Speech Day **14th November 2026** **Lancaster University**

Thank you, Chair of Governors, and to Peter Dyer; the Mayor, guests, governors, staff, parents, Old Lancastrians; and especially the pupils of Lancaster Royal Grammar School. Today is a celebration. Enjoy it!

Back in 1472 the Mayor of Lancaster was John Gardyner of Bailrigg, who left the profits from his watermill to fund our school forever. He left us some rules. The schoolmaster, he said, must not "Frequent alehouses," "Keep company with bad women" or play "unlawful & dishonest games". And how extraordinary that we are back in Bailrigg today – full circle! He knew the value of a school and he made it happen. The future isn't somewhere we're going, it's something we are making. Optimism is a mighty power. Build something!

Well done to the class of 2026 – and lovely to see OLs back today! Academically it was an outstanding year. The Upper Sixth achieved As and A*s in half of all their exams. 19 students gained three A*s, three got 4 A*s. No pressure – this year's Upper Sixth! Fifteen to Medicine, 10 Oxbridge offers, BAE, Rolls Royce, RAF, Catholic seminary, AI and robotics, PWC flying start, Royal Northern College of Music. We were delighted with GCSE results, and well done to all our students. Two thirds of grades were 7s 8s and 9s, with 20% grade 9s. Ten pupils achieved 8s and 9s in at least ten subjects, and we were in the top 10% of schools for progress.

Competitions brings out the best in us. There were Golds in Biology, Chemistry and Physics Olympiads. 88 Golds in Junior, Intermediate and Senior Maths challenges, with 4 Olympiad qualifiers and Kyden Waite's Distinctions in the BMO and Maclaurin Olympiads, Mark Douglas' Merit in the Cayley Olympiad, and Sebastian Soo in the Junior Maths Olympiad. Success too in the Royal Society of Biology Challenge, the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge, and the North West Biology Quiz.

Exams teach you to get things done – but school should teach you to make things happen. Orion Woodcock won an Arkwright scholarship; Year 12 Product Designers' made bespoke products for Loyne School pupils with additional needs; Ben Gibson was national runner-up at the Royal Geographical Society; Mishel Rafiq spoke on 5Live; codebreakers completed the National Cipher Challenge; coders completed the Perse and BEBRAS competitions; pupils won best robot design in the First Lego league; brilliant Extended Projects ranged from Lancaster's one way system to remote controlled gliders, from assisted dying to sign language; and the Saxons won the Battle of Hastings.

Before half term, a Year 7 pupil stopped me by the zebra crossing, looking flustered: "Sir, do you know where mushroom growing club is and can I join?" We asked Year 7 what clubs they've joined: there were dozens and the list started: *Classics, Climbing, guitar, Mindfulness, Rubik's cube, rugby, running, Christian Union, Warhammer, Pokémon, science; Junior debating, Lego club is really fun; I go to Armchair Generals which has all kinds of board games*. We send all best wishes to Matt Dower who is very unwell.

Clubs and societies are extracurricular, super-curricular, central to our ethos. We're a rainforest not a plantation. The point is the intellectual curiosity, the ambition, the get up and go. Stamp Club won a national award and were exhibited at the Royal Philatelic society. Chess goes from strength to strength: Northwest Champions and just pipped to victory in the Plate at the English Schools Finals. MasterChef winners were Nyi Tun and Daniel Faulconbridge.

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Languages week included Mandarin, Polish and Czech, and a visit from a British ambassador. Culture Day celebrated our pupils' links from Norway to Nigeria, Thailand to Madagascar.

And LRGS loves reading. Year 7 and 8 took part in the LitFest Big Read, Nevan Mathew our top reviewer. Our book of the year group recommended *My Soul a Shining Tree* – WW1 themed. Pupils saw success in the ESU Mace, public speaking competitions, and Poetry by Heart.

