



HEAD

Head Since 2019, Joanna Wright. From a family of vicars and teachers she attended both state and private schools before studying French with theatre studies at the University of Warwick. Early roles in accountancy were unfulfilling but she loved supporting her local school's plays so much she thought... 'maybe I could do this for a living?'

On starting a PGCE at Reading University she was told she 'wouldn't survive in state school' but applied to Hollyfield School, Surbiton anyway, where she taught languages. Later posts at Farlington, Oundle, St. Edward's, Oxford and Queenswood in Hertfordshire, where she spent four years as deputy principal in charge of pastoral. Her last post was as deputy head at Saint Peter's School, York, where she spent seven years.

Says it was the school's Foundation programme that brought her to King Edward's, *'Its deep historical roots in helping pupils who had...'*, she quotes the historical wording carefully, *'no hope'*. She was excited about the opportunity to improve the existing offering, giving structure to 'the journey' of pupils from year 7 to sixth form. 'The work we do... it's about the whole child... They need to feel that they belong.'

Parents we spoke to are unanimously positive.

In one mother's view, Mrs Wright has 'brought a focus to the school', keeping it 'on an upward trajectory, without it being a revolution'. Another said, **'It's incredible what she's done for the place.'** Her character, they tell us, is one of **'quiet, calm assertiveness,'** but also **'...a force to be reckoned with.'** One parent told us, **'She's probably one of the kindest people I've met in years.'**

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ENTRANCE

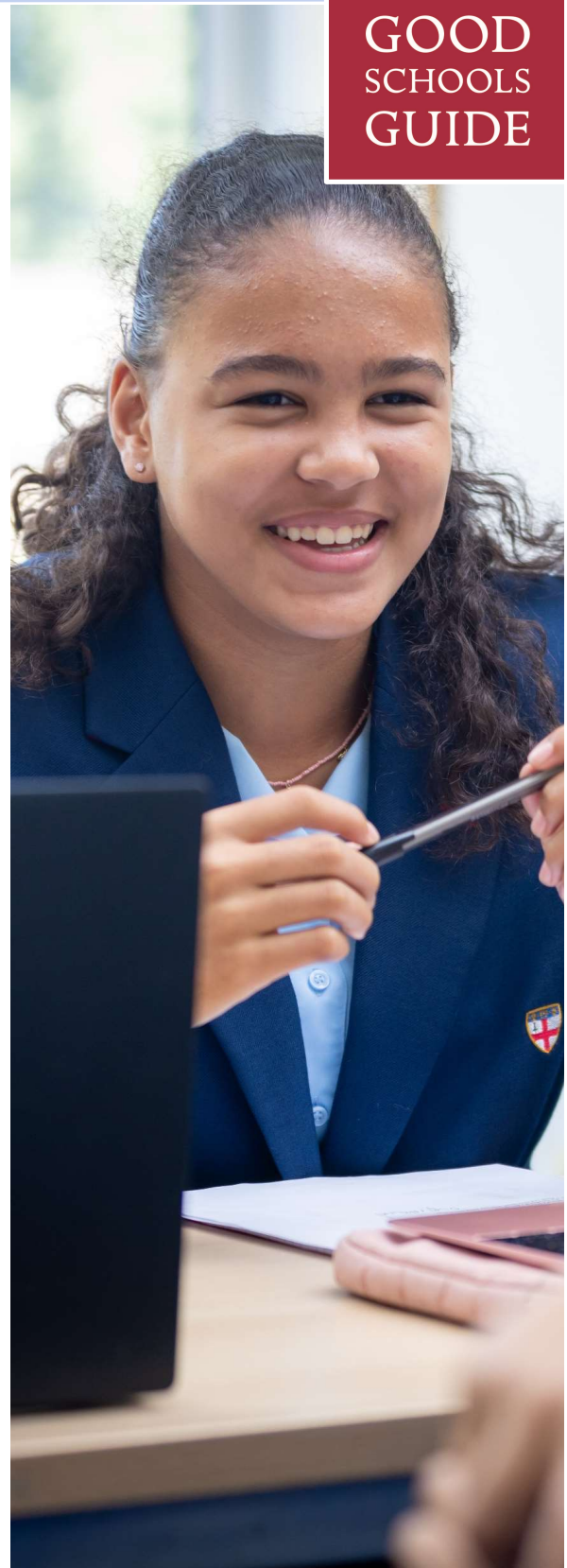
Key points of entry are years 7 and 9. Pupils come from a wide range of schools (equal mix of state primary and prep schools), including international pupils and London relocators.

Application involves ISEB tests, school reports and an interview with the head or a senior teacher. Children should be working at average level or above. Pupils from Bridewell Foundation partner schools, local preps Barrow Hills and Longacre, are granted assured places.

