

Prize Giving 2017
“Working together, learning together, achieving together.”

Introduction

Good afternoon

I have taken the title for this speech “Working together, learning together, achieving together” from our new Vision statement. Our young people, staff and the Parent Council agreed on this as the vision for our school.

Successful and ambitious schools are indeed where the whole school community is united in purpose and work together to achieve key goals.

In my address this afternoon, I will share with you what we have achieved this year by working together. Our key goal and purpose always being the pursuit of excellence and providing opportunities for our young people to experience success.

Anti-bullying Policy

As a parent, you want your child to feel safe and happy in school. From my experience, happy children achieve. Bullying behaviour cannot be accepted. We have worked together this year in House Council groups on the design of an anti-bullying policy, a poster is on display in all classrooms entitled “Aberdeen Grammar School is against bullying.” This is a good start and our young people are clear on what constitutes prejudice-based bullying and the types of bullying behaviour. However, in this age of social media, it is an area we must all continue to be vigilant about and work together on as a whole school community. The staff working group have posted materials for parents on our website to provide advice on this important area.

Behaviour is for Learning

In our school we have a strong work ethic as reflected in our vision statement, the “learning together” aspect. It is important that we all have a consistent approach to supporting our young people and managing behaviour. As a parent you want to know your child is in a positive learning environment and equally appreciate early notification if there are any matters causing concern; thus allowing you to be actively involved in making any necessary interventions. This year we have worked on the design of a new behaviour management policy and procedures entitled “Behaviour is for Learning.” You will already have received a copy of the policy and associated procedures. This is a staged intervention approach where early notification and action is the central rationale. Again, a key example of us working together to achieve the best for our young people. As we launch this policy in August, your support and feedback will be appreciated.

Working with Parents

Our aim is to work with parents in a more interactive way and to provide you with information on a regular basis. With this in mind, a new website has been introduced. There has been the odd technical issue but we are moving in the right direction with our digital strategy. We also invited parents to workshops as part of our “Planning for Success” series of parental engagement events. In the Senior Phase we concentrated on sharing what Google Classroom looks like and what it can do and some hints and tips on study skills. We changed the format of the Senior Phase Course Choice evening to a learning pathways event where parents and pupils had the opportunity to speak with staff, employers, further and higher education providers. This is part of our Developing the Young Workforce Strategy. This coming year, the development of a specific website for pupils and parents on learner pathways based around key industries is an

area we are exploring. Moreover, we moved to a system this year where parents received two interim reports. The idea being to provide more regular information. This has been well received.

Working across our Associated Schools Group

Central to improving outcomes for all our learners is working closely with primary school colleagues. This year, the focus has been on literacy and numeracy. Joint training has taken place for teachers on approaches to moderating the standard and agreeing the Curriculum for Excellence level our young people have achieved. Our Primary 7 pupils are currently working on a transition project with a focus on writing outcomes.

Investing in our literacy strategy and the refurbishment of our school Library

Linked to our work on literacy is our total refurbishment of the school Library. This is taking place as we speak and we aim to open the new Library just after the summer holidays. This is a project I would really like the whole school community to get behind. It is a costly enterprise but so worthwhile. We aim to have a new senior study space within the Library where our young people will have more access to IT to support them with any course and assignment work. There will be greater access to Advanced Higher materials. For our younger pupils we will have a bespoke area for them with a greater range of reading materials, fiction and nonfiction. I know I have the support of our fantastic Parent Council and PTA, a little plea to you all to support us with fundraising to ensure the Library is an amazing space for all our young people.

All this work, what difference has it made?

The above is just a taste of some of the work we have been doing together. However, it is impossible to capture every achievement and every piece of work. But, the key

question is, so what? What difference has it made? Are we improving outcomes for pupils? Are we achieving our vision of achieving together?

We can point to the hard data and say that we continue to have strong levels of achievement and examination performance in the Broad General Education and the Senior Phase. By the end of S3, almost all our young people achieve third level outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Sixty per cent achieve fourth level, this is beyond the national benchmark and expectation. In the Senior Phase we outperform schools similar to ourselves at every level (National 3, 4, 5, Higher and Advanced Higher). Our young people achieve well above City and National averages.

Take away the statistics, let us look at our young people, they are hard-working, ambitious, creative, scientific, excelling in sport, music or whatever field they put their minds to. Think back to the outstanding performances in the school show "The Witches of East wick" and the moving portrayal of unfolding tragedy in our senior play 'Chat room'. Think about our triple award winning Platinum Concert band which continues to perform at the highest level not to mention the vast array of group and individual talent evident at our music concerts. Think about all our sports teams and their local and national success. Our 2 golds and 1 silver at the Scottish Schools Volleyball Festival and our S2 athletics team who won the ACC Giant Heptathlon for the North East and so many other team and individual successes. Think about our formula 1 teams and their Scottish and British successes, we wish them well at the World championships in Malaysia in September. Most importantly, they are well rounded, caring and respectful young people.

We could not offer all of these opportunities without the dedication of our teachers, instructors and non-teaching staff. A huge thank you to them. In fact, Mr Allan (Principal Teacher Pupil Support) received a Star Award from Aberdeen City Council for his contribution to Volleyball and involving more girls in sport.

Finally then, I do believe we are living our vision statement "Working together, learning together, achieving together." Congratulations to all our young people achieving awards today. Very well done, I and I am sure your parents are extremely proud of you. Thank you.