



## Speech Day Address 2022

### Matt Williams, Headmaster

Chairman, Governors, parents, staff and pupils. Firstly, can I thank Ian for his kind words, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the governors for the support and guidance they have generously given this year. It has been wonderful to welcome them back onto site and for them to be able to see the school in full operation once again.

As ever at this time of year we say goodbye to colleagues who are leaving us.

Fran Rodriguez has been a wonderful teacher of modern languages at Warminster and has been instrumental in setting up and nurturing partnerships with other schools on the continent, through the World in Wiltshire scheme. Fran has suggested she is retiring, but I fully expect that we will keep in touch and use her considerable expertise in the future.

Jess Weeks has been an energetic and skilled member of the history department and as a Deputy Head of Finch. She spent several years working in boarding, being a real asset to Stratton, and now takes up a position at Gordon's School in Surrey.

Having spent three days in Switzerland last week I am very jealous of Adam Richardson who leaves the Sports Department for the mountain retreat of Beau Soleil College. Adam has been a great teacher, coach, and assistant housemaster and will be sorely missed.

Ros Johnson leaves us after all too short a time and her productions of Tristan and Yseult, Midsummer Night's Dream, and Feed, a lockdown radio play, will live long in the memory. We wish her well with her new business venture.

The music department and Ivy House will greatly miss Molly Grainger-Hull, our amazing music assistant. After a disrupted first year, Molly stayed with us for a second and we are so glad she did. She has been an incredible asset to the department, and we wish her all the very best.

Cedol Dyfdd has possibly one of the most Welsh names I've ever heard, and he has been a fantastic Graduate assistant working across the Prep School and Games department. We wish him luck with his studies and his rowing and hope to see him in a GB boat soon.

I am hugely grateful to Sarah Hall who joined the English department at short notice and did a fantastic job of teaching a range of classes, but particularly a Year 11 class who fell in love with her teaching style and passion for literature. We are only sorry that Sarah can't stay with us longer but luckily with three children and a husband in the school we will continue to see a lot of her.

Finally, we say goodbye to our language assistants Paula Diepa and Maeva Le Chevanton-Kusen who leave us after making a considerable impact in the MFL department and to the students with whom they've worked.

To all our leaving colleagues, you depart with our very best wishes, and we sincerely hope you stay in touch and let us know how things are going – except Mr Richardson...I really don't want to be reminded about how wonderful the skiing is in Switzerland.

Whilst I am talking about staff it is important I thank all of the teaching staff for their efforts this year. With a return to public examinations, the pressures have been considerable, and I am very proud of all my colleagues and the way they have taken this in their stride. They have also given of themselves with enthusiasm outside the classroom and with a return to full fixtures, Duke of Edinburgh, Ten Tors, music concerts, drama productions, Green Zone and the new EDGE program, they have all worked tirelessly to provide fantastic opportunities for our pupils. Thank you.

The other major contribution this year has been from the non-teaching staff. Those colleagues who work feverishly in the background to make everything magically happen. Whether it be the catering teams who have returned to running our many functions as well as the usual three meals a day. The grounds staff who have kept the campus looking so beautiful as well as preparing a multitude of pitches for our return to full sport. The maintenance department who have taken on many new projects as well as general upkeep. Our marketing and admissions staff who have seen unprecedented number of prospective parents flood through our door, driven by their own hard work and the fast growing reputation of the School. The domestic teams who have kept things clean and tidy as well as safe and sanitised. The bursary, IT, and administrative staff who have worked tirelessly to respond to the changing needs of parents, suppliers, and staff. To all of you I give my sincere thanks, we cannot do it without you.

