



DOWNSIDE SCHOOL

Head Master's Speech on Prize Day 2019

One of the aspects I thoroughly enjoy in my role as Head, is meeting prospective families who visit the School. It gives me the chance to share with them what I know is special about Downside. Sometimes I meet families at the beginning of their visit, sometimes at the end. Whilst the substance of our conversation is the same either way, there is a subtle yet profound difference. You see the most important aspect of their visit is the tour they are given by one of our pupils. Families I meet at the end of their visit have seen the evidence for what I am telling them. What I am saying has 'authority', as there is invariably a clear match between my words and what they have experienced. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our pupils, not only those who have taken these families on tours, but all of you who make visitors feel so welcome, for holding doors open, for greeting them and taking an interest, but just as importantly for treating one another with the respect and humanity, witnessed by the chair of governors and mentioned in his speech today. It is noticed and remarked upon. My own small example recently was a candidate, who'd come on interview for a job. He told me how touched he had been that pupils greeted him as they entered the classroom before his observed lesson. Understandably he was nervous, but it put him at his ease and gave him confidence. A small thing which had a big impact.

When I speak about our Catholic and Benedictine identity, I often quote CS Lewis, probably best known as the author of the Narnia stories, who once said, 'Never speak about God unless you are asked, but live your life in such a way that people always ask you.' There is plenty of talk of God at Downside, but it is not forced or imposed, it is because there is no shortage in our community of those who exhibit deep seated confidence and joy and who are happy to share their secret.

The confidence gained from belonging to this school community enables all of us, pupils and in fact staff also, to extend ourselves and take on challenges, to do the right thing rather than the easy thing, do our best, risk failure, celebrate success if it comes or pick ourselves up if we don't succeed, celebrate the success of others or pick them up, learn lessons and go again. We work in partnership with you as parents, so I am grateful to you for your support and for the trust you put in us which is such a vital part of the Downside recipe.

We see it over and over again as our pupils happily and willingly enter the Physics Olympiad, enrol on the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme or try out for Ten Tors, take on an unfamiliar sport, or learn a musical instrument, play in the Concerto Competition, enlist in the CCF, sing in the choir, help with the Languages day for prep and primary schools, lead a retreat for younger pupils, sleep out in aid of a charity for the homeless, audition and take

on a part in a play, join a group working to make a positive difference to the environment. I could go on.

As you heard from our Chair of Governors, in October we had a visit from a group of educational experts, consisting of seven current or previous heads teachers and one current deputy head AKA an ISI inspection team. There's nothing like receiving a phone call from the inspectors to get your pulse racing on a Monday morning.

But I should be clear, their visit was certainly not unwelcome. We have learnt to embrace the inspectors in recent times. We have nothing to hide and are always keen to learn. The outcome, as you know, was immensely positive, in not only highlighting areas in which we are excelling but also aspects in which we can learn and grow.

There was one slightly heart-stopping moment when the lead inspector, came to see me to say that a pupil had taken up the offer to come and speak confidentially. Whilst the inspectors meet with groups of randomly selected pupils, and every pupil is asked to fill in a questionnaire, it is essential that no one feels they have not had the chance to express their view or raise an issue in person. This could be a difficult moment, I thought. My fear was short-lived however as he told me that the pupil had actually wanted to tell him about all the positive aspects of the School and what a warm welcome he had received on his arrival in September.

We are happy to take on board the recommendations for further improvement in the final report, all of which relate to areas, already identified for development and for which inspectors recognised we had begun to implement plans. We are investing time and resources to developing our use of ICT across the curriculum and have appointed Ian Ramsden in a full time capacity as Head of Computer Science and E-safety, which means that he will be extending his teaching of the subject next year. He is already teaching coding to our younger pupils and coordinating a microbit project in the third form. His work with School and House Councils is helping to engage pupils in maximising the productive use of the School's network. This is an important factor in stretching and challenging pupils of all abilities and in enabling them to utilise fully their independent learning skills. Our careers provision, another area the report highlighted, is already going from strength to strength under the leadership of Richard Rawlins, who took on this responsibility at the beginning of the year, alongside his responsibility for guiding our pupils through the UCAS applications.

