



## Prize Giving Speech 2017

Mrs Hamilton, Captain Ablett, Sisters, ladies and gentlemen and girls – welcome. It is a delight to see so many of you this evening.

This is always a significant event in the school year. We come together as a community to look back over the last year – focussing on personal and school achievements in a whole host of arenas, academic, sporting, musical and dramatic as well as unique successes that enrich the lives of all involved. We are delighted that many of last year's Upper Sixth and Year 11 are here with us tonight. This really is an evening for celebration and happy reflection.

I think it apposite to begin by acknowledging the fact that later in the month on the 21 November our Sisters, the Religious of Christian Education will be celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> year of their foundation. Established by Abbé Louis Lafosse in the aftermath and void caused by the upheaval of the French Revolution of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century this religious order was founded in Normandy specifically to educate young women, who for too long, were poorly, if educated at all.

The humble beginnings of the order, made up of just four young nuns, belie the significance and impact they, and those that were to follow, have made on society,

These four women made two vows – those of obedience and chastity. They promised their lives to God, and to perform faithfully the duties required in order to give a full education to the young people entrusted to them.

The founding ideals of the order were based upon mercy and forgiveness; as well as the love of truth and desire to help people to grow fully. How was this to be achieved? Through creating a happy environment – we, and countless generations, have reaped the rewards of this commitment.

This vision and the espoused values have remained of utter importance to the Sisters through the decades. These aims include the mission of the education of the whole person, developing the talents of all, ensuring that women play a significant role in society and fostering leadership in all areas; at all times allowing people to grow to be the very best version of themselves.

The world of 2017 is so very changed from the rural parish of Echauffour, where the order was founded; the demands, challenges and ambitions have magnified, and yet when I say to you that “children have never had a greater need than today of an education and good example” I am speaking not my own words but those of Lafosse. The same is true when we consider the long-term aspect of our work at school, as we, in conjunction with families seek to help each girl to develop and become an agent of change. Again, I use the words of Lafosse when looking to see the long-term role education will have on our girls as I say, “some seeds take longer to come up but which, nonetheless, do grow and bear fruit”. This is pertinent today as it was in 1817.

I am truly impressed by the vision of Lafosse, a man not of his time, but one that saw the merit and need to support young women. A man that inspired those around him, to follow his lead and make a difference in society. A brave man who had the courage of his convictions and faith to challenge the norms of society that were too narrow in their opportunities. We at Farnborough Hill have much to be grateful to him and the Sisters for – as we continue their legacy; to inspire, to encourage and to engage young women.

The idea that education must be complete and rounded and happy, and the bid to serve the Lord joyfully and wholeheartedly should be watchwords to us as we go about our business, and it certainly is tonight as we celebrate success in all its guises.

This academic year began with the eagerly anticipated public examination results. Once more the girls of Farnborough Hill proved that they can deliver in the highly competitive academic realm. A level results were met with a real sense of achievement. 47% were A\* and A, while 90% were A\* to C. This compares most favourably to past years and indicates once more that year on year a Farnborough Hill education is of huge value.

This excellent start has allowed our girls to follow their academic dreams to a range of universities, where they are reading the full gambit of subjects: from Finance at Bath, Biochemistry at Birmingham, Medicine at Southampton, Drama at Bristol, Liberal Arts at Durham and Music at Sussex - we are proud of these examples and indeed all our girls.

Particular mention should be made of Ellie House, reading History at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, Charlotte Dannatt reading Biomedical Science at St John's College, Oxford and Lily Becket who has secured a place to read Classics and English next year at Regent's Park College, Oxford.

AS results bode very well for the coming year. 41% of all grades achieved were A. The AS has served as a useful midway point for girls to evaluate their progress to date and we have been impressed by the level of effort and focus girls put into capturing these grades. However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that this qualification is not given full weight by universities and employers. The best universities are simply making offers based on 3 A level results – the grades for which must be achieved at the end of the two years, rather than being carried forward from the Lower Sixth. We are therefore mindful that for many of our girls in the future it will be in their best interest to see the AS simply as an exit certificate rather than looking to be examined at the end of Lower Sixth in all their subjects.

