

Headmaster's Prize Day Address by Dr. S.J. McGuinness

Friday 12th September 2008



Mr Chairman, Mayor Chivers, Ms McGregor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

I am delighted to welcome our many distinguished visitors especially our Mayor and our chief guest Mrs Anne McGregor.

I am pleased to present the report for the year 2007-08, another chapter in the story of this great school. Day by day, month by month, year by year we each contribute our own piece of the story. If you're sitting comfortably, then I'll begin.

We welcomed some new faces to our staff in September; Mr Brian Purcell joined physics, replacing Mr Ken Smith, and Miss Martina McLaughlin took over as Head of chemistry, taking the place of Mrs Carol Crown, a lady who gave years of wonderful service to the school, both in the chemistry classroom and out as she tended to those who needed pastoral support. Miss Joanne Feeney was recruited to teach chemistry. Mrs Heather McAlister was appointed as Home Economics Technician, Mr Peter Campbell as Physics Technician replacing Mrs Freda Kennedy and Miss Charlotte McDonald as appointed as art technician. During the year Mrs Pauline Robinson left our office staff to be replaced by Miss Audrey Neil.

I congratulate our Head Boy and Head Girl, Richard Robinson and Emma Mitchell for the work they undertook, and for the support they gave during their year in office. Martin Tierney, joint head Boy, left us to start up his own engineering business in December; we wish Martin well.

Each year we have great excitement as our new Year 8 intake sets off to the Bushmills Outdoor Pursuits Centre to get to know each other. This year was no exception, and one of our new students described it as a 'great way to meet new people'.

Our in-service days in August 2007 were focused on the new curriculum. These were rewarding days and were followed up during the year by a series of joint sessions on developing a joint Learning Policy for all the schools and colleges in the Roe Valley Learning Community. This partnership of schools is now recognised by the Minister for Education and her department as an exemplar for all other school groupings in the province. This is a tribute to my colleagues who lead the partner schools. Our partnership has its testing moments, but we support each other with great fondness and good humour. Thanks to our partners we can now offer a range of vocational subjects including Moving Image, Performing Arts, Engineering, Construction and health and Social Care along with our traditional subjects at A-level. Thanks to our partnership schools we are able to offer new sports such as basketball and Gaelic football to our senior students this coming year. A highlight on the Performing Arts side was a joint dance and music presentation at the Waterfront Hall which was judged badly since we should have won! I pay a glowing tribute to the support we receive from Alison Smith and Raymond Moffatt among several others. Raymond and his colleagues have given us great support in implementing the new Curriculum.

We welcomed our French Assistant Aurelie Bernsteiner, our German assistant Dorothea Bobler and our Spanish assistant Ruben Farias- James. Our links with countries in Europe continue to be strong; we have pupil exchanges with Germany, France and, for the first time, Spain, as well a formal link with Bishop's School Sri Lanka. Based on these exchanges and our continuing Comenius projects linking us to several European countries. I am proud to report that just last week we received the accolade of International Schools' Award. We will celebrate this great achievement in a few weeks time when we formally receive the award.

As you are aware, a most significant part of our story is the link we have established with Kenya. The annual walk for Kajiado, Kenya went off well in late April, and we raised £8000 for the project. Our students, staff and friends went off to Kajiado at the end of June and over a period of five weeks laid the foundations of the Boarding School which we are building.

Our annual Readathon raised an amazing £5329.27 making a grand total of almost £43,000 to help children and young people in NI who suffer with cancer; further amounts were raised for UNICEF, Children in Need, the Poppy Appeal, Concern, Salvation Army and Vincent de Paul, British Heart Foundation and Bangladesh. We are involved in much community service, at Cornfields Nursing Home and at the LCDI After Schools Club and Day Care club as well as at Rossmar School.

The Scripture Union had a wonderful chapter this year; apart from their usual very successful Friday meetings, they held lunchtime Bible Study, organised trips to Belfast and Cultra to attend Christian events, a highlight being the visit to the 'Celebration of Hope' in the Waterfront Hall..

As for the school magazine, congratulations go to the staff and students who produce such a bright and interesting read. The magazine gets better and better each year.

