



Speech Day 2018 - Headmaster's Speech

A very warm welcome to Caterham School Speech Day 2018.

I am very grateful to Elspeth Finch for joining us today. Not only is Elspeth is a hugely talented and successful chemist and engineer, she is a hugely successful entrepreneur and a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion in science and business. In January 2018 she was awarded an OBE for her services to science and engineering.

There has been plenty to celebrate once again this year and we will celebrate the individual successes of many pupils later this morning, just as we celebrated many of the team and house successes yesterday at our end of term assembly. The school has been as busy as ever and in all areas, from academic to cultural, from co-curricular to digital, pupils have been hugely involved and massively successful at both school, regional and national levels. The cultural life of the school reached a crescendo this week with our relaunched arts magazine on Thursday evening – fittingly called ‘Cat among the pigeons’ in honour of Geoffrey Pidgeon, an old Cat, who is present here today and who has generously sponsored a new award which will be given out for the first time today. If you get a chance to bump into Geoffrey afterwards you will not be disappointed – at the age of 92 he still has more energy than me and will amaze you with his stories about Bletchley Park and his career in intelligence.

‘Cat among the Pigeons’ is a great example of a pupil led endeavour – and just like our politics magazine, Preview, or ‘Quantum Ultimatum’ the annual science magazine of the

Moncrieff-Jones Society, demonstrates both the creativity, enormous ability and independence of our pupils.

As you entered the marquee today you will have heard some incredible musical performances, and you will another later this morning. Those of you closely involved in the musical life of the school will recognise the huge leap forward we have made in the past year or so. The concert at St James's Church, Piccadilly, in the Easter term was breath taking and we will repeat this next year on an even grander scale – the orchestral and choral work of our school now rivals the best in the country. Our performing arts is a real showcase of what Caterham continues to do well – high quality, high energy and delivered with an infectious sense of fun. MAD live and the Talent Show remain highlights of the year and as a parent I was delighted that the girls won the dance off this year, though the boys did a pretty good job at running them close. I am really looking forward to our production of 'The Heights' in December - a bold and inspirational choice of musical by Miss Fahey that reflects the absolute belief we have in the ability of your sons and daughters to do amazing things.

Pupils have represented counties, regions and countries in a variety of sports this year – we have athletes, duathletes, rugby players (boys and girls), netballers, water polo players, swimmers, judo players, hockey players (boys and girls), cricketers and lacrosse players all with representative honours. Remarkably, over the Easter holidays we had 7 of our senior girls playing lacrosse for either England, Scotland or Wales in the Home International series. Old Cat steeplechaser Rosie Clarke continues to excel – she became British Champion again last weekend, OC Chole Wyner played Lacrosse for England in the world cup in Japan and OC Charlie Robertson drove in the Le Mans 24 hour race. Just as pleasingly, every single boy and girl in the first two years has represented the school competitively this year.

It is my firm belief that you build success by encouraging participation alongside providing expert coaching. The future of Caterham sport is looking very bright indeed.

There is so much more I could say about pupils' achievement this year – but trying to cover everything would inevitably mean that we remain here for many more hours.

Of course, all of our pupil success is based on their hard work and determination, and your on-going support and commitment as parents to the notion of a rounded education, but it is also based on the professionalism and dedication of my colleagues who are not only expert in their own particular discipline, but also genuinely willing to go the extra mile to ensure that your sons and daughters are able to enjoy the full benefits of a school such as Caterham, whether that be taking a sports team, running a club or society, taking D of E trips or taking a trip away. It is not just you or your sons and daughters that believe in the benefits of a rounded and balanced education – they are supported by a wonderful staff who consistently model these values to our pupils. I would ask that you join me now in thanking them for their efforts this year.

We said goodbye to those staff leaving Caterham this year at our end of year assembly yesterday. But one colleague that I would want to pay public thanks to is Mr Andi van Niekierk. Andi joined the school 15 years ago as a graduate assistant. He has gone on to be a wonderful English and Geography teacher, an inspirational housemaster of Townsend house, the junior boarding house, has run trips abroad to Tanzania and many other places, has done pretty much every job the school has ever asked him to do and always with great humility and always with an infectious smile.. He has also run our incredibly successful circus club. He is also the kindest and most genuine man I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. Andi is taking some time out of teaching to be with his wife and new baby son down on the Kent coast. Although he is leaving, Andi will be back from time to time to makes sure our

circus skills don't get too rusty. Andi thanks for all you have done for this school and I wish you well in your adventure.

While I am thanking people for their contributions, I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Prefects who have done so much to make this year such a success. I think people often underestimate the power of a good body of prefects – we meet weekly and their feedback and ideas this year have helped shape and inform some of the ways we think particularly about how the school addresses issues of inclusion and mental health. I am very grateful indeed to all of them.

I am particularly grateful to the Head Girl and the Head Boy, Natalie and Tom, who have been outstanding role models this year I have enjoyed our weekly Wednesday lunchtime chats and they have done an excellent job of challenging me and keeping me on my toes. I would ask them both to come forward and receive a small gift of thanks from me.

