



FRANCIS HOLLAND SCHOOL
SLOANE SQUARE

PRIZE GIVING
CADOGAN HALL
17th September 2015

Your royal highnesses, my lords, ladies, gentlemen, and girls, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to this our third Prize-Giving in this illustrious hall. This occasion has become the springboard of our academic year, drawing us together to celebrate not only the achievements and endeavours of our girls, but also the rich tapestry of life in our School. It has also provided the opportunity for us to reaffirm our values and goals as we hear the words of the inspiring women who have been our guest speakers. We are honoured to welcome tonight Sarah Drinkwater, who, as you see, heads up Campus London, Google's physical space for early stage entrepreneurs, offering 40,000 registered members a support network, mentoring, workspace and more. We look forward very much to hearing from her after we have awarded the prizes.

As you can imagine, drawing together such an event so early in the school year is quite an undertaking. Every single girl who receives a prize is given a book chosen for her by the head of department and the organisation of this and the logistics of combining prize giving and performance to 1000 people are complex. I'm indebted to Vanessa McKinley and the team who have brought it together – Christine Remy-Miller, Sophie James, Lucy Ellwood, Helen Vickery and the music teachers, Val Hitchen and her ballet teachers. We are celebrating not only academic attainment, but effort, engagement and progress in study too, as well as other qualities of character which are so vital to the happiness and success of our school. My last thanks, therefore, is to our staff. At the heart of education is a teacher and a learner. Education sometimes seems to be a sort of DHL system of tracking and delivery, but teaching is truly an art form and a relationship, and our teachers engage and ignite our pupils with their passion

and commitment. Their dedication and kindness are phenomenal and, although you will do a lot of clapping tonight, I would like the first applause to go to the staff.

It is a great pleasure to have the headmistress of our sister school, Francis Holland Regent's Park here. Vivienne Durham retires at Christmas after 12 outstanding years at the helm and we welcome her successor, Charles Fillingham, to the partnership set up by Canon Francis Holland, chaplain to Queen Victoria in the late C19th. I will miss Vivienne's guidance and support greatly and I wish her all happiness in this new phase of her life.

To start our evening, I am delighted to invite Marie Winckler, the Chair of the Francis Holland Schools Trust, to say a few words.

Thank you very much, Marie.

On the first day of this term, I told the new Year 7 girls that we often talk about a triplet of words – which, happily, all begin with the same letter: character, courage and creativity. (This year I added a couple more, in fact – community and kindness!). In our first Prize Giving, we considered the importance of an education which develops emotional and mental strength, which draws out a child's individual talents and passions, and gives a child the precious gift of self-esteem and confidence. Last year, we dwelt on the need for courage, reflecting on the fear of failure and the striving for perfection which holds so many girls back from fulfilling their potential. And this year we will focus on creativity – and I don't mean the ability to paint, or sing or dance, wonderful though those gifts are – but the ability to THINK creatively, with curiosity and connection. (They all begin with C again).

Three years ago we had a vision for transformation in the life of our School. Today we see the first fruits. Like the refit of the ocean liner, the QE2, the School retains its fundamental grace, strength and tradition. But the heart of the school beats with a new energy and enthusiasm, (and the old girl has had something of a facelift too). We have two simple aims: first to develop young women who can stand up for themselves, and second to develop young women who are prepared to stand up for a purpose greater than themselves. To

achieve both we have built on our spiritual foundation, reaffirming our belief in the value of the individual, made in the image of God, and our commitment to the community in service and love. To establish this character and courage, we have introduced many initiatives which have given a new direction and meaning to the lives of our girls. Sport has enjoyed such growth that we are now winning matches and tournaments in every discipline across London and beyond. Several of our girls compete at national and international level – as do our staff, who provide inspiration and encouragement to the girls. The choice of a wide range of physical activities - from boot camp to pilates - means that all girls can stay fit and energised, building a stronger body-image, a sense of achievement and self-discipline as well as teamwork. To strengthen this mental resilience further, we have now a well-established programme of mindfulness for our whole community – pupils, parents and staff - and the Place2Be counselling initiative is being established in the school to help girls themselves to manage the anxieties and stresses of their lives.

Added to this, we have the Exploration Society expeditions developing leadership and teamwork, highly successful debating and public speaking programmes to enhance communication and presentation skills, Business Studies, Music Technology, Photography, the Young Enterprise initiative, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, community service and volunteering, links with schools and charities in Uganda, the Hubdot networking event, partnerships with business and industry, Environment Society, coding, robotics club, Mandarin, the Feminist Society – and 53 other exciting societies and clubs which give girls the opportunity to be curious, courageous and creative.

