

Speech Night 2018

Mr Twigg, Deputy Lord Mayor, honoured guests, foundation members, fellow governors, parents, colleagues and especially pupils.

I would like to welcome you all to this prize giving and speech night, and thank you for making it possible.

I am especially grateful to Ms Wynne, Upper School administrator and to my wonderful PA Susan Bamber whose organisational and administrative midas touch is behind the success of these evenings, and the success of so much in the school besides. On your behalf, I also want to express our thanks to Dr McNamara who wrote and directed our Latin oration, a scholarly feat, and to Mr Bishop and Ms Clark who lead our orchestra and choirs in preparation for this and so many other wonderful occasions.

I want to thank the governors chaired by Mrs Mason who work tirelessly for us, challenging us to take the school forward together to new heights. I want to thank the Liverpool College Foundation for their continued support and their generosity to the school which makes possible not only the award of many of our prizes tonight but also the Gladstone leadership programme. I want to thank the Wilton Trust for their donation which supports the Wilton scholars programme so ably organised by Mrs Sarah Doran.

We also benefit from the generous donations of the Old Lerpoolian Society, the Margaret Bryce Smith Charity and Investec Wealth and Investment and from individuals like Collin Thompson, who sponsor prizes and promote entrepreneurship education and the values of the school. I want to thank the PTA for their energy and drive and for the way their efforts support what we are able to do.

Mr Ric Thompson, our bursar and latterly director of operations has been an invaluable servant of the school. Mr Thompson really is Mr Liverpool College having been head boy, and having supported all his children to receive a Liverpool College education. During his tenure, the management of the finances and resources of our school improved greatly and he delivered more building works in a shorter period of time than any bursar of the College ever did. Indeed he is still busy building a Pre Prep for us. Mr Thompson has been a friend to me and a wise counsellor. We shall miss him.

They say a week is a long time in politics. A year is an eternity in a school like ours. Since we met here last year, so many great things have happened but some of the worst possible things have happened also.

Steve Doran was our friend and colleague, a warm hearted, funny and kind man whose service to the College was total and who played the instrumental role in creating the IT infrastructure of our school. His humour, his kindness and his determination to make school and life fun for his family and for his pupils and colleagues were qualities which inspire and which make his loss so enormous to his family and to the school. Mr Doran's example and his passing put everything in perspective, and continue to teach us that what matters in any school is people and their relationships.

Today we look back a little on the fantastic achievements of our prize winners and on our achievements together. Our school continued to grow. It is easy to forget that the the College welcomed 100 more pupils this year, as well as 18 new members of staff.

We climbed even higher academically, setting an amazing standard, our school achieved some of its best results ever at both A Level, university entrance, and at GCSE. For example, last year the achievement of our GCSE pupils placed us in the top 50 schools in the core Ebacc subjects out of more than 4500 schools, in the top 2% nationally, and in the top 8% for progress of all the schools in the country. We obtained more Oxbridge offers than in any year of the last 18 and more than any independent school in Merseyside. We trained more teachers than ever before. You, our pupils, have consistently outperformed what people who do not know you expect of you, whilst your teachers and our staff have worked their socks off to support, inspire and teach and guide you not only in the classroom but across a wide array of sports, activities and trips to France, Spain, Holland, Poland, and Iceland. At the heart of these achievements is a belief in your importance, and the importance of your very personal challenge in achieving your potential, not only as a student but as a person. I hope it is something neither we as teachers and staff nor you as pupils will ever take for granted, because it is the purpose, the moral purpose of the school, which our founders insisted we pursue and not lose sight of.

We defeated our rivals in hockey, indoor cricket, city cricket championships, won debating competitions, dominated CCF camps, and Duke of Edinburgh award completions. We resurrected the Middle School and Sixth Form newspaper, learned to cook for university, to Irish dance (if that is a verb), to yoga (if that is another verb), we put on plays, and we toured France with an orchestra and choir. We can all be proud of these achievements and the way volunteers, teachers, pupils and parents have maintained this buzzing and ambitious activity of our school.

