HEAD OF FOUNDATION'S SPEECH
PRIZE-GIVING EVENING SEPTEMBER 2026

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. We continue to perform at an elevated level and we are rapidly raising the benchmarks by which we consider our results to be successful.

At A Level, 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, 48% of all grades were an A* or an A grade - almost half.

17% of all grades were an A* grade and 1 in 5 of our students secured all grades at either A* or A.

Great results usually make for great University entry and this was certainly the case with more than three-quarters of our Year 13 students going on to their first choice university, 68% of those universities being Russell Group. We also have a number going on to Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships and this route continues to gain traction among our student body. 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 64% of all results at grades 9-7, a significant increase on last year and actually our second best year ever after 2023. Indeed, these 'best ever years' have come thick and fast in recent times - a measure of our progress. A third of pupils gained at least nine grades of 7 and above. 42% 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, like all of my speeches in the last seven years, it has been a real pleasure to do so and it's such an important part of what we do. It is testament to our focus on excellence in teaching and learning, supported by outstanding pastoral care, that the exam results of the school have improved so significantly in recent years. We use different yardsticks these days, and so we should. What would have been seen as exceptional results just eight or nine years ago would now be seen as standard and our expectations, along with those of our parents and pupils, are rightly much higher.

That said, I hope the rest of my speech will demonstrate our 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.

Our extra-curricular provision will always continue to be at the heart of the school ethos, putting personal development as well as learning at the heart of our community. There was a real buzz about our school community last Spring, with the production of School of Rock. Our press release reported one audience member as saying: "What an incredible performance from a very talented group of youngsters! The comic timing, energy, passion, and humour were infectious, and the musicianship was truly impressive. It was brilliant to see a full range of pupils from Year 7 to Year 12 involved in the acting, singing and the band. Several of them could definitely have a future in the West End. A resounding success!" I'm not sure who the audience member was (it might even have been me), but that person captured the sentiment very well. As has become 'the norm' with our productions, it played to a sell-out audience for three nights in this hall. This event will certainly be one of those memories of school that those involved with the show will remember for the rest of their lives.

In a new development at King's, we also staged a 'Performing Arts Summer Celebration' for the Lower School in the Summer Term, giving our Drama enthusiasts an opportunity to showcase their talents and the work that they had been doing throughout the year. Full of uplifting performances that made you proud to be at King's, it left the audience (and the pupils) feeling much better about life afterwards.

Music is undergoing somewhat of a renaissance as those of you that have been to a concert in the last academic year will know. Concerts are showing greater participation and much more variety; with rock bands sitting comfortably alongside the Foundation Choir in major concerts and beginner groups cutting their teeth next to seasoned pros in the Chamber Concert Series. This time last year, 220 students at the school were involved in individual music lessons at King's. This week, we have had 300 students who will have individual music tuition. And the number of students who have chosen to study Music as part of the timetabled curriculum in Year 9 has quadrupled this year. I feel that we are at the start of something really special happening in the Music Department.

The school's sustained success across a plethora of sporting disciplines has continued. We have so many sporting successes in so many different sports that it is fraught with danger for a Head of Foundation to read any out as I'm bound to miss some and suffer the resulting remonstrations of those that put an awful lot of hard work into the sporting life of the school.

In netball, our U16 team reached the National Finals putting in some excellent performances so that they can now call themselves a top 10 team in the country. Our U12 team were plate winners in the National Sisters in Sport Competition. They celebrated, just 24 hours later, by being crowned County Champions in the Cheshire tournament - amazing 'back to back' victories in two important competitions. Individually, we now have girls participating in four different franchise programmes, Manchester Thunder, Leeds Rhinos, Birmingham Panthers and Nottingham Forest.

In hockey, our U14s were County and North West Champions, eventually achieving 5th place in the Tier 2 National Finals. Our U16 team also had an excellent season, reaching the fourth round of the National Cup.

In rugby, the 1st XV were again crowned Cheshire Champions. One highlight of the season was definitely the match against Denstone College, which was played under the flood lights at Macclesfield Rugby Club, and live streamed to the nation. The school's first live streamed game had 5,000 views and resulted in a victory (the first over Denstone in 10 years and what a time to do it). There were rumours that at least 4,000 of these views were Mr Hetherington but I believe them to be unfounded. It was an amazing occasion, and very entertaining, with players (and staff) revelling in the attention and the post-match interviews. Of particular note in rugby was that last season saw the most matches played in one season, the most teams fielded at any one time in the school's history, and the most players representing their school in one season - a fabulous achievement. Our biggest challenge now is finding schools out there that can match the strength and numbers of teams that we need to get everyone involved and maintain our provision.

In cricket, it is really encouraging to see the continued progress of our girls' teams, with the U15 team making it to the latter stages of the National Cup, beating Worksop College, Stonyhurst College and Repton School along the way.

