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## PRIZE GIVING ADDRESS

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Who would have thought that, at the end of the summer term, so many good things would abound. Not only is the weather perfect, but the passing of time has revealed the extent of the England football team's gargantuan effort in managing to escape from the 'group of death' in the World Cup. However, clearly the exertions the team expended in overcoming the footballing powerhouses of Algeria, Slovenia and the USA was so great that we are unable to celebrate their third week participating in the World Cup. Still, perhaps equally unusually, we nonetheless have British interest at Wimbledon this afternoon and I promise that my report will finish in time for you to watch Murray's match against Nadal. Probably.

### Introduction

I cannot in all my life remember a year going by more speedily than this one. I was told on numerous occasions by numerous people that St Bede's was busy. 'But all schools are busy...' I thought to myself, 'surely it won't be that different'. But it is: St Bede's *really* is busy! There are weeks, as I have done my very best to drive myself on, wilting and waning, whilst I witness countless teenagers tearing on, acting, singing, dancing, painting, riding, playing sport, and even, now and again, studying.

As you might imagine, I have had to get to know St Bede's very quickly indeed. In that respect, given the size and scale of the place, my learning curve has been very steep indeed. For example, in my second week here, I found one first year girl - also new to the School - looking terribly upset. 'What's wrong' I asked, presuming she was finding it hard to settle in. 'St Bede's is just so unjust and unfair' she said. Horrified at the thought that this poor young girl had been the victim of some life-scarring instance at the hands of one of my new colleagues, I asked her why she felt this way. 'Well,' she said, 'I was punished for something I didn't do'. 'That's

terrible', I replied aghast, 'how awful. Tell me, what was it you didn't do?'. 'My homework', she replied.

There is so much for us to be proud of at St Bede's. First, we have a philosophy that sets us apart from other schools. Our aim can be expressed so simply - 'all shall come and all shall succeed' - yet is so difficult to deliver. The fact that we do - and I truly believe we do - is down to the commitment and genuine esteem in which our staff and students hold each other. Our aim to provide genuine variety and choice for our students is capably illustrated by the range of subject choices, qualifications and activities available in the School.

So what is it that makes a school *good*? In recent years there has been a tendency for the general public to equate a school being 'good' with how selective its intake is. Personally, I think that analysis is to miss the point of education. What makes a school good is the *quality of experience* that it offers its students: the warmth, mutual respect and compassion displayed by all members of the community - be they adult or teenager, teaching or support staff - towards each other. This is a sentiment that may be easy to say, yet is not quite so easy to deliver.

My growing sense of St Bede's is that, on the whole, we achieve this aim. And our secret is that we allow young people to immerse themselves in the things they want to do; providing them with the time to do so; validating their choices; and celebrating their interests and successes whilst recognising the need for young people to be challenged. A half-hearted commitment to excellence will only result in failure and, throughout my first year, I have simply been blown away by the dedication, depth and brilliance of our students and staff. There are no half-measures at St Bede's.

Yet, there are things that we can do to improve the experience of our students. Our academic results are, in many ways, impressive, however, we need to challenge *every* student to do the best they can. I have regularly maintained that I don't mind what grades a student gets as long as those grades are the best that *they* can get. We are not an academically selective school - that philosophy will not change - but it doesn't mean that we are not an academically *ambitious* school.

That is my overwhelming academic aspiration for St Bede's: *to be ambitious for our students*. Consequently, it is crucial that our students and staff are all

supported to maximise the academic potential of every student in every subject they study.

To that end, we have made some changes to the way we will go about our business next year. The lines of leadership have been clarified; we have built teams and networks of support for academic and pastoral staff; our pastoral system has been reshaped to retain the best of what we have at the moment, yet provide regular, individual and powerful support to our students. Certainly, it would be fair to say that some of our students - particularly at GCSE - have not always been pushed or supported to maximise their potential as far as they might have been. We will address this, and work tirelessly to ensure that every student at St Bede's achieves the very best they can in the classroom. As many of you know, our ICT is undergoing a revolution and you will all begin to experience its benefits as we improve our communication with you and care for our students.