Academic achievements are not simply confined to A level. The EPQ programme is growing in value - universities are mindful of the skills and approaches it develops. We are certainly advocates of it, and look forward to it growing in popularity in the coming years. This year's trail-blazers included Hannah Bollons, Charlotte Dannatt, Sarah Gammer, Emilie Langdon and Alex Woods. Their projects covered interesting and specific subjects, such as the impact of the Vietnam War, the integration of asylum seekers on Swedish society, the way autistic children are accommodated in education and the consequences of nanotechnology. Their reward was twofold, a string of superb results - one A\*, two As, three Cs, and the satisfaction of getting fully immersed in a subject of particular interest.

Success was not confined merely to Sixth Form achievements. We are incredibly proud of our GCSE candidates. Always a challenge for young people as they face the rigours of national

testing, this time the tension was more so given that in many subjects the curriculum has expanded and in Mathematics and English grading was by a new system, specifically designed to tackle the grade inflation of recent years. The question asked both near and far – how would this effect results? Well at Farnborough Hill anxieties were allayed in late August with the results achieved. A\*, and grades 8 & 9 made up over one quarter of our total results. Indeed, the grade 9 – seen as the very best nationally, and certainly rarer than the A\* it replaces was awarded 22 times. Overall the pupils achieved across the board and our A\* – C results were a fabulous 98%.

Our girls' results are testament to their hard work, positive attitude, thirst for learning and the huge commitment and inspiration on the part of the teaching staff - these results really are a team effort.

Prior to examination in GCSE subjects, we award scholarships for study at Farnborough Hill in the Sixth Form in several categories. These are given to young women that we believe have shown talent and indeed potential for the rigours of the coming years as well as acting as excellent role models – embodying the spirit of Farnborough Hill. So, while the talent may vary from skills in different spheres academic, to sporting to creativity – the approach to life and willingness to work hard are the same.

It was a great pleasure to award the following Sixth Form scholarships for 2017 – 2019:

Academic scholarships to Emily Bird, Kimran Birring, Samantha Perryman, Isabella Rainier, Ciara Smith, Abigail Terry, Madeleine Wayland and Hannah Wilson.

Sports Scholarships to Isabella Bretherton, Chloe Wells.

Performing Arts Scholarships to Sophie Farrelly, Natasha Selby, Lauren Fowler.

Old Girls' Scholarship to Tegan Williams.

And for scholarships for exceptional achievement at GCSE to Thalia Smale and Sophia Broxis.

We are proud of our scholars, but this should not give the impression that this is all that matters at Farnborough Hill – the truth is far from that. We are committed to the belief that all children have their own gifts and talents – therefore each member of our community can make a valuable contribution to it. Time and time again this is proved to be the case – the very fact that each of our Upper Sixth girls has a responsibility position is indicative of our faith in the pupils. There is scope and expectation for everyone to play their part. This diverse group was led last year calmly, diplomatically and wisely by Anna Martinovic and Olivia Pockett – I thank them for their care and diligence.

An area we are often recognised as enjoying success in is sport. Our philosophy of encouraging participation is wholly endorsed by the number of pupils who get involved. The range of extracurricular activities is most pleasing, and I am particularly encouraged that virtually every girl in Years 7 – 11 voluntarily took part in a sporting activity. We all know the value both physically and mentally that exercise brings – it is heartening to know our girls relish the opportunities provided.

Deciding what to speak of this evening was really my only challenge as the diversity and level of achievement in this area is most impressive. Therefore, I have scaled it down to mentioning our major sports.

### **Netball**

At the U15 District Netball Tournament our A Team were Runners up, at the District League they were Champions and were also the Ison Versatility Tournament Runners up.

