

HEAD OF FOUNDATION'S SPEECH PRIZE-GIVING EVENING SEPTEMBER 2023

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.

In particular, it brings me a great deal of pride to report on the academic successes of the last year.

At A Level, a remarkable 17% of all grades were at grade A* and 48% of all grades were A* or A. Almost half of all A Levels taken were an A or above. And a third of Year 13 pupils gained grades of three A's or better. Notably, seven pupils gained three A* grades, or more, in their A Level subjects. Over three-quarters of these pupils will now join their first-choice university and it's wonderful to have several of them here tonight to recognise their achievements.

You may be aware that before results were announced last month, the national media was awash with reports of grade boundaries increasing and that we should expect a return to percentages and pass rates last seen in 2019. Well, bucking this trend, we have clearly outperformed our results of 2019 and, likewise, stretching further back than that, this externally assessed performance at A Level represents our best in the last eight years; a demonstration of the academic progress that King's continues to make.

At GCSE level, the progress is even more stark. We gained 64% of all results at grades 9-7. Not only is this an improvement on last year (again, when the grade boundaries were more generous) but this represents our best performance on this same measure for the last nine years. A third of all pupils had nine subjects with grades of 7 and above.

Of course, excellent exam results are indicative of excellent standards of teaching and learning - I'm sure that you'd expect a Head to boast as much. It was great to have third party recognition of this when we were awarded the 'Gold' award in the nationally recognised Learning Quality Framework last year - the first secondary aged school in the country to receive such an accolade. The report that followed our accreditation visit contained the following remarks:

- The school has an engaging vision for 21st Century education based on the learners' learning imperatives. This vision guides the school's development and underpins the learning culture at King's;
- The impact of the vision on teaching and learning is significant and has never been realised to this standard in any Learning Quality Framework accredited school;
- Students adopt an interdependent, positive, can-do attitude.

There were many more quotes that I could have used from the report which is a delight to read.

Our academic aspiration has been further demonstrated by the ongoing development of our use of technology and, in particular, the expansion of our 'Bring Your Own Device' scheme into Year 10. We're taking a common-sense approach with this and enhancing the variety and effectiveness in our teaching. Of course, I am mindful of the potential downsides of ICT in education and you couldn't have failed to notice the media storm surrounding Artificial Intelligence in the last 12 months and its potential impact on schools. Parents should be reassured that any plagiarism or work completed by artificial intelligence will be detected by appropriate other artificial intelligence that we've acquired to spot the initial use of AI! Of course, we are embracing the positive uses of AI within school - it now writes all of my school assemblies! I've had several compliments as to how they've improved recently! And, of course, ChatGPT wrote this speech! Please don't be tempted to tell me how much better than last year's speech it is! After having read the first draft that ChatGPT wrote, I wasn't happy with what had been written. So, I asked ChatGPT to include a joke. Here we go:

What do you call AI that goes kayaking with you?
A row bot.

An increasingly important part of our planning for future development and improvement at school is to include pupils in the discussion and debate around progress and planning. After all, it's as much their school as it is anyone else's. Our annual pupil survey which has now become a regular fixture in our calendar continues to reveal much positivity. More than 85% of pupils think that teachers treat them fairly and more than three-quarters find most lessons 'interesting'. Those of us that have greater experience of these kind of questionnaires (particularly those involving adolescents) will understand how impressive these results are. The vast majority of children describe themselves as 'happy' at school, and with a supportive peer group and staff to help them. On a 5-star rating system, pupils rated their academic progress at 3.76, making them pleased with their progress but also, and true to our aspirational aims, meaning that they still feel more progress can be made. An overall rating for school was also given at 3.92, also being very positive but indicating that, as a school, we should also be ambitious to do better.

