

Thank you Chair of Governors; a very warm welcome to Paddy Earnshaw and family; Lord and Lady Shuttleworth; Deputy Mayor; distinguished guests; governors, staff, parents, alumni; and especially to the pupils of Lancaster Royal Grammar School.

In ancient times our speech day was on Shrove Tuesday. This is how it went: *On Shrove Tuesday boys were permitted to throw cudgels at an unfortunate fowl tied to a special pit in the playground. The bird was subsequently eaten by the Masters. On the same day the annual prize-giving was held, the Headmaster providing three books as prizes. Instead of an examination, a simple procedure determined which boys should win awards. A dice box was placed on the desk. Then, starting with the Head Boy, each pupil came up and threw the dice. Those with the highest score won the books.*

Well, we've got plenty of books! Today we celebrate every single pupil, and also our school which like all the very best things exists not for gain or for glory – but to prepare young people to go and change the world for the better.

And education is a precious thing. Haven't we learnt that, in these COVID years. Our first speech day since 2019. Before we were rudely interrupted. And a lot has happened since then. I'll bring you up to date on the plot, and then some highlights from this year.

Three years ago we had just welcomed our first Sixth Form girls; now over 140 girls have joined LRGS – day and boarding – locally, and from Nigeria to Hong Kong; the school has grown; and we've given priority in admissions to pupils eligible for Free School Meals in line with our grammar school mission of social inclusion and diversity.

Not to dwell on the challenges of that period - but when things were at their worst, the school was at its best: In the instant move to live lessons on Teams; in pupils and staff who helped and volunteered and fundraised; opening boarding houses for free to NHS staff who were isolating.

But to the pupils I want to say thank you. You gave up a lot. You've done us proud, the pupils of LRGS over the past couple of years. Well done.

This year marks our 550th anniversary – they say the first 500 years are the hardest – so we survived the Civil War, we survived the Black Death – and now what a joy to have come through the lockdowns and bubbles and CAGs and TAGs and stranded boarders. And wonderful to see the school burst back into life these past 12 months.

The writer Steinbeck wrote this at the peak of World War Two: "All the goodness and the heroisms will rise up again, then be cut down again and rise up," he wrote to a friend. "It isn't that the evil thing wins — it never will — but that it doesn't die." And optimism is a mighty form of resistance. Optimism and opportunity open every door.

Well done to the class of 2022. Academically this was an outstanding year for the Upper Sixth. At A-level, our largest ever year group achieved our best ever results. Almost a third of grades were at A*, and more than three-quarters were A* to B. Fourteen Oxbridge offers, 11 Medics, apprenticeships with Rolls Royce and Goldman Sachs, and universities from Malta to Hong Kong. Thirty-two students got at least three A*s. To the Upper Sixth here today - no pressure!

Well done also to our GCSE pupils with excellent results from a year group who experienced all that disruption – including twelve pupils who achieved Grade 9 in at least eight subjects, and many of them are here this morning.

Wider success included 14 Golds in the Senior Maths Challenge, and more in the Intermediate and Junior Challenges and Olympiad. There were Golds in Biology, Chemistry and Physics Olympiads, with special mentions for Ben Wilkinson in both the Year 12 and Year 13 Biology Olympiad; and Daniel Goody – selected for the British Physics Olympiad training camp. Success also in the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge, and North West winners in the RSC Schools Analyst competition.

The LRGS alphabet begins with academic curiosity and achievement – but it doesn't end there, because those qualities should make things happen beyond the classroom too.

In Business, Millie Chetham, Poppy Surtees and Geneva Chan were finalists in the Lancaster University Management School Enterprise Challenge. We became Young Enterprise Centre of Excellence in Finance Education. Subhash Chatterjee was named as one Lancashire's outstanding young leaders for his digital strategy business. I did notice that most of the others were in their thirties!

Matthew Nickson, Henry Coates and Ernie Collinson were awarded Arkwright Engineering scholarships – we are the top Arkwright school in the north – and our Product Design students created mounts for Roman artefacts in Carlisle Museum.

Parallel Histories held 40 digital debates with schools across the world, and Sixth Form girls were highly praised as mentors for MoD veterans with Forward Assist. We worked with Lancaster Black History group to research our city's slave trade past, and Harry Edmondson and Travis Taylor spoke at an international conference and their work is on display in the City Museum.

And well done to Kyden Waite in Year 8 who passed GCSE Maths at grade 9, raised £4000 for NHS Charities, and was Young Achiever of the Year in the Visitor Sunshine Awards.

And so to Sport: The summit of a successful season for the First XV was an epic Lancashire Cup win against Manchester Grammar. Our under-16s also reached the County final in an otherwise unbeaten season; under-15s reached national quarter finals in the NatWest Plate; Under 12s won the Lancashire Festival, and girls rugby is popular and growing. Joe Osivwemu and Freddie Deeks played for the North of England.

It was a fabulous season for LRGS Cricket – named again the Top 100 Schools by The Cricketer magazine. The 1st XI recorded famous victories over the MCC and Sedbergh; they won every match in the Royal Grammar Schools Festival to take that national Trophy home for the third time in four years, with Josh Wills Player of the Festival. Several junior sides made Lancashire finals. Faizan Ghumann made 50 on his First XI debut while still in Year 9, and Charlie Parkinson played for the North of England. The commitment of staff and pupils is hugely impressive.

