



# SILCOATES

Independent education for boys and girls aged 3-18

## Headmaster's Speech Day Address: 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019

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

Before I start, I would like to thank all the contributors to tonight's proceedings. I would also like to thank Miss Wang, who has been our Graduate Music Assistant for the past year. It truly has been a privilege listening to her play at Assembly and in our concerts throughout the year and I know she has inspired many of the pupils with her playing and teaching. We wish her well as she moves to take up a similar position at Woldingham School in Surrey.

I hope the variety of our programme tonight will give you a sense of just how remarkable the past year has been. As last year, as well as some musical items, you will hear from several boys and girls about the activities in which they have taken part or been responsible for. Of course, this is only a flavour and there are many more who could have spoken about what they have achieved over the past year, both collectively and individually.

The presentation of prizes to particular pupils is our way of formally recognising individual talent and achievement. And behind several of our prizes, there is also a story ... of success in a new venture, of progress beyond expectation, of endeavour in spite of the odds. Some of the stories we can share with you but, overall, I would like to think that tonight is also a broader recognition of all our pupils across the year. I continue to marvel at the strength in depth of our pupil body and so I am fully aware that there are numerous others who could also have been given prizes tonight.

I am particularly pleased, and honoured, that our Chair of Governors, Mrs Sue Lee, will be addressing us this evening and presenting the prizes. Sue took over the role of Chair at the start of the academic year and I thought this was the perfect opportunity for her to be able to tell you a little more about the Board of Governors and their role in taking the School forward. Personally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sue, and the rest of the Board, for their energy and commitment – in what are, of course, voluntary positions – and their personal support to me as Head. Thank you, Sue, for taking the time to present our prizes here tonight.

As it always does, the academic year begins with the public examination results of the last. At GCSE, 93% of grades were at Grade 4 (or Grade C) or above and 44% were at Grade 7 (or Grade A) or above. 9 students achieved Grades 7 to 9 (As and A\*) in all their subjects and 5 achieved all Grades 8 and 9 (or A\*). Much has been made in the press about the difficulty of achieving a Grade 9 and so it was very impressive that 12% of the

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grades were at this level. At A Level, 50% of the grades achieved were at A\* to B, particularly impressive when taking into account the predictions based on students' underlying ability. Indeed, our 'value added' score outstripped most of our competitors in the region.

We make no secret of the fact that, at Silcoates, our students have a broad range of abilities. Our ongoing mission is to ensure that each student achieves their potential through the flexibility of our curriculum, the quality of our teaching and a learning environment in which expectations are ambitious and pupils are encouraged to set themselves high standards. Our introduction of Firefly this year has ensured that pupils understand more what is expected of them, that teachers are able to communicate more effectively and immediately with both pupils and parents and that extra resources are made available. We seek to embed the learning opportunities available through Firefly next year.

Most of our Year 13 leavers went on to study an impressive range of courses at some prestigious universities. However, and this is part of a growing trend, a number opted instead to go straight into employment, possibly through an apprenticeship, or to take up an internship, such as at the Bank of England or Deloitte. Although our Sixth Form curriculum remains one based on three A Levels, within that model we seek to create enough flexibility, as well as Enrichment opportunities, such as the EPQ or the ASDAN qualification, so as to prepare our leavers for whatever outcome they seek.

Sport continues to be a central feature of Silcoates life. In the Autumn Term, 160 rugby and hockey matches were played. The 1st XV reached the semi-final of a very competitive Tom Burrow Cup and enjoyed an end-of-season tour to North Wales. The stand-out rugby side were the U12s, who won 7 out of 11 matches. The girls' hockey fixtures were as hard fought and competitive as ever, with the younger teams showing particular promise. In fact, the U12A team went through the season unbeaten, winning 12 and drawing 1.

