

Speech by Mr Mark Rosevear, Principal

What is the purpose of this assembly? It might sound like an odd question, but it is worth asking. It cannot be to say goodbye to our year 6 students, because we have already done that, although I am pleased to see some of them back with us again. It certainly provides an opportunity for all of us to come together, something I have said before we need to do more often. As far as I understand today is called Prize-Giving, and when you look at the schedule, there are a lot of prizes to be awarded. Logically that means at least a part of the assembly must be a celebration of success. Some people believe that we should not necessarily celebrate success because not everyone succeeds.

Our mission statement states, that we will *'strive for the highest standards'*. It is better to aim high, and not quite get there, than to aim low and achieve a low goal. This ceremony is to acknowledge those who have done well, whether it be through academics, sports, the arts or otherwise. But not all the awards are for those who came first. There are others for effort, or attitude, and these are equally important, for our mission statement also says that we want our students *'to strive to develop their talents to the best of their abilities'*. That is why we can celebrate success at different levels.

It is true that not everyone can win, or at least not all of the time, but because one person does not win, it seems wrong to not celebrate the success of the person who did do well. Rudyard Kipling said that we should *'meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two imposters just the same'*. We have to learn to succeed and fail, because nobody in history has ever succeeded all the time. I remember watching an interview with one of the great and most successful All Black captains, Sean Fitzpatrick. He was asked which games he remembered most. He spoke of about four, and then the interviewer interrupted saying, 'but Sean, you lost all those games'. Fitzpatrick's point was clear. Those were the games that drove him and others to try harder and achieve more. This was where they learned. A system whereby everyone is rewarded is both unrealistic and detrimental to learning. Sir Winston Churchill, always a good source for quotes, said that *'Success consists of going from failure to failure without any loss of enthusiasm.'* Or as the old saying goes, 'if you don't succeed, try, try and try again'.

Another part of our mission statement says that students should have a *'sense of belonging, a deep rooted pride and affection for the school as an institution its traditions, school spirit and institutional memory'* as well as a *'profound sense of empathy and an awareness of their responsibility to their community'*. Many writers have said that communities no longer exist in the modern world. They do, but they have changed. Previously everyone understood they were part of a community, whereas these days the real world, the virtual world, truth, post truth, history, fact all seem to have become blurred and it is hard to know what is real and what is not.

There are more pressures on a community because of the distractions caused by the unprecedented rise of instant communications. As little as 15 years ago, phones were just phones and the internet was in its relative infancy. One effect of the internet is that we are bombarded with information. One event moves into another without pause for thought. The internet has seen the end of 'experts' and informed opinion. Anyone can contribute and millions do, without any real knowledge of the subject they are commenting on. Benjamin Franklin commented that *'Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain and most fools do.'* But remember, this is our community, and every action by every one of you reflects on the people here, and the people who came before you and will come after you. The British Schools is in its 110th year, and is physically unrecognizable from the school it has been over those years. As are you, the students. Look back at the pictures, the clothing, the fashion and you will see it has never stayed the same. However, the core beliefs have not changed. The community might look different, but it is still our community and we are proud to be a part of it.

All talk of the present, or the future, seems to be full of doom. The people who generally make these comments are older people. I am certainly not a young person, but I am optimistic about the future. I think young people today have greater opportunities than before, not only for themselves but to contribute to their communities. Henrik Ibsen, wrote that *'a community is like a ship. Everybody must be prepared to take the helm.'* At times, you

will need to lead, so be prepared take the initiative and do the best for your school community in whatever way you can.

Congratulations to all of you who have won a prize here today. And congratulations to all of you here who have done your best but not won a prize. If you have done your best, then you have succeeded as well.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the staff here for their hard work during the year.

I hope you all enjoy your summer holidays. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New year to everyone.