

Reading School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110097
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	354490
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Scott HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Grammar (Selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	885
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	289
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Philip Mitchell
Headteacher	Mr John Weeds
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 May 2007
School address	Erleigh Road Reading RG1 5LW
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Boarding provision	Reading School
Social care Unique Reference Number	SC054201
Social care inspector	Lucy Martin HMI

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 33 lessons, held meetings with students, staff and governors, and talked with parents and carers. They observed the school's work and looked at policy documents, 236 parental questionnaires, the school's own progress tracking information, surveys and evidence of monitoring.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of teaching in targeting individuals' learning needs
- the impact specialist status has had on the school
- the outcomes for boarding school students and new sixth formers compared to other students in the school
- the extent to which the boarding facilities offer a safe and inspiring environment to support the development of all individuals.

Information about the school

Reading School is broadly average in size with a large sixth form that takes some students from other schools. There are a small number of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including specific learning difficulties, physical difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Students from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages attend the school, although most are of White British heritage. The school has boarding provision for around 70 students.

The school has been a specialist humanities college since 2005, and has added a second specialism in science in 2009.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Reading School has a real sense of community and helps students to reach the highest of academic standards as well as developing a keen sense of purpose and responsibility. The academic performance of students is considerable and the inquiring minds of students are well provided for with a wide range of opportunities to enhance their learning and personal development. Students gain from teaching children in other schools, sharing their knowledge and passion for learning. This not only contributes to wider community cohesion, but also gives them invaluable learning experiences.

Teaching in Reading School at its best is truly inspirational. Teachers display very good subject knowledge and an almost palpable enthusiasm and passion for their subject. When teachers drive learning by building on students' high levels of understanding and ensuring that they are challenged at the highest level, progress is outstanding and carries far beyond the boundaries of exam courses. Leaders have a very clear picture of the quality of teaching in the school and are working hard to spread such best practice. Lessons are generally well planned, although students are not always clear enough about what their next steps for learning are, and at times opportunities are missed to encourage more independent learning and to develop and apply higher order thinking skills. Some marking is very effective; it gives students a clear short-term focus in lessons and is used well to motivate students still further. This diagnostic marking is not, however, widespread. The pace of many lessons is brisk and even where teachers talk at times for too long, students remain engaged and enjoy learning and are keen to make a positive contribution.

The curriculum is outstanding. The introduction of the International Baccalaureate (IB) has added an important dimension, allowing students a distinctive route to higher studies that is successful for those who have embarked on the course. The IB is at an early stage of development and is not yet fully embedded. New curriculum developments such as this are helping to broaden opportunities and meet the needs of a wider group of learners into the future. A wide range of activities take place that enhance the curriculum, including international visits relating to cultural and subject studies as well as a variety of sports and arts opportunities.

The school recognises the importance of students' academic success but shows a determination to ensure their personal development is also outstanding. The care, guidance and support systems in the school are highly effective at ensuring students' success. The personal support for all students, including the boarders, is outstanding. This helps to ensure the school ethos is clear and contributes to a sense of belonging and self-worth among members of the school community.

Governors are very dedicated and work hard in the best interests of the students. They hold the school to account well and use external consultants to confirm that the school is continuously improving. Policies and practice are reviewed regularly, and ways to confirm best practice and include a broader range of stakeholder views are being explored to develop governance still further.

Boarding provision is good. Boarders are well supported and cared for, and contribute a great deal to the school as a whole through their participation. They benefit from a wide range of activities in the evening and a strong community is apparent, with boarding staff knowing students well. All except two of the national minimum standards for boarding are met.

