



3 November 2011

Dear Members of the Ascham Community

Today the Council of Governors has great pleasure in announcing the appointment of the next Headmistress of Ascham School. Dr Helen Wright will commence in January 2013, when Mrs Louise Robert-Smith will step down after seven very successful years in her role.

Helen is Scottish-born and graduated from Oxford with a degree in Modern and Medieval Languages. Although aged only 41, she has been the Head of St Mary's Calne, one of the leading independent schools in the UK, for nearly nine years. In 2011, she also became Chair of the Independent Girls' School Association, a role that entails significant representation responsibilities at the national level in the UK.

Helen is an inspirational leader and great role model, with an outstanding track record as a headmistress. Governors were impressed with Helen's appreciation of the enormous benefits that flow from our Dalton approach to education and the way in which she grasped the power of Ascham's philosophy that drives independent learning and brings out the best in each individual girl.

We chose Helen after an intensive 12-month global search assisted by Russell Reynolds and after a rigorous selection process involving all Ascham Governors. Our aim was to find an experienced Head of a respected school who would embrace Ascham's distinctive tradition and culture whilst moving the school forward. We were impressed by the quality of candidates attracted to the quality and reputation of Ascham.

In conducting our search we held in-depth interviews with four domestic and three overseas candidates. Each candidate was asked to: provide a personal statement of educational philosophy; make a formal presentation to Council describing what she considered to be unique about her school; participate in a number of interviews with the Council as group; engage in four topic-specific discussions with small groups of Governors. Candidates not familiar with Ascham were given a tour of the school. Short-listed candidates also met Governors in informal settings and hosted visits to their schools.

Our visit to Helen's school and private conversations with parents, staff and Governors of St Mary's confirmed what we saw in our interviews: Helen is held in the highest regard by all and has fostered a culture that values academic excellence, diversity of educational experience, and the importance of bringing out the best in each girl—all critical elements of our Ascham experience.

We spoke to two St Mary's Governors who said about Helen:

"I believe she is the best Head in England...She understands people and how to get the best out of people. She is incredibly hardworking and passionate about ensuring the girls in her care succeed and fulfill their potential. She puts the pupils first, as a consequence the staff admire her and the children love her. She has always looked at what is best for the girls as her top priority."

"We are very sorry to be losing Helen...but we knew that in becoming the Chair of the Independent Girls' School Association, her talents would be obvious to the external world. Importantly, Helen will leave us with a legacy that includes great systems and clear frameworks to set the expectations of staff and our students. Unusually, her leadership is not 'all about her', but rather about creating a genuine legacy, and that she has done extremely well."

I recommend her unreservedly. We are very disappointed, but not surprised and we are thrilled for Helen. She is an outstanding leader who at the end of the day is also a very practical woman. She will make a move as complex as taking her family to the other side of the world look simple."

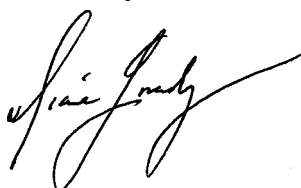
Helen will move to Australia with her husband, Brian and their three children ages eight, five and almost two. Brian's brother has lived in Brisbane for many years and the family has visited Australia on multiple occasions. Brian is an Oxford graduate who currently runs IT at Oxford's business incubator campus.

Coincidentally, Louise visited St Mary's while on sabbatical in the UK to explore establishing an exchange program with the school. When our search firm rang Helen just a few days later, she was interested. Helen is ready for a new challenge and believes that Ascham provides just that opportunity. As she said during our interviews: *"I appreciate the subtlety of the challenge. It is much tougher taking a really good school and making it even better. You need to delve deep inside and pull out the great"*. Helen is attracted to Ascham precisely because it is in excellent shape and she is energised by the possibilities that arise to build on that foundation.

The Governors are unanimous in our enthusiasm about the appointment of Dr Wright as the next Headmistress of Ascham School. We are eager for her to meet the whole school community and plan for her to visit during the week of 13 February 2012. We will also be holding a video-conferenced Q&A session with Helen, Louise and Governors on 17 November 2011 at 7pm. If you would like to attend please RSVP to office@ascham.nsw.edu.au and please include any questions that you would particularly like addressed.

In the meantime, we can all look forward to the next 14 months with Mrs Robert-Smith at the helm as she continues to develop the school. During that time there is much to be done and much to celebrate. We will enjoy paying tribute along with all of you to the important contribution and legacy Louise has given to Ascham.

Yours sincerely



Ms Diane Grady
Chair, Council of Governors