



FYLING HALL

SCHOOL

Looking to the Future: Our Strategic Direction June 2007

Our Vision

The Trustees of Fyling Hall School aim to steer a course towards the year 2023 that will enable us to embark on our second century securely financed, handsomely equipped and widely respected.

Although we will always be responsive to a changing world, we must have the confidence to resist mere educational fashion as we conserve and develop the school's distinctive character. This character is rooted equally in the natural beauty of our setting and the family warmth of our small community. In the combination of place and spirit lies our unique quality – and our greatest strength.

Thus, we aim for a school in our centenary year which may be greatly changed by improved facilities, rigorous business planning and enhanced reputation – but it will remain recognisable as the school Mab Bradley founded and Clare White continued: an unfussy, happy establishment where children flourish and learn to the very best of their potential.

Introduction: Where We Are Now

The statement of Our Vision which opens this document aims to distil the varied, but impressively similar, visions of Fyling Hall put forward by staff, parents, pupils and friends as well as the Board of Trustees at our conference held on the weekend of the 5th May 2007. It was agreed that Fyling Hall's greatest strength – or Unique Selling Point, in marketing terms – is not any single asset (view, heritage, buildings), but the very particular combination of our location, both for its beauty and environmental value, and the genuinely family-like atmosphere. This atmosphere has always pervaded the school and, in some mysterious way, even as pupils and teachers come and go, is transmitted from one generation to the next. On 5th May, current students were as eloquent, and often used exactly the same words to describe this, as pupils from thirty or more years ago.

However, this unique combination, which we rightly cherish, of rural setting and family intimacy depends on our being a small school, in a delightful but thinly populated corner of Yorkshire, with an inclusive mixed ability, co-educational intake. All three of these factors – size, location and composition – present economic challenges. Our boarding fee income cannot expand beyond the numbers we can accommodate; half our catchment area for day pupils is under the North Sea with much of the rest populated chiefly by sheep; and our commitment to being non-selective academically does us no favours in league tables. These are in-built economic constraints which must be incorporated into any planning process.

Added to that, we are confronted by the problems common to all UK schools. Demographic changes mean fewer school age children. We face fluctuating levels of competition from day schools locally, both state and independent, and other boarding schools nationally. We have to contend with the effects – still emerging – of the Charities Act, requiring us to prove benefit to the wider community. With a substantial proportion of our boarders coming from the armed forces, we are vulnerable to any reform of the Government's forces boarding policy. Changes in DfES or EC social legislation – for example requiring the removal of bunk beds – could pose a serious threat. Finally, our flow of international students from some countries, notably Hong Kong, depends on their governments' support for educating children abroad and this support is diminishing.

It's hardly surprising that so many small independent schools close. Fyling Hall, it's fair to say, has survived – and flourished – against considerable odds. Our conference explained, at least in part, why. There was fierce and heartfelt commitment expressed in all quarters to the philosophy on which Mab Bradley began this school, and which underpins our education to this day.

The school motto, simple as it is, expresses that philosophy: *The days that make us happy make us wise...* Allowing for poetic shorthand, we take 'wisdom' to mean the process of learning through which, ultimately, we might hope to attain wisdom, and 'happiness' to be a concept much more profound than mere transient moments of fun. Long-term happiness as experienced by a child at school is surely a composite of healthy growth, friendships, fruitful activity, stimulation, achievement and feelings of being both secure and valued within a community. It must follow that a child who is happy in this profound sense is a child ideally

placed to learn to the very best of his or her ability. And that, of course, is our overarching aim.

Throughout our consultations, then, we found little or no will for deep-rooted reforms in the philosophy, size or composition of the school. That is not to say there was a general feeling nothing needed to change. On the contrary. Improvements in all areas were suggested and hotly argued, and the purpose of this document – from which will flow a detailed, rolling five-year plan drawn up with the Headmaster and Senior Management Team – is to incorporate some of those ideas into a broad statement of our policy.

It is worth setting out first, though – obvious as they may seem – the unchanging principles which govern the education we offer at Fyling Hall.

- **Safety:** We protect children from harm, both physically, with sensible rules and risk management, and emotionally, with sound and sensitive pastoral care.
- **Academic Attainment:** We carefully identify and maximise the potential of each individual pupil, through good teaching and warm staff-student relationships based on mutual respect and trust, in an environment conducive to study.
- **Health:** Sport, outdoor activity and nutritious food are intrinsic to the school's daily life, and we teach the associated life-long health benefits.
- **Character development:** By giving increased responsibility to pupils as they grow up, we foster confidence, self-respect, team-work and leadership skills.
- **Environmental awareness:** We aim to build an appreciation of the school's beautiful surroundings and heritage into an intelligent concern for a fragile world.
- **Moral and spiritual growth:** We both practice and preach the simple, traditional virtues of courtesy, honesty, integrity, pride in appearance and kindness, while encouraging more profound spiritual exploration.
- **Widening horizons:** We promote a stimulating range of extra-curricular interests and activities in the arts, current affairs and community service.

