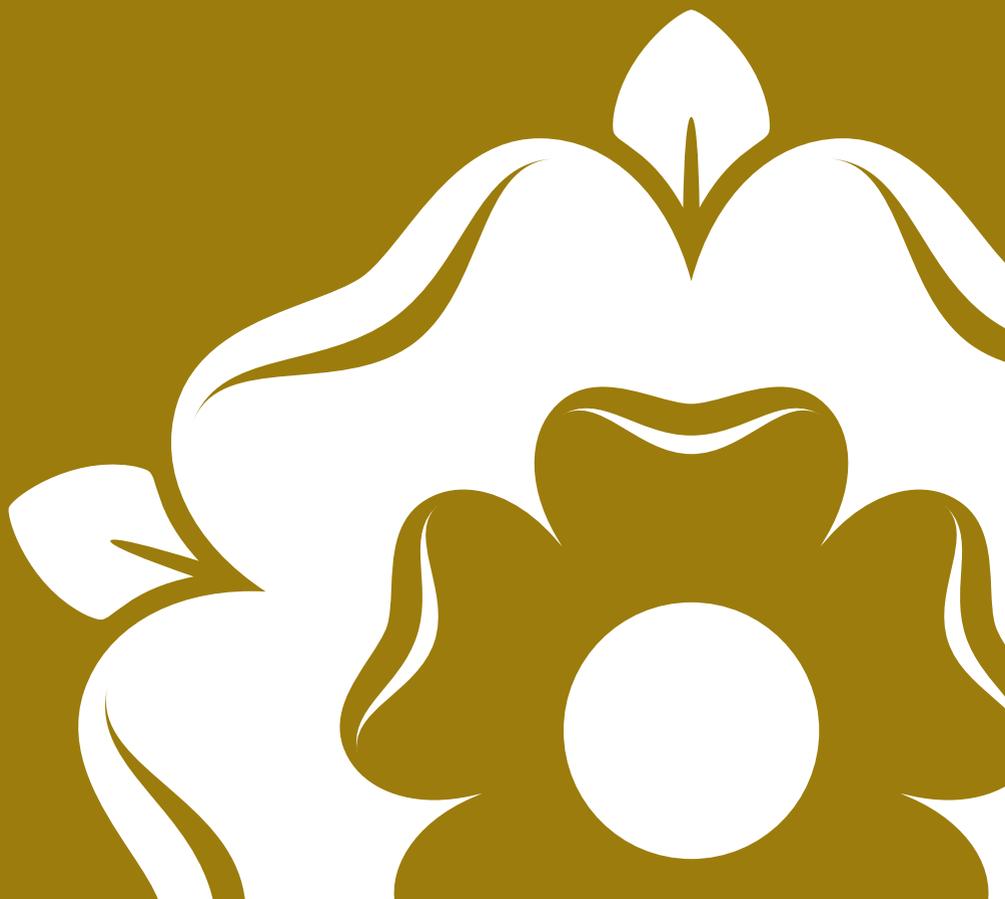




GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE REVIEW 2015



HEADMASTER

Since 2008, Mr Martin Boden MA (mid 40s), a French and German graduate of Jesus College Cambridge. After his PGCE he was invited back to teach at his old school, Bolton School, progressing from there to head of German at Cheadle Hulme School, then head of modern languages at Bradford Grammar, from which he came to King Edward's as director of studies. Appointed as an exceptionally young head, he has brought the school a stability and capacity for development with his clear vision and strong sense of ethos, which have been the key to both pastoral care and hence academic success. In his time the academic standard has become even stronger, due, according to Mr Boden and to the ISI inspectorate, to unrivalled outstanding pastoral care underpinning really good teaching. Parents definitely agree. Meanwhile, the sporting reputation of the school remains undiminished, whilst art, drama and music have flourished under his regime.

Dedicated to the grammar school tradition of accessibility, he has both kept the fees unusually low 'by lots of good housekeeping' and encouraged entry from bright pupils from less advantaged families through bursary provision. He is insistent that though the school is selective, it is not super-selective, despite the fact that its results put it in the super-selective league. As director of studies, he masterminded the now well-established

two-week timetable with hour long lessons, giving an 80 minute lunch break for an overwhelming number of activities and staggered access to the fantastic new dining facilities. Next on his wish list is a proper performing arts centre. He cites concert and cinema going as the only recreational activity he still manages to fit into a life as headmaster and father of two small children currently entrusted to the nursery and pre-prep at King Edward's. Married to head of geography, Jane.

