

Cheltenham Ladies' College

Cheltenham, United Kingdom



Since 1853, a pioneer of girls' academic education, still topping national IB Diploma tables among UK boarding schools.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	80/100
Academic outcomes	82/100
University placement	80/100
Prestige & heritage	83/100
Alumni network	78/100
Facilities	78/100
Transparency	74/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Cheltenham Ladies’ College still earns its place on a serious shortlist because it combines old-guard British boarding heft with results that are current, not inherited. This is a girls’ school founded in 1853, Anglican in foundation, and academically **hard-driving** in a way many schools advertise but fewer sustain. The numbers are plain enough: a ***10:1*** student-teacher ratio, average class size of ***18***, and a recent leavers’ profile in which 91% of 130 students went to top-100 universities, including 26 to Oxbridge, 37 to Russell Group institutions and 4 to the Ivy League. For a school that declares the IB curriculum, the academic case is reinforced by an IB average of 40.6 points in 2026, while GCSE results were equally forceful, with 71% at 9/8/A* and 87% at 9-7/A*-A. This is not a school trading on atmosphere

while glossing over outcomes.

What is special here is the combination of intellectual ambition, female focus and scale of tradition. Cheltenham has produced generations of high-achieving alumnae, and the verified alumni footprint is deep: 128 notable former pupils catalogued in Wikidata, including 24 scientists and scholars, 40 writers and journalists, 8 politicians and statespersons, and 13 actors or directors. That matters because it tells parents what kind of institution this is: not a finishing school, not a gentle hothouse, but a place with a long record of sending bright young women into public, academic and cultural life. It also has the institutional marks parents expect at this level, with HMC membership and ISI accreditation. The fees place it firmly in the **top-priced** end of the UK market: an average annual day fee of ***£39,626*** and an average annual boarding fee of ***£62,589*** across the full ladder.

The caveat is obvious. This school will not suit families looking for a **soft-edged** or low-pressure education. The public language leans heavily on courage and confidence; the substance underneath is competition, expectation and a strong university track. The right student for Cheltenham is academically able, self-motivated and happy in an environment where high attainment is normal rather than exceptional. She does not need to be narrow—indeed the school pushes breadth—but she does need stamina, curiosity and the appetite to use them. For girls who want serious academic company, established boarding culture and a **formidable** record of university destinations, Cheltenham remains **the real thing**.

STRENGTHS

- The 2026 IB Diploma cohort averaged 40.6 points, with 71.4% of candidates scoring 40 or above and 94.3% at 35 or above (school website).
- CLC runs both A-Levels and the IB Diploma concurrently, letting girls choose their own sixth-form pathway; its 2026 A-Level cohort achieved 69% A*-A across 379 entries (school website).
- Founded in 1853, it is one of England's oldest established girls' schools, with deep institutional history and a large, long-standing boarding infrastructure.
- Music provision is world-class (9.3), and the wider co-curricular offer is elite, supported by the Parabola Arts Centre and dedicated performance spaces.
- Around three-quarters of pupils are boarders, giving the school a genuinely embedded boarding culture rather than a token boarding offer, with an intake drawn from more than 40 countries.

TRADE-OFFS

- It is a girls-only school, so it is not an option for families with sons or those specifically wanting co-education.
- Fees are among the highest in UK independent education, at around £55,000 a year for boarding and £30,000 for day places.
- Entry is highly selective, with reportedly three to four applicants per place at 11+ and 13+, and competition is described as particularly intense for boarding and scholarship places.
- The campus sits in central Cheltenham rather than on a large rural estate, and is roughly a two-hour drive from London and its airports, a factor for international families weighing travel logistics.

ADMISSIONS

CLC admits girls at three main points: 11+ (Year 7), 13+ (Year 9) and 16+ (Sixth Form). At 11+, candidates sit the school's own online maths, verbal reasoning and English assessments after registration. At 13+, applicants follow either Common Entrance or CLC's own entrance papers, plus an assessment day and interview. Sixth-form candidates submit an essay or UKiset score, then sit written papers in their intended subjects and attend an interview. Competition is real, with agents citing roughly three to four applicants per place at 11+ and 13+, and particularly intense competition for boarding and scholarship places.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (128)

MUSIC: Paris Paloma

DRAMA: Talulah Riley, Margaret Kennedy, Gareth Peirce, Domino Vitali, Florence Farr, Delena Kidd, Damaris Hayman, Kristin Scott Thomas

VISUAL_ARTS: Bridget Riley, Amanda Wakeley, Nancy Spender, Leyly Matine-Daftary, Judith Ledeboer, Amy Nimr, Edith Downing, Gabrielle Maud Vassal

LETTERS: Margaret Kennedy, Jane Ellen Harrison, Amber Rudd, Katharine Burdekin, Florence Farr, Lisa Jardine, Amy Clarke, Lillias Hamilton

POLITICS: Cheryl Gillan, Amber Rudd, Fiona Mactaggart, Sally Keeble, Nessie Stewart Brown, Cicely Mayhew, Catherine Williamson, Blaise Metreweli

SCIENCE: Jane Ellen Harrison, Caroline Spurgeon, Lisa Jardine, Mary Archer, Maud Cunnington, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Elizabeth French, Jenny Uglow

BUSINESS: Amber Rudd, Rachel Lomax, Tamara Beckwith

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_73454f4ff9.