

Prize Day 2011

Mr Chairman, honoured guest, ladies and gentlemen and pupils of Limavady Grammar School.

This Summer saw the streets of our capital and those of other English cities in chaos as gangs of people, mainly young, ran riot causing loss of life, destruction to property and engaging in inexcusable looting. Following this there were many commentators who sought to explain why society had apparently degenerated so quickly.

Often it is argued that the young generation just won't listen to their elders and that the generation gap is widening.

It occurs to me; however, that the very gap we all refer to is in fact a necessary part of our development as a society. Within families younger members need to feel confident to express their views and opinions in a safe environment and in the knowledge that the love they have relied on throughout their early years will not be removed just because they disagree.

A successful society will continue this process outside the confines of individual families. It will listen to its young people if it has any sense. They have the energy and enthusiasm with which to tackle the future. As a school we work hard to create such an atmosphere and to prepare our young people for life and I know that our pupils here are guided and supported lovingly at home.

But a society must first be comfortable in its own integrity and believe sincerely that it has taught its children well and equipped them with the necessary knowledge and skills with which to form sound and true opinions. If that is the case, then we will be happy to accept their disagreements.

Delivering uncomfortable truths requires courage and commitment. The next generation must be tutored in that courage as many of the truths they must deliver may be unpalatable and may carry a heavy burden of culpability which we may not wish to hear. And yet they must be delivered and solutions must be found if we are to continue to develop.

Our pupils at Limavady Grammar School face many challenges when they leave school. Individual challenges which will force them to stretch themselves and hone their abilities tirelessly. Family challenges as they embark on their own roads of discovery into finding a life partner and founding the next generation. But above all, they will inherit the flawed and precarious world which we have moulded for them.

Recent phone-hacking events have called into question the integrity of many leading journalists; indeed this profession is just one which has corrupted itself from within.

Our young people will need all the courage and integrity available to them as they enter the world of work. And we must have the humility to listen to them, accept their criticisms and be advised.

A lot of listening is needed and a lot of truths.

Integrity, therefore, becomes a vital ingredient and the primary responsibility of the next generation.

Perhaps this is the hub of the problem known as the generation gap? In order to teach young people about integrity we must first be prepared to admit that, somewhere along the line, some people within our generation may well have lost their own.

Samuel Johnson once said:

Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.

Robert Bolt, author of 'A Man for all Seasons', explores the life of Sir Thomas More, Chancellor of England during the reign of Henry VIII and refers to his subject as 'a hero of selfhood'. In so writing, he defined the very essence of integrity in this phrase. Selfhood means knowing the truth and knowing what will be lost if we sacrifice it.

Like More, our young people require a sense of their own self and the courage and determination to preserve it against all encroachments of wealth, position or personal safety. That's asking a great deal, but essential.

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I don't doubt the capacity, energy or convictions of the pupils of Limavady Grammar School to take on this challenge. I am privileged to see those qualities in their raw form every day. So my advice to you is to keep doing what you do every day to the best of your ability and in the manner you know to be right.

You constantly impress and delight your teachers with your creativity, your achievements and your passion. I have occasion to be proud of you in many ways:

Over the past 11 years this school has been involved in a real partnership with the Kajiado district of Kenya. In July this year 36 people, pupils, Staff and community members travelled there for a month, the third such trip. I was privileged to have been invited to officially open the new girls school at Oloosuyain, funded by Limavady Grammar School. I would now invite Beth Patenall to comment briefly on the team's visit to Kenya.

Since 2001 our school has had links with Kajiado in Kenya. Mr Paul Ferguson spearheaded the work which has been supported by the whole school and wider community.

The second team visit in 2008 saw the digging of the foundations for a new Girls' Secondary School at Oloosuyian.

Our visit this year had a number of objectives which were fulfilled. Firstly we were privileged to attend the official school opening. The school currently has 24 girls enrolled, many of whom have been rescued from forced marriages and came from underprivileged backgrounds. It was a real joy to see that the work begun in 2008 had already achieved so much. Four substantial classroom blocks are now in place but one currently has to be used as a dormitory for the girls. Some of the girls had to share beds but while we were there more beds were being brought in.

Consequently our second objective was to lay the foundations for a new dormitory which will ultimately sleep 80 girls. Our team and the students from Oloosuyian teamed up to dig and pick axe the foundations whilst some wheelbarrowed the clay away. This helped us bond and make friends with the girls and it was something we had not anticipated but really added to the experience. Much of the money we have raised will be used to complete this building project.

Our third objective was to spend time with the girls. This was far easier than any of us had anticipated. The girls were all extremely confident, friendly and great to talk to. Over the month we worked closely with the pupils in the classroom, and on the building site, played sports with them and at the same time built up close friendships.

It would be fair to say that our trip was for many of us life changing. To see the passion the girls had for learning and for God was humbling and challenging. As a team we are grateful to all who made the team possible, and especially to Mr Dunwoody our trip leader. It is our hope that our school's links with Oloosuyian Girls' School will continue so that Limavady Grammar School pupils of the future will be able to be part of such an enriching project.

