

CRANLEIGH ●●

Horseshoe Lane, Cranleigh, Surrey GU6 8QQ

Website cranleigh.org

Head Martin Reader, since 2014; previously head of Wellington School, Taunton

Pupils 696. Day: 110 boys, 77 girls; boarding: 298 boys, 211 girls

Ages 13–18 Term Fees Day: £11,725; boarding: £14,240

Bursaries 35% of pupils, up to 100%

Alumni Historian Andrew Roberts, actress Julia Ormond, cricketer Ollie Pope

Bonds forged here last for life: a parent who himself attended Cranleigh tells us that 'most of my good friends are OCs'.

Nevertheless, he was drawn to the co-ed establishment not just because of his time here, but also because 'its greatest strength is nurturing all-round decent, principled and well-mannered young adults, at the same time providing a first-class academic education'.

Or as another says, it enables its charges to 'exceed all their expectations'. Set in 280 acres of green fields in a rural corner of Surrey, Cranleigh's site is undeniably attractive – it was even chosen as a location for *The Crown* – and with its outstanding facilities including a golf course, an equestrian centre and numerous pitches, it fields 29 brilliantly-coached teams a weekend in the major sports, while always offering opportunities to represent the school in lesser-known games. Off the pitch, Cranleigh hosts 70 concerts each year and last year the drama department staged both *Shakespeare in Love* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Not that the classroom takes a back seat, with an impressive 85 per cent of pupils achieving A*–B at A-level last year. One parent tells us the pastoral care is 'truly exemplary' and that head Martin Reader's regime is 'all about kindness and happiness' (another parent confirming these are 'two qualities he displays himself'). So it's little surprise that its 'caring and polite' youngsters leave for such universities as Exeter, York and Bristol 'equipped to pursue their potential and make a contribution to the world'.

D'OVERBROECK'S ●●

Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7PL

Website doverbroecks.com

Head Patrick Horne, since 2022; previously principal at The British International School Abu Dhabi

Pupils 740. Day: 235 boys, 196 girls; boarding: 135 boys, 174 girls

Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £9,515; boarding: £17,255

Bursaries 5% of pupils, up to 100%

Alumni Singer Will Young, actor Rupert Friend, political activist Dia Chakravarty

Founded in 1977, this place started life as a Sixth Form college and still concentrates most on the top two years, who comprise the bulk of the community. (It recently built them self-catering accommodation, as a stepping-stone to university life-style.) The school also welcomes more than 40 nationalities, who are encouraged to share cultures through events such as the annual International Arts Festival's big performance, which oscillates between musicals and straight plays. The newly-opened arts centre hosts pursuits ranging from textiles to photography and 3D techniques. Tennis stars are supported by a sixth-form academy, while the sports scholars certainly have range: one, who represented Team GB in gymnastics, has recently signed up with Cirque du Soleil. 'All types of children thrive in the d'Overbroeck's environment,' says a parent whose daughter's confidence has shot 'through the roof' since joining.

**DOWNE HOUSE ●**

Thatcham, Berkshire RG18 9JF

Website downehouse.net

Head Emma McKendrick, since 1997; previously head of Royal High School Bath

Pupils 551 girls: 32 day, 519 boarding

Ages 11–18 Term Fees Day: £11,840; boarding: £15,920

Bursaries 6% of pupils, up to 100%

Alumni Broadcaster and author Clare Balding, civil engineer Rachel Skinner, actress Geraldine James

Downe House concentrates on preparing its children for the outside world, as evidenced by its new Global Internship programme, which invites pupils to apply for places in a vast array of industries

– and countries. (Think a taste of research in Hong Kong, sampling asset-management in Germany, or a new law-elective that gives first-hand experience of jurisprudence.)

But there are plenty of opportunities actually on offer at school, too. Aspiring journalists can try their hand on a range of school publications that cover everything from fashion and literature to STEM, while eager sportswomen can become expert bowlers under the watchful eye of Tash Bott, the cricket-mad PE teacher. The drama department usually has a production on the boil; and the house plays allow all students to participate, whether as actors, producers, directors or designers. Composer-in-residence Bob Chilcott works closely with musical scholars, and brilliant new maths and music centres are in the works. All of this is led by the long-time and well-loved head, nicknamed 'Kenny', who famously knows all the girls by name – and according to one lucky recipient, even hands out bouquets on people's birthdays. 'She knows what is going on at the school and is liked and respected by parents, staff and especially by the girls,' says one parent. 'My daughters were always amazed at how much she seemed to know about them and how they were doing.'

