

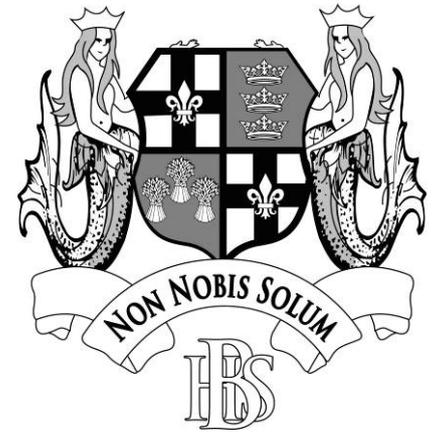
BOSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Aims, Values, and Admissions

A letter from the Headteacher

Boston High School

a selective Grammar School for Girls
with a mixed Sixth Form



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JH/wjb

28th June 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

Change is a constant in education. It is impossible for any of us to know what the future direction of government policy will be. Given this, it is all the more vital that parents know the core aims and values of any school that they might choose to entrust with the education of their children.

The purpose of this letter is to set out some of those things that we value, and that will remain 'constants' at Boston High School. It will also highlight some development priorities that will be of immediate interest to parents of girls in Year 5, and offer some information about the 11+ examinations and the processes that follow students' completion of them.

OUR BROAD AIMS AND VALUES

- This is an exceptionally happy, caring school and incidences of misbehaviour are few; our students are very well-behaved and a credit to their parents and the school. Students can learn in a co-operative, challenging but calm environment. Relationships are strong; 'discipline' is, and will remain, 'firm but fair.' All student achievement rests upon these fundamentals; the maintenance of this learning environment is, therefore, our central aim.
- We seek to treat our students as individuals, with individual needs, abilities and ambitions – but as individuals within a community. We aim to help all to recognise and respect the needs of others, and to contribute to the creation of a community that is worth belonging to.
- We are ambitious for our students. We want them to aspire, and to learn that success comes about as a result, primarily, of hard work, reflection on feedback, and an attitude of resilience when things become difficult. 'Ability' in of itself is not enough. We also cherish the fact that learning is enjoyable, enriching and rewarding. Children have to spend a great deal of time at school; the 'journey' is perhaps as important as the 'destination.'
- We want our students to excel in examinations, because high grades are a necessary, if insufficient, 'currency' that they will need to realise their ambitions. We also want them to be willing and able to think clearly, to reason, and to engage confidently with others.
- We seek to develop in our students the capacity to lead, and the desire to use their energies and abilities in the service of others.
- We encourage all to take a delight in the accumulation of knowledge and to make the most of the range of cultural, sporting and social opportunities that are available to them.

- We support our students with the aim of helping them to become independent people who can do things for themselves, and who are able to work together productively in pursuit of common goals.
- Life, as well as education, is all about change. The children who start with us will probably work in a number of different occupations over a long working life. By the time they leave us, they need to be adaptable people who embrace change and make their own futures. So we aim to give them opportunities to create change and to make an impact during their time here.

OUR IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

Our *School Improvement Plan* is a lengthy and detailed document that encompasses the scale of our ambition for the school. My experience of leadership in other successful grammar schools has taught me that 'the job is never finished' and that a Headteacher might sometimes be pleased but should never be satisfied. All areas of a school require constant review and improvement, but my colleagues have four overriding 'development priorities' over the forthcoming year:

