

Mr Magee, Governors, Colleagues, Parents and Boys,

In 1956, St Ignatius Junior School was celebrating six years since it moved to Palmerston Road in Buckhurst Hill. At the same time in Croydon two four year old twins were arriving for their first term in Kindergarten with Mother Mary Andrew at Coloma Prep School. The little boy was wearing a distinctive blue blazer, with a white shirt and a blue tie with diagonal stripes, a pair of shorts, socks with two blue stripes pulled up to his rather warty knees all crowned with a blue cap replete with school badge. Little did he know that thirty-two years later he would be arriving for his first term as Head of a school now named Loyola whose uniform was strikingly familiar ... or that sixty-two years later he would be retiring from there.

As you might expect from me, the history and tradition of the school means a lot to me and there is a book to be written about it sometime. Schools necessarily are transitional institutions and names once well known and even revered are lost as generations of pupils take their folk memories with them. In only six short years there will be no boys at Loyola who had been taught by Peter Nicholson and curious eyes will look at Paul Hatzar's magnificent window and say "We know what AMDG means but who or what on Earth is this PGMN?" And so it should be. But for the record, let's stir the mists of time and bring to

mind the pioneers who as Heads made Loyola what it is today. Gladys Stokes who brought the school here with only three forms (Elements to Rudiments) in 1950, Father James Palmer who established the school and its Jesuit credentials from 1951-1959; Father Frederick Lane who was in charge from 1959-1962; Malachi O’Gara who created something of a dynasty of teachers here and who served for an impressive twenty-three years building the school block that now houses Kindergarten and all of our Key Stage 2 classrooms; Ian O’Connor who brought the school into the modern era, planning further expansion and development and encouraging the Parent Voice in introducing the monthly newsletter and the P.T.A. And then from 1988 comes yours truly to be followed by the next exciting chapter in the school’s story with Kirsty Anthony in September 2018.

So our school has grown and continues to evolve. What am I going to miss most about it?

I guess initially it’s the passion and enthusiasm of Loyola boys. You know, you are a special breed with the gratifying ability to enjoy yourselves at school but also with a unique sense of occasion. You are receptive and talented, but also resilient and for most of the time ready and eager to try your best even when we

teachers intensify the challenge. You are normal boys, of course – and can argue, have disagreements and sometimes forget our school aim to treat others with respect as we would wish to be treated ourselves. But looking at you as your headmaster fills me with pride for the contribution you make to our school community.

I am going to miss teaching you and actually of visiting your classes when other teachers are teaching you. I have never wished to impose a house style for teaching methods as teaching is a personal skill and what works for me as a teacher (such as spinning a child around to represent gases swirling about in space before the Big Bang) would not suit all teachers. One of my theses about boys is that their excellent peripheral vision (ability to be distracted) requires them to have a varied approach from teachers – not the same teacher all of the time and certainly not the same method. Boys, thank you for your response and putting up with me over these last years – and colleagues apologies for the noise emanating from my classrooms at times and for the over excited children that you sometimes have inherited if you are teaching them after a history period.

I shall miss the academic buzz of the school. Mumsnet has described us as “probably the most academic school in the area” which makes sound a bit like a

pint of Carlsberg. Academic doesn't mean a hot house – it means a dedication to support each pupils' grasp of the academic forms of knowledge to the best of his ability following the precepts of St Ignatius of Loyola that education is about finding and acquiring skills to be developed as a means of service to others for the Great Glory of God. Achievement of course must be relative to natural ability. The boys know that my own academic record is chequered – caned at the age of 11 for not achieving 60% or above in a maths test and not passing the 11+ test for Grammar Schools, but my teachers pointed me in the direction that my future skills would evolve – inspirational teachers led me to the humanities in general and history in particular whilst my Dad as a World War 2 rear gunner in a Wellington Bomber and later a writer and journalist left me an interest in storytelling.

