



SILCOATES

Independent education for boys and girls aged 3-18

Headmaster's Speech Day Address: 5th July 2018

Good evening and an extremely warm welcome to our Speech Day and presentation of prizes.

Before I start, I would like to thank Jessie, Isobel, Izzy and George who performed for us so beautifully just now and indeed all those, staff and pupils, who have spent a considerable amount of time and effort preparing for this occasion.

At such events, I always think it best when pupils contribute to the proceedings as much as possible: it has been said that, whilst the best asset of a school may be its staff, the best advert is its pupils. And so, throughout this evening, as well as some musical items, you will hear from a succession of boys and girls about the activities that they have taken part in. I am sure you will enjoy these contributions, which will hopefully give you even more of a flavour of Silcoates over the past year.

The presentation of prizes to particular pupils is our way of formally recognising individual talent and achievement. However, I would like to think that tonight is also a broader recognition of all our pupils across the year. The strength in depth of our pupil body has certainly struck me as I have come into the School and so I am fully aware that there are numerous others who could also have been given prizes tonight.

Our guest of honour is someone who is familiar to most of you, Mrs Mary Chippendale, our Chair of Governors. Mary has been a part of Silcoates for over twenty-five years, having had two children through the School and been a governor for 12 years and Chair for the past 7. It is no surprise, therefore, that, after such a long period of outstanding service, she has felt the time has come to step down as Chair and we are honoured that, as one of her last official duties, she has agreed to present the prizes tonight.

Prior to my starting as Head, I was reminded by my previous employer that the Head's relationship with the Chair of Governors is crucial. This naturally concerned me, as the Chairs of Governors I had known hitherto had been pompous, austere and hopelessly out-of-touch. In that sense, Mary Chippendale has certainly broken the mould. Perhaps Mary's greatest quality as a Chair of Governors is that she is refreshingly down-to-earth and approachable. As a mother and grandmother, and a former teacher herself, Mary is fully aware of the many challenges that exist within schools, both personal and professional, hence her judgement and advice are grounded in common-sense and compassion. She has overseen a number of difficult challenges throughout her time as Chair and yet has always maintained a cheerful air of optimism and good humour. I, for one, am particularly grateful for her help and advice throughout my first year and am

pleased that she will remain a firm friend of Silcoates, not least in helping us commemorate the bicentenary of the School in 2020. Mary, on behalf all of us at Silcoates, thank you for all you have done through your many years of association with the School and thank you for taking the time to present our prizes here tonight.

Although the past year has been my first at Silcoates, 2017/18 is already feeling something of a vintage one in terms of its achievements and successes.

We began the year on a high following the excellent results of last summer. The A Level results were some of our best ever, enabling one of our students to go to Cambridge, three to Durham and four to medical school. This from a cohort of just 58. Indeed, 90% of our UCAS applicants achieved places at their first choice universities on the back of their academic success.

94% of last year's GCSEs were at grade C or above, with 47% at grade A* or A. 24 of the 55 pupils in Year 11 achieved 5 or more A* or A grades. All bar one of the pupils achieved at least a C grade in English Language and Maths and all bar two gained 5 A* to C grades. When one bears in mind the ability range at the School, these are remarkable achievements and testament to the hard work of students and teachers alike.

In Sport, involvement in team competitions continues to be high, with each pupil adopting a competitive yet sporting attitude to each fixture. In rugby, the 1st XV had a successful season, winning 7 out of 11 matches, and the U15s and U13s were able to match this success rate. The 1st XI girls' hockey side were third in the regional finals and managed to finish the season beating Yarm 3-0. The U14s were the Wakefield District tournament winners. The 1st XI boys' hockey side continues to show promise considering the youth of the squad, the U15s reached the quarter-finals of the Yorkshire Schools tournament, the U14s remained undefeated throughout the season, the U13s won 90% of their games and the U11s are the North-East HMC champions. The 1st VII netball team won the Silcoates invitation tournament, five players earned county and satellite representative honours and ten got selected for the Wakefield District squad. The U14s got to the semi-final of the Wakefield district competition and the U11s jointly won the HMC bowl. In cricket, the 1st XI finished the season with a tournament win over Rydhal Penrhos and the U11s got to the semi-final of the HMC six-a-side, losing to Ashville but beating QEGS in the quarter-finals.

