

Gianni, Governors, Colleagues, Parents and Boys,

I guess the announcement had to come. On the 21st June the school took an intake of breath to hear of the Head (and his wife) retiring. Not quite yet of course, but that countdown familiar to so many Rudiments boys over the years of this is the last time that I do this at Loyola is about to start for us.

It *is* a time for counting. 88 is a significant number for me: I started at Loyola in 1988 and in September will embark on my 88th term. Ten is a good number – ten scholarships gained by Rudiments in 2017 to seven schools: Joe Garfield gained four – to Bancroft’s, Forest, Chigwell and St Edmund’s, Sam Bunting two to Forest and St Edmund’s, Shanuggan Sivakunalan achieved a scholarship to City of London Boys and four Grammar School places (which in standard are comparable to scholarship), Yonni Levy gained an award to St Edmund’s, Oscar Whitely-John to New Hall and William Laniyan received a music scholarship from Haileybury. Two as a number isn’t bad – that’s the number of music exhibitions gained (by William and Joe); or how about forty-seven – the amount of 11+ entrances received or twelve – the number of schools from whom we received offers:

Bancroft’s	1 scholarship; 9 places
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Brentwood	3 places
Chigwell	1 scholarship; 9 places; 1 music exhibition
City of London Boys	1 scholarship; 3 places
Felsted	1 place
Framlingham College	1 place
Forest	2 scholarships; 6 places; 1 sports exhibition
Haileybury	1 scholarship (music)
New Hall	1 scholarship; 1 place
St Nicholas	1 place
St Aubyn's	1 place
St Edmund's	3 scholarships; 12 places

89.6 is very close to my magic 88. You may recall that I made an angry fuss last year about the new Government SATs which for the first time actually classified pupils as successes and failures by imposing tests (especially in Grammar) that contained frankly worthless information. On more sober reflection, I think that these were an attempt to impose a new 11+ selection test by the back door in the brave new world imagined before the last Election when Grammar Schools

would re-inherit the educational earth. This year we decided not to submit official data to the Department for Education as I still have doubts about the national labelling of all eleven year olds on the basis of one set of tests, but our Rudiments boys did undertake the tests which were sent away for external marking. The irony of course is that we did very well. The boys sat 125 papers altogether in English and maths with 112 above the pass mark – or 89.6% for all papers. Individual subject results show a 92% pass rate in maths and English Comprehension and an 80% pass rate in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Statistics released on the 4th July for results nationally show that 71% of pupils in England and Wales passed maths, 75% English Comprehension and 77% in the Grammar paper. Thus as a measure of our own standards against national expectations, we did very well.

Four is another number of interest this year. Over last Summer and into the Autumn the three floors of the 1960s wing that had been constructed in two stages during Mr O’Gara’s time became four with the arrival of what the Governors somewhat flatteringly have dubbed the Nicholson Suite. The addition of this new facility has already made a major impact allowing a widening of the practical opportunities open to pupils in science and ADT and as a bi-product allowing the expansion of other activities – such as the

massively successful Chess Club. In passing I must register appreciation of former parent George Leonides whose support and foresight is a major reason for such a rapid realisation of this project.

Five or six also represents the number of Sports that the boys have been able to play at interschool level this year: soccer, rugby, cricket, hockey and swimming.

I say or six as we also have played chess in inter school competition. I shall leave it to Mrs Regueiro who spearheads our chess so enthusiastically and Mr Bleasdale to haggle over the status of chess as a sport! We can add to that five or six sports in which the boys have been coached over the year: including gymnastics, trampoline, badminton, tennis, sailing, athletics, ski-ing ... and do we call P.O.W. a sport? Three represents the three soccer tournaments we have won. We are the local Woodford Green Prep School Champions but what has really enthused the school is our emergence first as Small School South East Regional Soccer Champions and then as National Champions. I hereby invite the Captain and Vice Captain of the Soccer Team to come forward to hold up the Trophies.... I do not want to denigrate rugby and cricket in which notable performances took place and which in cricket saw two Prep boys representing the first team, but this also has been the year of our best swimming performance coming 3rd out of 9 in the Bancroft's Swimming Gala, and achieving a higher

position than the hosts! I congratulate all the boys who make sport so vibrant at school and whilst I try not create litanies of names in this speech feel justified in thanking Ollie Morah, Neil Bleasdale, Gerry Scannell, James Johnson and Martin Foxall for their committed contribution to both sporting excellence and the availability of opportunities within the school. Meanwhile Amy Regueiro and Chris Brown extend extra curricular sporting activities in Elements and Rudiments. Modesty forbids reference to the facilitator of P.O.W. but I should include Michael Blooman who also has contributed to sports provision.

The number one has to suffice for our sports interhouse competitions this year as one team has dominated. Interhouse Champions in Soccer, Rugby and Athletics: the crown has gone to Southwell and his year Green has reigned supreme.