The Boat Club celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. Amongst other excellent results the Year 11 Quad were unbeaten in the region, represented the North West, and were fourth fastest school quad in the National Schools Regatta. Good luck at Northwich tomorrow.

It is excellent to see Netball growing including our first teams in the National Cup. First XI footballers won the North-West schools league. Athletics teams won silver or gold in every age group in the District; Fabian Schiller ran for the North West in the London mini-marathon; our Sixth Formers became British Champions at Orienteering.

There were outstanding individual achievements. In table tennis, Toby Ellis represented England several times, and is ranked top 50 in the world. In Modern pentathlon, Kirsty Maher won the world championships in the Laser Run – and she is racing and unable to receive her school prize today. John Bardsley became British Schools Cycling Champion. Ieuan Blackwell won three Welsh national swimming medals, and Tomáš Grime qualified to play at Wimbledon. Oliver Ablett was selected for the England Junior Curling team. Ben and Nate Giles are national champions at waterpolo, and in golf, Will McGhie was Lancashire champion.

Outdoor adventure is thriving, with Bronze, Silver and Gold DofE taking pupils from Parlick Fell to the Scottish Highlands. The CCF has record numbers in its three sections. Max Rowe and Thomas Starr received Lord Lieutenant's Certificates for Meritorious Service; cadets completed the National Three Peaks at Easter, and Josh Hyde and Harris Wood – Army Master Cadets – went one better by completing the challenge in 24 hours. Harris is now at Sandhurst with the Royal Gurkha Rifles.

From Stamp Club to Knitting, from the Whewell Society to the Year 11 prefects – there is a kaleidoscope of opportunities – so to Year 8 and 9 the challenge is: make sure you find your distinctive place and contribution.

And the creative arts are a key part of that culture. Some of the year's most stunning moments as ever were from Music, Art and Drama. Thank you to the Big Band this morning; best of luck to our choir in the final of the Lancashire Choir of the Year; well done to George Gellersen and Esther Easthope who played for the Earl and Countess of Wessex in September, and Connor Burns formed part of the honour guard for that Royal Visit.

Strolling with Shakespeare was a highlight of our recent drama also in the amazing setting of Lancaster Castle. For the first time, all students who studied for LAMDA Speech and Drama received Distinctions at Silver and Gold Medal level. And in Art, congratulations to ten students whose work was exhibited in Kurt Schwitters' Merz Barn in Elterwater.

And we are a school with a conscience that cares about the world. This year's Lenten Charity efforts were truly phenomenal. Pupils raised over £34,000 – by far our highest total ever. 9L raised £2500, and Tom Anderton and friends' virtual "Run to Kiev" raised over £4000. We sent almost a tonne of textbooks to African schools, and (if you can believe it) Storey House boarders completed 120,000 press-ups for Movember last year.

The host of one Ukrainian refugee who spent a term at LRGS wrote afterwards with thanks. He talked about the school's "humanity, kindness and care." He wrote: "He learned to play cricket for the first time. On one occasion he asked why people were so kind to him." We often say at LRGS that *who cares wins*. Care for the least, the last, the lost. And the measure of our success will be the quality of our relationships.

And school trips are one key way that memories and friendships are forged. They are well and truly back: DofE, CCF, Pooley Bridge, Music and Drama in London, Geography in Iceland, kayaking in Mull, Art in Liverpool, EntreComp to Cyprus, History to France and Northern Ireland where Frank Kelly appeared on the BBC news – next year's plans include Dubai and South Africa. And many thanks to the Old Lancastrian Club for their generous Sixth Form awards – which helped students travel as far afield as Scotland and Switzerland; Chile and Costa Rica.

Those are great opportunities. But great schools don't happen by accident. They need great teachers and LRGS has some of the very best. This year we have welcomed Allen Martin as Head of Sixth Form, Kate Hall in English, Tom Hynes in Physics, Caroline Withnell in Chemistry, Jenna Doswell in a new PE role; Harriet Butterfield in Drama; Henry Higginson and Freddie Deeks in sport and boarding.

But we have also said farewells: To Sharon Ibbotson and Sarah Jones from Learning Support, to Emma Novell in Drama; Holly Taylor in Classics. And to three brilliant long-standing colleagues: Ian Ralston taught at LRGS for 35 years wearing many hats and with his glasses perched on his head – Economics, boarding, Head of Middle School, coaching sports teams for all those decades. Jenny Cornell led Development and fundraising for many years – most obviously for InspirUS, our primary school masterclass and outreach work – and she built our vibrant alumni network. David Ashbridge joined the school in 1996, on a mission to eliminate Americanisms from the English language. He writes: "But at the heart of it has been the great privilege of teaching English and Literature to our wonderful boys, and latterly Sixth Form girls."

Please will you join me in thanking all the support staff and teachers of Lancaster Royal Grammar School for their efforts this year?

But there was sadness as well this year. The death of one of our pupils – Joseph Wolfe in Year 10 who died unexpectedly in the Easter holidays. We mark his life today.

And at a national scale of course the funeral of Queen Elizabeth. We reflected on that famous declaration on her 21st birthday when she said: *I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service.*

And she kept that promise. Her statement at that young age echoes in the values of our school as well. That leadership means service. And that the optimism of youth really can change the world.

Well done to all our pupils today – and to you all – the extended family and supporters of Lancaster Royal Grammar School – thank you.

