

Prize Giving 2011

Guest of Honour, honoured guests, members of the Local Governing Body, members of staff, parents friends and pupils. My thanks to our Chair of the LGB, Mr Tony Moffatt, for his welcoming address; I am sincerely grateful to him for his hard work and support to the school in general and to me personally over the last year and I also thank his fellow members of the LGB for their continued support and encouragement. To all of our guests, our parents, our friends and our pupils I wish to add my own warm welcome.

Tonight we are gathered here to recognise and celebrate the achievements of our pupils over the past academic year. This year, for most of our pupils, a major token of that recognition will be a copy of the King James Version of the bible. 2011 is the 400th anniversary of its publication; the publication of a book that not only gave the people of the England access to the word of the Christian God but also unified the language of the English speaking world.

In recognising and celebrating the pupils' achievements I have asked the senior prefects to help me and so first I would like to ask senior prefect, Layth Hendow, to tell us something about sport at the school, to be followed by the presentation of awards for PE.

Presentation of Awards for PE

Next, Deputy Head Prefect, Hippolyte Poirier, will tell us about the music at the school, immediately followed by Senior Prefect Tori Maw, who will tell us about Drama and finally Deputy Head Prefect Tom Brown will report on other extra-curricular activities. The presentation of awards for extra-curricular activities and school service will follow.

Presentation of Awards for Extra-Curricular Activities and School Service

Thank you to Layth, Hippolyte, Tori and Tom for their much valued contributions, giving us a personal flavour of what goes on at the school.

We are very proud of the variety and quantity of enrichment activities that are available, such an essential part in nurturing the well rounded young men and women who leave the school at 18. Tonight I have invited former pupil George Smith, who left the school three years ago having been Head Prefect, to tell us something of his post school experiences and how his time at the school prepared him for what was to follow.

Former Pupil Report – George Smith

I am grateful to George for joining us this evening and sharing with us some of his reflections on his time at our school.

Despite the doom and gloom on the business pages of the papers, recruitment to the school has remained positive; it is not without its difficulties however. Competition in the independent sector is fierce and, at times, unscrupulous. Our marketing strategy remains the same; it is to broadcast the quality of education we are able to offer at the school knowing that our pupils, current and former, remain outstanding ambassadors in our marketing programme. If what we do, and what we show that we do, is not about the pupils in the school then it's a poor show. And our pupils always do us proud.

Teaching staff turnover at the school has again been very low. In July we said goodbye to Mrs Feszczak who had been at the school for 26 years, the last six of them as Head of Year and to Mrs Hallgate, who joined the school in 2003 as Deputy Head and has been Assistant Head with responsibility for pastoral care for the last six years. To them we owe a profound debt of gratitude for their service to the school and we wish them both a long and happy retirement. We also said goodbye to Ms Jayne Baross, our librarian, Mrs Penny Vitta and Mr Gareth Hughes, our Head of Technology, who took up a new post in Essex. We thank those staff for the huge contributions they made to the school during their time here and we wish them every happiness and success in the future.

At the start of term we were pleased to welcome to the school Miss Jo Dyer as Head of Maths, Mr Adam Harriott to teach Physics, Mr Graham Rogerson as Head of Technology and teacher of Art, Miss Lucy Holvey to teach Girls' PE, Mrs Fiona Wells as maternity cover for Mrs Stack, Miss Caroline Crosby as maternity cover for Mrs Atkin and Mrs Juliette Orłowska, our new librarian. In addition, we have restructured our pastoral system slightly so that Mr Norris becomes Head of Upper School, Mrs Bloomfield Deputy Head of Upper School, Mrs Holvey Head of Middle School, Mr Henderson, Deputy Head of Middle School, Mrs Asbury, Head of Year 7 and Mr Windeatt, Deputy Head of Year 7. Mr Wainman succeeded Mrs Hallgate as Assistant Head responsible for Pastoral Care and Miss McDowell succeeded Mr Wainman as Head of Sixth Form. We wish all those who are new to the school and new in post a happy and rewarding time.

Finally I would like to thank Head Prefect Joshua Briggs, Deputy Head Prefect Max Bayston, Senior Prefects Katharine Haworth and Mahum Naeem and last year's team of prefects for their excellent service to the school during their year of office.

As you are all aware there was another change in staffing; I refer to the very sad and untimely death of our friend and colleague Mr Rob White. Here was a young man, an able teacher, a popular member of our school community, much loved and respected by his own family and by the staff, pupils and parents in our own school family. To our minds he had everything to live for. Our need to remember and commemorate his life has led to the planting of several trees around the school playing field and the purchase of splendid bench in a prominent position at the front of school. However, as long as we remember, then he is still with us and, in doing so, let us cherish and celebrate the life he had with us.