As Head of Sport from September, Mr Roberts has devised an ambitious new strategy for Sport throughout the school, with clearer lines of responsibility for individual sports and the provision of outside coaching in rugby, hockey, netball and cricket.

The proficiency and virtuosity of many of our musicians is evident tonight and, throughout the year, I have greatly enjoyed listening to our musical performers, young and old. The Christmas and Summer concerts were the highlights and I have been particularly impressed by the ensembles groups, which include all parts of the school community.

The highlight of the year in Drama was our production of 'Narnia'. Two of the cast members will be speaking about this in a short while but, as well as the fact that it was

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performed with great enthusiasm and gusto, was that, again, such a huge cross-section of the School were involved, from Sixth Formers in the band to the Junior School choir. Again, the sheer hard work that goes into such performances, from both pupils and staff, demonstrated yet again how so much we do at Silcoates is a collective effort.

At Silcoates, pupils begin the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme in Year 9 rather than Year 10 as elsewhere. We will hear from two participants in a moment but this does ensure that a significant number of pupils each year manage to achieve their Gold Award whilst at school – indeed, nine of our current Year 13 have a Gold Award and two are unable to be here today because they are collecting their awards in Edinburgh.

What has also been striking this year is how much of an emphasis we place on life outside the School. Pupils have been able to participate in a wide range of activities both in the UK and abroad – again, you will hear about these later but it was particularly notable that no fewer than 77 pupils went skiing in Italy just before Christmas and returned with not a broken bone between them!

Our biennial expedition to Tanzania occurs in October, with 35 students involved, in what will no doubt be a trip of a lifetime, judging from past experiences. Of course, this is not just a visit but a development project, as part of which the pupils have been involved in raising large amounts of money. Indeed, I have been hugely impressed by the extent of charitable fund-raising and giving at the School – it is anticipated that, in this academic year alone, over £50,000 will have been raised across the School for charities near and far.

Of course, many of these successes are due to efforts of students in the Upper Sixth, who leave us today. In our Valedictory Service earlier, we had the opportunity to wish you all well individually and I can only echo those sentiments now. You have been an exceptional year group, who have contributed so much to life at Silcoates over many years. I am confident that you all have bright futures ahead and, as Old Silcoatians, I hope you will keep in touch with us over the years, not least to come back and celebrate with us in 2020.

I would, however, like to single out two of you who have been such a huge help to me over the past year: Eve Howarth and Joe Reid, our Heads of School. It may be a strange thing to say but I'm insanely jealous of both of them. With Eve, it's car envy, seeing her each morning in her white Mini convertible, newly shined and polished, the picture of chic sophistication; with Joe, it's hair envy, as I marvelled at each of our meetings at his magnificently bouffant coiffure, not a hair out of place, each day as immaculate as the last. Jealous also of their eloquence, their ambition, their sense of service and determination to give of their best. As Heads of School, they have been superb: efficient, honest and responsible. They have bright futures ahead of them and we have the privilege to hear from them one last time at the end of this evening's proceedings. I am sure they would wish to join me in wishing the best of luck to our next Heads of School, Abbey Crowther and Liam Webb.

We also have to say a fond farewell to some of our teachers. Miss Towell, Mrs Robson and Mr Hinchliffe left earlier in the academic year. Dr Green, Miss Moore and Miss

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Reynolds will be leaving us at the end of this term and we wish them well in their future careers. Indeed, Miss Reynolds is moving on from teaching Maths to teaching other Maths teachers how to teach Maths, thus passing on her skills and expertise to a new generation of teachers.

In January, Miss Simmons joined us in the English department and, in April, Dr Russell joined us as Head of Learning Support and both of them have already made a substantial impact in those roles.

