



Head of Foundation: Mr Jason Slack, BSc (Hons), MA (Ed)

HEAD OF FOUNDATION'S SPEECH PRIZE-GIVING EVENING SEPTEMBER 2024

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 20% of all grades were at grade A* and 49% of all grades were A* or A. A shade under half of all A Levels taken were an A or above. And a third of Year 13 gained grades of 3 A's or better. Notably, five pupils gained three A* grades, or more, in their A Level subjects. Incredibly, more than 90% of those pupils going on to university will now join their first choice, an incredible result, and it's wonderful to have several of them here tonight to recognise their achievements.

We have outperformed our A Level results of 2023, 2022 and 2019. Stretching further back than that, this externally assessed performance at A Level represents our best in the last eight years, and is a reflection of not just the academic progress that King's continues to make but the academic prowess that we now consistently demonstrate.

At GCSE level, we had another excellent year. We gained 59% of all results at grades 9-7 and a third of pupils getting at least 9 grades of 7 and above.

The school has established a reputation for a sustained and upward trajectory of academic achievement as demonstrated by both these A Level and GCSE results. Our inspirational learning environment and innovative teaching is helping our young people to reach the highest academic standards. It's also incredibly satisfying and rewarding for teachers to be part of this growth in our academic excellence.

We will follow the onward success of our Sixth Formers with interest - they are undoubtedly destined for greatness beyond school. Of course, we have welcomed back the vast majority of our Year 11 pupils into our Sixth Form Division where they will make a very strong cohort over the next two years.

Our academic aspiration is further demonstrated by the ongoing development of our use of technology and, in particular, the expansion of our 'Bring Your Own Device' scheme into its final phase at Year 11. We're taking a common-sense approach with this and enhancing the variety and effectiveness in our teaching. This is complemented by our evolving use of Artificial Intelligence, which was a central theme of staff training at the start of this term. We saw some great examples of how AI can help with curriculum design and the creation of educational resources. Encouraged and enthusiastic about its use, I eagerly logged on and asked it to write a joke suitable for a senior school Prize-Giving speech. Now my family tell me all of the time that I'm not really a funny person

and so the bar is pretty low on the standard of joke that I might use. But either AI isn't really ready to be a comedian yet or I didn't understand the joke:

'Why did the teacher wear sunglasses to work? Because the students were so bright!'

AI is going to have a serious impact on education, but I feel it won't be in the areas of wit and humour.

Our extra-curricular provision continues to be a central part of the school ethos, putting personal development as well as learning at the heart of our community. Guys and Dolls, performed in this Hall last Spring, was a fabulous celebration of the very best of 20th Century musical theatre. Eye catching, ear tingling, slick and superb. Of course, a fabulous performance means very little without an audience and the show played to over 1000 people across its three-night run. Most rewarding for me was watching the cast perform as they were clearly enjoying every second of it.

You may also be aware that King's was transformed into Cranmede Academy over these last summer holidays. CBBC took over the school as it was used as a filming location for the children's series, 'So Awkward Academy'. It was a great opportunity for many of our pupils to get involved and a number of them were involved in the filming - as were a few staff, lingering around in the background of the shot, hoping to be caught on camera. If you're watching the show and see a familiar looking security guard chasing an intruder off sight, for example, you might recognise him as one of our ICT technicians. Mr Leah.

Rumours of a guest appearance of the King's Head at So Awkward Academy were premature. If you've seen the show, then you'll understand that I can't really compete with Cranmede's existing Head, Mrs Marmaduke. We don't share the same educational ethos of comic chaos, quirky curriculum planning and unconventional management.

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 'Music for a Summer's Evening' Concert was a highlight and a strong indicator of our continued strength as retiring Year 13 pupils made way for younger pupils who confidently stepped up to the mark to show leadership and musical talent in equal measure. I'm looking forward to some excellent concerts in the year ahead.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award continues to thrive within the school. 120 pupils took up the Bronze Award last year, 65 started Silver and 35 have signed up for Gold. This represents an increase on the figures for the previous year in this central area of our holistic focus on the development of broader skills.

I'm delighted to be able to reveal to you that King's continues to be at the very forefront of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme development. We will be the first school in the country that is licenced by the Scheme to include participants that are not King's pupils. This development has been years in the making but will allow us to host a number of young people from Macclesfield to join our own pupils on the scheme, and the expeditions. I anticipate this to be a central aspect of our strategic intent to develop our growing outreach programme as well as reinforcing our ethos of a holistic approach to education which values skill development, such as resilience, independence and leadership.

Our commitment to personal development through outdoor education was further demonstrated and recognised with the school winning the Manchester Education Award 2023 for pupil wellbeing for our King's Compass programme. This innovation started in our Infant and Junior Division and now links into Year 7 where pupils have timetabled lessons that take place outside, in the fresh air, and develop skills such as teamwork, confidence and independence. It was amazing to see staff at the glitzy awards ceremony in their dinner jackets when only hours earlier they had been wading through mud in bare feet whilst delivering a Compass session to pupils.

I have mentioned in my speech for the last two years that it has been difficult to recall a year in living memory where the school has experienced so much success in the sporting arena. Well that phrase could equally be as applicable tonight. Our success continues.

