



Principal's Address at Prize-giving 10 September 2009

My Lord, Dean, Directors, Ladies, Gentlemen, Staff and boys.

May I start this evening by saying how very proud I am to be addressing you as Principal of Elizabeth College for the first time at Prize-giving in this magnificent hall. As much of what I have to say will, of course, relate to last year, I would also like to make an honourable disclaimer and pay tribute to the work and leadership of my predecessor Dr. Argent. If I am standing here next year with just as much to boast about, I will be absolutely thrilled and believe that Dr Argent deserves appropriate recognition , albeit in absentia.

When I sat down to write this address, I received two pieces of advice from my senior team; 'keep it short' one said 'don't be dull' said the other. I had no idea they had heard one of my speeches before.

At this time tradition rightfully allows tributes to be paid to the longest-serving members of staff who retired at the end of last year. Mr Cross, Director of Studies, left us after 36 years of distinguished service in a variety of senior positions. He will be long remembered not only for his considerable development of the Classics department, but also his refined scholarship and extensive contributions to the musical and dramatic life of the school. Having guided the school skilfully through 3 inspections and in the words of Mr. Cottam, 'seen off four Principals', his legacy at Elizabeth College is a hugely significant one. Mr Cross cannot be with us this evening as I believe he is travelling in Macedonia, no doubt squinting at some dusty Roman mosaic as I speak. However, I think it is right to mark his remarkable contribution to Elizabeth College in the usual way.

Head of Physics Mr Higgins retired after 41 years at the College, the last remaining appointee of Headmaster JK Day who you will hear mentioned amongst the prizes this evening. Mr Higgins contributed greatly to sailing, CCF and Duke of Edinburgh programme at College and latterly as Careers Officer and in his strong leadership of the Physics department, maintaining excellent academic standards during a phase of much change in the science curriculum of secondary schools.

Mrs Dudley also left us, having spent 11 years at College, nine of which were as Head of the Modern Foreign Languages faculty. Having bravely fought against the tide at a time when modern languages has suffered decline in many schools, especially boys ones, it is a great tribute to her that numbers have remained stable and that we still teach three modern languages when many other schools have thrown in the towel and reduced to two. Both Mr Higgins and Mrs Dudley deserve our most sincere thanks.

While on his summer holiday in Devon, a School Inspector went up to a local farmer and said, 'If I can guess how many sheep are in your field, will you give me one?'

The farmer was taken aback but agreed to the deal.

The Inspector surveyed the field, made a quick mental calculation and gave his answer, '182'.

'Correct' said the farmer, "Choose a sheep".

As The Inspector was trying to get his prize into the back of his car, the farmer came over and asked if he could have a chance to win back the animal.

'If I can guess what you do for a job, will you return my fine beast?'

The Inspector agreed.

'You are an Inspector of Schools,' the Farmer said.

'How did you know that?' he replied.

'Well it's easy: you arrived uninvited, told me something I already knew; and charged me for the privilege'.

I cannot let this evening pass without mentioning the spectacularly good inspection report this school was awarded last April. In the eight inspection categories, Elizabeth College received the highest possible grading in four of them.

- Quality of Pastoral Care – outstanding
- Quality of links with parents and the community – outstanding

- Quality of Governance - outstanding
- Quality of SMSC – outstanding (for those of you wondering that is Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development)

The other four categories were all graded good (the 2nd category) but all with the caveat ‘though in many areas, also outstanding’.

Needless to say this is all rather intimidating for me and I don’t want to dwell on it too long, knowing what very big boots I have to fill! In the meantime, however, let us applaud those responsible for such accolades; the staff and directors of Elizabeth College.

This is undoubtedly a very high quality school and truly one to cherish on this island of ours, a school with a great tradition of all-round educational excellence, community support and inclusivity. Which brings me on to the more traditional aspects of this report.

Exam results this last summer, were again extremely impressive. At GCSE, for the third year running we achieved a 100% pass rate in compulsory core subjects with half of our pupils gaining 7 or more grades at A* or A. At A level very nearly half of all the grades awarded were at A grade, with fifteen boys achieving three straight A grades or more. You will be hearing, of course, the names of those individuals who have achieved academic excellence when the prizes are awarded later.

I have always been a great supporter of such scholarship and there is no doubt that particularly in our Sixth Form, there is opportunity to continue extending and stretching all our students’ minds. I see this is as vital, having read a sobering statistic recently that there are more straight A* pupils in China than there are pupils in the whole of Britain. Because the truth is that for many of our students, you will not be competing with the best in Channel Islands and Britain in your lifetimes, you will be competing with the best in the world. It’s not so much ‘Guernsey’s Got Talent’ or even ‘Britain’s Got Talent’ – as ‘The World’s Got Talent’. Before this all sounds too daunting, however, I do believe that schools such as Elizabeth College can and will produce young men to stay ahead of the burgeoning pack.

