



RADLEY

Academic Scholarship 2026

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

Introduction

There's a particular energy that comes with the Academic Scholarship week at Radley. It's the feeling I get when I sit opposite a boy who is not merely answering questions but thinking in real time. This year, that feeling arrived again and again. The boys walked into my office with ideas fizzing at the edges, eager not just to show what they knew, but to explore the things they didn't. I always find that the most interesting territory!

What struck me most was how many of them already understood something essential: that success in scholarship is not just about raw material. It's also about the habits of mind we've formed over years. The boys who stood out weren't simply the cleverest or the most knowledgeable - although they were both of these - but those who had learned to wrestle with a problem a little longer, to notice subtlety, to resist the urge to leap to an easy conclusion. They understood, instinctively, that progress often begins with paying attention.

A few qualities appeared again and again. Curiosity, as I mentioned last year - the kind that isn't satisfied with the first answer, or even the second. But also, a willingness to lean into uncertainty, to recognise that good thinking often requires letting go of the impulse to be sure of something immediately. Some boys seemed to relish this: they treated disagreement not as a threat but as an invitation and so provided evidence that, as Keynes famously put it, they were prepared to change their minds when the facts changed.

The best boys also had range. The most impressive drew from wide pools of knowledge: novels, podcasts, experiments they had done in school, historical oddities, philosophical puzzles. This was the first year (and probably the last!) that I've debated the ethics of eating crocodile meat... The best boys were omnivorous (unlike crocodiles): they were collectors of ideas, good at making links across different subjects, and using them to illuminate whatever question was in front of them.

We're very aware, at Radley, that this is not something that can be generated quickly. It takes years of close attention from adults who model good thinking and encourage a life of the mind themselves. It takes teachers whose own intellectual passions are infectious, parents who occasionally have to tolerate tangents(!), and schools willing to think hard about how their curricula build up a wide body of knowledge over time.

So, thank you - for the books you recommend, the debates you encourage, the patience you show, and the intellectual space you create. You are forming boys who are knowledgeable, curious, and bold in their thinking. They are, fundamentally, a product of the academic cultures you nurture; and they are a credit to you.

Best wishes
Jonathan Porter MA (Cantab)

Subject reports

ENGLISH

Section A

Here candidates can demonstrate their critical and analytical ability, in an imaginative engagement with the text. This year saw a range of interesting responses, and the majority managed to produce a good standard, with some outstanding textual engagement. There were some from whom the text drew basic responses which failed to appreciate nuance, and which revealed misunderstanding.

The strongest responses were analytical, and it was pleasing to see critical terminology used as a means to articulate observations (weaker responses were inevitably limited to listing techniques without analysis). The ability to draw inference and to appreciate subtlety was crucial to gain the highest marks. Candidates who showed thoughtful engagement, even if interpretation was shaky, were also rewarded.

It is advisable to use the whole of the text; some responses were limited by restricting reference to the first paragraph or so. The most complete answers dealt not only with the minutiae of the text discretely but drew together patterns, showing an appreciation of the piece as a whole.

Section B

This section gives candidates the opportunity to distinguish themselves through their creativity and ability to respond imaginatively to a prompt. Marks are awarded for making the response interesting and accurate. Encouragingly, as has been the case in recent years, the overall standard was good; fewer essays were clearly at an inappropriate level for scholarship entry.

There were a number of solid, unadventurous responses which were nevertheless grammatically correct and made sensible use of the topic. The most successful essays were lively and original, sharply focused on the task and crafted to produce specific effects on the reader. Brief but clear planning was evident in the best, producing a controlled narrative or a cohesive description. Vocabulary choices were generally appropriate and often sophisticated and precise, although some candidates were clearly limited in this respect, and found it hard to articulate ideas effectively.

The most engaging answers communicated through a strong individual voice and used close detail and imagery; these responses were also frequently the most skillful in their use of sentence structure and a range of punctuation designed for deliberate effect.

Section C

Candidates who had the most success on this discursive task drew on personal experience and wider knowledge of the world. In essence, the more experiential and cultural capital candidates were able to deploy in supporting their responses, the better.

It was encouraging to see an increasing number of candidates evaluating the statement and offering helpful definitions of key terms. Some less effective responses only interrogated one side of the argument and relied solely on hypothetical situations and speculation rather than concrete evidence or lived experience. Others spent too long explaining the meaning of the statement, rather than exploring its wider implications.

As ever, candidates who wrote with a specific reader in mind produced more compelling essays. Some effective use of rhetorical devices was evident, and a few responses attempted humour with notable success. When spirited, opinionated writing was matched with controlled and varied syntax, the very highest marks were awarded.