However, we must not forget our academic successes. The teaching at St Bede's is amongst the best I have seen (and in the last four years I have observed over four hundred lessons in several different schools). The care, time and warmth our teachers show to their students is astounding. I have never seen as many people go the extra mile as our staff do. Our value-added scores at A level are the highest in the county: we should celebrate that achievement. Many of our students - a number of whom are winning prizes today - have gained far higher grades in public examinations than they ever thought possible when they arrived at St Bede's.

This last point is, in part, a wonderful tribute to our Learning Support Department who do a fantastic job. I recently met with one of our Upper Sixth formers who, although not someone who has ever been in receipt of learning support herself, asked me how we could publicly celebrate the work of our LS Department. To her, the work of that group of people was palpable in the life of her friends: she had seen them grow in confidence and self-belief, becoming ever-happier with who they were, and witnessed their achievements and successes as a result of the support they had received.

Thus, I am delighted to endorse Emily Brock's generous sentiments and pay a public tribute to the Learning Support team. What is more, after several years of extraordinarily committed service, Mrs Mander is stepping back from leading the LS Department. She will be replaced by the hugely able Mrs Bunyard and I know the

Department will go from strength to strength. Thus, quite properly and with sincere admiration, I would like to thank Mrs Mander for her extraordinary efforts on behalf of our students: it is hugely appreciated.

## Co-Curricular

Many of you know that our co-curricular programme is one of our very best things. It is organised by a genius, Mr Richards, who somehow makes the most extensive - give or take, the number of unique activities this year was roughly 270 - and therefore complicated programme of activities work. That said, subversion does occur. One Lower Fifth boy - and you know who you are - having been instructed by his Housemaster in September to include variety and breadth in his activities programme, managed to sabotage Mr Richards' brilliant electronic systems and, without care for his Housemaster's plea, put himself down for *Recreational Soccer* every day of every week until he was finally caught out three weeks from the end of the Spring Term...

I have been blown away by the variety and quality of St Bede's co-curricular offering and humbled by the skill and expertise of our students. The teaching and coaching staff deserve a huge tribute. Each member of staff gives an immense amount of time and energy to supporting the students, be those students outstanding exponents of their arts, or, like so many of us are, mere journeymen who just enjoy taking part.

To my mind, the mark of a school is how well it caters for the least able, not just how it serves those who are brilliant. We already do a very good job in this regard and, in September, when Rachael Woollett joins us the Deputy Head Co-Curricular, we will focus on ensuring our activities provision best meets the needs of *every* one of our students. Moreover, I strongly believe that, as students get older, developing a sense of service is important, be that by coaching younger players; volunteering at the local primary school - as Di-Di Norman - who will go on to work with young children next year - and others have done so brilliantly this year; supporting Mr Juniper's ecological initiatives; using school assembly to raise our awareness of global and local injustices as the high-profile 'Causes and Concerns' activity have done. Knitting has also been a roaring success and proved so popular in the spring that we had to add an additional member of staff and a second room!

I am keen that we develop strong community links and we have already reached out to our wonderful village with some tangible success. We are forging partnerships with local schools, charities and community groups and, in time, I know our students will be able to make a real and personal contribution to their local environment. It is they who have the energy, the drive and the capacity to make an impact that will positively transform our society.

I was told before I arrived that the drama at St Bede's was good. 'Isn't it *everywhere?*' I thought, 'after all theatre is what independent schools are famed for'. However, again, I was staggered by what I saw: the quality and depth of performance; the thoughtfulness and dedication of the students; the care and drive of Mrs Cakebread, Mr Brown and Ms Birch. The genius and ambition of Mr Waring's stage sets puts them on a level rarely seen outside of professional theatre. The unsung heroes of the technical crew make everything work and they ceaselessly 'make it happen'.

