

**Great for forward thinking**

**Bedales**

Located in a pretty Hampshire village, Bedales aims to develop "inquisitive thinkers with a love of learning who cherish independent thought". It has always had a reputation for being ahead of the curve and launched its Bedales Assessed Courses (BACs), which are recognised by UCAS, more than ten years ago. BAC options include global awareness, philosophy, religion and ethics, outdoor work, digital game design, theatre studies and sports science, and pupils study them alongside core GCSEs and IGCSEs in years 10 and 11. New this year is a sixth form course called Living with the Land, where students will construct buildings with natural materials, cook with seasonal ingredients and try their hands at blacksmithing, animal husbandry and managing hedgerows. After talking to scientists and conducting research on teenagers' sleep patterns, the school will start the formal working day an hour later from this month (September), with tutor time at 9.25am and lessons at 9.45am.

[bedales.org.uk](http://bedales.org.uk)

**Other contenders:**

*Berkhamsted School*  
*Dulwich College*



Bedales



Downe House



Mayfield School

**Great for equestrian pursuits**

**Mayfield School**

This girls' school in East Sussex is a big name on the equestrian circuit. Riders regularly win team and individual gold and silver medals for show jumping, dressage and eventing at county and national competitions. Around half of the pupils are boarders and quite a few bring their own horses and ponies along to board with them – each has its own stable in the on-site equestrian centre. In addition to regular training with experienced staff, elite riders take part in coaching sessions with top level visiting instructors. Girls don't need their own mount to join in with the riding at Mayfield – the school has a loan scheme.

[mayfieldgirls.org](http://mayfieldgirls.org)

**Other contenders:**

*Stonar School*  
*Heathfield School*

**Great for outdoor pursuits**

**Gordonstoun**

Cold baths and arduous cross-country runs may make for great drama (as seen in *The Crown*) but they're definitely a thing of the past at this famous Scottish boarding school. Getting out into the rugged Highland landscape is still integral to the curriculum but today's pupils can look forward to comfortable beds and warm showers after a day in the elements. Gordonstoun's founder, educationalist Kurt Hahn, believed that challenge, service and internationalism were just as important as academics; his ethos is summed up by the school's motto, *Plus est en vous* ("More is in you"). All pupils are trained in expedition skills and sailing. The Duke of Edinburgh was inspired to create his Award scheme by his education at Gordonstoun and the Outward Bound Trust also has its roots here.

[gordonstoun.org.uk](http://gordonstoun.org.uk)

**Other contenders:**

*St Leonards, St Andrews, Fife*  
*Windermere School*

**Great for global outlook**

**Downe House**

For more than 25 years year 8 pupils at all girls' Downe House have had the opportunity to spend a term at the school's campus in France, having lessons in French, going on expeditions and doing charitable work in the local community. The school's Global Schools' Exchange Programme gives older pupils the chance to study and live abroad in 16 partner schools across six continents. Up to 60 girls in years 10 and 12 apply for 32 places each year and the lucky ones spend up to eight weeks studying at a partner school overseas – everywhere from Argentina to New Zealand. This Berkshire school, led by hugely experienced head Emma McKendrick, also runs staff global exchanges and global internships, asks girls to act as global ambassadors and holds international days to showcase the culture, beliefs and history of countries around the world.

[downehouse.net](http://downehouse.net)

**Other contenders:**

*Hampton Court House*  
*UWC Atlantic College*

**Great for music**

**Malvern College**

Founded in 1865, Malvern College sits in 250 acres at the foot of the Malvern Hills. It's an inspiring area, closely associated with Edward Elgar and one of the world's oldest music festivals, the Three Choirs Festival. In 2020, thanks to an anonymous benefactor, it became an "all Steinway" school. Every one of its 37 pianos, not only those in the college's historic Music School but also those in boarding houses, was replaced by a new Steinway. All Malvern's musicians will now be taught on or accompanied by a Steinway and the instruments mean the school can be a venue for leading soloists to perform and host masterclasses. Famous Old Malverians include author CS Lewis, occultist Aleister Crowley, actor Denholm Elliott, Monty Don, Jeremy Paxman and Professor Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer for England.

[malverncollege.org.uk](http://malverncollege.org.uk)

**Other contenders:**

*The King's School, Canterbury*  
*Abingdon School*