On the whole, written structure was coherent, though paragraphing was not always used effectively to organise responses. At the top end of the cohort, candidates had evidently considered elements such as cyclical structure, engaging opening hooks, and sophisticated sequencing language.

It was also pleasing to note a marked improvement in written accuracy across the cohort. Fewer technical errors in punctuation, grammar, and spelling were in evidence, and many candidates demonstrated genuine ambition in their vocabulary choices and sentence construction. This willingness to take stylistic risks, and largely succeed, was heartening.

MATHS

Paper 1

We deliberately set a slightly easier paper this year, with less algebra and more number skills needed. This reflects the fact that the number of candidates sitting this paper has increased in recent years, and we need to try to accommodate a greater spread of abilities. This resulted in all except for two of the candidates scoring more than a third of the marks. There were, however, very few scores over 90% and this may be because some found the paper a little too long to fully complete. The last two questions, unsurprisingly, were the worst answered and these were on simultaneous equations - one being a wordy example and the other involving quadratic fractions. New questions that we put in were on substitution, sequences, indices, probability and percentages. On these questions, most candidates made promising attempts, and they will remain in the paper for next year. The paper still contained sufficient amounts of algebra to test to see whether the candidates had a good grasp of factorisation and problem solving and, overall, we were happy with the balance. 20 candidates attained an A grade and nearly the same a B grade. We imagine that next year's paper will be of similar content and difficulty.

Paper 2

26 candidates were selected to sit Paper 2. The paper worked well, with a range of marks from 33% to 98%.

Q1 on percentages produced lots of correct answers. The most tricky bit was the second part where we had two savers. It was intended that the last part be completed by successive multiplication by 0.8, and I was surprised to see some candidates using logarithms – which of course is fine.

Q2 was a good discriminator and produced only five completely correct answers.

Again, Q3 discriminated well. Part b) was more tricky than would appear on a first reading and only two candidates scored full marks.

Q4 also had an easier first part, with a more demanding Part b). Another 10cm radius could have been included on the diagram to lead candidates towards Pythagoras but the best candidates managed to work it out for themselves.

Q5 was on quadratics and there were a number of completely correct answers. Of those who couldn't derive the equation, many went on to solve Part b). With 33 having only two pairs of possible factors, I had expected solutions by factorisation. A number of candidates used the quadratic formula. Candidates are getting better at permutation type questions, and lots of marks were gained here. But only four candidates worked out all the cases for divisibility by three, ie 3, 24 or 45, 234 or 345.

PHYSICS

The paper was themed around the Winter Olympics with examples referring to speed skating, bobsleigh and downhill skiing. All formulae were given to the candidates and a focus was on using the formulae correctly.

Most of the questions centred around mechanics and candidates demonstrated a good understanding of mass and weight as well as how air resistance is affected by speed. Some of the answers to the written questions were in the text provided, part of the paper being related to comprehension and using the information given.

Calculations were generally well completed, quite a few candidates struggling with unit conversions. Converting m/s into km/h or in reverse is a favourite question. No units for any answers were written on the paper; candidates were expected to include units in their answers. It was pleasing that most candidates did this, showing clear methodology in their calculations. (It is worth noting that a couple of candidates who sent in their papers appeared not to have used a calculator. Calculators are allowed in the Physics paper.)

The mean score of this paper was 58% with a range from 13% to an impressive 81%. Many candidates showed excellent understanding and seemed to enjoy the Winter Olympics theme.

CHEMISTRY

The paper was notionally divided into two parts. Part 1 was mainly built around replacement reactions and the states of matter topic familiar from the Common Entrance specification. Part 2 required more mathematical skills, including the analysis of a graph.

Part 1 started with a brief introduction to atomic structure and the underlying reactivity which is governed by the outer electrons. The reactivity of metals was used as an example, and candidates had to make predictions about reactivity given the information provided. Q1 followed on from

the introductory paragraphs. Q2a required a little chemical intuition. Parts b) and c) were familiar from the Common Entrance syllabus. Part d) required good knowledge of the Common Entrance syllabus which has not always been evident. Part f) needed a feel for forces and how these govern the state of a substance. Finally, Part g) demanded some transferable skills from what candidates have read.

Part 1 of the paper was answered reasonably well but there were gaps in the topic of simple states of matter. Only a minority of candidates were able to correctly interpret and apply the information successfully to the more challenging questions. As every year, it seems that candidates find particle theory more challenging than it should be.