1. We aim for constant improvement in the quality of teaching that students experience. Even the most expert teacher – and we have many - can become more expert. We have made considerable investment in leadership and in systems to establish and monitor the quality of teaching and to support the professional development of our teachers. **Our overriding priority is, and will always be, investing in building teaching expertise.** Part of that is helping students to learn independently both inside and outside of the classroom.
2. **Most parents are aware of the government's desire for more students to study what it calls the 'EBacc' subjects at GCSE;** English, Mathematics, History or Geography, two Science subjects, and one Modern Foreign Language. Employers and universities tell us that they value the EBacc. We also want more students to study these subjects; they are fundamental and students who have these qualifications are likely to enjoy the maximum range of opportunities in terms of further education and in what is a fast-changing employment market. We are investing heavily in these areas; students starting in Year 7 will study, initially, each of French, German and Spanish before specialising later and a highly successful new Head of Modern Foreign Languages joins the staff in September. We shall also welcome two new colleagues in Science, one of whom is an Advanced Skills Teacher, and the sciences will be taught as separate subjects at Key Stage 3. Additional curriculum time is being given to English and to Mathematics and considerable sums have been devoted to resourcing these subjects. As a foundation for future learning and careers, these subjects alone provide gateways to almost everything your daughter could wish to do.
3. **We have returned to a traditional curriculum model** – a three-year Key Stage Three will provide students with the foundations of knowledge and permit maximum progress during the two-year GCSE programme that follows. It is our intention that, at the end of Year 11, all students shall want to enjoy our successful Sixth Form A Level provision and meet the required criteria for entry. We have made significant investment in leadership of the Sixth Form this year; we are the largest provider of A Level education in Boston and over time we seek to become 'the' place to study for all who want to maximise their chance of gaining the highest A Level grades and enjoying the best all-round preparation for their chosen post-18 destination.
4. **We seek Academy status as a single-sex selective school for girls with a mixed Sixth Form.** The overwhelming majority of grammar schools have already gained Academy status and over half of all secondary schools in the maintained sector have done so. The financial advantages are considerable; although, unlike many Lincolnshire schools, we run a budget surplus, additional income would enable us to provide more opportunities for our students. More importantly, we would gain control over our own affairs and enjoy such stability as the world of education affords. We will continue with our 'outreach' work to inform parents and students about the 11+ and what it

involves, with the aim of increasing the proportion of local Year 6 students who take the tests. This is because we want all who are capable of benefiting from what we offer to have the opportunity to do so. A large proportion of our students are the 'first in their families' to receive a selective education and attend university and/or enter the professions. Their parents are proud of them. So are we. Providing these opportunities is, and will continue to be, a central aspect of our work as a school. Academy status does not mean isolation – we will continue to forge working partnerships with many other schools and places of further and higher education - both locally and further afield.

KEEPING YOU INFORMED

Since the start of the current academic year, we have done much to remodel the school's curriculum and staffing and leadership structures in order to help us to meet these objectives – and others. Key developments, and events in the life of the school, are reported each week in the *Boston High School Bulletin*, copies of which are emailed to all parents and students and made accessible via our website – www.bostonhighschool.co.uk. Those parents who have attended our 11+ Familiarisation Days, and who have been placed on our mailing list, receive electronic copies of the Bulletin each week. If you would like to be kept up-to-date with events at school, please email your contact details to enquiries@bostonhighschool.co.uk.

THE 11+ TEST AND ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES

Please note that the selection procedure will be carried out by the Boston Grammar Schools Federation and not by the Local Education Authority. The school will use Verbal and Non Verbal Reasoning tests that are specifically produced by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER). The tests will be administered by the grammar school of the area in which you live, but this does not prevent you from choosing a grammar school in another area.

June 2012 Two practice papers will be sent to your child's primary school. Your child's primary headteacher will use these as he/she sees fit.

September 2012 The Local Authority (LA), which has a duty to make sure that every child is placed, will write to parents giving details of Lincolnshire secondary schools and will include an application form requesting parental preferences of secondary school. The latest date for return of these forms is Wednesday 31 October 2012.

Your child will take a verbal reasoning test on Friday, 14 September 2012 at their primary school **or** on Saturday 15th September at Boston High School (Carlton Road, Kirton and Staniland students).

Your child will take a non-verbal reasoning test on Friday, 21st September 2012 at their primary school **or** on Saturday 22nd September at Boston High School (Carlton Road, Kirton and Staniland students).

October 2012 The outcomes of the 11+ procedure will be posted to you on Friday, 12 October 2012, and we will clarify the options which are open to you when completing your preference forms for return to the LA by 31 October 2012.

