

HEAD OF FOUNDATION'S SPEECH PRIZE-GIVING EVENING SEPTEMBER 2025

To Parents, Guardians, Prize-winners, Staff and 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, put very simply, the pupils gained the best results that the school has ever enjoyed. The measure most commonly used by the education world is the percentage of A* or A grades in all of the exams taken by pupils. Here at King's, 56% of all grades were an A* or an A grade. The previous best recorded by the school was in the rather one-off and exceptional year of 2013 when the school gained 53%. In recent years, we've been getting closer to that mark ... edging closer and breaking through the 50% barrier, but it was a great feeling to have this upward trend finally convert to our best results ever.

Mr Griffiths tells me that he has personally checked every single year of results going back to the school's creation in 1502 and he's given his own guarantee that the claim is valid.

There was a slight moment of doubt on results day when records initially consulted only went back to 2011 and the A* grade was first introduced in 2010.

Thankfully, Mrs Elliott rescued us by consulting *King's Colours* from September 2010 and seeing that Dr Coyne, the Head at the time, was celebrating 40% A*/A grades in the previous summer. We then went full steam ahead on the press release.

23% of all grades were an A* grade - that's almost a quarter. Sorry ... that sounds a little patronising now that I've said it out loud! I realise that most people in the audience will have the skills of Year 7 mathematicians and realise that 23% is almost a quarter. But it is remarkable to think that one in every four of our A Level grades was an A*.

37% of pupils gained three A grades or better and seven pupils gained at least three A* grades (some even more).

Great results usually make for great university entry and this was no different with more than four in every five applicants going on to university joining their first-choice course, 72% of those universities being Russell Group. We also have a number going on to Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships and this route is proving to be more popular at the minute. It's wonderful to have several of our Year 13 students with us tonight so that we can recognise their achievements.

At GCSE level, we had another excellent year. We gained 60% of all results at grades 9-7, an increase on last year. A quarter of pupils gained at least nine grades of 7 and above. 36% of all grades were a grade 9 or 8 - equivalent to the old A*.

I always start my Prize-Giving report with an overview of exam results ... and rightly so. And this year, in particular, it has been a real pleasure to do so. It's such an important part of what we do, but as I hope the rest of my speech will demonstrate, these excellent results and our established reputation for a sustained and upward trajectory of academic achievement has been accompanied by so many successes in other parts of school life. We pride ourselves on an holistic approach to education where important skills are transferrable from the DofE expedition, or drama production, or sports field - straight into the classroom (and vice versa). One of our Unique Selling Points and a fundamental part of the school's identity, our DNA, our vision (or whatever else you want to call it) is our holistic approach to education. We're committed to developing the whole child with a myriad of opportunities. We pride ourselves on having an ethos which is so much more than any academic hot house that values exam results above all else. We are an inspirational learning environment that values innovative teaching to help our young people reach the highest standards, academic or otherwise.

That said, having well rounded pupils gain such great exam grades is incredibly rewarding - for myself, for teachers and for all staff. And to be a part of this growth in stature and excellence, including academic attainment, makes the school an exciting place to be.

Our extra-curricular provision will always continue to be a central part of the school ethos, putting personal development, as well as learning, at the heart of our community. And there was a real buzz about our school community last Spring, with the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Performed in this very hall, it was a fabulous celebration of how accessible, modern and hilarious the Bard can be. It was a brilliantly updated take on Shakespeare and an ideal way to make it relevant to the younger generation. It had a modernised storyline which featured punk, grime and grunge; it was fast-paced, and incredibly entertaining. Whilst the pupils deservedly stole the limelight, with standing ovations on every night, special credit goes to Directors Chloe Deva and Donald Forbes, as well as our very own Julie Browne who re-wrote the original to make it so relevant and funny to the younger generation.

In a new development at King's, we also staged a second production for the Lower School in the Summer, *Moana*. A wonderfully sweet and endearing performance that left the audience (and the pupils) feeling much better about life afterwards. Drama is continuing to grow in popularity at King's, so much so that we are adding A Level Drama and Theatre Studies to our curriculum from next September. In this way, pupils can pursue their academic study of Drama all the way through GCSE in the Seniors and into the Sixth Form with this new A Level. We are working hard to provide every pupil with an opportunity to face a live audience with a polished, professional and crafted piece of work at every stage of their journey through the school. Our pupils develop so many life skills while putting on a large-scale production, as well as lifelong memories.

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. 116 pupils took up the Bronze Award last year, 65 pupils started their Silver and 31 (five of them canoeing!) have completed their Gold expeditions.