ACADEMIC MATTERS

This is a seriously academic school. In 2015, 25 per cent A* and 68 per cent A*/A grades at A level, with astronomical results in maths, further maths and English literature. All three sciences, Latin and photography are pretty distinguished as well – so they certainly excel in humanities as well as science.

At GCSE in 2015, the A*/A per cent was down to 73 per cent (from 2014's 82 per cent) but A* was still high at 45 per cent in a year when examiners were nationally very sparing with their stars. Some stunning results in maths, sciences, English language and literature and also foreign languages, with Greek and Latin surpassing the excellent French, German and Spanish. One parent commented that Mandarin had been considered but had not materialised.

As well as the strong, sympathetic pastoral back-up to stimulating teaching,

there is an all-embracing and friendly SEN department picking up quickly on children needing support or help. A three-strong team covers the senior and junior schools with a part-timer in the pre-prep. Lots of monitoring done via standardized tests, at crucial stages and when problems crop up so potential issues are picked up early. Appropriate supportive help, either one-to-one or in small groups. They are expert in most common areas of difficulty and have good liaison with staff and exam officers as well as providing encouragement and sympathetic back-up.

Parents comment that lessons seem to be really enjoyable and pupils are not overburdened with homework. Plenty of tests in class, but they take them in their stride. The prevailing atmosphere is that while academic study is interesting, serious and needs effort, it is also exciting and even fun.

GAMES, OPTIONS, THE ARTS

Sport is as strong as ever. Oodles of teams, particularly in rugby, netball and girls' and boys' hockey, in fact, in just about everything except lacrosse. Sport is taken seriously with teams doing a pre-season sports training sessions before the autumn term to get off to a good start and a sports physio set up in the school medical centre, but the team practices in progress on our visit still looked a lot of fun. It seems to work, as teams in just about all sports reach national school final level, and there are individuals at national and international competition level.

Rugby and netball, which are outstanding, do a regular overseas tour, most recently

to South Africa. Smashing sports hall with teaching area, cricket nets and the usual indecipherable tube map of sports markings on the floor. Extensive playing fields at Bathampton, a very short minibus-ride away, and cricket practices get the benefit of Bath Cricket Club. (Everyone has a two-hour weekly games slot, so plenty of time for travel etc.) Huge all-purpose Astroturf and lots of tennis and netball courts on site. Using the University of Bath Olympic training swimming pool and athletics track seem a better option than building their own.

Arts and music are excellent and getting stronger. Drama has smashing GCSE results and thriving theatre groups, one of which took Jackie Kay's 'Takeaway' to Edinburgh, and were thrilled that the writer came to see it. Orchestra has a new link up with the Bath Philharmonia, doing joint concerts and workshops, and choirs have similar musical links with the abbey, since the original school was just up the road from it. The music we heard was of a high standard with bags of enthusiasm from pupils and from staff in other disciplines. The calendar shows a swathe of workshops, masterclasses and concerts. Contemporary music is encouraged by the school's resident composer and there's plenty of scope for enjoying film scores and more popular stuff. Sadly, take up of academic music at exam levels is very small, but drama and art are much bigger and super-successful. Drama currently has the use of a large well-equipped theatre in mid school and a smaller studio in the sixth form area. Music has lots of soundproof teaching and practice rooms, some curiously lined with what looks like sea blue formica,

but which is actually proper efficient soundproofing. There is plenty of space, but the proper performing arts centre on the school's wish list would clearly be a bonus.

Art and masses of heavy duty DT equipment occupy a separate building. Art is up above with a Swiss-looking balcony giving panoramic views of Bath's sweeping terraces. A level classes we visited were just getting down to some really thorough but fascinating drawing technique. DT looks very suitably industrial and up to date.

On the day of our visit the Socrates Club was absolutely packed with 50 or more pupils and staff eagerly debating the problems of migrants in Europe with real concern and some discernment. The knitting club, however, had no takers, though it had done well the previous year. The range of options is impressive, including the academic, such as the Battle of the Books club, as well as music, drama and masses of sports. CCF, D of E. Outdoor pursuits such as Ten Tors can be taken for granted, and there are both curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for trips local and further afield, including prestigious ones like the South Africa tour.

BACKGROUND AND ATMOSPHERE

This was one of boy King Edward VI's many original grammar schools, as the lovely little roundel coloured glass window in the junior school proclaims. It was originally in a small neo-classical building in Broad Street just up from the abbey, and moved up to this rural-feeling

site in the 1960s. The elegant Nethersole house on which the school is centred still gives rather old-fashioned room to RE, philosophy, history and classics, plus SEN and the headmaster's office with accompanying meeting and admin space. Flowing along the hillside, the hotch-potch of undistinguished purpose-built facilities benefit from the sweeping grassy slopes and mature trees. B Block, a new stylish and high tech building, has labs (separate ones for practicals and ordinary teaching) and other subject areas.