February 2013 Offers of a school place will be posted by the LA on Thursday 28 February 2013 based on preferences submitted on your application form in the autumn. You will have the opportunity of appeal and/or to make a new application if you wish. You

must decide whether or not to accept the offer of this place by Monday 18 March 2013.

Boston High School will be posting letters to you on Friday, 1 March 2013.

Either: (1) confirming the grammar school place offered on 28 February 2013
or: (2) offering to include your daughter on a reserve list.

Please note:

It is vital you complete a registration form for your daughter to take part in testing. The deadline for return of the forms is July 6th. Please find a copy of the form in your pack, if needed; feel free to leave it with us at the end of your visit.

In line with our published admissions policy, and with the Lincolnshire aspiration for grammar schools to take 25% of the population, we operate the 11+ testing procedure alongside those other schools in the Lincolnshire Consortium of Grammar Schools.

Applicants take two tests (one verbal reasoning and one non-verbal reasoning) and the results are 'standardised' against all other applicants in the traditional catchment areas of Lincolnshire grammar schools. Once the top 25% of the entire Consortium cohort has been identified, those schools near county borders are free to fill remaining places from applicants outside of Lincolnshire. In Boston, we will keep to an intake of 25% of our local population, ensuring that Boston area parents have the expected access to their grammar schools.

The 11+ Tests: Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Should I enter my daughter for the test?*

The short answer to this one is...yes. As in all maintained schools, education at Boston High School is free and delivered by fully-qualified professionals, so applying to the school is no different to applying anywhere else. Our school is not 'elitist' in any way – it simply takes in students from all walks of life who can demonstrate that they have a high level of ability and would benefit from an academic education. There is nothing to be lost by taking the tests, as, for most students, your daughter will take the exams with her classmates at her primary school, where she will feel at ease.

2. *How will I know if she is likely to pass?*

There is no guarantee that any applicant will 'pass' the 11+ test. The test is norm-referenced, so it aims to take the top 25% of each cohort. That means that there isn't a set level of ability needed...she simply needs to do better than other students in her year group! As an indication, if she is currently getting Level 4s and 5s at primary school, then she is *likely* to do well in the tests, though there is not a direct correlation between the tests and Key Stage 2 scores.

3. *What sorts of things are tested?*

There are two papers: a Verbal Reasoning paper and a Non-Verbal Reasoning paper. We send practice papers to your daughter's primary school, so she should have had a go at one already. We also run 11+ Familiarisation Sessions for those students and parents wanting to look at the kinds of questions that come up year-on-year. The papers require students to think laterally, look for codes and patterns, and apply their knowledge of symmetry, rotation, word construction and vocabulary. Neither paper will test 'memory' of primary school curriculum learning, so there is nothing that a candidate can 'revise' before the test....these are cognitive skills application papers.

4. Do I need to have registered him for the tests?

Yes, you do. You will appreciate that it is quite a complex exercise to organise testing for all of the children in the primary schools in the catchment areas of the two grammar schools in the town, so we do need people to register for the tests to give us accurate numbers. So, if you haven't registered yet, collect a registration form on Open Evening, fill it in and return it to us before you go.

5. Will she have to come to Boston High School to take the tests?

We prefer to test girls in their own primary school classrooms, where they are surrounded by their friends and feel most at ease with being under exam conditions. Most candidates take the tests this way. However, for the small number of primary schools where the Head would prefer us not to come into school, we also run testing sessions the following morning at Boston High School. This year, those students being tested in their primary schools will take the tests on the Fridays of 14th and 21st September, and those coming to BHS will take the tests on the Saturdays of 15th and 22nd September.

6. When do we get the results of the tests?

This year, we will be posting out the outcomes of the 11+ procedure on 12th October, so you do not have to wait long to know if your daughter has achieved the required standard. In that letter, we will clarify the options open to you when completing your preference forms for return to the Local Authority (by 31st October).

