

Woodard Voice

November 2023

News from across the Woodard community

'Voices of Woodard' Choral Weekend in Shropshire

*"The one who sings ...
prays twice."*

140 pupils and staff from six Woodard schools converged on Ellesmere College in October for a weekend of singing ... and dancing ... and quizzing ... and forging new friendships.



The Senior Provost and the Director of Music at Ellesmere College led a residential choral weekend for singers drawn from Ellesmere, the Sir Robert Woodard Academy in West Sussex, Worksop College in Nottinghamshire, Crompton House C of E School in Oldham, Queen Mary's School in North Yorkshire and The Peterborough School in Cambridgeshire. The aim was to immerse the combined choirs in some of the glories of the sacred choral repertoire, and to forge new friendships across the schools.

Mozart's 'Ave Verum Corpus' warmed up the voices in Ellesmere's St Oswald's Chapel, before we moved to our overnight lodgings at The Quinta Christian Centre in Gobowen. A barbeque was followed by a ceilidh – called and accompanied by The Shipsters. The dance was a revelation to many pupils – several remarking that this was how they intend to celebrate their next birthdays!



The beautiful setting of Shrewsbury Abbey was the setting for Choral Evensong on Saturday afternoon. The High Sherriff of Shropshire and the Headmaster of Ellesmere read the lessons. The choir led the office with Tony Coupe's Versicles and Responses, Stanford's setting of Psalm 150 and his Canticles in B-flat. The anthem was Haydn's 'The Heavens are Telling' from his oratorio 'The Creation'. Fr Phillip Gration, Ellesmere's Chaplain, preached a leonine sermon linking together the symbolic uses of lions in the Scriptures.

The Senior Provost's Fiendish Quiz delighted and confounded in equal measure that evening.

Stunning music, combined with the liturgical excellence for which Ellesmere is renown, concluded our weekend with a Sung Mass in the College Chapel on Sunday morning. A setting by Harold Darke and a reprise of some of their earlier pieces demonstrated just how far this choir had come in just two days. However, it was 'Hail Holy Queen' from the film



'Sister Act', sung as a concluding Salve Regina, which was likely to be the number being hummed and strummed by the choirs and congregation on their way home.

Huge thanks go to Tony Coupe, Director of Music at Ellesmere for bearing the musical load so expertly;

the Headmaster of Ellesmere for hosting us; the team at Shrewsbury Abbey for welcoming us so warmly and graciously; and to the pupils, parents and staff of our schools for supporting this great celebration of sacred music-making in the Woodard tradition.

Denstone College celebrates 150 years with a Big Birthday Party

Denstone turned 150 in June. The Big Birthday Party included a celebratory Eucharist in the College Chapel. The Senior Provost recalled for the congregation some of the words of Bishop George Selwyn, preaching at the first service 150 years ago – and not pulling his punches:



"The neglect of religious education in this country has caused the downfall of the people of God ... Are we to sit still and see all Church teaching and even Christianity itself banished from our schools?! The fate of our nation seems to be trembling in the balance. It will not be saved by false philosophy, or secular education, or commercial prosperity; for none of these things can avert the downfall of a nation in which God is lightly esteemed ... Denstone is to be a place where children may be taught of the Lord and trained up for immortality and heaven. Here will be taught the true foundations of a nation's strength: to fear God and honour the King. No visions of unattainable equality; no assertions of imaginary rights; no covetousness, nor self-seeking, nor worldly-wisdom; no desire to do what seems best in their own eyes; but all our children will be 'taught of the Lord,' taught to look to the Cross of Christ, and then to learn to be subject one to another and to be clothed with humility."

Our Woodard Christian Ethos

Our Christian character, practice and teaching.

The Senior Provost is rolling out a request to Councils and Boards to give due attention to our schools' Christian character, practice and teaching in respect of those essential characteristics which should, in a Woodard school, be reflective of our shared faith. As an example, a school's 'Material Signs' are examined here. What questions might the school ask concerning its material signs?



Material Signs

The guiding intention here is that:

- Outward facing signs and published materials should acknowledge that this school is founded and established upon the principles of the Christian faith.
- It should be part of the school's mission statement that one of its purposes is to help its pupils to know, and to encourage them to explore for themselves, the Christian faith as the Church of England/Church in Wales has received it.

Questions to ask:

- Does signage which includes the school's name and description state that this is a school with a Christian foundation and a Woodard school?
- Do stationary / websites / published advertisements / job descriptions / public notices etc. indicate that this is a Christian school and a Woodard school?
- Do the above (where relevant) explain what this means in terms of the school's history, and its character, practice and teaching?
- Is the history and the vision of the foundation (and Founder) explained on all relevant outward-facing materials?
- Are there visible signs of the Christian nature of the school around the campus?
- Do significant events in the school's calendar make reference to and celebrate these founding principles when appropriate?
- Do pupils, staff, parents and visitors know that the school is a Woodard school and understand what this means in terms of the school's character, practice and teaching?



Woodard Schools and VAT on School Fees



"It is not an attack on private schools. It's just saying an exemption you have had is going to go."

