

Thank you, Chair of Governors; a very warm welcome back to Stephen Ogden and his family; guests; governors, staff, parents, Old Lancastrians; and especially the pupils of Lancaster Royal Grammar School who we celebrate today. Days like this, in places like this, with people like this, don't come around too often. A joy to be here.

Our school connects us to the future. The classroom is a vision of the future, and so is this Great Hall today. But it also connects us to what's important in the past. Joy Timberlake's wonderful memories do that. And in this remembrance season, can I give you one story from the First World War: Edward Keir was one of 76 LRGS pupils who died on the Western Front. He lived on Scotforth Road, won our top academic prize at Speech Day, captained the Rugby First XV: and in 1914 played for the Cricket First XI from which every player volunteered to fight. Edward Keir was shot down near Calais, and his squadron leader wrote to his parents. He said: *He was a splendid boy, keen and energetic, full of promise.* As is this room today.

And I want to take you even further back in our great old story. Christopher Columbus hasn't discovered America yet; but the Mayor of Lancaster, John Gardyner, buys a watermill on the River Lune; and in 1472, the date on our school crest, in his will says that the profits from that mill should support this school forever. The watermill has gone but John Gardyner's vision and the school have thrived. And so have its pupils.

Well done to the class of 2025 – and lovely to see OLs back today! Academically an excellent year with results up at both GCSE and A-level – so can I say to Year 11s and the Upper Sixth – no pressure! As and A\*s in over 40% of all their A-levels, in our largest ever year group, and 24 students gained straight A\*s. They now embark on every type of future from Architecture to Zoology; 15 to Medicine; Ten to Cambridge; Sofia McGhie won a US golf scholarship, Henry Machell working for an MP, Charlie Parkinson playing cricket in Australia, Leon Wilson joined the Royal Marines, last year's Head Boy (here today) is working for Rolls Royce. Just park it on the double yellow lines, Tom! GCSEs were outstanding with two-thirds of exams at grade 7 and above; eleven pupils with 8 or more grade 9s. Ethan Wong and Neel Sonwalkar with the clean sweep of 9s.

These are fabulous achievements. But getting things done isn't as good as making things happen. Exploration and intellectual curiosity are what we really love – and my favourite place to see those are in the Sixth Form extended projects: from laser dentistry to gigantic sea creatures; from the great schism of 1054 to research on online influencers - Thogdad, I'm sure they loved your work.

Competitions bring out the best as well. There were Gold medals in Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Maths Olympiads, and in the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge. Students won over 100 Golds in the UK Maths Challenges. Year 10 Maths Feast success here at Lancaster University; while Year 8 and 9 made the UKMT national team finals. Kyden Waite was selected for the Oxford mathematical training camp. Seven pupils achieved full marks in the BEBRAS

computing challenge, with 172 Gold certificates. Pupils enjoyed success in the Lego League. George Cookson won an Arkwright Engineering Scholarship.

LRGS loves reading. We say that leaders are readers; write like an expert. The Clockwork Conspiracy won the LRGS Book Awards. Sebastian Jasper was school winner and Debayush Ganguli runner-up in Poetry by Heart. We often say that we want to develop young people with voices and opinions – and we really mean it – and only occasionally do we regret that aim: Debating is thriving at LRGS – in the Whewell Society, Politics, Law, Parallel Histories – and our senior debaters were regional finalists in the ESU Mace competition. Emily Ennis won the national Entrepreneurship essay prize at King's College Cambridge, and Ben Gibson is going to the Royal Geographical Society, shortlisted for Young Geographer of the Year.

But if you want to see our beating heart, you go to our Assembly Hall in September to see the Societies Bazaar. Picture a walk through Diagon Alley with clubs of every type: Album Discussion to the Armchair Generals; Climbing Club to the Christian Union; Rock School to the Rubik's Cubers. And breadth matters because a school is one child wide and one child high, and we need every pupil to find their niche – or for Stamp Club, their postmark! – and Peter Talks was awarded national Young Philatelist of the Year in London. Chess Club reached the National Final in Nottingham, and Om Jayar won the EJCOA National Youth Final. MasterChef winners were Jonte Hayes-Picton and James Raymond. Imagine what you think 14 year olds can cook – you're wrong. The quality and the range were phenomenal.

And diversity runs through our Careers programme too – it is Green Careers focus this week – with many thanks to parents who have contributed, and to OLs including Thogdad who have supported our careers advice.

And of course diversity and depth to sport. An stunning sporting year. We hosted the RGS Cricket Festival in July – thanks to Matt Rosbottom for coordinating that brilliant event; and to the Friends and Old Lancastrians for making it possible. The First XI beat the MCC for the first time in over a decade; A teams beat Manchester Grammar School in every age group for the first time ever; Charlie Parkinson played for Lancashire under 18s and the senior second XI; Faizan Ghuman matched those achievements for Durham with a century as well; and both of them played for the MCC Schools XI in Bristol. And seven staff and 46 students toured Sri Lanka in our first joint cricket and netball tour; and netball is thriving in the Winter League and county cup.

Rugby highlights included the under18s winning their group at Rosslyn Park for just the third time in 15 years; the first XV took 5<sup>th</sup> place in the national state schools festival; the U16s won the Stonyhurst 7s and beat the hosts in the final; girls teams played three competitive fixtures; Jesse Ngute-Daniel, Fred Manning and Will Midgley all joined the Sale Sharks academy. The quantity and depth is so impressive.

