



FOREST
SCHOOL

Thriving through
Evolution







Warden's Welcome



When Forest School officially opened its doors to 22 pupils in October 1834, few would have believed it would become the thriving school it is today. Yet here we are, more than 185 years later, celebrating a school that has grown from strength to strength.

The educational landscape has never been as challenging and changeable as it is today, but Forest is determined to remain at the forefront of day school education in the country. The success of our school has always flowed from our ability and willingness to adapt; to assess the world around us and ensure the School is providing its pupils with the best possible preparation for life beyond school.

Indeed, we have always put the individuality of our pupils at the forefront of our thinking. Forest is a school that embraces difference and empowers pupils to develop both inside the classroom and out, in turn providing pupils with skills that go beyond the traditional confines of academic learning.

Forest's view is that the best preparation for a fulfilling life in the future is a first-class education in which all pupils learn together as equals and partners. Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. From the Prep School, in which pupils as young as four play and learn, through to the Senior School, where pupils work together and thrive in preparation for university or the world of work.

By creating environments in which our pupils work collaboratively, we embolden them to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lead to deeper learning, to develop a broad range of diverse skills, and to foster and encourage the emotional intelligence that comes from all pupils working together on a daily basis. These are not soft skills. They are the collaborative and interpersonal connections that define the world we live in.

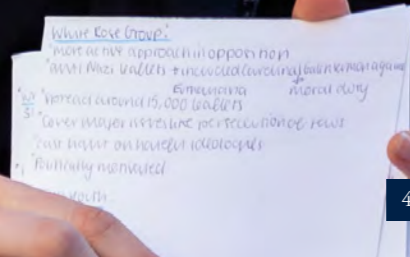
Therefore, from September 2022, we are excited to announce that Forest will strengthen its educational provision yet further by introducing co-educational teaching throughout the school, from Reception to Year 13.

All-through co-educational classrooms are the next natural step in the School's educational evolution, a step the Governors and the School Leadership believe that Forest needs to take in 2022 if it is to live out its ambition to remain the leading all-round school it is known to be.

This evolutionary change will sharpen and build on the holistic education we offer. Yes, the diamond structure has been a vital part of our journey as a school, but our future lies in closer collaboration; in developing a schooling structure that can shepherd pupils from the age of four through to 18 and provide them with the most holistic education possible.

The following pages offer a hopeful, optimistic, and eminently achievable look to the future. They reflect on where the school has been, and where this positive change will lead it. This is an exciting new chapter for Forest.

Marcus Cliff Hodges
Warden



Forest's History

The beginning – single sex education of boys

Forest was founded as Forest Proprietary Grammar School with 22 boys. It expanded significantly in the 19th century and the School's fortunes rose and fell, as did those of all independent schools. Eventually, the School became an educational charity and was set on a firmer footing in terms of pupil enrolment and future planning.

Girls admitted, and the 'Diamond Model' born

In 1981, HRH The Duchess of Kent visited Forest to commemorate the opening of the Girls' School, which marked a new era for Forest as it became the only diamond structure school in London. Middle school pupils have been taught on the same site, by the same teachers, but in gendered classrooms ever since.

Structural review – Centralised functions

Forest was structured around a federation of three separate schools: Boys' School/ Girls' School/ Prep School. An in-depth review recognised the growing complexity of running separate schools in parallel with more than 1240 pupils on the site.