The Labour Party has confirmed its intention to implement a policy to remove the exemption from VAT on independent school fees.

Michael Corcoran, Director of Finance, considers some of the implications for our independent schools.

Recent debate about the charitable status of independent schools dates back to around the time of the significant revision of the Charities Act, which came into force in 2011. At that time a number of commentators were raising the prospect that independent schools might lose charitable status in order to remove what are seen as the 'valuable tax breaks' enjoyed. In the end the real focus of changes made in that act became public benefit and the need for independent schools to demonstrate the benefit, which Charity Commission guidance seemingly interpreted as having a close link to free places. This was challenged successfully by the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and a wider interpretation was adopted.

Scrolling forward to 2017, and the issue of removing tax concessions for independent schools was raised again in political circles with the Labour Party manifesto including such a commitment:

'To aid attainment, we will introduce free school meals for all primary school children, paid for by removing the VAT exemption on private school fees'.

The claim is that such a move would generate around £1.7 billion, which appears to be based on a loose calculation by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). At that time the ISC commissioned a report from Baines Cutler which offered the view that the imposition of VAT would lead to the sector contracting by up to 25% after five years; an alternative study by the IFS estimated the drop at 5%. Only experience will determine how many pupils will leave the sector, the important fact is that the sector is assumed to shrink by anything between 25,000 and 125,000 pupils. These pupils will need education, and this is likely to be in the maintained sector. If the £1.7 billion savings are calculated before an increase in demand for maintained sector places, the perceived annual benefit will be lower by quite a margin. In places where there is much reliance on the independent



sector, such as Taunton, the impact on maintained sector demand against available places is likely to be very significant.

In recent weeks the Labour party has rowed back on statements that they would remove the charitable status of independent schools. This is not surprising as such a proposal would be extremely difficult to enact, and the practical consequences for charitable schools would have been potentially catastrophic. In many cases the charitable 'value' of a school lies in its land and buildings; if these were retained by the original charity but were no longer available to the educational operator without a significant rental fee, many schools would be unviable.

All schools need to address the possible impact and Woodard schools have been proactive in looking to prepare for the possibility of a difficult future. Schools have been evaluating a number of different scenarios, all of which assume a drop in demand. The general view is that a percentage of the extra VAT charges would have to be passed to parents in fee increases, but some would have to be absorbed. Of course, this is balanced in part by the possibility that VAT could be recovered on some input costs, but school costs usually include between 55% and 70% salary costs, on which no VAT reclaim is possible.

Bursars meet regularly to compare notes and, where necessary, Woodard is commissioning work to address common questions and to provide advice. Items being considered include the possibility of sharing more resources, but the practical steps can only be finalised once the scope of the legislation is known. As an example, it is unclear at present whether VAT would only be on tuition fees, or on the headline fee charged by a school; it is also unclear whether all aspects of school provision including, for example specialist support for dyslexia, would be included.

There are opportunities buried in the difficulties. One such opportunity may be that parents will



abandon more expensive schools and seek to maintain independent education for their children at the same fee level by choosing a school that represents 'better value'. Another may be the opportunity presented in a crowded landscape for, particularly, senior schools to acquire struggling prep schools in their current or potential catchment.

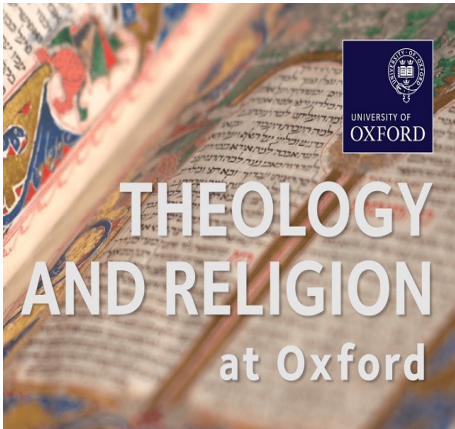
Finally, it is worth noting that most independent schools, and particularly Woodard schools, are outward looking, and already provide significant

benefits in their local areas. In many cases the Woodard school is the heart of the economy in its location, the school is the main employer and the provider of sports, arts and music facilities. This is not a unique situation. At present, little work seems in progress to assess the wider economic and social implications following the closure of an independent school, if it were to prove unviable. The sector will cope, somehow, and choice will continue to be available, but a full assessment of the impact of the proposed policy is only beginning.

An Oxbridge Theology Taster Day

Woodard’s passion for theological education

Nathaniel Woodard saw his mission as the transforming of society through education based on sound Christian principles. Society – and the Church – needs good theology. Serving the wider theological academy must surely be part of our mission today. To that end, a large group of Year 10 and Year 12 pupils from our schools across the North West converged on Crompton House Church of England School in Oldham in June for an Oxbridge Theology & Religion taster day and masterclass.



Dr Mary Marshall, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Outreach in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at Oxford, joined forces with the Senior Provost to convene our Oxbridge Taster Day. We wanted to put the idea of a Theology degree on to the radars of our ablest pupils, and to instil in them some enthusiasm for what is a stimulating (and marketable) academic discipline.