7. If she hasn't 'passed', is there anything I can do about it?

Yes there is. All parents have the right of appeal against the decision not to admit students based on the 11+ test outcomes. Indeed, if you and your daughter's primary school teacher(s) feel that your daughter is of an appropriate ability level to succeed at Boston High School, then you should appeal. That discussion with your daughter's primary school should be held when the outcomes are posted to you in October, as you will be nominating Boston High School as your school of choice on your preference form in order to be able to make the appeal later. This does mean that, if unsuccessful at appeal, you will be allocated a school by the Local Authority.

In past years, many students have entered Boston High School on appeal and have gone on to achieve excellent GCSE and A Level results and subsequently gone to university. No test can accurately predict the ability levels of all candidates sitting it, and it would be wrong not to take into account what you and your daughter's primary school already know about her. If she should simply have 'had a bad day' for the tests, and has not passed, then please do exercise your right to appeal. As we have two single-sex grammar schools serving the town, we have not traditionally had the over-subscription problems facing some other grammar schools in the country, so there have been places available for those deemed suitable by the independent Appeals Panel.

8. Is appealing for a place a difficult and stressful process?

No. It's actually quite straight-forward. You cannot make an appeal until after the Local Authority has allocated you a school place on March 1st (i.e. a place in another school). At that point, you can contact the Clerk to Governors, c/o Boston Grammar School, South End, Boston, Lincs, PE21 6JY and request appeal papers. For speed, it is quicker to contact her at clerk@bostongrammarschools.co.uk The appeal papers can also be submitted online for speed and convenience.

Appeal papers ask for some basic information about you and your child, and offer you the chance to make a statement supporting your daughter's suitability for grammar school. Most parents then attach copies of

primary school reports or supporting evidence of current primary school achievement. Once that is received, the Clerk arranges an appointment with you for a brief meeting with the independent Appeals Panel (usually in May / June), who will ask any questions they have about your daughter's circumstances and then make their decision on whether or not she should be admitted.

If it sounds stressful, it really isn't. Further information about appealing for a school place can be found at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/parents/schools/school-admissions/information-about-schools/faqs/

9. When will we get an offer of a place?

If your daughter has 'passed' the 11+, you will be formally allocated a place by the Local Authority on 1st March, and you will then receive our formal offer of the place on 2nd March. You should have accepted the LA's allocation by 18th March to take up the place.

If you want to turn down the LA's allocated place or re-apply, you should contact the Admissions Team at the Authority, which usually looks at reapplications in early May. If your daughter did not pass the test, but you appeal to us for a place and are successful, then the Local Authority will amend the admissions database to show that you are now coming to Boston High School and not the school you were offered on 1st March.

10. Doesn't failing the 11+ stigmatise a child for life?

No. As with all things, achievement is relative. Children will do more or less well than others in Key Stage tests, on the sports field, in their GCSEs....some will go on to fail their driving tests first time, while others pass. This is just one measure along the road of life, and there are many. Children mature at different rates, and the 11+ outcome should never be seen as some kind of measure of inherent genius or weakness. It's simply an aid to establishing what kind of education might best suit a child for the next five years...before we look at it all again at 16.

Parents should also bear in mind that, under the Boston Secondary Schools Agreement, students who have matured slightly later and come into their own academically have transferred into the grammar school where this has been deemed appropriate by the two schools involved. The 11+ is not a 'life-or-death' test.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK FURTHER, AND TAKE A TOUR

I would be more than happy to meet with any parent who is considering making an application to Boston High School on behalf of their daughter and who wants to find out more about the school. We can organise tours of the school outside of Open Day – and wherever possible we will make appointments to suit you. Parents of students already on roll are also welcome to come and see the school at work.

We look forward to meeting as many parents and prospective students as possible on Open Day and Evening on 3rd July. Should you wish to arrange a meeting with me, and/or a tour of the school, on a different date, please telephone Mrs Beet on (01205) 310505 in order to make an appointment.

Yours sincerely



Dr J Howard
Headteacher
Boston High School