



KING
EDWARD'S
SCHOOL
BATH

GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE REVIEW

2021





HEADMASTER

Since 2008, Martin Boden MA PGCE (early 50s). A product of the kind of seriously academic school he now heads, Mr Boden's career has been entirely in education, starting as a teacher of modern languages at his alma mater, Bolton School, after Cambridge. Spells at Cheadle Hulme School and Bradford Grammar preceded his arrival at KES as Director of Studies in 2005, before taking over as Head three years later.

“*KES remains at the top of the academic pops in Bath and beyond*”

His tenure has ensured KES remains at the top of the academic pops in Bath and beyond after an unsettled period, but this is far from all he has achieved: academics are a given, he explained, so his aim has been to raise the standard of the co-curricular offering to equal the academic. Some of this has been obvious, such as the building of the splendid Wessex Building which includes stand-out (literally – the view over Bath from its terrace is sensational) performance space and the recently opened Rose studio for smaller scale drama; other aspects less so, such as appointing music and drama interns as coaches alongside teachers, rather than well-intentioned gap students. We noticed much more emphasis on mental

health and inclusivity and frank, immensely thoughtful conversations.

Mr Boden embodies the seriousness of purpose KES is known for. Suited and booted, he appeared wearied by more than a year of steering the school through Covid and the lack of coherence from government and exam boards, though he acknowledged some welcome consequences of the pandemic, such as online parents' evenings, open days and pupil recruitment. Parents rate him: his unremitting focus on doing every aspect of KES as well as possible, his visibility both inside and outside school, his leadership, the fact that he confronts difficult issues, still teaches and crucially, that he knows all the students. 'Shrewd and caring' in the view of one mother. And in the students' opinion? 'Incredibly supportive, inspiring,' we heard, with particular praise for his assemblies which often include reflections on current affairs and a thought for the day. A bit like the *Today* programme, then.

Married to Jane, who is Head of Geography, and father to two children one in the Junior School, the other in the Senior.

ENTRANCE

Main entry point is at Year 7, for which all hopefuls are required to sit papers in English, maths and verbal reasoning, plus interview and reference. About half come from the Junior School, others from a range of local primaries and preps, though some move into the area for the school.

Any scholarships are awarded at this point – no separate exam. Special Talent Awards are applied for online - supporting evidence, interviews, assessments and endorsements required, of course.

Entry to other year groups according to availability (same process). At Sixth Form about 125 new students arrive, entry depending on interviews both with academic and pastoral staff, plus school reference, as well as at least a GCSE grade 4 in maths and English language (a 6 in practice), 54 points taken from the best 9 GCSE grades, as well as the school's preference for at least a grade 7 for any subject to be studied at A Level.

EXIT

Very few leave before the end of their school career. Over 85 per cent get to their first choice university or higher education destination, of which up to 80 per cent is Russell Group. Good numbers to Oxbridge every year (eight in 2021), with Leeds, UCL and Durham also popular; occasional overseas universities too eg Princeton. Ten medics in 2021.

LATEST RESULTS

In 2021, 92 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 85 per cent A*/A at A Level (97 per cent A*-B). In 2019 (the last year when exams took place), 70 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; 62 per cent A*/A at A Level (83 per cent A*-B).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Stunning results and consistent success at Oxbridge come from outstanding and rigorous teaching, not from narrowly

selective admissions criteria. GCSEs, some I/GCSEs and A Levels only are provided – no BTECs or IB here. Students are put through their paces in all subjects at all stages, yet while everyone works hard, they do not seem to buckle under the pressure (and anyone showing signs of academic overload will almost certainly be rescued by their tutor) – ‘We create expectations of hard work at the outset’ the Head told us.

The curriculum is broad for the first three years, with an emphasis on languages ancient and modern – everyone does two out of French, German and Spanish plus Latin and the ablest linguists can take ancient Greek from Year 9. Interestingly, students are set only in maths up until Year 10. At GCSE, at least one modern language and separate sciences are standard. Efforts are made to accommodate all subject choices and combinations both for GCSE and A Level, where about 30 subjects are on offer.



Many parents choose the school for its academic rigour and the climate of aspiration. ‘My daughter got better A Levels at KES than she would have done anywhere else,’ one mother told us.

That comes in part from the grounding students get in exam technique (revision centres on past papers and attendant mark schemes) and in part from the academic confidence, self-belief and effective work habits the school instils. ‘But it verges on the dry,’ one parent remarked ‘And the kids work **** hard! A good knees-up wouldn’t do anyone any harm.’ Another wondered if more imaginative extension work beyond the curriculum could be laid on for the super-bright and intellectually curious. According to students, top subjects are maths, English and classics; classical civilisation available at A Level only.