Intellectual curiosity and academic ambition remain absolutely central to our existence as a school. We are building on the School's tradition of scholarship, and an exciting project which will see the annual publication of an academic journal, showcasing the very best work of both pupils and staff is on its way to fruition.

The academic life of the School has been given further impetus by the arrival of Mike Randall as our new Deputy Head. He has already had a very positive impact in the short time he has been with us. Another area he has recently begun focusing on in close consultation with pupils and colleagues is looking at ways in which we can become more environmentally

friendly as a school. We have already made a pledge to cease having any single-use plastic bottles on site from the beginning of the next academic year and to work towards becoming plastic free as soon as possible.

It is always positive to have new staff and to make the most of the questions they ask and the ideas they bring. But at the same time we have to say farewell to others.

It is sad, as always to see the departure of our Graduate Assistants, Paddy Hyams, Rosie Hunter, Ella Johnson and Adam Longshaw. All four of them have contributed enormously to our sports programme and been on hand to run sports facilities and help with weekend trips and events. We thank you and wish you well as you move on to the next stage of your careers whether that be in teaching or coaching.

Harriet Cruden has been with us for the last two years as our Artist in Residence and in that time has had an extraordinary impact. An internationally acclaimed animator, she has inspired Downside pupils to produce their own animations, but she has been like an extra teacher, providing enormous support to our artists in every aspect of their work. Her legacy will be varied, including the thriving Warhammer Club.

It is difficult to think that Isabella will be without Sue Pughe Morgan next year. I know from my time as a housemaster, that you are only as good as your House Mothers. They are on the front line, triaging and dealing with issues as they crop up, and very often pre-empting them before they even happen. Sue's calm and capable presence and infectious cheerfulness have been a vital ingredient in the Isabella cocktail and I know just how much Karen Westlake has appreciated her support and before her, Claire Murphy. We wish you the very best of luck as you move to Cyprus but we are glad that we will still be seeing you in your capacity as a parent.

Stephen Ottewell leaves us to become the Deputy Head (Pastoral) at Epsom College Malaysia. This is a well-deserved promotion and an exciting move for him, but we will be sad to see him leave after five years as House Master of Roberts. Stephen's unremitting enthusiasm for life is contagious and he has been a tremendous role model, not only as a House Master, where the boys have benefited from his guidance and care, but in all aspects of life at Downside. There is no doubt that Stephen will be greatly missed but he leaves Roberts in good spirits for his successor, Daniel McLean, whom we have recently appointed and will be joining us from Rugby School.

After twelve years as House Mistress of Caverel House (and twenty-two years of teaching Art at Downside, much of that time as Head of Department), Belinda Bouchard is retiring from the School. She took on the role of House Mistress at a very important time in the School's development, soon after the introduction of co-education to Downside, and she has played a pivotal part in making it such a success. She has inspired generations of Caverel girls with the confidence to be themselves, to grow and to develop their unique gifts. She has created a wonderfully homely environment for the girls, and any visitor to the House can testify to the fact that they are made to feel immediately welcome. Belinda will certainly

be greatly missed but she leaves a tremendous legacy. I know that the Caverel girls will ensure that their house continues to be the warm and friendly environment it has become and that they will welcome Anna McGarry, the new House Mistress, as she joins us from Prior's Field, where she teaches English and Drama.

Whilst saying farewells, I think this is an opportune moment for me to express my gratitude to Andrew Walsh Waring and his Parents' Association committee for all their hard work over the course of this year and for many of them, over a number of years. Andrew very kindly agreed to remain as Chair for a second year, when I became Head, to provide continuity and stability but is now stepping down from his position. I cannot stress enough how much I appreciate his work and that of the Parents Association, for its unwavering support for the School. In a moment I will be speaking about our leavers and urging that they keep in touch in years to come but what can be forgotten is that as pupils leave we also say farewell to parents, often after a long association with the School. We have decided therefore to extend the remit of the Parents Association, to become the Parents and Friends of Downside so that it incorporates those beyond our current parent body who wish to remain in touch and support the School. I am also delighted to announce that Kashi Sharifi has agreed to be the new Chair of the Committee.