Then we come to the performances: a staggering eleven productions - not performances - productions, in a single academic year. *Peter Pan*, Miss Birch's last hurrah at St Bede's, was wonderful: running, jumping, dancing, shouting, fighting, screeching and even flying. Becky Wilkinson, who will no doubt go far in the acting world, is possibly one of the most versatile actors we have. Peter Verbielen, a wonderful comic talent, whose portrayal of Captain Hook was only trumped for effeteness by his own representation of *Blackadder's* Captain Darling in House Drama. Issy Riddy, Nikita Leys and Harvey Brown's intensity in *The Country* was stunning. The Performing Arts group entertained us royally in their adaption of *It was Murder but not a Crime*'. Just last week, the junior year's production directed by Miss Earp, *The Comedy of Errors* was a triumph of energy and frenetic farce. So much has happened in our theatre that to mention every notable performance could well take me all day.

However, there is one production I want to pause and dwell on for it was simply outstanding. Just before the Spring half-term the sixth form put on a play called *Laramie*. It recounts the events following the brutal murder of a young homosexual man in small-town America. Taking the perspectives of Laramie townsfolk, the students each played several parts and gave performances of extraordinary

maturity and profundity. The intensity and emotional demands of the piece, coupled with the harrowing nature of the crime, makes this one of the most challenging pieces of theatre to perform. And that is for professionals. Yet our students did it, and not only did they do it, they did it brilliantly. The ambition of Mr Brown and the belief he had in the cast's capacity to rise to the challenge made *Laramie's* success. In all honesty, I found the emotional depth the students displayed overwhelming. I think, probably, this was the very best piece of theatre I have ever seen performed by school students.

This year I have met many parents, current and prospective, who when the words 'Mary Goodhew' are mentioned begin to behave very curiously. Their eyes glaze over, they begin to sway slightly and, through their ecstatic haze, they mutter 'Mary Goodhew! How did you get her? She's brilliant'. Well, Mary *is* brilliant and she and her team prepare our Legat dancers wonderfully well. The enthusiasm the students have for dance, their talent, elegance and grace leave me feeling - well - rather like the awkward back-row forward that I am. Our dancers move differently to other human beings; their ethereal quality and utter commitment to success is humbling. Legat dancers will work themselves to the bone, dancing more than twenty hours a week and producing breathtaking work.

We have seen some great things this year, not least the wonderful end of year show last Sunday, and I know that the major dance show at the Congress Theatre, Eastbourne on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December will be amongst the cultural St Bede's highlights of next academic year. My sincere thanks to Mary and her team, her new deputy Mr Hinson, Mrs Blewer and Miss Natascha (as she is fondly know to all).

Sport is another important strand in the life of the School and one which we happen to be very good at. However, not only are we good in terms of elite sport - putting it crudely, good at 'winning things' - but we are good at getting people of all abilities involved. On a warm afternoon, the tennis courts are full; the sports hall overflows with students all year around; the gym clanks and heaves each afternoon and evening accompanied by the unmelodic thwack of squash balls; the clack of cricket bat on cricket ball is ever-present in our nets in summer term; our playing fields are constantly used and the swimming pool is rarely without students

churning the water. In cricket we have had fourteen sides representing the School this year and the same number in football.

To my mind, the mark of a school's success in sport should not be judged solely by the number of trophies it wins or the success of its first elevens, but by the number of students participating. I know the sports department share this view and we remain committed to widening participation for our students. Consequently, we are in the process of applying for planning consent to develop a further fifteen acres of land as playing fields at the Dicker. Happily, these plans have been supported by the Parish Council and the Residents Association and it has been a pleasure working with them to reach a positive outcome. These new fields will allow yet more students to contribute and, I hope, promote an extended 'touchline culture' amongst parents who will be able to watch their children play sport at St Bede's come wind, rain or sunshine.

There have been some remarkable successes in sport this year. In hockey, St Bede's holds all of the boys age group County titles. An extraordinary achievement. The U18 and U15 girls hockey sides are Sussex champions and three players, Patrick Skinner, Lauren Allymohamed and Nick Paxton, have achieved national representation.

We are National Football Champions again! However, this time it was our *female* footballers who became national champions and not the boys who brought the trophy home. Miss Muxworthy, a talented footballer herself, only formed the girls team this year and already they have won not just one national title, the Senior U18 eleven-a-side, but the U15s won the national six-a-side tournament too. Where do you go from there? Perhaps Real Madrid might see Miss Muxworthy as the worthy successor to Jose Mourinho when they tire of him, I should imagine, in the near future. Boys football was played with great spirit and positiveness. Two players, Michael Brown and Larry Egunjobi, both represented the ISFA team, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI - and well done to them - winning the Eastern Region of the Sussex League.