Our commitment to personal development through our (award winning) outdoor education programme has been further demonstrated with the introduction of King's Compass Outdoor Learning into Year 8. King's Compass lessons, which are based outside and start in our Infant and Junior Division, have previously linked to timetabled lessons for Year 7 in the Senior Division. We have now extended these lessons so that pupils in Year 8 will spend an afternoon each fortnight having timetabled 'Outdoor Compass' lessons as well that take place away from the constraints of a classroom, utilising our fabulous grounds and in the fresh air, developing skills such as teamwork, confidence and independence. The most recent addition to the activities undertaken in Outdoor Compass lessons is 'Paddleboarding'. This takes place in one of our ponds that is behind the astroturf pitches. Yes ... we have our own paddleboarding pond! This flow of provision from Infants and Juniors, through Years 7 and 8 now links smoothly to the DofE programme which starts in Year 9 and represents a progressive development of the provision throughout the Foundation.

And this emphasis on outdoor learning and our holistic approach to education works... As demonstrated by an email that I received in June from a member of the public who was staying at the same campsite as several dozen of our teenagers. The email reads:

I've been staying at Talmignedd Campsite for the last few days and have watched with interest your students arriving and leaving during their DofE expeditions.

I just wanted to express my admiration for the way that your students have conducted themselves, they are an absolute credit to your school.

I completed my DofE in 1968(!), and since then have acted as a mentor to students pursuing their various interests, so know how diligent they have to be to achieve their goals.

It's been a pleasure watching the next generation of our country's leaders achieve such an important milestone in their young lives.

Sincere congratulations to them all, and admiration for you as a school!

Very best wishes.

Now I'll be honest, knowing some of the pupils on that campsite, I had to read the email twice! But that's the point, isn't it - in the right environment, every pupil has the potential to shine.

I'm all for adventure and the great outdoors and like to think that we take our pupils to exciting places and that we're at the forefront of outdoor education philosophy. I had a first ever this last summer though, when I received a message that a group of our pupils on a World Challenge Expedition had entered a war zone. That certainly gets the heart rate of a Head, who was supposed to be relaxing on holiday, pumping a little. The Expedition Party found themselves in Cambodia as they declared war on Thailand over their disputed border. Needless to say that they were all safe. Dr Brading, the trip leader, calmly told me upon their return that they weren't ever in real danger as they were 80 km from the disputed border region - that's about from here to Leeds ... as far as I'm concerned, that's close enough, thank you.

That notification came the day after I was in a restaurant in a relatively quiet corner of Tenerife, trying to relax after a busy academic year, when I was approached by a very polite young man of about seven years old asking, 'Are you Mr Slack, the Head at King's School in Macclesfield?'. And so, for the second day in a row on a supposedly relaxing holiday, I found myself having to sober up quickly, sound coherent for a minute, and engage with the King's community!

The school's 'purple patch' of sporting success is becoming less of a 'flash in the pan' and more indicative of a sustained level of provision that is fast becoming the 'norm' rather than the exception.

I've yet to report a year where we haven't been National Champions in one sport or another, and this year is no different. We were National Champions in Equestrian sports again, this time in Eventing. In two different categories, our school teams were crowned the best in the country and we had a great demonstration of their professionalism when the team brought their horses into school just before the end of last term for a team photo at the front of school. It was an amazing sight to see the horses cantering up the grass for a moment and I wondered whether I was in an episode of Bridgerton. It was a rare opportunity for the school to show their support and appreciation of a team that we don't often see in school in their full glory, for obvious reasons.

We're also National Champions again in trampolining. In no fewer than six different categories, teams from King's were crowned National Champions.

In netball, we were County Champions at U15 level, quarter-finalists in the National Plate Competition at U14 level and third in the equivalent National Competition at U13 level.

In Girls' hockey, the U12 team were unbeaten in Saturday fixtures and County Runners Up. The U13 and U14 teams were both County Champions and the U16's were National Schools' Plate semi-finalists.

In rugby, our U15 team were national quarter-finalists and our U14 and U16 teams reached the last 32 of their national competitions.

Our swimming squads are also unbeaten in the school galas that they have taken part in.

Individual successes also continue to impress, both with the variety and level of their achievements.

We have a pupil who, at 16, represented his country at U19 cricket but also Lancashire 1st XV - in the senior team as a professional.

We have a pupil who, at aged 15, was Vice-Captain of her country's National U21 netball team that went on to win the Asian Netball Cup.