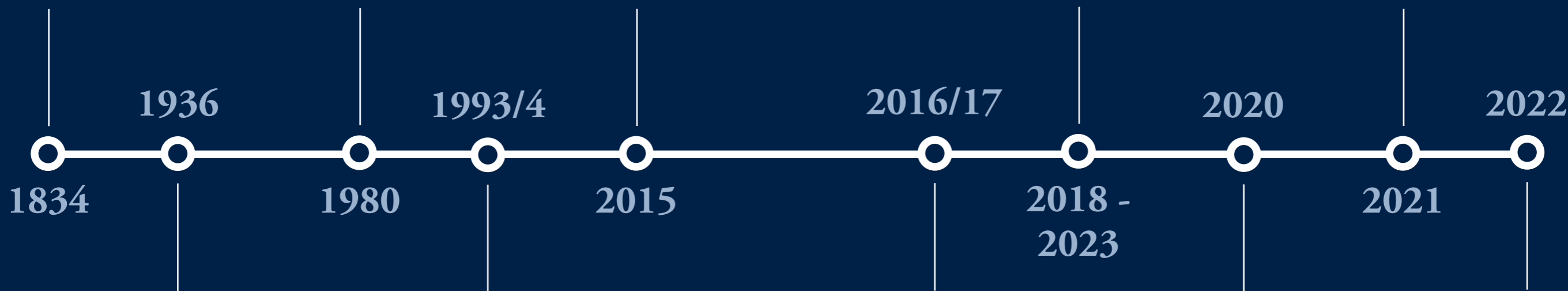
Whole School Strategic Plan

The Whole School Strategic Plan is based on simple, clear guiding principles and key areas of strategic intent. The starting point is that Forest pupils of all ages will have access to:

- Expert Teaching and Learning
- High Impact Pastoral Care
- Extensive Activities and Partnership
- The best Forest School staff
- Sustainable Operations

Prep School Expansion and New Building

A third form is added to Pre-Prep entry and the School invests in a brand-new building and renovated facilities for all of our pupils aged 4 – 11.



Expansion pre-and-post WW2

The arrival of Gerald Miller in 1936 allowed Forest to transform into a modern, 20th century school. Having led the School safely through WW2, Miller commenced upon a building campaign not seen before in Forest's history. The Aston Block, Science Block, new Junior School, new Manor House and tuck shop were added, and these new buildings were further enhanced by a new swimming pool and re-leveling of the Park.

Structural changes – Boys', Girls', and Prep Schools

The original structure of the whole school was changed into the distinct diamond shape of Prep, Boys', and Girls' Schools, each having their own leadership teams, as well as separate admissions processes, events, cultures, and academic teaching. This created a system that was co-ed from four to six, single-sex from seven to 16 and co-ed again from 17 to 18.

Coming Together

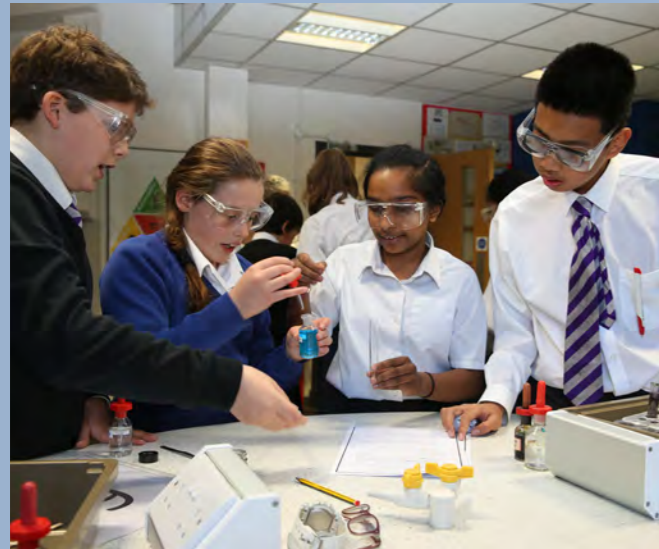
Both the Boys' and Girls' sides of the Diamond Model were merged into one Senior School.

Rationalisation and re-examination

To test perceptions of Forest, we commissioned parent and market research. This examined the financial and academic aspects of the Diamond model and the introduction of the Visible Learning initiative in the Senior School, which was designed to strengthen the Teaching and Learning culture even further.

A New Chapter

From September 2022, the entirety of Forest School will be co-educational from the age of four all the way through to 18. This exciting new chapter will provide our pupils with the best possible, holistic education, and is a further testament to Forest's ability to adapt and develop.



