

Headteacher's Speech – 27 October 2006

Mr Mayor, Mr Chairman, Dr Craig, Members of our Board of Governors, distinguished guests, colleagues and of course students and parents, good afternoon and welcome.

I feel proud and privileged to share this important day with you in these most beautiful surroundings and I think it is fitting now to express my gratitude to the community of Portadown College for the way in which I have been made to feel welcome in my short time as Headteacher. My sincere gratitude to you all.

But today, to our young people, I say, this is your day, this is the day we celebrate together your academic and extra-curricular successes. I hope you are as proud of yourselves as we are of you. A special welcome also to our mums and dads. Your sons/daughters would not be here without your support. Thank you for all you do in building our ever strengthening partnership between home and school.

And, to Dr Craig, the warmest of welcomes, I am delighted that you are here to share with us this special event. It is both fitting and reflective of the legacy of the highest academic standards in Portadown College that you are here today, a former student yourself. On a personal note, I have enjoyed meeting you and can only speak in superlatives about the standards of paediatric care in the Royal Victoria Hospital. I am sure I speak for all parents here today when I thank you most sincerely for the continued high quality of provision of individualised care for our young people. Your role in maintaining and developing the very highest standards of cardiac paediatric care is well documented, you have worked with great loyalty in your local community throughout your career and your strategic vision for this important medical field has played and continues to play a pivotal role in Northern Ireland and well beyond. I hope that you enjoy taking part in our celebrations today and refreshing your links with your 'Alma Mater!'

To our colleagues, both teaching and non-teaching, past and present, I extend a very warm welcome to you. You deserve much credit and gratitude for the key role you all play or have played in the life of our students.

The community of Portadown College is enriched by our excellent Junior High Schools Tandragee, Clounagh and Killicomaine and by the complementary provision of an excellent education in Craigavon Senior High School and The Upper Bann Institute of Further and Higher Education.

Our College is not an island. It is part of a community which reaches out beyond our physical buildings and our beautiful campus joining the Killicomaine and Gilford Roads. Portadown College extends into our local, national and international communities. Our colleagues and young people are engaged in numerous projects, the primary aims of which are to enhance the lives of others and to inspire others through our actions and the example we set, underpinned firmly by our Christian Values. Today we are celebrating those links - to our colleagues from other schools I extend a warm welcome.

The theme permeating my address today is the importance of community, of supporting one another and of encouraging and celebrating excellence.

In Portadown College our core values are:

Nurturing the Individual

Serving our local and global community

Encouraging lifelong learning

Respecting ourselves and others.

I should now like to share with you a visual and audio presentation exemplifying, through the work of our Music Department and our Web Design Team their impressions of what makes Portadown College special. My sincerest thanks to those of you involved in this, it is a testament to your pride in the school community.

PRESENTATION – 5 MINUTES

I have no doubt that such an ethos, underpinned by our values creates an atmosphere in which, year after year, our young people reach and indeed exceed their potential both academically and in their contribution to the life of the College and our community.

It is fitting that, at this juncture, I mention once again the pivotal role of my teaching colleagues, it is their ability to look at each young person as an individual whom they challenge and support and it is their academic and methodological expertise which ensures that our young people achieve the academic and extra-curricular successes they do.

Let's now show our appreciation for all their hard work, patience, dedication, enthusiasm and loyalty during 2005-2006 with a warm round of applause.

Our teachers and our young people participated in a most impressive range of trips and educational visits during 2005-2006, and after my address you will hear from our Senior Prefect Team in more detail about rugby, hockey, football, volleyball, athletics, tennis, Lifeline charity, Air Training Corps, Scripture Union, Music, Drama, Debating, our newspaper, camera club and I'll pause for breath ... our House Competitions.

The students of Portadown College are already important contributors to society, many of our young people give of their time to improve the lives of others. A group of our students went on an exchange visit to the Masai district of Kenya during the summer holidays, accompanied by a number of colleagues, to continue to support the Alliance schools and our African brothers and sisters in improving the lives of others beyond Portadown. Our thanks to all who participated in this life-changing project, to those who not only went to Africa, but also to all of you (parents, teachers, students, colleagues from our neighbouring schools) who helped raise funds and who organised, encouraged and supported the work. We look forward to welcoming Alliance students and teachers to a rather chilly Portadown in December. I am sure we shall all be greatly enriched both spiritually and culturally by the experience.

I shall turn now to focus on our academic achievements. 2005-2006 was an exceptional year for examination success.

