

23 June 2008

To all parents/guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian

Future Development of the College

Over the past number of years the College has been in discussions with the Department of Education about the rebuilding and refurbishment of the school buildings. It has been recognised for some time that a significant investment would be required to bring them up to the level where we can provide the state-of-the-art facilities which all of the young people who attend the school deserve. The announcement by the Department of Education in March 2006 of grant aid of £41 million towards the development of the College allowed the Board of Governors to focus closely on the many strategic issues facing the school and to take decisions on the future development of the College as a whole.

This has been a long, painstaking process with all of the relevant issues being debated on numerous occasions by members of the Board of Governors. Detailed consideration was given to all aspects of the development of the College including the Preparatory Department, the Boarding Department and the Secondary Department. These discussions were influenced by the current issues facing education in Northern Ireland, the predicted future trends in education and most importantly what will be required to keep the College at the forefront of education within Northern Ireland and beyond. While the central funding provided for this project is significant, resources will have to be found to provide the additional educational facilities that will ensure that we end up with a campus which will exceed the standards provided by the Department of Education.

The educational experience and the facilities currently provided at Fullerton and Downey were reviewed. While the former is highly commendable it is clear that action is required to improve the latter. Consequently, a decision has been taken not only to continue with the provision of preparatory education at the College but also to enhance it, and the Chair of the Board of Governors made an announcement to this effect at the recent Preparatory Department Prize Ceremony.

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The future use of School House and McArthur Hall which are currently used for boarders was also carefully considered. These are the original buildings of the College and so are a key link between the history of the school and its future. It was decided that in the longer term these two buildings should be used solely for

educational purposes by all of the pupils. As a consequence, boarding could no longer continue in these buildings and if the boarding department was to continue a new building would have to be constructed for this purpose.

With this need for a new building and the cost that comes with such a project, a detailed debate ensued on the issue of the future of boarding. Account was taken of the history of boarding within the College and the many benefits that have come from it over the years to the greater school community. The significant investment required to sustain and then develop the boarding department was considered alongside the many other demands on the limited funds available to the school, which have been outlined above. It is for these reasons that it has been decided that in the long term boarding will be discontinued.

The College has the well-being, academically and pastorally, of the young people who attend the school as its primary aim. Therefore there is to be a relatively long timescale between this announcement and the planned closure of the Boarding Department.

It is intended that the Boarding Department will close at the end of the summer term 2010. This timescale will allow for pupils currently in boarding to complete any examination courses that they are about to start, or have already started, and will also allow the parents of boarders to make alternative plans for the future. The College will, of course, facilitate and assist parents with arrangements in any way it can. Those pupils in boarding will be offered a day place in the College subject to the normal entry criteria.

The decision to close boarding was extremely difficult to take given the history of boarding at Methody and caused those involved a great deal of angst. However, it has been taken with the best interests of the future of the overall College in mind. The Board of Governors is confident that Methodist College will retain its place at the forefront of education in Northern Ireland and that the Secondary and Preparatory Departments will through time have facilities which will allow Methody to flourish.

The Governors fully acknowledge the positive contribution that boarders have made to the life of the College. The commitment and dedication of the boarding staff, past and present, is also greatly appreciated and this will be celebrated and commemorated in an appropriate way prior to the closure of the department.

Yours sincerely

S Naismith
Principal

J Mulholland
Chair of the Board of Governors