

Woodard Voice

Issue 1 February 2014

Introducing your new regular source of information about Woodard

I am delighted to announce a fresh initiative from Woodard which is aimed at spreading news about activity and developments across our range of schools. We are greatly privileged to count within our group some highly prestigious and successful schools from both the maintained and the private sector, and in 2013 we made significant progress in encouraging co-operation between them, at all levels.

We have seen students from both sectors working together on the Oxbridge Master Class and competing against each other in the Musician of the Year event; at the Student Leadership course in August those who attended have kept in touch with each other and agreed to meet up again.

We have run Conferences for Heads and Chairmen which brought together leaders from both sectors and provided a lively exchange of ideas and information, enabling all participants to deliver benefits to their schools and the education of the students in their care. 2013 saw the second National School Chaplains' Conference, the initiative taken by Woodard, which brought together 150 delegates, not only from Woodard Schools but from across the education and Christian community. This is now an established biennial event.

You will read elsewhere about the creation of King's Priory Academy in Tynemouth and the opening of new schools for our academies in Littlehampton and Stoke, and about Lancing's acquisition of a preparatory school in Worthing.

We are also delighted to report that the King Solomon International Business School in Birmingham, which has Woodard as an educational partner, has been approved for opening by the Minister.

The Corporation is currently working on preparing its strategy for the next twenty years based on some original research commissioned last Autumn. This will help us to guide our decision-making for the future and how we can best continue to deliver our charitable objective which is, in essence to deliver high quality education, in an actively Christian environment for all. To achieve this we will certainly need a growing body of advocates and I hope that all Fellows and Members of Woodard will encourage others who share our objective to join in this great endeavour.

Wishing you all a happy and successful year in 2014,

Yours sincerely,

Tom Fremantle
Chairman



Preparing for the future - 2030

One of the most important tasks of any Charity trustee is to set out the long term strategy by means of which the charitable objective can be delivered. Woodard had been limited in its pursuit of high quality education in an actively Christian environment for all, by being present only in the independent sector of education. In the late 20th century Nathaniel Woodard's vision to transform communities through education grounded in Christian faith found expression in working with state maintained schools in the inner cities who became affiliated to Woodard.

During recent years pressure from the Charity Commission and from the court of public opinion has driven us to finding ways of engaging far more widely in education for all. This inspired firstly Woodard's move to Affiliate - maintained sector schools which share the Woodard object and are keen to demonstrate their commitment to a very strong Anglican and Eucharistic Christianity. More recently it led to the sponsorship of Academies.

Today Woodard Schools offer a unique expression of Church of England schools in the nation. The Founder's vision of the family of schools as a Society is characterised by mutual support, help and encouragement.



"The education and economic scene is continually shifting"

The education and economic scene is continually shifting, but nonetheless we have a responsibility as Trustees to do our best to position Woodard to provide the structure, framework and support facilities which will allow consistent delivery of our object into the distant future. Of course we cannot predict the future, but children are now entering our schools in the expectation of fifteen years of education, emerging as fully rounded energetic citizens able to realise their full potential and play an active role in our society. At Woodard we must do as much as we can to ensure this outcome, and every one of our schools equally needs to be thinking about its long-term strategy.

Woodard commissioned a piece of educational research in the Autumn to provide a summary of current market trends and challenges in education, including that of faith based / Christian education, so that our strategy is built on a base of solid evidence. This piece of research has now been completed and is being considered by a core group, led by Board member Jim Sloane. This group, made up of Fellows, Heads and Bursars, will propose the key elements of a strategy for Woodard. Then during the first half of the year a wider consultation will be initiated with the intention that the Board can agree, and communicate, its strategy during the second half of the year. Every Woodard School has an interest in the strategy because it will point to a direction which each of them may wish to pursue, drawing on the Woodard research, as they develop their own strategic plans.