The senior leaders have a clear understanding of the issues that require attention and the many strengths in the school. They have a clear plan in developing further the strong middle leaders and a strong sense of drive and ambition is present across the school. Despite having some difficult decisions to make, leaders are taking decisive action to improve teaching and develop the school still further. The capacity for sustained development is therefore outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the outstanding practice already present in teaching to:
 - ensure students have more opportunities to develop their higher order thinking skills and are able to apply their thinking and learning in a range of different contexts
 - give students clear and focused points for improvement so they are able to work more independently and strategically, not just work more.
- Ensure that outstanding opportunities arising from new curriculum developments, such as the IB are fully embedded to widen the range of learning pathways
- Extend the contribution made by the governing body in terms of challenging performance by taking account of the views of all stakeholders.
- The school must ensure that it meets those national minimum standards for boarding which have not been met.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enter the school via an 11-plus entrance examination and start with standards that are high. Students' attitudes towards learning and the school ethos ensure that this strong starting position is used as a firm foundation for the future. Students work hard and standards seen in lessons and their work confirmed that a very high proportion reach the highest grades at GCSE. Most then go on to achieve similarly high standards at A level and in the IB. This academic success, coupled with the outstanding personal development of students, means that they are eager participants in school life and look forward to the next stages in their careers with confidence.

There are many opportunities to contribute to school life and the wider community and students take up these opportunities with great enthusiasm, making positive and useful strides forward in their own personal development and helping others on the way. The school council is used effectively, particularly by the older students. The younger students do not find this such a productive way of getting involved. Students have a clear understanding of what it means to be healthy and how to stay safe. Despite difficulties with the onsite food provision, they make the best of the situation. The school, students, parents and carers would all like better food provision onsite and clear plans are in place to improve this situation.

Students understand clearly what is right and wrong and take responsibility for their own actions. They conduct themselves in lessons and around the school with great maturity. The sixth form students are clear role models in the school. Students are clear thinkers and show a great awareness of the plight of others as well as an empathy with and understanding of the points of view and beliefs of others. It is this great awareness that ensures students are considerate and confident, and that they are willing to contribute so much to the community. There are no significant differences in outcomes for any groups in the school, including boarders and the students who join the school in the sixth form.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The teaching in the school at its best allows students to explore ideas and is not restricted by an exam syllabus. These lessons use the content to carry ideas about how students learn how to learn, and develop high-level questioning by students that encourages further enquiry. In all lessons, the relationships between students and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

adults are very positive and friendly, and reflect a high level of mutual respect. The use of marking and target setting are not as effective as they could be in motivating and giving students a focus to further improvements. On occasions opportunities are missed to further develop students’ higher order thinking skills. Assessment is being developed further and where it is used well, is proving a useful tool in targeting intervention and motivating learners. Lessons observed demonstrated how teachers can effectively plan a wide range of opportunities to engage learners in the processes of learning. The pace of lessons is reduced by too much teacher talk at times. Students commented that this was more evident in some subjects but where they had real hands-on, active learning they enjoyed it more, found they learned more and learning was more challenging. This was because they often had to think more for themselves about ‘the answers’ or think more about how to approach the questions.

The curriculum meets the needs of students very well, and most continue on into the sixth form and then on to university to a wide range of courses. The IB has expanded the opportunities for students who want to take a less traditional but no less rigorous route to further study, offering a broader base of study post-16. The school enhances curriculum opportunities well with visits that give inspiration to study, such as the geography trip to Iceland. The sport and house activities also add a great deal to the school provision, with the boarders also benefiting from a wide range of activities in the evening.

Students are very well supported by a team of staff that have their best interests at heart. The boarding team staff, associate staff, teachers and leaders all work hard to ensure that systems in the school provide appropriate support services for all students. The energy and passion that staff give to the school is part of the school ethos and ensures that the community feel is ever-present.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school is highly successful in ensuring students are successful but is not complacent about the high standards achieved, the diversity of the curriculum or any other aspect within the school, and is looking forward to the next stages of development with clear strategies and enthusiasm. Leaders, and particularly middle leaders, are increasingly developing a wider understanding of how they can enhance teaching still further. They are using tracking information with greater sophistication and are increasingly analytical about practice.

The school recognises the need to engage parents and carers still further, and

governors are also clear about the need to involve parents and carers other stakeholders in its work. Safeguarding procedures are good and meet the current government requirements but the school is working to improve them still further. There is a clear understanding of the need to ensure that the school promotes equality of opportunities. This is done very well. One example of how welcoming and open the school is comes from the students who join the school in the sixth form. This group perform equally as well as the other students and very much feel a part of the school by the time they leave at the end of Year 13.