How is this academic buzz exemplified? Actually I see it in Kindergarten and Reception where these tiny boys lap up the basic building blocks for learning with such natural joy and, frankly awe and wonder. I see it in work handed in from all years in history that go the extra mile and reach for the stars. I see it in the data.

If there is a part of a Prize Giving headmaster's speech that everyone dreads, it's

statistics. The recitation of numbers, percentages, and references to national norms are the bread and butter of school speechwriters. But this is my last speech, and I have reached page 5 with no data so far. But we need some – hopefully not over-analysed. This is because the boys and teachers who have achieved these results deserve recognition and this is one reason why some Mums and Dads are here. So here we go:

The academic year 2017/18 has been one of the most successful in the school's history:

At 11+ in total Rudiments boys gained fourteen scholarships and thirty-eight places. Scholarships were gained from seven different schools.

Congratulations in particular to our scholars: Tenny Marianayagam (City of London, Chigwell, Forest) Thierno Diallo (New Hall, Haileybury, Chigwell and in Music to Bishop's Stortford College), Aaron Huang (Haileybury), Arthur Johnson (Forest), Tami Unuefa (St Aubyn's), Matthew Reid (Forest), Michael Dong (Chigwell), Jensen Puvaneswaran (New Hall), and Regan Creasey (New Hall). In addition, Michael Dong passed the very demanding preliminary test for entrance to the major public schools at 13+.

Grammar School places achieved include : **Ilford County High (4), St Olave's (1), Royal Grammar School Colchester (1), King Edward Chelmsford (2), Queen Elizabeth's Barnet (1), Bromley Grammar (1).**

After a boycott of sending our SATS data to the DFE last year as a stand against what I still believe to be an unnecessarily over complication of the National Curriculum – I think to service a return to nationwide selection at 11 that was scuppered by the last Election – we reverted to submitting papers this year. The system has bitten back, and results are not being issued in time for them to be included here. (Maths, SPAG 82% of the class reached expected standard, Reading 91% of the class reached expected standard.)

I am not a great athlete myself which is probably why I invented such activities as P.O.W. whilst at St Edmund's. But I admire sporting prowess (despite supporting Crystal Palace) and I shall miss the boys' obvious enthusiasm for competitive sport. For the second year running this leads to a diversion into the expansion of sporting opportunities at school. I remain thrilled that, with Amy Reguerio's support, Chess

continues to flourish with tournaments expertly managed and stimulating individual pupil initiatives such as launching an interhouse competition. Hockey, Trampolining, Badminton, tennis, athletics, swimming, sailing and cross country all provide additional outlets to our traditional soccer, rugby and cricket. It has been an amazing season. Sit back and luxuriate as you listen to the honours achieved this season by a band of committed boys and talented coaches:

Soccer takes the palm:

At Under 11 we are the current

Chigwell School Festival Champions

Forest School Champions

Chigwell Regional Tournament Plate Winners

English School F.A. Essex Cup Winners

Woodford Green Prep School Champions

English Schools South East Champions

English Schools FA Danone Nations Cup Runners Up (after a penalty shoot out)

At Under10 we are:

St Edmund's Prep School Champions

St Aubyn's Tournament Champions (with no goals conceded)

Brentwood School Champions

At Under 9 we are:

Forest Tournament Champions

To coin a phrase "football has really come home" to a school which is modest in size and, in comparison with the local Big Three, facilities.

What they don't have is an Ollie, Gerry and Neil and the spirit of Loyola.

Meanwhile rugby has continued to flourish as our fixture list has extended all the way down to Under 9. Cricket has seen notable results at both Under 11 and Under 9 with our first team securing exciting victories in their last two matches against Chigwell and Avon House.

Internally Garnet are our interhouse soccer champions; Southwell triumphed at rugby and then again at Athletics. The champion athlete in the school after Sports Day was Raymond Ezihe.