Academic societies underpin most subjects, including clubs for history and Mandarin, medsoc (not just for aspiring medics but anyone interested in careers in health-related subjects such as forensics) and think tank for sixth formers applying to highly competitive degree courses – this by invitation only.

LEARNING SUPPORT AND SEN

Students needing learning support are generally identified by subject teachers, though all are screened on entry; those arriving from the Junior School will of course be known. About 10 per cent have a diagnosed SpLD/SEND need, which include ASC, ADHD and social communication alongside dyslexia and dysgraphia, and each student will have an individual pupil profile which goes to all subject teachers. Any individual tuition is ‘dovetailed in to the demands of a pupil’s academic timetable and co-curricular activities’ and charged separately. There are also drop-in sessions and support laid

on for anyone needing extra help with study skills, for example.

“KES has long since lost its reputation for being just about academics and sport. Its arts offer is right up there with the best of them”

THE ARTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR

KES has long since lost its reputation for being just about academics and sport. Its arts offer is right up there with the best of them. It faces some tough local competition on that front, but appears to bring home just as much silverware from the Mid-Somerset Festival as anywhere else. Collaborations with Bath Philharmonia, Bath Abbey, the Holburne Museum and the Royal United Hospital mean considerable exposure for young musicians, plus the frisson of playing or singing alongside established performers



in prestigious venues. The school provides many of the choristers for the abbey choirs. The dynamic duo of the Director of Music and Resident Composer mean there is something for every aspiring musician from several choirs, auditioned and not, (and a parents' singing group – hurrah) to ensembles ranging from full orchestras (three and depending on proficiency) to smaller groups for individual instruments, including steel pans. KES Soul provides funk and groove – we heard the Head takes to the drum kit on occasion...

Drama is equally showcased. Though the Wroughton Theatre is perhaps looking tired these days (new seats though!), some spectacular shows are staged there including *Pop! The Musical*, which was written entirely within school partly by students and *Discontented Winter: House Remix*, the inaugural Year 9 production. Perhaps not surprising that the school won the first ever Independent School of the Year Award for Performing Arts in 2018. More recently, *Romeo and Juliet*



was staged using five different pairs of star cross'd lovers; *Billy Elliott* planned and rehearsed, but interrupted by the

pandemic. Timetabled until the end of Year 8, drama continues to be a popular choice at GCSE and A Level, plus good take-up of Lamda qualifications, so much so that an extra teacher was recruited. Several notable performers such as Bill Bailey, Jon Monie and Tom Payne, plus documentary maker Xavier Alford are OE's, as former students are called.

Visual and practical arts centre on the teaching of technique and exploring different media, student response and the study of a range of artists, photographers and so on. The new Head of Art and Photography's mantra is 'just keep making' and the well-equipped department opens up opportunities for print-making and 3D structures amongst other media ('Make a



mark, get a mark,' as the website says!). Art adorns the school, inside and out – we especially liked the freaky fish hung outside and the motto of the King's Royal Hussars painted on an exterior wall as a reminder of its association with the school's active CCF. Museum and gallery trips both here and abroad and visiting artists complete the offering. Likewise, DT is timetabled until the end of Year 8. Students learn practical skills - these

included sewing masks during the worst of Covid - alongside using CAD/CAM to design (in a designated tidy space) and make a range of items. One Arkwright scholarship awarded in 2021.

SPORT

A sine qua non of KES. Feared adversaries on the local, regional and national circuit in all the main sports of rugby, hockey, netball and cricket, the school does what it can within its own grounds (a new Astro has just been created to add to the other two) and what it can't happens at its Bathampton playing fields, a brisk trot or short minibus ride away. 'We strongly believe that 'Excellence and Sport for all' can co-exist,' states the website – and to that end, A, B and C teams are fielded so everyone who wants a game can have one. Attendance at Saturday fixtures is expected, however.

Close collaboration with the University of Bath just up the hill – Team Bath gained international recognition as a training ground at the 2021 Olympics and some use is made of their top facilities. A comprehensive offer of pre-season training, strength and conditioning (all sports) and master classes with elite players (netball and hockey), the hosting of a hockey festival and a physio visiting weekly are all proof of KES' commitment to sport. Cricket is mostly played in the summer, though there are winter nets in the sports hall. Gender stereotypes are being gently dismantled with mixed training. Again, school forms relationships with local clubs eg Bath Cricket Club and Somerset County Cricket for coaching, raising aspirations and for what it cannot provide within its grounds.



