



RADLEY

Academic Scholarship 2025

(A series of detailed reports to provide feedback for Preparatory Schools)

Introduction

Interviewing boys for places at Radley is one of the best parts of my job, and interviewing candidates for the Academic Scholarship is particularly special. The intellectual calibre of boys applying to Radley continues to impress me: this year, my conversations ranged from Sherlock Holmes to black holes and everything in between. It was a joy.

One of the things that I talk a lot about at Radley is academic character. The two traits that most impressed me in this year's boys were curiosity and humility. Curiosity because there can be no academic culture without a desire to extend our knowledge beyond what we already know. Humility because when someone has a better argument – whether they're a boy or a don! – we should be humble enough to change our minds.

As I noticed last year, the most skilful thinkers were the boys drawing from a wide and fluent knowledge base. They were the sorts of boys who read voraciously – both fiction and non-fiction – and could move easily between different domains. They were embryonic 'Renaissance Men', specialists in a couple of areas but able to make connections between art and maths, science and philosophy.

I know there are no quick fixes to forming boys with this kind of intellectual dexterity: it takes time and care to do well. Thank you for everything you do to nurture such knowledgeable, thoughtful and engaging young men. They are the best adverts for your schools.

Best wishes
Jonathan Porter MA (Cantab.)

Subject reports

ENGLISH

Section A

This section tests imaginative engagement with a text and potential for critical analysis. This is inevitably the most challenging section for many candidates, and credit is given for independent thinking and use of textual detail. Most candidates were able to understand the poem on a simple level and to volunteer sensible ideas about the presentation of the astronaut, although some were clearly below scholarship level in terms of basic comprehension. Response to nuance and subtlety was the real discriminator here; the majority found engaging with ambiguity and assessing the tone challenging. The best responses suggested “perhaps...or” interpretations and supplied close detail from the poem to support the argument. Middle-ranking responses made pragmatic if unsophisticated responses which nevertheless showed willingness to think independently.

Responses appropriate for scholarship require a significantly sophisticated critical approach. There were some original and confident responses here and others that, if more pedestrian, suggested potential in literary analysis. Most showed a generally critical approach for their age, using broadly appropriate terminology and style. For top marks, candidates needed to make a range of astute, linked points illustrated by understanding and exemplification of the effect of specific techniques, including structure and imagery. Some worthy responses, even if comparatively lacking in critical terminology, nevertheless indicated instinctive engagement with the poem in general, and – crucially – were rooted in specific examples. Middling-to-weaker responses used critical terminology without detailed, relevant analysis, but showed some convincing understanding of the poem. Below scholarship standard were spot-the-technique responses which were difficult to reward because no clear point was made, and no effect was suggested. The weakest were narrative and/or those which displayed wide misunderstanding of language.

On the whole, the best responses were personal and imaginatively engaged, using a range of language and structure in analysis to support a convincing, critical argument.

Section B

This section tests students’ imaginative written response to a prompt. Candidates were assessed on their ability to write descriptively in an engaging and controlled way. This year’s cohort of aspirant scholars produced imaginative writing of a high standard, with creative and original responses being in the majority; only a small number of pieces felt derivative or overly rehearsed.

The level of accuracy both in spelling and punctuation was impressive, with the very strongest candidates demonstrating an ability to manipulate sentence and paragraph structure to deliberate effect. As in previous years, there was a tendency towards heavily plot-driven pieces in a small number of cases, which led to somewhat meandering and often unfinished work. The candidates who decided on a relatively contained event upon which to hang their description tended to be more successful.

Most responses managed to adhere to a clear structure, guiding the reader with control. Less successful pieces lacked sufficient sequencing. It was evident that most boys had a wide range of vocabulary at their disposal

and were keen to express themselves. Sometimes, this led to overripe prose, lacking precision and clarity. However, for the most part, language was chosen and deployed with some discretion. Clearly, the preparation for this section of the paper was thorough and allowed boys to display some impressive written skill.

Section C

This section tests the students' ability to think critically and express an argument and ideas coherently and convincingly. Candidates were assessed on their ability to organise their thoughts and ideas in a response which was logical, clearly expressed, and supported with sound and relevant evidence and examples.

The best answers were able to develop an interesting and insightful perspective, combining personal examples from experience with wider social or historical case studies. This wider frame of reference to current affairs and history was essential in order to raise an answer from the level of opinion and subjective views to a more persuasive argument. Most answers showed a controlled sense of structure and development of ideas, often using a simple list structure of points, evidence, and exploration. Sophisticated answers had more elaborate or detailed topic sentences that connected sections together to develop an argument.