Why

Introducing co-ed across the whole school is an evolution in how we operate and completely in keeping with our commitment to continually adapt to the changing world we are preparing our pupils to enter.

150 years ago, the drive to establish separate schools for men and women was driven by the separation of the sexes in social and political life. Of course, our world is more diverse, and roles have changed.

Although single-sex teaching evolved at Forest over time, as a model for the future, the single-sex classroom can be seen increasingly to limit the use of activities and tasks from which pupils of all genders could benefit and learn more by being mixed with one another. While the diamond structure has been liked by many, it is clearly not the reason many families choose Forest. We know from our data that at least 95% of pupils applying to Forest are also making applications at the same time to other schools which are co-educational.

In addition, the market research carried out in January 2020, before COVID, shows that parents are choosing Forest in big numbers because they believe Forest to be a truly excellent co-educational school that genuinely balances real academic success with exceptional personal development in a way that is evident in the young people leaving the white gates



Now?

at the front of the School aged 18. Meanwhile, the vast majority of pupils applying to Forest are also applying from co-educational primary schools and prep schools.

Recent educational research has moved away from claiming differences in how girls and boys learn. Instead, Visible Learning and other significant studies have focused on the tried and tested strategies that work for all learners regardless of gender. This research highlights exactly what works in the classroom and what helps pupils of all abilities to understand how to make the best academic progress.

We know that gender is not the factor that impacts most on learning in a classroom. There is no recognised research that shows single-sex teaching leading to better outcomes – the excellence of some very high-performing single-sex schools is not because they are single-sex but more because they are so highly selective on entry. We also know the rationale for a co-educational classroom is found more widely in the changing demands on pupils to develop skills and knowledge to become both high-performance learners and fulfilled adults at ease with diversity.

We are confident that this is exactly the right thing to do. It will support the all-round development of our pupils in a changing world and give them the greatest chance to succeed in life after school in their personal lives and in workplaces which are rarely siloed by gender.



What Next?

Forest always aims to be transparent about its plans, and we value hugely our communication with parents and the excellent, mutually beneficial relationships we have with the parent body.

After half-term (in June 2021), we will run webinars which we hope many parents will attend. The Warden and members of the Leadership Team will also be happy to meet with parents to discuss our plans and to answer any questions, or offer reassurance and further information and detail, as required. For our part, this is a very exciting step for Forest, and we are certain it is a necessary one for the School to take if we are to genuinely strengthen the education of our pupils from 2022.

In September 2021 we will publish a detailed timeline for the academic year 2021/22 to show the necessary preparations that will take place in the run up to September 2022. This will include the work we will do with staff, pupils, and parents, as well as listing the events, training, curriculum review and key communications which will keep everyone in the Forest community in the loop.

The co-educational classroom will provide opportunities to strengthen pupils' personal development and build a range of skills from working in a more diverse learning group. Curriculum review is continuous for schools, and Forest has a strong academic curriculum at present, but it is timely right now to provide a clear, detailed new articulation of our all-round, holistic provision to make sure the offering

of the subjects and activities delivers the knowledge and skills required by this generation of young people. Certainly, Forest will want to retain the breadth of choice that pupils traditionally expect and which being an independent school allows. We will start such a review next year, looking at KS2 and KS3 in the first instance.

Forest teachers have always focused on the individual pupil in separate boys' and girls' classes, so this will not require a change of pedagogy. Being flexible to the range of different learning needs will remain the key ingredient of any good Forest lesson. However, teachers will want to refine their practice to be more alert to the collaborative tasks and the learning behaviours that will allow all pupils to make the best possible use of being part of a more diverse group. As a collective teaching body, we will therefore prepare carefully to ensure teachers are maximising the broader learning opportunities of having all genders working together.

Needless to say, the highest impact on pupils' progress inside and outside the classroom still comes from effective teachers, and Forest is lucky to have such a hard-working, committed and engaged body of staff across the School. We will continue to recruit Forest teachers who are experts in their subject areas and who have a thorough knowledge of the learning process which informs their teaching practice. Above all, we will always employ the very best staff, who are prepared to go the extra mile and play to Forest's strength in getting the best out of every pupil.



