



# Blundell's

Rev'd Stanton, Chairman of Governors, Our Member of Parliament, Mr Mayor, Chairman of Mid Devon District Council, Ladies, Gentlemen, Blundellians.

The events of the past year outside this beautiful and protected place where we are all so privileged to live and work have surely brought into sharp focus the importance of being thankful for our many blessings.

Our purpose today is to look both backwards and forwards. James Shone, who spoke so movingly both at our Parents' Fair this year and also as the Guest Speaker at Blundell's Prep Speech Day last week encouraged us never to look DBI (down, back and in), but only to see the world by looking UFO (up, forward and out). We allow ourselves now to celebrate the achievements of Blundellians of all ages from the year that now draws to a close, but we shall most certainly look to the future year ahead (which is thankfully still a wonderful nine weeks away).

I was recently encouraged by a member of staff to watch the truly inspirational graduation speech of 2016 by Professor Jim Ryan, the Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

It has been viewed hundreds of thousands of times on YouTube. In that, he posed us all to ask five key questions of ourselves. These are questions that if answered well, provide the route for all of us to a truly happy and fulfilled life. I am sure what I have to say this afternoon will prove that the achievements of the boys and girls here before you today have done just that.

The first question we must always ask is 'Wait, what?' It is so easy in our day-to-day lives, just to listen to each other without really hearing. I am sure we have all switched off until we assume the 'good bit' is coming. Probably a few of you have already switched off already... and are just about to say 'Wait, what?' To assume that we know what is being said without challenging is to lack that essential intellectual curiosity that makes education worthwhile. The academic achievements of Blundellians over last year suggest that they are very good at challenging their assumptions and pushing themselves further academically than they might otherwise go.

The Year 12s sitting within these rows showed the value of hard work very well in their GCSE results last summer. More than a quarter of their grades were A\*, a position that equals the School's best ever results of 2015, and from a large and able group of pupils, more than half the grades were at A\*/A Level. In an improvement on last year, more than a third of the year group (31 pupils) gained at least eight A\* and A grades.

With huge changes to the GCSE and A level specifications over this year, they have managed their new A level courses very well with the enthusiastic support of the committed Blundell's staff. Whilst some will await final AS results this summer from the last set of unreformed subjects, we feel as a school that the lower sixth year has been vastly improved by the move to linear A levels which will allow us more freedom to go beyond the syllabus.

We have had record applications for entry to the Sixth form too, from a range of boys and girls with diverse talents and academic drive who want to join and add to this already terrific Year 11.

The Upper Sixth have shown their determination to succeed and despite the sweltering temperatures of the last week or so, we look forward to seeing them achieve their excellent university offers. A number of Upper Sixth are going on to US and overseas universities this year as well as over 40 different UK destinations. We had a record six Oxford and Cambridge offers this year, making 18 in the last four years. Therefore, I feel we can most definitely satisfy Professor Ryan's suggestion that we should all seek to push ourselves academically, in every sense, and to be keen to know more in the classroom.

That is perhaps the core value of our highly successful new academic enrichment programme, the Phoenix Society. This initiative, entirely created and run by Mr Berrow has seen pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 actively want to be involved in activities as diverse as running the transition team for Donald Trump, to dissecting frogs, from trips to Parliament and CERN, to visits to a nuclear power facility. Just last week a large group from the Phoenix Society experienced first-hand the design and engineering facilities at the Jaguar-Landrover factory. Thanks to the support from the wider staff and many parents, we have yet more exciting ideas for the coming year.

We are also extremely grateful to the many parents and businesses who have helped to arrange 90 work experience placements, offering valuable and sometimes life changing opportunities for our Year 11 students in the last few weeks. The variety and range of placements seems to increase every year and we look forward to seeing their presentations next term from placements which include; hospitals, law courts, Heathcoat's R & D Department, Crealy Park, British Aerospace, an Amazon advertising project, pharmacies, and an adventure hotel in Iceland to name but a few. More Year 12 students are also taking part in work experience during the summer, recognising the value on their UCAS forms and for choosing their future paths. I am sure Mrs Taylor-Ross will be delighted to hear from any other parents who feel they could offer something similar next year.