The sporting highlight of the Spring Term was undoubtedly the hockey and netball tour of Dubai, which took place over half term. 25 girls and 13 boys enjoyed a trip of a lifetime, playing hard-fought games against competitive opposition. On home turf, the term was equally as productive. Across the School, the girls played over 70 netball matches. Special congratulations must go to the U13, U14 and 1st VII teams, who were all crowned Wakefield District Champions, the 1st VII winning 20 of the 22 matches they played. The boys also performed well in their hockey fixtures, with special mention going to the U12A team who scored 47 goals on their way to 5 victories in 8 matches. The Summer Term's sports have unfortunately been dampened by the poor weather but it brightened enough more recently for the cricket tour of North Wales to be successful and enjoyable.

The proficiency and virtuosity of several of our musicians is evident tonight and, throughout the year, I have greatly enjoyed listening to our musical performers, young and old. The highlight was the Wakefield Cathedral Concert, which had such an impact that we have been invited back for a repeat performance next year. The 'Open Mic' Jazz Café was also a great event, notable not just for the quality of the performances but for

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the fact that pupils from Years 4 to 13 performed alongside each other, riffing with ease with our professional band.

The highlight of the year in Drama was our production of 'Grease'. Two of the cast members will be speaking – and singing indeed – about this in a short while but, as well as the fact that it was performed with great enthusiasm and gusto, was that, again, such a huge cross-section of the School were involved, from pupils in the band to the Year 8 cheerleaders. 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.

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 80 pupils went skiing in Italy just before Christmas and returned with not a broken bone between them!

Our biennial expedition to Tanzania took place in October and we will be treated to a film of that later. The preparation that went into the expedition was phenomenal – but then so was the impact it had on all those who took part. I was pleased to receive a letter from the Tanzanian High Commissioner, Dr Asha-Rose Migiro, which commended the School for the work we had done: 'please accept our deepest appreciation for the great work that you and your pupils are doing in our country' she said, going on to express the hope that she would be able to visit the School in due course.

Of course, many of these successes are due to efforts of students in Year 13, 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. Although not the largest group we've ever had, you have collectively contributed a huge amount to Silcoates life. What I have admired most have been the quality of your friendships, something particularly in evidence at the Summer Ball on Saturday. 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.

We also have to say a fond farewell to some of our teachers. In the Autumn Term, we said 'goodbye' to Mrs Helen Emmett, Mr Malcolm Affleck, Dr Paul Grooby, Ms Carol Marsh and Rev Janet Lees.

After two terms at the School, Mr David Russell completes his temporary Teacher of Computer Science post to return to industry. Having been our enthusiastic and meticulously organised Head of History since 2011, Mrs Jenny Everingham is leaving us for a post closer to her home in Leeds. Mr Andy Potter, having not only been a valued and respected PE and Games teacher at Silcoates for the past 16 years but a pupil before that, is going to Fulneck School as Head of Football and Golf. Mrs Joanne McManus, having been an extremely caring and conscientious Teacher of French for the past 15 years, has, for the moment, decided to take a step back from teaching.

Four members of staff are spreading their wings abroad. After three years as a Teacher of English at Silcoates, and several before as a pupil, Miss Isabel Nicholls is relocating to San Francisco: her contributions as Head of Evans and in Drama have been considerable; Mr Cale Hugill, our Head of Maths, is moving to become a Teacher of Maths at Kings' School, Al Barsha, Dubai. He leaves behind a Maths department, of which he has been a member for 11 years, that is not only successful and extremely hard-working but which is widely respected amongst the pupil body for always being there to help - a hallmark of Cale's approach and commitment. Mr Dan and Mrs Sandra Coll depart to join the staff of North London Collegiate School, Jeju in South Korea, Sandra to teach Latin and Dan to become Vice Principal (Administration). Over the past two decades, their contribution to Silcoates has been immense, in a huge variety of ways and in a number of roles. On the academic, pastoral and co-curricular front, they have been great servants to the School, not least because they are such a good 'team', as shown so clearly in last October's expedition to Tanzania: pictures of them hod carrying and African dancing to follow later this evening. I know they will be missed by staff, parents and pupils alike.