EXIT & LATEST RESULTS

Around 50 per cent leave after GCSEs for local colleges, but the addition of Jubilee House for sixth form in 2022 is improving retention. **A further 30 per cent join from elsewhere. Popular university destinations are Exeter, LSE, Durham, Nottingham, Leeds, Warwick and University of London colleges, with around 65 per cent to Russell Group.** On average, five per year to overseas universities and occasional one to Oxbridge. In 2024, one to medical school and two apprenticeships. On average, two choral or organ scholarships secured annually by talented musicians destined for universities, conservatoires or the Royal Academy of Music.

In 2024, 47 per cent 9-7 at GCSE; at A level, 37 per cent A*/A (69 per cent A*-B).



Each year around two thirds of our students' transition to Oxbridge and Russell Group universities; others progress to a range of other, often specialist universities, vocational training, apprenticeships or directly to their chosen careers.

TEACHING & LEARNING

We began our visit in **Queen Mary House (QMH)**, the hub for all pupils in years 7 and 8 (106 at the time of our visit), boarding and day alike. Everyone registers here and parents can drop off near the entrance, creating separation for the youngest pupils. **Parents describe this as ‘a really nice transition’ to secondary school.**

Children we meet tell us about their favourite (and least favourite) teachers, and are particularly excited to talk sports, drama and orchestra as well as science, Spanish and PSHE. From the outset, emphasis is on pupils’ ‘appreciation of the whole educational experience’, staff say, and compulsory after school activities aim to broaden children’s interests. ‘Learning is quite easy,’ says one year 8 pupil, adding that teachers are helpful and attentive. ‘They give everyone a go and make sure we’re all learning.’ **‘There’s something for everyone. Sporty and arty kids both love it.’** There’s also, ‘lots of prep’, one boy says, sadly.

Moving into year 9 feels like ‘a fresh start for all of them’ parents say, as numbers double and they’re mixed into different houses. Day pupils benefit from a similar experience to boarders, registering in their house buildings and returning at break times.

We spent time in year 9 history, where 19 pupils (five girls) considered whether Field Marshal Douglas Haig was rightly dubbed ‘The Butcher of the Somme’. In the light, spacious classroom with its wall of write-on glass, children weren’t just working silently, but enjoying a lesson that was inquiry based, interactive and experiential. Phrases like ‘I want to know...’ and ‘I actually think...’ suggested the teacher’s plan was working.

The head of academics tells us he promotes ‘approachable teachers, questioning and feedback,’ and parents agree that teaching staff ‘try to make things interesting’ and are ‘enthused and passionate, excited about their curriculum’. One mother, with particularly academic children said, ‘Any concerns we had that [our sons] wouldn’t be stretched enough were immediately dispelled.’

Home-school communication is an improving area, with opinion divided on how far it’s come, but **teacher-pupil communication supports attainment well. School prioritises verbal and written feedback, promoting ‘active planning of clear steps to progression’.**

Year 10 say their homework is ‘a step up’, particularly in English. GCSE economics (recently introduced) is proving popular, as are classics and Latin. GCSE textiles and business will be offered from September 2025. To help stretch and support pupils, the head of digital engagement has coded an AI Bot to act as an online tutor. We’re ‘embracing technology, rather than being afraid of it,’ say staff.

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Parents of sixth formers say they are 'very happy with the school'. **A broad approach to learning includes BTECs, City & Guilds and Level 3 diplomas.** We saw EPQ (extended project qualification) exhibitions that were ambitious and unique: medical data in the media, AI abuse on YouTube and international counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. **We visited A level economics, where students were studying the fear of boom and bust in a rigorous, lecture style lesson where discussion and participation were encouraged.**

A bespoke 'Pre 6th Course' for children coming into A level from other (international) educational systems offers a one year, boarding, intensive iGCSE programme across academic, scientific or creative pathways. All students are offered additional arts classes, cultural and educational trips.

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LEARNING SUPPORT & SEN

Academic baseline testing in year 7 and 9 and a literacy assessment help identify any learning needs. School's preference is for quality-first teaching and inclusive classrooms. They build a picture of pupil need through conversations with primary schools and parents, creating learning profiles in collaboration with the child. SENDCo stresses the importance of ongoing dialogue with home. 'I'm particularly looking for the kind of anxiety that doesn't manifest in school.' One pupil with an EHCP when we visited.

A strong, working relationship between the SENDCo and the academic lead is maintained through weekly meetings; they tell us they'll happily 'open a conversation' with teaching colleagues if a pupil is struggling in a particular class.