Trying to fit numbers into reporting on our performing arts may seem more problematic. A seeming cast of hundreds seemed to populate the Nativity, skilfully masterminded by Mrs Anthony and her team. This annual production always reminds me of watching opera at Verona of the Passion Play at Oberammergau such is the number of cast members and ambition of the production. At the other end of the year Mrs Brown and Mrs Butler produced

the traditional Rudiments play – this time about a super hero called Stan and a Super Villain who closely resembled an even more demented Willy Wonka and featured the usual assortment of men in frocks, silly voices, dancing with varying degrees of precision, fighting and slapstick and singing (Jake, Sam, Joe and Joseph arguably standing out). This week we were entertained royally by two festivals of poetry and music and movement. We went from the oldest poem on Earth with Figures to an Old Woman with a major eating disorder in Pre-Prep 2, to a mischievously rude use of words in Prep, to meet a wide assortment of felines with Elements, to excellent examples of choral speaking in Pre-Prep 1 and highly entertaining co-ordinated dances in Reception and Kindergarten. Sam Bunting then concluded proceedings by reciting a poem of his own about what it feels like to be leaving Loyola. (I may need to borrow his text!) The Choir had two major enterprises: singing on stage at the Barbican through a complexity of songs was challenging for all concerned (mums who accompanied us there will attest to that) although my impromptu teaching of the choir of the Alphabet Game during one of the intervals offered light relief. However, as ever the concert, alongside many other schools for Barnardos, was a success. More recently we had the enjoyment of Goldilocks. This was quite simply splendid. The boys sang from memory with gusto and obvious

enjoyment. Patrick's scream to signify the eating of Arthur as Goldilocks by Theo as Baby Bear was truly heart stopping! At Christmas we experimented in taking the Choir and Schola to Chigwell Convent for our Carol Service. The setting was beautiful and the acoustics kind. Maybe we marooned some of the choir on the sanctuary too far from Mrs Thomas's direction with the schola in the organ loft, but as a service I think it worked, although we may need some tweaks if we return. The high spot for the Schola was singing at Westminster Cathedral at a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Nichols. The purity of their voices floating from the choir stalls behind the altar up into the Nave was sublime. My resolution not to include names is weakening. Mrs Thomas remains the inspiration and guide for what is still recognised as an exceptional feature of the school. I also want to use this opportunity to thank Julie Tarling, one of our outgoing mums this year for all of her support over the years when the boys have been outward bound on their choral activities.

Instrumentally we have enjoyed two show-cases of our young talent this term. Pupils performed on violin, viola, cello, flute, piano, guitar and percussion or as vocal soloists. Our string orchestra has met early most Tuesdays of term and contains boys from Rudiments down to Prep. I am grateful to all of our peripatetic teachers for the extra dimensions they bring to the school: Miss

Harrington, Mr Wood, Mrs Gallagher and my good lady wife.

This year Gerry Scannell stepped down as Chair of the P.T.A. after nine years at the helm. Founded in 1986 by my predecessor Mr O'Connor, the P.T.A. has enjoyed a proactive and enterprising history. In my time it has contributed to the installation of the I.C.T. Suite, the provision of interactive whiteboards, the purchase of the astroturf, the purchase of i pads, the acquisition of two minibuses and sundry donations of books and equipment. Gerry has led it with calm efficiency and whilst also thanking the whole committee for such activities as the Barbecue, the Irish Dancing Night, the Quiz Night and the Christmas Fete, I thank Gerry for his many years of service.

Mrs Tidmarsh has completed her first year as our composite Head of RE – responsible for both Religion as an academic subject but also for the organisation of our liturgy. She inherited a rich if formidable tradition, originally established by the much-missed Mrs Sands and continued by Mrs Garnar. Our liturgy is still the highlight of my week as we come together to esteem the diverse Faiths that we bring with us in what is a profoundly spiritual experience. The opportunity for boys as young as 4 and a half to contribute to the readings and prayers leaves its mark on the great sense of occasion that our

pupils often bring to formal ceremonies and the self-assurance they show as public speakers. Thank you Ellen for continuing the tradition so eloquently and to all staff who help prepare the boys so effectively. (Pre-Prep 1 led by Miss Roddy to know their readings by heart being one such example).

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am fortunate for the continued support of so many talented and dedicated staff. Equally the support of the governors and trustees remains critical and as totally unpaid positions those who fill them do so out of love of the school. They have an interesting time ahead. When thinking of my own longevity in this post, it is worth reflecting on the long service of many of the Governors. In nearly thirty years as Head I have only had three Chairs of Governors – Alfred Wheater (who employed me), Don Magee and Anne Marie Fox. Such loyalty is another factor of what makes our school strong.

And so to me. This isn't a valediction – a farewell speech – but I want to reflect just a little on what I think is important in Headship.

I never expected to be here for so long. Democracies change their leaders every five to seven years. The U.S. copy Ancient Rome in only allowing their Presidents a limited number of terms in office. Tyrannies tend to have long lasting leaders. So has this been a period of despotism or benevolent tyranny?