Candidates should be encouraged to take a side: being brave and supporting one side of an argument with reasons is valued over a neutral and noncommittal presentation of two sides of a debate. Vocabulary and sophistication in expression are key in this task in order to express nuance. Simplistic answers tended to be narrow in vocabulary range and made limited reference to a variety of points. As always, the best answers, expressed in controlled and clear writing, showed evidence of individual reading, creative thought, and development of subtle understanding of a complex debate.

MATHS

The 2025 cohort seemed pretty homogeneous, with no really outstanding candidates, but lots of good solid citizens. We still have the issue of some boys trying to write Paper 2 on the question paper. Paper 2 should be answered on lined paper. Only Paper 1 is answered on the question paper.

Paper 1

The mean mark on the paper for those candidates who were selected for part 2 was 72%, compared with 67% in 2024 – and had a spread from a lowest mark of 43% to a highest mark of 96%.

Paper 2

The mean mark for selected candidates was 62% compared with a mean mark of 55% in 2024. I think this year's paper might have been slightly easier than 2024, but I was happy with the standard. The spread was from 22% (boys who were selected for qualities other than their mathematical ability!) to 92%.

Q1 was intended as a gentle start on simultaneous equations. Part b) on the rectangle had a small twist on the theme, but many worked it out.

Q2 was intended as three fairly routine parts on percentages. I was surprised that some knew about logarithms to solve the compound interest. I had expected them to just play around on their calculators. Again this question was mostly well done.

I clearly misjudged Q3. There was not a single completely correct answer. I had thought that giving the area of the trapezium as half the area of the big triangle, would lead to the area of the small triangle being half the area of the big triangle. Then I had expected them to use either similar triangles to get the length PQ, or do something clever involving the square root of 2. Alas, I was wrong.

Q4 on the other hand was done better than I expected. The most common mistake was to fail to convert 50 minutes to hours. It was quite a tricky quadratic factorisation, but there were enough completely correct answers for me to think that I pitched it about right.

Q5 was another question that was better done than I expected. Many managed to get the sum of the odds by subtracting the sum of the evens. In the final part, not many candidates spotted the factor of 4.

Q6 seemed to work well. Each part was a bit more challenging than its predecessor, and those who got to the very end were, in general, the very best candidates.

To conclude, again this year the papers did what we wanted them to do. We will try to set papers of a similar standard in 2026.

PHYSICS

This year's paper was designed to test estimation and interpretation of graphs rather than prior knowledge. The premise was set as Felix Baumgartner's jump from 24 miles above the Earth. The prior knowledge needed was in the definition and formula of density, as well as how to calculate the speed of an object. The format was accessible to candidates with the mean score being 65% with a range of 21-97% and generally normal distribution (slightly towards the top end with a number of exceptional candidates scoring above 80%).

The first part of the paper was focused on volume and density, as well as how density changes as height above the Earth increases. Lots of interesting responses were given to the 'estimate the volume of the room you are in' question. This question is very difficult to get an exact answer, the very best responses often included a diagram so that the methodology the candidate had used was clear.

The second part of the paper focused on the speeds that Felix reached during the jump and many candidates were able to convert between km/h and m/s, or at least make many of the steps required to do this.

Throughout the paper candidates were encouraged to use scientific notation and it was pleasing to see that some candidates were comfortable with this. Often it was the very best candidates who gave their answers using scientific notation. Many candidates also were clear in their calculations and included units throughout, however one or two candidates missed out on including any units in their answers, which was unfortunate.

For an unseen application it was impressive how many candidates were able to apply their reasoning to the situations presented and it is clear many students are encouraged to think beyond the content where they currently study.

CHEMISTRY

This year's paper contained a mixture of Common Entrance knowledge and problems that should stretch aspiring scholars. States of matter is an obvious topic that is often underappreciated by candidates. A few questions tested boys' imagination and ability to assimilate new information and use it in an unfamiliar context.

Q1 This question was about solubility and particle theory. It was answered well but boys struggled with unit conversion from cm^3 to dm^3 . It was nice to see that a good number were able to find the concentration in g/cm^3 and recognised that they needed to divide the mass by the volume (which often did not follow through in question 4i). Many candidates had a good grasp of particle theory although a significant minority could not recall the salient points on the day.

Q2 This question tested knowledge of elements, compounds and mixtures of substances and ascertained how familiar boys were with basic substances they have encountered during their science lessons. While there was some confusion over molecules/atoms, on the whole this was answered well.