Cricket has been wonderful this season. We have been blessed with wonderful weather and have lost only half a game across the whole season to rain. Our boys have conducted themselves with great distinction and played the game enthusiastically but with sportsmanship and always with a smile on their faces. The 1<sup>st</sup> XI won the Sussex Title and also won the South East Regional 20/20

Championships, a feat repeated by our very talented U15 team on Monday evening. Callum Jackson, aged only 15, has already represented the Sussex 2<sup>nd</sup> XI and is part of the England Elite Performance Squad. Our girls cricket is developing very well and, under the leadership of Mrs Quinn and Petch Pyemont, it will, no doubt, go from strength to strength.

Our U18 netballers retained their Sussex Championship title and, narrowly, by a two goal margin, lost out at the regional finals. Mrs Merchant's leadership is first class and she - and all the junior and senior girls - can be very proud of their achievements this year.

Perhaps the maddest group of people in the School are our swimmers. Out of bed and in the pool every day by 5:45; tearing up and down the lanes for four to five hours each day; and, as if that were not enough, lifting weights and working out on land to improve their fitness further. Their dedication, and that of Mr Ayers, has seen St Bede's end the year as Sussex County Men and Boys Champions league. Moreover, we have a number of swimmers at this year's English, Irish and Welsh National Youth Championships this summer.

Our superb tennis players, led by the utterly focused Ms Salmon, have won four Sussex trophies: the Sussex Independent League for Boys at U18, the Boys U16; the Girls Sussex Shield at U15 and the Boys U15. Both the St Bede's girls and boys teams have qualified for the U19 National Finals which take place in Hertfordshire next week. We wish them all well as they take on the top sixteen schools in the country. Perhaps most remarkably, the supreme - and towering - Valentin Clements has reached the ranking of number two in the United Kingdom.

For the second year in a row our fencers, Kai Sodahl and Tish Barrett, attended the prestigious Public Schools fencing Competition. Our U18 rugby players won the Sussex Development sevens at U18 level with girls rugby being offered for the first time. Mr Dixon is developing a strong badminton squad and St Bede's is playing competitive fixtures once again. In Cross Country we had five students reaching Sussex level or higher. Squash continues to develop and we look forward to next year as these more understated sports grow and flourish.

Our golfers, led by Mr Halford, had a strong year overall. They have played ten matches since September, winning eight and losing only two. Those two losses were in the regional semi-finals of the main two cup events - the HMC foursomes

and the ISGA Singles matchplay - and were only 2-1 losses. I'm told - and these are musings familiar to my own imprecise and erratic game - that aside from a wayward drive, not getting it up and down, and a missed putt ... we could have won these two games as well.

Finally, on sport, I ought to mention several individuals who have produced extraordinary sporting performances. Firstly, Yolanda King was crowned Sussex sports personality of the year and won the National Table Tennis title playing against players three years older than she is. In athletics there has been national representation for the following athletes: Jay Amin in the 200m; Lauren Allymohamed - who seems to be brilliant at *every* sport - in the Javelin; Jonathan Ketley in the 800m; and Maddy Smith and Abigail Ashbee Simmonds may still qualify.

My sincere thanks to all the teachers and coaches who make sport happen. Without you, these teams would not play; so, on behalf of all the students, thank you to you for your efforts.

Many of you will have seen the art exhibited today in the Marquee. This is but a small snippet of something extraordinary. The public exhibition of examination art at St Bede's, as displayed for the last week, and opened last Friday evening in the Private viewing, is simply exceptional. If I understand correctly, over the last 17 years, of 501 students sitting Art at A level, only 33 have achieved less than a 'C' grade. Incredible. However, exam results are one thing, whilst passion and inventiveness are something more rarefied altogether. What I see in our art and design technology departments is something truly inspirational. Young people given the time to immerse themselves in their heart for hours at a time; guided by a dedicated team of teachers who, under the leadership of the irrepressible David Graham, give of their time, expertise and insight without apparent limitation. Essentially, our students have the experience of a foundation course at school. They can specialise in more than one areas and are taught by specialists. It is therefore no surprise that following our recent assessment visit by the *Good Schools Guide*, the reviewer wrote that:

