

Quakers in Yorkshire October 2026

Bootham School presentations:

Deneal Smith, Head

[SLIDE1: Crest]

[SLIDE 2: Photo of the campus]

I am very much looking forward to Bootham hosting QiY next year under our new arrangements of tying in Open Mornings with these meetings. We had our own Open Morning last Saturday at Bootham and it was a huge success - we tried a new approach which enabled all our students in Year 9 and above either to be involved in an activity which visitors could join, or being the lead tour guide with a family. Speaking to a wide range of students really is the best way to understand the school and I encourage you to do that in twelve months.

Rather than have our usual student presentation therefore, I am going to run you through some of the highlights of the year and plans we are about to reveal in greater detail to our parents next Saturday.

Slide 3: Academic

Our academic results have improved year on year since the pandemic arrangements came to an end. Last year over 75% of A-level grades were at grades A*-B and hitting that threshold puts us among the top academic schools in England. GCSE results saw 61% of grades at 9-7 - which is the equivalent of the old A and A* grades, again an impressive performance. These raw results get published in league tables which do not reflect the entry levels of students. Highly selective schools really should be getting these grades - and better, but Bootham's students span the range of previous attainment. We avoid speaking about ability because it implies something fixed, whereas we know hard work and good teaching can bring huge improvements in students and we do not want to put a ceiling on what any of them can achieve. Our value-added data is the thing of which we are most proud - this measures results compared with perceived ability earlier in a child's schooling. Last year we were in the top 20% of schools - our improved results this year should place us up towards the top 10% of schools.

We pride ourselves on being a school that caters for all - and for many that draws the focus towards Learning Support and bespoke programmes for students who would struggle with a full programme of 9 GCSEs or 3 A-levels. Indeed, our SEND students (those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) have done extremely well and even exceeded the non-SEND cohort in terms of proportion of grades exceeding expectations. Our new Director of Digital Learning is focusing initially on how the available technology can support SEND students: we follow the mantra that good SEND teaching is good teaching, so this will help everyone.

There is a renewed focus this year on students whose needs are at the other end of the spectrum - those who devour knowledge and want to be stretched and challenged. New academic scholarships have been introduced for students in Years 9, 10 and 12. These are absolutely not about drawing in students with promises of huge fee discounts to prop up student numbers - although scholars will be given priority when we determine means-tested bursaries. The academic scholarship programme is

about having a nucleus of driven students who will be given advanced opportunities - so for example the scholarship assessments included a philosophical component. A month in, the first groups of academic scholars are very keen to be involved in hearing and giving academic talks and entering academic competitions. The programme of Jeremy Heywood Lectures continues - this term we heard from Edward Garnier KC, former Solicitor General, who spoke to us about the threats to trial by Jury and referenced William Penn's famous trial at the end of the 17th century as the point at which this right was fully asserted (against the wishes of the judge in the case). The Heywood lectures are open to the public and you are very welcome to attend.

SLIDE 4: Art/Music/drama

Other scholarships have been made available for performing arts, music and fine art. Dramatic opportunities continue to grow - this term three productions are scheduled for different year groups: the Diary of Anne Frank; The Mudlarks; and a staged production of Jesus Christ Superstar. In the last two terms we saw West Side Story and Mary Poppins as our two major musicals, as well as the student-led Improvised Musical which will be going to Edinburgh next summer. The music department continues to surpass itself - the range of styles is everything from classical orchestral and choral to jazz and rock, and the quality is extraordinary.

SLIDE 5 Sport

The final type of new scholarship is for sport. Sport at Bootham is enjoying something of a boom. Basketball is a major sport for the boys and Bootham has seen huge ongoing success, last year winning the district leagues at U13 and U16. Our 1st VII netballers went all the way to the national final in Loughborough, and the 1st XI boys won a regional football competition as well as achieving impressive results against our much bigger local schools. Swimming is a phenomenal success story at Bootham, with both boys' and girls' teams competing on the National stage, and the girls' U18 relay team winning gold in the nationals. We emphasise sport for all and playing in the right spirit. Last month we held our first sports awards with special guest Ben Mee, a recently retired Premier League footballer who, as captain of Burnley, called out prejudice when opponents of Black Lives Matter protested - he is a great role model and we were delighted to have him.

SLIDE 6 US trip

Following my trip to China in 2024, this spring I spent ten days on the eastern seaboard of the United States, visiting a number of the Quaker Schools in the area, from New York to Philadelphia to rural Pennsylvania and New Jersey as down to Baltimore and Washington. It was fascinating and I have brought back more ideas that I can share right now which will further strengthen the Quaker ethos at Bootham. We are developing opportunities for collaboration with our American friends. We hope to welcome groups from each of the schools to spend time with us, spending time in school with our students, enjoying all York has to offer, and we would also support them in undertaking the Quaker pilgrimage route. We may be able to see some of them come for extended periods - a term or a year - and spend time in boarding.