In September, Mr Chris Evans, who is currently at Heckmondwike Grammar School, will be taking up the new position of Deputy Head (Pastoral). In this role, he will be directly responsible for overseeing the pastoral life of the School, with a particular focus in his first year being safeguarding, e-safety and a school-wide policy against bullying. I view this as a key appointment within the Senior Leadership, where the roles have been clarified so that Mrs Dews will henceforth be known as the Deputy Head (Academic) and Mr Coll will be known as the Senior Deputy Head (Staff), to reflect the different areas of the school for which they are responsible.

In other appointments in the Senior School, Mrs Rebecca Reddish is joining us from Morley Academy to be a Teacher of Art, Mrs Riona Redfearn from Thornhill Community Academy to be a Teacher of Physics and Mrs Sarah Roberts from Heckmondwike Grammar School to be a Teacher of Mathematics.

They will be joining a staff who have excelled this year in their energy and commitment to the School. Part of the joy of teaching in a school such as the variety of the job and it is always fun to think that one's normal working pattern can involve activities as contrasting as teaching differentiating exponentials one minute, to performing in the Wind Band the next, to taking the U12 netball team away for a fixture. Day in, day out, over the past year, the teachers have gone above and beyond, to help pupils learn and grow, not just as students of their subject but as active, enthusiastic and responsible young people.

The same is most certainly true of our support staff, who step up to whatever challenge faces them, with good humour and generosity. On behalf of all the pupils and the parents, I would like to thank all the staff at Silcoates for everything you have done over the past year. Your endeavours are truly appreciated.

Over the past few weeks, I have been asked on several occasions how I feel as I come to the end of my first year as Headmaster of Silcoates. My response to this question could literally last hours ... no, don't worry, it won't ... but I would like to share with you five particularly special moments from the last 10 months.

The first is House Music. This takes place in the first half of the Autumn Term and is a bitterly fought contest. It's a play off, sing off and dance off all in one, with the battle between the House choirs the climax. The sheer exuberance of the winning house, Moore's, singing 'We're all in this together' from 'High School Musical' was infectious and a joy to behold – as personified by Ellie Irvine as she skipped up to collect the cup. This is what House competitions are all about – team spirit, collective energy and

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dedication and downright fun. It is something that we are looking to build on next year, with a new Head of House Activities, Mr Falloon, and an expanded range of competitions, from House sudoku and House dodgeball to House 'share-picking' and House lip-sync. Houses will meet fortnightly and participation will become the norm, placing the House system right at the heart of Silcoates life.

My next special moment came when listening to the presentations given by those Year 13 students who undertook the Extended Project Qualification this year. The EPQ is effectively a research project, the subject of which is entirely up to the student. Over two evenings, we were therefore given the opportunity to consider an eclectic range of topics, ranging from 'Is it moral for the film industry to make money from the Holocaust?' and 'Is Darwin's Natural Selection the true founder of Eugenics?' to 'Why plant potatoes on Mars when we could plant in Africa?' and 'Prevention Vs Treatment: Which one should we invest our finite resources in to eradicate malaria?' There was also not one but two presentations on serial killers. Without exception, the standard was outstanding, with each student able to speak knowledgeably and eloquently about their chosen topic.

Not for the first time, they highlighted to me the academic capabilities of the students we have at Silcoates and why we should place academic ambition at the heart of our School and not as 'an edge' as the old strapline suggested. The extent of the ability range within school should not limit our expectations of each pupil nor their ultimate potential. I was told the story this year of a swimming lesson in a school. The teacher was overseeing the lesson from the side and could see a girl in the middle of the pool thrashing around, clearly in trouble. He dived in and swam to the middle and managed to save her just in time. 'Emily,' the teacher said, 'you told me you can swim'. 'Oh, Mr Johnson,' replied Emily, 'I can swim, but just not yet'. I want the pupils at this school to be like Emily, believing in a 'can do' approach that they can be an A* student - Grade 8 or 9 in new money - or, if not, an A or a B student - with hard work, determination and, most importantly of all, perseverance.

