

Jo MacKenzie's Talk from 7 Jan

Good evening – I am immensely proud to be standing here as the new head of Bedford Girls' School. Honestly, I wake up excited at the thought of blending two very distinct schools, with proven reputations, into one vibrant, forward thinking school.

So what do I see during and by the end of the transition period. Well I see Bedford Girls' School as thriving. Prospective parents will be queuing up at every point of entry to get their daughters into this school because as soon as they walk through the doors they will feel the energy and vibrancy of the teaching and learning. The lessons will be peppered with laughter, success of every kind will be celebrated and there will be a strong sense of "can do" amongst the girls and staff. Not only will Bedford Girls' School be warm and welcoming it will be vibrant, creative and alive.

So how do we achieve this?

The starting point for me will be to focus on the teaching and learning because it is fundamental to what we do. As I have said we are bringing together two schools, each with their own staffing body and their own distinctive styles of teaching and expectations. I have met many of the staff and talked at length to both heads. I spent today at Bedford High School. I know there is a pool of tremendous talent, teachers who are experts at teaching girls – who are passionate about their subjects, and are highly professional and committed, – many of those who I have spoken to, are like me, clearly excited by the merger. They want to build an integrated teaching community that capitalises on the strengths of the two different staff rooms. However, in order to do this most effectively, time is needed to allow staff to share their ideas of best practice at individual, departmental and whole school level. I am really pleased and grateful to the Harpur Trust that my current school has allowed me a day each week this term, to have this time to spend in both schools. Time to meet and get to know all the staff, to meet the different Heads of Depts, to visit their depts and see their good practice and share and enthuse about their ideas to be able to build a new school community that brings together the best of both schools onto the one Cardington Road site.

This next term I will be putting together a team, of senior leaders and heads of depts. who share the vision of creating an outstanding school of which the girls, the parents and the staff are proud. A team, open to new ideas, who want to foster curiosity and excitement in their teaching and the students' learning but most of all want to give your daughter the best education for life.

As a team we will work together to design a new curriculum that builds on the strengths of both schools. Whilst both schools deliver effective curriculums – the curriculums do vary so this gives us a fabulous opportunity to look at what we do best and what we could do better. It gives us time to share ideas and think about introducing new approaches that enable our students to be ready for the world they will move into. For example, more and more colleges at universities and interview panels for jobs are testing students not just on their knowledge but their aptitude to think. So it has become necessary to consider seriously how we teach our students to think and more importantly teach them to think about thinking. One way is to timetable a lesson a week where you teach students a whole range of different thinking skills – thinking tools they are called so that when the students are stuck or given unfamiliar questions, they can select and deploy the appropriate thinking strategies that will enable them to solve these problems and answer unfamiliar questions. We have time now to discuss this and many other ideas to enable us to

design a new curriculum that draws on our core values, a curriculum that promotes effective learning, and one which continues to build our students' self esteem.

With the merger we are pooling together the resources of two schools – this gives us huge opportunity to provide a very rich and diverse co-curriculum, where we can bring together the very best in Sport, Music, Art and Drama. By having this rich provision it will give opportunities for every girl to develop self confidence and the experience to succeed.

An outstanding school has high expectations. I have high expectations. To meet these expectations during the transition and to the new Bedford Girls School we need to be accountable for what the girls are doing now and in the future in their class rooms. This accountability happens with regular dept reviews led by the new Heads of Depts. These depts will be able to review and evaluate what they do and how they teach, will scrutinize the work completed by pupils to monitor the progress of their students, whilst working at the same time with the new senior leadership team to ensure that high standards are consistent across the whole school during and after the transition. Trust us, we will look after your daughters' education, during and after the merger to ensure your expectations will be met.

Jill Berry has always said that a school is not about the bricks and mortar it is about the people in it – it is you – the parents, the staff, former pupils, friends of the school but most importantly your daughters. Whilst it is important to get to know the staff, I also feel very strongly that I need to get to know you and your daughters. I am in a very fortunate position of being able to take up the post of head of Bedford Girls' School at Easter and work at the same time alongside two excellent heads, Julie Eldridge and Jill Berry. It gives me a term to focus entirely on the new school and its successful transition without, for a term, the day to day concerns of running a school. It gives me the opportunity to meet you – to discuss your thoughts and hear your ideas about the new school. It gives me time to spend in both schools meeting your daughters, chairing discussion groups, listening to their views: to ensure we provide the best for your daughter's education and overall well being.

I want to build an outstanding school that has high expectations. I want Bedford Girls' to be an exciting place in which girls learn and a school where the staff and students are proud to belong. I know at times it will be challenging. But it provides a tremendous opportunity to pull together the best of what the two schools offer individually, merging them into a larger and therefore better resourced institution. This gives us a much greater means of realising our high ambitions. Over the next two terms, I am very keen to learn as much as I can about the two existing schools from girls, the staff and you so that together we can achieve the result of creating a new outstanding, forward thinking school known to all as Bedford Girls'.

Thank you