

# Lord Digby aids school in assisted places quest

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Education Correspondent

A top independent girls school in Birmingham is enlisting the help of former business leader Lord Digby Jones as it seeks to open its illustrious doors to more pupils from less well-off backgrounds.

The fee-paying King Edward VI High School for Girls, in Edgbaston, has invited Lord Digby, former director of the Confederation of British Industry, to be guest speaker at its 125th anniversary dinner on Friday June 5.

It is hoped that the fund-raising event will lead to a significant increase in the number of means-tested bursaries which the school is able to offer to girls from across the region through its assisted places scheme.

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HEAD TEACHER SARAH EVANS

Head teacher, Sarah Evans, said: “Out of about 550 girls, around 100 to 150 are on some sort of assistance. We are hoping to be able to offer more.

“I think it is absolutely fundamental to the ethos of the school that we can offer access to girls regardless of their financial position. This has always been at the heart of the King Edward’s mission.”

About 90 of the school’s assisted places are funded by the King Edward’s Foundation, with the remainder coming from companies such as IMI, Pinsent Masons and Wragge, as well as help from the Old Edwardians’ Association.



Sarah Evans, head teacher of King Edward VI High School for Girls

Picture Iain Findlay (IF0100107Head-02)

“We always had some form of outside funding, either from central government or the local authority,” Miss Evans added. “It’s only in the last few years that all of that has gone.

“That’s why it has become more of an issue, because there is no other way of funding these assisted places.

“What we feel is that it has been a key in Birmingham to unlocking social mobility in the past. Once we have them at age 11, one hundred per cent of them go on to top universities.

“It’s what social mobility means, because their career and life opportunities are going to be transformed.”

A similar assisted places scheme also operates at the neighbouring King Edward’s School for boys, where about 40 per cent of pupils receive some kind of financial support.



Lord Digby Jones

The £35-a-head fund-raising dinner featuring Lord Digby, who was briefly Minister of State for Trade until becoming a business ambassador at UK Trade & Investment last year, will include a raffle and an auction.

Miss Evans said: “Having Digby Jones is very attractive and we are very grateful to him for his support. He went to an independent school on a scholarship so he recognises the value of assisted places.”

This year’s 125th anniversary celebrations for King Edward VI High School for

Girls continues this evening with a concert at Symphony Hall, featuring former pupil and Shakespearean actress Lindsay Duncan.

The 58-year-old actress, who starred as former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in a recent BBC documentary, is to appear alongside David Tennant in a forthcoming Dr Who special.

The concert will also include a performance by 17-year-old Jinah Shim of Grieg’s Piano Concerto, which formed the subject of a famous sketch in the 1971 Morecambe & Wise Christmas special featuring conductor Andre Previn.



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