

Speech Day 11th November 2023

Thank you, Chair of Governors; a very warm welcome to Sir Peter Ratcliffe; distinguished guests; governors, staff, parents, Old Lancastrians; and especially the pupils of Lancaster Royal Grammar School. Days like this, in places like this, don't come along too often – so enjoy it.

Our first great scientist was William Whewell. An LRGS pupil from 1808, someone wrote: “We have a boy in this town of the name of Whewell who is quite a prodigy of learning. A carpenter's son. Fond of drawing – he has taught himself mathematics – learning is no labour to him.” Whewell added several words to the scientific dictionary, including anode, cathode, physicist, and the word *scientist* itself – he became Master of Trinity College Cambridge – but more to the point gave his name to our debating society, still thriving today.

Just one year later Sir Richard Owen joined the school. He was a biologist, rival to Darwin, founder of the Natural History Museum, coined the word *dinosaur*. Perhaps he could have paid more attention in his Values lessons. One biographer described him as “a most deceitful and odious man.” That's a bit strong but we're still proud of him.

And our third great nineteenth century scientist was chemist Sir Edward Frankland. Too poor to become a doctor as he hoped, he was an apprentice in a pharmacy close to this building – and ended co-discovering helium, developing the concept of chemical valency, and improving public water supply.

Remarkable men. But schools aren't about the past. They're about the future. And golden ages aren't only in the past. They're right now and in the future too.

Sir Peter, we are very proud to be linked with your achievements – and very grateful for your time yesterday and today with our students. With the next generation. Pupils in this room whose careers may not take them in a straight line quite where they're expecting – just as Edward Frankland's didn't. But which will take them from Lancaster to the world. Pupils (I hope) who won't just get things done – but make things happen.

Talking of which - Well done to the class of 2023. It is lovely to see so many of you back today!

Academically it was an excellent year. Almost half our A-level grades were As or A*s, eleven students achieved three or more A*s, fourteen went on to Medicine, 13 Oxbridge offers, apprenticeships from BAE to Linklaters, universities from UCLan to Hong Kong.

Well done also to our GCSE students. Almost 40% of GCSEs were graded 8s and 9s – the old A*s – five pupils gained ten or more grade 9s, and 25 pupils gained at least seven grade 9s. Exams matter. Exams open doors. But the real point is the get-up-and-go, the intellectual curiosity, the ambition.

There were Golds in the Biology, Chemistry and Physics Olympiads. 93 Golds across Junior, Intermediate and Senior Maths Challenges. Daniel Arputharaj went on to the British Maths Olympiad, and Tim Varughese to the Junior Olympiad; Kyden Waite won a Distinction in the Cayley Maths Olympiad and was national joint winner of the Oxford University Coding Challenge.

Harry Mason, Tom Prince and Abdullah Aseef were awarded Arkwright Engineering Scholarships, and the Design and Technology department is shortlisted for an award for excellence. Andrea Amatulli won the Queen's College Oxford Young Translators prize. One of our business teams won Lancashire University Management School's 100 day challenge for the UN Sustainable Development Goals; one of our Young Enterprise teams won Lancashire's Company of the Year. Parallel Histories debated online and in person across Europe. Our Senior Quiz team reached the national finals. Stamp Club gained national success.

MedSoc, Law Society, History Society thriving; the Whewell Society, Politics Society – Mock election this week; Model United Nations next week. InspirUS our primary school masterclasses. Warhammer, Knitting,

Lego, the Biologists' new bee hives and no-mow zones setting an environmental standard for the school. And the theatre trips and tours, and art and photography in Liverpool and Edinburgh.

Some of the most stunning moments of the year were from music and the arts: solos and ensembles through the year: the String Group, the Choirs, the joint orchestra, rock school, Blake Creeley's solo at Founders' Day, Leo Xu and others in those morning assemblies – and packing the biggest punch of all, of course, Big Band. Thank you for playing this morning! 10 students gained LAMDA speech and drama awards, and more than 140 pupils have music lessons, in 17 different instruments. And our choir won Lancashire Choir of the Year just after Speech Day last November. Performance is powerful. To the rest of the school – find your niche, find your voice.

And behind all those successes, we are privileged to have such supportive parents. It has been fabulous to transform the Upper Courts with your support this year at Giving Day. We raised £75000 from over 200 individual donations, own clothes day, the Friends of LRGS, the Old Lancastrian Club, and gifts in memory of Douglas Cameron. I found your enthusiasm for that project really inspiring.

Thank you for your support for the Annual Fund – our extracurricular programme couldn't run without it; huge thanks for the Friends Committee, the school shop the Memo Café, cricket teas, rowing, Burns Night – and to all those parents who simply behind the scenes encourage and support your children and their circle of friends through the trials of teenage life, which are sometimes considerable.

It was an amazing sporting year. Cricketers won the Royal Grammar Schools' Festival in Colchester, winning for the fourth time in five years. Under 15s were County champions. The school played 17 matches on tour to the UAE. Centuries or five wicket hauls came from Faizan Ghumman, Joe Pearson, Anupam Tripathi, Charlie Parkinson, Josh Wills – and Stephen Fry (no less) presented Joe with a shield at Lords for his century against the MCC.

But it's the scale as well as the quality of our major sports that's most impressive.

Rugby teams toured South Africa with an amazing 72 players. We have often field B and C teams week by week. The highlight at home was the First XV winning the Lancashire Cup for the fourth straight year. Girls played and won their first ever rugby fixture against Stockport Grammar. Under 12s won the Lancashire Festival, U13s were unbeaten at Rosslyn Park, Under 14s were Lancashire finalists; teams came home with silverware in seven different sevens tournaments.