Professor Ryan's second key question is to ask ourselves 'I wonder if...' That curiosity can be seen in subjects from the Sciences to the Arts, and from Languages to Business and Economics. We can also see our ambition in the Music and Drama that has been an ever present opportunity this year. Nearly two years ago, Dr Leaman came to see me to say 'I wonder if... we could work alongside the nationally renowned London Chamber Orchestra for a year?' This was not nearly as easy logistically as you might at first think, but that has not stopped us making this happen. There have been workshops and classes, several small recitals and of course the highly professional Spring Concert which saw the Big School stage crowded with our own instrumentalists of all ages sitting alongside some of the world's greatest musicians and all performing together.

It was a challenging programme but it was a good example of that ever present feeling at Blundell's that nothing is ever going to hold us back. Alongside the LCO work, there have been some wonderful choral music which saw the choir reach the final of the Barnardo's Choir of the Year competition, scholar and piano concerts, Blundell's on TV, the Big Band and Blundell's Unplugged which always showcases our pupils' own interpretation of the music they love. 'I wonder if...' at Blundell's is always accompanied by an answer of 'Yes, let's give it a go'.

In terms of Drama, we have most certainly pushed the boundaries this year. 'I wonder if... we can put on one of the most difficult musicals in the West End?'; was one of the questions posed by the Drama department, Steven Sondheim's 'Into the Wood', was most definitely answered with a resounding 'Yes we can'. This senior production was outstanding and as it played to four nights of packed audiences in the autumn term I know we all saw some of the best Blundell's musical and dramatic talent come to the stage.

In addition, the Year 7 and 8 play, 'Far from Home' was a really mature and moving interpretation of the sequel to 'Street Child', the Barnardo story that we put on last year. Alongside another set of hilarious and truly irreverent house plays that do come with something of a parental health warning, we saw the Year 9 and 10 production of J.M. Barrie's 'The Admirable Crichton' performed in an innovative way across several areas of the school, both inside and outside. The Drama and Music departments continue to go from strength to strength and whilst we will really miss our most senior Upper Sixth performers in both Music and Drama who will leave us this year, we have a new group with some terrific talent coming up through the school.

Professor Ryan's third key question is one that again, I feel we ask ourselves all the time and which has led to an outstanding array of physical achievement both in terms of sport and outdoor pursuits.

'Couldn't we at least try...' has led our sports coaches and teams to put their own determined efforts behind achieving some excellent sporting results this year. There is never enough time here on Speech Day to outline the very significant achievements of both teams and individuals. There are many detailed in your programme, but if you spot an omission there too, please forgive us.

Some of the highlights have included National level achievements in rugby for both boys and girls. The 1<sup>st</sup> XV reached the quarter finals of the Championship League against Epsom College for the third year running as well as having a terrific season both in rugby union and sevens. Other teams had excellent seasons too with the Under 12As showing they are likely to do a great deal to build on the strong tradition of Blundell's rugby. Our inaugural girls' rugby sevens team, with real encouragement both from the boys and the rugby staff, exceeded all their expectations by reaching the final of the Rosslyn Park Sevens girls' competition, losing just 10-12 in the final to the defending champions of the last four years.

The girls' hockey players and teams have also done very well. Georgina Pitts had a great achievement in being selected for the HIPAC training camp, playing for the Wessex Leopards. Both the Under 14 and Under 16 teams became County Champions and the Under 16s and Under 13s made it through to the National Schools finals with the Under 16s coming 4<sup>th</sup> in the country. The boys have enjoyed a strong season too.

We have seen National honours in all three major school sports with Sam Maunder selected for the England Rugby Sevens squad, Millie Attwell selected for the England Under 16 Hockey team and OBs Dom Bess and Jack Maunder also taking on National selection in cricket and rugby this year.

Under Liam Lewis' excellent leadership, our up and coming cricket squad has shown they are a force to be reckoned with. The Under 14As have had a superb season winning 10 out of their 11 games as well as the Devon Cup and the Under 12As won the Devon final just last week, making them county champions.

Our equestrian team have yet again become National Champions. In kayak racing, both Dougal Glaisher and Francis Huntingford are looking at National representation and in shooting, two pupils, Will Scripps and Jessie Zhu have beat off hundreds of competitors to reach the Eley Small Bore Prone final at Bisley for the first time in many years. Our swimming team has grown in expertise and confidence under the enthusiastic guidance of Helen Youngs and the athletics squad has gained county honours, with Lucy Walliker, Bertie Frankpitt and Trixie Nicholson heading off to the English National Finals in Birmingham in high jump, hurdles and javelin in a few weeks' time.

As all Blundellians will be aware, we continue to enjoy all the varied sport that we do. Football, tennis, cross-country, rounders, basketball, fives, squash and many other sports are taken seriously and have been enthusiastically led by those who manage them.