The site has been transformed into an organic whole by the brilliant addition of the new Wessex Building, opened by the Earl of Wessex in summer 2015. The attractive dining suite with café-style verandas overlooking the central all weather pitch links the sporting and academic areas. Pupils seemed to be enjoying the food, with a choice of hot meals, salads or sandwiches. The dining room overlooks a sunny (on our visit) terrace with fountains, and milling-about and sitting areas including a miniature Greek theatre. The top floor has flexible lecture come co-curricular and entertainment facilities, while the basement, cunningly dug out of the hillside, houses one of the very best school libraries.

Manned as long as the school is open, it offers cleverly placed reading, discussion and research areas, even a corner with whiteboard walls for teaching/ conferencing. It was hearteningly full of older pupils busy working, reading or having serious-looking discussions – though this may have been partly due to the sixth form being temporarily out of its quarters while last minute refurbishments

there were being completed, due for occupation the next day. Even so, it seemed a good demonstration of genuinely independent work, with help at hand when necessary. The stray new boy, clearly confused about where he should be, was sympathetically directed to the right class.

The refurbished sixth form centre was near enough completion to be inspected and has spacious study and IT areas as well as a modern spruced up social area complete with coffee shop. The school day runs from 8.40am registration until 4.00pm, but there is a breakfast club from 8.00am and the library is open for study etc until 6.00pm. Definitely a day school feel, with main activities at lunchtime, though there are masses of clubs and team practices after school and matches on Saturday, with major performances and rehearsals in the evening.

Neat uniform with navy blazers, grey trousers/skirts (or Lindsey Tartan for younger girls) and a particularly smart V-necked jumper with the KES Tudor Rose on it. Girls, in particular, like to wear the stylish games uniform (navy with dark red and white) in the afternoons if they can get away with it (only worn for sport not for classes, say the staff). Sixth form boys in smart suits (like young estate agents), though the girls' interpretation of suit-equivalent clothes seems rather more casual, and parents would support tightening up here. The complete uniform list is formidable, but there is a good second-hand shop, now with a plentiful supply of games items (rather expensive new) after a short hiatus when suppliers changed.

PASTORAL CARE, WELL-BEING AND DISCIPLINE

The school rightly prides itself on its pastoral care. Bonding trips and activities for new groups in year 7 start a process of building a cohesive and supportive community in which pupils feel confident enough to take any concerns for themselves or others to staff.

Exceptionally good collaboration between academic and pastoral staff ensures that needs are identified and supported. In the lower school, this is delivered via heads of years who coordinate with the form teachers, who 'lay eyes on' pupils twice daily at morning and afternoon registration. Both get to know them really well as they stay with them as they move up through the years. In the sixth form, tutors supervise groups of about 15 pupils. Pupils were enthusiastic about the trust, sympathy and expertise of their teachers.

Part-time school chaplain doesn't push religion but is exceptionally supportive to church-going families and runs a prayer group. The school recognises the mix of faiths among pupils, describing itself as non-denominational. Parents comment that though some may have a healthy disrespect for formal religion, they still sing very enthusiastically in the abbey. Throughout the lunch hour we came across teachers chatting or in serious conference with pupils. Special care taken with university preparation, including a special Oxbridge and medicine applications help forum.

Though the head had to take a tough line when he started, the atmosphere now seems to be a happy combination of

academic and personal rigour underpinned by care and respect. Pastoral care was particularly commended by the ISI and the head's belief that care for pupils is absolutely key to academic achievement is central to the exceptionally close working relationship between head, pastoral and academic staff – no slipping through the net here.

Sixth formers are expected to be role models and mentors to the lower school: in the lower sixth they can try out being deputy prefect for three weeks before standing for election. Forty per cent of upper sixth then become prefects, with 10 or so senior prefects, from whom a head girl and boy are appointed. There is also a mentoring system targeting less confident pupils, including those in the junior and pre-prep, which both mentored and mentors value highly.

PUPILS AND PARENTS

Pupils seemed relaxed and pretty well organised. Some more open than others, but all appeared to have a sense of purpose and were polite and natural. The head likes to remind them that having all those opportunities does not make them better people. Parents, from all walks of life, include the very well-heeled but also lots who have to work hard to afford what one described as 'unbelievably good value'. Academically ambitious for their children 'but not at the expense of all the extras,' they support the school in all it does, by active fundraising for extras. In common with most co-ed schools, about 60 per cent boys.