Without music life would be a mistake – and again and again the creative arts frame the highlights of the year: choir, joint orchestra, rock school, assemblies, Music for Youth in Hull, 100 Year 7s saw the National Youth Orchestra, Clara Spence and Fitzroy Shaw Stewart our Young Musicians of the Year – but the biggest and boldest obviously Big Band. Thank you for playing this morning!

Your next musical invitation is to our Autumn Concert at the Priory on November 26th. Please watch your inbox for details of *Wendy and Peter Pan*, our Christmas Production, and for Shakespeare at the Duke's in March. Well done to LAMDA students on their Merits and Distinctions. Drama students went from Shakespeare Playhouse North to the Globe; artists travelled to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool. Lola Peters is exhibiting her paintings at the Whitaker Gallery, and Harry Holmes' fabulous photography is on permanent display in school. And the message to the room: Performance is powerful. Find your voice.

And behind all those successes we are privileged to have such supportive families. Thank you to the Friends Committee, for their brilliant fundraising, for School Shop, Supper Run, Burns Night coming up in January. Thank you to all families who support the Annual Fund.

Also to the Old Lancastrian Club for their support and generous donations including a fabulous new tractor for our grounds team. They made me drive it. I tried to explain that I'm more of a bicycle person but they wouldn't take no for an answer. Apparently it can go much faster! Massively appreciated. Thank you.

This was an amazing sporting year – in scale, in breadth, in quality. The Cricket First XI played 17 and won 13 including Manchester Grammar and the MCC; centuries for George Willan and Faizan Ghumman, and 5 wickets each for Sam Brown and Oly Sanday. We won the RGS Festival in Worcester, with Logan Edge Young Player of the Festival.

Rugby teams toured South Africa with an amazing 77 players. And through the season: 19 teams, 154 fixtures, boys and girls; teams won Sevens trophies in four age groups; county finalists in four age groups, U14 winners. LRGS was Lancashire Rugby's School of the Year.

Netballers won their league to become the only school in Division 1 of the Lancaster Ladies' League, with three teams playing through the year. Eyes now turn to the Sri Lanka netball and cricket tour in February.

Rowers won medals at regattas and regional heads across all age groups. Two crews competed at the Schools' Head in London, and our Quad competes on the Tideway again next week.

First XI footballers won the District Cup and the 2nd XI played 12 matches undefeated.

Athletics teams were District Champions at every age group; two teams reached the North West finals; 90% of pupils competed at Sports Day; the whole school ran the Set Run. Cross-country teams qualified for the regional finals, and Senior Boys were 2nd in the county.

Year 7 and 11 orienteers were British Schools champions, and they're defending their titles today. U15 tennis players reached the Lancashire finals; there were fixtures in basketball, handball, hockey, badminton, rounders, fell running and golf. Year 8 swimmers achieved Northwest relay Silvers; intermediate boys won regional Bronze and competed in the National finals in Birmingham.

Five pupils represented England. James Cotterill on BMX, Toby Ellis in table tennis, Blake Creeley in wheelchair basketball, Patrick Pammenter – korfball, Remy Gibson at the World Street Dance championships.

And we believe that the great outdoors is every pupil's entitlement. "Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolteachers" wrote John Lubbock.

Every Year 7 pupil camped, climbed and canoed. Pupils also kayaked in Scotland in horrendous weather, climbed the Three Peaks for Lenten Charities, went on foot and bike through the Lake District, Yorkshire, Scotland and Wales; and geographers studied Blencathra.

Thirty CCF cadets walked from the sea to Snowdon's summit. Army Section were runners-up in the Altcar Cup, John Fitzpatrick won the individual trophy in the NW Cadet Skill at Arms for the second time. Cadets flew with the RAF section, with thanks to Flight Lieutenant Williams who retired this year; the Air Squadron Team came third in the regionals and good luck for the next round this month. The Naval Section's sailing team have just become National Champions at the CCF Regatta in Southport. Year 8s – another fabulous thing to start next year.