Too many successful sporting former students to list here, but several have gone on to national sporting pathways before representing their county or even country, such as netballer Summer Artman, hockey player Emily MacLean and rugby players Henry Thomas and Max Ojomoh.

No pool – any swimming takes place at the 50m pool at Team Bath. Those less keen on team games get some choice from Year 10, such as jiu-jitsu and athletics, plus the all-ages lunchtime running club, but at least one mother felt there was too much pressure on boys to play rugby.

CCF particularly active, popular and successful, with two young recruits chosen as Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset cadets. DofE (nearly all in Year 9 do it) and that scourge of west country schools, Ten Tors also undertaken with the grit and determination typical of KES.

ETHOS AND HERITAGE

Nearly 500 years old and now in its fourth home in Bath, the founding of KES was one upside of the dissolution of Bath Priory by Henry VIII: parents and the mayor petitioned the young Edward

VI to endow a school for the continuing education of their sons, after the last one went up in smoke. Academically selective from the start and having journeyed through various iterations and sites to its current home on the southern slopes of Bath, KES maintains its grammar school feel and ethos to this day. That said, although academic life is central, it is certainly not at the expense of everything else, with KES kids both working and playing hard. 'This is a very busy school,' we kept hearing.



Most parts of school life take place on site, in and around buildings which are more functional than beautiful, with the exception of gracious Georgian Nethersole, complete with drive scarily narrow for visiting cars, and architecturally adventurous Wessex. Existing buildings have been imaginatively refurbished – we loved The Rose studio for drama, and funky new sixth form space with its beautifully designed zones for individual silent study or small group collaboration, plus all important hang-out space and café. Parents of younger students would welcome more space for them – lunchtime lasts for an hour and a half to accommodate the many clubs

and societies (eg the Dark Earth Book Club, which mixes saving the earth with inspiration from the latest SF and fantasy titles). Much available space seems to be surfaced with Astroturf or tarmac and occupied by sporty types, but the school has kept a number of designated areas identified during Covid for kids who would prefer just to chat with their friends, which have gone down well. Some clubs exist just for fun – Christmas cross stitch, anyone? - but generally the expectation is that students do masses and do it well. 'We're looking for joiners and givers' the Head told us. 'Students do their best in everything that they try – that's more peer ethos than peer pressure' he added. A Head of Co-curricular has been appointed to oversee smooth timetabling, to avoid clashes where possible and most importantly, to check students are not over-committed. As well as sport, some music, drama, CCF, DofE and Ten Tors necessarily take place at weekends.



PASTORAL CARE, INCLUSIVITY AND DISCIPLINE

A school that has truly upped its game to support young people through what is an unquestionably demanding environment. By the school's own admission, mental health issues have increased massively. The Head of Pastoral and her team are widely praised, but students also rate their tutors' ability to support them through the helter skelter of school life - 'They can tell when you're struggling' - and like both the continuity of the same one from Year 8-11 as well as the chance to trade them in if the relationship is not working out. One mother wondered if the tutors realise how much some of their tutees do outside school and help them balance their commitments accordingly. Discipline does not loom large at KES - below Sixth Form, misdemeanours (eg poor work or turning up with the wrong kit) might result in break time detention (aka sin bin), but any such incidents are tracked through centrally held referrals to identify underlying patterns. Is arriving for maths without a calculator just forgetfulness or

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a silent plea for help with organisational skills? Academic merits are liberally dished out in Year 7, but 'rather fade away after that!' sixth formers told us - 'Rewards at the top end of the school tend to be intrinsic rather than extrinsic, though great references and reports go down well'.

KES has long prided itself (note intentional wordplay) on its inclusivity – it is absolutely OK to be whoever you are, just so long as you abide by the dress code. Its historic links with Bath Abbey do not result in a Christian ethos (there is, however, Christian Union and a busy part time chaplain), though many of the qualities expounded by that faith are actively practised, such as welcome and acceptance. It has been fine to be LGBT+ at KES for a long time and it's definitely out there and proud. Any off colour (non-rainbow) language would be jumped on and the delightful sixth formers we saw spoke candidly about how they tackled the fall-out from Everyone's Invited, by devising a PHSE session to tackle misogynist language and attitudes head on.