Q3 Most boys successfully filled in the missing formulae simply by using the information given. Knowledge of water and hydrochloric acid was required as well as the acidic property of hydrochloric acid. (A few boys attributed that acidic characteristic to chlorine.) In d) boys needed to recognise that the ratios of the relative masses can be used to find the mass of the product from 10 g of gas. It was nice to see that boys were able to construct the correct molecular formula in e) though a few did not follow the instructions correctly and gave the chemical symbols in a different order to the one required.

Q4 Rates of reaction is an important aspect of chemistry and this question introduced boys to this concept. They will have met some/most of it already. It involved analysing a graph and predicting similar graphs at different conditions. A significant minority thought that parts c) and d) were simply points of the existing graph A rather than new graphs. The initial rate and the end volume differed. Most boys were able to predict relative rates of reactions at higher temperatures and lower surface areas. The last part of the question was an extension to Q1a). Boys needed to recognise units and convert them accordingly to compare the three different solutions. The attempts were good but all too often the ratios were transposed (volume over mass). Units can often be used very successfully in finding the correct mathematical operation.

Q5 Boys will have carried out a number of experiments involving common reagents during their time. This question tried to find out whether boys have remembered the appearance of some of the substances they used in their experiments. It turned out that boys could not remember the colour of basic substances such as copper sulfate and sodium chloride and a solution of the latter was often described as white rather than colourless. Practical chemistry is important and the skill of observation a vital one.

BIOLOGY

This year's paper was well answered by most candidates. Results ranged from 33-91%, following a roughly normal distribution pattern. As ever, the paper was of a comprehension format, starting with a passage to read followed by a selection of questions.

The first of these requested definitions of ten keywords highlighted in the text. Students were quite good on science words and phrases such as population, photosynthesis and fat reserves and had a decent stab at zoo/phytoplankton and crustaceans, often nailing those marks with a suitable example. What we might call "English" words and phrases such as turbulence and pack ice caused the most problems.

When asked to name and describe characteristics of a crustacean, only the brightest could manage a description (shell to protect from predators, for example). About half of the entrants seemed able to name three of the five classes of vertebrate, though some were under the impression whales are fish, and only a few went on later in the paper to make the link to whales needing to breathe air.

Food chains were well described; only a very small minority this year not knowing what to do with the arrows - a positive change from previous years. They were also able to make logical deductions about the effects of hunting on a food web, for example.

Most knew what migration was but depressingly few were able to give an example (though there was a lot of generic reference to seagulls from the text). Rather depressingly, just one boy was able to name a pair of British summer migrants (swift and swallow in this case) and not a mention was made of cuckoos, martins, warblers or nightingales. Perhaps we all need to act if the next generation is not to become culturally deprived! So few students seemed to have even the most basic knowledge of our native flora and fauna, something probably far more important than any "science" we might teach them.

Knowledge of global warming and, more importantly, how to deal with it was very well understood by nearly all students, though, which is most encouraging. Perhaps they will be able to conserve the natural world, even if they are a bit less certain what species (migratory at least) are actually in it!

FRENCH

The responses to this year's examination once again demonstrated a wide range of skill levels. Scholars were able to show their grammatical understanding whilst also focusing on some contemporary vocabulary around the topic of climate change. The most able linguists managed to identify the various elements of grammar required, although the search for an adverb once again posed difficulty (*au siècle dernier* was only identified by two candidates), and many were not able to spot the superlative (*les pays les plus pauvres*).

The gap-fill exercise was largely done well, although some misplaced the *allé* or attempted to fit two verbs into the space provided. In this exercise, the gender and number of items should provide guidance in the selection of the right answers, and candidates should try to rely on tense recognition and known grammar rules to select the correct option.

The translation section identified confident use of the perfect tense and reflexive verbs, but some lacked knowledge of key constructions, for example *avant de* (plus infinitive), and only a few were aware of the need to use the future tense to translate 'When I am older' into French. Successful attempts at these elements

helpfully separated out the candidates who have gone above and beyond in their study of grammatical structures.

The bullet points in the writing section allowed candidates to show a range of vocabulary and tenses in the short time available. The most successful answers were those which targeted the bullet points and avoided irrelevant material for the sake of weaving in pre-learnt phrases.

A surprising number of candidates described their house rather than their town for the first bullet point, confusing the word *ville* for 'villa' at times. However, there were some strong responses which employed interesting adjectives and a range of verbs in the present tense. Many were also successful in demonstrating the perfect and imperfect tenses in the second bullet point, although some struggled with the vocabulary required around the topic of household chores. Finally, the use of the future and conditional tenses was limited, with many choosing to use the present tense to describe their plans for the summer.