We have a pupil who has represented her country at U18 water polo and a tennis player who has represented her country in tennis by winning the European Winter Cup. We had a Year 11 pupil, last year, who represented Team GB in show jumping and won a Mediterranean Equestrian tour event. And a Team GB BMX rider on a pathway to the World Championships in Australia next year.

No less than 15 of our pupils were part of team Maximum Cheer Platinum that came second in the world at the World Championships in Florida last year.

With all of this success, it is no wonder that we were finalists last Autumn in the Independent School of the Year Awards, being ranked in the top five schools across the country for sport. For a day school competing in the same pool as large boarding schools with much more significant resources, this is pretty exceptional!

Our success does not stop with sport or performing arts. Our Chess teams, in particular, are absolutely flying at the minute in what is an incredibly competitive area. Both Junior and Senior teams worked themselves through various regional rounds to qualify for the National Championships at Nottingham University last summer. Our Junior team came sixth in the country and our Senior

team were ranked 12th. With a huge amount of potential being shown in both teams, this promises much for the continued success as these players mature further and move up the school.

Success comes in lots of different areas of our educational provision. No fewer than 12 pupils achieved Gold medals in the Intermediate Maths Challenge, for example. Our Engineering Team have once again excelled, earning an Engineering Development Trust Gold Award and being recognised for their excellent teamwork by the judging panel.

Last academic year saw the Independent Schools Inspectorate visit King's. Although these inspections have just a day's notice of taking place, we'd been anticipating them for a while as they are supposed to happen within three years of the last inspection. In the end, they arrived exactly three years after the last one. 'The call' came on the Monday morning and we were descended upon by nine inspectors on the Tuesday. We were recognised to be fully compliant and to have met all standards in all areas. The inspection framework has changed and no longer allows for school descriptors such as the 'excellent' that we achieved in our previous inspection. That means that you have to dig a little deeper to understand the impression of the inspectors. However, once you start reading the report in full, the comments used to describe the school don't disappoint and reinforce our ability to achieve our aims. It is very complimentary about a broad cross section of school life including; the breadth of our provision, how we utilise our fantastic campus, the extra-curricular life of school, our King's Compass programme, the academic progress of our pupils and our SEND provision.

If you'll indulge a proud Head whilst he reads out some quotes, the highlights include the following:

- Pupils are self-motivated and ambitious about their learning and achievement;
- Relationships between pupils and adults are positive across the school;
- Pupils experience a broad curriculum and achieve well as a result of the high quality teaching they receive;
- Pupils build on developing their skills in collaboration, alongside their sense of personal responsibility and respect for each other;
- Pupils feel their views are valued and that they can contribute meaningfully to the school community.

The report emphasises an approach that we're keen to promote and it was incredibly rewarding to have this recognised.

Of course, no school is perfect, and there was a recommendation to ensure that older Senior and Sixth Form pupils fully understand the purpose and relevance of our Compass programme (this is our version of PSHE lessons). And we'll work on this in the future. I was struck by the enormity of the task and getting adolescents to think carefully about the significance of social events happening around them. It took me back to the genuine diary entry of a teenager in July 1981 that reads: 'Terrible row with Mum about borrowing her eyeliner. Janice says she might get me an autograph from her cousin who once met Adam Ant. Also, Prince Charles got married to Lady Diana today. TV was on all afternoon. Everyone crying. Except me. I had spots'.

Or a diary entry from a teenager in 1989: 'Ran out of hair spray. Disaster. Lisa lent me some but it smells weird. Also: people knocking down a wall in Germany. Apparently important. Dad says history is being made. I say – bring back my hair spray'.

Or one in 1966 (again, absolutely authentic): 'Wore new skirt to youth club. Sandra copied me – again. Nobody noticed I'd had my hair cut. Went home sulking. England apparently won some football thing. Everyone shouting. I'm not sure why'.

And they say ... why would you want to be a teacher. Needless to say that we'll continue to help them develop empathy and an appreciation of things beyond themselves!

Sadly, the current political landscape means that the independent education sector is facing some challenging times 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 has been 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.

We will continue to focus on offering the best education for your children so that the investment that you, as parents, make 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. This focus continues to be rewarded with strong interest in the school and we welcomed a jam packed Year 7 into the Senior Division just a few weeks ago at the start of this term.

The school 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 co-operation.

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 will not 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. We must also maintain and develop further our facilities and incredible school site to fulfil our strategic aims and support our ethos - developing the whole child. We are superbly well placed to meet these challenges and incredibly excited about the future of the school and what this means for our pupils, your children. Thank you for listening.

Jason Slack
Head of Foundation
September 2025