As you know the school saw several changes at the beginning of this academic year, with a new boarding model, new shape of the week and importantly a new Wednesday afternoon program called the EDGE. As you will remember EDGE stands for Explore, Discover, Grow and Engage. Here at Warminster, we have always said that what happens outside the classroom is just as important as what happens inside it and the EDGE was a way to cement that philosophy. With a full games program for Year 7 & 8 we can now have a proper range of midweek matches and also include the Prep School in block fixtures. From Year 9 upwards we have given the CCF the time it deserves, and cadets are now more able to participate in an exciting range of activities. The alternative programs in Year 9 and 10 give opportunities for outdoor pursuits and practical life skills such as cooking, first aid, and upcycling. It is perhaps, however, the community action projects for Years 11, 12 and 13 that have made me the proudest over the last year. Rather than tell you about it, I thought I would show you, so here is a film that gives you a sense of what we have achieved in a short space of time and what opportunities our pupils are exposed to:

**EDGE FILM**

Before I took up the Headship at Warminster, I visited the School in the summer term on what is called Community Action Day. I was hugely impressed by what I saw but felt instantly that we could do more. As you have seen, well over a hundred of our pupils are engaged in community service every single week and I am very proud of what we now offer. This school has been at the heart of the community of Warminster since 1707 and I now feel that we are very much in a position to give back and really make a difference to the lives of the people around us.

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to spend a wonderful lunch with some Old Verlucians – these gentlemen, most of whom are in their eighties are known as the Macdonald Boys. Ian Pendlebury Macdonald was Headmaster of this school from 1940 until 1958 and along with Huntingford in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and Alcock in the 19<sup>th</sup>, he could be said to be one of the three Heads that have done the most for this great school. A keen exponent of the arts, Macdonald was known to read Dante to the entire school with tears streaming down his face. He was also a professional racing driver. Robert Hope in his history of the school said this: *“...the qualities required by those who engage in competition on the racing track were his in full measure; a sense of urgency, combined with quick perception, and the ability to make an opening and to take full advantage of it, going out in the lead and maintaining it. These characteristics were just what the school required of its new Headmaster.”* Interesting that these qualities are not in my current job description but perhaps should be...

What struck me ahead of today was that in addition to celebrating the achievements of our prize winners and indeed our pupils as a whole, we are also celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It is amazing to think when we look back on Macdonald's tenure and the stories of boys in his care – a period of time that seems of a different age entirely - that her Majesty acceded to the throne in 1952, when some of those gentlemen were still in short trousers and caps and perhaps listened to the coronation on a wireless in their dormitory. The fact that we continue to nurture such a strong relationships with our former pupils is hugely important to me and I look forward to introducing you to another one in a moment. This school has such a rich history, and we often talk about the Tudor chair that sits in my study or the Wren doorway we pass through to enter School House. However, history is also about people and as we bid farewell to our leavers, it is important to remember that you will have all left a legacy and you will smoothly transition from being a Verlucian, to being an Old Verlucian. The charge that I read in Church this morning finishes with the following line which I think it is worth repeating:

**So may the School be honoured in the lives of its past teachers and pupils, and may God richly bless each one of you in the years to come.**

To all of our parents I also wanted to express my sincerest thanks for all you have done and continue to do in support of this school. Your unwavering loyalty and commitment makes our job far easier, and I know your children greatly value your love and support – even if they don't always tell you. We always speak of community here at Warminster and our parents are just as much a part of that as the pupils and the staff. Today is also a celebration of you and I hope you enjoy a wonderful day.

Before I introduce today's guest speaker, I wanted to leave you with a final quotation. Ralph Waldo Emerson was an American essayist, poet and philosopher and I often find his words to be an inspiration. Today we celebrate success – the success of your sons and daughters who have won prizes for their academic achievements and engagement in school life. We also celebrate, in advance, the success of our leavers and the achievements they will reap in August when nervously opening that envelope. But here at Warminster I truly believe that success comes in myriad forms and Waldo sums it up perfectly:

*“To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”*

Now, ladies and gentlemen I would like to introduce you to a more recent Old Verlucian than any of the Macdonald Boys, Mr Kwame Kwaten. Kwame's CV is long and rich and I will let him tell you more about himself. For me Kwame certainly demonstrates success, and we are very privileged to finally have him speak to us after two aborted attempts over the last couple of years. I am sure he will be inspirational, entertaining and a great advertisement for the OV network.