All proposals for change are aimed at improving the way we put into daily practice these seven key principles.

Before moving to future directions, however, we should briefly note the additional responsibilities borne by the Trustees, because these duties will, on occasion, constrain our freedom of operation, and must be taken into account in any planning process.

- The Board of Trustees is legally bound to safeguard the school's financial viability at all times.
- We must accept the obligations laid upon us by the Charities Act and ensure we are serving the wider community.
- We have legal obligations to our Landlord, and neighbourly responsibilities within the local community.
- We are responsible not just for our pupils, but for the safety, welfare, training and career development of all our employees.

The Future

Teaching and Learning

We are determined that every child will realise his or her full academic potential. While we are very deliberately not an academic hothouse – and our ability to withstand the pressures that turn some schools into exam-passing factories is appreciated by many parents as one of our strengths – this should not be confused with a lack of commitment to the highest possible standards of teaching and learning.

Monitoring academic achievement: Although we have always had some very bright pupils, our mixed ability intake means we are never going to be near the top in league tables. Our success is measured rather in the improved performance of each of our pupils – our ‘value added’. **The Board applauds recent initiatives to quantify the improvements we are achieving in our students’ performance and looks forward to seeing this systematic assessment applied more widely across the curriculum.**

Our curriculum: All small schools today face difficulties offering the range of subjects requested by students – non-selective schools like ours even more so, because we are under pressure both to expand the more demanding academic disciplines in order to fulfil the needs of our most academic children while diversifying into more vocational subjects to engage and stimulate the more practically minded. These are not decisions to be taken lightly – and we realise that the Headmaster needs flexibility, on occasion, to accommodate individual requirements. Nevertheless, **we propose a comprehensive formal review of our curriculum, to be reappraised annually.** We also believe that the lengthening of the school day to provide more quality teaching time will be invaluable in assisting our pupils’ learning.

Teaching: A culture of commitment to the school and to everything the community stands for is inherent in a good school which puts its pupils first.

We welcome and support the ongoing process of review and appraisal of teaching staff, and intend to make continuing professional development (CPD) a priority.

We must continually seek to strengthen our teaching skills.

Input by Non Teaching Staff: Fyling Hall has a very successful tradition which continues to this day of encouraging non-teaching staff to share their skills and interests – for example Sarah Husband’s cookery lessons. **We will seek out and foster this sort of initiative whereby staff share their skills and interests with pupils.**

Composition of the student body: We warmly welcome the cultural diversity that our international intake bring us, but are aware that too great of proportion of international students can swamp the character of Fyling Hall – which is what attracts students to us in the first place. We are not a language school. **Therefore, we will aim to restrict the percentage of pupils whose first language is not English to below 20%.**

Similarly, we are justifiably proud of being a school where vulnerable children thrive and flourish, but **we must exercise skill in identifying those children whom we can help, and recognise that we have neither the facilities nor staff to cope beyond a certain level of need. We must also be careful in not allowing the welfare of the majority to be compromised.**

Beyond the Curriculum

Our location: Given universal agreement over the importance of our rural environment, the Board is passionately committed to exploiting the rich resources of our location. **The woods, fields, moor, surrounding farmland and shoreline should be used as imaginatively as possible for teaching purposes, for leisure pursuits and for raising environmental awareness.**

Extra curricular activities: The quality of our extra curricular provision has varied. It is probably inevitable that the range of interests catered for will fluctuate, reflecting current fads and changing populations. However, a diverse and stimulating mix of activities is vital to a rounded education, particularly in a boarding school. While we serve our pupils well in sport and physical pastimes – witness the popularity of the climbing wall – we have been less successful recently with music, drama and cultural pursuits generally. We have two notable assets in the Barn theatre and the Rose Garden amphitheatre which are underused for creative purposes. A thriving culture of extra-curricular activity cannot be dictated by the board – to succeed it must develop out of the enthusiasms of staff and pupils. **However, we must actively encourage and facilitate a rich mix of activity to suit all our pupils, both creative, non-sporting pursuits and traditional sporting ones.**

Catering: We recognize that our excellent meals are a great asset to the school, and **we shall continue to support our cook as she educates students in the benefits of lifelong healthy eating and discourages junk food.**

Our Staff

The Board recognises that staff should be a school's most valuable asset – a school is only as good as its teaching and the support to this teaching. The warm relationships between staff and students, moreover, are central to the precious family atmosphere of Fyling Hall, as is the continuity provided by long-serving teachers and non-teaching staff. Salaries however – as at any school – represent far and away our biggest cost. At Fyling Hall, it's probably fair to say our staff has had to bear much of the burden in times of economic stringency, and the Board is profoundly grateful for their loyalty.