Sport continues to play an important part of the learning process. Our golf, tennis and equestrian clubs have continued to develop young talent and afforded competitive opportunities. Rugby continues to grow in popularity. Our Medallion Squad, coached by Mr Bogle and Fred Boyd, played the final of the Medallion Shield at Ravenhill, watched by more than half of the school as well as many parents, former pupils and friends. This wonderful achievement was the result of hard work, commitment and talent and I congratulate all involved.

The U15 Soccer Squad won the Coleraine and District Shield, defeating Coleraine Academical Institution in an impressive final match. Not to be outdone, the Colts Cricket XI became Ulster Champions for the second time. Well done to the boys and to Mr Donnell who coached both teams. Ross Allen, Stephen Kennedy and Jamie Millar all gained representative cricket honours for Ireland at U15 level.

The girls continued to work hard at Hockey and Netball during the year and the Swimming Club was popular with both boys and girls. Thanks to Mrs Connolly and Miss Lindsay the Badminton Club was reestablished and in the summer term Ultimate Frisbee led by Miss Lindsay proved popular with all age groups as was the Surfing Club led by Mr Parker. Dr Floyd's Chess Club saw a group of enthusiasts always keen to outwit their challenger.

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As well as partnering a school in Kenya the partnership between the local post primary schools has continued to develop both on the curricular and extra curricular front. St Mary's High School became the lead school in the Sharing Education Programme and this has allowed us to be more actively involved in a number of initiatives including Drugs Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education to the benefit of our pupils. Mr Handforth has ably coordinated our SEP participation. I would pay tribute to Mrs McKenna who recently retired as principal of St Mary's and would extend to her successor, Mrs McCloskey, my congratulations. The RVLC Cuchulainns this year represented Ulster at the Continental Youth Games in Boston and the local schools fielded a joint Gaelic Football team in a Schools' league.

Samuel Johnson once said

'Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings'

This year Limavady Grammar School staged two outstanding musical productions- *We Will Rock You* and *The Wizard of Oz*. I am confident that drama can contribute to the building of self confidence. The pupils of our school are fortunate to have directors like Miss Gordon, Mrs O'Brien and Dr Collins who have the ability to develop the artistic skills of so many and at the same time present productions which would not be out of place in the West End. Congratulations to all involved in these productions and also in our Spring Musical Concert. I hope that many others will see the performing arts as a wonderful way to be part of a team and to develop their self confidence.

Well done to musicians Eva Gonzalez, Alexandra McClelland and Andrew Paul who all gained Grade 8 in instrumental examinations.

Through our volunteering scheme and our charity committee our pupils have been given the opportunity to contribute actively to the wider community and I thank Mrs Harvey and Mrs Mills for their leadership.

The Junior and Senior Law Societies had a good year and their activities culminated in Mock Bar Trials at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. These were excellent opportunities to gain experience in the legal system and later on today a new Award recognising outstanding contribution to the Law Society will be made. Our thanks to Mr Crawford and Miss Wright who have supported these groups, and to Mr Sampson whose French Debating Team was narrowly beaten in the NI Finals at Queen's University.

Mr McKeague, supported by Mr Desmond Paul led the Sentinus Engineering Project in association with Wrightbus.

Darryl Agnew and Patrick Jack were awarded first and second place in the prestigious TE Utley Memorial Essay Writing Competition. There are many such competitions open to young people and I would encourage all our pupils to be proactive in seeking out and entering these events.

Trips included an A Level Government and Politics visit to London, French and Spanish exchanges, the Ski Trip to Switzerland and a visit by pupils and staff to our link school in Sri Lanka. Such international visits have contributed to our school being reaccredited with the International Schools Award and I thank Mr Handforth who coordinates this work and the Staff who give freely of their time to accompany the pupils.

The Science, Technology, Textiles and Guitar Clubs and Young Enterprise Group provided wonderful opportunities to develop skills of investigation, creativity and entrepreneurship ably supported by our teaching and technical staff.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which was introduced to this school by our Special Guest, and now ably led by Mr S Bogle, continues to flourish. Over the last year 41 Silver and 18 Gold Awards have been made.

Today we are celebrating high achievement. At A level 25 students gained 3 or more straight A grades, with 16 pupils receiving 4 grade A*/A, an increase of 8 on last year. Daniel Simpson achieved an A* in four subjects – English Literature, French, German and Spanish. Rachael McSparron achieved 3 A* grades; Patrick Jack,

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Alexandra McClelland and Adam McClintock two each. More than 84% of all grades awarded were at A*- C level. The Sixth Formers who are leaving us have been part of a child-centred, academic focused grammar school and their outstanding A Level grades are only part of the rounded young men and women who will face the future with confidence.

We were very encouraged by our GCSE results. 94% of our pupils gained 7+ grades at A*-C, up 1% on last year and nearly 8% on 2009. The teaching staff worked hard to support and motivate our pupils. Most responded and were consequently well rewarded.