However, I am not sure we should look back on the year for too long. Schools, like armies, always seek to fight the last war. It is inevitable. We look at what happened last year and begin to predict and plan what will or should happen in the next. Usually we repeat our actions in pursuit of all our old triumphs, thus ensuring a repeat of all our errors, in an unending cycle of almost tantalizing repetition.

We are encouraged in this by the common belief that the future is something we must prepare for rather than something we must make or hope for. The most recent government initiatives in career education are very much born of this defensive and mechanistic view of the future. It is valuable and important for pupils to understand the link between what they are doing now and what they might do in the future. Just as it is fruitful for people to try to anticipate the likely conduct of an Ofsted inspector on their next visit. Psychologists tell us that the nearer in future time we expect an event to occur, the more likely we are to imagine it occurring in a familiar way, in a familiar place with familiar people. Schools, we like to believe, are those familiar places where the seasons cycle seamlessly into the past. We are encouraged, because of financial and educational changes, to plan on a year or two long cycle or to focus on the next set of qualifications. Presumably, further than that into the future, plans neither work nor help.

If you had asked a young Mr Fox when he joined the school in 1987 about emailing parents, he would have told you that he did not know what email was. If you had led him through to the master's tennis courts where gowned men smoked pipes and read the Daily Telegraph while an all-boys HMC independent school went about its eternally serene daily business

and told Mr Fox that one day there would be building there housing a co-educational academy with, heaven forefend, girls walking down the corridor toward a football match-and even more amazingly, their football match! , he would have asked; what is an academy?, aren't we a rugby school? and do girls play football? The reason he did not know, could not know, is that the spirit which made these things possible had not yet revealed itself at or to Liverpool College.

Nothing is more sobering than reading the training materials for my careers teacher course from 1990. Sobering because it is all depressingly similar to what we tell pupils today while completely missing out on all the creativity, possibilities, and dynamism of the internet, of digital media, of globalisation, of new entrepreneurial ventures. In hindsight, it is like looking at one of those ancient maps of a flat earth. Pretty useless, and only very partially true.

I recently asked a member of my Year 9 Archbishop of York award group what the difference was between wishing and hoping. It is not an easy question. A wish they said means you do not think it will happen. A hope is when you think it might, somehow you expect it will happen.

That answer was worth a challenge point.

The spirit of the people assembled in this room is the greatest resource for hope in the future, better than any careers guidance or prognostication. Learning with character, our motto, means three things. It means emphasizing and facilitating the development of a person's character as well as their intellect, it means learning in a place with some characters in it, and when I look out into this Cathedral and see the school sitting there I certainly notice several of these, and it means that learning itself is an act of character, of hope, of being open to all the possibilities of the future.

In that future, there will be further growth, we will move into new buildings and fix up our old ones, with the Sixth Form having a dedicated building in Godwyn House. We will strengthen our house and activities system and create ways for even more leadership opportunities not only through the Archbishop of York award, learning to lead, CCF and D of E, but through the structure of the school itself. Teaching will continue to improve, driven not only by reflection and discussion among teachers, but by mature and effective feedback and input from pupils who learn well and all of whom make exceptional progress because they are in an exceptional school. We will improve pupil engagement in learning, especially for pupils who are vulnerable, who struggle to learn or who are disaffected by school, including improving the behaviour and leadership of pupils and strengthening their ability to take charge of their learning progress. Our spirit will do this. Our spirit will make that future, even if the exact shape and content of that future lies before and beyond us, an exciting and open invitation.

From time to time I ask pupils to tell me what is the best thing about the College. What pupils like is friendliness, and belonging, as well as sports, CCF, and fish and chips for Friday lunch. I agree with every one of those things. Recently, a pupil asked me "what do **you** think is the best thing about the College?". I was stopped in my tracks, struck dumb, in a way a teacher can be struck dumb when they are asked to think rather than just talk. My answer was poor, but I get a chance to improve on it today. The best thing about the College is the character and the spirit of its people, followed by fish and chips on Friday. Our motto is not only an ideal, it is already a reality which will shape the future, our future.