



THE SPENCE SCHOOL

HEAD OF UPPER SCHOOL

Start Date: July 2027

The Spence School

New York, New York | spenceschool.org



Carney
Sandoe
& ASSOCIATES

MISSION STATEMENT

With a commitment to academic excellence and personal integrity, The Spence School prepares a diverse community of girls and young women for the lifelong transformation of self and the world with purpose, passion and perspective.

Non scholae sed vitae discimus. — Not for school but for life we learn.

At a Glance



1892
established



812
total enrollment



288
Upper School enrollment



54%
students of color



135
total faculty



79%
faculty with
advanced degrees



6:1
student-faculty ratio



OVERVIEW

A premier New York City institution, The Spence School is a K-12 independent school for girls located on Manhattan's Upper East Side that operates and delivers at the highest levels. Spence enrolls a diverse group of students who enjoy a rich and challenging academic and co-curricular program rooted in deep inquiry and intellectual discovery in the service of engaging with the world. It is a place of joy and spirited adventure where girls find their voices and develop confidence that sets them up for a life of purpose. Inspired by outstanding teachers who often stay at Spence for decades, students engage enthusiastically in school while also utilizing the wealth of resources New York offers. Along with an outstanding program and an exceptional faculty and staff, the School has impressive facilities, operating across three-plus locations in the East '90s including a state-of-the-art athletic and education center that houses a gymnasium, nine squash courts, and the Brizendine Center for Ecology, which includes a greenhouse, teaching kitchen, and rooftop garden.

Clara Spence, a visionary educator, founded Miss Spence's School in 1892. In addition to strong academics, Miss Spence ensured that her students took advantage of the city, taking them on "sightseeing trips." She developed relationships with universities and invited the likes of Helen Keller and Booker T. Washington to speak. A rooftop terrace offered students outdoor space. Most importantly, Spence's progressive curriculum insisted on the utility of education for the purpose of service to the community. While she characterized life as "a splendid struggle," she also believed in having fun, encouraging play and joy among her students. All these characteristics – including the rooftop play area and impressive speakers – remain integral to the School today, which moved to its current location on 91st Street in 1929.





Having outgrown that building, the Lower School moved into a renovated historic mansion on 93rd Street in 2003; the purchase of an adjacent townhouse added significant additional space to the 91st building which houses the Middle School and Upper School in 2008; and the athletic and education center--referred to as 412--was completed in 2021. Last year, Spence acquired new property adjacent to its Lower School and is currently considering potential plans for the space.

In 2022, Felicia A. Wilks assumed the leadership of the School as the 15th Head of School, ushering in a new chapter in the School's distinguished history. Beginning in 2023, the School has engaged in a thoughtful and inclusive Strategic Planning process that has engaged the School's community of students, parents, faculty, and alumnae together in townhalls and focus group meetings and enlisted their input through surveys. In March 2025, the School launched its Strategic Plan, *The Spark of Spence*, with a community celebration and is already seeing its vision come to life.

In its first year, *The Spark of Spence* drove meaningful progress across the School. The School refined its K–12 curriculum, advanced AI competencies and strengthened environmental education. New Upper School opportunities were developed, including courses to prepare students for lives of courageous and engaged leadership. The School also deepened its commitment to civil discourse, creating new opportunities across the School for students and adults to learn and practice the skills of true dialogue. Central to this progress has been the leadership and partnership of the School's division heads and their peers on the senior leadership team, whose vision, expertise and collaboration have helped translate all-school ambitions into meaningful action.

Spence seeks a warm, kind, and enthusiastic educator to serve as its next Head of Upper School, beginning in July 2027. The new Upper School Head will lead a division with strong systems, deep trust, and a highly collaborative leadership team. The Head of Upper School sets the division's academic vision, works closely with department heads and supports faculty through ongoing feedback and evaluation. In this work, the Upper School Head both sustains and strengthens the division's exceptional academic program, ensuring that rigor and intellectual excitement remain at the heart of the student experience. On the student life side, the Upper School Head also partners with the Upper School Dean of Students to oversee the grade deans and the student advisory program, and the guidance counselor to support student well-being. Like most Spence administrators, the Head of Upper School teaches a class. The role calls for close partnership with parents, including navigating challenging conversations, and for helping to lead the School's work on student wellness, belonging, and technology and AI.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The next Head of Upper School will join a division with remarkable strengths and a clear sense of purpose. Members of the Spence community identified the following opportunities and challenges for the division's next leader.