It was another exceptional season in trampolining; of particular note was the Year 10-13 girls' team who were crowned National Champions in the elite category – it doesn't get better than that.

Sport is such an integral part of the school's make up and it brings a huge amount of pleasure to all those involved, myself included. I recall one amazing afternoon in the summer where I was having to channel hop on the TV, trying to follow a tennis match involving a Year 11 student, Annabel Wong, competing in Junior Wimbledon on one side, and simultaneously trying to keep up with Joe Moores (who left Year 12 last year to pursue a professional cricket career) playing for Lancashire Lightening in the T20 competition on a different channel. I don't think that there are many Heads across the land that have such challenges.

Of course, excellent sporting success and increasing participation requires excellent sporting facilities. The construction of the Forster Pavilion is a huge step in our provision in this regard - twice as much changing space downstairs and enhanced accessible changing as well. The real prize of the facility is the huge open plan conference room upstairs, which spills onto a wraparound balcony that overlooks both artificial pitches. Together with the two smaller meeting rooms and the catering facilities, you have a sensational venue that won't just be used for sport but also for conferences, formal dinners, meetings and community events.

You'll be aware that the school regularly hosts high profile external events. Last year, this included being the venue for BBC Question Time, and also the venue for the East Cheshire Hospice fundraiser of BBC Today's host, Nick Robinson interviewing Dr Kathryn Mannix. This new facility will significantly increase our ability to host similar events in the future. The new building is a tremendous addition to the school's estate and helps consolidate our position among the very best schools in the land with regard to facilities.

Roy Forster, after whom the Pavilion is named, is a former pupil, a Maxonian who attended the school from 1934–1944. He was a talented sportsman throughout his time at school. Roy trained as a vet after school and was well respected in the profession. In his retirement, he ended up looking after the remaining donkeys in a donkey sanctuary that was gradually being wound down. Upon his death in 2009 (aged 82), there were just four donkeys left in a field alongside the cottage where he lived with his second wife, Jean. Rumour has it that his children from his first marriage euthanised the remaining donkeys after Roy passed away, much to the dismay of his wife, who then wrote them out of the will. And so, when Jean passed away in 2021, King's became the proud

owner of a former donkey sanctuary! Once we were certain that a challenge to the will wasn't forthcoming, we've set about trying to maximise the asset in the best interests of the school. If anyone is interested in a planning opportunity in East Sussex with land that has secured planning permission for residential dwellings, then please do approach me afterwards.

The school seems to be at ease with nature and in embracing nature, as shown by Roy's bequeathment of a donkey sanctuary. You may be aware that we had an invasion of cows last term (not our first cow incident). The catering team (who are invariably the first to arrive on the school site each morning) arrived one morning to find a herd of cows on the Sports Centre car park. If you haven't seen the ensuing speeded up footage of Kevin, Diego and the catering team trying to corral and chase the cows around the back of the Sports Centre to appropriate music (the old Benny Hill theme tune for those of a certain age), then I would encourage you to watch it. It's quite the sight and very entertaining.

As the footage of the cows being chased demonstrates, the school does not believe in standing still, and the other significant development that we have undertaken in the last year is the improvement of our Sixth Form facilities. The Sixth Form Common Room has been redesigned and updated into a modern multi-use space. Bright décor and jazzy furnishings have been used to improve the space, with the addition of a quiet work room. Most excitingly, we've added a new coffee shop. 'Benugo at King's' opened its shutters for the first time last Monday and has been very well received. Many of you will have come across Benugo as the coffee shops operated by John Lewis stores as well as having some standalone coffee shops dotted around the country. Well our coffee shop is every bit as professional and grown up as any other that you might come across. This catering facility adds to the café that the Sixth Form use in the Sports Centre, but serves toasties, paninis, cakes and pastries and so has a very different offer to the existing café. And the whole Sixth Form Centre looks great! - an adult and independent space that really does spoil our Sixth Formers.

And, whilst I'm digressing into catering facilities, I should really mention the additional facility of our food truck. Made necessary because boys playing football on the astros at lunchtime were getting so engrossed in the games that they would frequently 'forget' to eat. We decided to take the food to them and set up the food truck next to the astros so they could grab something substantial and not disrupt their matches too much. It's been incredibly successful, with parents at weekend fixtures as well as pupils during the week. According to the pupils, the food tastes better from the truck! The fact that the food is cooked in the main kitchen and simply taken out to the truck and kept warm before being served seems lost on them! We thought about names for the food truck, King's Kebabs, or 'Royal bites' perhaps? Or even 'Slack's snacks' – but nothing seems to have stuck just yet.