PUPILS AND PARENTS

Pupils come from quite a wide radius around Bath and not all driven in by fond parents - some arrive by train (school lays on shuttle bus from the station a few minutes away) and many by bus, public or one of the three coaches laid on from Frome, Corsham and Midsomer Norton. What unites parents who send their children to KES is an insistence on high academic standards and aspiration, an extensive extra-curricular offer and definitely not social cachet - the parents we spoke to spent more time talking

about academic demands and how the school balances them than anything else. Virtually all students will find like minds here and there is room for nerds. A wider socio-economic mix differentiates it from the other Bath independents. The Head is keen that KES students appreciate their many advantages - 'Having all these opportunities does not make you better than other people,' he often says - and that they use them to the greater good now and in later life - alongside all the sporting, artistic and hearty options, runs a strong thread of community service such as Thursday afternoons for sixth formers helping out at local primary schools, care homes and the autism unit up the hill, plus masses of charitable fund-raising.

MONEY MATTERS

Extraordinarily good value in comparison with local competition, but of course no boarding overheads. Generous bursary provision (over £1m) which supports nearly 20 per cent of students in some form, up to 100 per cent in exceptional cases - only applicable at Year 7 and 12, note. Not too much expensive monogrammed uniform – fair amount of sports kit, that said – and some available second hand.

“*Harder, faster, higher than the other Bath schools*”

THE LAST WORD

Harder, faster, higher than the other Bath schools and not a place where anything

is done by halves. For the nearest thing to a no nonsense unapologetic grammar school, look no further, but the closely woven safety net of support means all students can go on and achieve all they are capable of in any sphere. KES turns out young people who are not merely hard-working and well-educated, but compassionate and thoughtful to boot.

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KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL, BATH JUNIOR SCHOOL & PRE-PREP AND NURSERY SCHOOL

HEAD TEACHER

Since 2009, Greg Taylor BSc NVQH (50's), by his own admission a west country boy and graduate of St Luke's, a teacher training college part of the University of Exeter. Secondary trained in maths and sports and indeed an accomplished enough sportsman to have played football professionally from the age of 14, Mr Taylor decided some years ago that he would prefer to work with younger children – and KES Junior is the lucky beneficiary. Mr Taylor brings a wealth of experience both professional and paternal (special schools and being a father to four children, three of his own and one adopted, being just two aspects) to his headship, but what really moved us was this beefy-looking footballer welling up when vehemently sharing his view that no child should ever be put down for not being able to do something. 'Children should be challenged through learning and emerge better people; it's more about progress than achievement here,' he states. Parents and children alike like him immensely and appreciate his palpable interest in his young charges.

The Pre-Prep has, since 2008, been headed by Jayne Gilbert (50's), previously deputy at Bedales Prep, but whose previous experience includes some time teaching in Penang. A deeply reassuring warm head who devotes as much focus to the breadth and creativity of the curriculum as to its (undoubted) academic rigour, Ms Gilbert is exactly the sort of calm, motherly yet authoritative person

you would be happy to leave your 3 year old with of a morning. She loves the autonomy of her position, reporting as she does straight to the Head of the Senior School, and has introduced many initiatives during her tenure, such as specialist teachers for French and music, forest school and teaching even the tiniest children to use things with care: no Melamine plates here, thank you – it's real china even at snack time. Ms Gilbert has two grown up children.

ENTRANCE

Nursery from age 3, preceded by a home visit by a member of staff. Transfer to reception is automatic and care is taken to make sure all goes smoothly. Admission is not academically selective for children coming into reception or years 1 and 2, but for the junior school at year 3 an annual assessment day is held every January for external candidates, when children are tested (in as least pressurised a way as possible) in English, maths and picture-based non-verbal reasoning. Children from the pre-prep will have been thoroughly (but unobtrusively) assessed and do not sit entrance assessments.

EXIT

Almost all from the Pre-Prep go to the Junior School site across Bath, but Ms Gilbert is unambiguous when she says that the Junior School, with its faster-paced academics, will not be right for every child. Again, almost all children from the Junior School will progress to

the Senior School, with doubtful runners being identified in plenty of time to find alternatives. Everyone is required to do assessments in English, maths and verbal reasoning plus interview on a given day each January.

OUR VIEW

The Nursery and Pre-Prep, sited in a charming Victorian house (less sightly additions behind) on the gracious western edge of Bath, could hardly provide a more delightful start to a child's education. Each age group has its own area inside and out, and the Nursery children in particular spend the majority of their time outside (not many concessions made to bad weather) enjoying ride-on toys, the mud kitchen and outdoor stage. An abundance of sunny outdoor space, carefully zoned or timed so that 3 year olds are not mown down by older children, includes grass, tarmac, play equipment, Teddy's Garden with pond and raised beds where



children grow vegetables, and a baby Astro. The youngest children 'wake and shake' before school - dance moves in the playground to oxygenate young minds - and older ones work up to a mile's jog around the Astro.