Part 2 contained a mixture of skills: chemical equations to graphical analysis, some simple calculations involving density and percentage composition and chemical understanding including simple risk analysis. It concluded with another, more advanced, states of matter question. Candidates had to analyse a graph of the rate of oxygen production against time and the challenging aspect was to recognise that rate was plotted on the y-axis (rather than a quantity). This included describing the trend shown by the graph, reading off simple values and summing over a range. This was followed by predicting the shape of a graph for the decrease of mass in a decomposition reaction. This section also dealt with balancing a simple chemical equation and identifying the number of one type of atom in a formula unit. The section also tested the ability of candidates to apply ratios in finding masses of reactants. The most challenging aspect of this section was to recognise that rate has been plotted on the y-axis. Again the quality of the answers in this section was wide-ranging.

While some of the questions in this paper were by their very nature challenging, others/most required solid Common Entrance knowledge. All required precision in answering. It was, therefore, important to carefully read the instructions and the guidance given. Provided the prior information in the opening paragraph was properly assimilated, the questions should have been quite accessible. Overall, the paper showed a good spread of marks and precision, and careful reading was rewarded.

BIOLOGY

Each year the Biology paper is a comprehension exercise, though candidates who have done a fair bit of classification, ecology, environmental studies and natural history in general should be well able to access it. We look for scientific rather than literal thinking, and are particularly impressed when candidates are able to make logical links or sequence a set of events.

The first 10 questions involved simple definitions of keywords. Words like omnivory, ambush, camouflage and gene were quite well dealt with by most, but words that required closer interpretation of the text (for example, carnassial, melanism) were more troublesome. Ideas like ancestors and competition had a tendency to elicit “English” definitions or everyday examples, rather than scientific responses.

The next three questions focussed on classification. Most candidates knew what a species was, but they tended to miss the nuance of a genus, thinking the first bit of a scientific name meant the

animals were in the same family (in this case cats) rather than part of the family (big cats/panthers). The universal advantages of Latin were less well understood. The majority of candidates were quite good on vertebrates, though some thought insects and crustaceans belonged to this class. The more wildlife they know, the better.

Incidentally, at secondary level, the Royal Society of Biology Challenge and Olympiad Competitions value Natural History knowledge alongside the “academic”. Classes with a nature table/Attenborough hour each week, to complement other initiatives like Forest School, are to be commended, combining the knowledge and mental health benefits of nature.

The next few questions focussed on ecology. Worryingly, when asked for examples of species in British gardens, a number of candidates reported seeing lions and rhinos here! Most were good with food chains and food webs, though, perhaps curiously, there was a tendency for them not to use arrows within the latter, even if they had got this right on the food chain (most did). Some quite careful reading of the text was required to determine the right trophic levels here, so well done to those who got full marks on this part. Some misread a fossa as being a cat rather than cat-like viverrid.

Q8 focussed on inheritance, and I was pleasantly surprised by the relatively good understanding many candidates had of this. Though not referred to in the text, most candidates talked about genes, knew that they were passed on (a description of this was often given at a cellular level) and even traits/evolutionarily beneficial characteristics and examples emerged. A minority of candidates, however, talked about inheritance in financial terms. But the vast majority got the idea of using a science test to talk about science.

The final question was a mini-essay which allowed many of the better scientists to shine. In essence, it asked candidates to describe what happens in the body during exercise, and what I was particularly interested in were answers where candidates went through a sequence of logically-linked events. Many made the distinction between aerobic and anaerobic respiration, going on to describe the effects of lactic acid (very few described oxygen debt, which is fine for this stage). The misconception that anaerobic replaces aerobic was quite common. Fewer candidates than I would have expected mentioned the “obvious” points that heart and breathing rates increase to carry more oxygen to body cells for respiration (adrenaline got quite a lot of mentions, though). Perhaps by the end of a long paper they were in the mindset of “difficult” concepts and overlooked the obvious. Some talked about gas exchange but didn’t know which one went which way. I was impressed when reference to CO₂ (and water in sweat) being excreted was made. Many shot themselves in the foot by saying energy produced/made - the sooner we can train them to say “energy released” the better, as this often costs candidates a mark even in GCSE and A-Level exams.

Overall, the test was a very good discriminator. The marks ranged from 24% to 87%, following a roughly normal distribution. I was proud of the candidates whose papers I marked - they nearly all shone in one part of the paper or another. The good sense of genes/evolution and body processes was encouraging, leading on nicely from the classification/ecology part of the paper. Much good Biology is clearly being done in Prep Schools. Do have the confidence to let the

candidates free on lots of Natural History, too, perhaps doing some good things to help the natural world in the process.

