

Monday, January 29, 2024,

Dear Parent/Carers,

I am writing to inform you of my recent appointment as Headteacher of St. Julie's Catholic High School. It is a privilege and an honour to continue the legacy of our foundress, Julie Billiart, the Sisters of Notre Dame, and Mr. Alderman.

Our Notre Dame heritage, values, and mission statement remain at the heart of everything we do to develop exceptional young women. Julie Billiart was a forward-thinking and visionary woman who recognised the importance of education. In 1804, Julie Billiart said that teaching is *'the greatest work on earth'*. The Sisters of Notre Dame continued her work by educating millions of children across the globe. A strong and purposeful Catholic education ensures that students excel and leave school as confident, independent, and good citizens through a sense of belonging, community, leadership, and service.

My vision for the school will focus on four key areas:

1. Maintaining and celebrating the **Notre Dame heritage and Catholic life** of St. Julie's Catholic High School.
2. **Ensuring equity in education** by identifying students' talents and enabling them to flourish. This could be through the arts, STEM, sports, academia, or other creative subjects.
3. **Academic excellence:** Catholic girls' schools provide an empowering environment where young women can focus on their academic growth and confidently explore diverse fields of study.
4. **Leadership and service:** Catholic girls' schools foster an environment where girls develop self-confidence, leadership skills, and the belief that they can be leaders and innovators. Young women are encouraged to take on leadership roles from head girl to form captain, instilling in them a sense of responsibility and risk-taking within a safe and secure learning environment.

Collaboration and partnership with parents and caregivers are the keys to a school's success. This is the reason why we are committed to the Parent Partnership Award to ensure that communication between home and school remains effective to achieve the best for individual girls. Furthermore, we have recently begun our partnership with the Girls' Day School Trust and the Girls' Schools Association. This provides access to mentoring, high-quality learning resources, and extracurricular opportunities.

In January 2024, we announced our partnership with the award-winning Girls Out Loud national mentoring programme. This will link individual students with inspirational women from a range of public and private sectors, such as CEOs, innovators, entrepreneurs, barristers, and the science industry. Alongside this, the Scholars Programme will continue to enhance and support academic excellence across the school.

Bespoke support for students with SEND has been strengthened further through our partnership with the ADHD Association. We now receive weekly onsite support from a therapeutic practitioner who specialises in neurodiversity and young girls with ADHD. Alongside this, we have an outstanding pastoral support system that enables students to take part in workshops linked to coping with stress, anxiety and developing resilience.

To secure academic excellence, we use research-based evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation and the Girls' Schools Association. There are subtle differences in how girls learn in the classroom in comparison to boys. This includes:

- High-impact starters take students' interest and get them listening and involved; the teacher intrigues and captures the student's interest at the beginning of the lesson.
- Teachers create a sense of security with a clear direction, an opportunity for collaborative learning and helpful prompts, along with a coherent summary.
- Encouraging self-discovery: insisting on the girls' thinking rather than being directed, emphasising the importance of getting the girls to take ownership of and responsibility for their learning.
- An inclusive culture that encourages girls to risk and explore, testing their powers of reasoning against and with others, interacting with the girls to give immediate verbal feedback, to encourage, to affirm, and to challenge so that girls think critically, systematically, and logically.

The Considered Lesson Format lends itself well to supporting excellent progress in the classroom and will be strengthened further through our work with the Ambition Institute (in association with University College London) and the instructional coaching model. All teaching and support staff will take part in this programme, working alongside the current Embedding Formative Assessment model. This has transformed how effective feedback is delivered in class, enhanced students' recall and retrieval, and developed their long-term memory store.

One of the significant benefits of girls' schools, as highlighted by the GSA and the Institute of Physics, is the minimisation of gender stereotypes. Girls have the freedom to pursue their interests without societal pressure. Research shows that girls attending girls' schools are more likely to study traditionally male-dominated subjects such as physics, questioning conventional notions about subject preferences. Additionally, single-sex schools witness significant increases in girls' participation in sports, challenging the notion that girls are less inclined towards physical activities.

In the 21st century, girls' schools hold significant importance in empowering young women to become leaders and change-makers. A single-sex education fosters an environment where girls can excel academically, develop their leadership skills, and embrace their authentic selves. Beyond academia, all girls' schools nurture resilience, confidence, and a sense of community, preparing girls to face the complexities of the wider world.

St. Julie's Catholic High School's commitment to academic excellence recognises the significance of girls' schools in empowering young women to become confident, resilient, and trailblazing leaders of tomorrow. Girls should be able to flourish in supportive surroundings. The academic and social climate we create should be reassuring but exciting so that girls have the confidence to reach beyond their own perceived limits. Every girl should feel she belongs and should be happy, resilient, and academically and mentally equipped to succeed in the future.

To conclude, this was highlighted in our most recent inspection, which stated, *'Leaders expect pupils to follow the principles of the school's founder, which encompass respect, friendship, enjoyment, and compassion. Pupils rise to leaders' high expectations. This helps them develop into confident and independent citizens.'* OFSTED, May 2023.

I look forward to working with you, your daughter, trustees, governors, staff, and the wider community.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Kate McCourt
Headteacher