

The Right Reverend Jeremy James, Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Perth, Ladies and Gentlemen and students of Guildford Grammar School, good evening.

It's a pleasure to be speaking with you this evening on behalf of the School Council in what is an historic week for our School.

Prize Giving is always a special day in the Guildford Grammar School calendar. It is the day we reflect on a year of achievements and acknowledge those who have made significant contributions to our School over the year. It is also a day on which we reflect on the fabric of the School and what makes it great.

While tonight is about your sons, it would be remiss not to talk about our announcement yesterday that Guildford Grammar School will be extending its coeducational offering throughout the whole school.

Since yesterday we have been overwhelmed with interest from the sisters of our boys, as well as the daughters and granddaughters of Old Guildfordians and new people looking for a top tier, independent co-educational school.

The question of co-education has been looked at by Council many times over our 120-year history. Indeed, when Guildford was established in 1896, it catered for the education of both boys and girls and it remained that way for five years until 1900. In 1976, Guildford Grammar School made the bold move to introduce co-education into the Preparatory School.

As indicated by Tom Moody in today's West Australian Newspaper, around that time the then Headmaster John Moody was party to discussions regarding the future of Guildford as a fully co-educational school. In likelihood Mr Moody was looking at the move in the 1970s made by Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, to become fully co-educational, a move which they executed very successfully.

Council's unanimous decision on Monday night to extend our co-educational offering throughout the School has been the culmination of an exhaustive and rigorous process that extended over an 18-month period.

It is impossible to take you all on the lengthy journey that we as a Council have travelled to arrive at this point. It has involved a large body of research, the Headmaster travelling to other schools that have successfully transitioned to co-education, a comprehensive business case and countless hours of

discussion as a Council about what is best for the long-term interest of our School.

I acknowledge that this decision was unexpected by most of you. One parent said today that they very much supported the transition but that they were disappointed about the consultation process around the decision, a view which I completely understand and sympathise with.

So, let me address that point. Like all representative bodies, the Council (or the Board in a corporate environment) goes through a careful process of weighing the pros and cons of any decision. Council did this in relation to how it should consult with the broader school community.

In short, what became clear from this process is that there were very real risks associated with adopting that approach. One risk is that we would invariably end up disappointing a large component of the School community because there will be some 'for' change and others 'against' it.

Another risk, as I outlined above is that it simply isn't possible or practical to take parents along on the same journey that we as a Council have taken in making the decision, which has involved an enormous amount of research and discussion.

That is why organisations (including our School) are structured the way that they are. Having a representative Board avoids organisations not moving forward at all, because it will never be possible to properly inform everyone of all the pertinent facts or get total alignment on big complex questions.

It is our job as a Council to thoroughly investigate matters and then come to an informed decision that is in the best interests of the School. As much as we might like to delegate our decision making to others, we would be derelict in our duty if we did so, because we are the only ones that have taken the long journey.

Another risk, is that Guildford Grammar School, like all other schools, operates in a competitive environment. As a Council we needed to be mindful that some information could actually hurt the School if it were made public prematurely. But perhaps the most compelling risk is that a public debate on a big issue that concerns the School could be a distraction for our students and ultimately your children's wellbeing is our primary concern.

I won't say anything more on the process now but I hope you get a flavour that the weighing of considerations in relation to broad consultation is more complex than it may first appear. I look forward to elaborating on this at our upcoming workshops, the first of which is on 12 December.

In the meantime, I encourage you to visit our website where you can view some of the research and other information in relation to co-education. You are also very welcome to speak with me after the ceremony this evening. I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

Turning now to the decision itself, more than anything else, what has guided us on this process has been our School Purpose which applies to all our students, including notably, our senior boys here tonight. But our student body also includes our more than 100 female students in our Preparatory School. Clearly, if we require our Year 6 girls to seek an alternative educational institution beyond Year 6, we are not delivering on our purpose to those young Guildfordians, some of whom have been at the School since kindergarten.