I would also like to give my best wishes to Mr John Nelmes, who is retiring, having served as a Biology technician for 38 years. Formerly a pupil at the School, he also been the School's photographer for much of this period and many of the pictures that you have seen tonight have been taken by him.

It is always sad saying farewell but naturally we share your excitement at the opportunities ahead. Thank you for all you have contributed to the School during your time and we wish you all the very best for the future.

I have previously announced the appointments that have been made for next academic year. We are fortunate in being to attract some extremely well qualified and experienced teachers and the proof of that is already evident from the already outstanding contributions from Mr Evans, Mrs Reddish, Mrs Redfearn, Mrs Roberts, Dr Rowson, Mrs Tattersall and Mr Williamson in this academic year alone.

Mr Simon Rudsdale will be our new Head of Maths and Mr Jas Singh is joining the Religious Studies department. Both currently teach at Queen Mary's School, Thirsk. Miss Maddie Smith is joining the English department from Cokethorpe School in Oxfordshire and Mr Peter Mirrlees is to teach Latin and French, having taught for many years at Wath Comprehensive School. Our sporting provision will also be enhanced by the arrival of three Graduate Sports Assistants: Mr Martin Sutherland, as Lead Hockey Coach, alongside two former pupils, Miss Charlie Slaski and Miss Annie Townsend. I am sure that our pupils will soon see the benefit of these new members of staff following their arrival in September.

They will, of course, be joining a staff who continue to excel in their energy and commitment to the School. Part of the joy of teaching in a school such as this is the variety of the job and it is always fun to think that one's normal working pattern can involve activities as varied as teaching advanced calculus one minute, to stitching 'Grease' costumes the next, to taking the U13 rugby 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 face 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.

In my New Year Assembly, I rather rashly offered my predictions for the year ahead. These included a couple that have turned out to be sort of correct – I said we would not leave the EU at the end of March but on 1st July; that Lady Gaga would win an Oscar (admittedly, for Best Actress rather than Best Song) – and some which have yet to be borne out one way or the other. For example, I predicted that Jeremy Hunt would be the next Tory leader (don't worry, I haven't put any money on that one). As well as being an opportunity to reveal how bad I am at predicting, the point of the Assembly was to convey how unwise it is to obsess about the future: all we can control is the present.

A sensible message for pupils clearly. But, as the Head of Silcoates, I don't have that luxury because, naturally, I have to look to the future, as it is that future which we are preparing our pupils for. And, as it stands at the moment, it looks like a very challenging and uncertain future. Whereas those leaving school thirty or forty years ago could perhaps look forward to a career lasting into their fifties, at which point they may be able to retire on a final salary pension, having been able to buy their own home, those leaving school today face a more indeterminate prospect. In what might be a working life of fifty years, they might well undertake three, four or five different careers, as well as a multiplicity of roles and employers. Those which previous generations may have taken as a mainstream aspiration – home ownership, financial security – may increasingly become the preserve of the few. Reports suggest that 35% of jobs in the UK may be threatened by increasing automation and often we think of low-wage, low-skill jobs being the most vulnerable. However, the indications are that middle-income jobs, such as office workers, civil servants and junior lawyers – are particularly at risk, with even higher threats in developing countries, with two-thirds of jobs at risk of being automated.

Whilst it is certainly true that automation is not new, and throughout history employment patterns have changed, what is significant here is the pace of change and that fact that all workers will be affected. Indeed, I attended a conference this year which highlighted the ways in which teaching may be transformed due to technology.

This is a picture of Eddie Woo, an Australian Maths teacher, whose YouTube channel, inevitably called WooTube, has over 600,000 subscribers, and whose videos regularly top 3m views. He was even a runner-up in the last year's Global Teacher Prize. Much to the trepidation of most of the Heads in the audience – and the delight of a few – the question was raised as to whether this was the future of teaching.