More formal learning begins in Reception; though the EYFS curriculum is followed, the watchword is learning through play – the children hardly realise they are learning. Academic expectations start

“*The watchword is learning through play – the children hardly realise they are learning*”

to show early on in KSI, however, with an insistence on as neat work as a child can manage. We were struck by the high standard of written work on the theme of The Secret Garden displayed on the walls – and our question as to whether only the best work was on show was met with polite incredulity. Classrooms are light, bright and inviting and we especially liked the way in which the original features of the house, such as coloured glass in the doors, are used to show its age and history.

The Junior School occupies the top left hand corner of the Senior School site. Dating only from 1990, it is skilfully built into a steepish slope, with a staggered design which means every classroom has an unobscured view over to the other side of Bath. Surrounded by lots of grass, an adventure playground, spiritual garden and boasting its own Astro, there is plenty of opportunity for pupils to pursue the kind of active outdoor school day for which good habits start in the Nursery. Inside, the building is centred on the well-



stocked library bang in the middle - and this sets the tone of academic endeavour which distinguishes this school from many others and provides a welcome retreat from the hurly burly of the playground for children who need it. Years 3 and 4 are taught mainly by class teachers, but specialist teachers take the 2 upper year groups; all however are able to benefit from dedicated teaching spaces for art, DT, science and ICT. French from the off, German and Spanish on termly rotation for older children.

We came away with the distinct sense that for each child, how they learnt was as important as what they learnt and each has a learning profile, compiled by teachers. Interestingly, children are not set by ability, but grouped by learning profile. Asking questions, building on the answers and – crucially – not being afraid to make mistakes are part and parcel of what goes on in class. New material is frequently presented using a thermal analogy: cold tasks have not been encountered before, growing familiarity moves them up the metaphorical thermometer, as far as volcanic, where total mastery has been achieved and extension work dished out. Any

perfectionist tendencies are discouraged – here it's all about progress, higher level thinking and adventurous minds, as the school's strapline puts it. No one will be left languishing in the learning pit – a state of muddle and confusion – for long: a bit of effort and questioning will result in every child standing on the other side feeling good about themselves.

Intellectual rigour is underpinned by excellent pastoral care – these kids really seem to thrive. That said, one father sounded a cautionary note that it would be tough for children who are not at least moderately bright to bump along at the bottom of the class, and that some occasionally leave to avoid this.

“*Intellectual rigour is underpinned by excellent pastoral care – these kids really seem to thrive*”

Learning profiles are helpful in identifying any learning differences, as SEN is called here. The department is located in the Senior School, but the Junior School has its own SENCo and experienced LSA and there is close liaison throughout, as well as with pastoral staff - sometimes 'there is an emotional component attached' as the rather well hidden section on the website says.

The two children we spoke to were unequivocal fans of their school: 'Tell us the good bits' we invited them. 'Inclusive

- our opinions matter, opportunities especially choir, no one is afraid to apologise and puddings' they responded, quick as a flash. They were stumped when asked about less good things.

KES sporting prowess is well documented and much of it starts or continues here, with the use of Senior School facilities and staff as necessary. Music is brought to life by the timetabling of whole class strings lessons for Year 3 (eek – or should that be squeak?), working through different instruments including gamelans as far as steel pans in Year 6; individual lessons and ensembles too of course. Performance is encouraged from the start with informal concerts, culminating in the Prom concert, a highlight of the Summer Term. Drama stand-out too – the Junior School is lucky enough to have its own hall with connecting lunch area. At the time of our visit, the leavers' play *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was in full rehearsal – we were practically trampled by a herd of oompah-lumpahs rushing through the corridor to make their next entrance. Less confident children are sometimes given leading roles. A whole school musical every other year (next up *The Lion King*), appearances at the egg (part of Bath's Theatre Royal) in the



Shakespeare Schools Festival and a drama club for fun complete the offering. Lots of trips and external visitors to enhance learning. Lunch time clubs (Airfix or flamenco, anyone?) and keenly anticipated Activities Week off campus at the end of the Summer Term mean somewhere for everyone to shine and have fun.

MONEY MATTERS

Remarkably good value and few extra charges, though lunch is one of them in the junior school - included in fees before that. Individual assessment and learning support lessons are chargeable, as is after school care until 6pm. Quite a lot of uniform embossed with the school's Tudor rose logo and/or name, but a thriving second hand shop run by parents.

LAST WORD

A busy stimulating place for able children who will thrive on the pace, and excellent preparation for the rigours of the Senior School - indeed any senior school. Although the children are undoubtedly stretched and work hard, 'Children should have fun in school: not to do so is criminal' the Head declared. So do they? 'My son is having a wonderful time and enjoys everything he does at school', one parent told us, unprompted.





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