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Our expertise in
supporting
independent schools

Expertise for independent schools

Strong schools are essential not just for individuals, but to the wider economy and society. These crucial institutions need legal advisers with deep knowledge and experience, who speak their language and have the resources to assist with the most challenging of situations.

- We have a leading independent schools practice in the UK. With independent school governors and former teachers in our team, we understand the issues you face.
- Independent schools are an essential part of school-age education in the UK and are diverse in their character and legal needs. We look to establish long term relationships with our clients, so we can provide advice that is tailored, efficient and pragmatic. This advice is not commoditised, but bespoke and high quality, while at the same time representing excellent value for money.
- We understand not just law and regulation, but also the other requirements and expectations to which schools and their leaders are subject. These include public and regulatory attitudes to issues like safeguarding, political views on public benefit and charity tax and rates relief, and associated reputational risks.
- We know that those running independent schools are under immense pressure given the importance of their work, their regulatory burden and the potentially severe consequences for individuals and organisations when things go wrong. With the benefit of long experience, we can guide governors and senior staff through the legal web efficiently, pragmatically and without fuss, allowing them to focus on their own work and students.
- Given our global presence, we are uniquely placed to advise independent schools on their international projects, including setting up schools overseas and advising on international collaboration and funding. And as a full-service law firm, we can help you with all your legal needs.



How we can help schools

Our team is here to support you on all matters you may encounter, including:

Core school matters and governance

- Day-to-day governance and other matters, including governance reviews and amendments to governing documents
- Admissions, exclusions and SEN provision
- Safeguarding advice
- School policies, handbooks and parent contracts
- Charity law requirements, including constitutional advice, reporting serious incidents and public benefit issues
- Trading and tax, including the establishment of trading subsidiaries and associated governance

Crisis management

- Dispute resolution including mediation and complaints handling (including in relation to discrimination)
- An 'independent person' service for stage 3 panel complaints (providing you with an independent lawyer to sit on your appeal panel)
- Judicial reviews and challenging regulatory decisions
- Challenging ISI inspection results and OFSTED intervention
- Independent reviews, whether in respect of safeguarding, employment, criminal or other matters (see the [Independent Reviews](#) section below)
- Media handling and reputation management



How we can help schools

Our team is here to support you on all matters you may encounter, including:

Commercial and other matters

- Commercial contracts
- Intellectual property including trade mark protection and exploitation
- Data protection, including disputes and Subject Access Requests
- Property law matters including development and management advice
- Immigration law advice
- Employment, pensions and HR advice

Fundraising

- Working with professional fundraisers, sponsors and other commercial organisations
- Advising on alumni and philanthropic development initiatives and the structuring of major donations
- Legacy administration (contentious and non-contentious)

Major projects

- Setting up new schools including international schools and franchise arrangements
- Transactions and restructuring, including mergers, sales and acquisitions of schools
- Construction law advice on property development



Independent Reviews

Allegations of peer-on-peer abuse, bullying and harassment, and other safeguarding issues continue to loom large in the education sector.

- When schools, universities and colleges find themselves the target of allegations, often made publicly, they face complex challenges - ensuring that their students and staff are safe, and reassuring the wider community (including protecting their reputation), whilst, all the time, continuing the delivery of their core educational provision.
- To help address these challenges, institutions are increasingly looking to authoritative, independent reviewers to scrutinise and advise on their arrangements. At Withers, we have specialists in the key areas needed to conduct such reviews, and we are ready and able to assist.
- For further information on why an independent review is important, our team and our expertise, please [click here](#).





Our experience

Our experience

We advise schools, education providers, edtech companies, foundations and philanthropists.

An
education
provider

on the sale of three independent schools and the acquisition of two independent schools for one of the largest independent school groups in the UK

Maths – No
Problem!

in relation to a publishing agreement with Dorling Kindersley for 36 books based on a highly successful, award-winning school maths programme that has helped children all over the world master maths.

A leading
independent
school in the
UK

on its arrangements to establish international schools in Hong Kong and China.

A primary
school

on issues including staff harassment, data protection and engagement with OFSTED.

A British
education
institution

on the establishment and structure of a new international school including advice on corporate matters and funding arrangements.

Owner of
preparatory
school

in Oxfordshire on the sale of his school to a private investor.

Our experience

We advise schools, education providers, edtech companies, foundations and philanthropists.

One of UK's
leading
philanthropists

on his ground-breaking
education projects.

A leading
Australian
private
school

on their international fundraising
plans for their alumni.

The Girls'
Day School
Trust

on a governance review and
various other legal matters
including general charity law
advice and legacy matters.

A group of
preschools

on their lease of new school
premises from a landlord, the
takeover of assets from the
previous tenant at the premises
and the novation of tenancy
agreements.

An
independent
school in
central
London

on restructuring its governance
arrangements.

An top
London
independent
school

on their international
fundraising projects.



“This was very helpful – thank you all so very much.”

Chair of trustees of an independent prep school on the conclusion of a governance review to resolve tensions within the original governance structure



“Thank you so much – all of you – really fantastic.”

Head of legal of a leading independent school group to their Withers team on the successful acquisition of a school



Our team

Our dedicated team

Advising independent schools across the UK.



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Our dedicated team

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