In outdoor pursuits we have certainly asked ourselves 'Couldn't we at least just try...' in terms of pushing ourselves harder, further and through more difficult territory than before. There are currently 80 pupils taking Bronze Duke of Edinburgh awards this year, with 18 pursuing Silver and 24 Gold. The CCF has had a successful biennial inspection and continues to thrive under the leadership of Mr Dawe and our senior cadets. Despite being one of the smaller contingents at the annual CCF camp this week, they have come back with over half the cadet awards.

We had our largest ever group of pupils out on Dartmoor taking part in the Ten Tors challenge this year with 18 in three teams of 35 and 45 mile groups as well as four pupils who joined other local teams. A record number of 12 pupils started and finished the gruelling Devizes to Westminster canoe marathon with our teams winning the Girls Schools event and the Mixed Schools event. We now look forward to hearing of the experiences for our intrepid group heading off with World Challenge to Borneo. At this time tomorrow they will be on their flight.

As part of their training the group have walked 5,700 miles between them, the equivalent distance of walking from Blundell's to Vietnam, and I know they and their equally adventurous teachers are well equipped for the challenges they will face. 'Couldn't we at least have a go at something that will really challenge us, mentally and physically?' I feel very confident on their behalf to say, 'Yes, we can'.

The penultimate question in this theme is to ask ourselves 'How can I help...' One of our most treasured school aims, a part of 'Roots and Wings', is the idea of social responsibility and this year we have seen the pupils and staff engage in many different charitable activities, raising not just money but more importantly awareness about some of the charities that have meant the most to us. The Charity Committee, led by pupils and supported by Mrs Weaver and Miss Rees have organised and run many events which have raised well over £13,000 this year in addition to money raised by each individual House. Blundell's Unplugged this year included the chance for us to vote on how money raised might be allocated through the Blundell's part of the Devon Community Fund.

Led by Mr Menheneott, we have continued to support Community Learning International in Laos as our overseas link charity and I am glad to say the purchase of our elephant for the project at a cost over £18,000 has been exceeded through our support over the past two years.

In addition to that there have been fund-raising days for cancer charities CLIC Sargent and Force, car washes and clothes collections, cake sales, cookies, candy canes and Christmas shoe boxes to name but a few. Pupils and staff have run half marathons all in the name of charities which they have felt drawn to support. 'How can I help...' is not a question that we ask at Blundell's for very long before coming up with an answer. By rolling up our sleeves and putting ideas into action is the most common response.

So to come to Professor Ryan's fifth and final question, we must ask ourselves 'What truly matters to us?' To my mind what really matters is the people that we are and the people that we know.

At this stage of term, we are always looking back with a tinge of sadness as we say goodbye to colleagues and friends who will be leaving us this year. Whilst thankfully not a permanent departure, Emma Sage will leave us in September with the exciting challenge of motherhood that lies ahead. Emma is a superb teacher of Classics, a netball coach and tutor in School House. We look forward to hearing her news and meeting our new family member in the coming months. We welcome experienced Classics teacher Lauren Douglas who will be joining us in September.

Jaz Hutchinson-Bazely has been a terrific addition to the Music department as our Organist in Residence this year. To those who regularly have the treat of listening to him in the mornings, most Sundays or even

as you are passing by chapel as he practices there at all hours of the day and night it seems, Jaz has been an inspirational musician and has done a great deal to further interest in the organ. We thank him too for coping with the poor substitute in musical terms that we had for a month or so, as the main chapel organ had an extensive refurbishment earlier in the year. Jaz continues his studies next year in Amsterdam and Daisy Gibbs, a Cambridge graduate in Music who is currently studying for her PhD at Newcastle joins the team in September.

Andy Thain has made a terrific impression on us all in just this one year since he arrived from the prestigious Patana School in Bangkok last September. Andy has been an inspirational teacher of English across the school in a year when we have seen many changes, not least the really positive impact of our new literacy programme 'Accelerated Reader' in Years 7 and 8.

However, his ingenuity came fully to the fore just this term, as many parents will know, as he created and implemented the Year 8 week long 'Island Project'. This was a wonderfully creative experience for the year group as they learned to manage budgets, a government, media scrutiny and the devastating environmental impact of a natural disaster, all in the space of four days. We thank Andy for his commitment and dynamic ideas and congratulate him on his appointment as Senior Curriculum Lead at the E F Academy in Torbay.