Then there are the complications in the story. Our Governors had a challenging year as they faced up to the challenges presented by our Minister for Education. Despite her assertions to the contrary, the St Andrews agreement guarantees that selection is here to stay in Northern Ireland. We have had a series of meetings with the Association for Quality Education, and have committed ourselves to use their Common Entrance Test as part of our selection process for entry to year 8. While I understand the Minister's desire to remove the perception of fail and pass which has dogged the 11+ examination for decades, surely the pragmatic answer lies in developing partnerships of equal but different schools with pupils transferring easily between to access courses which suit them. While we have excellent schools in this borough moving incrementally towards a better future with each school offering a unique ethos, it seems strange to be attempting to end such uniqueness, and to produce, in seven years time a group of comprehensive schools all competing for a shrinking population of pupils and linked funding.

I'm pleased to report that *our* Finance committee has had great success in changing our annual deficit of the past to a small surplus. However, predictions show that we need to be prudent with the resources allocated to us in the next three years.

The Young Enterprise group formed the company 'Creations', and gained a great insight into how companies operate.

The Junior law society had a successful season, competing in the Ulster Mock Trial competition.

The French Debating Team has had marvellous success over the past two years. We weren't able to repeat our great victories this year but the team of Alana Johnston, Laura Knox, Chris Donnell, Lisa McNeill and Naomi Canning wish 'Bon courage' to next year's team.

The School Council met four times. This year the first meeting focused on learning styles in the classroom, and the young people expressed their support for the active style which we promote. Later meetings focused on issues such as a new Summer School uniform. With the guidance of our students we have decided to introduce a simple summer alternative uniform.

The Sentinus engineering team of Warren Keys, Matthew Beattie, Natasha Carton and Julie Pearson were each awarded a prestigious Gold Crest Award recognised by the Royal Academy of Engineering. Our team of Bright Sparks, Jayne Allison, Jonathan Rathfield, Robin Moore, Martin Tierney and Shakiera McIlmoyle made the final of the BBC Technology Challenge.

The Chess Club met regularly, as did the Textiles Club, the Technology Club, the Debating Society and indeed the group who run the School Bank.

The library team of two staff and sixteen student librarians work very hard to provide an excellent service. The library remained a popular place to meet friends and browse the literature.

This year's senior drama production was 'Dancing at Lughnasa', and it proved to be a fabulous production with a small but very powerful cast. Andrew Devlin and Lisa McNeill, Warren Keys and Daniel Mullan have starred in two fabulous productions in a row, and were ably supported by Rachel Currie, Naomi Canning, Naomi Given and Hannah Jack. The wonderful direction given to our young actors and actresses ensured that the production was amazing. I felt tears in my eyes as the curtain closed at the end of this marvellous play. At about the same time the seniors held their Formal Dance and great fun was had by all in the Everglades Hotel.

Late in the year, our junior drama club put on an excellent production in June. 'Cinderella' captivated the audiences each night with Jessica Ferris, Judith Corbett, Mike Lynch and Matthew Ferris outstanding, while Alice Purcell as Buttons commanded the stage. Manon Bartlett and Beth Patenall completed the major parts in this fun production.

The Pottery Club learnt how to throw pots, to slip and score and to glaze. Members came from all year groups in the school including those learning skills for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Study Club was popular with those who wanted a quiet atmosphere to catch up on their work.

Senior students engaged in Community Service through the Limavady Day Care Centre and the Limavady Community Development Initiative playgroup.; the charity committee was active through Children in Need, Operation Christmas Child, St. Valentine's day, and Comic Relief.

The junior and senior Brass Bands entertained us at Christmas and Easter and the Jazz Band thrilled us at both concerts as well as in the Limavady Jazz and Blues Festival and in the very successful Parents' Association dance in May. The string group continued to grow. They were complemented by our boys' rock band. Our Parents' Association held a Jazz and Blues Night and the crowd who turned up had great fun. The school choirs, Junior and Senior, successfully presented ambitious pieces at the Christmas and the Spring concerts. The guitar club met regularly and through the efforts of the staff developed their skills.

Every February we put on Open Nights for prospective year 8 and year 13 pupils. These were so successful that we have achieved our maximum enrolment of 910 this year. I am confident that all our students receive excellent careers advice. A significant development this year was the 'taste and see' experience at the local FE college, through which students have the opportunity to experience a range of vocational subjects with the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, subjects vital for the development of the Northern Ireland economy. I thank and congratulate those who are involved in the Careers department.

