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Dear Parents

The admission of girls into the BWS Sixth Form from September in 2020 is currently being planned, subject to the normal statutory consultation we have on admissions every year. This letter explains the reasoning behind this initiative.

The main reasons for this proposed change are as follows:

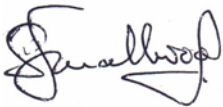
1. The number of students involved in the current collaboration between BWS and SWGS has become unbalanced in favour of BWS. We therefore feel that it would be far more straightforward to offer the opportunity for girls to join the BWS Sixth Form and therefore avoid the complexity of operating across two schools.
2. In future we would like to have more flexibility with term dates, timetable blocking, length of the school day etc; collaboration makes this very difficult to contemplate, let alone implement.
3. We feel that the current position, where some important subjects have been 'lost' to BWS post-16 is not healthy for a school of this size and status – but equally there seems little prospect of A level French and German being viable in the longer term without girls on roll.
4. Evidence gained from other boys' schools where girls have been admitted to Years 12 & 13 strongly suggests that the change improves the academic and social ethos of the Sixth Form. As you would expect we have looked carefully at these case studies, and of course we already have a good deal of expertise with both academic and pastoral work in our already coeducational environment.
5. We also feel that the opportunity for girls to study in the Sixth Form environment that we offer will be different to what can be found at the other providers in the local area – in other words an academic environment where students will be required to dress smartly and have a structured regime, but also with a distinctive and rich extra-curricular programme.
6. Finally, BWS offers the distinctiveness of a Church School for post-16 students in the Cathedral Close – something that is unique and not replicated in any way elsewhere.

I think that it is worth re-emphasising that our aim is to enhance what we offer at BWS by adding girls; their admission will not be at the expense of boys, and we believe that what we will offer will be distinctive and different to anything that is currently part of the local educational landscape. My hope is that students across the local area will benefit and that our coeducational provision will grow with the projected demographic expansion over the next 5 years or so, so that we complement existing provision. I should add that girls admitted to the BWS Sixth Form will be additional to, rather than in place of boys – in other words, no boys will lose the opportunity to come here provided they have met the required grades at GCSE.

We want to avoid unnecessary worry and turbulence for the parents of boys and girls who are in the current Year 12 and also those who will join the Sixth Form(s) in September 2019. Because of this I proposed to SWGS that the current collaborative arrangements continue for those students. SWGS have agreed that the joint lessons should continue for boys and girls who have already started their Sixth Form courses; sadly, with the exception of A level Music, SWGS decided to withdraw the opportunity for Year 12 girls to attend BWS as part of our joint arrangements in September 2019. We will therefore ensure that a similarly wide range of subjects will be available at Bishop's for the boys starting in Year 12 next September. We also hope to continue as much of the joint extra-curricular working as possible, as this is very much to the benefit of the boys and girls.

I hope that you understand the rationale for making this change to our admissions policy – the policy will be open for consultation later on this term and I would welcome any comments that you may have. In school we firmly believe that admitting girls to our Sixth Form will enhance our lessons and learning, and that girls who join BWS will continue to excel academically, as they always have under the guidance of my staff. The SWGS girls who have studied with us over the years have contributed a great deal to the successful working of the Sixth Form, and it is very evident that they have enjoyed the experience of travelling to learn on the BWS Campus too. Above all we will aim to provide that holy grail in education – an academically challenging environment which is also rich in co-curricular opportunities for the young men and women in our care.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S D Smallwood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

S D Smallwood
Head Master