However, the news is not all bleak. Research suggests that fewer than 5% of occupations can be entirely automated by existing technology, as our jobs are simply too varied and changeable for robots to take on all the tasks. Instead, they predict around 60% of occupations could see a third of the activities they currently do being farmed out to machines. This will mean that most of us will probably be able to cling onto our jobs but the way we do them is going to change significantly. Robots will complement, not replace, you.

And, luckily, there are some things humans can do that machines just can't right now. One example of this comes from some work by researchers in Singapore, who attempted to teach two autonomous robotic arms to assemble a flat-packed Ikea chair.

Despite using some of the most advanced equipment around, the machines struggled with the most basic tasks. Even identifying different objects from a chaotic mixture of parts was a major challenge for robots and, in a recent test, it took the two robots more than a minute and half to successfully insert a piece of dowelling into one of the chair legs (although I kind of have some sympathy for them on that point).

The most realistic take on the future is not that jobs will disappear but that they will be different and the challenge will come in dealing with the pains of that transition. And that is where schools come in, as most experts in this field argue that it is through education that the young people of today will develop the skills and abilities to cope with and, indeed, embrace the opportunities that will come with automation of tomorrow.

But what is frustrating for many of us is the lack of foresight and imagination shown by politicians and policymakers. As you know, secondary schools are just emerging from a root-and-branch change to the GCSE and A level examination system. You might think that such a reform programme would seek to address some of the challenges I have just identified. But, instead, Michael Gove, as Education Secretary, decided that exams which enabled candidates to resit certain modules and take coursework as well as exams, made them too easy. And so he demanded that the exams revert to the same type of exams that existed in the mid-1980s, i.e. one-off terminal exams, written in longhand and principally reliant on the powers of recall – in other words, the type of exams that clever Oxbridge chaps like Michael Gove do very well in. And the sort of exams, of course, that the data-crunchers and league-table compilers love because everything and everyone can be measured, labelled and judged a success or failure. And yet, as I am sure many of you will attest, these qualifications don't principally recognise or develop those qualities sought after in the workplace – resourcefulness, teamwork, persistence, the soft skills of civility, persuasion, empathy and intuition.

And that is what I view as our mission at Silcoates: alongside a first-class academic education, enabling each and every pupil to achieve the best grades they possibly can in public examinations, we provide a school experience which encourages them to discover and develop their own individual strengths, inculcates the values of friendship, compassion and community and instils in them a sense of vision, purpose and responsibility so that they go on to live fulfilling and enriching lives. Lofty ideals maybe but evidenced in a veritable smorgasbord of events, activities and experiences over the past academic year.

Academically, Sixth Form students are particularly stretched by the Extended Project Qualification, and, of six students who undertook it this year, four were awarded A\* grades and two A. The titles they decided upon, as ever, were eclectic, such as 'How will the universe end?', 'Should the West fear Russia under Putin?' and 'What effect would privatisation of the NHS have on families with children with special needs?'. Through doing it, they gained a thorough understanding of not just the topic but of the skills

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required in writing a dissertation on a subject which they have researched themselves. Not only that, they also have to give a presentation to an audience, who are, in turn, able to question them on their ideas and findings. And the skills they learnt will prove to be invaluable in the future, so much so that one of our academic targets for next year is to increase the range of opportunities for extended writing throughout the Senior School.

What consistently strikes me about Sport at Silcoates is, whilst striving to be the best, it is never lost on our Games staff that fundamentally the pupils are here to learn and improve. There is a palpable appetite to include and educate, a challenge when teams may comprise pupils of differing abilities and experiences. And the attitude of the pupils themselves when playing I find heartening: yes, competitive and frustrated on occasion but respectful and encouraging to their teammates and the opposing team. I was also gladdened on Sports Day, when tutor groups gathered together to cheer on, and, indeed, run with, their peers who may have found the long distances races, well, just a bit long: testament again to the strength of comradeship and friendliness amongst our pupils.