*We could be forgiven for running out of superlatives when viewing [St Bede's] art department. They consistently win our top gold award for best*

*school in this category. A real productive buzz exists around the studios; they are awash with new quality light studios and outstanding student work. Everything done to the top of the game, ceramics, fine art, photography, graphics, textiles, design technology, sculpting, pottery.*

I have never seen a music department as wonderful as ours here at St Bede's. Under the dynamic leadership of Andrew Barclay, the music department have put on 28 concerts this year. That's right: 28 concerts. Not only is that number extraordinary, but the range and variety of music on display is unrivalled. Take the choir for instance. One choir is not enough for us. Firstly, we have the full school choir which, at its peak this year, had eighty singers in it. Add to that, the Chamber Choir, the Jazz Choir, the Girls' Choir, the Folk Choir and, the most recent and esoteric of all, the St Bede's Welsh Chorale, formed to pay tribute to Welsh hymnody at the recent Dorter formal dinner (albeit without a single Welshman amongst its members).

There have been so many musical highlights this year. House Music, my first introduction to St Bede's was stunning. The quality, talent and confidence of the performers, particularly the solo singers, was sensational. The Knights band's performance, with a six piece brass section among their twenty or so players, was the epitome of St Bede's. Energetic, hugely accomplished, abundant confidence, self-assured performances, massive talent and, above all, huge fun. Since then we have had the Cabaret Concert - an annual fixture which will go from strength to strength - Christmas Concerts, year group concerts, recitals at the Mansion House in London, Evensong at Chichester Cathedral, Chamber Concerts of a wonderful standard, song-writing showcases, exam recitals, the school musical, the wonderful BTEC gigs, the Folk Evening, Jazz bands, culminating last week in the St Bede's version of Glastonbury - St Bede's Rocks - an afternoon of music on different outdoor stages. I think you get the picture: music is massive at St Bede's, one of the best things we do and it is brilliant. Certainly, in my experience of schools, it is the best standard of music I have seen.

There are some dazzling performers in the School. In the most senior years we lose three of our leading singing lights this year. In a moment, you will hear Georgie Collinson, Sophie Booth and Ros Lloyd-Bostock sing. They are fabulous. Some of our

younger musicians have been part of the Glyndebourne set-up: Amelia Read and Luther Vine took part in the new opera *Knight Crew* and Zak Kahn, Nikita Leys and Hannah Savignon-Smythe sang with the Glyndebourne Youth Choir.

But why is St Bede's music so good? Well, we devote huge amounts of time to it. But, beyond that, we have brilliant, demanding yet sympathetic teachers. Even I have improved as a singer. I have always enjoyed singing in choirs but have never really been terribly good. Now, not for one second am I suggesting that I am anything better than tolerable in the bass section, however, thanks to the infectious culture of excellence in the St Bede's Music Department, even I can *almost* do it. However, I do realise that my family may not necessarily share my analysis...

The point is that our music department is not hidebound by convention or prejudice. All musical forms are represented and celebrated with many of our students practically living in Old Crossways. The teaching team are extraordinarily committed. Miss Morris's imagination and vision, Mrs Von Riebeck, Mr Dixon, Mr Beattie - and his ever-present and hard-working technical team (nothing, including today, could happen without you) - and the incomparable Mr Scamardella, all put hours into developing, improving and nurturing our young musicians. And of course, who could forget our dynamic, ever-youthful Supremo, the Director of Music, Mr Barclay.

I need to thank our Governors. Theirs is a voluntary task and they devote many hours to supporting the School and holding us to account. In my first year as Headmaster, their support, and in particular the unstinting support of the Chairman of Governors, Major-General Meier, has been superb. Thank you.

I must thank the teaching staff. Never before have I worked with such a talented - multi-talented - group of people. They work incredibly hard and give so much of themselves to the School. You are a brilliant group of people. Thank you for all you do.