Perhaps the greatest change at the school this year is one that I signalled at this point last year but which came to fruition in December, and one which, may have passed many of you by. After a lengthy but positive discussion with United Learning, the Charitable Trust which owned the freehold of Caterham School, the Trustees of the School secured the freehold of the school. In short, we bought ourselves out. We began the Spring Term as a once again fully independent school, completely in charge of our own destiny and able to invest all of our resources in the development of this school and the educational experience of your sons and daughters.

When we began this journey our primary aim was to ensure that any transaction did not disrupt the educational experience of any of you – I hope you will agree that we have

achieved this and more. Indeed, we now have the unparalleled opportunity to use this freedom to build on the successes of the past two decades and create a school and an educational legacy that we can all be proud of. It is an exciting time to be involved with this school.

The other main aim of our buy out from United Learning was to ensure that we could continue to provide the sort of education that has served generations of Caterhamians so effectively over the years. When I speak to parents about this school, and why it is the best co-educational school in this part of the world, if not the best, co-educational school in the country, I talk a lot about the feel of the school. It is a bit of a cliché, but choosing a school is a lot like choose a home. You will recognise it when it feels right – once you have stripped away all the gloss and the building projects and the league tables and the websites, it is the feel of a school that is what counts. The feel of this school is fantastic. And the feel of the school does not come from the buildings, it comes from the people within it and the values that they espouse.

And the values that Caterham School espouses have not really changed much at all in the 2 centuries that have elapsed since John Townsend founded the school in Lewisham.

As an historian, one of the things that intrigues me most is the notion of continuity and change. We spend a lot of time examining and explaining that which changes, but too often we neglect the narrative arc that connects us to our past.

Although John Townsend, Thomas Rudd, Allan Mottram, Daniel Hall or Terry Leatham may not recognise the school that they were once Headmasters of, they would, I am confident, recognise the values we espouse and the education that we continue to provide. Indeed, on

this very platform in 1961, the then Headmaster, Terry Leathem, said that the purpose of this school was to ensure that pupils ‘go out with a feeling of responsibility, realising that they have something to give beyond their technical or paper qualifications – that they can, by service, leadership and example, play a useful part in the community their life leads them to enter.’”

Our ethos and aims remain the same today. Looking back at the history of the school I think there are 6 words that sum up what we are about and the values that are at the core of a Caterham education. These are:

INDEPENDENCE; INTEGRITY; INNOVATION; CURIOSITY; COURAGE; COMMUNITY

We do not often talk about the roots of our school in the Congregationalist tradition – indeed many of you may not know anything of this tradition, or indeed have any faith at all. But what you should know is that these values sit at the heart of our history and our tradition. At the core of those who founded this school, particularly John Townsend and William Wilberforce, is a conviction that when the transformative power of the community is harnessed positively, effectively and purposefully, there is nothing that cannot be achieved... that by working together the benefits flow through everyone. A belief that collectively we have the power to change things and make a difference to the world around us. I know that this is a belief that our leavers here today can take with them into their adult lives.

John Townsend, William Wilberforce and Terry Leathem all believed the same thing. You know that I also believe that as a school we are here not just to provide an outstanding educational experience and outcome for your children, but to transform their lives and the lives of others. We are a school with a sense of mission and purpose.

The school was founded in 1811 because sons (and eventually daughters) of ministers who were not of the Anglican faith were excluded from educational provision. It was this sense of injustice that drove Townsend – he was a man of integrity, a man prepared to innovate and think anew about how to solve problems, a man who came from a tradition that believed in independence and setting his own course, a man who had the courage of his convictions, to stand up for what he believed to be right however unpopular that view was, just as William Wilberforce was, a man who founded a school to foster curiosity and a man who believed in the power of community to overcome challenges and the power of community to enhance and enrich the human experience. Townsend and Wilberforce, a man famous of course for leading the moment to end the slave trade, were both men who believed in the power of education to change lives, particularly the lives of those who were excluded from the system.

We believe exactly the same thing at Caterham today.

I am very proud of the enormous number of meaningful collaborations and partnerships that we have developed over the past few years – partnerships that benefit our own community as much as those we are working with. Wednesday saw our first ever community day when 130 pupils from two local primary schools came to Caterham to be taught a range of different activities, from maths to innovation, by our L6th. Those of you pupils who were involved, and the parents of those involved, will know what a hugely positive and enriching experience it was. I am also very proud that, through our bursary fund, we are able to open our doors to children who would not otherwise be able to take up their places here.

Although there is always a danger that in looking backwards, it can sometimes lead to a conservative tendency to cling on to what you believe to have been a better time and a better place, I take a different view. I think the fundamental values of our school are

incredibly progressive and, given our new found independence, we have a great opportunity to reinterpret these foundational values in fresh, exciting, purposeful and relevant ways to ensure that Caterham School continues to provide an inspiring education for life for generations yet to come.

And so to our leavers. Go out into the world and live by these values and you will not go far wrong. Go and be courageous in following your dreams and passions, be ever curious about what is just beyond the horizon, be independent in your views and your intent, follow your own path, don't see problems as roadblocks, be innovative in finding your way around them, great things come from challenge, be authentic to who you are and live your life with integrity. Perhaps the greatest of these attributes is the notion of community – find strength in those around you and never underestimate the power of connection. As you move on to new challenges and new opportunities, never forget that you will all always be part of the Caterham community and that you will always have a connection with each other and with us.

I wish you all the very best of luck for the future.