of choice for local families seeking an outstanding education for their sons and daughters in central Oxford, with first class facilities, superb academic and co-curricular choice, and a reputation for excellence.

## **3.4 Headington Prep was single-sex – why have the Governors decided that the new combined Headington Rye Prep School will be co-educational?**

We are responding to increasing parental demand for a co-educational prep school in East Oxford and believe that this will be valued by many families.

Rye has been co-educational up to Year 6 for a number of years and Headington Prep only became single-sex in 2008 after being a successful co-educational prep school for many years. As a result, we believe that we have significant experience of operating a co-education prep school.

## **3.5 Headington Prep staff told us our daughter would thrive better in a single sex school. Does that mean this is no longer the best Prep school for her?**

Headington Rye Prep will still have everything (and more) on offer for the girls as well as the boys. The size of the site and superb facilities, coupled with outstanding teaching, will facilitate this. The experience of the combined staff will ensure that pupils are taught by teachers who can get the best out of each child.

## **3.6 Do current Headington Prep staff have any experience of teaching boys?**

Yes – many current staff have significant experience of teaching in a co-educational setting and moving between the two is common. By combining the staff of both Rye and Headington, the team will be able to draw on considerable experience of co-educational teaching and best-practice across different settings. Staff will also be able to draw on specialist teachers from



the Senior School to augment their own teaching, particularly for sport and cocurricular activities.

### **3.7 Where will boys go after Year 6?**

Parents in Oxford have a wide choice of schools available to boys progressing into Year 7. Some boys may choose to remain local and opt for MCS, continuing to travel to school on the same integrated bus network. Alternatively, some families may opt to travel further afield to take advantage of a wide range of different types of schools. The staff at Headington Rye Oxford will be able to advise and support families in making the appropriate choice for their son when selecting their senior school.

### **3.8 Why will the Senior School remain single sex?**

Headington and Rye remain firmly committed to single-sex education for pupils in the Senior School, recognising the many strengths that this brings for pupils, free from the traditional stereotypes. As a city centre school with many joint educational and social activities with local boys' schools, we believe that Headington Rye Oxford offers the very best of both types of education.

### **3.9 Rye has an outstanding record for pastoral support and is currently much smaller. How will pupils be supported pastorally in a much larger school?**

Both Headington and Rye have a strong reputation and commitment to pastoral care.

Individual pupils in the Senior School will be supported by two Form Tutors, a Head of Year and both an Academic and Pastoral Head of Section. Additionally, pupils will have access to an appropriately-staffed Wellbeing Centre, as well as support from a team of qualified and experienced School Counsellors. All pupils also have access to a dedicated and highly qualified nursing team. The local GPs also operate weekly clinics for boarders.

Pupils in the Prep School are also supported by Year Group Learning Assistants, School Counsellors and a Wellbeing Assistant.

### **3.10 Will there be a new uniform?**

Yes – in time. The School will consult both pupils and parents about selecting an appropriate uniform for the new school. We appreciate how important it will be to agree to any changes as quickly as possible, however we are also mindful of the need to minimise the financial implications of any change.

### **3.11 Will the Sixth Form have to wear uniform?**

No – pupils will continue to wear their own clothes in line with the dress code whilst in the Sixth Form.

### **3.12 How will you support children with SEND cope with the change?**

Those children with additional needs will be given extra support to ensure a smooth transition. We will work closely with all relevant staff to create a detailed plan to support them.

## **Boarding**

### **4.1 Will Headington Rye Oxford continue to admit boarders?**

Yes – Headington Rye Oxford will continue to admit full boarders, weekly boarders and half-weekly boarders from Year 7 and above. Initially, boarding will be centralised on the current Headington senior school site from September 2024. However, Governors are considering how best to make use of the boarding facilities on the Rye site.

#### **4.2 Will Headington Rye Oxford continue to recruit international boarders?**

Yes – Headington Rye Oxford will continue to offer boarding places to both UK and international pupils. We believe strongly that there is significant benefit of pupils being taught in a diverse and multicultural environment, where tolerance and understanding is promoted and encouraged.

