

Gordonstoun the school Prince Charles loathed!

Gordonstoun is a famous and very expensive boarding school in a remote part of Scotland. It has its own fire station, theatre, yacht, and Mountain Rescue Unit.

Wealthy parents from all over the world are eager to pay up to £35,000 a year for its special brand of 'character education'. It has many famous 'old boys', including four princes from the British royal family.

The school's history

The school was founded in 1934 by the German educator, **Kurt Hahn**. He was born in Berlin in 1886, and studied at Oxford University. As a young man he read Plato's *The Republic* and came up with the idea of a modern school. In 1933, Hahn was arrested for daring to speak out against the Nazis. He was exiled to Britain and it was there that he decided to start a new school in Scotland. Its beginnings were very small, with only two students. The numbers gradually increased, and included the young **Prince Philip** of Greece, who went on to become the husband of Queen Elizabeth II. By the end of the 1940s, there were 250 boys.

Outdoor activities and risk-taking were central to Hahn's beliefs, so skills such as mountaineering and sailing were taught. Boys were expected to endure hard conditions, followed by icy cold showers. They wore shorts in all weathers, slept on hard bunk beds with the windows open, even in the freezing Scottish winters, and were made to go on long walks in pouring rain.



Hahn also believed that it was very important to understand different cultures, and encouraged the boys to work overseas. Over the years, they have helped build schools in Africa, wells in Thailand, and cared for orphans in Romania.

Prince Philip so enjoyed his years at Gordonstoun that in 1962 he and the Queen decided to send their shy, sensitive 12-year-old son, **Prince Charles**, there. Charles loathed it. He called it 'a prison sentence', 'Colditz in kilts', 'Absolute hell!' He was bullied, cold-shouldered, and mocked for having big ears. Kinder boys were afraid to befriend him. His father wrote him letters urging him to be strong. He wrote back, 'I wish I could come home.'

The school today

Girls finally joined the school in 1972. There are now about 600 pupils, from the age of eight to 18, and 100 teachers, so there is a very low student-teacher ratio. There are nine boarding houses on the campus, three for the girls and six for the boys. They all have TVs, a common room, and a kitchen. It's a truly multicultural school, with about 35% of the students coming from 40 different countries. There is also an international summer school, attended every year by 250 children from all over the world. Nowadays, pupils are allowed to use email, text, Skype, and Facebook if they feel homesick.

Sport still plays a central role in the school's crowded timetable. Outdoors, there are tennis courts, and playing fields for rugby, football and cricket, and a 400 metre running track. Students can also do horse riding, rifle shooting, and golf. Indoors, there's a large sports centre with a rock climbing wall, a swimming pool, a weights room, squash courts and a hall for basketball, badminton, netball, and karate.



On the arts side there's a first-class music department with its own recording studio, drum studio, and concert room. Over 40% of the students learn to play an instrument. Also, there's an excellent drama department, which has its own 200-seat theatre. Like the school's talented musicians, its drama groups often tour overseas, most recently to the US.

Community service is an important part of Gordonstoun life. Every Wednesday, pupils help in the local area, visiting retirement homes, nursery schools, and hospitals. They also help with local fire and emergency services. The school has two fire engines and a Mountain Rescue Service.

Schools nowadays are often accused of being 'exam factories' – this cannot be said of Gordonstoun. It aims to produce much more 'rounded', 'risk-taking' adults.

Postscript: Old Gordonstounians

There are many other famous 'old boys' – Prince Charles' brothers, Princes Andrew and Edward followed in his and their father's footsteps. Princess Anne, the Queen's second child, was not educated at Gordonstoun, which at that time was for boys only, but she sent her two children, Zara and Peter, there. Other famous sons and daughters include, Oona Chaplin, granddaughter of Charlie Chaplin; Jason Connery and Duncan Jones, sons of Sean Connery and David Bowie respectively.