Key FAQs

Where is the research that says this is the right thing to do at this moment?

- Recent educational research has moved away from claiming differences in how girls and boys learn. Instead, Visible Learning and other significant studies have focused on the tried and tested strategies that work for all learners regardless of gender. This research highlights exactly what works in the classroom and what helps pupils of all abilities to understand how to make the best academic progress.
- We know that gender is not the factor that impacts most on learning in a classroom. There is no recognised research that shows single-sex teaching leading to better outcomes – the excellence of some very high-performing single-sex schools is not because they are single-sex but more because they are so highly selective on entry.
- We also know the rationale for a co-educational classroom is found more widely in the changing demands on pupils to develop skills and knowledge to become both high-performance learners and fulfilled adults at ease with diversity.
- We are confident that this is exactly the right thing to do. It will support the all-round development of our pupils in a changing world and give them the greatest chance to succeed in life after school in their personal lives and in workplaces that are rarely siloed by gender.

Do the learning opportunities in a co-educational classroom require teachers to change their approach?

- Not fundamentally. Forest teachers already take great care to identify and address the individual needs of each learner, building learning characteristics and encouraging best learning behaviour – and they choose the appropriate content and the appropriate learning tasks to allow this to happen. We already firmly believe that pupils of all ages need to understand how they learn and engage with work that challenges and develops them.
- As ever, pupils will build their academic foundations in individual academic subjects, drawing on learned knowledge to complete new tasks. They will continue to think critically, analytically and creatively, evaluating information to solve increasingly complex problems. And, in teams, they will communicate and understand multiple points of view and know how to cooperate to achieve a shared goal.
- However, the co-educational classroom will, by definition, provide broader input to help our pupils develop those critical learning skills such as creativity, resilience and communication. The co-educational classroom will support respectful collaboration and encourage productive disagreement across genders, all part of the skills, instincts and understanding that should be embedded at a deep level as part of the all-round curriculum a Forest education offers.

I have heard that boys and girls distract each other in a co-educational classroom. How is that different for Forest?

- Everything about this evolution in our learning provision is intended to strengthen pupils' experience at Forest and their opportunities to succeed after they leave the school. In creating a different working environment in the classroom at Forest, we will be looking with fresh eyes at how pupils can work collaboratively. Appropriate tasks, discussion and reflection will be built into lesson plans to ensure this development happens.
- No matter if boys and girls are taught separately or together, pupils of any gender are capable of distracting each other if lessons are not well taught and pitched at the right level. The Senior School has shown the successes inherent in making a co-educational environment. The classroom culture will be different but learning together will benefit both boys and girls equally as they work together, building confidence and helping themselves develop respectful relationships in preparation for life after school.
- As we know from our youngest and oldest pupils already working in co-educational classrooms, well-managed lessons with high expectations of the pupils and enough challenge in the work set feels absolutely normal.

Can you say a bit more about exactly what those learning opportunities are?

- 150 years ago, the drive to establish separate schools for men and women was driven by the separation of the sexes in social and political life. Of course, our world is more diverse, and roles have changed. Although single-sex teaching evolved at Forest over time, as a model for the future, the single-sex classroom can be seen increasingly to limit the use of activities and tasks from which pupils of all genders could benefit and learn more by being mixed with one another.
- We are already a co-educational school where our youngest and oldest pupils are taught together, and these collaborative learning opportunities are already there for all pupils in the extensive co-educational activities outside the classroom. Co-educational teaching at this time is a natural evolution in the middle year groups at Forest.

Will some girls or boys feel less comfortable learning in a co-educational classroom?

