



Liverpool College

Speech Night 2019

Ms Pearson, Deputy Lord Mayor, Cllr Murray, honoured guests, foundation members, fellow governors, parents, colleagues and especially pupils.

Tonight we celebrate the remarkable life our school, its variety, its diversity, its vitality and its excellence.

Events like this require much preparation. I am grateful to Ms Wynne and Mr Gill for their administrative labours and for my wonderful PA Ms Bamber who has taken on so much of the organisation of every aspect of the evening. Dr McNamara has once again deployed her formidable intellect and erudition to compose a Latin oration and train our senior prefects in its performance. Mr Bishop and Ms Clark move from concert to concert with their energy, synergy and their enormous and growing choirs and orchestra now involving 150 pupils, devoting themselves to raising the cultural quality of the College. Mr Ken Siviter, an OL and member of the Foundation has greatly improved the programme for the evening by writing pen portraits of those who have given their names to prizes, thus telling the story, as he did in his earlier book about the school, of the amazing people on whose shoulders we still stand today.

I want to thank the governors chaired by Mrs Mason. They work tirelessly on our behalf and their vision, dedication and knowledge of the school were identified as among the strongest features of our school by the Ofsted inspectors earlier this year. The Liverpool College Foundation provides support to the school which makes possible not only the award of prizes tonight but also the Gladstone leadership programme. One OL and foundation member, Mr Roger Peach, recently funded a major renovation of part of Godwyn House which we opened this afternoon and has also endowed a business prize. His commitment to give back to his old school inspires us as do the other donors who allow us to plan, to dream, and to develop our school beyond the constraints of paltry government funding. We are grateful to Cllr Murray and Mayor Anderson for their innovative support of the expansion of our campus and their commitment to help us develop boarding on our campus. Thanks also to Wilton Trust for their donation which supports the Wilton Scholars programme. Indeed, there is an invisible army of supporters woven into the fabric of the city and country around us. The Old Lerpooian Society, the Margaret Bryce Smith Charity and Investec Wealth and Investment and OLs and individuals like Mr Collin Thompson, who sponsor prizes and promote entrepreneurship education and the values of the school. The PTA under the leadership of Mrs Young and her committee bundle the energies of our community together to create wonderful events and much needed financial support.

I would like to thank especially the prize-winners. Recently I was talking to a pupil who I was considering excluding for a period of time. I asked him why he liked being at the school

whose fabric, social relations and ethos he had damaged with his repeated poor behaviour. He told me that he liked being at the school because of its reputation. He liked saying to people that he attended Liverpool College and noticing how impressed they were. He was in short, proud of being a College pupil. I took the opportunity to point out to him that the source of his pride and the reason people responded to him the way they did, was the attitude, work ethic and commitment of teachers and pupils in the College, and especially those pupils who work day in day out to do their best and to pursue the mission and goals of our school. His pride in belonging was only possible because of that shared attitude and approach from Year 7 to Year 13. Tonight we recognize the people, pupils and teachers, support staff and governors, who by dint of hard work, propel our reputation, our pride, and our future forward.

We designate the 28 acres we inhabit together as a special place calling it a school, putting a rather high fence around it, and making anyone who turns up push a buzzer to get in and a buzzer to get out. We organize tests and admissions appeals to whittle down the 1425 young people who want to join Year 7 to about 140 who actually do, similar processes convert more than 300 sixth form applicants into about 50 new sixth formers. I can never quite decide whether the fence is to keep the dangers of the world outside out, or the manic energy of the school in.

Around the day I began to think about this speech, the school had qualified for the finals of the Cambridge Union debating competition, returned from a cultural trip to Valencia, attended performances of *Girl on a Train* and *Macbeth*, narrowly lost a Lancashire rugby final, one of the more than 250 sports fixtures we have played this year, got through to the third round of the government's mysterious and sinister sounding cybersecurity competition, successfully staged a House Baking competition and House Literature quiz, put on another musical involving 129 pupils, sent football teams to our guest speaker's previous school whilst governors met for three hours to make decisions about campus expansions, a new boarding facility, and a new way of reporting your progress. Mr Brady was engaged in decorating his new sixth form country house, hanging the pictures of our history and the pointers to our future. All this on top of five lessons a day, lessons full of questions, discussions, quizzes, tests, homework setting, writing, experiments, stories- indeed there have been more than 30 000 so far this year including over 1200 different activity sessions ranging from etiquette and cooking to yoga and netball. It is to use a popular pupil word "Mad" how much happens in the school when you think about it - how much life and vitality pulses through the campus, how much gets learned, talked about, planned, done. Each and every one of you makes that happen, and each and every one of you is Liverpool College.

