



Spring Assembly – Head Teacher’s Address



Friday 3rd April 2020

Good morning to all of you. In normal circumstances we would end this term with a whole school assembly in Wellington Church. This gives us the opportunity to come together as a school community, reflect on the successes of the term, hear from our school captains Ellie and Ronen and enjoy some excellent performances from our musicians. This year, we cannot be together in person at the end of term but it is still important to remember that we are part of a whole school community and so, rather than delivering my usual Head Teacher’s Address at the assembly, I am emailing it to you all instead.

All of our whole school assemblies focus on one of our five school values of kindness, ambition, integrity, resilience and respect. The planned focus for this assembly is ambition. As a school community we define ambition as having the highest expectations for ourselves and others and we see examples of such ambition every day in our school in so many different ways: in classes or supported study; our leadership academies; our clubs, groups and sports teams and your work with mentors to name just a few. Normally at this time of year our S5 and S6 pupils would be just weeks away from sitting their SQA exams and I would be wishing them well with their studying over the break. This year, of course, is very different and while school (and life) is about far, far more than exams, I do not underestimate how tough the last month has been for our senior pupils and I could not be prouder of how you have handled this unprecedented situation.

Those of you who have been to a number of these assemblies will know that I always like to share something from what I have been reading that term. This time though I have drawn inspiration from a film called *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* which tells the true story of a man called Fred Rogers. Fred Rogers was a much-loved American television presenter and writer who created a wonderful children’s programme called *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* that ran for over 30 years. Towards the end of his life, Mr Rogers was asked to give the 2002 Dartmouth College commencement address. A commencement address is a speech given to graduating students and the speaker gets the opportunity to share some words of wisdom on what they believe matters most in life. If you want to hear all of Mr Rogers’ speech you can find it here: <https://news.dartmouth.edu/news/2018/03/revisiting-fred-rogers-2002-commencement-address>

I would like to highlight the following section of his speech though as I think it is particularly relevant to us today:



KINDNESS



AMBITION



INTEGRITY



RESILIENCE



RESPECT

I have a lot of framed things in my office, which people have given to me through the years. Beside my chair, is a French sentence from Saint-Exupery's Little Prince. It reads, "L'essential est invisible pour les yeux." What is essential is invisible to the eye. Well, what is essential about you? And who are those who have helped you become the person you are? Anyone who has ever graduated from a college, anyone who has ever been able to sustain a good work, has had at least one person, and often many, who have believed in him or her. We just don't get to be competent human beings without a lot of different investments from others.

I'd like to give you all an invisible gift. A gift of a silent minute to think about those who have helped you become who you are today. Some of them may be here right now. Some may be far away. Some, like my astronomy professor, may even be in Heaven. But wherever they are, if they've loved you, and encouraged you, and wanted what was best in life for you, they're right inside yourself. And I feel that you deserve quiet time, on this special occasion, to devote some thought to them. So, let's just take a minute, in honour of those that have cared about us all along the way.

[One silent minute.]

Whomever you've been thinking about, imagine how grateful they must be, that during your silent times, you remember how important they are to you.

It's not the honours and the prizes, and the fancy outsides of life which ultimately nourish our souls. It's the knowing that we can be trusted. That we never have to fear the truth. That the bedrock of our lives, from which we make our choices, is very good stuff.

If you did pause for the minute of silence while reading Mr Roger's words - as the college graduates did when he delivered his speech - then I'm sure you were able to think of someone who has had a big impact on your life. I thought of my mum who always supported me, who passed on a love of reading and who valued kindness above all else in people. You may have thought of a parent, grandparent, brother or sister, friend, teacher, mentor or someone else important to you. You may have thought of someone that you cannot see in person just now and who you are really missing.

To our pupils, I would like to say on behalf of all the staff we miss you more than you know: we miss spending time with you in class, during MTA or at lunchtimes or after school; we miss your humour and your kindness and your personalities; we miss the little interactions that take place every day and that are taken for granted until we are apart. We know it is hard for you not seeing your friends at school and, while we love seeing the work you are doing at home, we know it is not the same as seeing you every day. It is hard for our staff too, not to be together in school and we are all trying to find ways to stay connected to each other while we cannot be together in person. We are incredibly lucky to be part of a wonderful school community who are working together to look after each other. Our Parent Council are doing an incredible job supporting our school in so many ways and even delivered lots of chocolate treats to staff a few weeks ago. In a time when the news can be



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overwhelming, it is so helpful to focus on the many acts of gratitude and kindness we can and do show each other.

The second key message Mr Rogers makes is that we must not get caught up with the “fancy outsides of life” and this is also very apt for our current situation. Many of us will be communicating a lot more through social media just now, but often what is presented on Instagram or Facebook is a very idealised version of reality. Pupils might see examples of peers posting images or clips of some amazing work they have done to social media and feel bad about their own efforts; teachers might see video clips of colleagues who appear to have become overnight IT gurus and feel inadequate by comparison; parents and carers might be seeing perfect images of home schooling and despair that this is not their reality as they try to juggle work with supporting their children. We need to let go of these false comparisons and remember to see ourselves through the eyes of those who know us and love us and value us. We are all learning our way. We will make mistakes. We are all doing our best. If we continue to remember we are part of a great community then we will find a way through these unprecedented times.

To sum up by returning to the value of ambition: your ambition for this most unusual holiday should be to be proud of all you have coped with in the past few weeks, to take a break, to stay safe but most of all to be very, very kind to yourself and to others in your life. Never forget you are all made of very good stuff!



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