Our excellent pastoral care programme encompasses not only employability as I've described; it ranges widely through the topics challenging our youngsters and their parents. An innovation this year was the introduction of a Heart Start programme, through which students in year 10 were given instruction in dealing with emergencies such as a heart attack victim. This session was led by one of our many First Aid experts. Through the work of Mr Chris Little, we have a forty out of seventy-five of our staff holding First Aid Certificates and seven with the four day First Aid at Work qualification.

Our 1st XV rugby team gave us yet another exciting season taking the group of supporters on our annual tour of Ulster. This year we beat Lurgan College in the first round and drew away to Down High in the second round. In an incredible replay we went 14-0 down but fought back and won by 17 points to 14. Unfortunately we were forced to play the next round against a big fresh Grosvenor side just three days later, and despite a courageous display we lost. The Medallion trained and played hard and have developed and matured well as an outfit. We express our gratitude to Ian Gallagher, Jock Wilson, Steven Haslett, Ian McGregor, and the other parents and friends who give generously of their time to coach the boys. Highlight of the year was the visit of the three rugby superstars, Ieuan Evans, Shane Byrne and David Humphreys to launch the Six Nations rugby championships.

We used our new Astroturf surface daily and we were delighted to open it for the use of local sports teams. Soccer players from Limavady and Gaelic players from Dungiven shared the pitch with hockey players from Limavady ladies. Our own hockey teams were on a steep learning curve as they coped with the new Astroturf surface. It was only towards the end of the season that we began to see their potential emerge. The great news is that the young team remains almost completely intact for the new year, so we expect to see sparks, girls.

The soccer players trained hard and played well all season. We put out teams at U-19, U-16, U-15 and U-14 and their hard work paid off as the senior boys won the final of the Halifax Cup against arch-rivals Coleraine Inst.. Philip Lowry scored the winner in that encounter, and the 1st division side Leicester City have expressed a great interest in him. The girls had their most successful season ever, as they won the NI five-a-side trophy and then rounded off their season with the seniors coming runners-up to Thornhill College in the NI Schools Cup and the juniors going one better by winning the Schools Cup in a fabulous final in Cookstown.

Netball continued to be a popular sport and we fielded teams at minor, junior, intermediate and senior levels.

Sports day was a great success; for the past three years the sun has shone on our competitors. Stuart Hull and Chris Rodden were top junior boys while Amylee McIvor and Rachel McSparron were top girls. Forty-five LGS athletes competed in the District Championships. Our outstanding athlete

is Daniel Reid who excels at UK standard in 400m, high jump and 400m hurdles. Among many successes Daniel finished 4th in the 400 m hurdles at the UK School Games in Bath in August.

The Senior Boys' Tennis Team enjoyed some success last year in Section 1 of the Senior Boys' Cup recording victories over Larne Grammar School and Coleraine Inst., only missing out on reaching the semi-finals by losing to a strong Campbell College team.

The swimming club continues to be one of the most popular in the school. Nine of our best competed successfully in the Minor Schools' Championships, and we ran a Gala at all four age levels.

The golfers had a combative season with our strong team selected from Conor Kelly, Conor Wisener, Ross Brown, Mark O'Connor and Aaron Holmes finishing in the top 15 in the Irish Schools Stroke Play Championship.

The cricketers were led by Matthew McNabb once again and, while the squad did not collect any trophies, Philip Moon and Simon Olphert played for Ireland U-15 on their tour of the West Indies. Stuart Thompson was selected for Ulster Schools at U-19 and Irish Schools at U-17. Jordan Magee and Simon played for Ulster School U-15. Pride of place in this report must deservedly go to the Year 8 cricket team who won the Ulster Schools Centenary Shield overcoming Bangor in a thrilling final. In a team of future cricketing stars Ross Allen, Jamie Millar, Andrew Pierce, Lee Richie and Calum McGregor shone brightly, Ross and Jamie gaining Irish Schools representation. The girls' cricketers had a short but enjoyable season.

In the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme continues to be a significant extra-curricular activity I am pleased to report that we gained nineteen gold awards this year and thirty-five silver. For the past two years, our assessment hikes have taken place each in England's Lake District. I know how much our students and parents appreciate the onerous work undertaken by all the staff involved in these activities.

Each year we enter the UK maths challenge, and this year at senior level we had 1 gold, 3 silver and 8 bronze while juniors collected 10 gold, 28 silver and 44 bronze. Emma Mitchell, Nicola McCallion and Matthew Feeny were best in school in their respective age groups.