In general, the final task gave a broad range of responses and allowed the most successful candidates to shine, especially those who clearly enjoyed being able to show their knowledge of irregular verbs and ambitious constructions. It was encouraging to observe meticulous adherence by most to instructions and to the letter format. As last year, a minority of candidates struggled to access the grammar required to attempt the paper with confidence. In future, if any scholarship candidates have studied French for less than 18 months, we would encourage you to inform us, as they may be better suited to our Language Aptitude Test.

GERMAN

Given the low number of candidates who sat the German paper, it is not possible to comment on trends.

The paper assessed reading comprehension skills and required candidates to understand a range of synonyms, antonyms and red herrings with reference to the two texts, both of which were pitched at the A1 level (CEFR). The overall accuracy of responses was good.

In the second part of the paper, candidates were required to translate short phrases into German. These sentences tested basic vocabulary and word order as well as case usage. A knowledge of regular verbs was sufficient in most cases, although there were also examples of strong, separable, reflexive and intransitive verbs, which discriminated well. It is possible for candidates with otherwise impressive scores to attain a low mark in this section, depending on how the language has been learnt.

The third part of the paper allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the target language through a directed writing task. On the whole, there was good interaction with the prompts, which were in English. A model response would include development of ideas and a range of opinions. It was encouraging to see largely accurate usage of three tenses.

SPANISH

The assessment focused on evaluating candidates' language proficiency, specifically in the areas of reading, translation and extended writing. Most candidates demonstrated excellent reading skills and were able to comprehend complex texts effectively, reflecting a strong grasp of language nuances and context. The majority of candidates found false friends like “emocionante” difficult. The translations submitted were generally of good quality.

However, a notable observation is that some candidates lack basic topic vocabulary and struggled with translating time phrases such as *el año pasado*, *el año que viene*. In the extended writing section, some candidates exhibited a commendable range of vocabulary. Several candidates stood out by providing well-developed answers, incorporating opinions and justifications effectively.

Manipulating the past tense posed a problem for many candidates. Having a basic understanding of phrases like *fui a*, *fue + adjective* would have improved their writing. However, there was a high level of confidence in handling the present and near-future tenses.

LANGUAGE APTITUDE TEST

This paper was intended to provide evidence of linguistic skills for candidates who have not studied one of the three European languages taught at Radley for a significant length of time. In most instances, candidates have acquired English as a second language. The overall quality of responses was mixed. The first question required a working knowledge of the various parts of speech. Candidates had to identify, explain and correct a variety of errors in an extract from *Treasure Island*. Although most were able to identify at least half of the errors, a couple of papers showed limited awareness of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Stronger candidates were able to correct each error with reference to specific categories such as adverbs, adjectives,

possessive adjectives, tenses and pronouns. Less successful candidates referred to errors in very broad terms. As a result, there was a wide spread of marks for this question.

The second question required candidates to read the Lord's Prayer in Old English, West Frisian and Modern English, and to arrive at the meaning of words by studying these parallel texts. A key step was to identify repeated vocabulary, cognates and other similarities. The most impressive papers evidenced a clear understanding of such links. Candidates who did not make the necessary connections scored low marks. There was no requirement to describe steps this year. Nevertheless, candidates taking the LAT paper should always be prepared to explain their answers when tackling linguistic problems.

HISTORY

This year's paper was designed to test reading comprehension and aptitude. The exam comprised two questions, which were tied to a series of three short unseen primary sources. The first question invited students to engage with the sources on a single point of inquiry. The second question asked students to reflect on the usefulness of the sources to a historian.

Impressive responses to the first question developed a tripartite structure for each point made: a) an inference would be asserted, b) specific reference to the text which illustrated that inference would be quoted, c) analysis or explanation of that text would be offered. Candidates who scored most highly made 3+ inferences, supported by textual evidence and analysis/explanation.

Strong responses to the second question identified and evaluated both strengths and weaknesses of the source for the historian's craft, paying close attention to the question. Issues such as provenance, genre, intended audience and reception, motivation, limitations, and dissemination were creditable considerations. Candidates would be reminded of the questions historians use to interrogate sources, and to apply them critically.

Overall, those who earned top marks not only addressed all the aforementioned criteria, but expressed themselves clearly, with careful attention to spelling and grammar. History is largely a written discipline; the value placed in reading comprehension and writing fluidly (and well) cannot be understated.

GEOGRAPHY

Most candidates engaged well with this year's paper, demonstrating a solid understanding of key topics. The paper required students to answer three questions, each worth eight marks, from a choice of six. The aim was to test their wider geographical knowledge and assess their ability to make links between different concepts across the subject. This year's themes included climate change, coastal erosion, deforestation, urban challenges, desertification and volcanic activity.