At the core of the strategy is the need to recognise the roles that the Corporation performs / should perform. The roles are as follows:

- To be a distinctive educational brand that attracts parents, students and staff to the community of schools (standing for academic excellence; holistic education that is focussed on human flourishing);
- To promote and extend education in an actively Christian environment through being the convenor and developer of the community of schools (growing leadership, professional development, sharing of practice, research and development, collaboration, developing a strategy for growth and extension);
- To be a distinctive voice in the world of education (leading debate through the distinctive element of our brand, and developing our strategic network);
- To provide strategic and operational challenge to the schools and to support schools where it is deemed necessary;
- To transform communities through education;
- To ensure the effective running of the charity (creating efficiencies and economies of scale through joint procurement, leveraging the benefits of being an educational group through joint enterprises).



The research – key findings

The UK schools sector is characterised by broadly static pupil numbers, a decline in the number of schools and efforts to improve performance. While the number of 'Good' and 'Outstanding' schools has increased over the last few years, there is a good amount of variance between schools. This is also the case in Woodard: strong performance of Woodard

schools as a group is offset by wide variations. This would suggest increased benefits of collaboration between schools.

Projected population growth is regional and not national. Therefore greater monitoring of trends and a strategy for improving flexibility could help Woodard schools accommodate the changing demand.



“Greater monitoring of trends and a strategy for improving flexibility could help accommodate the changing demand.”

Within the independent sector boarding programmes have become increasingly international, but their popularity varies regionally and by school type. Plateauing fees and increasing financial assistance suggest that independent schools are experiencing strong financial pressures to maintain pupil numbers. Aside from recruiting pupils internationally, schools can explore options of preparing pupils for studying abroad, or even setting up new schools abroad. Higher education is becoming increasingly international and an increasing number of UK-educated pupils are choosing to study abroad.

The complex maintained school market is becoming increasingly autonomous, with an overwhelming trend of schools switching to Academy models. If they live up to expectations, Academies could, alongside higher performing maintained schools, become an increasing threat to independent schools. Woodard's maintained and independent schools could realise benefits from collaboration and thus strengthen overall positioning in an increasingly competitive market.

From a political perspective, recent Labour party agreement with the new concept of Academies suggests that this trend is likely to continue regardless of the General Elections outcome. While the future of the for-profit model of Academies is still uncertain, there appears to be party-wide agreement on furthering performance-based teacher pay.

Despite criticisms faith-based schools have maintained the same school and pupil numbers over the last decade. The Church of England has made solid progress in spreading its influence, improving school quality and supporting the growing trend of Academies. At the same time, the Church of England faces key challenges particularly pertaining to the Academy conversion trend. Certain gaps in faith-based education could present an opportunity for Woodard to develop a stronger role as a CoE group.

In our next newsletter we will provide a summary of the key strategic strands developed by the core group.



Schools in a Competitive Environment

There are only so many potential pupils in any school's catchment and, as time goes on, the opportunity for all schools in the catchment to compete for them is increasing. Independence in governance and financing of education is becoming a reality for an increasing number of schools across the country, and this forces governing bodies and senior management teams to identify, to approach and try to attract new 'customers' or retain old ones.

Previous administration of the majority of education was the domain of local authorities and their education departments. With their schools, the authorities established the strategy for education, catchments, the entrance criteria and the location of new schools. If parents did not like the schools open to their children they moved house, or entered the independent market and paid for it. The creation and expansion in the number of academies and free schools has changed this landscape. It is no longer obvious where the strategy for a local area is generated or monitored; it is no longer obvious how the catchment in a local area is defined, and there is the increasing possibility of a shortage of places in one area, and school closures in another.

"There is an opportunity for a competitive school to thrive"

Schools are inflexible machines relying as they do on buildings that can take years to build, and a professional workforce that cannot be redeployed or restructured without considerable time, cost and pain. A school lacking up to date information about its catchment, or recruiting the 'wrong' head, or failing to match the expectations of parents can quickly find itself uncompetitive, with extra scrutiny and possible enforced closure or merger.