The story wouldn't be complete without a report on our examinations. I'm pleased to report that the results at GCSE and A-level were once again excellent.

At A-level our pass rate was 100%, unprecedented in the school's history.

In this year's excellent results twenty students achieved 3 A grades or better and eight achieved 4 A grades.

Outstanding were Rhoda Alcorn, Christina Connell, Abbie Coulter (4), Hannah Crawford, Rachel Currie(4), Andrew Devlin, Leigh Ferris, Kasia Glowaska (4), Aaron Grieve(4), Laura Kearney, Philip Lowry, Gavin MacQueen, Ceara McCool (4), Gillian McKinley, Matthew McNabb, Liam McNulty, Kevin McVeigh(4), Emma Mitchell (4), Daniel Mullan(4), Mark Wilkinson(4)

Top subjects at A-level were art with 85% AB, biology with 71%, chemistry with 50, English literature with 100, and English language with 64. Spanish 60% and French 55%; politics 73%, health and social care, 63, geography 59, business 75, history 73, home economics 79, information technology 57, maths 65%, physics, 57% moving image 67, and RE had 83% . Technology scored 64% AB. For the second year in succession biology topped the sciences with 70% AB. Physics had 65 and chemistry 60. ICT had 62 and music 50%. Overall 63.4% of our grades were A or B. Having gained 1st place in GCSE Spanish two years ago, Hannah Crawford gained a 1st equal place in the United Kingdom in A-level German. Edexcel's managing Director, Jerry Jarvis sent his personal congratulations.

When all the results at GCSE were in it emerged that the year 12 had given a record performance with 53% of our grades as A or A*. Last year was the first we topped 50%, so it's onwards and upwards.

Twenty-one candidates had straight AA* grades. They were Ruth Bunting, Ben Cartwright, Becky Coulter, Naomi Davis, Emma Dunwoody, Andrew Given, Matthew Haslett, Clare Henderson, Emma Henderson, Hannah Jack, Jake Knowles-Jensen, Genna Logue, Claire Lynch, James McCaffrey, Nicola McCallion, Pamela Nicholl, Conor Peace, Laura Shiels, Andrew Simpson, Trevor Smyth, Julie Willis, Andrew Wilson and Hannah Wilson.

Top subjects at GCSE were Art with 96% AA*, biology with 71%, chemistry with 76%, Graphic Products 73%, Home economics 67%, English lit 55%, Spanish 83 %, RE 73%. Physics 68%, History had 65% and geography 60%. Maths 56%, PE with 58% and ICT with 68% AA*.

It looks as though the title for the chapter just written should be, 'onwards and upwards'.

I express my gratitude to my industrious deputies, Ernest Bogle and Nigel Handforth, my excellent leadership team of James Calwell, Ken Mawhinney and Kaye Henry and my governors, especially my chairman, Dr Heaney, who knows more than anyone about the challenges of the year gone by, which together we overcame. I thank my staff, both teaching and support, the Department Heads and Year Heads, who, by their constant determination and their undoubted talent, make it all happen. Finally I wish to thank my wife, Jennifer who is a steadfast source of support and strength.

It is always a highlight to see the delight on the faces of the young people who have worked so hard for the success on which I base my report. There was something special this year; the party atmosphere of the year 12 group as they danced about with their GCSE results contrasted with the obvious delight of the departing sixth formers mixed with sadness as they left for the last time. Those year 12 students didn't know that their results placed the school in third place in NI in the Times GCSE tables, behind Lumen Christi and Banbridge Academy, but behind no other. Watch them in two years time. Watch out for the results this time next year as a great promise emerged in the AS results of the Year 13 students.

The departing Year 14 students smiled quietly as they received their results; one commented in the school magazine:

'Looking back at my time at Limavady Grammar School, it's hard to believe how much the school has helped me mature over the years. Not only have I improved in my ability to prepare for and sit

exams, but also I feel I have developed my skills as a sportsman and have learned to have respect for other schools and opponents, a trait which undoubtedly sets our school above the rest. When starting my A-levels in year 14 I couldn't believe the commitment of my teachers in doing all they could to prepare me for my exams, and I felt that they truly wanted to help me in any way they could. It was then that I realized I should feel proud that I am part of such an enthusiastic and successful school and that any current pupils should feel very lucky that they belong to a school, which genuinely strives to get the best out of each individual.'

Leigh Ferris, in that little piece, has summed up the story for me.

Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes this year's chapter.