Phil Mawson has been one of the unsung heroes of the Common Room in the last three and a half years. He came as a science specialist to join our Learning Support team with individual high level science expertise, but as with all good teachers who join an ambitious school, we haven't been able to resist using his talents in the classroom far more widely. He has taught both Mathematics and Science to a range of classes and his wisdom and totally unflappable nature has been much appreciated. We wish him well as he now joins his wife in the boarding house and teaching Chemistry at Taunton International School. I am delighted to say that we have engaged the talents of Georgina Trivett as a full time newly qualified teacher for the coming year.

The Chemistry department as well as many other areas of the school are very sorry to see Beth Rees leave us this summer for a role nearer home at Pocklington School. As well as being an exciting and dynamic teacher, Beth has been a brilliant resident tutor in Westlake. She has coached and run the organisation for netball and girls cricket (being a keen player herself). She and Emma Weaver have put hours of work into running the charity committee and she has been at the heart of the staff committee that run social events in the Common Room. We thank Beth for all that she has done for Blundell's in the last four years.

Jo Francis has had the dubious pleasure of being my Head of Department for the last four years. Jo has taught History and Politics with great success, and in addition, as her excellent leavers chapel address noted, she has had a wealth of other experiences along the way, coaching sport in all three terms, running mock elections, accompanying outdoor pursuits as well as being a much loved tutor in NC. We will really miss Jo's dry sense of humour and totally selfless commitment as she moves up to the midlands with her husband Ian, taking up a position at Solihull School. However, Jo is not quite off the hook yet, as she has generously agreed to accompany the Borneo adventurers for quite a bit of this summer holiday. Thank you Jo for all you have brought to the school. It has been a real pleasure personally to work with and for you.

Matt Hawkins, or Hawkeye as he is affectionally known, has been a loyal and committed teacher at Blundell's for the past 10 years. Matt arrived as a teacher of History but soon took on the mantle of Head of Sixth Form as part of the Academic Leadership team until 2015. On the departure of his great friend and colleague, Ben Marsden, Matt was the obvious choice to become Head of History and he has continued to invest a great deal of time, thought and energy into supporting the pupils in this core subject area.

Matt has run an annual trip for Year 9 to the WWI battlefields, a trip that has been especially poignant in the last two years as we remember the 100-year anniversary of the Great War. He has coached sport to a high level, taking responsibility for teams including the Under 16A football team and the 15B cricketers. His coaching talents are matched by a wonderful rapport with the boys who enjoy every element of his input. Matt is a prolific runner himself, running several half marathons in the past and recently for cancer charities that are close to his heart and ours. We are very sad to lose Matt to Court Fields School in Surrey where he will take up the post of Head of History, but hope that he and Jocelyn who has been a great support and friend of our community will enjoy being closer to family in the South East. We welcome Richard Moore, former Head of Politics from Cheltenham College and more recently teacher of History and Head of Cricket from Epsom College to take over the role of Head of History and Politics from September.

Damian Marshman decided that the time was right for him to step down as Housemaster of School House after six years in post here and three as a Housemaster at Queen's College. Damian will be very well known to anyone who has come through Year 7 and 8 and all who know him appreciate his commitment and enthusiasm for the pupils. I am delighted that Damian will be remaining with us as a teacher of Maths and Kate Corbin, our current Head of Learning Support will be taking over the reins. She will continue to have the support of Pastoral Housemistress, Kate Woolford and the Academic programme will now be overseen by Stephen Mault who takes up the new post of Academic Head of Years 7 and 8.

Dee Brigden is one of those people that I find it hugely difficult to do justice to in this sense, as she has been a member of the Blundell's staff for over 21 years. Dee and husband John are very well known to many here and they were the original House parents of the newly formed School House from its inception in 1996. Dee has taught Biology throughout her career amongst other things, like PHSE and she has been involved in many different extra-curricular activities, including being Mrs Batting's major support in the organisation of the Blundell's One Day Event. In my time here, Dee has been a part-time teacher but we have never felt that she has been here any less. Dee, we thank you for your incredible efforts on behalf of all those who you have taught, both past and present. Your kindness to pupils, tutees in NC and other members of the common room is quite legendary. We will truly miss your calm resolve as well as your friendship. You have had a long and successful career here and will remain a valued friend and colleague now that you have decided to keep John in line at home full-time.

I would like to pay a personal tribute to our retiring Governor, Vivienne Heeley. Vivienne has been great support to the staff as their representative governor for the past 12 years in addition to agreeing to take responsibility for safeguarding and chairing the Education Committee in recent years. Thank you Vivienne for all your support and we look forward to seeing you for your final meeting in the autumn, after which we will welcome former Second Master and Acting Head, Randall Thane to join the Governing Body.