- Initially, there may be some understandable apprehension, however, there is no one type of pupil at Forest and we don't want there to be, so our question is always: what will a Forest education add to every pupil to ensure they make the best possible academic progress they are capable of and can develop into the best possible version of themselves? This will remain the focus every day in all our classrooms, ensuring pupils feel reassured and valued in their learning environment, while outside the classroom, they will continue to mix and interact across the School as they always have.
- Young people enjoy challenge and Forest pupils understand that they need to move beyond their comfort zone to generate deeper learning. At Forest, we talk a lot about pupils 'feeling comfortable being uncomfortable' and the co-educational classroom will provide a safe environment for pupils to navigate the additional challenges which will come to enrich their learning.
- Forest's reputation for building the skills and character that ensure pupils lead useful and fulfilling adult lives is already well known, so our commitment to further promoting the development of life-long collaborative learning skills for every pupil is absolutely in keeping with the character of a Forest education.

How will this work for teaching staff?

- Forest teachers have always focused on the individual pupil in separate boys' and girls' classes, so this will not require a change of pedagogy. Being flexible to the range of different learning needs will remain the key ingredient of any good Forest lesson. However, teachers will want to refine their practice to be more alert to the collaborative tasks and the learning behaviours that will allow all pupils to make the best possible use of being part of a more diverse group. As a collective teaching body, we will therefore prepare carefully to ensure teachers are maximising the broader learning opportunities of having all genders working together.
- Needless to say, the highest impact on pupils' progress inside and outside the classroom still comes from effective teachers, and Forest is lucky to have such a hard-working, committed and engaged body of staff across the School. We will continue to recruit Forest teachers who are experts in their subject areas and who have a thorough knowledge of the learning process which informs their teaching practice. Above all, we will always employ the very best staff prepared to go the extra mile and play to Forest's strength in getting the best out of every pupil.

Is Forest trying to save money by making this change?

- This is not a financially-driven decision. Of course, as you would expect, the School's Leadership, overseen by the Governing Council, has thoroughly examined the financial implications of the move to a fully co-educational version of Forest, just as it does any major change to the School. We have undertaken all necessary financial due diligence to ensure the future viability of the School.

Will pupils still receive the same level of individual pastoral care?

- As you know, Forest is a humane, inclusive school where the pupils' academic attainment is high, and their all-round personal development is absolutely central to our provision. Above all, it is a happy school that understands the rich inter-relationship between the curricular, the co-curricular and the pastoral. None of that will change.
- Each pupil will be known, liked and valued as an individual learner in the classroom, and, as before, will be supported more generally as they develop and grow through the high-impact pastoral care delivered by the Prep School, Senior School Sections, Houses and Tutor Groups.

Will pupils still be in their single-sex Senior School Houses in September 2022?

- Yes, they will. Prep School houses are already co-educational but Senior School houses will remain in their current configuration. We want to focus fully on embedding co-educational learning in the classrooms from September 2022 and allow pupils to engage in their learning knowing that the familiarity and support of their houses is still very much there for them.
- That said, we are moving to a more inclusive definition of schooling and the single-sex houses are already operating as mixed-gender twinned houses for some events and activities. Forest's evolution in those terms, makes a review of the houses a sensible step in due course. We will start the review in September 2023 with an open mind on the matter, bringing together the views of all our pupils, parents, staff and stakeholders.

Are the reasons for the change different in the Prep School and Senior School?

- No. The basic principles of learning are the same at all ages, and the skills and characteristics that can be built and refined in a co-educational classroom are best started early to become all the better embedded, as they already are for those Forest pupils in the younger years in the Pre-Prep.
- At Forest we understand the things that have the highest impact on learning in the classroom, those things that make learning happen and allow pupils to progress. Our teaching and learning culture allow pupils of all ages to make the most of themselves as learners, the result of which is a school full of bright, sparky Forest pupils at every level.

Will class sizes stay the same?

- Class sizes at Forest are comparatively small at the moment and will remain within the same guidelines as now, with only the usual fluctuation year by year, depending on the uptake in some smaller option subjects. They will simply be mixed-gender.

