

Reading School

Reading, United Kingdom



Founded within Reading Abbey in 1125, this selective state grammar for boys still sends the bulk of its leavers to Russell Group and Oxbridge places.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	79/100
Academic outcomes	84/100
University placement	80/100
Prestige & heritage	79/100
Alumni network	78/100
Facilities	70/100
Transparency	74/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

At Reading School, the first thing that matters is selection. This is an 11-18 state grammar for boys, founded in 1125, and it still runs on the old compact: high academic pace, high expectations and no apology for either. The exam profile is blunt. Year 13 students secure A* to B grades in more than 90% of A-level entries, and GCSE candidates take the top grades in more than 85% of courses. Leavers then move on accordingly: in 2024, **92%** of **130 leavers** went to top-100 universities, with **22 Oxbridge** places and 49 Russell Group offers; Cambridge, Oxford and Imperial featured heavily. For

parents who want proof that a state school can compete with expensive independents at the top end, this is it.

What distinguishes Reading from many high-performing grammars is that it does not sell itself as an exam factory, even though the results would justify that line. The school states its priorities in plainer moral terms: character, service, relationships and social impact. That can read like rhetoric at schools with weaker substance behind it; here, the academic record gives the broader pastoral argument credibility. Class sizes average 25, so this is not a small, *hand-held* environment, and boys need enough self-direction to thrive. The presence of boarding also widens the proposition beyond the local commuter belt, though this remains a school defined by scholarship and intellectual seriousness rather than by boarding-house culture.

Reading belongs on a shortlist for families with a boy who is *fiercely academic*, comfortable in a competitive cohort and keen on university ambition without the full independent-school price structure. It also suits students who like tradition but do not need a glossy version of it. The school’s age, alumni depth and destination record give it *real institutional weight*; 87 notable alumni are catalogued in Wikidata, with strength in politics, scholarship and public life. This is not the right fit for a child who needs extensive individual cushioning, a broad-ability intake or a less pressurised sixth form. It is right for a boy who wants to be stretched hard, keep company with other bright students and treat school as a serious intellectual enterprise. In that market, Reading is *a formidable state-sector outlier*.

STRENGTHS	TRADE - OFFS
• As a state grammar school, day places carry no tuition fees, and boarders pay only for food and lodging, around £13,000 to £15,000 a year, rather than full independent-school fees. • The school traces its history to Reading Abbey and dates its founding to 1125, making it one of the oldest schools in England. • It operates as a genuine state boarding school with dedicated boarding houses (including East Wing), a structure that is uncommon among English state schools. • The school's boarding was praised in its OFSTED 2023 inspection for warm, caring relationships and strong pastoral support. • The academically selective intake and grammar-school setting give able boys a demanding, high-expectation environment aimed squarely at leading universities.	• It is a single-sex boys' school throughout, with no coeducational option at any stage, including sixth form. • Entry is unashamedly selective: all applicants must sit a competitive entrance test in English, Maths and creative writing, and demand for the roughly 150 Year 7 places is described as fierce. • Boarding is weekly rather than full-time; boarders return home at weekends, which may not suit relocating families needing continuous residential care. • External sixth-form applicants face a high academic bar, needing strong GCSE grades (a Grade 7 minimum is required for several A-level courses), which can disadvantage students arriving from non-UK curricula.

ADMISSIONS

Main entry is at Year 7 via a competitive entrance test covering English, Maths and creative writing, sat in September or January before entry, with results published in mid-October. A small number of places arise in Year 9 and Sixth Form. Day places follow Local Authority criteria (looked-after children, siblings, distance); boarding places are allocated by 'boarding need' with no catchment area. External Sixth Form applicants must meet minimum academic requirements (around 56 points, with Grade 7 GCSE thresholds for some subjects) and apply by a January deadline for the following September.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (87)

SPORT: Tom Dollery, James Yates

MUSIC: David Warburton, Douglas Guest

DRAMA: Phaniel Bacon, Sydney Seaward, Richard Vernon, Owen Nares

VISUAL_ARTS: John Minton, William Havell, Ross Brawn, Michael Goaman

LETTERS: George Hanger, 4th Baron Coleraine, Griffin Higgs, James Merrick, Joseph Wells, Phaniel Bacon, William Frederick Deacon, Nigel Ward, Mark Field

POLITICS: Constantine Phipps, Daniel Blagrove, David Warburton, Edward Young, Baron Young of Old Windsor, Francis Moore, Henry Vansittart, Lionel Cripps, Richard Body

SCIENCE: Clifford Charles Butler, Joseph Wells, Norman Gash, Robert Hedley, Robert Vansittart, Paul Badham, Ross Brawn, George William Series

BUSINESS: Ross Brawn, Alexander Tilloch Galt, John Kendrick

WTS RATING 

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