I shall miss the opportunities for contributing to school visits. All classes throughout the school have the opportunity to embark on trips and this is a good time to thank colleagues for providing a variety of exciting trip destinations such as the Kingswood Centre near Cromer, Greenwich Observatory, The Tate Modern, King's College Cambridge, Paradise Park, Epping Forest Conservation Centre, Ray Park, Henry Moore's Sculpture Park, Hampton Court, the British Museum, Willows Farm and Palmerston Road to conduct a traffic survey! I shall miss escorting pupils around the British Museum and picking up a trail of usually Japanese tourists en route.

This year Sarah and I have been lucky to be included on two residential trips. The ski trip so well organised by Neil Bleasdale proved to be a metaphor for the camaraderie between parents, staff and pupils that always has been such a distinctive part of the Loyola experience. The pilgrimage to Loyola and Lourdes was a personal dream come true through the passion, plotting and preparation of Carmel Thomas and Chris Brown. This really was taking our school back to its spiritual roots and all sixty-

nine of those lucky to be present enjoyed a potentially life changing experience.

The Arts have continued to be a major component of school life. Mrs Anthony inspired another in a long line of superb Nativity productions, Mrs Brown took Rudiments to Rock Bottom levels; for the last time, my wife led the strings ensemble. Concerts and performances punctuated the year really climaxing in the astounding performance of the schola at the end of centenary diocesan mass at St Edmund's College and the extraordinary farewell masses at school and at Brentwood Cathedral last Friday where they were joined by former choristers taking the bass and (in one courageous case) tenor lines. Many of those who heard the boys sing Tears from Heaven or Time to Say Good Bye would have been moved to tears as I was; Carmel's assistance in facilitating You Have a Friend as a personal tribute to Mrs Nicholson and the support of the boys in being co-conspirators in keeping the plan a secret is still greatly appreciated.

Which brings me to what I shall miss the most. I gave this away in my closing remarks at Brentwood Cathedral. I went into great detail about

what I have felt has been my mission as Head in my speech last year so I shall not repeat this. But if there is anything that I feel most proud about it is that Loyola is truly a Eucharist Community – a society in which every week, thanks to the relationship that we have continued to enjoy with so many priests, we have been able to offer thanksgiving usually in the form of a Catholic Mass in which we break bread together – as companions sharing common values and esteeming the diversity of Faith and culture that is part of our school. Thinking back, I recall the names of those since deceased who fuelled this vision: the legendary Maura Sands, Fathers Eastwell, Dennis and Hewitt and then the long list of priests who have supported us including Fathers Roger, Walker, Bossy, Page, Waller, Selvini, Fox, O’Kane, Coveney, Headon, Howath and Myers. Three bishops have celebrated Mass at different times at Loyola: Bishops Thomas and Alan of Brentwood and Bishop Peter Doyle of Northampton – an old boy of Loyola. In Rome, Loyola has celebrated Mass on numerous occasions before the tombs of St Peter and St Ignatius and at a Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II. At Westminster we have sung at mass celebrated by the Cardinal; in Loyola, Spain we have participated in a mass almost adjacent to where as Inigo, St Ignatius was born; in Lourdes

our choir sang solo at a televised mass in front of a congregation of 16,000 worshippers.

The life blood of this tradition has been the continuing service of Anne Garnar, Carmel Thomas and Ellen Tidmarsh. If I wish anything for the school going forward, it is the continuance of this important tradition.

Obviously I shall miss the boys although my grandson Theo now becomes an excellent substitute. But I shall also miss the parents – for all the right reasons. The work of the current P.T.A. has maintained an excellent tradition of mutual support. Events such as the Quiz Night, the Christmas Fete, the Family Fun Day, the monthly lottery and the Ball, which was such a wonderful experience for my family, have all contributed to raising the funds for replacing the school mini buses. My thanks go to Rachel and all her team on the executive, but also to all mums and dads for their continued support over the years.