What about pupils who will be half-way through their GCSE courses in September 2022?

- In terms of continuity of Teaching & Learning, it would be disruptive to mix up classes half-way through their 2-year GCSE courses, so pupils starting Year 11 in September 2022 will remain in their previous single-sex classes for their GCSE year. Thereafter, all years across the School will be taught in co-educational classes.

Does the co-educational classroom offer opportunities to enhance the curriculum?

- We want to define pupils in the classroom increasingly as individual learners, rather than individuals within single-sex groups of girls and boys. On that basis, it is worth emphasising that this change is not as drastic as it might initially sound – it will not require a change of pedagogical approach, but it will require a change of language, perception and vocabulary, although we have taken significant strides in this direction already.
- Lessons will provide different opportunities to strengthen pupils' personal development and develop a range of skills from working in a learning group where the mixed genders will provide a wider range of experiences and views to bring to the work tasks.
- Forest has a strong academic curriculum at present, but it is timely right now to provide a clear, detailed new articulation of our all-round, holistic provision to make sure the offering of the subjects and activities delivers the knowledge and skills required by this generation of young people. Certainly, Forest will want to retain the breadth of choice that pupils traditionally expect and which being an independent school allows. We will start such a review next year, looking at KS2 and KS3 in the first instance.

Apart from the classroom learning environment, what else will change?

- Forest has been a co-educational school since the late 1970s when the first girls came to the School. The changing of an internal academic structure at this point does not require anything else to change on the back of it.
- Of course, Forest will continue to evolve, and we are always looking to improve aspects of the School where we can. However, there are no other plans in terms of co-education at this stage.

Won't Forest lose its 'unique selling point' as a 'diamond structure school'?

- Forest has indeed been known as a diamond structure school. However, and certainly in recent years, the term 'diamond structure' has become more of a catch-all label for Forest as a happy, supportive school with a distinct ethos and extensive educational opportunities for all pupils.
- In marketing terms, supported by the whole-school parent research carried out in 2020, we feel Forest's success has seen it outgrow the Diamond School label and the School has become much better known for its strong inclusive ethos based on our recognised Forest values.

How many pupils and families choose Forest because pupils are taught in single-sex classrooms?

- Although the diamond structure has been liked by many, it is clearly not the reason the majority of families choose Forest. We know from our data that the vast majority of pupils applying to Forest are also making applications at the same time to other schools which are co-educational.
- The market research carried out in January 2020, before COVID, shows that parents are choosing Forest in big numbers because they believe Forest to be a truly excellent co-educational school that genuinely balances real academic success with exceptional personal development in a way that is evident in the young people leaving the white gates at the front of the School aged 18. Meanwhile, the vast majority of pupils applying to Forest are also applying from co-educational primary schools and prep schools.

How will an internal gender-based change help prepare pupils better for the modern world?

- Learning in all Forest classrooms should be governed by an understanding that gender **equity** leads to gender equality. Gender equity can be defined as the understanding of gender differences being incorporated into strategies and actions in the classroom to ensure boys and girls enjoy the same opportunities, and that different behaviours, aspirations and needs are equally valued and favoured.
- In considering how teaching and the curriculum can be made gender-equitable, the following key areas will be included: Curriculum content, learning methods, language of instruction, and methods of valuation and assessment – the latter with a clear sense of what is being rewarded.
- The resulting gender **equality** for every learner will be seen in terms of classroom status, opportunities to progress, representation, equal communication and ability to develop as a learner in a more inclusive Forest classroom.
- British education looks very different to even ten or twenty years ago. If Forest is contributing to the building of a more diverse society with a huge array of backgrounds, and which includes both men and women equally, co-education fits better with that idea of a strong, fairer society, with fully functioning, informed and participative citizens.

What happens between now and September 2022 in terms of preparation?

- In September 2021 we will publish a detailed timeline for the academic year 2021/22 to show the necessary preparations that will take place in the run up to September 2022. This will include the work we will do with staff, pupils, and parents, as well as listing the events, training, curriculum review and key communications which will keep everyone in the Forest community in the loop.