The Act of Remembrance is my third special moment. This is, of course, a tradition that goes back many years at Silcoates and rightly so - Silcoates, like many other public schools of the era, was affected disproportionately by the slaughter in the trenches in the First World War. It was indeed a moving sight to see pupils from Year 3 join hand-in-hand with members of the Sixth Form, as they walked to lay their poppy beside our memorial to the war dead. The deeply moving ceremony showed me two things. First, we should celebrate the opportunities the children have due to the fact we are a 3 to 18 school. The younger children gain so much from the example and the guidance of the younger children, such as in the paired reading scheme; but, then again, the older children gain so much from the younger children - not just the 'aah' factor but an opportunity to lead and be a role model for those who look up to them, literally and metaphorically. Second, that, as a small school, we should increase the time we spend together as a community.

To date, the Act of Remembrance was my only opportunity to address the Senior School collectively: due to the size of the School, only parts of the School can be addressed in the Hall and in the Chapel. I feel this is a shame when the shared experience of

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Assemblies does so much to engender school spirit and belonging. That is why, from September, the Senior School will meet twice a week in the Sports Hall for a whole-school assembly. On Mondays, this will focus on the events of week ahead and the week that is passed, celebrating achievement, such as the weekend's sports fixtures, and hearing reports from expeditions and trips abroad. These assemblies will also feature a considerable degree of participation by pupils from across the School. On Thursdays, there will be a Spiritual Assembly, giving us all a fixed point in the week for us to pause and reflect. The programme will be wide-ranging, loosely based on key Christian themes but involving contributions from a number of outside speakers from a range of faith backgrounds.

My fourth moment has two parts to it. One is relatively mundane but significant, in that it illustrated to me exactly what a good school is about. I think it would be true to say that the U13 rugby side had a mixed season: to be fair, the team has a range of abilities, with some never having played rugby before this season. Mr Potter was the coach and he refereed the home matches. What I was struck by was his constructive and balanced approach, particularly with the opposition team. Of course, the fixture was competitive but Mr Potter never lost sight of the fact that these were children and they were there to learn. This is an approach I have seen replicated on so many occasions across the year, with our teachers emphasising inclusion and participation, who see every fixture, win or lose, as a learning opportunity. It's also about 'team spirit', which is such a strong part of the ethos at Silcoates. This was clearly evident in the 1st XV's eventual defeat to Hill House in the Nat West Vase competition. After a difficult start, with Hill House building up a significant lead, Silcoates battled back, closing in on them during the second half, before unfortunately dropping back towards the end. Although defeated, the team were dignified, respectful and unified – and one could not wish for more in school sport.

My fifth moment is really a collection of moments. I have already said that there are a range of pupils at this school, with a range of talents, interests and abilities. Some find school easy, some not so. The strength of a school lies in its ability to help those for whom maybe life is not going so well at the moment. Sometimes, it is due to matters outside their control; at other times, it is because they have made the wrong choices and got themselves into trouble. Ultimately, it can lead to a meeting with one of the Heads of Section or Mr Coll or me. And what is great about those meetings is that, whilst things may not always improve 100%, in most cases, pupils manage to change and turnaround their behaviour, approach or attitude. And that is why I wish to ensure that our pastoral system is the best it can possibly be, with Mr Evans' appointment as Deputy Head (Pastoral) ensuring all matters concerning pupil behaviour and wellbeing are dealt with swiftly and effectively, with a clear policy on escalation should that need to happen. This will hopefully 'nip in the bud' any issues to ensure that all pupils remain happy, safe and supported at school.

But, of course, this is a rather long-winded response to the question 'how do you feel after your first year?'. In that case, two words will suffice. The first is 'lucky'. Few people get the chance in their working life to be in the position I am in at the moment. And the other is 'excited'. Excited by the new academic year and by the opportunities that lie ahead.

And, so lastly, I would just like to say 'thank you'. Thank you to the pupils for all your endeavours over the past year; thank you to the staff for your commitment and ceaseless good humour; and thank you to the governors, parents and other friends of the School, for your steadfast support and goodwill and for making me feel so welcome over the past twelve months.

It only leaves me to wish you all a very happy holidays and I look forward to seeing everyone again in September.