Some suggestions for improvement and to potentially achieve even higher scores in the future have been given. The pupils asked for changes to our sports kit, including the introduction of a new 'quarter zip' sports top, which we have indeed now introduced. And I have to confess that this was a good idea and looks very smart. Other suggestions might be a little more challenging; such as the request for 'less discipline, fewer rules and more fun in lessons'. OK, well, we'll keep trying but we've still got a curriculum to cover! And just when you think that our pupils have some great ideas and should be trusted to have a greater say, other suggestions remind you why teachers are still needed to guide adolescents on their choices; one pupil asked for 'less homework and shorter days'. Parents will be reassured to know that we'll continue to give you your money's worth by thinking very carefully before acting on that particular suggestion. Various, we also had suggestions for a 'movie day', a 'pyjama day', and 'regular water fights'. Oh, and hash browns to be served in the canteen every day. But the suggestion that I hadn't seen before, even after a number of years of running such surveys in several schools, was for the introduction of 'sleeping pods' in the school building - areas in the school where hard-pressed teenagers can go for a lie down and 'power nap' in the middle of the day, it would seem. In the unlikely event that the pupil wanting these 'sleeping pods' is at our Prize-Giving Ceremony tonight, I'm afraid that I will have to give the disappointing news that we have no plans to introduce such a sleeping facility.

Our extra-curricular provision continues to be a central part of the school ethos, putting learning as well as personal development at the heart of our community. Bleak Expectations, performed in

this Hall last Spring, was a glorious celebration of English humour and anything but bleak. The show was full of bravado and masterful comic interludes. The portrayal of Headmaster Wackwell Hardthrasher was particularly enthusiastically received in some quarters, although inspiration for the characterisation of the role has been kept very secret. The performances of this critically acclaimed production were so popular that we had to put out extra seats for the final night as we 'outsold' our publicised capacity.

Music also continues to make great strides, as seen with our Concert programme last year. In particular, the standard and quality of music continues to keep getting better and better with both growing participation and excellent variety. The enjoyment of the pupils who get involved is clear for everyone to see and audience members always leave a concert with huge smiles on their faces.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award continues to thrive within the school. 122 pupils took up the Bronze Award last year, 59 started Silver and 30 have signed up for Gold. To put this in context, this represents about 1,976 hours of volunteering, 12,000 hours of physical activity and over 700 nights spent under canvas.

DofE forms a central part of our broader educational offer, being consistent with our ethos of seeking to produce courageous and responsible citizens who contribute to society through leadership and service. It was shortly after one DofE expedition that I received an email from a member of the public that demonstrates this ethos far better than I can explain and I'd like to read part of it for you now:

'...whilst walking around my village up in the hills near Taddington, I lost my mobile phone. The next day I thought I would have to walk the long difficult walk again to look for it! I hadn't slept due to the worry. Just before we were about to set off, I received a call on my landline unbelievably, I answered the call to youngsters who had found my iPhone and were ringing the number displayed across the screen of the lost phone from my own attempts to locate it. They were doing their DofE. We arranged to meet them to collect the phone. How honest and kind they were! Please thank them once again for me and please feel honoured having them from your school.'

It gets better as the lady gave the group some money as a reward. But rather than do the obvious, break DofE rules and visit the chippy in the next village, they instead put the money in the collection box in the local church!

Warms the cockles of your heart!

I mentioned in my speech last year that it was difficult to recall any year in living memory where the school has experienced so much success in the sporting arena than the 2021-22 season. 2022-23 has seen the continuation of what is turning out to be a 'golden era' of sport at King's.

Both 1st XV and U15 rugby teams reached the quarter-final of their respective National Cup Competition. The U14 rugby team reached the last 16 of their National Cup Competition. The U13 rugby team were undefeated at both 15-a-side and 7-a-side.

Both Girls' U14 hockey and Boys' U14 hockey teams reached their respective National Finals tournament, finishing 5th and 4th respectively.

The 1st VII netball team finished the season as County Champions, having a win ratio of 82% across the season. The U13 netball team were also crowned County Champions and reached the semi-finals of the National Independent Schools' Cup.

The school's trampoline squads again demonstrated their high standards, with 12 teams gaining podium finishes in the North of England Championships. King's went on to win the National Schools' Trampoline Championships in the most competitive category of all; Elite Girls.

The U15 boys' cricket team reached the National Final (in a competition that starts with over 1,300 schools). Sadly, they lost out to a very strong team from Epsom College, but deserve much credit. The U13 boys' cricket team also reached the last eight of their own National Cup. The U14 boys were crowned County Champions, as were the U12 boys' team just this last week in a delayed match from last June. Most pleasing has been the growth of girls' cricket within the school. The U14 girls played a year up, to reach the final of the U15 County Cup Competition, and the U13 girls' team played a significant role in King's sporting history by being the first girls' team to play on the Wilson Field in the semi-final of their County Cup competition.