And the founder of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award used to say: *Plus est en vous*. *There is more in you*. Dozens of pupils gained Bronze and Silver, plus 15 impressive Gold Awards, with expeditions from the Ben Nevis region to the Bob Graham Round.

Staff led 145 trips in total, over 10000 pupil-days. Nine overseas trips – South Africa, History to Dublin and the Battlefields, skiing in Austria, German language trips, Food Science in France, Business & Economics in Berlin, Classics in Italy. Politics students met Lord Foster, former LRGS pupil, in Westminster; and Careers trips took all of Year 10 into the workplace – as well as the brilliant Careers Fair this term.

And our school believes that who cares wins. A school with a conscience, a school that cares. Pupils supported St John's Hospice, Morecambe foodbank, Save the Children, MacMillan; James Proctor raised £8000 cycling to John O'Groats for Mind. This month the Mo bros have stopped shaving, and tomorrow five Sixth Formers are walking 22 miles for Movember. Pupils raised over £21000 for Lenten Charities. We had Fin Webster's cricket challenge, the Toby Scamman brownies, Anything but a bag day, Mr O'Kane running all weekend. Pupils – this is the moment to start to dream up next year's plans. What will you make happen?

Build something. We have School Rebuilding plans which have been a long time coming. They are now at pre-planning phase with the City Council. They should transform the upper site with the facilities our pupils deserve. I need to pay tribute to one governor, Matthew Maxwell Scott, who chaired our Properties Committee and very sadly died unexpectedly in July. We pay him great tribute today.

And an inspector called, twice, in June. Outstanding in every category in Boarding: Ofsted wrote: *"Children in boarding thrive both academically and socially."* A full school inspection the following week awarded two Exceptional grades, and said: *"Pupils flourish – expectations of academic success and character building are high and unwavering."* And pupils: They described you too. What adjectives did you conjure in the inspectors' minds? They said: *"responsible, self-motivated, ambitious"*. Of course.

And to my colleagues, I want to say: What an amazing team, thank you. We welcome new staff: Kate Kidd as Director of Finance; Jack Bunker in Geography, Hazel Hardie and Ben Thacker in Physics, Kate Hill in Design Technology, Niamh Spivey in Maths, and Charlie Wilkinson in sport and boarding.

But we have also said farewells: to Sarah Taylor in Business; Sam Fraser after 8 excellent years in DT; and three giants of the school: Steve Bell, Head of Physics for 17 years, and just as dedicated to DofE; Michael English after 18 years in Physics, a man with many degrees and a heart for the underdog; and to Mark Chambers, just 49 years after arriving as a pupil, Deputy Head, mathematics, rugby, cricket, a huge legacy in the school.

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

We have many books to present in a moment. An envelope arrived on my desk at the start of term – containing this book presented at an LRGS speech day long ago, plus this small object retrieved from a battlefield on Easter Monday 1917, and this letter.

Dear Dr Pyle – I enclose a book awarded as the Storey Writing Prize to my great uncle Rowland Howson in the summer of 1900. Uncle Rowland's brother also attended LRGS. Their father was Manager of the Lancaster Banking Company and friend of Sir Edward Elgar. Second Lieutenant Rowland was killed in action on the first day of the Battle of Arras (9th April 1917), leading his platoon of the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, c. 3pm, forward in the snow towards enemy lines. The War Diary states that they were hit by withering enemy machine gun fire and suffered heavy casualties. Objectives not taken. I hope you will also be able to take Rowland's "dog tag" (enclosed) and other papers into your archives. Yours sincerely.

So this is his identity tag collected where he fell. The motto of LRGS isn't "work hard and pass your exams" – it is lead and serve. Make things happen. And pupils today, we are on the edge of our seats to see what you will make happen.

From John Gardyner all those years ago to this wonderful celebration today. To parents in particular, thank you for your partnership in this extraordinary school which like all the best things in life exists not for gain, not for glory, but to build a better world, one pupil at a time. Thank you.

CJP 14th November 2026