

School Assembly 7 September 2016

The Headmaster's address

Good Morning and welcome to a new term and a new academic year. A particular welcome to those pupils and staff who are new to Warminster.

WHY NOT YOU?

As I am speaking this morning, I want each and every one of you to think about your goals and ambitions, for this year but also longer term. What are they? How difficult are they? How ambitious? Are you dreaming big? What do you need to do to achieve them? Who's going to help you get there?

Or, to put it another way and to quote Jamie Casap of Google:

What problems do you want to solve?

Or have you got no idea, have you not really got any goals, are you quite happy to stay in your comfort zone, settle for mediocrity, for second-best, to fail to fulfil your potential or to be the best you can?

I can tell you that sitting in front of me at the moment there are examples of both types of person. Some of you are ambitious, determined and not afraid to give things a go, don't look for excuses and prepared to take a chance. You don't fear failure. You think big,

dream big and won't give up, blame someone else or be deterred by failure.

Others of you are probably already losing interest in what I am saying, thinking 'that's not for me, I couldn't do that, sounds too difficult, too scary, too much like hard work, I can't be bothered. I wonder what's for lunch?' The point is, you can change. So hear me out, all of you, for the next few minutes and at least think about what I am saying.

WHY NOT YOU?

Last week there was a story in the news about a group of pupils from Eton College, a famous independent school just outside London. The boys (it's a boys' school) invited the personal priest of Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, to give a talk at the School. They didn't inform the School they had done this. After the talk, they asked the priest how they could arrange a visit to the Kremlin to meet Putin. He made it clear that it would very difficult but agreed to help. More than a thousand emails later, having shown great persistence, a refusal to be defeated and to take no for an answer, a group of 17 & 18 year olds met Putin and took selfies with him in the Kremlin. Those boys undoubtedly believe that they can achieve anything if they put their mind to it. WHY NOT US?

David Cameron, when asked why he wanted to be PM before he did so in 2010, answered: "*Because I think I'd be good at it.*" In other words,

what he was thinking is that someone's got to be PM, why shouldn't it be me?

So I ask you again, WHY NOT YOU? Why not you that becomes PM, why not you that wins a place at Oxford, why not you that takes the lead in a West End Play, why not you that finds the cure for cancer, why not you that represents your country?

Why not you that gets the best GCSEs you possibly can, why not you that passes Grade 8 at the violin, why not you that learns to speak a new language, why not you that gets into the hockey team, why not you that becomes a school prefect? WHY NOT YOU?

Describing the Eton boys' adventure in The Times newspaper, one journalist wrote the following:

'Confidence is rarely born, it is acquired: every pupil should be encouraged in their audacity, to ask the question: "Why not me?"'

I believe that the most important things you leave school with are NOT your exam results but are self-confidence and high self-esteem. Here at Warminster you have so many opportunities, both in and out of the classroom; sport, music, drama, trips, clubs, societies, leadership, CCF, Ten Tors, DofE.....the list goes on. Do you take those opportunities? Do you challenge yourself? Try new things?

Two days ago the teachers here listened to a fascinating talk about the skills people need to succeed in life. He talked a lot about challenging ourselves and I want to share some of his ideas.

FLIPCHART

All of us have three zones:

- Comfort Zone
- Stretch Zone
- Panic Zone

What's in your stretch zone? What challenges make you feel a little nervous? It might be public speaking, asking a question in class, learning a new instrument, taking visitors on a tour of the School, auditioning for a role or just going up and introducing yourself to someone. Or do you rarely venture outside your comfort zone? And if you do, is it straight into the panic zone?

WHERE ARE YOU ON THE CHART? What is in your stretch zone for the coming year?

During the same talk, the speaker also listed some of the crucial qualities that all the evidence suggests you will need to lead a successful and fulfilling life in the 21st century. These are life skills, not just employability skills. Listen carefully to this list and be honest with yourself and reflect: 'Do I have this, do I show or demonstrate this?'

- Self-awareness – do you know your strengths and weaknesses, and ask for feedback about yourself?
- Do you have a ‘can-do’ attitude and believe you can overcome problems? Do you energise those around you or do you drain the energy from others?
- Are you curious? Asking great questions shows an active, interested and engaged mind and someone who’s keen to develop and learn
- Do you prepare and practise to ensure you do the best you can?
- Do you have a sense of ambition? Are you aware of your potential and show determination to go as far as you can?
- Are you resilient? Do you bounce back from failure? Do you have the determination and drive to persevere when things are tough?
- Do you have integrity – how do you behave when no-one is watching you? How honest are you?
- Are you independent and do you show initiative? Can you work on your own and be self-motivated?

Let me say again – these are not just qualities you need to do well at school or get a good job, these are what you need to form good relationships and have a fulfilling life.

I also want to mention the Olympic Games that took place last month in Brazil. I’m sure many of you were hooked on them and on the fantastic performance of the British team. 67 medals: 27 golds, 23 silver and 17 bronze. An astonishing performance. Think about what I’ve said

this morning – how much time, effort, sweat, determination, perseverance and sacrifice those athletes put in. Every single one of them thought WHY NOT ME? They typify what I'm talking about and I want to quote just one of them, the incredible track cyclist Laura Trott. She is just 24 years old, not much older than some of you. She won two Olympic golds in Rio to add to the two she won in London in 2012. As well as an Olympic champion four times over, she is also the holder of seven world championship golds, ten European championship golds and two Commonwealth golds. Reflect on that. Last month, when asked about her success, she replied:

“It doesn't matter how much pain I have to endure in a training session, I know that the benefits I reap mean the pain will be worth it. You can push yourself to a whole different level, a level that most people won't ever experience in their lives.”

WHY NOT YOU?

In your tutor rooms you will see a poster on the wall like the one I'm holding up, with the title: '10 things children can learn from Olympic athletes'. Take the time to read it and discuss it with your tutor, with each other, with your parents. Most of all, though, think about its message. How many of the ten qualities it lists do you possess or display? It is unsurprisingly similar to the other qualities I've talked about today. Of course it is, there's no trick to all of this, but there's also no shortcut. Acquiring these personality traits and skills takes

time, hard work and determination. Only you can do that – not your friends, not your parents and not your teachers. However, as a school, we will continue to increase the amount of focus on helping you develop these attributes and you will find that this year, your tutor and teachers talk more and more about them. They are also my expectations of each and every one of you as a Warminster pupil; not that you necessarily have them already, because you, we, are all still learning, but that you are prepared to work hard and do want to develop them as part of your personality: energy, optimism, determination, resilience, passion, confidence, belief, ambition, curiosity and initiative. If you don't want to develop those qualities, then, to be frank, this isn't the right school for you. We will not settle for mediocrity, second-best, and wishy-washy half-heartedness. That is my challenge to you, both in and outside the classroom and the School.

So, to conclude, pursue your goals, work hard at them, give 100% and don't let others deflect, discourage or put you off. Believe in yourself, be yourself and be your best self, because, let's be honest, you're stuck with yourself – this year and forever!

And always remember to ask yourself 'WHY NOT ME?'