We are currently national champions in no less than three different sports. First of all, our trampolinists are national champions in four different categories. Such is our strength and popularity in this sport that it has become largely routine to make such announcements, although it shouldn't be underestimated how much time and commitment goes into this success - lots of energy, actually, if you've ever had the pleasure of visiting a training session, the level of enthusiasm and excitability with that group of young girls and boys is incredibly high.

Secondly, we are National Dressage Champions in Equestrian Sport. And it was quite the sight taking the winning team photo in front of school as all riders brought in their horses to celebrate their success. In a sport that requires a huge amount of commitment that largely takes place 'behind the scenes' and away from the broader school population, it was lovely to give the pupils their moment of recognition.

And finally, our Under 14 rugby team are also national champions - the first time that we have held a national 15 a side title in this sport. After two very close games in the quarter-final and semi-final stage, it was a relief that the team raced to an early 19-0 lead against Collegiate School, Bristol, when the final was played at Rugby School last Spring. And although the final 10 minutes or so were a little 'nervy' with the opposition scoring two late tries, the performance and final result of 29-19 was thoroughly deserved by King's as the stronger team.

We've reached the latter stages of national competitions (at least quarter-finals or final day tournaments) in a large number of other sports and age categories including:

- U14 Girls' Netball
- U14 Girls' Hockey (where we are ranked 4th in the country)
- U16 Girls' Hockey
- U19 Girls' Hockey
- U19 Boys' Hockey
- U16 English Schools' snowboard slalom championships
- U18 Boys' Rugby

We're County Champions in the following:

- U15 Boys' Cricket
- U12 Boys' Cricket (unbeaten all year)
- U13 Girls' Hockey
- U18 Rugby

It also gives me great pleasure to tell you that our girls' cricket continues to grow both in popularity and success with our U13 team being County runners up and our U15 team reaching the semi-final stages of their tournament.

Last year, I told you that seven pupils had gained national or international honours in sport. Well, we've added to this list with a further eight names including water polo, equestrian, handball and, most recently, U19 cricket. And such is the variety and strength in depth that I feel sure that we will add to this shortly, perhaps in wheelchair basketball where we have a pupil on the England pathway.

Given all of this success, there is no wonder that we were told this week that we have reached the final of the Independent School of the Year Award in the category of Sporting Achievement. This takes us down to the last six schools in the country and is recognition of not just our achievement but also the astonishing breadth of opportunity. For example, across Years 7-10, 79% of pupils have represented King's in sport during this last year. And that might have been in one of 20 different sports that the school offers.

Our success does not stop with sport or performing arts. No fewer than 22 pupils achieved Gold Medals in the Junior Maths Challenge, for example. Our Engineering Team have once again excelled, earning an Engineering Development Trust gold award and being recognised for their excellent team work by the judging panel. And a team of Year 10 computing wizards came third in a nationwide competition from a field of 600 schools in the British Interactive Media Association Digital Challenge.

Each year, our King's community supports a significant number of charities through a broad and often spectacular range of fundraising activities. It's particularly rewarding for a Head to see so many of these activities are spearheaded by our pupils and our charity prefects, who take the lead in proposing and championing different charities as well as organising and taking part in the fund raising activities. This last year, we undertook our first ever Charity Fundraising Triathlon; three significant charity events in the same week in aid of charity. We had a 24-hour swimathon, with staff and pupils swimming around the clock in our fabulous pool - eventually swimming the equivalent of seven times across the channel. We also held a Water Aid Relay, transporting buckets of water from Spencer Brook to our wellbeing garden, and then we had a sponsored 'Sleep Out', where brave students slept under the stars (well, under the canopy at the front of school), to raise money for the homeless charity, 'Shelter'.

The school raises a staggering amount of money for charity, almost £45,000 last year. Just as impressive is the amount of time and energy 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 in a positive manner, as demonstrated by our investment in the best part of half a million pounds worth of solar panels on the roof of this building over the summer.

Some of you may be doubting the wisdom of solar power in Macclesfield. It's not renowned for sunshine - some kind of rain driven hydro power, perhaps. However, the solar panels on the Sports Centre generated a third of the electrical power needs of that building last year and the 1,500 square meters of panels on the roof of this building will hopefully do the same for the main building.

Sadly, the current political landscape means that there are some challenging times ahead and whilst it isn't my intention to use this speech as a soap box from which to give political opinion, I am

intensely aware that the subject of VAT being imposed on school fees will be foremost in the minds of many parents. I see many hard-working parents making huge sacrifices to create the opportunity for their children to attend King's and, in my mind, it is grossly unjust to penalise them in such a way.

For our part, King's must continue to offer the best education for your children so that the investment that you, as parents, are making continues to be justified. As a school, in partnership with parents, we are expertly placed to make a real difference to the development of the children in our care.

A further indicator of our strength is our continued growth in pupil numbers and we have seen an increase again this year on last year's roll.

And whilst we have amazing exam results and a wonderful extra-curricular provision, we are so much more.

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 purpose from our shared effort. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are proud to pull on the school badge. This pride is at the heart of the character of a community which values good fellowship and cooperation.

We are 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.

We cannot become complacent; the external challenges we face mean that we must remain 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 whole child. We are superbly well placed to meet these challenges head on, maintaining our aspiration and fulfilling our aims.

Jason Slack
Head of Foundation
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