In Pool B, our U15 B Team at the District Netball Tournament were Runners Up, as was our U16 Team. The U16 Squad came in 3<sup>rd</sup> place at the Hampshire County Netball Tournament.

### **Hockey**

The U16 Hockey Team were 4<sup>th</sup> at the Hampshire County Hockey Tournament and Hannah Macdonald and Amy Collier were selected for the Futures Cup Hockey.

### **Cross Country**

The U15 Team are the Intermediate District Cross Country Champions and U17 Team the Senior District Cross Country Runners up.

Charlotte Dannatt represented Hampshire at the English Schools Cross Country Championships and finished in 28<sup>th</sup> place out of over 300 runners and was also the first Hampshire runner to finish. She has been recognized by the Aldershot and District Schools Athletics Association for her outstanding contribution to the sport and was awarded the Vice-President's Trophy here at school.

### **Athletics**

The U15 Team are the Intermediate District Athletics Champions and the Hampshire County Track Knock Out Champions whilst the U17 Team were runners up at the District Combined Events.

### **Rounders**

The Year 10 Team were runners up at the District Rounders League.

### **Cricket**

At a national level we have enjoyed basking in the success of Providence Cowdrill who Captained the U17 Hampshire Cricket team to 3<sup>rd</sup> place nationally.

### **Music**

The musical life of the school continues to flourish - an eclectic and inspiring varied programme of extracurricular music runs, with rehearsals before school, at break and at lunchtime almost every day of the week. Following a minor re-structuring of the ensembles, both the level of participation and the standard of the ensembles has, on the back of the girls' commitment, dedication and skill, increased.

80 girls successfully took practical or theory exams with the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music or other similar boards, including five girls who passed the prestigious

ABRSM Grade 8 Examination. Over 25% of those entered for examination passed with distinction.

Major events are as follows and I mention them chronologically:

### **Christmas Term**

- Swing Band and Rock Choir performed at Hartley Wintney as part of the International Day of the Elder Person.
- Senior Choir sang for the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice alongside the Rushmoor Male Voice Choir, at Farnborough Hill.
- A packed Musical Soirée in St Cecilia's featured some of the new ensembles and recordings of GCSE Compositions.
- Senior Choir sung Evensong at Christ Church, Oxford and also provided music for Mass of the Holy Spirit, All Saints, Community Feast Day, Remembrance Service, and the Advent Carol Service.
- Swing Band entertained the guests at the Christmas Bazaar.
- All the school's major ensembles performed in the Christmas Celebration.

### **Easter Term**

- Flute Concert in St. Cecilia's featuring the Jazz Trio and flute pupils.
- Again the Choir had an opportunity to sing Evensong – this time at Salisbury Cathedral.
- A huge success was the Easter Concert in the Chapel including a massed choir performance of Fauré Requiem and the premiere of a piece written specifically for the Flute Quartet.

### **Summer Term**

- The Swing Band, Orchestra and Year 7/Junior Choir performed on Open Morning and later in the term the Swing Band visited St. Augustine's Care Home to provide open-air entertainment for the residents.
- The year was brought to a compelling close by the Senior Choir Tour to Prague, consisting of four sell-out concerts, plus Mass at St. Vitus Cathedral.

### **Drama**

The opportunities and richness of experiences offered in this area of school is really wonderful, in terms of whole school productions, as well as small group activities by way of Trinity examinations and the curriculum.

To start with the senior school production, an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in March was simply a triumph. This involved an impressive number of girls both on stage and behind the scenes. Theatre on the Hill was transformed into Mr and Mrs Bennet's home – Longbourn Estate. It made for a stunning backdrop in which the story of the various affairs and matters of the heart were debated and eventually resolved. Double casts performed to packed houses on four occasions showing emotion, humour and even performing authentic Georgian dances.