Particular congratulations must go to Connor McKee and Clare Nicholl (10 A* grades), Andrew McClure (9A*, 1A), Matthew Feeny (8A*, 3As) Myles Mitchell (8A*, 2As) and Susan Deacon and James Grant (6A*, 4As).

These results reflect the hard work of our students, the industry and commitment of their teachers both here and in partner schools and colleges and the support provided by the parents.

There can be a tendency, in times of economic downturn, for some people to 'give up', believing that hard work is pointless. We will continue to encourage all our pupils to strive for academic excellence and in order to do so we will continue to rely on supportive parents.

The incredible catalogue of activities and achievements, to which I have not been able to do justice, does not just happen. This school has a wonderful combination. Hardworking and enthusiastic pupils, committed parents and willing helpers from beyond the school and an exceptionally devoted and diligent Staff who give freely of their time to support the pupils in our charge all contribute to make our school what it is today. I would ask all the pupils here this afternoon to acknowledge the Staff of this school, both teaching and Support, together with our volunteer helpers for the exceptional commitment, compassion and loyalty which they show to you. You are a privileged group to have the Staff who help develop your skills, talents and interests in so many ways.

For more details of our busy school year, I would direct you to Roesian, our excellent School Magazine so ably edited by Mr Warwick.

During the last academic year we were joined by Mr McKeague, Miss Lindsay, Mr Cather, Miss McCarron, Miss Cooke, Miss Robinson, Miss Hutchinson, Mr Hayes, Mrs Birney and Mrs Loudon and each of these teachers contributed to the all-rounded ethos of our school. Mr Rowan joined us as Sixth Form Supervisor and we were pleased to welcome as Temporary IT Technician Philip Moon, a former pupil who was on a gap year before heading to University next week.

Almost 100 years combined service was given by three Staff who retired in June. Mrs Martin had been teaching Mathematics since 1980 and Mrs Higgins, originally employed in our former prep department continued to teach girls games, geography and careers, with breaks, for family reasons, since 1973. Thank you to you both for your service and loyalty to our school. Mr Calwell was originally appointed as a teacher of Chemistry in 1977. Following a period as Head of Department he was appointed a Senior Teacher in 1991. I would pay tribute to Mr Calwell for the support and loyalty he showed to me over the last two and a half years as a Senior Colleague and would extend to all three staff our best wishes for a long and healthy retirement.

The world of education continues to be challenging. Rising costs and falling budgets will put core educational provision under threat. This will undoubtedly pose increasing problems for us. I know, however, that the Board of Governors of Limavady Grammar School will continue to work hard for the interests of our pupils and Staff and I would take this opportunity to thank our Chairman, Mr Alcorn, and his committed governors for all their hard work and loyalty over the last year. We know that, while the fabric of our premises on the whole is reasonable, we will continue to rely on the support of The Western Education and Library Board. We have already been in negotiation to secure refurbishment of the Biology and Physics departments, and to have improvements to the driveway and gravel pitch in the interests of health and safety. I know that Board officers will continue to work hard in order to bring about the improvements which they have acknowledged are essential. Thank you to the Chief Executive, Mr Mulholland, and all his Staff, including Mr Raymond Moffatt, our Link Officer for their ongoing support.

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The third example of partnership which I would refer to is that of the Association of Controlled Grammar Schools. A little known body, I gain significant professional support from my colleagues in the other controlled grammar schools in the province. During the year the group has lobbied with CCEA on the vexed issue of Controlled Assessments, has continued to be proactive within AQE and has had fruitful meetings with both the Permanent Secretary and the Minister for Education. The status of controlled grammar schools is often misunderstood. Unlike most other controlled schools, we do not have transferor governors representing the churches, nor do we have the independence enjoyed by the voluntary grammar school sector. As a group we believe that the place of selective education within the state sector, for pupils of all religious and socio economic backgrounds, is desirable and essential and I know that this is what parents both present and potential want for our school.

Returning to my original theme, I would say to the pupil body: Your intellect, wit and courage demonstrate daily the spirit of our school motto 'Vita Veritas Victoria' and you embody the integrity that underpins it. All I ask of you today is that you continue to conduct your lives in this manner as you make your way in the world; that you remember to protect the truth in every decision you make; that you use your integrity to govern those decisions and that you never compromise that integrity. Like the fabric of our world, it is not a commodity which is renewable and, once lost, it cannot be reinvented.

Theodore Roosevelt – 26th President of the United States wrote:

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again because there is no effort without error and short-coming, who knows great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the high achievement of triumph and who at worst, if he fails while daring greatly, knows his place shall never be with those souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

We will always face challenges both in our own lives and the communities within which we live. However I hope that each member of The Limavady Grammar School Community will seek not to be the critic but the person in the arena who knows victory and maybe defeat but above all else:

To thine own self be true.

Mr Chairman, this concludes my Principal's Report.