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. When thinking of my own longevity in this post, it is worth reflecting on the long service of many of the Governors. In now just over 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 – a topic to which I shall return later this evening.

So what are my worries about the future? There are some, although none directly associated with our school. But there are issues beyond our control.

I am concerned about increasing Government interference in the independence of our schools. Yes, I understand the immense importance in relation to safeguarding and fully applaud the inclusion of all schools in the statutory orders contained in the constantly reviewed document Keeping Children Safe in Education. As you know I am more concerned about the manipulation of the National Curriculum to in effect make the state system more selective and the unnecessary additional learning which is now leaking into the content of some independent school selection

papers that this has imposed. I am most concerned about the trend in the political parties in general to see the independent sector as a way of raising much needed additional funding for state education. For several years now, private schools have been encouraged to enter partnerships with state schools but the Independent School Associations are warning of possible attempts at imposing premium business rates on charitable private schools (as has already occurred in Scotland) or (as is already part of Labour policy) to attempt to impose VAT on school fees. Of course all these will do is to make private schools more financially elitist and potentially increase the number of children entering state education. However, as voters, please be aware of the threat as lobbying may well be needed in the future.

A more insidious threat to the stand-alone Prep School sector is what Donald Trump famously calls “False News”. This relates to the suggested increasing difficulty for pupils to gain access to independent secondary schools at 11+ and therefore the advantage of securing a place at 7 or even 4. As you will expect I keep in very close contact with fellow independent school Heads in the locality and we share certain similarities. One is

growing numbers of Year 2 pupils seeking places at 7 and increasing number of children being accepted. One highly performing school lost 15 children to Bancroft's alone for example whilst like us several schools are reporting higher numbers of children departing at 7 than usual. Now don't get me wrong. The whole premise of private education is the importance of parental choice, and I do not blame parents who look to do the best for their children. But be aware that leaving prematurely short changes what schools like us can offer our pupils – as hopefully you can see in the confidence and bearing of the young men who will be collecting their Leavers' Ties and Certificates later this evening. Like us, schools are reporting achievements with justifiable pride, and searching for reasons why these are not sufficient to maintain their numbers.

So what is this alleged “false news” and from whence does it originate? There is as you know a vibrant industry in tutelage and it does serve this sector well to perpetuate ideas of the impossibility of securing places at 11. It is true that the baby bulge that has benefited primary schools recently has now spread to the secondary age range and that the numbers of applications have arisen. A local school famously reported two years ago

that they had over seven hundred applicants – for 120 places. But the truth is that many of such applicants, encouraged by the enticement of possible discounted fees, are entirely dependent on bursaries to fund entry, whilst many candidates are sitting multiple schools. How can it be that there is a major shortage of places at 11 when at least four local stand-alone Prep Schools are reporting this year as a bumper year for 11+ exam success?

But I don't want to end on a sour note. My privilege has been to do a job that I love – sometimes imperfectly, usually enthusiastically and always wholeheartedly. As I stand here, I can visualise the faces of so many boys and girls who have been my students and feel honoured to have been given the chance to touch their lives. They certainly have touched my life and I want to thank not just this generation of students but all of the children who have learnt for example (and boys fill in the last word if you can) “the universe began with a great big ...”

I used to believe that the relationship between a Head and the Staff is a bit like that of a Prime Minister and a Cabinet. I am now not so sure, particularly following yesterday's events – but it remains the case that the

Head has to lead a team of professionals. I want to pay tribute to the Team here – perhaps like the Cabinet it consists of various hues of opinion, but unlike the Cabinet it serves with loyalty and in the genuine best interests of the institution it serves. I also want to once more publically endorse my successor Mrs Anthony. The school remains in excellent hands.

Finally, thank you Sarah. No more singing I promise, but you have been the foundation of all I have tried to undertake and have looked after me and my welfare. Thank you St Ignatius for your patronage and inspiration. Thank you Loyola School for your respect and your love.