Inclusion is also evident in our Drama and Music. Some schools would have barred younger pupils from taking part in our production of 'Grease' but there were a number of Year 8 children involved, who were able to have their moment to shine. The Years 7 to 9 'Production in a Day', a new House competition which took place in Activities Week, was built on inclusion, with all pupils involved in one way or another, mounting a musical production with just four lessons to prepare. The sheer range of our Music output – from the formality of the Wakefield Cathedral Concert to the out-and-out hard rock of SFest – is all about giving as wide a section of the Silcoates community the opportunity to perform and get involved. And, as for, 'Silcoates Does', how wonderful it is to have an event wholly run by Sixth Form pupils which showcases and celebrates pupil talent across the full age range of the Senior School.

A lot is talked about the need for 'character building' in young people and perhaps nothing encompasses this more than the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Silcoates' record in this is outstanding, with around a dozen pupils each year obtaining their Gold Award. But what is also striking is how they go about it. The fact, for example, that a number of Year 9 pupils choose to volunteer after school in the Junior School to help the younger children, including taking it upon themselves to teaching children in Year 6 how to do the Rubik's Cube. Indeed, the examples are legion of older pupils helping and leading others, whether that be as Peer Mentors, on the School Council or at our Act of Remembrance.

A focus on leadership has also been apparent in our House competitions, which have become more varied and numerous this year. From House Ultimate Frisbee to Lip-Sync to Crystal Maze to Dodgeball, pupils across the School have combined to compete and have fun. And what I like most about our House events is the emphasis it places on taking part. Indeed, there are four prizes which we will be awarded for the first time tonight given in the name of Mr Harry Smith, a former English teacher and housemaster at Silcoates, who sadly passed away last year. The Harry Smith prizes are specifically given to those pupils who consistently volunteer, show up and pitch in because they team-players, reliable and trustworthy: valuable qualities indeed.

And we remain ever-conscious of the need for our pupils to become responsible citizens – looking out beyond our daily bubbles to the city, region and world outside. We will hear shortly from our Charity Prefects about the outstanding work they have led this year supporting a wide range of charities, building upon the superb fundraising in the Junior School. I am particularly proud of the Silcoatian Spirit – a sense of service and giving back – that is such a hallmark of pupils as they progress through the School.

Next year, Silcoates celebrates 200 years as a school. This remarkable landmark will be celebrated in a number of events next academic year, with our main day of celebration being on Friday 1st May and our Bicentenary Ball on the 2nd. Such a moment is the perfect time to look forward and back.

When Silcoates was founded in 1820, its founders in the Congregationalist movement deliberately set out to found a school that offered something different to the conventions of the time. Whilst religious observance remained at the School's heart, and biblical study the principal vehicle through which the School's education was delivered, there was also an imperative to not merely replicate what pupils experienced within the grammar school system. They were, after all, dissenters, not intent on agreeing with what was necessarily the norm but what they viewed as 'right'. And that sentiment has persisted throughout the School's history: when the convention has been to go left, the School has often gone right. What else would you expect from Non-Conformists? And that is a sentiment that I, as Headmaster, wish to hold dear. To meet the challenges ahead, I wish to resist the pervading orthodoxy that one should focus on a narrower range of subjects and activities; that one should be exclusively data-led; that one should stick to what we know. And that is why we are seeking to place change and innovation at the heart of our leadership agenda within Silcoates, academically, pastorally and in the co-curricular realm. Further initiatives will be communicated to parents in the coming months but this is a heads-up about one of them. From September, at the behest of Dr Russell, Head of Learning Support, we are welcoming into school a Therapy Dog, principally to help with Literacy. The dog as yet doesn't have a name and has only just begun its training but it's a beagle and it's a boy.

In the meantime, I would like to finish by, again, expressing my thanks. 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 over the past year. It is very much appreciated.