FRENCH

This year's examination encouraged candidates to draw on their vocabulary and grammar knowledge whilst also demonstrating their analytical and inferential skills, which the strongest were able to do successfully. The comprehension was well understood overall and the ability to identify different tenses in the reading passage was shown by the strongest candidates but the fact that several of the possible answers were irregular verbs caused some candidates to miss them.

The gap-fill exercise was answered successfully by many, although there was confusion over tout/toute and some were incorrect in their choice of past participles or mistook plus for a past participle. As in previous papers, some candidates attempted to change the words to make them fit in the passage, which resulted in lost marks.

The translation section invited candidates to demonstrate precise use of modal verbs and tenses. In Q1, many used devoir correctly, but only the best candidates used arriver accurately in the perfect tense. Very few knew surtout for 'especially' but there were several successful attempts at using the correct direct object pronoun in Q2. Only a few were aware of the need to use the future tense to translate "if I have the money" into French. Again, successful attempts at these elements helpfully separated out the candidates who have gone above and beyond in their study of grammatical structures.

The writing section was designed to give scope for candidates to demonstrate a range of vocabulary and constructions in the short time available. Many candidates showed accurate use of present tense and adjectival agreements in the description of their school and used basic opinion phrases successfully. It was encouraging to see some moving away from aimer by attempting to use more advanced opinions, for example, Je dirais que... for the second bullet point, although the accurate spelling of subjects such as les mathématiques and the word professeur caused some issues. The third bullet point was used to demonstrate some future and conditional tense phrases by most candidates, however some misunderstood the question or avoided using these tenses, which hindered communication.

Overall, the written task presented a broad range of responses. The most successful candidates were able to manipulate the questions to show the full range of tenses and to showcase selected pre-learnt phrases, used correctly in context, to embellish their already accurate and varied writing. Others were less successful in this regard which resulted in some of their content being irrelevant to the bullet points or repeated multiple times. We are keen for candidates to pay close attention to accuracy and to use a wide variety of language, for example, irregular verbs, negatives and modal verbs.

SPANISH

The assessment focused on evaluating candidates' language proficiency, specifically in the areas of reading, translation and extended writing.

All candidates performed well on the True/False reading exercise, demonstrating a strong ability to decipher the general gist of an extended text. Some candidates were less successful on the second task, which required them to be familiar and precise with specific vocabulary. For example, “abuela” was either not known, or confused with “grandfather”.

Candidates averaged a score of 10/20 on the translation section. On the whole, candidates knew lots of the basic vocabulary but there were frequent lapses in basic grammar, with incorrect adjectival agreements and genders of nouns posing many problems. Many candidates could use the present tense correctly, including the verb *gustar*. Only a small number were able to translate sentences in the near future and conditional tenses.

In the extended writing section, several candidates stood out by providing well-developed answers, incorporating opinions and justifications effectively in response to all five questions. The bullet points gradually increased in grammatical difficulty, and this was reflected in most candidates' responses. Many pieces of writing would have been improved with the inclusion of more basic tense switching, using structures such as *fui a*, *fue + adjective*, *voy a + infinitive*, *me gustaría + infinitive*.

GERMAN

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).

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. 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 presented in English. A model response would include development of ideas and a range of opinions as well as successful reference to multiple time frames.

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 year or more. In most instances, candidates have acquired English as a second language. However, some candidates opted for the

LAT paper instead of German, French or Spanish, which we do not recommend. The overall quality of responses was very 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 *Animal Farm*. Although most were able to identify at least half of the errors, some 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. A surprising number of candidates found fault with perfectly correct sentences.

The second question required candidates to identify cricket team names written in the Devanagari script. A key step was to identify repeated patterns in the script, where letters represent consonants with an ‘inbuilt’ vowel (short a). About half the candidates obtained full marks, and there was a wide spread of scores below that.

The final part of the paper required candidates to engage with translations into and out of Fur, a language from western Sudan. Most candidates obtained more than half marks on this question. They were required to notice patterns such as SOV word order (subject–object–verb), and that plurals are marked with -à, both on nouns and verbs with plural subjects.

There was no requirement to describe observations 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 an unseen primary source. The first question invited candidates to engage with the source on a single point of inquiry. The second question asked candidates to reflect on the usefulness of the source 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 three or more 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, and managed to get

substantial answers down on paper, often nearly two pages. History is largely a written discipline; the value placed in reading comprehension and writing fluidly (and well) cannot be understated.

GEOGRAPHY

This year's Geography paper comprised three compulsory 6-mark explain questions. The assessment focused on candidates' ability to develop clear chains of reasoning, apply accurate case studies and make synoptic links between human and physical processes. Precision of written communication and use of geographical terminology were also key skills being assessed. The topics were tourism, air pollution, food shortages, flood risk and managing resources.