'The school is good at understanding the needs of many types of pupil,' said one mother. 'Some people come here because it caters to a broad ability, so staff have experience of different needs,' said another. Dyslexia specialists, a school counsellor and two trained ELSAs (emotional literacy support assistants), including one with additional speech and language training. One parent told us she was confident that interventions had improved her son's grades, another that he was happy with the ongoing observations of staff.

THE ARTS & EXTRACURRICULAR

We visited the **Countess of Munster Music School**, where specialist teachers deliver 150 instrumental lessons a week, including on the organ. The school was the fifth to be accredited by the Royal College of Organists, after schools like Eton, Radley and The Royal Hospital School. Ensembles include brass, sax and jazz bands and around 170 pupils get involved in school concerts each year. Weekly recitals range from informal showcases to larger events.

Chapel services are twice weekly and Chapel Choir (around 70 pupils) performs at Mansion House, Guildhall, St Bride's and abroad. Camerata (chamber choir) is even more elite; **their ethereal voices have brought goosebumps to congregations at Westminster Cathedral, Windsor Castle and the Vatican City.** It's not all about the elite though - two lower school choirs, senior vocal ensemble and junior vocal ensemble aim for 'absolute inclusivity'.

Drama is 'definitely a favourite' according to pupils. Staff say they 'want everyone to be professional... use the right language... get as professional an experience as possible'. Three productions a year, including the year 8-13 'big show', which is a musical every other year. We visited the modern drama studio where theatre studies students were preparing for their A level devising exam; some as technicians on lighting or sound, an option at both GCSE and A level. In Charter Hall next door, antique portraits look out across wooden floors. It's the main performance space, regularly used for assemblies and the occasional disco.

Extremely spacious classrooms for art and textiles, including dark room, ceramics studio and A level studio spaces. Teachers describe themselves as having 'one foot in the industry' and an artist in residence works with scholars and sixth formers. Gallery trips and workshops by visiting artists. Leavers have gone into architecture, fine art and illustration.

The fully refurbished design technology department gained the prestigious City & Guilds centre certification in 2024. **Huge woodwork and metalwork rooms, with laser cutters, vinyl cutter, vacuum former and no less than five 3D printers set out amongst the vast range of equipment (and top-notch work) on display.** Level 2 Certificate in design and craft on offer (taught after school) from 2025.

Compulsory after school programme (year 7 and 8) includes games nights, book club, mental health, physical and well-being activities. Older children, 'can change clubs every term', said one mother, whose son was signed up to coding, debating (as part of Model United Nations) and using the fitness suite. **'If you want to be overly sporty, musical or theatrical, you can,' said one boy, 'but if you're happy to dabble, that's also fine.'** Clubs are included in fees (except wakeboarding and padel clubs).

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Music has been the shining star here for years, but there are strengths across the arts and some impressive facilities.





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SPORT

Two hours of games a week (minimum) for all pupils. The focus is on football, netball, hockey and cricket. 'Rugby is a side-sport' one boy told us happily, 'it's optional'. Core PE (boys and girls together) is a rota of activities including swimming lessons in the school's 25-metre swimming pool. On site squash courts and climbing wall are a bonus and we liked the forest school option, for those experiencing anxiety around organised sport.

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Around 80 per cent of pupils play in competitive matches, a good turnout against standard benchmarks. Fixtures are on Saturday mornings, with advance notice required of absence. Staff say, **'there's a place for everyone'** and at least one mother agreed, 'My son wasn't that talented or encouraged [into teams at primary school], but he's now an enthusiastic member of third team.' Another parent said, 'It's a small school, but individual year group teams are very strong.' Sixth form sports can suffer comparatively, from lack of numbers.

Elite performance programme for sports scholars offering additional strength, conditioning and nutritional support. Staff graduate psychologists coach teams through psychological barriers.

Top performing individuals in swimming, American football, athletics, cricket, football, golf, hockey, skiing and squash. **Recent alumnus, Toby Roberts, won an Olympic gold medal in Paris 2024 - the first UK medal in climbing.**

BOARDERS

Roughly 30 per cent of pupils board (most of whom full time), with a further 10-15 per cent flexi boarding. **In Queen Mary House (years 7 and 8) common rooms look comfortable and homely. Thoughtfully designed bedrooms give everyone a sense of their own space.** Most choose to share rooms, but one girl had her own, 'Her preference,' staff said. With a day's notice, non-boarders can stay until 8pm at no extra charge, enjoying dinner and activities before pick-up. Appreciative parents tell us pupils can arrive for 7am breakfast too, and 'really feel part of the community'.

From year 9 everybody is allocated a day or boarding house. Wakefield, Grafton, Edward and Ridley for boys; Elizabeth or Tudor for girls. **Older pupils say houses are 'not just where you register and hang out... they're an important part of identity'.**

BOARDERS continued...