We have the Platinum Award in the School Games mark – with fixtures in basketball, handball, cross-country; excellent football including some likely recent fixtures; Years 7 8 9 and 10 all won their District Athletics Championships, with the outstanding performance award for Sean

Oladele; junior boys were 3<sup>rd</sup> in the northwest finals; Faris Mister, Will Wareing and Finley McDaid broke school records on Sports Day; orienteers won national team and individual medals; Jack Eccles is County fell running champion; 300 people did the Friends Supper Run and everyone did the Set Run – including for the first time Old Lancastrians so it is never too late!

Rowing is remarkable and I am delighted that this year's OL President, Barry Wild, took to the river with the Boat Club earlier this year. Six quads raced on the Olympic course at Eton Dorney, with Year 9s ranked highest; Year 9 and 10 quads raced at the National Schools Regatta and the Year 10 quad won the D final; and there were wins for crews across the age groups at regional head races and regattas.

An amazing year for tennis. Under 16 boys were first in the North of England, and narrowly second in the national School Sport competition – with huge congratulations to Kjell Jendis, Daniel Drinkall, Andrea Amatulli and Ben Leeming - and under 15s were first in Lancashire. Kjell won the under 16 singles and the under 18 county doubles.

Swimmers won the QEGS hexagonal swimming match for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year running. Oliver Ablett represented England at curling; Reuben Schofield 7<sup>th</sup> in the national biathlon; Tara Nel Allan represented Great Britain in Judo; James Cottrell is British BMX champion and ranked third in Europe and the World.

And we believe in exploration and adventure too. Margaret McMillan said: *The best classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky.* All our Year 7 pupils climbed, canoed and camped. Pupils achieved dozens of Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh Awards and 47 are working towards their Gold Awards right now.

The CCF is huge and stronger than ever – thanks to staff, parents and volunteers. The Army Section were runners up in 3 out of 5 shoots in the Cadet Skill at Arms Competition, John Fitzpatrick was the best shot in the entire Brigade, and the CCF led camps from Halton to Capel Curig and Leak – Bleak Leak, it says in my notes. Cadets greeted King Charles on his first visit to Lancaster as King – although Mrs Marshall had tea at Buckingham Palace for her work with the PTI. The Naval and RAF sections are also thriving, most recently at the National Regatta with Eddie Otley national champion in the single handers, and our joint team with the Girls' Grammar placed third.

And school trips are part of that ambition and entitlement. Sea kayaking in Scotland; Lake District mountain biking; modern languages to Germany, France and Spain; skiing in Austria; canoeing in Norway; the Battlefields; Drama and English to the Globe, Politics to Parliament, Classics to London, Art to Edinburgh, Food Tech went foraging – and pupils climbed mountains from Ingleborough to the Highlands with DofE and the CCF.

But if the school connect pupils to the world and the future, it also connects us to one another. To look up from the phones, to become more human – that's the task of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To multiply empathy; to make a difference; to zig when the others zag. And the Arts provide the

richest introduction to ourselves. More than 200 pupils have individual music lessons, huge thanks to Adrian Boardman and the Big Band for setting the tone so brilliantly for us today, we look forward the Michaelmas concert on November 20<sup>th</sup> – to all our ensembles, choirs and bands. Congratulations to Young Musicians of the year – Tom Bryan, Clara Spence, Ethan Rae, James McSweeney. Every student achieved Distinction at silver or Gold in their LAMDA speech and drama awards, and we will now offer these lower down the school. You should do it. Risk it! Where could it take you? And one of the most magical summer evenings was Strolling with Shakespeare, with Twelfth Night, Macbeth, Hamlet in stunning sunshine. Amazing to be in that crowd, loving our students' confidence and craft.

The school motto *Praesis ut Prosis* is all about the future too. Creating future leaders who understand that they can make a difference. That life happens for you, not to you – so that you can make a difference to other people too. John Gardyner knew that back in 1472 and so should we. Well done to the school on a brilliant year of Lenten Charity fundraising - over £18000 for causes local, national and global – no-one who tried it will forget Creeley's Wheelies – and efforts for Morecambe foodbank, St John's Hospice, Macmillan, Save the Children, Movember.

Great schools require great teachers. There are no statues of teachers but they are extremely important people. What we leave behind isn't carved in stone but woven into the lives of other people. We are delighted to welcome new staff: Helen Booth, Laura Nelson, Estelle Morel and David O'Kane between them leading Year 7, special needs, French and RS; Michael Masci-Gore in English, Emily Morris in Classics, Nicola Stubbs in Maths, Toby Lush in boarding and sport.

But we have also said farewells. To Alastair Hall although still sometimes seen at the Memos with his rugby boots; Liz Hodkinson who led RS so well and championed diversity; Elliot Davies Taylor promoted to Housemaster elsewhere; and Lee Topping in Maths. Three legendary teachers have moved to retirement: Kathryn Page, hugely influential as Head of InspirUS and Year 7; Lou Lightbody, surely the most enthusiastic teacher in the history of the school; and Miriam Jenkinson who transformed learning support with deep, deep pastoral heart. Please will you join with me in thanking the support staff and teachers of LRGS for their efforts this year?

Schools really are all about the future. It is an extraordinary privilege to work with pupils who will go from every street in Lancaster and Morecambe and beyond to a huge variety of wonderful futures. Like Edward Keir: "*Splendid. Keen and energetic. Full of promise.*" From John Gardyner all those years ago to our pupils' three-dimensional achievements today: to parents in particular, thank you for your partnership in this great and extraordinary school. Thank you.

CJP 8<sup>th</sup> November 2025