We have already put in place new contracts and a new teaching salary scale and we will review this annually to ensure it remains transparent and fair. Given the financial constraints dictated by our size, we are never going to be in a position to offer lavish remuneration, but in the short term we shall aim to provide an affordable increase in salaries. In the longer

term, as part of our business planning, **we are looking at salaries elsewhere, and are committed to ensuring that our overall levels of pay and benefits, if not generous, are fair.**

At Fyling Hall we have always tried to avoid multiple 'add-on' payments for extra duties, but a boarding school in term time is inevitably a 24-hour operation, and **the Board is committed to ensuring that the burden of work is fairly and equally shared amongst the staff.**

We have reviewed and revised non-teaching staff contracts and **will put in place a system of review for non-teaching staff to help them benefit from professional development.**

Our buildings and facilities

Buildings: Fyling Hall has never been, and never will be, a grand establishment. We believe that a friendly supportive atmosphere matters more to a child than fitted wardrobes. Having said that, we are aware that some areas of our dormitory accommodation in particular would benefit from radical refurbishment, over and above our permanent rolling programme of repair and renewal.

Moreover, while we have always been resourceful in both funding new buildings and adapting old ones to changing needs, we somehow remain permanently short of space.

Building is, of course, enormously expensive. What's more, we have only limited (flat) land on which we could build, even should we be in a position, financially, to do so. We are also constrained by being in a National Park, on a Heritage coastline and having Grade II listed buildings. Therefore **the Board intends to establish a Buildings Projects Group**, composed of trustees and volunteers with relevant expertise, the first task of which will be **to undertake a thoroughgoing review of the existing usage of all our buildings to see if this can be improved. In consultation with Board and management, this group will also explore new building options with outline projections for the necessary fundraising.** It goes without saying that all this must depend on our financial planning outlined below.

Environmental awareness: We are already committed to reducing the school's carbon emissions. **We will research the feasibility of, and possible grant aid for, the construction of an innovative eco-building, powered by 'green' energy which would both reduce our fuel costs and serve as an educational tool.**

Staff accommodation: We are keenly aware of the benefits to the school of staff being resident on the premises and, while our options are necessarily limited, **we will do what we can to provide sufficient accommodation of a good standard on site for resident staff.**

Facilities: **We fully recognize the importance of ICT, and having invested substantially in new facilities in 2006, are committed to a rolling programme of annual upgrades.** Alongside this, we maintain our faith in the importance to education of the printed word in books, and will keep our library well resourced.

Business and Financial Planning

To say that we intend to put the school's business and financial planning on a more formal footing is to imply no criticism of the past. On the contrary, our recent strengthening of the Bursarial role in the management of finance and non-academic administration deliberately echoes the dual (academic) Headmaster/(administrative) Principal model by which Clare White and a succession of headmasters so successfully ran the school, as well as bringing us into line with common practice.

Our aim in day-to-day financial management remains transparent, carefully monitored control of expenditure, and we have responded to the urgings of successive inspections by devolving agreed budgets to subject areas.

On the wider financial front, our proposed reforms reflect recent evolution in the role and composition of the Board. Many of us bring outside expertise to the table, rather than the long and intimate experience of the school which has (very effectively) informed decision making in the past. Moreover, while it might be argued that planning at Fyling Hall has tended, historically, to be reactive, with plans for investment being drawn up *ad hoc* in response to a profitable year or two, we aim to be more pro-active. The challenge facing us – as it always has – is balancing necessarily limited pupil numbers and our desire to keep our fees affordable with the need to invest in and improve our facilities. While we disregard a culture of thrifty and commonsensical housekeeping at our peril, **we will work within a longer, rolling five-year timeframe. We will develop clear goals and economic targets in a realistic business model underpinned by detailed risk assessment.**

Such a process is not to be undertaken quickly or lightly, and **we are actively looking both to recruit new Board members (see Governance) with the appropriate skills, and possibly to seek advice from qualified non-board members.**

More immediately, although the bulk of our income is derived from fees, we have for many years let the school during the summer to other charities and groups. **We shall consider whether there are other initiatives that could provide income from use of the school during vacations.**

Marketing

Natural logic suggests a school's marketing strategy should develop out of a planning exercise such as this. Being Fyling Hall, we have worked in reverse, with our strategic thinking following on the recent renewals of website and prospectus. And while the website, working within the generally accepted five-year cycle, will be due for a major re-think by 2010 and the prospectus in 2011, radical change in these twin pillars of our marketing policy is necessarily limited in the short term.

