

# MERGER OF BEDFORD HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS & DAME ALICE HARPUR SCHOOL

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



**SEPTEMBER 2009**



## CONTENTS

<i>No.</i>	<i>Category of Questions</i>	<i>Page</i>
1	<b>Why and when are the schools merging?</b>	3
2	<b>What communications are planned with parents, students, staff and former pupils?</b>	4
3	<b>What curriculum will be taught at the merged school?</b>	5
4	<b>How will you deal with the differences of both schools?</b>	5
5	<b>Where will the merged school be located and what will the facilities be like?</b>	6
6	<b>What boarding provision will be available?</b>	8
7	<b>What will happen to the staff of both schools?</b>	8
8	<b>Bedford Charity related queries</b>	9
9	<b>Sources of further information</b>	10

## Why and when are the schools merging ?

### 1. Can you explain the strategic thinking behind the decision?

For several years, the girls' schools have seen a gradual decline in their combined pupil numbers. In 1990, over 2,000 girls were educated across the two schools and today the figure stands at approximately 1,500. Coupled with the rising cost of providing a high quality education it is the Trustees' view that operating two girls' schools will not be the best way to continue to offer the high standard of education that is expected from a Harpur Trust school.

Trustees wish to ensure the merger establishes one strong, vibrant and successful school that will be a beacon for modern, single-sex education for girls. They also wish to ensure the new school is financially strong and will be accessible to as many girls as possible by keeping fees as low as possible.

### 2. Who made the final decision?

Trustees of the Bedford Charity unanimously took the decision to merge the two girls' schools during the Governing Body meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 having spent a considerable period of time reviewing their future. Their final decision was informed by independent research conducted by a leading business consultancy specialising in the education sector, who were commissioned to review the current status of the schools and propose viable and sustainable options for the future.

### 3. Is this just a money making exercise for the Charity?

No. The motive is to secure high quality, affordable single sex education for girls in Bedford and the surrounding areas for the foreseeable future.

### 4. Why was it announced on the last day of term?

It was not our intention to announce the news on the last day of term. We had planned to release the news early in the autumn term once more work on the merger had been undertaken over the holidays. However, because we were advised that the Beds on Sunday would be running a story on the merger we felt it important to inform parents, pupils and staff ourselves before the paper was published.

### 5. What is the timescale for the existing schools to close and the new one to open?

Trustees anticipate it will take between 3 and 5 years to complete the merger but this will be reviewed during the planning phase and you will be regularly updated on the progress of our plans.

### 6. How long will the planning phase last and who will be involved?

There will be opportunities, throughout the planning phase, for staff, parents and pupils to attend a series of information sessions where they can ask questions of Trustees, Heads, Bursars, the Chief Executive Officer, Human Resources and communication staff. In addition groups of staff, parents and pupils will also be invited to comment on various elements of the merger throughout the planning phase, which will take approximately 9 months.

### 7. Are there any examples of other independent girls' schools that have merged in recent years?

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (which has some 20,000 members employed in independent schools) has confirmed that at least 25 independent schools have already had to close or announce a merger over the past few years.

Some successful mergers over the past few years include :

- The Grammar School at Leeds is the result of a merger between Leeds Girls' High School (founded 1876) and Leeds Grammar School (founded 1552).
- Berkhamsted Collegiate School was formed by the merger of Berkhamsted School (founded in 1541), Berkhamsted School for Girls (founded in 1888), and Berkhamsted Preparatory School.
- The Stamford Endowed Schools was formed by a merger of Stamford School (founded in 1532), Stamford High School for Girls (founded in 1877) and Stamford Junior School.

## What communications are planned with parents, students, staff and former pupils ?

### **8. Why do we have to wait so long to find out more information about the merger?**

This is partly to do with the premature announcement of the news in the local newspaper coupled with the fact that the schools were then on holiday. It would have been impractical to hold information sessions when a large proportion of people were on holiday and would be unable to attend.

In addition, as per our original timescale, Trustees, Heads and Bursars are currently working with our external advisers, Tribal Group, to develop the detail of the merger plans which will take several months to complete. During this time we will release additional details on the merger once they are agreed but will not be in a position to release the entire merger plans for several months.

### **9. Why were the details of the merger not in place before an announcement?**

It would have been impossible to complete all the work necessary for this complex project, which may well take several years to complete, without the news becoming common knowledge. Trustees therefore took the decision that it would be better to announce their initial plan before the news was reported in the press or rumours were circulated among staff, parents and pupils. Being open about their plans also enables Trustees to invite staff, parents, pupils and former pupils to become involved in the planning of the new school through information evenings and project working groups.