A Trust this size could not work without a legion of support staff. Our IT team, lead by Guy Cleverley, do a wonderful job keeping the place running. Their ambition,

helpfulness and good humour - particularly when confronted by IT inept Headmasters is always refreshing.

We sit here in beautiful surrounding and they do not come about by accident. My sincere thanks to the facilities and maintenance teams led by Shaun Pantrey and Steve Hadland; the Grounds Team led by Leigh Bennett; and the Gardens Team led by Ken Hughes. It is a great thing passing time - generally in the holidays - with these talented, delightful and dedicated people.

The finance and admin teams do a wonderful job keeping the cogs oiled. One exceptional person, my PA, Karen Ray-Gain, has been an absolute rock this year, supporting and guiding me through the School. A special thank you to Karen who, as you might imagine, has been extra-busy this year.

Thank you also to Jo Newton who runs the School Shop; Mr Paxton and his team who keep the Sports Complex operating eighteen hours a day, seven days a week.

Thank you to our Marketing and Admissions teams who work incredibly hard for the success of our school.

Then there are those who look after us. The matrons in the Boarding Houses are all wonderful people who do a difficult job playing mother to 350 of our boarders and, often, day students too. You are all much-loved and appreciated by the students and staff alike. Those leaving school today will always remember you. Thank you for all you do.

The School Nurse, Emma Bowes-Crick, an Old Bedian herself, has worked tremendously hard this year. As a veteran of Army tours to Afghanistan and Iraq, she does not panic easily and is able to tell 'real' complaints from those merely 'imagined' by students...

Our cleaners are taken for granted too easily. Appearing before we arrive in work and, again, as we leave, it is too easy to imagine that classrooms, offices and houses magically clean themselves. They don't and thank you to the Cleaning Team for everything they do.

565 of you are day students here and you arrive here each morning by school transport. It only works so well because of the brilliance, flexibility and humanity

of Kevin Read and his team of drivers. Unsung heroes all: the School couldn't work without you.

Our caterers work tremendously hard on our behalf preparing roughly 2000 meals a day in difficult and challenging conditions. We appreciate everything you do and thank you for your considerable efforts on our behalf.

Finally, I would like to thank my senior team. They have worked incredibly hard this year and been more supportive than I could ever have wished for. We have achieved a lot together this year and it has been a pleasure working with you. Your passion and drive for our students has been absolutely inspirational.

And of course, a thank you to our students. I have listed your splendid achievements earlier in this talk. However, I want to thank you for the little things: your conversations, your laughter, your capacity to talk to anyone, your ability to recognise the good in each other and your willingness - always - to support each other and celebrate each other's successes. You have made my first year an utter pleasure: thank you.

One student to whom I am hugely grateful is this year's Head of School **Jack Christie**. Three weeks into August, I interviewed Jack and two other candidates for the Head of School position. Two things stuck me about that process. Firstly, it was evident that Jack possessed many fine qualities, all of which self-evidently recommended him as a head of school. Secondly, I was struck by how genuinely pleased his fellow candidates were for his success.

Happily, Jack has gone on to be a roaring success as Head of School. He has a calmness and measure one tends not to immediately associate with eighteen year olds. He is popular without courting popularity, friendly whilst not having favourites, wise without being aloof. Jack is enormously talented, an actor of serious distinction - so much so that he has been offered a place at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts whose patron is Dame Judi Dench. Mountview is one of the top drama schools in London where around 3,000 people audition for only 40 spaces on the course. It is exceptionally rare for an 18 year old to get offered a place for a degree in acting at such a young age.

Jack's thoughtfulness and insight into the School has been a great benefit to me as he has helped me to understand and know St Bede's. We met each week and had

lunch together and, during our conversations, his advice and wisdom were invaluable in helping me gain a perspective on the students' experience of the School. It has been a privilege to work alongside Jack as Head of School in my first year at St Bede's.

