

Jill Berry's Talk from 7th Jan

I've been asked to speak for just a few minutes this evening to give a current Head's perspective of where we are and where we're going - to focus specifically on the educational aspects of what lies ahead.

As you've heard, a great deal of activity has taken place since we had the Parents' Meetings at Dame Alice and Bedford High in September. Some key decisions have been made, the next one of which has to be when and how the Senior Schools will combine. This is a complex issue, as David has explained, as there are a number of significant factors, which include physical capacity and the pace at which we are going to be able to develop the Cardington Road site in order to accommodate the number of girls we are likely to have at different times. However, the most significant considerations, as they have been throughout, are educational, not physical or financial. We clearly can't ignore the issue of physical capacity and the financial elements of the proposed changes, but it is educational principles which are driving this. We are committed to trying to find the best model so that the education of girls currently in the two schools continues to be as positive and successful as possible. The decision about the merger was taken in order to preserve and to build on this quality of education, and this hasn't changed. We are all invested in doing everything we can to ensure that Bedford Girls' School is a superb school, and we have to keep this very clearly in mind as we plan the next steps.

Julie Eldridge and I, and Corinne Royden and Susan Braud in the respective Junior Schools, are determined to maintain stability and to protect the education of the girls we are currently responsible for. We know we do this through the work of the talented and committed staff we have, teaching and support staff, and we are extremely appreciative of the dedication and professionalism which has been shown by the staff in the two schools throughout what has been a challenging period. We will continue to work with our staff on both maintaining the current high standards of education and care while also planning for the future.

It is vitally important that we are able to encourage current and future parents to have confidence in us and to have faith in the vision of what Bedford Girls' School will achieve in the future. This means encouraging you to trust us and, once the timing of the transfer plan is decided – and the decision will be made this half term - to accept our professional judgement based on our understanding of education and not to rush to transfer your daughter earlier than has been recommended, or to lose your confidence in Bedford Girls' School and what a tremendous range of opportunities it will offer your daughters.

We do need time to make some key educational decisions so that we can work together to launch BGS as successfully as possible. As BGS Junior School opens in September of this year, the priority this term has to be the structure, staffing, and curriculum of the combined Junior School, which Corinne Royden will lead. We are confident that we can do this successfully within this time frame.

We also have to make decisions about the Senior School staffing and curriculum this academic year. We have already asked Heads of Senior School departments to meet to make decisions about GCSE and A level syllabuses where there isn't already alignment, and we can then prepare to teach the same examination syllabuses as soon as possible, planning the staff training which will be required. Further staff will also need to be trained to deliver the IB so that we can confidently teach both a healthy range of A levels and the IB to an enlarged Sixth Form when these year groups combine. We know we have to have the time to plan this properly so that we can do this well. We can't sacrifice quality of provision to speed.

Jo MacKenzie, as she has explained, takes up her post at Easter, so the activity in the Summer Term can be focussed on making Senior School staffing and curriculum decisions

which should give us more than twelve months' notice of when these decisions come fully into effect.

It is understandable that some parents feel unnerved by the change, and some may think they should move their daughters as soon as possible. However, we feel strongly that you need to appreciate the complexity involved in ensuring we are fully prepared and confident about delivering the best possible education we can to the number of girls we will have in 2010, 2011 and 2012. Please be assured that we are focussing on the girls' interests here. When the decision is made it will be the best one possible to ensure the success of Bedford Girls' School, to which we are all absolutely committed.

Thank you.

JB Y

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