### **10. How and when will regular communications take place with students, parents and staff?**

We have already arranged a series of information sessions for parents and staff on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> September where they can ask questions of the Heads, Trustees and senior Harpur Trust staff. We are also planning information sessions and smaller group sessions for pupils.

In addition to termly information sessions we will communicate news as it becomes available via email, intranet and websites.

At key stages during the planning process we will also invite groups of parents, pupils and staff to comment on elements of the new school's development including uniform, name, logo etc.

### **11. How will you be communicating with pupils and will it include using the social networking site, Facebook, where they have already set up a petition to stop the merger?**

Early in the autumn term pupils will be invited to attend information sessions with their Head, Bursar and some of the Harpur Trust staff. During these sessions pupils will be given more details on the merger and will also have the opportunity to ask questions. Additional information sessions will be arranged as details of the merger emerge.

Additionally groups of pupils from both schools will be invited to participate in a series of working groups that will be looking into the details of the merger including uniform design, name, logo, extra curricular activities, houses, student voice and facilities within the merged school.

We are aware of the Facebook discussion group and have used many of the questions posted on the site to produce this set Q&A document. We will be placing news updates on this site throughout the planning process and will be monitoring feedback on a regular basis.

**12. Will parents and pupils be given the opportunity to be involved in developing the merger plans?**

Yes. We will be inviting staff, parents, pupils and former pupils to be involved in various aspects of the merger throughout the planning process. This may include uniform design, branding, logo and school name.

**What curriculum will be taught at the merged school ?**

**13. What will happen to International Baccalaureate (IB) – currently BHSG offers it and DAHS doesn't?**

Currently it is our intention that the new, merged school will offer the IB; our aim is to provide the greatest possible choice for pupils within a sustainable and high quality provision.

**14. There are differences in the curriculum. What subjects will be kept?**

The whole curriculum will be reviewed as part of the planning phase so we cannot say yet which subjects will be included beyond the core subjects. The aim will be to provide the greatest possible choice for pupils within a sustainable and high quality provision.

**How will you deal with the differences of both schools ?**

**15. How will you deal with the pupil rivalry between the schools in this interim period before the schools merge?**

We are very aware of the existing, traditional rivalry between the two schools. We will be examining ways in which this can be converted into useful, constructive energy that will help establish the new school. Currently, we anticipate bringing pupils together to contribute their views on aspects of the merger and in helping to determine issues on which they feel very strongly such as uniform and various traditions.

**16. The existing schools are incredibly competitive and the pupils are proud of their schools and its heritage so how will you ensure existing pupils successfully integrate following the merger?**

In addition to the pre-merger plans to enlist pupils in various aspects of the merger, we are also looking at mechanisms to ensure the two communities join together as soon as possible and that, wherever possible, cliques do not emerge or become counter-productive. Activities they already do together include the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), a proposed sports tour and a range of Harpur Trust activities including the English Society and the Debating Society.

**17. Will the schools retain their identity?**

The two current schools will retain their own identity until the new school opens at which time the new school name will be adopted and the new school's identity will be firmly based on the strengths of the two current schools. However, Trustees envisage that for a significant period of time the previous names/logos will be included on marketing and communication materials to ensure that the new school

is recognised as having being built from the established and successful foundations of BHSG and DAHS.

**18. What will happen to the former pupils' associations of the schools?**

Over the course of the transition, we will communicate with both the Bedford High School Guild and the Dame Alice Harpur School Association with a view to creating a new former pupils' association for the girls passing through the new merged school, which will retain the individual heritage and history of both the BHSG and DAHSA. Our former pupils are a very important group of stakeholders whose views are very much sought throughout this period.

**Where will the merged school be located and what will the facilities be like ?**

**19. What will the new school be called?**

Until Trustees have completed the first stage of the merger process, which may take approximately 9 months, no decisions will be made on the new school's name.

**20. What will the logo look like?**

Again, until Trustees have completed the first stage of the merger process, which may take approximately 9 months, no decisions will be made on the new school's logo or identity.

**21. Where will the new school be located and when will this decision be made?**

We will examine all options for the location of the new school, including utilising the existing sites, during the first stage of the merger planning process.

**22. Will the junior and senior schools be located on the same site?**

Until we have conducted a feasibility study on the existing school buildings no decision will be made as to where the junior and senior schools will be located.

**23. Will there be a separate merged junior school and if so where will it be located?**

See Q22

**24. Will there be a separate merged 6<sup>th</sup> form facility and if so where will it be located?**

See Q22

**25. How many pupils are expected to be in the merged school?**

It is anticipated, owing to the steady decline in pupil numbers predicted for the next 3 to 5 years, that the new school will provide 1,100 (+/- 100) places for girls aged 7 to 18.