Other performances during the year included the A level set exam pieces, devised and scripted – *Life Goes On*, *Golden Doors* and *Hansel and Gretel* – each powerful and engaging in their own ways.

Year 11 were not to be outdone, their various devised pieces demonstrated a wide range of thought-provoking topics and subjects showing originality and flare.

Many girls take Trinity Drama examinations with 75 taking them last year, they work together to devise or learn scripted pieces and perform, examined from Grade 1 to 8. It is always a great joy to attend these performances, and even more of a boon to note that 90% of our candidates gained a distinction in their exam.

## **Charity Events**

Farnborough Hill has always held dear the idea of serving the wider community, and it behoves us to consider and work on the behalf of those that are less fortunate than we – we should favour the least. I am immensely proud of the school's giving nature. We have raised money for all manner of good causes – from Book Aid International to the Little Princess Trust to cancer charities including Breast Cancer Now and Macmillan Cancer Support

We work to educate in school and support outside. Girls are keen to introduce us to charities close to their hearts and these include smaller initiatives such as the Next Chapter Animal Rescue as well as more well-established organisations such as the Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Regular annual fundraising events that we are always keen to support are the charities CAFOD and Phyllis Tuckwell. Our commitment over the years is notable, yet it is the energy that the girls bring to the events that is truly commendable; last year the girls managing to persuade and cajole the staff into a fundraising talent show to raise funds for CAFOD. Our charity work reaches so far that in March we were presented by the National Citizen Service (NCS) with their Champion School status based on the volume of pupils volunteering in their programmes.

## **Young Enterprise**

This initiative has grown in popularity over the years, the level of business acumen and transferable skills of teamwork, communication and creativity have been impressive. It is not just the words of a proud Head – this is evaluated in the same way by various judges.

For instance, the company Quotes and Co scooped the top prize for the best overall company at a trade fair in Basingstoke. While in Farnborough, this and the other two companies Mariposa and Glo took all the prizes available, moving on to larger success in Southampton - Glo and Mariposa came first and second respectively in the judging at West Quays Trade Fair. All 3 companies reached the prestigious area final, which Glo won overall on the night. Mariposa achieved best company report.

Communicating is something we do really well. Our Year 10 public speaking team, coached by Mrs Campbell, made up of Tabitha Minson, Verity Powell and Shika Desai, speaking on the subject of "Oppressive language does more than represent violence, it is violence", moved seemingly effortlessly through the competitions at local, district and regional level – going on to compete at the National Level in the Winston Churchill English Speaking Union public speaking final.

All this, in the same year that our senior Rotary Youth Speaks team, coached by Mrs Winch-Johnson, comprising Catriona Flesher, Roisin Royle and Imogen Usherwood became National Champions delivering the most incisive and thought-provoking talk on the issue of social media – a speech in fact entitled, ‘There is nothing social in social media’. A topic that our speaker, Catriona, notices has now become topical in The Economist; we were there first!

## **Trips**

Outside of the curriculum the girls ably led and encouraged by the staff have visited and engaged with activities and locations all across the world. From the Physics students trip to Cern in Switzerland, to the Classics expedition to Pompeii and Herculaneum, the History visit to Berlin, languages trip to Spain and the Geography Department’s 10-day visit to China - we have looked to feed the girls hunger for knowledge and adventure.

## **Duke of Edinburgh’s Award**

Closer to home, but in no way less challenging, indeed at times the blisters and aches would tell a different story, the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme has expanded and really gained in status. The enthusiasm and commitment of staff and volunteers, prepared to give up time in such a generous way has helped the girls, already keen to follow through and take up and achieve the challenge. I am a huge proponent of the scheme as I thoroughly endorse the aspects of personal determination, alongside volunteering and developing skills – I am not alone in this regard; the statistics speak for themselves.

59 Year 10 took part in Bronze DofE, completing their qualifying expedition in the New Forest.  
42 Year 9 also started their Bronze award in 2016-17.