Oxford wants to hear from our pupils – especially those in the maintained sector. What’s more, the admissions statistics are very much in the applicant’s favour.

	Applications in 2022	Offers in 2022	Offer Rate
Computer Science	875	53	6.1%
Law	1806	203	11.2%
PPE	1997	268	13.4%
Theology & Religion	113	48	42.5%

Theology is an ancient intellectual discipline, with continuing and momentous social significance around the world today. An undergraduate will gain an understanding of the intellectual underpinning of religious traditions and study the social and cultural contexts for religious belief and practice. This ‘Queen

of the Sciences’ will train students to become something of a historian, a philosopher, a textual and literary critic, a linguist ... and much more.

Theology at Oxford allows you to study, among other things, the five major world religions and their primary languages; the relationship between religion and science; the philosophy of religion; and the place of religious ethics in public life.



Typically, Theology graduates go on to careers in Government and the Public Sector; Finance; Commerce; Journalism; Education; the Charity Sector; and Ministry.

The day was a great success. Huge thanks is due to Dr Lyshia Whitworth at Crompton House, and to the Head, Karl Newell. We intend to run the event again in other parts of the country, and with other universities, in 2024.



Woodard Schools as Inclusive Communities



"We all perform best when we feel we belong."

We rightly celebrate our students' academic accomplishments, writes Chris Wright, Director of Education. However, it is the key principles of well-being and inclusion which, in line with our core Christian principles, ought also to be at the heart of our mission.

Both in the heat of the pandemic and in its aftermath, mental and emotional well-being, as well as social skills, are top concerns for schools. As a Woodard community of schools, we champion a holistic approach to education, considering both individual students and the broader school community. Our schools give primary importance to the well-being of both students and staff. Inspection reports (ISI and OfSTED) attest to the priority our schools give to pastoral care, safeguarding, and social and emotional well-being. This is so important at a time when longitudinal research shows that metrics for well-being are declining for young people globally.

Inclusion means belonging and embracing diversity. As a community of schools, grounded in the Christian Gospel, we believe in the equality of all peoples and value the richness that comes with racial and ethnic diversity. "There is neither Jew nor Greek ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) We're committed to welcoming all, recognizing everyone's unique identity as persons created in God's image. As our prospectus says: "We are inclusive, creative communities that build understanding, respect and empathy in young people."

In recent years, our concept of inclusion has expanded. We embrace insights from neuroscience on diverse learning styles and are prompted by societal shifts. Inclusive education now embraces all learners equally, not just those with special needs. The following principles of an inclusive education challenge how we view the learner, their diversity, and our role as teachers:

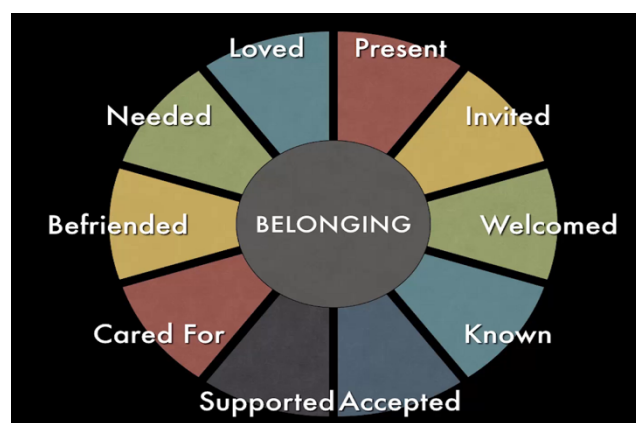
- ✓ Emphasize students' strengths, not their disabilities, as the foundation of learning.
- ✓ Value and incorporate students' input and insights into their learning process.
- ✓ Create learning environments that foster belonging, safety, self-worth, and holistic growth for every student.
- ✓ View the diversity in learning styles and abilities among students as valuable assets for creating inclusive communities.

We all perform best when we feel we belong. So, how do we create a sense of belonging in our classrooms for all our students?

This transcript of a film from Apple helps us to embrace diversity as a richness:

"Open a door, and it opens all the others. Open your mind and see what happens next. No great thing, no beautiful invention, was created in a vacuum. It happens when we leave our comfort zone and come together. Embrace faiths, cultures, disabilities, differences. Embrace races, ages, ideologies, personalities, creating a tool or devise nobody saw coming. Humanity is plural not singular. The best way the world works is everybody in, nobody out. So, who we are made of is everyone. The truth is we don't see things the same. The power is we don't see things the same."

In addition to academic achievements, Woodard schools prioritise inclusion, well-being, and holistic education, in line with our Christian values. This commitment is especially vital in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic. We place great importance on the mental, emotional, and social well-being of both students and staff, as highlighted in inspection reports. Our inclusive approach is rooted on our belief in the equality and diversity of all people, reflecting our Christian principles. We recognise that embracing diversity leads to creativity and progress. Our evolving understanding of inclusion encompasses all learners, emphasizing their strengths and unique contributions. By fostering a sense of belonging and valuing diverse learning styles, we aim to create inclusive communities where every individual thrives. Our vision for education is deeply Christian, with Jesus' promise of 'life in all its fullness' at its heart.





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