SLIDE 7 Boarding

Throughout its history, Bootham has been a boarding school. Boarding has been placed under increased threat by the imposition of VAT and the hostile immigration policies towards international students wishing to come to our universities - that is percolating down to all schools.

At Bootham we have two outstanding boarding houses - Fox and Rowntree - and a brilliant team of academic staff working with the houseparents to give our boarders a real home from home. We have started running boarding experiences for our new Year 7 children. Our 11 year olds spend 3 nights in boarding by tutor group - 7 or 8 in each of the boys' and girls' houses, and they have dinner, spend some time on homework before activity in drama, astronomy and sport. They have loved it and no wonder - I am delighted to say that Bootham is a finalist in the Boarding school of the Year category of the Independent School Awards.

Among our boarders are six Springboard students. We don't publicise who they are, but these are young people from backgrounds without the capacity to pay anything towards a boarding education, and in some cases, they are looked-after children, with no parents on the scene to give them these opportunities. The school covers the entire cost of their education with a fund available to pay for additional items including sports kit, music lessons and essential trips. The focus of our fundraising has been on these transformational bursaries - and we would like to be able to fund more than six. That will rely on the generosity of parents, Old Scholars, and those for whom the gift of a Quaker education within a caring community is something they want to bestow on a young person.

SLIDE 8: 61 Bootham images

Future capital plans are focussed on the end building of the Bootham frontage, next to Bootham Park. This is the former Institute for the Deaf, and Bootham governors purchased the property a decade ago, in order to complete the set and provide opportunities for development in the future. That time has now come and we have plans to convert this underused building into a new Sixth Form Centre, with classrooms for A-level teaching and independent study spaces. There is a demand for conference spaces, and with a setting just a few minutes walk from the train station, the building will be designed for letting out 16 weeks a year. No name has yet been agreed but I hope it can be seen as a centre for Peace - I have already spoken with Woodbrooke about York becoming a hub for more of their in-person courses.

SLIDE 9: same as Slide 2

Melissa Askew, Clerk of Governors

The Governors are delighted with the progress that the school has made this year across the academic, creative arts, sport and boarding and pastoral care. As Deneal has shared, there are great stories to tell across all these areas of school life. As governors, a major focus is on the enduring Quaker ethos in the school, and we have been pleased to see that this - already a strength of the school - is being enhanced in many different ways.

Deneal didn't mention the Social Action programme which is now embedded in the timetables of all college students, each of whom have an afternoon a week set aside to allow them to volunteer in a

local primary school, charity shop or on one of the other many programmes available. We see the benefits students get from these opportunities, as well as the benefits accruing to the schools and charities involved. The 'Let Your Life Speak' course is another bespoke element of the Year 10 curriculum which is now in its third year. Pulling together elements of Quaker history and activism, it also introduces students to business, economics, politics and psychology, and is drawing attention for other schools.

Despite the financial impact of VAT on school fees (a tax that would be illegal in the EU) and the loss of business rate relief, governors are committed to sustaining the bursaries programme for a diverse range of backgrounds. All fee support is now means-tested - so gifts to the bursary fund can only be channelled to those whose circumstances make financial support essential. Bursaries cover local students on day places as well as the SpringBoard students mentioned. We also have two Ukrainian students - refugees from the war - who are being supported at Bootham.

One lesson that Deneal brought back from America was the centrality of fundraising and philanthropy to the business models of their schools. This is being adopted by Bootham, with the first capital fundraising in many years about to be launched to support the creation of the new College Centre. Deneal will be sharing the plans at a session for parents next Saturday morning. We have appointed a Director of Development who is looking at ways to move to a greater philanthropic element to the schools funding - akin to what is seen in American Quaker Schools although we have a very long way to go to match their levels of fundraising.

Another significant focus for governors is on the long-term sustainability of the school. We know we have a wonderful proposition, and we are investing more in marketing, with a new website due to launch next term, and a Partnerships Lead appointed to develop relationships with feeder schools at home and abroad.

Growing pupil numbers and fee income are important parts of the strategy, but so too is living within our means and making sure the school delivers excellent value for money. In a difficult climate, Bootham is projecting itself as a school that can provide the right educational offer for all our students.

As Deneal says, we are looking forward to giving you a more immersive experience at this time next year – please do take the opportunity to tour the school and learn what a 21st century Quaker education is for our young people.

We do want the Quaker voice heard in the school and on the Governing Committee – our schools are a force for good and Deneal and the team benefit from a strong group of governors. If you would be interested in becoming a governor and have skills that could benefit the group – education, finance, marketing, HR etc. – please do speak with me later.