Championing Academic Excellence and Intellectual Engagement with Joy: The next Head of Upper School will bring the intellectual weight and experience to respect every discipline and to articulate what rigor looks like. They will lift up teaching within and across departments, sustaining a division where students are joyful because learning is intellectually engaging—and because the School genuinely values and fosters the playfulness of being young. Spence is also a school where students and faculty are encouraged to dream big.

Prioritizing Student Wellness and Balance: Student mental health and wellness remain at the center of the Upper School, held alongside academic rigor. The next Upper School Head will continue the division's commitment to high expectations and high support. That work includes drawing on rigorous, ongoing research to inform everything from the Upper School schedule to school policies. It also includes expanding education for faculty and parents, keeping the college process current, and celebrating every student's path beyond Spence.



Fostering Kindness, Belonging, and One Community:

Belonging is a deeply held value at Spence, and the School is intentional about putting it into practice through deliberate structures. Equity and belonging live throughout the program, including course placement and the classroom experience. The next Head of Upper School will continue to champion this work to support all students.

Sustaining and Supporting the Faculty: Spence's faculty care deeply about their students, and the rapport between teachers and students is a hallmark of the division. The faculty feel supported and honored, and they value feedback and visibility from their leaders. Faculty workload, additional student support structures, and department head responsibilities need to be reviewed to make certain that Spence's faculty continue to feel supported and do their best work in challenging students and meeting their needs.

Embracing Innovation, Technology, and AI: The Board envisions an innovative, tech-forward school that is not afraid of change: thoughtful about the future of education, open, and curious. AI and the development of technology that promotes deep learning and engagement are priorities. The community hopes for a Head of Upper School who is comfortable with technology and eager to learn more. They also seek a leader who will work in tandem with colleagues to consider what students need in a changing world.

Building Partnerships with Upper School Families:

Spence's parent community is engaged, with more than 150 parents in leadership positions through the Parents' Association. The Head of Upper School will continue to strengthen the Upper School parent community, communicate clearly and warmly with families, and be a visible presence to students and caregivers alike.



\$8.5M

financial aid
awarded



1 in 5

students receiving
aid



\$176M

endowment
(current market value)



\$61.5M

annual operating
budget

QUALIFICATIONS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

The Spence School seeks a Head of Upper School who loves adolescents and learning and who brings the academic depth and organizational skill to lead a high-achieving division. The ideal candidate will also have the warmth and steadiness to sustain the division's joy.



Professional Qualifications

The ideal candidate will bring:

- Classroom teaching experience and a desire to continue teaching, as this is an expectation of most Spence administrators
- Administrative experience leading, supervising, and giving feedback to a high-quality faculty
- Deep expertise in the adolescent development of girls and student support
- Intellectual depth and respect for every discipline, with a clear vision of what academic rigor looks like
- Strong commitment to supporting girls' education and leadership development
- Familiarity with the New York City independent school landscape
- A proven ability to manage complex projects from research through execution, in partnership with colleagues
- Skill in navigating challenging parent conversations
- Current knowledge of the college admission landscape
- A commitment to supporting and deepening the School's work around equity, belonging and dignity
- Comfort with technology and AI, including using data to support students



Personal Attributes

Spence hopes its next Head of Upper School will be:

- Warm, kind, and enthusiastic, with a sense of humor and an appreciation for a joyful school
- Calm and non-reactive while remaining responsive, especially in difficult moments
- Intellectually curious, open-minded, and eager to keep learning
- A collaborative team player with humility, for whom no job is too small
- Visible, approachable, and relational with students, and a good listener
- Decisive, with strong follow-through and the courage and integrity to say no when needed
- Organized, a clear communicator, and skilled in public speaking
- Comfortable giving feedback and holding accountability as a form of care

LEARN MORE

- [School Website](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [School History](#)
- [Upper School at Spence](#)
- [Core Values](#)
- [Diversity and Equity](#)
- [College Matriculation](#)
- [About New York, New York](#)





TO APPLY

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultants in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission) to:

DARRYL J. FORD, PH.D.

Vice President, Educational Leadership Services
darryl.ford@carneysandoe.com

BURKE ZALOSH

Senior Consultant
burke.zalosh@carneysandoe.com

The full-time salary range for this position is \$320,000 - \$360,000. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors which include years of experience, education background, and expertise.



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