#### **4.3 Will Headington Rye Oxford offer short stay opportunities for international pupils?**

Initially, we believe that all of the boarding beds will be utilised in supporting current students. However, the Governors remain open minded about utilising any spare capacity to provide cultural and language immersion courses for international pupils in the future.

## **Co-curricular Activities**

#### **5.1 Will Rye pupils be able to participate in activities such as CCF and rowing?**

Yes – all pupils from the new Headington Rye Oxford will be able to participate in the extensive range of co-curricular clubs, sports and activities currently available at both schools.

#### **5.2 Will Rye and Headington pupils be able to take advantage of each school's programme of co-curricular activities, trips, and events during the academic year 2023-24?**

The co-curricular programmes of each school will remain separate during this academic year, but the schools' leadership teams will work together to retain all that is best about the programmes in both schools for a new combined programme starting in September 2024. Rye pupils will be given the opportunity to sign up for Headington trips taking place during the academic year 2024-25.

## **Religious ethos and teaching**

#### **6.1 Rye St Antony is a Catholic School and Headington follows the rites and traditions of the Church of England. How will pupils of different faiths be supported?**

Although Rye St Antony was set up as a Catholic School and Headington as a Church of England School, both schools share a broad Christian ethos and admit pupils of all faiths and of none. Headington Rye Oxford will reflect this by continuing to have a broad Christian ethos whilst supporting pupils of all faiths and of none.

Both Catholic and Church of England pupils and staff will still be supported along with pupils of all faiths and none. The School will continue to have an ordained minister and lay Catholic Chaplain on the staff, and they will work together to further develop the broad Christian ethos that the two schools have in common. They will support pupils of all faiths and none and ensure that proper provision is made for those of specific faiths, mindful of the heritage of the two merged schools.

# Admissions

## **7.1 Will the merger impact school fees?**

Headington Rye Oxford will operate a single fee structure from September 2024. The Governors believe that the Headington Rye will continue to offer excellent value for money.

## **7.2 How will admissions be managed for entry in September 2024?**

The Marketing and Admissions Teams of both schools will work together to produce a unified admissions process for recruiting pupils into a single all-through merged school. Pupils joining Headington Rye Oxford in September 2024 will become the first pupils to join the new merged school.

## **7.3 What will happen to pupils who have been pre-tested for entry into Headington in Year 9?**

All pupils who have been pre-tested and subsequently received a firm offer of a place will continue to hold a place in the new Headington Rye Oxford senior school.

## **7.4 Will the new school be selective?**

Yes – Headington Rye Oxford will remain a selective school as both schools currently are. Places will be offered to those pupils who meet the entry criteria for the new school and who, in the view of the academic team, will be able to thrive at Headington Rye Oxford. All current pupils will be able to stay at Headington Rye Oxford for the entirety of their education provided they meet the current criteria for selection.

## **7.5 Will the academic profile of the new school change?**

No – there is no intention to reduce the academic entry standard for pupils joining the new school. The Governors believe that it is vital to maintain the academic profile of Headington Rye Oxford in order to build trust and confidence amongst both current and prospective pupils and parents.

## **7.6 Will Rye and Headington pupils currently in receipt of a means-tested bursary continue to receive financial support?**

Yes – all pupils currently in receipt of a means-tested bursary will continue to receive financial support in the new school, subject to routine annual review of personal circumstances. Indeed, it is the intent of the Governors of the new school to offer more bursaries to families in financial need.

## **7.7 Will Rye and Headington pupils currently in receipt of a scholarship award continue to be viewed as a scholar and receive the same programme of support/reward?**

Yes - all existing scholarship awards will be honoured according to the terms of the original offer. Scholars from both schools will take advantage of the same programme of scholarship events and support.

## **7.8 As a parent, I do not agree with the merger and wish to consider an alternative school for my child.**

By making the formal announcement in September 2023 a full 12 months in advance of the schools physically merging, pupils and parents have sufficient time in which to consider their options. We hope that all pupils will remain in the new merged school, taught by familiar staff and surrounded by friends. If parents have any queries or concerns they are encouraged to discuss them with the schools before making any decision to change schools. If parents subsequently decide to move their child to a different school they are able to do so but must give the requisite full term's notice.