

School Assembly Wednesday 7th September 2011

Good morning and welcome back!

It's a great pleasure to be here with you all at last. My family and I have been settling into the school over the last two or three weeks, and during that time I've met lots of members of staff and quite a few parents, and indeed some of you on AS level and GCSE results days. I've done a lot of talking and listening and getting ready for the new term, but this morning is the beginning of what school's really about: you, the pupils of Wrekin College, gathered in this lovely chapel to mark the start of a new year. It's wonderful to see so many cheerful and enthusiastic faces. I hope you've all had a restful and enjoyable holiday and that you're raring to go now.

There are three things I want to talk about this morning. Firstly, I want to say a bit about new beginnings, and new arrivals in our school community. Secondly, I want to tell you all a little bit about me, what you can expect from me and what I will expect of you. And finally, I want to celebrate some successes and set you all some challenges for the year ahead.

The start of a new year is an opportunity for a fresh start for everyone. Especially with a new headmaster at the helm you all have a chance to impress, to turn over new leaves, to find something new to enjoy or to try out. It's also a chance for us to welcome new additions, both pupils and staff. Dr May and Mrs Hornby join the English Department this term, Dr Cusack joins the Maths Department, Signorita Diaz joins the Spanish Department, and Ms Bromage is our new Biology technician. I hope they will all be very happy here.

There are plenty of new faces among the pupils too – most of them in Lancaster, year 3 and the Lower Sixth, but we also have 18 new pupils in the 4th and 5th forms. I'm sure the Wrekin veterans amongst you will want to show all the newcomers how friendly the school is and how warm our welcome can be.

I'm new too, of course, and my family and I could not have had a more positive start to our life at Wrekin or a warmer welcome from staff and pupils alike. I have been looking forward enormously to taking up the reins at Wrekin since I was appointed last autumn, and to building on the strong foundations of the school. I am delighted to be getting on with the many tasks that face any head at the beginning of his time in school.

Some of you have met me already, or heard me speak to year groups and parents over the last couple of days. You may know a bit about my background – that I've taught for twenty years in three different schools, some of that time as a Head of Department and a Housemaster, but that I've also worked in investment banking and in marketing. You may know that I have five children – two of them now at Old Hall – and that I love music, sport, and of course, as befits an English teacher, reading and the theatre.

I hope you will find me approachable and willing to listen, but I am also someone who expects high standards in every aspect of school life – appearance, behaviour, work, sport and artistic activities.

I want to see all of you looking smart and business-like around the campus, paying attention in lessons, working hard at your prep, and doing your best in everything else you do.

I want to be proud of the impression you create to visitors, and in the local community.

Above all, I value honesty, kindness, tolerance and a willingness to make the most of the talents you all have and the opportunities available to you. I want you all to achieve the best you're capable of.

Many of you sitting here already have successes to celebrate. Last year's Fifth form had a record-breaking year for GCSE results. There were some outstanding individual performances: many congratulations to the 20 pupils who gained at least 5 A and A* grades, and especially to Stewart Bates who clocked up 12 A*; to Lucy Nicholls, Tori Shanklin and Miles Oakley who each got 9 A* and 2A.

Many other pupils also exceeded their predictions and expectations, achieving results that were personal triumphs. Congratulations are due just as much to them. Altogether, more than 40% of all GCSE grades were A*s or As, a tribute to the hard work and commitment of every pupil in the year and their teachers, and a solid foundation for

their AS Level courses. I will be inviting all who have done well to the headmaster's study for a congratulatory tea early in the term. Let's have a round of applause for them.

Last year's U6th also had a bumper year of A level results. More than a third of grades were A*s or As, a record for the school. Several pupils are going on to read for competitive courses such as medicine, dentistry, law, engineering and architecture at top universities, but we are also proud of pupils who have achieved their goals in, for example, going on to agricultural college or to join the police force. All are going to be very useful members of the community.

I hope that the current U6th will build on what were for most of them encouraging AS levels and will go on to match last year's record. The run-down to A levels – and indeed to AS levels and GCSEs – begins today!

I want to underline that all of this exam success is not achieved at the expense of extra-curricular activity. Lots of those taking GCSEs or A levels also contribute enormously to sport, music, drama and the many other activities that take place at Wrekin. Busy people learn how to manage their time effectively, and busy pupils are often those who do best in exams.

I've already talked about making the most of what's on offer here, but let me say it again: if you don't have a project on the go, or an instrument to play, a part to learn or a sport to get stuck into, then start the term by finding a new activity to engage with – don't retreat to your dorm or day room at every opportunity.

I want you to excel at Wrekin. But what is vital for you to understand is that to achieve at any age and stage, there is no substitute for hard work, good organisation, determination, enthusiasm and commitment. Ask our gymnasts, swimmers, netball players and musicians, to take just a few examples.

Being at Wrekin is a great privilege which is not open to many, and I expect you all to value the education you are lucky enough to receive, and not to waste any of your time here. The people who will make the difference to your lives and achievements are you yourselves, but we are all here to support, guide and encourage you. Between us, let's see how much we can achieve this year.

Richard Fleming
Headmaster