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Voluntary Aided 11-18 Roman Catholic School for Girls  
Headteacher: Ms Julia Waters BSc (Hons) MA

Crescent Road, Wimbledon, London SW20 8HA  
020 8255 2688 / [www.ursulinehigh.merton.sch.uk](http://www.ursulinehigh.merton.sch.uk)

12<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Dear Ursuline Parent/Carer,

I am writing to let you know that after 18 years as Headteacher of the Ursuline High School, Wimbledon and 23 years' service in total (with 5 years as Deputy Head), Ms Waters has informed governors of her decision to retire at the end of this academic year.

It is difficult to do justice to the transformative changes introduced and embedded by Ms Waters over the past two decades. They cover every aspect of the school – from physical improvements and the creation of new spaces, to developing the enriching extra-curricular and extended learning opportunities for our students, to the development of *Serviam* as the Ursuline's distinct charism - whilst all the time driving outstanding progress and achievement for all our students.

Under Ms Waters' leadership, the Ursuline has fulfilled its Catholic mission to educate the whole person and in particular, to encourage students to contribute to the common good.

It is important to acknowledge some of the ways that the school and students have benefited under Ms Waters' leadership:

- ❖ the introduction of a PGL trip in Year 7 to assist new students to bond and build friendships and a spirit of adventure;
- ❖ the introduction of laptops for all students to create a level playing-field for learning;
- ❖ the introduction of 'FESTWEEK' – an annual week of cultural experiences to build on students' knowledge, experience of the world and social capital;
- ❖ the creation and fundamental refurbishment of a new Arts block to better foster and develop students' enjoyment and knowledge of art, music and drama;
- ❖ the establishment of a new and beautiful chapel to better bring students together to reflect, pray and worship individually and collectively;
- ❖ the establishment of a new 6<sup>th</sup> Form block to give Year 12 and 13 students dedicated learning and social space;
- ❖ the establishment of the Dorothy Kazel block to provide a dedicated space for students studying Business and Health and Social Care;





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- ❖ the new T-Level building, the Katherine Johnson building, to provide students with the opportunity to study the new T-Levels in 6<sup>th</sup> Form;
- ❖ exchange trips for Year 9 and 10 students with Ursuline students in Dallas, USA to help students appreciate and establish links with the global Ursuline community;
- ❖ student trips to China and New York;
- ❖ the establishment of a Pastoral Centre to give students a safe space to discuss and receive support;
- ❖ the acquisition - after years of lobbying, discussions and negotiations - of Morley Park, a dedicated sports ground for our students;
- ❖ the introduction and development of exceptional extended learning for students whether that is through philanthropic projects, extensive career advice and experiences or enrichment opportunities in 6<sup>th</sup> Form;
- ❖ the development of an excellent PSHE programme that educates and prepares our students for the full range of societal and cultural issues in order to better enable them to understand and cope with life's challenges.

It is a matter of immense pride to governors that under Ms Waters' dedicated leadership, the Ursuline High School has been a beacon of Catholic female education. Ms Waters worked tirelessly - with her committed and dedicated staff and senior leadership team - to ensure that every student felt valued and understood that whatever her particular gifts or background, she could achieve her very best at the school. This has been borne out year after year by our students' academic outcomes, destinations and careers.

We saw Ms Waters' exceptional strategic vision in evidence most noticeably in March 2020 when the UK went into lockdown for the first time. Thanks to Ms Waters' preparedness, the Ursuline was almost unique in the way in which it moved seamlessly to remote teaching and learning to its students. The school also worked to provide practical help and support to our community's most vulnerable families in that period.

The governors have always been appreciative and grateful to Ms Waters for the example she has set in working always towards the common good. This has been very clearly evident in the extensive help and time she offered and delivered to other Catholic schools including the Sacred Heart Primary School in New Malden, St. Teresa's Primary School in Morden and St. John Fisher Primary School in Raynes Park. Ms Waters led and/or contributed to other initiatives and community events including Teach Wimbledon and the Wimbledon Bookfest and in more recent years, made the school the central hub





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of Merton's Mental Health Trailblazer project. Ms Waters also worked closely with Wimbledon College and the Ursuline Preparatory School and was a governor at both schools.

Ms Waters' vision for Ursuline students has been to encourage and facilitate students to recognise the contribution they can make to the world through their knowledge, respect and compassion for others. She has led by example with a consistent focus on looking outwards and remaining open always to new ideas and ways of doing things. This has led to remarkably successful partnerships including with St. Philomena's School, Carshalton and Mulberry School for Girls in East London. Ms Waters was also Chair of the Association of State Girls' Schools and the co-author of a number of publications including, *What Makes Great Catholic Schools*.

The past few years have led to incredible upheaval, difficulties and reckonings across society. After the murder of George Floyd in May, 2020 Ms Waters led the school on an extensive evaluation of its systems, policies and practices. As a result, the school has worked to put belonging and racial justice at its heart in line with its mission and values. Such work is on-going but Ms Waters' commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion has been recognised by experts such as Professor Paul Miller.

Whilst governors are sad and sorry that Ms Waters will leave at the end of this academic year, we feel grateful that the Ursuline High School was blessed with her leadership for so long. Her dedicated and inspiring leadership led to a generation of students who benefited from a pre-eminent Catholic education.

A particular highlight was the school's celebrations of its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2017; the school organised and led a hugely successful Women of Faith conference in Westminster's QEII conference centre and brought in prominent speakers from all walks of life (and religions) – politicians, activists and religious figures – to discuss the significance of faith to their life and work. The entire school further celebrated Mass in Westminster Cathedral and the 6<sup>th</sup> form choir and leadership team participated in a trip to the House of Lords. The celebrations marked an important milestone in the history and life of the school and carried the hallmark of Ms Waters' aims and aspirations for her students – to live out their faith and make a difference to the world.





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The governors assure you that we will now dedicate ourselves to appointing a headteacher who can best lead the Ursuline High School forward and build on the immense achievements and legacy of Ms Waters. Ms Waters has confirmed her commitment to ensuring the best of transitions for her successor whilst continuing to serve her staff, the students and you, their families.

Along with our gratitude for her outstanding service to the School, I am sure you will join me in wishing Ms Waters a long, fulfilling and exciting retirement.

Yours faithfully

**Claire Thorogood**  
**Chair of Governors**