Most candidates found the format accessible and successfully completed all three questions. Many demonstrated secure understanding of the themes they had chosen and attempted to explain their ideas rather than simply state them. There was evidence of candidates drawing links across the discipline, particularly where human actions influenced physical environments or vice versa.

The strongest responses showed a confident grasp of the command word explain, providing well-structured answers with clear points developed through logical, disciplined reasoning. These candidates used accurate case studies that enhanced their explanations and employed geographical vocabulary effectively. Their writing was clear and coherent, reflecting strong geographical thinking.

Middle-ranking responses showed generally sound knowledge but lacked consistent development or did not address both aspects of the question. Case studies were sometimes vague or only partially accurate, limiting analytical depth. These answers showed promise but did not fully demonstrate the precision needed for higher marks.

Weaker responses were brief, under-developed or contained misconceptions, such as referring to Africa as a country. These candidates tended to list points without explanation, offered generalised statements or omitted case studies. Synoptic links were often missing and writing lacked clarity.

Overall, the performance was encouraging. Continued emphasis on developing full explanations, applying accurate examples, making synoptic connections and writing with clarity will further strengthen candidates' future responses.

THEOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY

There were three questions on the paper covering Christianity, Theology and Ethics. Candidates were required to answer one question. The two main assessment objectives relate to factual information and the construction of an argument which directly answers the question. Five marks were awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar in this paper.

It is essential that an argument is constructed in the answer, and the best answers had a consistent thesis which ran throughout the essay. Candidates are required to consider two sides of an argument, and so a line of evaluation at the end of each paragraph is a credible way of putting

one's overall argument forward, noting if the candidate agrees or disagrees with the points that have been made.

Candidates are also required to refer to religious or ethical teaching. Successful answers referred to scripture well, and it was pleasing to see a higher level of biblical literacy in answers than in 2025. Some candidates showed knowledge of Kant and Bentham, which is seen as standard knowledge for an A grade. Knowledge of other philosophers, like Hobbes and Rousseau, was evident this year, which is most certainly rewarded.

Most candidates opted to answer the question on freedom of speech. The most successful answers differentiated between deontological and teleological approaches, outlining the limits of freedom of speech therein. Acceptable but less successful answers gave examples in current affairs to illustrate the limits of freedom of speech. The question on God's omniscience and free will was also popular, and successful candidates used scripture to support arguments pertaining to the requirement to uphold free will, for example, as a result of being created in the image of God. There were also credible arguments regarding determinism.

It is essential that candidates answer the question, thus a conclusion is an appropriate way to finish the piece. It is recommended that conclusions are justified and choose a side of the debate to agree with rather than highlighting merits of both sides. Conclusions do not need to be lengthy and should not be a simple list of points that have been already made.

LATIN

It was pleasing to have 33 candidates sit this year's paper. There was a very wide range of marks, reflecting the varying levels of security across the cohort, with the highest mark being 77%.

Encouragingly, in Section A many were able to convey the general sense of the translation. However, weaker candidates showed significant gaps in vocabulary which limited their accuracy. It was pleasing that many handled purpose clauses and indirect commands correctly, but participles remained a stumbling block for some. Indirect statements also caused difficulty for all but the most secure. Candidates should be encouraged to use punctuation as a guide, translating in clear blocks so that an error in one section does not distort the rest of the sentence.

Section B was generally stronger. The grammar questions were answered well by a good number of candidates. However, weaknesses in identifying cases led to confusion in several comprehension questions. Candidates should also be encouraged to translate the Latin given in the lemma as accurately as possible before attempting to answer the question.

Section C, as always, was demanding and was completed less successfully. Constructions were often not identified before translation was attempted, and even basic noun and verb endings were not always accurately given. Further consolidation of core morphology and a more methodical approach would significantly improve performance here.

GREEK

This year's Greek paper was sat by four candidates, all of whom did well and within a narrow range of achievement (71%-80%). It followed the same structure as last year, and it was encouraging to see that most found the initial section accessible.

Section A comprised 10 words for transliteration and the translation of five frequently used verbs in different tenses. All candidates performed well on the transliteration, although some were caught out by the use of -γξ in the word "sphinx". Candidates were uncertain as to how to handle ῥ- in transliteration. The responses to the verbs were generally good, though it was a surprise that not a single candidate correctly identified ἔπαυσα as a first person form.

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 all 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, although the parsing of verbs and grammatical analysis were generally successful. 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.