In the meantime, we are reviewing the content, targeting and most effective placement of our advertising, both print and Internet. We're well aware how easy it is to spend great deal of money in this area to precious little effect – and how difficult to measure efficacy. We have

identified key questions. Given the very different requirements and expectations of armed forces boarding parents and local day parents on the other, should we be advertising quite differently to these constituencies? Thus far, our adverts have been similar across the board. Similarly, should we be marketing Whitehall independently from Fyling Hall?

Overall, we recognize that **professional marketing must be a priority**, in a way it has not been in the past. While we know word-of-mouth recommendation will always be more potent than the glossiest ad or prospectus, a coherent marketing policy encompasses vastly more than mere advertising. In its widest sense, marketing is inextricable from virtually every area of school planning. One need only choose at random any of the myriad factors which influence parents – and potential students – in choosing a school, from curriculum options or class size to satellite television or even (as was suggested on 5th May) muddy and restricted parking on a first visit! Many of the crucial decisions outlined in this document would benefit from informed market research.

We now have an active marketing committee, and have managed in-house the production of a prospectus and website which we hope successfully reflect the qualities of the school, but the committee, and the Board of Trustees as a whole, lack professional marketing skills. Hiring specialist expertise in the educational sector is expensive. Non-specialist local marketing consultants may be cheaper but, we suspect, are unlikely to be of much use. With regard to the narrower issue of focussing our advertising, we hope to draw, at minimal or no cost, on the goodwill and skill of contacts. However – particularly looking to the future renewals of website and prospectus – **the need to recruit a trustee (see Governance) with marketing expertise becomes imperative**. We will also consider investing in professional advice. And we must recognize that effective marketing demands considerable time and effort from the members of staff responsible.

Finally, since marketing is also about enhancing our standing both locally and beyond, we warmly welcome recent initiatives such as the holiday activity days, and projects like the Great Trek which attracted widespread press coverage. Given that we're tucked away on a secluded hillside, we need to find as many 'shop windows' as possible, hence our rather splendid tent at local country shows. **Our aim is to persuade Whitby and the surrounding area to embrace Fyling Hall as its own, local, independent school. The more we can do to involve, impress and interest the community and media the better.**

Alumni and Fund-raising

Given that Fyling Hall, as we know, commands exceptional loyalty from many of its former students, the school has been surprisingly haphazard in establishing and maintaining contact with them. This must change. Building plans depend on fundraising and, for any independent school, past pupils are a prime source of support.

We are, however, rightly wary of appearing to take an interest in old boys and girls only when we want money. This is far from being our sole motivation. Happy former pupils are potentially our future parents and grandparents, as well as our ambassadors worldwide.

Within the school, the sense of continuing tradition flowing from the involvement of past students enriches the experience of the present day community.

Thus we warmly welcome the recent rapid expansion of the alumni e-mail database, under the supervision of John Jeakins, and look to this being further developed into as comprehensive a register as possible. Most crucial is that the resulting database is then updated and maintained on a systematic basis. **We will also do all we can to foster the foundation of a formal alumni society, alongside and possibly linked to the Buildings Projects Group** (see under 'Our Buildings and Facilities') **which we hope will take a dynamic role in school development plans.** In the meantime, via future editions of the recently launched alumni newsletter, we will circulate information and host regular formal and informal reunion events with a view to establishing a thriving alumni network.

Governance

The Charity Commission states that **'Trustees have and must accept ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of a charity, and ensuring that it is solvent, well-run, and delivering the charitable outcomes for the benefit of the public for which it has been set up.'**

In practical terms, we define our role as leading the strategic direction of the school; ensuring compliance with legislation and regulations; overseeing sound and responsible financial management; and monitoring and evaluating the school's progress. To do this most effectively, **we are actively looking to expand the Board to strengthen our pool of expertise specifically – but not exclusively – in business management and/or marketing, building or architecture and the law.** We are also aware of the problems of having a Chair at the far end of the country – not least for the Chair herself! – and will plan for a succession.

Beyond the school gates, we are responsible for fostering happy and fruitful relations with the local community. We have always offered jobs in a rural area where traditional sources of employment have diminished, and sought to share our facilities where feasible. But **the Charities Act requires us to examine our public service role, and we will seek new ways to enhance this,** not least by building on the recent success of the activity days offered to local children in the holiday.

Finally, not the least important duty of a Board of Governors – arguably even the most important – is to recognise, celebrate and safeguard the ethos of the school, the very essence which makes that school what it is. Being 'Keepers of the flame' was how this role was described in a seminar held by the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools. Thus, keen as we rightly are to add to the expertise and experience offered by our Trustees, we must always ensure the Board includes people intimately associated with the school, as former pupils or staff – in full confidence that the days that made them happy at Fyling Hall will make them especially wise in guiding its future.

The Board of Trustees, Fyling Hall School, June 2007