The school has now gained a second specialism so that it has both humanities and science status. The impact of the specialism on the school and the local community, including the local authority, is very powerful. For example, there are very strong links with the primary schools, with teachers going in to support the specialist areas. Students, too, work in primary schools, teaching areas like French, chess, sports and other areas of the specialism. The school also has international partnerships in Ireland, France, Germany, Spain, Poland, Belgium, Norway, Iceland, Sri Lanka, South Africa and China. A wind turbine has also been built for a science partnership school in South Africa.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The school is meticulous in its organisation and management of the sixth form. This enables students to attain at the very highest levels. The personal development of students is very strong and enables the school to produce successful young men. This is recognised by the very large number who progress into the most prestigious universities and the wide range of courses students go on to study at higher levels. Students are proud of their school and their achievements but this is expressed in an understated way, allowing their early wisdom to show through.

Students appreciate the fact that the curriculum offer has increased recently to

include the IB and so offers them a very wide range of choice. It is now excellent. All feel that they can find a range of subjects that matches their interests and attributes as well as offering them progression into areas they want to study further.

Students have very high aspirations, want to achieve well and accept the challenge of the very high expectations that are part of the school’s ethos. They have drive and determination and great capacity to learn. Students become even better learners and work very effectively independently. Students are very mature; they respect each other and all visitors. They take responsibility for others, including the younger ones, and take on a very wide range of roles both inside the school and the local community.

The support that the students are offered is thorough and perceptive, and ensures that all are supported and challenged to achieve their potential. Everyone spoken to felt that there was a wide range of academic and pastoral staff they could go to for help, and the chaplain was seen as a neutral person who offered significant support. Leadership and management are excellent. Almost all students in the school continue into the sixth form and about another 25 join them each year. They are quickly assimilated into the life of the sixth form and feel they are completely integrated.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Boarding provision

The overall quality of the boarding provision at the school is good and there are areas which are outstanding. Boarders enjoy their experience of boarding and feel safe and well supported. Although a small group in terms of the school’s size, boarders retain a high profile within the school. There is a strong sense of community among boarders, who say, ‘It feels like a family within boarding.’ The school’s management structure, in which members of the school’s leadership team directly oversee and monitor boarding, contributes effectively to the promotion of boarders’ welfare. Improvements have been made to the administration of prescribed medication and the ways in which boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. Both were recommendations from the last inspection.

The boarders’ health needs at the school are well met. Healthy eating is encouraged and there are varied opportunities for physical activity in boarding time. There is good first aid and medical care provided by the two boarding matrons who, between them, are on duty from 7.30am to 9.00pm in the boarding houses. There are effective links with the school nurse and the local doctors’ surgery. Sound procedures are in place for the administration of medication and clear records are maintained regarding any medication or first aid administered to boarders.

Both boarding houses eat meals together, except for breakfast. Mealtimes are sociable, informal occasions with staff and boarders eating together. The quality of the food provided is a concern among boarders, with most dissatisfaction being expressed about the evening meal which does not consistently meet expectations. The school has worked hard with the catering company to resolve these issues. There have been recent improvements and a permanent evening chef has been recruited.

The standard of behaviour among boarders is generally very good. Bullying rarely takes place. Boarders are confident about reporting issues to staff and say that they are quickly and effectively dealt with. Boarders are involved in reviewing and agreeing the rewards and punishments used in both boarding houses, which ensures that they are fully signed-up to the behaviour code. Records are appropriately maintained of any punishments given and the reasons why.

Robust child protection procedures are in place and there are effective links with outside agencies. Good levels of training are provided for all staff in child protection and they are aware of the reporting procedures. Improvements have been made to the staff recruitment arrangements but procedures regarding the appointment of 'gap' students are not fully complied with.

Health and safety matters within the boarding houses are taken seriously. Fire drills take place at least once a term in boarding time and there are annual checks of the portable electrical appliances in the houses. Written risk assessments are undertaken for trips that take place during the school day but not consistently for those that take place in boarding time, such as trips to the cinema or bowling.

