

HEAD OF FOUNDATION'S SPEECH PRIZE-GIVING EVENING SEPTEMBER 2022

To Parents, Prize-winners, Staff, Governors

It is an absolute pleasure to be able to celebrate with you the achievements of our pupils, your children, at this year's Prize-giving.

It was a delight and actually very exciting last academic year to have a relatively 'normal' year - if, indeed, such a thing exists in schools. What I mean is that it was lovely to have the opportunity to run school with greater freedom than the pandemic years allowed. With the notable exception of school trips (particularly overseas trips where we are still recovering from the disruption), we were able to provide a more recognisable 'King's' education and fulfil our school aims. And I'm delighted to report that the pupils and staff grabbed the return of this opportunity with both hands, thrust it in the air, and danced around with it in joyous celebration at the prospect of being challenged to aspire, work hard and achieve (without the previously imposed limits).

Academically, pupils returned to sitting external exams in a traditional manner (in this very hall, for the first time) and with all of the anxiety and uncertainty that brings. Results days, this year, were very different to the previous two years, as not even teachers knew in advance what grades pupils would receive (as was the case with CAGs and TAGs). Whilst this was quite sobering for staff, we needn't have worried as they gained results of which we can all be immensely proud.

At A Level, a remarkable 20% of all grades were at grade A* and 52% of all grades were A* or A. More than half of all A Levels taken were an A or above and a third of Year 13 gained grades of three A's or better. Almost 4/5ths of these pupils will now join their first-choice university and it's lovely to have several of them here tonight to recognise their achievements. CAGs and TAGs of the pandemic years aside, this represents our strongest performance in A Level exams stretching back for eight years.

At GCSE level, 63% of all exams were at grades 9-7. Half of all pupils had nine subjects with grades of 7 and above - again, our strongest performance in non-pandemic times for nine years. This year group will go on to make a very strong Sixth Form.

It should not be forgotten that both of these cohorts have experienced significant disruption to their learning over the last two years and have had to show immense resilience to complete their courses. They deserve huge respect and lots of praise. Sometimes, you've got to go through 'tough times' to understand what that really means. In the trade, this is called 'Experiential Learning' and it goes without saying that these pupils have had more than their fair share.

It was wonderful to re-introduce our extra-curricular provision this last academic year and the outcomes were nothing short of sensational. Those in the room who attended the 'Little Shop of Horrors' were treated to an absolute delight. The first ever Senior production in the Jackson Hall played to more than 1000 people over the three nights and it was a joy to see the humour as well as the maturity of the individual performances come together in such an entertaining showcase.

I think that it is safe to say that music at King's is on a journey to rebuild to pre-pandemic levels of participation, having suffered more than most areas with fewer pupils taking up instruments during the periods of lockdown. However, the journey has well and truly begun and we have been treated to ensemble performances of real variety and skill, particularly in our Summer Concerts. We look forward to continuing musical development in the coming year. Incidentally, whilst it may be too late for those in this room, we are proactively encouraging greater uptake of musical instruments by making instrumental tuition part of our Year 4 curriculum from now on. Every child will receive instrumental lessons at no extra charge to help re-build in this area and to lay strong foundations for later years.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award continues to thrive within the school. 120 pupils took up the Bronze Award last year, 58 started Silver and 35 have signed up for Gold. To put this in context, this represents about 8,000 hours of volunteering, 12,000 hours of physical activity and 600 nights spent under canvas.

It is difficult to recall any year in living memory where the school has experienced so much success in the sporting arena. Our U14 rugby team were down to the best four teams in the country, reaching the semi-finals of the National Cup. Our U16 netball team qualified for the England Schools' Netball Finals Competition, as well as qualifying for the semi-finals of their National Cup. And our U13 Boys' cricket team went one better when they were crowned National Champions, defeating Dulwich in a well contested final that went down to the very last ball. We are the very best school in the country at that level and we'll have the chance to recognise this achievement when we re-present the trophy later this evening. We are the first school in Cheshire to win a National Cup in cricket for over 40 years. We also reinforced our position as a centre of excellence for trampolining; hosting the National Schools' Championships with four of our teams walking away as National Champions in their respective age group and category. That we are competing at the very highest level in the country and across a range of different sports is testimony to our commitment as a school to a holistic approach to education. This strength also reinforces our national reputation for excellence that the school now holds. I worry that the frequency with which we announce County Champions in whole school assemblies is too routine, and risks trivialising significant achievement. Three of our cricket teams are County Champions. Four of our girls' hockey teams are County Champions. Our U12 netball team are County Champions. Our U12 and U13 rugby teams were unbeaten all of last season. And the U16 rugby team were also, guess what, County Champions.