This is a size that research has shown is large enough to allow for a full and diverse curriculum whilst enabling fees to be kept as low as possible, but is not so large that the institution becomes impersonal. It is close to the number of pupils that have been taught in both locations and will also balance the provision of numbers available for boys and girls within the Charity.

**26. Will the new school be more selective than DAHS or BHSG?**

No. The new school will be neither more nor less selective than the current schools.

**27. How will you fit all of the pupils into one school? Will there have to be a lot of additional building work to provide space or will class sizes increase?**

At present the two schools combined are educating approximately 1,500 girls and neither location could currently accommodate all of these girls on one site. By the time the final phase of the merger is complete, however, it is anticipated that 1,100 pupils will be accommodated on one location and this might require some limited renovation, conversion or building work.

It is not the intention to increase the size of classes.

**28. What will be the size of individual classes and will this be different across the year groups?**

The Trustees' intention is not to increase the current overall class sizes as they understand and value the benefits of girls being educated in smaller classes.

**29. What will happen to the existing school buildings? Will they be sold off or used for other Charity purposes?**

During the first stage of the merger process we will be conducting a feasibility study, with the assistance of professional advisers, into where the new school will be located and what will happen to existing buildings if they are deemed unsuitable for housing the new school. Until this study is complete we cannot predict what may happen to existing school buildings.

**30. What will the uniform look like?**

Until decisions have been made on the new school's name, logo and identity we will be unable to develop a new school uniform. Once we are in a position to look at school uniforms we will invite a group of girls from both schools to be involved in the design process.

**31. Will we be expected to buy new uniforms and how much will they cost?**

Yes. All pupils at the newly merged school will be expected to wear the new school uniform. However, the method and timing of moving to the new uniform will be the subject of discussion with parents. Trustees are very mindful of the cost of school uniform and will take a pragmatic approach to its introduction. Nevertheless, the new uniform, which will be a potent symbol of the new school, is important. At present we cannot provide a cost for the new school uniform but anticipate it will be a similar or lower price to the current girls' schools uniforms.

**32. What will the fees be at the merged school?**

No agreement has yet been reached on the new school's fee structure, but Trustees anticipate they will be of a similar level/range currently charged by the existing girls' schools. Wherever feasible, measures will be taken to keep the fees as low as possible consistent with the provision of high quality education.

**33. How are you going to promote the 'new' school with no previous track record to go on?**

Whilst the new school will not have its own track record we will be promoting that it has been established as a result of the merger between BHSG and DAHS and that it draws on the strengths, histories and reputations of the two former schools to provide a top quality, single-sex education for girls in Bedford. We hope that the respective former pupils' associations from each school will help us to achieve a sense of continuity of heritage and history from the former schools.

### **34. What traditions will be maintained?**

It will be the responsibility of the Governors, new Head, senior leadership team, staff, pupils and former pupils to agree what traditions from each of the previous schools will be continued within the new school. Trustees will be keen to ensure some of the traditions from each of the previous schools are retained and built upon, including valuing individuals, personalised learning, maximizing potential, widening access, independent learning and social responsibility. However, the primary aim of ensuring a high quality of education is offered via a wide curriculum and extensive extra curricular activities will be paramount.

### **35. Will my daughter, who is currently at DAHS or BHS, be guaranteed a place in the new school?**

All pupils in BHS and DAHS will automatically be given a place in the new school, subject only to the normal conditions and regulations that currently exist. The admissions process for new pupils is yet to be determined but it is likely that it will be very similar to the current process at DAHS and BHS.

### **36. What reassurance can you give that the 3 - 5 year transition period will not result in disruption for the students and will not compromise their education?**

The Trustees' objective is to minimise the impact on current pupils.

The current Heads and their staff are committed to continuing to offer the best possible educational provision to all their pupils, while still planning for the future. Ensuring that current pupils achieve the best they can academically and outside the formal curriculum will continue to be of the highest priority,

GCSE is clearly a discrete two year unit and as such this would be completed in the school where it was begun. It is clearly essential that we ensure minimum disruption at this time and both schools will be working closely to harmonise the curriculum to support this end.

The Heads will encourage current pupils to look to the future with confidence, and hope that parents will support them in this by being positive in their own conversations about the merger with their daughters.

## **What boarding provision will be available ?**

### **37. What will happen to the current boarding facilities?**

At present the boarding facilities will continue to operate as normal. However they will be reviewed, as will all aspects of current school life, as part of the initial planning process and research will be undertaken to assess the market for boarding facilities in the future.