Famous Old Edwardians range from Thomas de Quincy, The English Opium Eater to comedian and TV presenter

Bill Bailey, with more recent additions of actor Tom Payne, author Lawrence Norfolk and quite a panoply of distinguished academics and military men.

ENTRANCE

At 11, by passing an entrance exam in maths, English and verbal reasoning. Some 100 or so places are up for grabs. Half come from the junior school and take the same exam, though parents can be confident that the school would have been in discussion with them if a child were unlikely to pass it. Head says that the few children who 'would not cope' are gently steered elsewhere, and though thorough, the entry test is not unreasonably stringent. Since the whole ethos of the school is that pupils - whether super-confident or more fragile - 'absolutely flourish', it is clearly sensible that children unsuited to flourish in this supportive atmosphere are directed to an appropriate environment. Most of the other half come from local-ish primaries.

Some 25-30 external sixth form places are offered, on the strength of good GCSE passes (A*/A desirable for A level subjects), interview and references from their previous school. Sixth form entry tends to attract girls from local single sex schools.

EXIT

Most to unis of their choice, with about 10 annually to Oxbridge (nine in 2015) and lots to well-established mainstream courses as well as a sprinkling of drama and art. The school is exceptionally helpful to those few with unexpected results, helping to ensure they have a suitable offer by the end of results day.

MONEY MATTERS

Exceptionally good value, according to parents. Lots of trips, most are pretty inexpensive, but no pressure to take part in the more expensive ones and lots of pupils fundraise for these themselves. Approximately 15 per cent of pupils receive means-tested bursaries, total fees in exceptional cases; the head is very keen to encourage able but less affluent candidates to apply.

OUR VIEW

This is a school which achieves its exceptionally high standards by support and inspiration. 'Teachers are exceptional', one parent said, 'a real inspiration to our children'. The atmosphere is relaxed and constructive, which is probably why the results are so impressive. Parents say teachers have the knack of identifying an area where a pupil can shine and the confidence gained infuses everything else. Pupils accept that, in the few subjects they may not enjoy, effort is worthwhile. High standards are expected and achieved, but the achievement is grounded in confidence, trust and support rather than academic pressure. Though highly academic, certainly not an 'academic hothouse', but a school where even the process of getting into Oxford can be happy and relaxed. The synchronisation of information through careful co-operation between teaching and pastoral staff with the heads in the senior, junior and pre-prep sectors is truly impressive. Everything is directed towards the well-being of pupils. No wonder they enjoy their education and do so well in it.

“This is a school which achieves its exceptionally high standards by support and inspiration.”

KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL, BATH

JUNIOR SCHOOL AND PRE-PREP & NURSERY SCHOOL

HEAD TEACHER

Since 2008, Mr Greg Taylor, BA (Education, Exeter), who joined King Edward's from the George Ward Secondary School in Allington with experience of 'special' education. He progressed from head of PE, then maths to deputy and eventually to head of the junior school. He is also a serious sportsman, especially about football, which he played professionally from 14, and has four children.

Head of the pre-prep since 2008 is Ms Jayne Gilbert, whose teaching career before King Edward's was initially in the state sector before moving to a British International School in Penang, then returning to be deputy at Bedales pre-prep from which she was appointed to King Edward's.

Mr Taylor and Ms Gilbert share a refreshing accessibility. On our arrival, Mr Taylor was busy arranging tables in the sun so that the parents coming in later could enjoy an informal meeting with tea and cakes, while Ms Gilbert was about to join a group of parents for coffee and feedback in the pre-prep dining room.

ENTRANCE

Though it is possible to start in the nursery and go all the way through to sixth form, there is also entry at pre-prep level and into the junior school at 7. Both take about half from other local schools. It's good to get in early, as entry to

senior school is competitive, but the vast majority pass the entrance exam, having flourished in the junior system.

EXIT

Most progress to the senior school, whether they join at 3, 4 or 7. There is an entry exam to pass, but anyone who is really unlikely to cope will have been forewarned and advised about alternatives. There is lots of competition in Bath, so a few move elsewhere locally or away to boarding school.

OUR VIEW

The junior school nestles at the far end of the KES site surrounded by garden and wildflower meadows, giving masses of opportunity for ecological study. It is cunningly designed so that the class units, each with its storage, display and cloakroom area, feel rather like little houses in their own right, built in a staggered line to get the best of the sun and view. The school remained in the original King Edward's building in Broad Street until 1991, when a benefactor sponsored the construction of the new buildings. Behind the little street of classrooms is a unifying hall and library space on two levels, essentially a gallery running round an attractive school library. A few extra wings house the school hall, music department, labs and dining area.