Of course some people believe that 50 years from now school will be very different, or even that it should be different now. Their hope is that our education will be individualized through technology, we would then be able to study and learn at our own pace, and even in the places we choose, and access those things which really interest us rather than the things the school thinks are important. To these visionaries, the future of school involves more of what you all like to do, using your phone and figuring stuff out at times when you are ready

and interested, not at the challenging hour of 0825 in the morning.

If this were to happen, would we still need to have schools, physical places of learning, where people for example eat lunch together? I asked this question to a professor who is the inventor of character education research. Our school is focused on the development of your character, and as such his ideas are important for us. The professor explained to me that people are social animals and that a big part of what we do at school is develop the habits of good living which enable us to flourish together. We need in other words to learn to live together by actually living together. That means sharing an environment together, not just a social media platform or a virtual learning environment. It means navigating our way to maturity - to the wisdom that comes from true learning - through taking responsibility, not only for ourselves but also for our relationships with each other.

Our school abounds with examples where this is happening. Teachers and pupils working in and outside of lessons together in Chapel talks, on trips to all sorts of destination, in sports training, school fixtures, DofE expeditions. The list is endless.

And yet. Like in any school, there are also plenty of pupils who do not on the face of it participate in building a community or strengthening their skills in building a community. Some do not turn up for fixtures, or detentions, or never contribute to any cause other than their self-interest nor do they themselves say they contributed something they can point to in the environment of our school as a contribution to improving our life together.

These pupils do not feel an obligation to contribute nor do they feel they have an opportunity to impact the school. This is tolerated and accepted as a feature of school life in this country.

Schools are conditioned to think of pupils as units of outcomes, as products, as raw material they have shaped into something useful and impressive. Pupils are taught to think of their school as a service provider, like a giant educational Amazon, a thing which allows them to “get” or “obtain” what they need to take the next steps. In neither paradigm is a pupil required to care about their school, learn to build relationships, or focus on building a better community. Nor is a school required to help every pupil to learn to do that.

The longest ever Harvard study –over 80 years’ worth of data-on wellbeing and happiness provides evidence of how important learning to do just that may be. A person’s assessment of the quality of their relationships has a stronger correlation to their wellbeing than intelligence, wealth, or even health. In other words, if you are able to make strong relationships you will more likely experience happiness and wellbeing than if you are clever rich, healthy and fit or successful. Most people concur that the goal of all human action, including learning and teaching, is human flourishing, human happiness. It turns out then that a school could really help you if it could help you learn to take responsibility for building strong relationships.

As a country, we would never accept a system of education where pupils do not learn any maths or English, where pupils are free to choose whether they engage in learning anything academic at all. Yet, we are willing to accept that some pupils can choose not to engage in learning those things which we know are essential to make them happy, and allow them to flourish, the ability to build strong sustainable and respectful relationships, the ability to live well together in a community, the ability to and will to contribute to a common good and to put their talents at the service of others. In the future, both immediate and long term, we have to place the development of these skills at the centre of our purpose.

The future of our unique school depends on this insight, which first was given voice in the motto of the school almost 180 years ago, not only intellect but character. Even Ofsted are beginning to see that school is about more than qualifications. This does not mean that we do not need to learn with serious intellectual ambition, but it does mean that we need to learn to live well together, to find a way to make a contribution to our school, local and international community, and have the wisdom and resilience to build lasting relationships of learning and service. The inspectors recognized that our school already leads in this area of educational reform and curricular development. With this insight in mind we will continue to develop our school community together, looking for ways to strengthen pupil voice into pupil action, making sure that our curriculum, school buildings, campus, routines, policies, lessons, activities, teach you the need and power of relationship. The future of our school and the future of all schools is more likely to be found away from individualized learning and in an increased sense of responsibility for building a school community together. That future is a future where Liverpool College will have much more to offer its pupils, our city and our country.