Alongside these team successes, we also have a huge number of individual successes with pupils becoming National Champions, or representing their country in a whole host of different sports including: fencing, netball, long jump, equestrian, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, climbing, trampolining, inline skating and hockey. In other schools, not so blessed with as much success, any one of these achievements would be celebrated and publicised industriously in their own right and please be reassured that we don't take any of them for granted.

Our success does not stop with sport or performing arts. Our Engineering Team gained national recognition from the Engineering Education Scheme with an award for their collaborative approach to their project; harnessing the energy from composting to accelerate seed germination. Our debating team reached the regional finals of the English Speaking Unions Mace Debating Competition. And we had a British Physics Olympiad Gold Award.

Our new site is, undoubtedly, making a massive impact on our extra-curricular provision. The last year saw us host our first inter-school swimming gala, for example, and a particular highlight of

mine, on a sunny summer's day, was seeing no less than eight cricket fixtures taking place across the site - girls as well as boys. Our participation remains strong.

You would think that with such sporting pedigree, our pupils are well versed in the rules and customs of the sports that we play. Well, in the interest of balance (and to bring us back down to Earth again), I will tell you of a rugby game where King's had scored a try and a conversion kick was therefore necessary. As the team huddled around, congratulating each other and preparing for the re-start, the member of staff refereeing the match shouted over to one of our substitutes on the side line, 'bring on the tee'. The kicking tee was needed to help the player attempting the conversion, where the ball is kicked over the bar. The confused-looking substitute started looking around the side lines, looking for the tee. The even more confused member of staff, being able to see the tee (plainly on the grass), shouted over again, 'bring on the tee'. The player (looking even more confused and a little panicked), and frantically looking around the floor shouted, 'Sir, I can't see any tea, all I can see are the water bottles'. It dawned on the member of staff that the substitute thought he was being asked to bring on a pot of drinking tea for the players to drink in between plays and not a kicking tee! An instinct that our late Queen would be proud of, I'm sure.

Of course, one of the highlights of last year that should be mentioned is the outcome of the School Inspection. 'The call' came on Monday morning, 24th January, when Mrs Elliott popped her head into my office to explain that 'ISI are on the phone'. When I answered the call, the Inspector explained that they would be with us in 24 hours and we were descended upon by a total of nine inspectors during that week. Having been preparing for a while (knowing that it was on the horizon), it was something of a relief when inspection finally came as we were keen to get it out of the way, if I'm honest. Regardless, it could not have gone any better, fully compliant and with the top grading of 'Excellent' in every category. Most impressive were some of the wonderful words used in the text of the report. I'm hoping that you won't mind indulging me for a moment while I read a few of them out:

- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning and achieve highly in both academic and other areas.
- Pupils have excellent communication skills; they are highly articulate and confident speakers and listen and respond maturely.
- Pupils' social development and collaborative working skills are excellent, and relationships between pupils are warm and considerate.
- Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate a high level of self-understanding, self-confidence, self-discipline and resilience.

Of course, no school is perfect and within the context of these excellent outcomes, we had one recommendation:

- Ensure that pupils develop a deeper spiritual understanding and appreciation of the non-material aspects of life.

It is fair to say that there were a few knowing smiles exchanged between SMT who were in the room when hearing that feedback. It would seem that the Inspectors had got to know some of our pupils well! There may well be parents in the room who can relate this recommendation to their own children. In the interest of understanding the origin of this recommendation, we have since canvassed some pupils involved in the Inspector interviews to understand where Inspectors got to this position.

They recounted being asked:

'How does school help you to develop the spiritual side of your character?' It would appear that not all of our fairly typical and hormonal teenagers understood what the Inspectors were talking about. I took solace from the fact that this isn't a present-day problem. Teenagers have been placing undue importance on the trivial and what is only relevant to them for some time. The NASA Artemis missions that are currently receiving a lot of media attention reminded me of a genuine diary entry from 20th July 1969 by a teenager that she rediscovered only recently in her sixties.

'I went to arts centre (by myself), in yellow cords and blouse. Ian was there but he didn't speak to me. Got a rhyme put in my handbag from someone who's apparently got a crush on me. It's Nicholas, I think. UGH! ... Oh, Man landed on moon'

Of course, we will work on this recommendation with our adolescents but we don't, however, underestimate the challenge in meeting it.

Something which will help with acting on the recommendation is the extensive charity work we do.

Our pupils raised £22,000 for various charities last academic year - a phenomenal figure. Just as impressive is the amount of time that our pupils give to charity.