The feel is definitely more like a very good state primary school rather than a traditional prep school. Masses of artwork

and displays everywhere – the school is constructed to encourage this, and the whole environment is both absolutely child friendly and encourages ecological awareness. Divided from the main school by a band of trees, the site, overlooking Bath's panorama, has a wildlife meadow, delightful wild pond and lots of wonderful stone blocks and trees for climbing. Adventure is encouraged, though carefully supervised. The latest project is the greenhouse, where children are growing their own veg – tomatoes from last year were still going when we visited - and doing wonderful experiments involving breeding and releasing butterflies into the wild. Specialist subject teachers, for languages (French from year 3, with German and Spanish from year 5), science (with a smashing, well-equipped lab), maths etc.

Parents comment that the key to education here is inclusion and encouragement rather than educational pushiness. 'Effort is rewarded as much as achievement and the school does not feel the need to get children to peak at junior level'. As in the senior school, the integration of pastoral care and academia is taken very seriously. New children are encouraged to support each other in a scheme which allocates different 'talk partners' each week. 'Working with everyone in turn, not just friends, creates cohesion,' one parent commented. 'They really value citizenship and social awareness. Friendships extend across year groups and classes and pupils won't stand for bullying or turn a blind eye to it'. SEN is integrated with the senior school department. Tests at appropriate levels and plenty of help available.

Sport is competitive but, according to parents, very inclusive – everyone encouraged to participate. Boys do a short rugby tour and girls a hockey tour, playing matches all over the country. The same applies to music, with lots of singing, a yearly young musicians' challenge and an inclusive scheme in which a different instrument is taught to all pupils in each year group. We enjoyed the first session of the ukulele band, but other years do gamelan etc and in year 6 steel drums, which are said to be 'just incredible!' The art programme is enhanced by taking part in a National Gallery competition, which has culminated in pupils' sculpture and painting being on show there several years running. Drama, dance etc all included, with an impressive filmmaking project on the year 6 French trip.

Pre-school breakfast club from 8am in the new Wessex Building is open to juniors as well as seniors and there are after-school activities and supervision until 6pm in the junior school.

The pre-prep is separate from the senior and junior schools in a 'leafy suburb' on the other side of Bath, but there is a staffed minibus between them which means parents with children in both can make one drop-off and know children will be supervised from there on. It provides an ideal environment for little children, with cleverly planned outside areas equipped with every kind of equipment and divided into age-related areas. On our visit there was a lovely activity, involving walking around the shapes of letters, going on in one place, while the real tinies were enjoying their miniature tricycles – good for directional skills.

All year groups have weekly forest school visits. More conventional classes are in large double areas with two classes in each year group, semi-divided so they can work separately or together. SEN experts are brought in at an early stage to do specific tests where necessary, so emerging problems can be picked up and special help given if expected progress is not being made. Lots of music and PE both indoor and out. An art specialist works in all three schools.

Sensible simple navy blue uniform with white shirts, but masses of tough-looking coveralls for outdoor stuff and also for art and craft. Spacious dining room where staff like to eat with children and healthy eating is promoted. Parent contact seems to be high priority and a parent group was enjoying coffee and discussion with Ms Gilbert on the day of our visit.

Before and after-school care provided in Teddy's Lodge, a small house on the edge of what once must have been the front lawn to the main Edwardian House, but is now convenient car park. This is a cosy space that has become something of a community centre for the area, offering

parent craft and similar workshops, such as craft, music and dance for babies and toddlers during the daytime. A calm and gentle environment with children everywhere just happily getting on with things.

KES feels like a happy school. Pupils are friendly but not over-sophisticated. Parents feel included, have well-organised channels for feedback and suggestions, and say there are 'no serious gripes'. The synchronisation of information through careful co-operation between teaching and pastoral staff and the heads in the senior, junior and pre-prep sectors is truly impressive, and everything is directed towards the well-being of pupils. No wonder they enjoy their education and do so well in it.

“KES feels like a happy school.”



KING
EDWARD'S
SCHOOL
BATH

KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL
SENIOR & JUNIOR

North Road
Bath BA2 6HU

KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL
PRE-PREP & NURSERY

Weston Lane
Bath BA1 4AQ

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Please contact our Registrar

Tel: 01225 820399

Email: admissions@kesbath.com