Now to our departing pupils and particularly our Upper Sixth, whom I wish to thank. I feel an enormous affection for this group. I'm not sure that was entirely reciprocated by the boys from this year whom I coached for rugby in their younger days. Though we went through an entire season without a win when they were in the fourth form, I like to think I helped lay the ground for what, this year, was the most successful season the school has had in recent years. That might be stretching it a bit. I also helped to coach the girls at netball, although in this case the word help and coach would certainly be stretching it a bit. I can take absolutely no credit for their success this year. But what is for sure is that this group has come a very long way during their time at Downside and those who have joined the cohort over the years have added a huge amount and raised the aspirations of their peers and all the pupils in the School. We will be extremely sad to see them go but they leave the school a better place. We will miss their talent but most of all we will miss their presence. However we share in their excitement as they move on to the next stage of their lives and hope very much they will stay in touch in the coming years.

Now I would like to express my thanks to this year's Heads of school, Lucy Pughe-Morgan and Oscar Healy. I am full of admiration for these two. They are tremendously impressive individuals, who have worked fantastically well together and I am extremely grateful to them for their support and hard work over the course of the year. They are always calm and composed, managing their extensive commitments alongside their responsibilities with extraordinary maturity. They have set a wonderful example in fully committing to every aspect of school life, including performing the lead roles in last term's musical, *Grease*. I have really appreciated their input which has been sensible, considered and most importantly, at all times, honest. They have been wonderful ambassadors for the School. I look forward to

watching their progress beyond Downside. To say thank you, I have some gifts for them today, as a token of thanks from me and the School.

There was a very strong field of candidates to replace Lucy and Oscar and I am delighted to announce here today that next year's Heads of School will be Georgia Bolton and Matthew Kapustka. I very much look forward to working with them.

I want to end by thanking our hugely committed governing body under Adrian's leadership, for their unstinting support of the school and to echo his comments in my gratitude to those retiring members of the board. We have achieved an enormous amount in the last year but there is no time to sit back and admire. We will remain on a constant cycle to improve. In these interesting times in which we live, we must at all times be open to growth and change and harness the creative energy of all who make up the Downside Community.

Gregorian Medal:

I have decided this year as has been the case in recent years to award two Gregorian Medals. The decision has been extraordinarily difficult. I might easily have been tempted to award five or six. There are a number of pupils in this year group including our Head Boy and Girl, who would be deserved winners of the award but I am limited to just two. If you are one of those who does not win the award, please do not think that your contribution is unappreciated.

I don't think that the first recipient of the award will be expecting to be receiving it at all. She is very modest and is often behind the scenes, quite literally. She has demonstrated leadership skills in a number of areas including the CCF, Duke of Edinburgh, and Ten Tors. She has made the most of her considerable academic ability and contributed much to the girls' sport during her time here, including playing representing the 1st XI for hockey. She also in her younger years sang in a school choir. I mentioned her being behind the scenes, and this is an area in which she has truly excelled, as a vital part of the production team on school and house plays as well as the highly successful fashion show. She has devoted considerable amounts of time to service activities, including sleeping out to raise funds for the homeless. She is an effective and selfless organiser, as deputy Head of House, she takes the minutes of her House Prefect meetings without fuss and emails them to her grateful House Mistress at the end of the meeting. She very much deserves her chance to step out into the limelight. The Gregorian medal goes to Anna Bowman.

The second recipient is one who like Anna is a long serving member of the School, joining in the first form. He has never given less than one hundred percent to the enormous variety of areas to which he contributes. He has given a huge amount to the CCF and led both Duke of Edinburgh and Ten Tors teams. He has been an important member of the sacristy team, serving on the altar, as torch bearer, cross bearer and thurifer. He is a regular and excellent reader in Mass and on other occasions. A member of the St. Teresa Community, he has contributed much to service in the School. In sport he has been a stalwart, always courageous and always giving his all, even in the early years when the going was pretty

tough, but getting his just rewards as part of the 1st XV this year. An accomplished trumpeter, he has also contributed much to the music over the years. He has somehow managed to balance his studies, gaining an offer for Earth Sciences at Oxford, with being a strong and committed head of Powell where he has gained the respect of the pupils and staff alike. The Gregorian medal goes to Freddie Wright-Morris.