Maybe you should ask the staff or the pupils. But why have I stayed so long?

Well in my time I have looked elsewhere. That should be expected, but the grass is seldom greener elsewhere just a different shade. There were always incentives to stay. My immersion in the Jesuit approach to education taught me Ignatius's belief that schools educate to enable pupils to identify and develop their talents, but these talents then are to be used in service of others for the Greater Glory of God (the English translation of AMDG – the school motto). St John describes how at the start of the Last Supper, Christ washed the feet of his disciples – the Master serving the Servants. Both images have stuck with me. I am unusual I am sure in many ways but one in particular is how much I teach. This is partly arrogance – I love teaching and want to do it. But also it is part of the idea of the person in charge utilising skills to serve the community. I may be tyrannical in some ways, but if I come up with an initiative that effects teaching and learning in school, I am affected by it as much as my colleagues.

Modern headship does not allow the luxury for this. I am Chair of St John's Buckhurst Hill and the Head there does not teach – he hasn't time – and I suspect that my model is old fashioned and anachronistic. But it has kept me

here and I hope will leave a legacy. In fact I know it has. Last Friday Mrs Regueiro and Mrs Brown organised an excellent activity day centred around art and design activities. Aboriginal art mixed with kite building gives a flavour. The boys were resplendent in their house colours moving from activity to activity in Houses. What was striking was how the Rudiments and Figures boys worked alongside to Reception and Pre-Prep boys – often serving their needs before their own. This is using talents to serve others and our boys do it instinctively.

We see it in the relationship between Jake, Harry and their Senior Prefects and the smaller boys in school, in the sympathetic manner in which our senior boys support the younger ones. Our Early Years boys so well supported this year by Mrs McHardy, Mrs Quirk, Mrs Foster, Mrs Payne, Miss Stratton and their teams aspire to be Rudiments boys because of the example that they receive. We see it in our excellent Teacher Assistants throughout the school supporting both the teachers and their pupils.

We see it in the manner in which individual staff bring their specialist expertise to support your boys such as Mr Hatzar with Computer Science, Miss Savage who supports Prep in that vital transition between key stages and along the ways

fills their imagination with a wonderful array of stories, Miss Daly who along with Mrs Tidmarsh offers such measured guidance to our small groups in Prep, Mrs Wilson and Mrs Bird who open up access to modern foreign languages, Mrs Pereira who brings Latin to the top set Figures and Rudiments timetable, or Mrs Boulton who festoons upon Figures and Rudiments her love of great literature and through being Librarian encourages reading as a real and enjoyable past time.

Our school is an inverse triangle. The nearer you are to the base, the more important you are. The closer you are to the apex the greater your responsibility to serve. So the Head must be the Servant of all.

I also have stayed due to a commitment to the education of boys. This isn't just because I have three sisters and three daughters but out of an absolute conviction that between the ages of 3 and 11 boys are better being taught separately. I won't extend this speech by going over the evidence again, but we stand alone in the area offering boys' education at the primary stage. Twenty-nine years ago, Chigwell, St Aubyn's, Daiglen and Loughton Independent were all schools for boys. How times change! But the opportunity to work with colleagues to create a structure and teaching methodology designed to suit

primary age boys has been a great privilege. Some years ago I discussed this with schools' minister Nick Gibb. Maybe in retirement I can continue to spread the word!

My opportunity to teach is due to both the forbearance of the governors but also the efficiency of the school office. I owe a personal debt of gratitude to all of my Senior Team – my two deputies Mrs Brown and Mrs Anthony particularly who in taking over so many additional responsibilities liberate me from many of the shackles of administration, but also to Mrs Rosario, Mrs Lawless and Mrs Long who keep me on the straight and narrow but also run the office with such courteous efficiency.

Ladies and gentleman I also have stayed for a close personal reason. Many of you will know the story of my daughter Annabel and how in 1990 the boys of Loyola alongside the pupils of St Antony's and of Avon House united in prayer for her when life support had been switched off and Great Ormond Street waited for her to pass away. Not only has she survived (now living and working in Germany) but many more have survived since as the Hospital changed the way they treated patients with her condition as a result. I believe implicitly in the power of children's prayer and this place will always mean so much to my

family.

Two last numbers: 36 and 9. 36 years ago I married my wife Sarah, just a month after Prince Charles married Diana. For the first six years Sarah had to share the family – boarders and day students, boys and girls - that were the pupils of St Hugh's Prep with me; for the next 30 there have been interlopers in blue blazers in our household. Throughout this time Sarah has sustained me with her love and support as well as providing musical subsidence to my schools by teaching the violin. She has been patient as have my three daughters who as children often had to remind me to be a Daddy and not a school teacher. From August 31st 2018, I can start at last to be a full time husband and father. And the number 9? On July 9th 2017 while I was lecturing to aspiring Heads in Oxford, my daughter Sophie gave birth to Theodore Peter West. Theo – a Gift from God indeed.

Thank-you.