At GCSE an amazing 51% of the grades achieved by our students were A or A* with 96% of our young people achieving 5 or more A*-C grades; 94% of all the grades achieved by our young people were between A*-C. When you compare this with the Northern Ireland average of 72% you can really appreciate the very high standards of academic success we are celebrating today. 30 of our students achieved straight A* and A grades; Joanne Weekes achieved a very impressive 10 A*.

At AS level, 40% of the grades achieved by our students were A grades and A&B together were 64% of all the grades achieved. The % of A-D grades achieved by our students was 93% and 42 out of 166 students achieved 3 or more A grades at AS level.

At A2 our students surpassed all our expectations. Twelve students achieved 4 A grades and a very impressive 30 students achieved at least 3 A grades. Five students who sat 4 A level subjects achieved all A & B grades and 27 students in Portadown College achieved at least 2 Grade A's.

When we compare the performance of our young people at AS and A2 with that of students in all other schools in Northern Ireland where at AS, 40% of our grades are A, and in NI the average is 33% and at A2 where 44% of the grades achieved by students in Portadown College were A grades and in Northern Ireland the average is 32% you can truly appreciate the results of our hard working, talented and diligent students, supported and challenged by the expertise of our teachers.

To all our young people here today, I say, we are rightly proud of you; these are exceptional results, results which we hope will provide you with excellent foundations in your professional careers and whet your appetite for lifelong learning.

I think it is now fitting for us all to congratulate you for these excellent achievements.
APPLAUSE

We, at Portadown College, seek to educate holistically and a rich range of complementary activities, some of which the Senior Prefect Team will outline in a few moments in, I am sure, their own inimitable style, encouraged our students to set high but realistic goals and then achieve them.

The individual extra-curricular achievements last year were very impressive. Indeed Rachel Mulligan and Elizabeth Colvin both represented Ulster and Ireland at U18 and U16 levels respectively in hockey; Adam Aigbokhae was selected for the U19 School's Rugby Squad and Elizabeth Black, Ruth Boyce and Lindsey Hill all played for the NI U18 Volleyball Squad.

The community of Portadown and the College has always had strong links with rowing and last year Christine McDonagh, Daniel Graham, Ian Lester, Joseph Henry and Peter Nelson came third in their class at the All Ireland Championships in Cork winning a Bronze Medal.

Stefan McIlween was a member of the Ulster Swimming Squad and was the Irish and British Breaststroke champion.

Conor Liggett excelled in equestrian competition and competed in both Irish and European Championships.

We had further Ulster representation in cricket. Jamie Matthews played in the Interprovincial tournament.

In football Kris McAdam has excelled. He has played for the NI U16 Team.

There are numerous other outstanding individual achievements in your programme, I am sure you will be impressed by both the variety and the quality of these.

Today is also about celebrating the success of what our students give back to society. The young people of Portadown College are involved in a wide range of charitable activities, the aims of which are to improve the lives of others.

We today commend the work of Lifeline in the College, those students involved in the excellent unifying work of Xpression in the town and those colleagues and community and church leaders who inspire our young people.

Michelangelo, the great genius of the Renaissance said in his latter years “I am still learning” The wide and varied range of extra curricular activities in which our young people participate is proof that our students have grasped the important skill of lifelong learning to which Michelangelo was referring. We are all still learning, believe me I am learning something new every day!

It is important that we view learning both from its past context and in the future context. It seems fitting, at this point, in my address, to pay tribute to our retired Headmaster Mr Tom Flannagan I should like to thank him personally for his professionalism, transparency and goodwill during our handover. Mr Flannagan has kindly gifted to the College a new Prize called The Flannagan Award which will be presented each year to our Top ‘A’ Level student. This is, I am sure you will all agree, a fitting legacy to a valued colleague. To Mr and Mrs Flannagan the warmest of welcomes, we are delighted to have you with us today.

Our future context is very much occupying my thoughts and those of our hardworking and dedicated Board of Governors and together we have the exciting challenge of driving forward the Project for our new £15 million school building. May I take this opportunity to thank our governors and SELB colleagues for their enthusiasm and expertise in supporting the community of Portadown College in modelling its physical future.

But as we all know, education is much more than our physical surroundings, it is all about people and relationships...As William Butler Yeats once said “Education is not the filling of a pail but instead the lighting of a fire”. I trust it is clear today that the fire and the appetite for learning burns brightly in Portadown College. Ladies and Gentlemen we have had another excellent year – our students today are a credit to us and I have no doubt, will continue to be so.