

Inspection of Reading School

Erleigh Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5LW

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Ashley Robson. This school is part of the Reading School trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Bob Kenwick.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Reading School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged Reading School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school inspires pupils to be the best versions of themselves. Impressively high aspirations for academic excellence are matched by those for pupils' holistic development. Pupils rise consistently to meet and exceed these expectations, achieving very well academically by the time they leave the school. Those who join the school in the sixth form do equally well. Just as importantly, pupils develop into kind and thoughtful young people who are keen to make their mark on the world.

The school's work focuses clearly on developing people of character. The Floreat programme gives pupils deliberately planned opportunities to learn deeply about relationships, resilience and leadership. The effectiveness of this work is constantly evident, through how pupils interact with each other, respond to challenges and lead aspects such as house events and a broad range of clubs and activities. They extend this work successfully beyond their own school community, such as through engaging pupils from local primary schools in the 'Future Stories' programme.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently positive. Their enthusiastic engagement with learning matures into determined commitment to their studies. They are equally committed to the broad range of enrichment activities provided by the 'electives' curriculum, which all pupils benefit from.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Highly effective leadership has ensured that standards have been sustained and improved, both in the school and boarding provision, since the school was last inspected. A determination to provide the absolute best for pupils and to contribute to the wider community are abundantly clear in the collective work of trustees, leaders and staff. A sense of pride and moral purpose pervades the school.

Pupils experience a carefully crafted and innovative curriculum, reflecting high aspirations for their academic and personal development. Right from the start, pupils study a range of subjects that extends way beyond national curriculum and English Baccalaureate subjects. This gives pupils a broad and deep foundation on which to build subsequent learning and develop wider skills and talents. Teachers are experts in their field. Lessons are planned precisely, matching what pupils need to learn and when, and stretching beyond national curriculum and exam specification requirements. Additional support, particularly in the sixth form, is highly effective in ensuring that pupils keep up with the fast-paced curriculum.

Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is evident throughout. In lessons, they listen actively to each other, developing their collective thinking. Their commitment to working hard and bettering themselves is reflected in the excellent standards they achieve in external examinations at the end of Year 11 and 13. Equally, it is evident in their mature, respectful and thoughtful contributions to the wider life of their school.

Adults know pupils extremely well. They actively identify any factors, such as social disadvantage, that have the potential to prevent pupils from thriving. They address these factors subtly, such as through the well-planned electives programme that all pupils participate in. This deliberate set of rich and diverse experiences raises pupils' aspirations and broadens their horizons far beyond their own context or social background. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported similarly well. Considerate work with families ensures that pupils' needs are met while sustaining access to a broad curriculum. As a result, additional needs are not a barrier to pupils' success and they achieve very well.

Pupils are fluent readers on arrival. Nevertheless, literacy, oracy and reading are a constant focus. Subject-specific technical language is an integral part of learning in lessons, becoming more sophisticated as pupils move through the school and into the sixth form. The library is a warm and welcoming hub, where pupils develop great lifelong reading and study habits. Enrichment activities, such as debating club, develop pupils' confidence in expressing their knowledge and views. As a result, pupils become highly articulate and eloquent.

Character development is an exceptionally valued and valuable aspect of the school's work. Staff are determined for pupils to have a broad set of experiences to help them to find their way in the world. An effective programme of careers information, education, advice and guidance helps pupils understand the full range of opportunities available to them when they leave the school. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and the Floreat character development programme are pivotal in bringing leaders' mantra of 'creating good people' to life. These provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to develop resilience, confidence and an understanding of leadership. Pupils apply this learning successfully by willingly and dutifully taking on roles of responsibility, such as house captains, prefects and leaders of various enrichment groups.

Inclusion is a way of life at Reading School. The air of acceptance, kindness and respect is tangible. Those who join the school at the start of Year 12 are welcomed warmly and settle quickly into the life of the school. Pupils describe an absence of malice or spite in their interactions with each other. They are proud of how they 'check' each other if someone behaves in a way that they do not think is OK, helping each other to learn from their occasional mistakes. Their time at Reading School enables them to flourish.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136449
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10256328
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,139
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	383
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Bob Kenwick
Headteacher	Ashley Robson
Website	www.reading-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Reading School is an average-sized selective boys day and boarding school. The predecessor school opened almost 900 years ago and converted to academy status in February 2011.
- The school is owned and operated by Reading School, which is a single academy trust. The board of trustees acts as the board of governors.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school is currently providing education to a small group of Ukrainian refugees, by agreement with the local authority. These pupils, two of whom are

female, are subject to the same rules and routines as pupils enrolled at the school.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the school's boarding provision.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and representatives of the board of trustees to discuss standards in the school.
- Deep dives were carried out in English, mathematics, science, languages, geography and drama. For each of these deep dives, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors gathered wider evidence about the quality of education, including through discussions with the special educational needs coordinator and with senior leaders who are responsible for the broader curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record, talked to staff and pupils and looked at records of safeguarding training and concerns, in order to consider the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors gathered further evidence about pupils' behaviour, attitudes and personal development, including in the sixth form, and about the effectiveness of leadership and management. They did this through meeting with relevant staff and pupils and looking at documents provided on the school website and by school staff.
- The inspection team spoke to groups of pupils, and took account of survey responses from pupils, staff, and parents and carers via Ofsted's online questionnaires and the Ofsted Parent View survey.

Inspection team

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His Majesty's Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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