So, will the Forest classroom positively challenge gender stereotypes?

- Several research studies over the years have clearly shown how the co-educational classroom environment can remove gender bias and the implicit gender stereotyping that comes at the point of separating boys and girls, and how, with sensitivity and positive intent, a teacher can create a highly productive working environment where the physical and social environment of the classroom promotes healthy, mutually respectful relationships between all genders.
- Forest will see a shift to more collaborative learning in the classroom, with the teacher ensuring all activities are carried out in mixed groups and all pupils show themselves and express themselves in class as better 'can-do' learners. Engaging pupils in discussions and problem-solving, encouraging cooperation and open reflection, are all ways of breaking gender barriers.

Will the character of the School change?

- The same question is asked whenever a school makes an evolutionary change such as this, and it was certainly asked in 2015 when Forest moved to becoming one Senior School in place of the previous Boys' School and Girls' School running as separate schools on a shared site. There has been no loss of character or loss of identity for the individual pupils from that evolution, and we do not believe the School's character will change following the move to co-ed classrooms.
- As a starting point for strategic planning, many schools ask what sort of school they want to be in five years' time; at Forest we started by asking what sort of learners we want to be producing in five years' time, using learning in its broadest sense to cover pupils' achievement and pupils' personal development inside and outside the classroom. With the pupils' experience remaining firmly at its centre, the character of Forest will not change.

Will parents have an opportunity to meet staff to ask questions in person?

- Absolutely. Forest always tries to be transparent about its plans, and we value hugely our communication with parents and the excellent, mutually beneficial relationships we have with the parent body.
- Forest carries out regular external market research. In 2020, our whole-school parent survey included a dedicated section to elicit parents' views of the diamond structure, alongside the other sections which explored the reasons parents are choosing Forest. We received responses from 728 parents which have been fed into our planning for this change.
- After half-term (in June 2021), we will run webinars which we hope many parents will attend. The Warden and members of the Leadership Team will also be happy to meet with parents to discuss our plans and to answer any questions, or offer reassurance and further information and detail, as required. For our part, this is a very exciting step for Forest, and we are certain it is a necessary one for Forest to take if we are to genuinely strengthen the education of our pupils from 2022.
- Central to the success of a pupil's learning is the promptness and quality of communication between home and school. This was very clear during lockdown when parents became even more involved on a day-to-day basis in their children's learning. We are committed to seeking further ways to encourage and foster active parent engagement in supporting the learning process their children are working through at Forest.

A Vision

Forest wants to be itself, comfortable with the distinct emphasis of its educational provision from September 2022. A Forest education has always looked beyond purely academic outcomes – vital though they are – to the characteristics that are developed in every Forest pupil as they throw themselves into the full life of the School day by day. As a result, we believe this evolutionary change is the right thing to do at this stage of the School's development.

As reflected through the success of the Prep and Senior schools, much of the groundwork for the co-educational classroom has already been done. Indeed, Forest already prides itself on the central qualities which a fully co-educational environment can bring. As noted in our last ISI inspection report:

“Pupils are confident, articulate, and show a determination to keep trying even when something is challenging. They are very aware of their strengths, exhibit good self-control and are highly motivated to succeed. They show a willingness to work collaboratively with their peers and teachers.... Pupils are extremely friendly and welcoming, working well with their peers within a supportive learning environment.”

It is Forest evolving, not Forest changing.

Evidently, our pupils thrive when working together, with this transition providing them with even more opportunities to do so. A recent Forest parent of a boy and a girl wrote:

“It never ceases to amaze us how well staff at Forest know our children, and how your understanding of their path through the years has always been considered thoughtfully and expertly. We have felt that the learning and pastoral journey is one that is truly believed in, crafted and shared.”

In 1834, Forest School began a journey. Now, we can look forward to the next chapter, and all the exciting opportunities it will provide the entire school community.



for the Future



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SCHOOL

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