Now, creative independent thought hasn't always been encouraged in schools. One of my teachers wrote drily on my report, 'Lucy's ability to project herself into another world will not help her master the geography of this one.' And I remember in a physics class, the teacher saying, 'Isaac Newton was sitting under a tree when an apple fell on his head and he discovered the law of gravity. Isn't that wonderful?' To which my friend replied, 'Yes, Miss Jones. If he'd been sitting in class looking at books like us, he wouldn't have discovered anything.'

In fact, it's not always teachers who become obsessed with acquiring facts and exam grades. We parents can sometimes cause our children to feel that all that matters is their academic attainment. One of our Year 5 pupils startled her

teacher by saying, 'I don't want to scare you, but my daddy says if I don't start getting better marks, somebody's going to get a spanking.'

Children are innately creative, though, and are endlessly imaginative and inventive – unless our educational systems snuff it out in them. As a child, I attended a Catholic school for a while, and at lunchtime there was a large pile of apples at the head of the table. One day, one of the nuns made a note, and posted it on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching." At the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies and as I passed along I saw a child had written another note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

Sometimes children think creatively without realising it. Here are one or two actual test answers written by pupils:

Question: **What is migration?** Answer: It is the headache birds get when they fly south for winter.

Question: **State one change in boys at puberty?** Answer: the vice deepens. Never a truer word....

But joking apart, we really do set very high store on **creativity**, on thinking outside the box, on making connections. So much so, in fact, that, last term, **creativity** was the only item and indeed the only word on the agenda for our main staff meeting. How could we not only teach more creatively but how could we truly be a creative school? We have had a flood of fabulous ideas from our staff who are truly some of the most imaginative, enthusiastic and committed teachers I have ever met. Some of these involve resources and approaches which are innovative and challenging – like flipping the classroom – but extension tasks, research projects, the virtual learning environment, participation in global competitions, MOOCs, conferences and programmes are all now incorporated into the life of the School.

As seismic changes occur in technologies, industries and social structures, young people need an education which not only offers knowledge and information but develops the creativity to adapt to the challenges and opportunities ahead. The poet Robert Frost commented that *Education is the path from cocky ignorance to miserable uncertainty* and although that seems very dark the last word is

true. The one certainty about life is that it is full of uncertainty. Too many schools (and governments) are preparing children for a world which is already past, and are fixated on academic league tables and a narrow range of subjects and activities. These develop only cognitive skills at the expense of character and the ability to cope with failure, change or rejection. The resulting emotional fragility blights the potential of girls in particular, holding them back from taking risks, thinking big and believing in themselves. Feeling their value lies in academic achievement only, they reject activities that cannot be qualified by a certificate or letters after their name.

Our children are growing up in a highly technologized world. They interact, engage, and disengage with greater speed and choice than ever before. New jobs, businesses and technologies are springing up all the time – telematics, smart clothes, 4K TV, robocars, artificial intelligence – and a traditional education will leave young people lagging behind in the digital revolution. In this world, it is **creativity** that has become the economic engine of the 21st century.

In the face of these challenges, Francis Holland, as a relatively small school with creative staff, has been able to adapt and innovate with energy and optimism. In the many ways I've mentioned tonight, we are seeking

- to place creativity and innovation firmly at the heart of our educational provision by developing facilities and resources which deliver a challenging learning environment. Alongside a rigorous academic curriculum, computing, design, technology, and enterprise must be opportunities open to our girls
- we are also creating an interface between school and the world of work – through work experience, bespoke courses, gap internships – and you, our parents, have such a key role to play in helping to provide these opportunities. Thank you so much to all of you who have offered placements in your own businesses and work places.
- and we seek to be a place of enrichment and opportunity for the whole community, stretching and challenging our girls in body and spirit, embedding the ideals of service, volunteering and giving in their hearts.

After we have awarded our prizes, Sarah will tell us a little about her own experience in developing these qualities and skills. But lest you fear that Francis Holland is flirting dangerously with the avant garde and the nouveau, let me finish with some **ancient** words which epitomise much of the ethos of our School and which forms the bedrock of our ability to innovate and create. This is Socrates:

Whom do I call educated? First, those who manage well the circumstances they encounter day by day. Next, those who are decent and honourable in their intercourse with all, bearing easily and good naturedly what is offensive in others and being as agreeable and reasonable to their associates as is humanly possible to be... those who hold their pleasures always under control and are not ultimately overcome by their misfortunes... and last, those who are not spoiled by their successes, who do not desert their true selves but hold their ground steadfastly as wise and sober-minded men and women.

Character, courage and creativity. These qualities characterise our girls. Bright, independent, imaginative, resilient and tenacious, a Francis Holland girl will leave us, we hope, able to listen to almost anything without losing her temper or her self-confidence, eager to embrace the new and the daunting with courage and humour – and prepared, in short, not simply to make a good living but to make a good life.