While the concept of a fully integrated co-education model is new in Western Australia it is not new in independent schools throughout Australia. Indeed, it could be said that WA is lagging the other states in not having a top tier independent co-education school. Some of Australia's most recognised and highly regarded independent schools have been co-ed for many years, including Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, Pembroke College in South Australia, and Caulfield Grammar School, also in Victoria.

In the past four years alone there have been several other schools make the transition including, recently, Canberra Grammar School, and Barker College in Sydney which is one of NSW's oldest private boys school. We don't hear about it much in the west but it is happening at an increased rate over east and in the UK and Canada. And there's a reason that it's happening. It's because the Councils of those schools have also looked at the research and come to an informed decision that it's in the best interests of those schools to evolve. It seems radical here in Western Australia, but I assure you it is not.

Guildford Grammar School is the first to move in this regard in Western Australia. We should be leading, just as we have done throughout our proud history. And while we are first to move in this regard, I very much doubt we will be the last.

Council's decision to extend co-education throughout the School establishes a learning environment that mirrors the universities and workplaces that our students will experience when they leave the School.

To end tonight I would like to tell you about an Old Guildfordian that you might not previously have heard about.

This Old Guildfordian was part of the first class enrolled at our School in 1896 and was known for their intelligence and quick wit. Born into a well-known pioneering family, as a youngster they spent many hours exploring the banks of the river.

During a long and eventful life, this Old Guildfordian worked to support a diverse range of charities and volunteer groups across all levels of the community. Following World War 1 they were recognised by the French Government and awarded the La Medaille de la Reconnaissance Française for their dedicated war efforts.

In the 1920s and 1930s, this Guildfordian singlehandedly pioneered the tantalum mining industry in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. They served as Chairman of the Board of Tantalite Ltd and, during World War II, this rare mineral was used in the critical development of radar technology.

In short, this Old Guildfordian's contributions changed the course of history, and this Old Guildfordian's portrait now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery of Australia.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this Old Guildfordian's name is; Deborah Vernon Hackett. Deborah Hackett was an influential and ground breaking female leader and we are proud to call her an Old Guildfordian.

I speak on behalf of the Council when I tell you we are excited at the prospect of supporting a new generation of female leaders who will stand alongside our young men as we write the next chapter in the history of our School.

I appreciate that it will take some time to digest this change, but we need not fear it. Guildford's traditions will be preserved. Yesterday, and in the days leading up to yesterday, I spoke with many Old Guildfordians and former leaders at the School. I also spoke with previous chairs of Council and Fellows that have served on Council in the past.

I spoke with current and former Presidents of our School Foundation, the OGA, and the P&F. Between the Headmaster, other Fellows and myself, we spoke with dozens of past and present leaders in our school community. The overwhelming majority of people are very excited with this change. Indeed, I think many in our community feel a sense of pride that Guildford is leading from the front, just as we should be.

We have received many emails from Old Guildfordians including several from female Old Guildfordians, ecstatic with the change and only sorry that they couldn't have completed their full educational journey with us, having had to leave us at the end of Year 6.

Ladies and Gentlemen, and senior boys. I am an Old Guildfordian, I was a boarder at this School for nine years, initially in the Preparatory School and then five years in the Senior School. Our Vice Chair of Council, Dr Bill Kean, is an Old Guildfordian, and several of our Fellows of Council are Old Guildfordians or have children attending the School.

We understand what it is to be a Guildfordian. We understand our traditions and know that it is important that we protect and treasure them. But we also know that it is very-very dangerous to be blinded by them.

We will continue to build upon generations of good men and we will now focus equally on creating generations of good women too. Guildford Grammar School will do this and we will do it very well. Extending co-education at Guildford Grammar School speaks directly to our School Purpose and our motto, and it is the right thing to do for our School.

I always want to see Guildford Grammar School at the forefront of educational and social outcomes thinking. That is our charge as a Council and that is how we will best equip your children for the world upon which they will embark when they leave our school gates.

I urge you to become involved and I hope you share our sense of excitement as we Go Forward, Together.

Have a wonderful Christmas and thank you for your support.