We looked around Grafton, where years 9 to 10 share rooms, but years 11 and 12 get their own Common spaces and the kitchen were functional and busy. Termly house trips like go-karting (extra cost). **‘The school were looking to support us,’ said one parent with boarding bursaries, ‘they see the boys as their family.’**

Jubilee house is co-ed and caters for year 13 exclusively. All have single, ensuite rooms and there’s a separate study room for prep. Girls and boys are accommodated at different ends of the building and the head allowed that, ‘Trans students’ needs [would be] considered on an individual basis’. Part of promoting ‘university-style living’, students learn to cook inexpensive meals in ‘lunch club’, and responsible drinking (with parents’ permission) ‘is okay with a meal’, say staff. The ‘outduction’ programme includes interview skills, bike maintenance, drugs awareness and ironing. They also do their own laundry.

ETHOS & HERITAGE

‘United by Diversity’ is the motto, and it holds true. Part of the Bridewell Royal Hospital Foundation, King Edward’s was founded in 1553 as a school for ‘destitute children’ and has inherited a substantial tradition. Originally based in Saint Bride’s Church, Fleet Street, near Bridewell Royal Hospital, it remains a Bridewell Royal Hospital school, with bursaries funded from that source. The school moved to Surrey in 1867, with some buildings dating back to that time.

A recent re-design has shifted the (formerly unwelcoming) entrance to a new reception building with a bright, spacious library upstairs and a ground floor café, open to staff, pupils, parents and the community. **The school feels contemporary and uncrowded, with preserved historical charms like the magnificent chapel and the old quad, where a statue of the young King Edward stands peacefully.**

School’s popularity has increased in recent years since it firmly dispelled an ‘old reputation’ for poor discipline. This was unfair and largely based on prejudice, the head explains – as many children came from London and difficult circumstances. The school still supports foundation children (around 10 per cent), but changes to supporting organisations funding models have resulted in a higher proportion of pupils now applying from local and international private markets.

The aim, says the head, is to be inclusive, caring and quietly ambitious. Achieving excellence, but without feeling the strain. A sense that, ‘We can do this together.’



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Parents (around half from state primary) choose the school because it's co-ed and, unlike some local competitors, goes beyond 16. **Flexi-boarding and the wrap-around hours are attractive, as well the pastoral strengths.**

Being five minutes' walk from the station (London-Guildford-Portsmouth line) makes rail a good choice for transport, while those driving generate 'a car park of VWs, Audis... 'more normal cars [than some independent schools]', said one dad, echoing a widely held feeling that the economic and racial diversity here (an improvement on the local demographic), is refreshing. **School supports inclusivity by being 'mindful of how everybody feels'** when selecting parent events. Parent talks, 'Founder's Day' and 'Prom in the Park' are popular. Choral and sports parents are particularly involved.

Parents' association re-launching in summer 2025.

MONEY MATTERS

Fees similar to local competitor schools. Sibling discount of five per cent extends to their partner prep schools. Scholarships also from five per cent (higher for exceptional pupils) are available for art, drama, music, sport, design technology and academics.

London foundation applicants apply via bursary scheme. Bursaries can cover 'a significant proportion of fees' and are awarded to those facing challenging times, like family trauma.

The 'Bridewell Shining Stars' scheme gives all year 7 pupils the opportunity to learn an orchestral instrument free for a term (after which cost is means tested).

THE LAST WORD

A few years ago, King Edward's may not have been first on many parents' lists, but thanks to impressive leadership and investment, it is now. **'It's a broad church in terms of sports, arts and academics... there's something there for everyone,' say parents. Pupils agree, 'Everybody's journey is so different.'**



VISIT KING EDWARD'S

The best way to experience what life is like at King Edward's is to see it first-hand.

We encourage every prospective parent and pupil to arrange a visit to our school where you will be welcomed with a personal, tailor-made visit which will take into account your daughter or son's interests and give you an excellent feel for all our school has to offer.

We warmly invite you to visit us to explore and experience how special a place King Edward's is for living and learning – truly an education without limits.

PERSONAL TOURS & OPEN MORNINGS

Usually lasting around 90-minutes your visit will include a meeting with our Head, Mrs Joanna Wright, alongside opportunities to see our diverse and exciting school community in action and a chance to meet and talk with our pupils as they take you on a tour of our excellent facilities.

Visit our website to book an [appointment](#) or feel free to contact our admissions team.

Open morning events run throughout the year and can be book by visiting our [website](#) or by contacting our Admissions team to book your place.

CONTACT OUR TEAM

If you have any questions, our admissions team would be delighted to hear from you.

Email via admissions@kesw.org or by calling us directly on +44 (0)1428 686735.



King Edward's
WITLEY

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SINCE 1553

