23 January 2015

TAS to embark on co-education consultation process from February 2015

Dear TAS Community,

We write to you at the beginning of the school year with some very important information concerning TAS and its strategic growth goals for the future.

From the beginning of February 2015 until the end of March, the TAS Board and the school Executive will embark on a period of broad consultation with all stakeholder and community groups including current parents, students, Old Boys, Foundation members and prospective parents to discuss the possible transition of the school to full co-education from T-12 in January 2016.

The strategic direction of the school, articulated in our TAS Vision 2025 publication published in 2012, states that the goal of the school is to be the best boarding and day school in regional NSW and among the best schools in the nation.

With a possible move to full co-education, TAS can provide to all families, not just families with sons, the best education, broadest subject offering and an unparalleled co-curricular and leadership program that develops character, independence and resilience for life.

The combination of compelling expert analysis, dedicated research, genuine interest from families for a TAS education for their daughter as well as their son makes the move to co-education an attainable, obvious vision. Having girls on the TAS campus and not just in our classrooms is not a new development. We have simply never drawn much attention to the fact. We already have a co-ed Junior School and for the past 15 years TAS has taught, and continues to offer and teach, senior secondary subjects in Years 11 and 12 (and Years 9 and 10 until recently) to significant numbers of students from NEGS and PLC.

Beyond the classroom, TAS provides access to girls for a broad range of co-curricular activities from sport, to musicals and drama, inclusion in academic excursions and overseas service trips such as Fiji and Thailand and within Australia to Yipirinya; they have also joined our Hawkesbury Canoe Classic teams over many years. The co-education experience is already occurring but has not before been given voice.
Over the past two years the TAS Board has engaged in significant research and analysis into the future of independent education in the New England and North West region. The decision to make this step toward change and evolution has not been made without significant background work. The most important key findings in the research and analysis include the following:

1. Despite the varied media and other reports, there is no conclusive evidence that single sex education is "better" than a co-educational experience for either boys or girls. What makes a successful school, and therefore ensures successful student outcomes, is related more to the quality and innovation of the teaching, the values, culture and tone of the school, viable cohort numbers providing social stability, visionary leadership and access to excellent resources.

The global trends in education are toward co-education and not single sex education. The UK independent school system provides a good comparison for Australia where the trend toward co-education has been even stronger in both the boarding and day markets. In the UK there are now only 24 boys only boarding schools and 48 girls only boarding schools whereas there are 257 co-educational boarding schools.

2. In the Australian independent schools landscape, Armidale remains the only regional hub to have no independent co-educational school offering for families despite the compelling fact that 85% of all Australian independent schools are co-educational. In fact, in the past 50 years, 17 new boarding schools were established and 100% of them are co-educational.

3. In terms of location, size and the enrolment landscape, TAS resembles closely those co-educational boarding schools in other regional centres that have taken their success and managed to grow significantly with the adoption of co-education. In fact, Armidale is an anomaly with Australia’s three smallest independent single sex schools located in a regional centre with an unchanging population of 25,000.

4. In January 2015, the Association of Independent Schools (AIS), the peak body representing the independent schools sector in NSW, completed a study into the independent education market in Armidale and concluded that a "a co-educational TAS will expand opportunities for independent schooling in Armidale and will appeal to families who have not had an independent co-education option in the past."

The AIS concluded that a re-visioning of independent schooling in Armidale is necessary and co-education is most likely to deliver sustainable independent schooling in Armidale in the future.
Despite the fact that our enrolments for 2015 include the highest secondary enrolments since 1994 and the highest boarding numbers since 1997, without offering any unsustainable financial incentives, our aim is to provide all families with the best academic performance and support, un-paralleled co-curricular depth and range and genuine adventure, leadership and service programs that build independence, resilience and prepare our young adults better for the wider world.

Undoubtedly, the Board is fully aware of the importance of this potential historic change, particularly for our current families, students and our Old Boys. Any process toward full co-education would not be at the cost of changing our values, history or networks in the community. Perhaps it would provide some assurance to know that any move would not affect in any way the school’s GPS status or any of the connections the school has made over its 120 years. It would simply allow the school to grow and develop from a very strong base, and at the same time we could look forward to the school being enriched and enhanced by the indelible stamp the inclusion of girls will bring to the fabric of the school.

It must be remembered that the TAS Board has made no final decision and the school is merely entering a period of consultation to speak about the school’s future direction openly with all our stakeholders. The TAS Board’s ultimate responsibility is to deliver the best possible future for TAS; our students, staff and families, current and future. The timing for TAS to embark upon broad consultation is right and we look forward to hearing from you during this period through either attendance at a consultation session, through our email survey which will be sent in the coming weeks or through a direct contact on our dedicated phone number 0487 549 477 or email consult@as.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Murray Guest
Headmaster

[Signature]

Sebastian Hempel
Chairman, TAS Board

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