

OBA LUNCH – 1 December 2006

Mr President, Old Brutonians, fellow guests, about a month ago I was challenged by a prospective parent about what I regarded as the important values that King's would instil in a boy or girl, that would stay with them throughout their lives – she didn't put the question using quite these words – in fact, she actually wanted to know how to recognise an Old Brutonian if she met one at a dinner party. An extraordinary question, but one that was clearly not to be answered by simply listing off a series personal values as stated in the prospectus!

“Common Sense – full of common sense – that is what I hope you would find in an Old Brutonian”. The lady looked puzzled – “Yes”, I said, “Common Sense”.

In many ways Common Sense is like an old friend who has been with us for many years, but has now passed on. In its heyday, Common Sense cultivated many valuable lessons, such as life not always being fair; learning to laugh at yourself; and also being able to say, ‘maybe it was my fault after all’.

Common Sense helped us to take risks and realise we can't live our lives in cotton wool; it helped develop the idea that respect is earned, not given by right.

Sadly, I explained, we now live in an over-regulated world where Common Sense has gone out of the window: a world where schools are required to get parental consent to administer Panadol, sun lotion, or a sticking plaster to a child, but are not allowed to inform parents if their daughter is pregnant and wants to have an abortion. Common Sense took a real beating when it was decided that you can't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home, and the burglar can sue you for

assault. Common Sense finally died when a woman who failed to realise that a steaming cup of coffee was hot, spilt some on herself and was promptly awarded financial compensation.

Common Sense was born out of truth and trust, but is now only survived by three more unpleasant characters:

“I know my rights”

“Someone else is to blame”, and

“I am a victim”

The woman looked at me rather puzzled, but then smiled. “You are right”, she said, “We all need some Common Sense back in our lives”. She left my office and promptly signed her son up to join King’s next September!

Of course, if we are to have any chance of getting Common Sense back into education, we must do all we can to provide a genuinely holistic education. In a educational world which is constantly driven by the desire to establish specialist schools, I am very proud to be Headmaster of a school whose specialisation is breadth.

Academically, it has been another excellent year, with this year’s A level results passing the records that were set last year – 62% of all A level entries were graded A or B, and there was a 100% pass rate for the first time. However, far more importantly, King’s was rated the 10th best school in the country when it comes to “Valued Added” performance – how much better does a student do at a school than might be expected based on IQ type tests carried out when a pupil joins a school.

The academic success is a result of high expectations which are built into all we do, whether it be in the classroom/sports field/theatre or whatever.

Earlier in the term, I asked a third former (only weeks into his time at King's), to keep a daily diary to gain some insight to what the expression "holistic education" might mean to a 14 year-old – I wonder whether this brings back any memories:

- 7.15am Woken by that damned bell – although haven't slept much due to constant noise from house printer – clearly the U6 are having an essay or coursework crisis.
- 7.45am Breakfast – American pancakes – good start to the day.
- 8.40am Drama – had to pretend to be a flower. Not really a boy thing.
Food Science – apple pie. Great!
Maths – oh dear.
- Break Giant cookies and hot chocolate in the JCR. Even time to finish my French prep.
- 11.05am Double Chemistry – at my prep school, the boys were better at science than the girls, but not here. The girls in our group are nice but scarily clever.

- 1.05pm Lunch – I have to confess the foods not bad, and today the Deputy Head, Mr Evans, said “hello” to me in the queue. I have never seen such a tall man, I don’t want to get into trouble with him!
- 1.45pm Went to watch the senior house debating competition. Lyon beat the girls from Wellesely in some argument over Afghanistan – boy power rules again!
- 2.25pm Back to lessons. Maths, French, and ICT. Every one of them gave us prep – that’s not good. The Headmaster told us the other day that there was no such thing as “no prep” – and I thought he was quite a nice man!
- 4.30pm Lessons over – phew! Just about to get changed to go to Hazlegrove for canoeing in the swimming pool. Great fun – learnt how to roll a canoe.
- 6.00pm Back to King’s and a quick dinner before a junior play rehearsal. We have a performance next week and everyone is getting stressed.
- 7.15pm Late start to prep – too much work at this place!
- 8.45pm Prep done – wasn’t so bad after all. Now off to Blackford for a pool competition.
- 9.30pm Time for bed – prefect doesn’t seem in a good mood, so better not bother with any pillow fights tonight. I’m rather tired anyway – good night, sir!

Beyond the world of a 3rd former, this year has also marked a major step forward in co-education at King's. Only last week, a combined girls team entered the senior boys' inter-house indoor hockey competition – in front of a packed sports hall – they began by winning their first game 3 - 0, followed by holding the overall winners to a 0 - 0 draw, before narrowly losing to the remaining two boys' houses. As to who lost and who drew – well that had better remain a closed secret.

Old and Wellesley have dominated house music. Blackford set new heights for house drama. New House are an energising force in house sports, while Lyon and Priory still seem to win more cups than the others. Arion is in the midst of its final year as a 6th form boys' house, before it opens its doors to girls next September. King's will then be made up of 4 boys' and 3 girls' houses – a balance that will enable us to build further upon 10 successful years of full co-education.

Last year, I talked about our extensive capital development programme for the coming years – it is therefore very encouraging to report that the first full year of our Development Office under the direction of Richard Claas, has been very exciting.

Back in August, we launched a Legacy Programme, “Your Past, Our future”, and already several Old Brutonians have pledged bequests to the school for which we are eternally grateful. Legacy gifts are, in the long run, likely to be the most significant source of income for schools like King's up and down the land. I was intrigued to read a month or so ago, an article which stated that those who remember a charity in their Wills are predicted to extend their life expectancy by 7 years – so an “investment” in the future in every sense of the word!

(6)

Only last month, the first Annual Fund was launched at King's – I am sure you received the brochure. The Annual Fund gives everyone with a relationship with the school the opportunity to make a gift (small or large) that has an immediate effect on the lives of current Brutonians. This year's fund is principally aimed at redeveloping our theatre, and kick starting the first proper refurbishment programme of our boarding houses for over 25 years. Our target for this first Annual Fund is £50,000, and it is therefore very pleasing to announce that over £20,000 has already been generated. Old Brutonians have played a major part in this success, and we are all extremely grateful for the support you are giving your old school. Small gifts do make a huge difference – as I said at the launch of the Annual Fund, if every family in the wider King's community gave £10 a month for the year, the fund would realise nearly £400,000 – quite a staggering statistic.

From next September we are aiming to introduce a new series of Old Brutonian reunions at King's – a further step in helping the OBA to thrive. A thriving Association and a thriving school – now that really is a formidable combination.