This week myself, Mrs Belrhiti, the Senior Housemaster (Boarding), Mr Dickie, the Senior Housemaster (Day), spent ten wonderful hours interviewing prospective prefects. Seventy-seven lower sixth formers applied in writing, with all their letters beautifully presented, coherently argued and persuasive. We three saw each of them and were stunned by their maturity, easy self-assurance and talent. On the first day, we interviewed for seven solid hours and not any point did we feel dejected or agitated. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, laughed a huge amount, and I just felt an overwhelming enormous pride - just as you parents should feel - in the people that they are. From that seventy-seven, we chose twenty-nine to be prefects.

Earlier today, we said goodbye to our Upper Sixth. A group of people I have not been able to get to know well enough but whose company I have thoroughly enjoyed. However, today we also say good bye to a number of staff who have contributed to our community:

Rosie Leefe and Andrew Keir joined us in January as temporary members of staff. We are grateful to you both for your hard work and commitment this year.

Dylan Beattie joined us last September and made an instant impact on the community. He has worked tirelessly with our music technologists and sound crews who support almost every school event. Dylan has decided, at the age of 27, that if he doesn't go for it in the music production industry now, then he never will. He leaves us to set up his own business with his partner and we wish him every success.

Oliver Morgan has taught English inspirationally for the last two years. He leaves us to move to Geneva where he will teach part-time whilst studying towards a Ph.D. His humane and intelligent influence will long be felt by the St Bede's community.

Joanne Venter has taught EAL at St Bede's for nearly three years. She did try to leave us at Christmas to join her husband who had already moved to Watford. However, ever the professional, Joanne chose to put off the charms of Watford - how could she do that?! - to see her students through the year. An act of typical goodness from a very fine person.

Paddy Green is another member of staff relocating to distant climes. Paddy has been a stalwart member of the Learning Support Department for three years and will be wonderfully appreciated by many, many children who have received her support and kindness over the years. Paddy, good luck in Romania which I know will be a wonderfully exciting venture for you and your husband.

Jon Dale has been a member of the PE Department and Dorms house for three years. He leaves us this year to return to New Zealand not only with memories and rich experience, but with a fiancée. Miss Earp joined St Bede's two years ago as a member of the EAL Department and recently, she and Jon announced their engagement. As their lives change radically, we wish them every happiness together.

Lastly, Kate Birch leaves St Bede's after four years to travel around the world for - she says at the moment - a year. Katie has given a huge amount to the community as drama teacher - *Peter Pan* was her production, as Deputy to Lou Belrhiti in Dorter, and as a wonderful ball of Welsh energy. There were many tears shed at the Dorter farewell dinner when Katie said goodbye to the House. It was evident to us all that you have made an incredible impact on so many people and we wish you well in all you do.

You will be pleased to know that I am approaching the end of my speech. My final duty, before we turn to the Prize Giving, is to thank you - the parents - for your warm welcome, support and openness in my first year here. Many of you have been willing to share your observations of the School with me. I hope you feel that you have been heard and sense the School is heading on an upward curve.

Your support has indeed been much appreciated, indeed, in some cases, it has gone beyond the call of duty. Take, for example, the parents of a sixth form

boarder who, when confronted with a dilemma regarding their daughter, wrote an email that read:

*'Dear Mrs Housemistress' - names have been changed to protect the guilty - 'We understand that the Leavers Ball on Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> of May may well finish by 10:30 pm and that the students plan to have an after-ball party on the beach at Eastbourne. Mildred has asked us to write in giving permission for her stay out overnight with a friend so that she can attend said beach party. However, we are unwilling to provide a 'fake confirmation' for her and insist that she stays at school. She will be leaving early in the morning and needs a good night's rest'.*

With support like that, you can't really go wrong!

I started my address by asking what makes a school 'good'. I think I have found the answer here at St Bede's: St Bede's is a place that affirms young people. It allows them to become who they want to be; we are a school that does not push square pegs into round holes. Our 'end product' is only typical in the fact that our students are *not* typical. They wear their differences easily and make choices with confidence. They leave us self-aware yet remain sensitive to the needs and interests of others; they are comfortable in their own skin yet able to recognise the intrinsic value of other people; they have achieved but are able to recognise the achievements of others; they are tolerant whilst able to exercise judgement and hold strong principles; they think as individuals yet are able to understand the need for community. Above all, they are happy and are happy that others too have found happiness. To my mind, it is that which makes a school good.