Because as my own headmaster used to say, ‘qualifications may get you the interview, but who you are will get you the job’. And as we all know, who we are cannot simply be defined by letters and pieces of paper. After all it was one of the greatest scholars the world has ever

known, Albert Einstein, who said 'Education is what survives when what has been learnt has been forgotten'.

And this naturally leads me to recognition of those aspects of a school education endearingly referred to recently by my 14 year old nephew as 'all that other stuff', namely sport and extra-curricular activities. One of the reasons I wanted to be Principal of this school is the fact that it does 'all that other stuff' so incredibly well. Not only is it essential for the development of character and emotional intelligence, allowing what Plato referred to as 'the simultaneous and harmonious development of all aspects of the human personality', but it also vitally gives opportunity for many pupils to excel at school in their own individual way.

Last week, with various tasks accumulating rapidly on my desk, I felt obliged to play the new boy card and knowing that I had this report to write, I sent out a plea to all staff requesting that they let me know about any significant events or achievements in last year's sporting and extra-curricular programme. The tsunami of information that was returned caught me quite off guard and I have spent this last week trying to rationalize and reduce this part of the report. And what a great testament to this school that as well as the standard successes in mainstream activities one would expect of a flourishing independent school, I was also informed that pupils had achieved top 3 national positions in archery, cycling time trials and dinghy sailing competitions and that a group of boys had started sea rowing; an activity, along with many others, superbly supported by the ongoing work and generosity of the Friends of Elizabeth College.

So forgive me but if we are going to get these prizes awarded, which I think is quite important this evening, I will only be able to refer to some of the key highlights of last year's broader educational programme.

Mr Aplin sent out an email to all staff last week asking if anybody knew of someone who could help out the College with some horse-riding practice. His reasoning was sound; having again come 1st in the Public Schools Fencing championships, 3rd nationally in the Ashburton at Bisley, 4th in the medley relay at the English schools swimming finals and with a current crop of outstanding middle-distance runners, all we need is a little show-jumping practice in order for College boys to make a clean sweep of medals in the Modern Pentathlon at the forthcoming 2012 London Olympics.

Arguably more importantly than the Olympics, College enjoyed a successful year against Victoria College, Jersey. The hockey 1st and 2nd teams won their matches, the cricket 1st XI won a thrilling home fixture on the very last ball with only 1 wicket left and the Haines Shield for shooting was comfortably retained by a margin of 40 points at Bisley.

Senior football had a relatively modest season by previous standards though there is much excitement regarding future prospects, especially with an undefeated Year 7 side and the Year 8 team winning the Guernsey Schools league. Rugby continues to develop at College and the 1st XV secured a well-deserved victory in the annual grudge match vs. Grammar. All such sports will undoubtedly benefit from the new pavilion being currently built at Memorial Field. Funded out of the recent Foundation appeal, helped in particular by the generosity of parents, old boys and the Old Elizabethan Association, it is hoped this marvelous new structure and facility will be opened in the new year.

Outstanding sporting achievements of an individual nature include Michael Creber, as seen in the Press today, for being selected for the Great Britain Athelings shooting team, Adam Clark for representing the U16 England Hockey team, Hywel Robinson for setting new records and winning Gold in the 4x400m for Guernsey at the Island Games, James Jurkeiwicz and Joshua Lewis for winning Gold in swimming events at the same event and Pierre Ozanne for being made Senior Master at Arms, that is best fencer, at the Public Schools Fencing championships.

It was an incredibly busy year for the Combined Cadet Force, Duke of Edinburgh programme and School Scouts group, all of which have long and distinguished histories of participation at College. Life-enhancing trips to Corsica and the Cairngorms, success for all our groups in the gruelling Ten Tors challenge, a highly impressive General Inspection at Government House led by our new Corps of Drums and 55 life saving awards as well as a multitude of various leadership awards and scholarship courses undertaken.

And last but by no means least, I am delighted to report that the standards of art, music and drama at College continue to excel and be the envy of other schools on the island. The Art department held a well-received exhibition in the Princess Elizabeth Hospital and won best art school display at the Eistedfodd, Music goes from strength to strength with record numbers in the choir and five major concerts in the course of the year and Drama, with a completely sold-out, 3 day run of the musical Oliver!, featuring boys from Year 7 to the Upper Sixth and a live

band provided by the music department, as well as an excellent all-male production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* later in the year.

The breathtaking scope of all such activities reminds me of Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings* telling Frodo 'all we have to decide is what to do with the time we have been given'. It seems to me that as a Year 7 pupil, deciding what to do with your time at Elizabeth College could be a pretty intimidating task.

All of these activities and the academic achievements of which we are about to hear, strongly rely, of course, upon the spades of effort and enthusiasm provided by College staff and I would therefore finally like to end this address by paying tribute again to those people sitting behind me. Thank you.