

## **Julie Eldridge's Talk from 7<sup>th</sup> January**

It is important to stress at the outset that no decision has been made about the model for transfer. I have been asked to give an indication of the way in which Option B would be a good experience for the year groups in question if left as the only occupants of the Bromham Road site.

### **The "special experience" option**

Girls who are currently in Year 9 (Upper 4) and Year 11 (Upper 5) are about to embark on a really important and exciting phase of their education and one which will have significance in their future careers. For this reason it is really important that we are able to offer the very best environment and educational continuity that we can under the circumstances of merger.

In September I gave an undertaking that we would do all in our power to avoid any disruption to these girls in particular, and I believe that Option B is the very best way to fulfil this promise.

I realise that I am speaking mainly to two year groups of BHSG parents at this point because it is the High School site that will eventually be vacated when the merger is complete.

In September 2011 current Year 9 girls will be moving into Year 11 and their final year of GCSE, current Year 11 girls will be completing their Sixth Form courses – whether this is IB or A level. With just these two year groups on site there are a great number of opportunities for a more mature working environment, development of greater personal responsibility and more tailored learning environments. All of the specialist facilities at BHSG are contained in the Main Building and for this reason we would be able to create a smaller unit on what is otherwise a large site. Social facilities would be maintained – the Year 11 (Upper 5) common room is already there and the Year 13 (Upper Sixth) would take over the Staff Common Room which used to be the Upper 6 Common Room in my early years at the school! The Bay and Atrium could also be a mixed social area to allow girls space to associate between year groups, and indeed to meet with staff. Girls would therefore be able to continue to be taught in familiar surroundings, by staff they know, and the normal interaction within the year group might be extended with opportunities for more shared activities with the two year groups. Combined Cadet Force and Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme participation would continue in the normal way and we would expect to provide additional opportunities to join with sport, music and other extra-curricular activities at Bedford Girls' School (BGS). It would be our intention to timetable games lessons across the two schools for Year 11 to enable team participation to continue for those who have enjoyed involvement at this level, and a wider range of opportunities for general sports lessons. On site facilities in the SPA would continue to be available during the day for the additional PE lesson in the BHSG timetable, as well as before and after school.

Following our excellent rating in last year's inspection we would obviously retain our commitment to excellent pastoral care, and girls would continue to have contact with form tutors as well as a senior member of staff attached to each year group. However there would be wider opportunities for mentoring making use both of e-communication and PSHE time. Joint activities would also be arranged and hosted at both sites as appropriate for the different year groups; these might include such events as Careers and Interview Guidance and Practice, Pastoral issues such as Drug and Alcohol Awareness and Money Management to list just a couple of the events we normally run for these year groups.

Girls in Year 11 would be involved in the Sixth Form Information programme at BGS and although their progression would be expected, there would be an opportunity to make an informed choice about transfer. Information about the IB Diploma Programme would be made available at both sites as part of the ongoing process of guidance and planning.

Girls in Year 13 would have greater opportunities to develop leadership skills and it would be most important for the Student Voice to be channelled through a Student Committee which would adopt a more significant role in planning events for the year. As we seek to develop independent learners it is important to listen to what the girls feel would most enhance their experience and I would expect that many decisions about activities outside the curriculum would be student led as we encourage responsibility and the development of the skills of citizenship.

It would be a chance for Year 11 girls to develop a more adult way of working and a more adult relationship with their teachers, in an environment where there were no younger girls to consider. Many schools across the independent sector are considerably smaller than ours and I do not believe that a number of between 150 and 170 girls on site would seem unduly small. Most socialising in all schools takes place within year groups rather than between years, and yet there will still be opportunities for house competitions within these senior years – perhaps the greatest leadership challenge for House committees will be to persuade all of the year group to participate in events other than sports day.

However, we do recognise that the most important aspect of this year will be to complete programmes of study to the highest possible standard and for the Upper 6 to progress to the Universities of their choice. We are fully confident that we will be able to support these endeavours in this model and that the environment provided will be far better and more conducive to achievement than one where the additional numbers had to be accommodated in temporary classrooms on a site which felt unduly crowded as a result.

Present Year 11 girls would have had the opportunity promised to complete their education as High School girls on the High School site – but with the added bonus of additional extra curricular opportunities at BGS if they choose to participate. Present Year 9 girls would complete their GCSEs following a familiar programme and syllabuses for which their Year 9 curriculum had prepared them, and an option system and curriculum structure with which they were familiar. Their subsequent progression to Sixth Form would be the next exciting phase and one which we hope they would choose to spend at BGS, but to join the school at a natural transfer stage.