Previously such a reality was mainly the domain of independent schools, most of which realised that they had a 'product to sell' and that the product needed to match 'what the market demanded'. Dependent on where you live in the country this reality is now faced by more schools than ever before. But why is where you live so important; surely there is a common approach to the governance structures for delivery of education wherever you are?

Take as an example Taunton, Peterborough and Grimsby (sourcing data from Edubase in November 2013, and using a spread based on a radius of five miles of the town). Taunton has a mixed range of types of school including community schools, voluntary aided and controlled, independent schools and academies. Typical of the South West, there is a reliance to some extent on church and independent schools. By contrast, Peterborough places a high reliance on community schools – those that are still controlled by the local authority. There are few academies and church schools, and fewer still independent schools. This approach is in stark contrast to that adopted by Grimsby, where the vast majority of maintained sector schools are academies. This area of the country was an early adopter of academies and the only real alternative to them are the few remaining community schools. The more

one looks at individual areas of the country, the more variety in approach is found and there is no consistency. This is a benefit and a curse.

The benefit is that there is an opportunity for a competitive school to thrive; the curse is that the lack of consistency in the markets can make it harder to pick the right approach and strategy, and even the best schools can be undermined by a change in strategy in other sectors. So what factors influence being a competitive school?

The basic element is to be armed with information about the local market, the catchment and local competition. Parental surveys can help a school understand what it is that parents are looking for. Information on why parents send their children to the school is vital, but more important is information on why they do not. In almost all cases competitive schools are smaller than they could be if they had an endless capacity to accept any child who wished to enrol – governors and staff design the size of the school to meet the demand. Knowledgeable and experienced staff are essential but truly competitive schools provide their staff with a career path and the training necessary to develop their skills. Finally, competitive schools are commercial in their approach: they exploit their facilities, recognising that there is an income stream outside the educational day; governors and staff are active in their local networks and fundraising and communication are treated as core activities.

There are competitive and successful schools of all shapes and sizes but with the competitive environment changing, retaining a professional approach is vital to long term survival.



News from Woodard Kenya

We are pleased to report that the school buildings are now substantially completed. The enlargement of the girls' toilet block has recently been completed along with the final four classroom block and the laboratory. The water tower is complete and so they are now able to harvest the water from the roofs and to pump it up to the high level tank which in turn supplies the toilet blocks with water. The construction of the dining / meeting hall (which was

always beyond the original scope of the project) has also begun due to the generosity of the pupils at Derby High and another substantial donor. £15,000 needs to be raised to complete the hall. The local MP (who was the project manager of the initial build) has promised that the cost of furnishing the hall will be met by the Kenyan Authorities so we are nearly there! The third batch of children (120) is due to start so there will be 360 students attending the school at the beginning of February.



Whilst we have met the challenge of the fundraising target the school still needs help!

- £15,000 needs to be raised to complete the hall.
- There is a need to equip the splendid Science lab of about £1,000.
- We need reading books for the Library, say £3,000 to properly equip the library for 500 children.
- Form 3 text books are needed: £5,000 all subjects for 120 children after a 20% discount.

And some people costs: it is £150 to sponsor one child for the entire year. That £150 covers the modest school fees, uniform provision and a hearty meal each day.

It costs £1,650 a year to pay the salary of a single teacher. Whilst this is notionally the responsibility of the Kenyan Government there have been great challenges getting them to honour their pledge!

Are there any generous benefactors out there who might be prepared to help with this final fundraising initiative?

Please get in touch with the Senior Provost if you, or your school, can help.





**Woodard Voice will be published regularly.
For more information, or if you have any queries,
please contact Canon Brendan Clover via the
head office address below.**

Woodard Schools Head Office

High Street
Abbots Bromley
Rugeley
Staffordshire WS15 3BW

Tel: 01283 840120
Fax: 01283 840893

Office Manager: Mrs J M Shorthose

Registered Company Number 4659710
Registered Charity Number 1096270

Woodard Academies Trust Head Office

1 Adam Street
London
WC2N 6LE

Tel: 020 3397 5100

Office Manager: Mr S Webb

Registered Company Number 6415729

www.woodard.co.uk