There is an excellent range of activities provided for boarders and a number say that this is an aspect of boarding that they really enjoy. Clubs take place after school and in the evening and are run by staff. These include activities such as touch rugby, softball and cricket in the summer and a film club, table tennis, swimming and a 'jamming' workshop in winter. Boarding staff run the clubs for boarders and participate enthusiastically in the activities involving boarders with a range of abilities. House staff, assistants and tutors all teach at the school and so there are strong links with the rest of the teaching staff.

The boarders receive outstanding levels of personal support from a range of school staff and there is also independent counselling available if required. Relationships are strong within the boarding community and with the rest of the school. There is regular contact with parents and carers, including social events such as the summer barbeque, which foster positive relationships with families. Younger boarders talk positively about the mentoring scheme which ensures that new boarders have an older boarder to talk to. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Boarders are known well and any specific needs are well supported.

Boarders have excellent opportunities to put forward their views and to influence the operation of boarding. Meetings are held and views are sought regarding a range of areas such as the food, the decoration and furnishing of the boarding houses as well as making decisions regarding the reward and punishment system. As a result,

boarders feel that they can talk to staff and that their views are listened to.

Boarding accommodation is of a good standard and all boarders have their own room from Year 9 upwards. There is a rolling programme to replace bedroom furniture which is nearly complete as well as a programme of more general redecoration of the houses.

There is strong and effective leadership of boarding. This is strengthened by the 'Boarding Strategy Group' which meets to discuss and to develop boarding within the school. There is regular monitoring of records within the boarding houses and a commitment to ensuring that there are sound working practices in place. Boarding staff benefit from a comprehensive handbook which outlines boarding policies and practice. There are good staffing levels in the boarding houses and there is a strong commitment to provide training to staff in boarding practice.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- Ensure that before the appointment of 'gap' students all of the required reference checks are carried out as for any other member of staff recruited to work at the school. (NMS 38.4)

- Ensure that written risk assessments are undertaken for outings and trips in boarding time. (NMS 47.9)

This is the grade for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	2
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Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers generally have a very positive view of the school and most agree that the overall experience of their child is positive. They expressed concerns that communications are not always effective and this supports the school's own views. Parents and carers are also concerned that the food provision in the school does not meet an expected standard and are supportive of the plans to remedy the situation.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Reading School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 236 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 885 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	135	57	84	36	8	3	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	109	46	111	47	8	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	126	53	90	38	15	6	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	147	62	74	31	11	5	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	125	53	92	39	5	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	83	35	97	41	41	17	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	19	121	51	51	22	10	4
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	109	46	85	36	15	6	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	128	54	81	34	15	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	75	32	106	45	25	11	9	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	65	28	96	41	31	13	13	6
The school is led and managed effectively	103	44	82	35	27	11	6	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	147	62	73	31	13	6	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Reading School, Reading, RG1 5LW

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave to me and the inspection team when we visited your school. I was most impressed with your conduct. It was extremely helpful to us to see your work, and to talk to you around the school and in lessons. Your honest and straightforward answers made a big contribution to the overall inspection.

We think your school is outstanding. The staff care a great deal about you and your future. They work very hard to ensure you have a wide range of opportunities to develop further understanding, skills and interests. You have very good and productive relationships with the teachers and associate staff in the school as well as in the boarding houses. This adds to the sense of community you have and helps to make lessons more enjoyable. You reach very high standards in your learning but you also have a clear appreciation of the wider world. We were very impressed by the work undertaken in the other local schools and how this brings a wider sense of community cohesion.

The teaching in the school is good and some is really inspirational. You have a role to play in improving the teaching still further by understanding clearly what your personal short-term targets are within subjects so you can work in a more focused way – not just work harder. We also want you to have more opportunities to develop your higher order thinking skills and to apply your thinking and learning in a range of different contexts. The school already provides an outstanding curriculum and we have asked the school to fully embed such initiatives as the International Baccalaureate to ensure you have pathways that suit your needs now and in the future. The governing body is aware of the need to take more account of students, parents and carers views and for the school to ensure all of the standards for boarding provision are met

I hope you continue to enjoy your learning. I wish you all the very best for the future and feel sure you will be the best you can be, in all that you do.

Yours sincerely
Paul Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

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