The majority of students interpreted the questions accurately and applied their knowledge effectively. Many were able to express their own opinions and incorporate relevant case studies. The strongest responses demonstrated a clear structure, with students stating their argument, supporting it with appropriate evidence and maintaining accuracy in spelling and capitalisation, particularly for place names (this remains a challenge for some). There was also evidence of candidates making connections between different geographical themes, which strengthened their responses.

However, there were some very weak responses this year. A number of candidates struggled to complete three questions, limiting their ability to showcase their full understanding. Weaker responses often lacked focus, with some failing to address the specific demands of the question. A common weakness was the absence of relevant examples, which restricted the depth of analysis. Some responses also lacked structure, making it difficult to follow the argument.

An area for improvement is precision in selecting and embedding case studies. The strongest responses used examples effectively to develop arguments rather than simply listing information. Ensuring answers are logically structured and tightly focused on the question will also help candidates improve their responses.

Overall, the standard was encouraging, with many students demonstrating a solid grasp of geographical concepts. A greater emphasis on structuring responses clearly, completing all three questions and using case studies more effectively would further enhance performance.

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

There were three questions on the scholarship paper covering the subject areas of Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Religious Studies. Candidates were required to answer one, worth 20 marks with five marks being awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The most important criterion for candidates to meet in their answers is the construction of a clear and successful argument. Most candidates chose to answer by addressing more than one perspective on the question. This is absolutely fine, and encouraged, however it is crucial that a judgement is made at some point in the answer. Better arguments did not ‘sit on the fence’ but selected one side of the argument to support in a conclusion and provided justified reasons for their opinion.

In addition, the best answers showed theological, philosophical and/or ethical knowledge. Some candidates demonstrated knowledge of scholarship and were able to refer to specific passages of scripture. This knowledge is best used to support the argument that the candidate made. Very impressive answers gave utilitarian and Kantian approaches in their assessment of assisted dying, where those who mentioned theodicy and scripture did well in the problem of evil and Christianity questions.

There was a lower standard of religious literacy in the 2025 scholarship answers. It may be the case that schemes of work at prep schools address philosophical and ethical topics more frequently. However, knowledge of the bible and/or factual detail of other major religions will allow students to score highly on the Religious Studies question.

LATIN

It was pleasing to have 32 candidates sit this year’s paper, which maintained the same level of difficulty as in previous years. As expected, the paper presented significant challenges, with some sentences exceeding GCSE-level complexity. The range of marks (12%–78%) reflected this, though most candidates managed to convey a general sense of the translation passage in Section A.

Indirect statements remained a major stumbling block, with only the most secure candidates handling them correctly. Additionally, passive verbs were frequently mistranslated as active, a noticeable weakness this year. More care was needed in making use of the vocabulary provided below the passage - many failed to take

advantage of this resource, leading to unnecessary errors. A further issue was the tendency to produce translations that, while grammatically plausible, made little sense in English; one candidate, for instance, suggested that the pirates crucified themselves to threaten Caesar. This lack of sensitivity to the narrative weakened many responses.

Section B was done surprisingly poorly. A particularly striking issue was the inability to correctly identify the case of words, even when the forms were relatively straightforward. This suggests that more focused work is required on tightening up knowledge of noun and adjective endings.

Section C, as always, was demanding, and responses were weaker than in previous years. The key issue was a failure to correctly identify which construction was being tested before attempting a translation.

GREEK

This year's paper was undertaken with varying levels of success (ranging from 20% to 85%). It followed the same structure as last year, and it was encouraging to see that the majority of candidates found the initial section accessible. Section A comprised ten words for transliteration and the translation of five frequently used verbs in different tenses. All candidates performed well on the transliteration, and many demonstrated promising knowledge of vocabulary when translating the verbs. However, a number of candidates found it challenging to correctly identify the tense of the verbs and would benefit from further reinforcement of these fundamentals.

The sentences in Section B were generally handled well, with many candidates displaying a sound grasp of cases and sentence structure even when their knowledge of vocabulary was lacking.

The comprehension and grammar questions in Section C were also often answered with success. The longer passage for translation proved more demanding, but it was encouraging to see that several candidates still managed to convey a good overall understanding of the text.

As in previous years, the most frequent errors stemmed from difficulties in accurately recalling vocabulary and in correctly recognising the tense, voice, and person of verbs. We continue to urge future candidates to commit to thorough learning of the Greek CE Level 1 and 2 vocabulary lists.

As always, we warmly encourage any candidates who are interested to sit the Greek paper. Any engagement with the language is highly beneficial, and a lower score would never be viewed negatively in the broader assessment process.