



KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL

SOUTHSIDE WIMBLEDON COMMON LONDON SW19 4TT

The Head Master AD Halls MA

19th January 2012

Dear Parents,

Sixth Form Curriculum from September 2013

I hope that the term has begun well for you and your family. I also hope you have now had the chance to read through the school's new ISI Inspection report and that you feel it reflects the school accurately. Thank you very much to all parents who have so kindly written in to congratulate the school on such a warm report.

I write this letter however for a particular reason - to inform you about some important changes we are planning to make to the Sixth Form curriculum as from **September 2013**. These changes will I am sure be of interest to all parents but especially to those with children now in the Lower Fifth (Year 10) or below. In short, we will from that date once again be offering A levels in a number of subjects alongside the International Baccalaureate.

This decision will not affect boys and girls who are currently in the top three years of the school. We will continue to teach the IB with exactly the same passion and skill that you expect of us and that has led to our being one of the most successful IB schools in the world. It will mean, however, that we can in future offer additional choice which I believe can only be welcome.

The decision has not been taken lightly. The governors have held five meetings in the last term alone discussing the Sixth Form curriculum with Miss Hunnaball and myself. Finally, in their full board meeting in the last week of term, they decided unanimously to return to a "dual economy" with effect from September 2013.

The reasons for the change are as follows:

- The IB has proved an exceptionally strong and successful form of education. We are pleased to remain an IB school, but we accept that the IB may not be the perfect fit for every pupil. I am very aware, as Head Master, that some older boys tell me they have stayed at King's because they love the school too much to leave it, but that they wish they could have had a choice. Much as the governors and I respect and admire the IB, we believe recent changes in the national examination system, and in the size of our own Sixth Form, enable us once again to adopt plurality.
- A level has strengthened in the last few years. Quite apart from the reduction in the number of modules and the introduction of "stretch and challenge" components, the new A* grade has begun to repair a reputation damaged by over ten years of grade inflation. The A* has clearly been welcomed by universities, and we feel heartened by suggestions from the Secretary of State that further changes will occur that will enhance the status of A levels. I am sure that the success of IB, IGCSE and, so far, the Pre-U, has acted as a powerful reminder to government that a poor national examination system will not be tolerated.
- For some pupils, the demands of pursuing six subjects in the IB combined with the commitment needed to excel in sport, music or drama - or many other equally worthwhile ventures - can be too great a burden. In the Senior School inspection report, there was, you may remember, only one recommendation - that we help pupils "to manage the demands of the very full academic and extra-curricular education". To some degree, the inspectors were sensing the pressure some boys and girls in the Sixth Form feel to perform very well in a demanding examination, and yet also to take part in all the other things that matter so much to them. My colleagues had expressed similar concerns in a questionnaire they filled in last year. Not all pupils feel this, of course, but further choice in the Sixth Form could alleviate the pressure for those who do.
- A school is far more than the public examination system it adopts, and to have some choice is a way of emphasising this. While it can be argued that our being exclusively IB makes for a "unique selling point", it is also the case that it can over-define us, limiting the potential of the school in other ways.

- The recent expansion of the Sixth Form at King's, by approximately one third, makes the idea of returning to a "dual economy" both sensible and affordable. It is a model adapted by other impressive schools, and was the position here at King's for some years until 2007.

There have of course been plenty of criticisms of marking in the 2011 GCSE and A level public examinations, but here at King's we had issues with IB marking and moderation too. Sadly, all public examination systems have their weaknesses, as well as strengths, and it is our duty as a school to provide pupils with what we feel are the best choices for them as time goes on.

We are very proud of all that our Sixth Form pupils achieve in the International Baccalaureate, and we still feel it is an outstanding preparation for university, and for life beyond study. The introduction of A levels will not diminish our IB success. Boys and girls will be free to choose whichever course they prefer, subject choice allowing, and there will be no sense within the school that we feel one alternative is inferior to the other. That is not to say we will not sometimes suggest that one course of study may suit an individual better than another, but these are discussions I think parents and pupils will welcome.

Of course, I cannot promise that every single subject imaginable will be available from September 2013 in both systems, or, indeed, in some cases, ever, but we will create an appropriate choice of A levels to run alongside the range of IB subjects. All pupils will continue to receive excellent advice over which subjects to choose, whether for the IB or A level, and parents will always be very welcome to discuss with my colleagues and myself any concerns or dilemmas they feel as they help guide their son or daughter through the choices that are available to them.

Miss Hunnaball will provide more detail in a letter she will write to all parents early in March. However, I wanted you all to be aware of this decision before this term was further underway.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Halls
Head Master