We had 8 girls preparing for Gold last year. They completed their practice expedition in the Dark Peaks in the Peak District in June, and their qualifying expedition in the Keswick area of the Lake District in August/September.

Focus has been given in this last year on inspiring our girls – no more so than through co-curricular activities designed to let pupils lead, question and engage in ideas.

For instance, sixth formers led discussion forums – ‘Can poverty ever be eradicated?’ and ‘The psychology behind social conformity’ (Christmas term 2016) as well as an educational session on the lessons to be learnt from Auschwitz.

While other events involved participation in Teen Tech and election activities in June.

## **Chaplaincy**

Of course, the spiritual aspect of school underpins all. This was brought home by the focus of Retreat Week – “Building on Firm Foundations” where girls looked at what their lives / beliefs / morals / behaviour are founded on. Girls were encouraged to unpack these values and expectations creatively and work collaboratively. The Upper Sixth Retreat was focused on walking the labyrinth, representative of our journey of life.

Earlier in the year we were very proud to host the Catholic Independent School Conference Chaplaincy Day - a great day to share together and develop ideas to enrich our Catholic mission. Input included Godly Play, working in an Ignatian way, and praying with Scripture.

It would be wholly wrong not to mention again at this point, the incredible achievement of the RCE celebrating this year it's 200 years of existence – an event we continue to celebrate. One such commemoration was our whole school tea in June.

### **Staff Leavers and New Staff**

There is no doubt that the school year passes at a rapid rate – the hive of activity that is a school makes for a busy, purposeful and dynamic environment – in some ways ever-changing while in others a bastion of stability and security. And yet change is a reality. This is always made clear when we come to the end of a school year and wish our leavers well as they go into the world to begin the next chapter of their adventure called life. This is both true of young women for whom this has been their school, but also the staff. The teachers who have devoted so much energy and professionalism upon their charges here – no matter how long serving or how senior, each has had an impact upon the school – leaving us with their unique footprint.

This year we acknowledged, thanked and wished well: Mrs Anne Griffiths (Deputy Head – Academic), Mr Jeremy Hoar (Assistant Head), Mrs Jenny Cornelius-Green (Head of Extracurricular PE), Mrs Sarah Bond (Teacher of Textiles), Mrs Jaimee Nix (Teacher of D & T), Mrs Alex Barker and Miss Rebecca Peters (both Teachers of Mathematics) and Miss Sheila Farmer (Chaplain), resigning in the summer but continuing to support the school until the new year as well as Rob Wallis our resident caretaker for over 17 years and Mike Mellor in the ICT team.

Our new staff, building upon the work of their predecessors and promising so much are: Mrs Zoe Ireland (Deputy Head – Academic), Mrs Carmel Landowski (Head of Classics), Mr Mark Sinclair (Temporary Head of English), Mr Joseph Adams (Teacher of Music and Mathematics), Mr William Maxwell (Teacher of Mathematics), Mrs Pauline McFadden (Teacher of Science and ICT), Mrs Alex Johnstone (Temporary Teacher of History), Mrs Liz Larkin (Teacher of D & T), Ms Denise Dolan (Teacher of Art) and Mrs Michelle Blockley (Counsellor). We will soon be joined by two new staff Mrs Nicole Kirby (Teacher of English) replacing Mrs Rachel Inman in January and Mrs Nelle Dalton (Chaplain).

It has been a wonderful year, certainly for the school community and for me personally. The satisfaction of being part of such a vibrant community is so very positive. An evening such as this, when we have the opportunity to look back and reflect on the activities, events and triumphs of the year really is joyful. So, I thank you for your indulgence. But a paradox remains: this past year has been unique in so many ways for the girls involved and yet it remains an example of the standard we must always offer our girls and build upon as we continue to aspire for excellence.

Thank you.

Mrs Alexandra Neil  
10 November 2017