Finally, David Chambers retires as Bursar at the end of this academic year after 14 years and amongst his achievements is the strong and secure financial position that the school finds itself in today.

David himself has often said that the Bursar has a reputation akin to being the mother-in-law of the school family, and to that end it is perhaps an unenviable job that requires strength of character and resilience above all else. However, in my time here, David has been nothing but positive in the way he has looked to resource the different elements of the school. Many will be aware of the attention to detail as well as the compassion that he has shown over many years. He has led his team well and has shown a selfless attitude towards supporting the pupils and staff in achieving their aims.

David has served under four consecutive Heads. Ian Davenport, my predecessor wrote to me to say "When I arrived at Blundell's in 2004 it became immediately apparent that David was a real star. He managed to negotiate the school through some genuinely testing complexities with barely a ripple, and this was a

testimony to David's financial acumen, professionalism, skill and clarity." We both agree that the life of a bursar is not an easy one. Many people don't understand the financial constraints which independent schools face and too often the bursar is charged with having to say no. Whilst this may also have been the case in the early part of his career at Blundell's, it has certainly been less so in recent years.

He has frequently been able to transform our combined ambitions into reality as evidenced by the building of the Popham Centre, the extension to Westlake and the full refurbishment of both NC and GH. As he did with Ian, David has certainly indulged some of my braver, and more challenging ideas. He was and is fiercely proud of and loyal to the school. We have been able to build, figuratively and literally, on his financial foundations and in the history of Blundell's we will look back on David's contribution as a significant one.

There is a lot to be thankful for in this past year and also much to look forward to in the year to come. The school will be full once again as we welcome back almost 600 pupils at the Senior School next term. We will be undertaking continued high levels of Estates work in the houses and departments thanks to the hard work of the excellent maintenance and grounds team led by Assistant Bursar, James Halton. The new and enlarged school shop has now opened. This summer the main school library will see a refurbishment which will include new improved study space furniture as well as some more inviting reading areas for all pupils.

Alongside these physical changes, a great deal will be going on in the academic sphere, led by Charles List. We have a new reporting system for all pupils, and a better recording and tracking management information system. This has Parent, Pupil and Teacher apps for easy mobile phone access to school events, reports and information.

School House will see the launch of a new 'Roots and Wings' programme of academic enrichment on a Wednesday afternoon as well as an adventure and leadership award amongst other things.

The School Monitors this year have been true role models and I would like to thank all of them and in particular the Heads of School, Hugh Hamilton-Green and Imogen Sanders-Dutton and their Deputies; Annabel Cox and Caspar Montgomery for their leadership and wise counsel. Their successors, Heads of School, Jack Watt and Samantha Unsworth-White and Deputies, Harry Olive and Cecilia Cheng will continue this great tradition of service I am sure.

I would like to thank the Governing Body and especially Cedric Clapp, the Chairman for all the time and effort they commit to supporting me and the school as a whole. I thank the hard-working support staff for looking after us and the facilities we have so willingly and so well.

We will soon be having another delicious array of food from our excellent Chef, Craig Sampson and Catering Manager Geoff Edwards. As ever their team has continued to pull out all the stops for us. Of course, I could not finish without thanking William Lancelles for designing another beautiful display of flowers and to all the administrative and bursary staff, and my PA, Helen Tucker who make sure things run as smoothly as they do.

Thank you to you, our parents, grandparents, guardians and friends. We value your support so much and are committed to living up to the high expectations you have of us in every way.

So to go back to Professor Ryan's key questions, I think we have answered them all. The final question is 'what truly matters to us?' I leave that for you to decide. I know that for me it is that your sons and daughters grow up in the safe and secure knowledge that they can succeed on their own and help others in

the process. I hope that, having had a bit of a rest, they can't wait to get back to the excitement of school next term.

I will finish with a quick story, a letter from the Telegraph that I saw, as reference of what else that might mean.

*Sir, I was assisting my 16-year-old daughter with her homework when she received a text from her mum, which read 'What do you want from life?'*

*This was an unexpected and profound question for a teenager revising at the dining room table for her maths GCSE, but we thought about it long and hard and debated various answers; exam success, wealth, love, all three?*

*Five minutes later, she received a second message, blaming predictive text for correcting the word life. It should have said Lidl.*

Thank you.