### **38. Will boarding facilities only be available for 6<sup>th</sup> form?**

Until we have assessed the market's future demand for boarding facilities we cannot predict what boarding opportunities will be offered or for which year groups.

## **What will happen to the staff of both schools ?**

### **39. Will staff have to re-apply for their jobs?**

The Charity wishes to retain the high quality staff already working at both schools, but until we have completed the first stage of the merger process we are not able to predict what the staffing structure of the new school will be or what jobs will be available for either teachers or support staff. We are

therefore unable to confirm at this stage what method of selection to jobs may be used in the new structure, should one be required.

However, the Trustees will ensure that any process for filling positions in the new structure is fair, transparent, legal, follows the correct Human Resources procedures and that staff are appropriately informed and consulted throughout the process.

#### **40. Will there be any redundancies among staff?**

Until we have completed the first stage of the merger process we cannot predict what the staffing structure of the new school will be or, therefore, how many posts may become redundant. It is one of the important objectives of the Trustees to keep redundancies to a minimum by making use of the opportunities when staff retire or when staff choose to leave as part of their normal career progression.

#### **41. Why has the Trust recently recruited a new Head for Dame Alice when they knew the two girls' schools would be merging?**

The current Head at Dame Alice, Jill Berry, had already chosen to move on from her role before the merger plans were formally agreed. As it will take three to five years for the girls' schools to merge it was essential to recruit a new Head to ensure Dame Alice Harpur School continues to offer a first class education for girls during the interim period.

The new Head, Jo MacKenzie who takes over as Head on 1 September 2010, is fully aware and supportive of the Trustees' plans to merge the two schools.

#### **42. Who will be the Head of the merged school?**

It is anticipated that until the two schools merge both current Head Teachers will retain their roles within their respective schools to ensure the merger process causes as little disruption as possible for pupils, parents and staff.

The Trustees are delighted, however, to have two current Heads who are both capable of running the new school. Equally, they are confident that they have selected a new Head for Dame Alice Harpur School, Jo MacKenzie, who is enthusiastic about the merger and who will also prove to be a candidate to run the new school. It is likely, therefore, that either Julie Eldridge or Jo MacKenzie will become the Head of the new school. The trustees have the discretion, however, to recruit a new Head through open competition should circumstances change.

### **Bedford Charity related queries**

#### **43. How does the Charity function and does it fund its schools?**

The Bedford Charity is the single legal entity under which operate the four schools, Bedford School, Bedford Modern School, Bedford High School for Girls and Dame Alice Harpur School. The Trustees of the Charity are ultimately responsible for the governance of the schools, although this is achieved through the structure of the individual school committees reporting to the main body of Trustees. Each of the schools is required to budget for the income arising from the pupils attending, and for the attributable costs of running the school, in a way that ensures that neither a significant surplus nor deficit arises. Whilst the Charity has an endowment investment portfolio from which it receives income to be distributed in the pursuit of its charitable objects, one of which is education, this is not given to the schools to offset costs, although some is still provided by way of means tested Bursaries to pupils attending the schools.

#### 44. Can you explain about budgets and the effect of lower numbers on fees?

Each of the Charity's schools, whilst being part of the one legal entity, is accounted for as a stand alone activity and has to ensure that the costs of the educational provision are matched by the resulting income. Fees and costs are therefore subject to adjustment in order to ensure that the "books balance". If pupil numbers decrease, there are variable costs that can be adjusted, notably the staff costs, although there can be a delay in effecting the saving dependent on the accuracy of the pupil number projections. Fixed costs however, e.g. the costs of the buildings, maintenance and loan finance, remain the same from one year to the next and have to be covered from the fees charged. If pupil numbers decrease, the amount of the fee per pupil taken up to cover these costs increases, and hence the upward pressure on fee levels increases, or other costs (and hence the level of service provided) have to be cut.

#### Sources of further information :



##### Websites :

[www.bedfordhigh.co.uk](http://www.bedfordhigh.co.uk)  
[www.dahs.co.uk](http://www.dahs.co.uk)  
[www.bedfordcharity.org.uk](http://www.bedfordcharity.org.uk)



##### Email :

[ssharp@harpur-trust.org.uk](mailto:ssharp@harpur-trust.org.uk)  
[rama.venchard@tribalgroup.co.uk](mailto:rama.venchard@tribalgroup.co.uk)



##### Phone :

Suzanne Sharp : 01234 369500  
Rama Venchard : 07891 749884



##### Post :

Suzanne Sharp  
Communications Manager  
The Bedford Charity (The Harpur Trust)  
Princeton Court, Pilgrim Centre,  
Brickhill Drive,  
Bedford MK41 7PZ