Netball players have just toured as far as London and Leeds so far but their eyes are on Sri Lanka next. They were promoted unbeaten to become the only school team in Division 1.

Rowing crews won medals at all the regional heads and regattas they entered; with particular success for the J18 and J17s. We had our first girls' quad competing, and five quads raced at Eton Dorney.

Kirsty Maher reached the final of the English Schools and ran for England; Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 were all District Champions, and Kyran Kouacou triple jumped 12 metres 80 to break a record that had stood for 20 years. Intermediate boys made the National Cross Country finals, and individuals also shone in fell running. Year 8 Orienteers became national champions.

Swimming teams compete with success despite adversity. Our junior team have again qualified for the English Schools national finals – last year in the Olympic pool and later this month in Birmingham – we wish them luck.

Tennis is growing with 9 teams including our first girls' teams; the Boys' First team made it to the regional finals; Kjell Jendis and Daniel Drinkall represented England in Aberdeen; Serban Salbaticu qualified to play at Wimbledon.

In Curling, Oliver Ablett represented England in Finland, and Toby Hall in the four nations. Year 11s are District Handball champions, and Carin Maden has been selected for the England Squad. Harry Lee qualified for the European Junior Golf finals in Spain. James Cotterill is European champion on the BMX; John Bardsley raced across Europe; and possibly at a slightly slower speed even the LRGS staff won a cycling competition for the total miles cycled this September. Apparently we were the first workplace in Lancashire and top school in the UK.

And there's outdoor adventure and service too, because we believe those are the entitlement of every child. All our Year 7 pupils climbed, canoed and camped. In the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, pupils achieved dozens of Bronze and Silvers, with 11 Golds – five of them presented at Buckingham Palace.

The CCF is larger and stronger than ever. Louis Waller-Sargent was top student in the Senior Cadet Instructor course; Jos Hall too on that prestigious course; Max Rowe won the Lord's Lieutenant Commendation for Meritorious Service.

And this was the year when school trips finally returned in full. From the CCF in Snowdonia, to DofE in the Highlands, kayaking in Mull, to Spain, Austria, Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, South Africa, Morocco, Dubai. And Sixth Form travel grants that took pupils from Mont Blanc to volunteering in Portugal to Japan, and plenty more.

Volunteering and fundraising are hugely important in a school with a conscience, a school that believes that who cares wins; a school that knows that if service is beneath you then leadership's beyond you. Pupils raised an £26,000 for Lenten charities – our second highest ever – for St John's Hospice, Cancer Research, Human Appeal, Team Reece and Money for Madagascar.

Pupils, this is the time of year to start dreaming up your fundraising plans for next term. Will Mr Rafferty submit to another haircut, will you sponge the teachers, the prefects, tug of war, five a side, will you be sponsored to sleep in a tent in February, as someone did this year? A special mention to pupils in last year's 9S and 7T (on the balcony) who each raised well over £2000. And lots more charity work too from foodbanks to the Morocco earthquake appeal to Movember just sprouting on top lips now.

But great schools don't happen by accident. When our pupils succeed it is also because of great staff.

And we welcome new teachers. Rose Martin as Director of Music; Jonah Kennedy, Head of History; Amy Sharples in Food & Nutrition; Annelise O'Connell in Classics; Andrew Brassington and Jack Spencer in Maths; Anthony McAloone in Business; Jon Fenton in PE & Games, with Ben Schofield and Joe Wilkinson.

But we have also said farewells. To Robin Walkden from Maths, Steve Foy as Head of Cricket, and Patri Peñaroccha who headed home to Spain with LRGS in her heart.

To Emma Lamb, who as Director of Music truly believed what every great teacher knows – that every star can shine, every bird must fly. From the joint musicals to tours, CDs, dozens of concerts, Choir of the Year, and many of those events that bring us together and fuel the school through music, we owe her much.

And to Hugh Castle, Head of History, who in 32 years never cancelled the Battle of Hastings and never ran out of new ideas. A few years ago, Hugh dropped into my office with one of those ideas. An overseas trip, headmaster. Eight days, 22 students. So far so good. Destination? Israel and Palestine. Both sides of every divide. Meet settlers, meet refugees. Play football against their schools. Stay in Jerusalem. Stay in the West Bank. What a timely vision in that work. It was a catalyst for the charity Parallel Histories which has had an impact on thousands of pupils. Last weekend's Observer newspaper featured our part in that work.

Please will you join with me in thanking the teachers and support staff of LRGS for their efforts this year?

One final, lasting highlight of the year were the glowing remarks of the Ofsted boarding inspectors who came in June. Outstanding, they wrote: "This school has a profoundly positive impact on the lives of children. Boarders make exceptional progress because of the commitment of the staff."

There are no statues of teachers or matrons or housemasters. But as Pericles said, the legacy we leave behind isn't carved into stone but is woven into the lives of other people.

That is true of Tony Joyce, great Headmaster of this school from 1972 to 1983, through turbulent times for the school, who died in July at the age of 93. It is right to remember him now.

And on Remembrance Day we also reflect on those hundreds of former LRGS pupils who died in war, often unbearably young. They died in the air, on land, at sea. We have a remarkable exhibition dedicated to one of those pupils, Edward Keir, in the banqueting suite if you are able to join us for refreshments later.

But before we hold a moment of silence before Sir Peter distributes the prizes.

Today is a reminder that it will always be our job to take children from every street in Lancaster and Morecambe and send them out into the world to win Nobel Prizes. No pressure!

Well done to all our pupils today – and to all our guests: Thank you for your support and partnership in this fabulous school – which like all the best things in life exists not for gain, not for glory, but to make the world a better place – one pupil at a time. Thank you.

CJP 11th November 2023