I have described successes in sports, music and performing arts. Of course, this only tells part of the story and our successes extend to so many more areas of school life:

Five students received national commendations in the 2026 Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators, a national competition run by the Queen's Translation Exchange at the University of Oxford, with 25,000 students from 532 schools across the UK taking part. Our language students have had a good year as they were also placed second in the North of England Debating Contest … where they debated in Spanish!

In Chess, the school continues to build a national reputation for excellence. We qualified for the National Finals at both U11 girls' and U19 girls' competitions. This followed the school occupying the top three places in the U19 Cheshire and North Wales Girls' Championships. The school is also

taking a much more active role on the national stage in hosting several national chess championships, including the very first UK Chess Challenge Macclesfield Megafinal that attracted over 100 entrants, one Saturday morning, where the atmosphere during a session of 50 matches in this hall was about as tense as it gets.

Our Engineering Team have once again excelled, earning an Engineering Development Trust Gold Award and being given an award for innovation for their project of developing a mixer head that can be used to produce foam used in seats and beds.

The Sixth Form, last year, raised over £30,000 for the Christie - what a phenomenal achievement and one that really underscores one of our characteristics for life of Service. This has represented the Sixth Form's greatest academic year of fundraising to date. The majority of the money comes from the Sixth Form Show but other events include Valentine's Day merchandise sales, movie nights and cake sales.

Of course, a forward-looking school must also be reflective, considering what we do well but also areas where we can improve - it's what we ask the children to do all of the time and we should really practise what we preach. So, this last year, we undertook a professional parental survey, carried out by an external agency. 547 parents shared their views, offering a rich and detailed picture of the King's experience. The findings show a very strong level of satisfaction, with 86.8% of parents reporting that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the school overall. A similarly positive picture emerged around value for money, with 76.5% rating the school as good or very good value. The organisation that carried out the survey on our behalf are able to benchmark these figures against other schools across the land and were keen to explain that they were both very high scores.

The survey found that parents consider a wide range of factors which they deem important when choosing the school. Of these factors, the quality of teaching along with the atmosphere in the school were rated as the highest. We are blessed with a very well qualified and highly experienced staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and they also work incredibly hard. Parents recognised this by stating that recruitment and retention of high quality staff should remain our top priority. I would like to add my own thanks to the appreciation shown by parents in this survey, for all of the hard work undertaken by staff.

The breadth of co-curricular opportunities remains an important and valued aspect of the King's experience. Parents highlighted the vibrancy and range of activities on offer, as well as the high quality of school facilities, which continue to be recognised as one of King's greatest strengths.

Particularly heartening were some of the words used by parents in the free text portion of the survey, stating:

"This is a brilliant school. My child has flourished and grown in confidence."

Another wrote:

"We are delighted — thank you for the leadership, teaching, pastoral care and sport."

And another wrote:

"A well-rounded education with access to a wide range of opportunities - it gives children the best chance to thrive."

We also do an annual pupil survey and this year we gained our highest ever pupil satisfaction score of 4.16 out of 5 – up from 3.96 last year. And it's incredible to think (and, of course, you'll understand that we're dealing with teenagers) that 98.4% of pupils believed that staff treat them fairly – again a high watermark for us. That said, comments are less common about lessons and more usually about food.

Sixth Formers were obviously on a campaign at the time and the most popular comment among them (on any subject) was for free cheese in the Sixth Form Café. A comment seen on several occasions also explained that pupils wanted 'no random vegetables on top of school lunches'. Quite what counts as a 'random' vegetable wasn't made clear. Several pupils wanted school on just four days a week. And you always find out something unexpected - this year it was that the PE leggings are too itchy.

Sadly, the current political landscape means that the independent education sector continues to face challenging times. Last year, several local independent schools closed and I fear that this may not be the end, particularly with regard to smaller schools who operate on slim margins and are stand alone. As a bigger and more stable unit, with all of the successes that I have described in the last few minutes, King's is more than well placed to not just survive the storm, but to thrive. Our school roll (across the Foundation) stands at 1,370 and is the largest that it has ever been on the new site. Families are attracted by the successes that I have mentioned, our ethos, our stability and our aspiration to keep up the forward momentum.

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.

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 - you'll see this as much as I do at events such as Open Mornings, when pupils enthusiastically act as guides, and sporting competitions when pupils represent their school in the sporting arena with real passion and a sense of belonging. This pride is at the heart of the character of a community which values good fellowship and co-operation.

We've just entered the school's 525th academic year of operation. And isn't it an absolute privilege to be even just a small part of that incredible history. We will honour the amazing legacy of Sir John Percyvale, our Founder, with a varied programme of events in the coming year – please be on the look out for further news in due course. Our achievements, new and old, are absolutely worth celebrating. And we can also be confident of the school's strength and longevity as we fulfil our custodianship in passing on the baton to those that will follow in the next 525 years.

We will, however, 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 our 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 I trust that you share our excitement 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 2026