Whilst, of course, we celebrate team success within school, we also recognise individual success and parents may be aware of the tradition that King's upholds of placing a picture and some sporting memorabilia into the Sports Centre for every pupil who gains international selection.

It has been an honour to add to this collection in the last year a further seven names:

Lydia Hine - Netball, England Roses U17
Reece Grady - Swimming, Team England, Commonwealth Youth Games
Toby Wilson - Rugby, England U18
Annabel Wong - Tennis, GB Youth Team
Emma Edwards - Climbing, England Youth Team
Oliver Gotts - Inline Hockey, GB at European Championships
Minnie Longdon - Horse Trialling, England

In addition to this, we also have pupils from the Infant & Junior Division adding to the list with Louisa Storey and Eliana Hume representing Team GB in competitive dancing. Most Heads and schools would be delighted with one such international honour every couple of years at their school. How incredible that we have nine pupils in just one year.

The frames on display in the Sports Centre usually include a piece of sporting kit, such as a jersey or dress. Users of the café will be pleased to hear that we've decided to use our swimmer Reece's swim cap and not his Speedos!

Most Heads are not big fans of league tables, but they are usually willing to make an exception if their school has done well in them. So here goes. I've no idea how School Sports Magazine decides the best sporting schools in the country but it's only right that King's features in their list. Our strength of achievement, as well as participation, across a range of both girls' and boys' sports is something of which we can all be incredibly proud at the minute. Our reputation for expert teaching, coaching and developmental infrastructure is growing and long may it continue.

Our success does not stop with sport or performing arts. No fewer than 11 of King's young chess players qualified for the Northern Gigafinal and we currently have 120 chess players in the Foundation in age groups from 5 to 18. When asked if it was expert coaching or enthusiastic

motivational teambuilding that was responsible for the popularity, our coach, Andrew Ireland, said that he thought it was down to the TV show, Queen's Gambit! I'm sure that we can use some imaginative marketing there... a spin off series of 'King's Gambit', perhaps - a courageous endeavour, needing expertise to employ efficiently and made successful only by the most effective of Grand Masters. A metaphor for the Head of Foundation role at King's, perhaps? Queen's Gambit is a good show if you've not seen it!

The King's School engineering team completed nine months of work and were presented with the Gold engineering award for the project 'Harnessing energy from mains water to generate electricity for household use'. The team were complimented upon their outstanding presentation and teamwork by the judging panel.

Charity work is something that also plays a prominent part within the life of the school, again being true to one of our strategic aims to form an integral part of our local community.

Our pupils raised a staggering £59,579.36 for various charities last academic year - a phenomenal figure. Just as impressive is the amount of time that our pupils give to charity.

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 see significant aspects of our Strategic Plan take shape, such as the expansion of the Bring Your Own Device Scheme, now in Years 9, 10 and the Sixth Form. Outdoor Education is now embedded in our timetabled curriculum in Year 7, through our King's Compass programme, developing those qualities that we value, such as independence, resilience and leadership. We also recently covered the roof of the Sports Centre building in solar panels to bring some much-needed security and protection from fluctuating energy prices, as well as being environmentally forward-thinking. Fortunately, the contractors scratched a few when installing them - they still work, of course, and we've now kept them as they will make excellent science projects.

We've even started producing our own King's honey from the four hives that we have on the school site. Admittedly, not a lot ... I got one snack-sized individual breakfast jar out of it. We haven't quite got a cottage industry just yet, but it's a start! And it is an important indicator to our pupils of the responsibility King's has to its environment, leading by example.

As the stability and success of the school continues to strengthen, our roll continues to grow to the extent that we are full in the Infant and Junior, and Senior Divisions, with waiting lists in most year groups.

King's remains an exciting place to learn and work. 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. This combined strength is at the heart of the character of a community which values good fellowship and co-operation.

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 to support your children and believe in them.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in short, King's is in a uniquely strong position. We are a school that creates a positive and supportive atmosphere for its stakeholders. 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.

Jason Slack
Head of Foundation
September 2023