This year we again had excellent examination results. At GCSE our raw pass rate was 93% with 98.7% of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A*- C; 94.9% gaining 5 or more grades A* – C including English and Mathematics. At A level our pass rate was 99% - 1 pupil failed one A level subject - with 53% of grades at A*, A or B. At GCSE and A level our valued added was positive; in other words our pupils in Years 11 and 13 achieved grades on average over and beyond what might be reasonably expected.

The results reflect the hard work and dedication of everyone, staff, pupils and parents; I am particularly grateful to all the teaching staff who have worked without stint to bring out the best in everyone.

Of the 49 in Year 13 last year, 67% of those who applied through UCAS were able to take up places on a university course of their first choice, 10% in their second choice and a further 8% through clearing. Seven pupils have chosen to upgrade their qualifications and reapply next year...a record number. The care and dedication that we show to UCAS applications is second to none and the success of last year's applicants was due to careful help and advice in making realistic and achievable applications. The hike in fees from 2012 led to a significant rise in applications this year and hence there were bound to be disappointments. More universities stuck to the fine detail in their offers and, alas, pupils who didn't meet their offers, albeit by a very fine margin, were rejected. Whilst the critical mass of pupils at the school met their expectations, it was tough, and it is little comfort to those who need to go through the process again next year to know that this was the toughest year ever.

Last year at this time we were undergoing the first of the two parts of the Independent School Inspection. We are given five school days' notice and so a school needs to be ready; we were ready. The first phase of the inspection, which took place on 21 and 22 September...timed perfectly to coincide with Speech Day & Prize-Giving...reported on whether the school was compliant with the 400+ educational regulatory requirements. We were pleased to arrive at the City Hall eventually almost exactly a year ago having just learnt that we were fully compliant. The second part, from 18 - 20 October, inspected the school's broader provision.

To be able to use the words of others to promote the school is not a pleasure always afforded me. However, I make no apology for sharing with you again some of the main findings of the report. The inspection found that the school had made significant strides since the previous inspection in 2006 – just 12 months after the completion of the merger – and that strong foundations established at

that time had been built upon and developed successfully. Pupils' achievements are good and attainment is above average in relation to national standards. Progress at all levels is good in relation to the ability of the pupils and the pupils have a very positive attitude to learning. Pupils are well educated in accordance with the school's aim of bringing out the best in everyone. The reflective and encouraging culture of the school provides an environment in which pupils thrive becoming willing independent learners. The curriculum has been thoughtfully developed, effectively covering all the requisite areas of learning. The quality of teaching is good overall with some outstanding practice, showing significant progress since 2006 – and please do not think that when anything in this report is described as good it is to be damned with faint praise...good is...good.

The personal development of the pupils is excellent and a significant strength of the school, meeting its aims to care for and respect pupils and to nurture each individual. This ethos permeates school life and results in excellent relationships amongst pupils and with staff. Pupils respond to the school's high expectations of achievement, conduct and work; the school has excellent arrangements for the welfare health and safety of pupils and the staff provide high quality support and guidance for the pupils.

The governance fully supports the school in achieving its aims; the management and leadership of the school are good with some areas of excellence. Members of SLT have clearly defined roles which have developed significantly since the previous inspection. They provide a clear vision for the school with dynamic leadership and high expectations. That is merely a glimpse, yet this was an excellent report following a hugely successful inspection.

We are a significant force to be reckoned with in independent education. We remain ambitious and restless in our desire to achieve as a whole school and to bring out the very best in each individual child. I am immensely proud of our present record and extremely sanguine about the future. Whilst it is our aim to continue to make progress in pupil attainment, in the quality of teaching and learning in the broadest sense, in the quality of governance and management, in the spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils and in the quality of the school's physical assets, I would like to commend to you our growing efforts in the voluntary sector; our wish to reach the local, national and international community. Currently each and every tutor group in the school sponsors a pupil's attendance at the Great Lakes High School in Kanungu, Uganda. In addition, pupils from the school volunteer help at Ganton Special School, host the Children's University at the school and we are hoping to provide further volunteering opportunities through KIDS, a local charity which provides opportunities for disabled children. I have seen how important these experiences are to our pupils; providing help and support for our fellow human beings who, for whatever reason, find themselves in need...of money, of an education, of physical and material support...this experience for our pupils is an education in itself.

In reaching our current strong position I must thank others for their efforts; the teaching and support staff for their hard work, experience and expertise and, most significantly, the discretionary effort they put in over and beyond the call of duty; I thank the Group Service & Support Team at Oundle; the parents for the trust they have placed in the school and their loyalty; the pupils for their support, their loyalty and the joy and happiness they bring with them to school and to each of us every day.

Fortiter – bravely

Floreat Nostra Schola – may our school flourish.

I thus conclude my report for 2010/2011.