A particular highlight of our charity work last year was a visit to the school by Pudsey. And the pinnacle of my career - I got to floss with Pudsey. Duly filmed and tweeted to raise awareness of our Children in Need activities, it did not take me long to regret it when, the following day, a group of Year 10 pupils lined the boulevard at the front of school and welcomed me into the building with a flossing guard of honour as I passed by. There's nothing like children to keep you grounded!

This last year has seen real developments in one of our strategic priorities to be at the centre of our community. Seven local schools visited King's to receive outdoor education and bushcraft lessons on the school site last term. Local Junior Schools and Park Lane Special School came into school to receive swimming lessons in the pool. Twelve local schools attended King's for a Junior Schools Maths Challenge. Ten schools were visited by our Science staff to receive our 'flashes and bangs' Science presentation.

Our wonderful facilities and maturing site are also making us a very attractive venue for community events. We hosted the Macclesfield Junior School Girls' Cricket Festival and Netball Competitions. I have already mentioned the National Schools' Trampolining Final. And some in the Hall may have had the opportunity and privilege of attending the Adam Peaty Swim Training Course that took place at the end of the summer holidays.

The Jackson Hall will also be the regular venue for the Northern Chamber Orchestra this coming 'season' with the first concert timetabled for the October half-term break. I'll look forward to seeing you there. We are hoping that this will lead to musical collaboration and opportunities for our pupils.

And then there was the bizarre experience that I had whilst visiting London over the summer. Whilst passing the Nike shop on Oxford Street, I gave a cursory look at the huge TV screens that they tend to have showing their latest adverts, only to see Derby Fields being showcased and proudly displayed - featuring Ronaldo playing football in Nike's latest football boots. Of course, I should have expected it as I knew the advert had been filmed and there was plenty of excitement last year

when the filming crew and Ronaldo's huge entourage visited Derby Fields - recognition of our amazing facilities and the excellent work our Estates team undertake. The only issue we had during that filming was the film crew didn't give us enough time to get any more 'weed and feed' on the grass and it wasn't green enough, so we had the ridiculous experience of having to have the grass painted more green for the filming!

The last year has been incredibly successful and we should rightly celebrate the achievements of the school. We are in a strong position to move forward and it has been exciting to plot that route forward over the last couple of years, now outlined through our strategic plan. The plan was published last Easter and gives a roadmap for the direction that we will take and the further development of our school. Our vision is to make a difference to each and every child in our care, giving an individual approach that develops rounded and grounded adults with choices beyond school. We have six priorities centred around; academic aspiration, a holistic approach to education, strong pastoral care, being a centre within our local community, having the stability to bring confidence, and making the most of our new site. Much work has been completed already. BYOD has been introduced into Year 9 and will follow into Years 10 and 11 in successive years. We have introduced lessons in Outdoor Education into Year 7 as part of our routine timetable in our newly branded 'King's Compass' programme. We are making the most of our site - we even have speed bumps! You might have noticed them on your way in. The stability of the school continues to develop, our roll continues to grow to the extent that we are full in all but one year group in the Senior Division with waiting lists in several other year groups. This is a real position of strength from which we can embrace the future, particularly given the financial insecurity of the broader economy - schools use plenty of gas and electricity as well and they take some heating (although you might want to invest in warm winter vests and long johns for your children to wear in school in the coming winter months). And while exciting developments, such as the Sports Pavilion, are being carefully considered as we gain a better understanding of the economic environment, there is still a real ambition to provide excellent opportunity for your children in both our facilities and the quality of the teaching and learning.

King's remains an exciting place to learn. The energy that drives our collective endeavour comes straight from our aims of aspiration, hard work and achievement. We gain strength from our shared effort. The combined impact creates the character of a community which values good fellowship and cooperation.

As amazing as our facilities are, the soul ... the heart of a school beats through the individuals that come together to make up its community - a community working together to achieve those aims. A community with staff, I might add, who work incredibly hard, as Mr Barriskell has rightly recognised, to support your children.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in short, King's is in a uniquely strong position. I mentioned in my speech last year that the school had thrived during the pandemic thanks to its sense of community. I believe that this sense of community has only grown stronger since the restrictions of the pandemic have lifted and we have been able to come together to undertake those activities that we all enjoy in the last academic year. We are a school that creates a positive and supportive atmosphere for all members. This is not a position we will take for granted, nor do we intend to become complacent. We must stay dynamic and ambitious in our approach and sustain a level of excellence in our teaching and learning and in our emphasis on the broader, holistic education of children. The route forward will inevitably present challenges, but we are superbly well placed to meet these challenges head on, maintaining our aspiration and fulfilling our aims.

Thank you for listening.

Jason Slack
Head of Foundation
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