

SPEECH DAY - 10TH MAY 2008

Our annual speech day was a packed event this year and the audience enjoyed a variety of musical performances before speeches from the Headmaster, the presentation of academic prizes and an address from the guest of honour the Kenyan Commissioner for Sport.

Address by the Headmaster Mr. Martin Bentley MBE

Comment by a proud mother at a parents consultation evening...I keep telling him – if he sticks in and gets these GCSE's then the world is his lobster. Just wanted to make the point from the outset that our examination results are influenced by genetic inheritance.

Q. Who was it that didn't like the return of the Prodigal son?

A The Fatted calf

As Tony Blair's premiership ended much was made of the fact that over ten years ago he declared that the three most important areas for his government to address were Education, Education and Education. In one sense he was saying nothing new and was echoing Disraeli, who on 15th June 1874, told the House of Commons "Upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends". No change there then and just as applicable here in Kenya.

Every boarding school has to claim that it has a warm family atmosphere. It seems to me that Greensted's is one of the very few where that is genuinely true. This is a great school, in fine form and we will continue to develop and improve because standing still is not an option. My style of leadership will remain a combination of the evolutionary and where necessary, the revolutionary. I am a great believer in holistic education. The boarding school ethos is ideal in this regard. Of course, there are very few "real" British Curriculum boarding schools here in Kenya and we are without doubt considered to be amongst the best.

I believe unashamedly in the pursuit of excellence, but I see excellence as both an absolute (for example those pupils who gain entry to the best universities, who play sport at representative level, or who achieve distinctions at Grade 8 in music) as well as relative (for example pupils who, through sheer effort and determination, are selected for a team for the first time, who gain the necessary grades for entry to their first choice university, or who just manage to pass Grade 4). Greensted's exam results have been outstanding given the fact that we aren't particularly selective as far as our intake is concerned. We are proud of last year's A level candidates of whom 40% achieved A&B grades. Just as gratifying are those pupils who weren't high fliers when they joined us, but who through determination and excellent teaching have gone on to achieve top A Level grades and entry to distinguished universities. Top in the World in Geography; Top in Kenya Biology, Chemistry and History provides objective evidence of the tremendous added value which a Greensted's education gives. Our GCSE pass rate was 100% that is if you accept A-G as official pass grades. Several schools in Nairobi use this statistic to dupe, fool parents into believing they are highly successful academic schools but in reality, at GCSE, we should be looking only at the % A*-C because those are the ones universities recognise as significant. We continue to be in the 80% bracket which considering the UK is 56%, is remarkable and would place us alongside the best Independent Schools anywhere in the

world. If we compare ourselves to Premier league football teams we would be at the Man utd end and not a Derby County. Bear in mind too that many of our students are not working in English as their first language and we are non selective at entry.

Academic work is at the heart of what we do but it is certainly not the be all and end all of Greensted's life. The skills learned and experience gained outside the classroom on the games field, in music & on the stage, President's Award, MUN complement and supplement hugely what is going on in the classroom. And at Greensted's there is tangible excellence and breadth of opportunity in so many areas of the wider curriculum. U15 Netball winners; Rounders Runners up; Open Age Cricket league and twenty20 competition winners, Hassan Abdi playing for Kenya U19's; Runners up cricket U15's, Quinn Sorabjee U15's for Kenya; Hockey, Open Age Boys losing Finalists, Open Girls Nakuru District Winners losing in the Semi Final of the Nationals at Kericho. History trip to Egypt in July last year; Rugby tour to Dubai last Feb and at the same time we had a party from here enjoying Skiing in Austria. Music Tour to Tanzania in June followed by the USA tour in December. French trip planned for October half term.

Closer to home we continue to support the Arap Moi orphanage on a financial and personnel level each week and in August we have a team of talented artists coming over from Spain to paint the orphanage plus other arty/crafty events. We hosted Operation Smile surgeons, doctors, nurses, carers and undertook fund raising at which we raised over a quarter of a million shillings. We also supplied Tents, food, clothing, school materials, footballs and man/woman power for the IDP's in Nakuru. Right now, Ulinzi and Red Berets are using our lower field as their home ground in the Premier league as the Showground is still unavailable. We currently have about 30 On President's Award Bronze, 17 on Silver, 4 finishing Gold this year, 6 completing next year.

I have a firm sense of the accuracy of the idea that education is what is left when you have forgotten everything you learned in the classroom. But perhaps most importantly a Greensted's education is, and under my Headmastership will continue to be, about learning and developing the skills and qualities vital to adult life, many of which are central to the ethos of the school. Some would say that I am being very traditional when I talk about the importance of integrity, industry, responsibility, self-discipline, good manners, loyalty and service to others, but I see such qualities as being timeless rather than traditional. I believe that, more than ever perhaps, integrity will be a vital quality in the world of the future. A Greensted's education therefore will continue to combine the instilling of these timeless qualities with the more specifically modern transferable skills with which we must equip our pupils as a preparation for adult life.

Every school has an ethos peculiar to itself. We offer an education, which seeks, of course, to bring out the best in each boy and girl but with a strong moral and spiritual dimension, in a community that reaches out to the world with a genuine concern for the disadvantaged. This ethos must permeate all we do. Incidentally, as all independent schools, under the understandable pressures of inspections, results and regulations, increasingly offer the same thing; it will be the distinctiveness of schools, which will be critical to their future success. It is the growth and development of the boys and girls, sometimes unexpected and often once they have left, that fills one with delight, challenging any temptation to cynicism that we may have and understandably fallen into, when you are still with us. To put it another way, education, what we think it is and should be, and how it should be managed, constantly evolves and, like evolution, has always been a matter of the survival of the fittest. We are living in exponential times of change and there has been much that has been

good. There is no doubt in my mind that schools are generally better at putting children through schooling than they have ever been.

The rules of engagement in schools has dramatically changed from when we parents, were at school and we sometimes think how we were schooled was the most effective or the only way. Knowledge might well indeed be power but in a world when the capacity of the microchip doubles roughly every 6 months and where there are over 10 million mobile phones in Kenya; where there is too much knowledge almost instantly available where the blurring of the virtual and the real worlds is rewriting the rules of engagement; then it is now the case that power actually resides not in knowledge itself but in how we respond and react to knowledge. How we equip our young people with the skills, the abilities and the self-confidence to orientate themselves along the digital and other highways of their futures, is the most important way a school can 'educate' its pupils.

We have to embrace a rapidly changing environment. Our young people are remarkable; they are no more and certainly no less intelligent than their parents for that would be scientifically implausible, unless human evolutionary development was on steroids, but they know and can do very different things and in very different ways from us, their parents. Today's Prize Giving is a celebration of achievement and success; a recognition of targets set and goals achieved. I am immensely proud of our students' achievements and as ever, I am struck by the confident, self-assured young men and women who leave this school at the end of Year 13. Sometimes today, it is too easy to hide behind safety regulations and concern for possible legal action, even in the case of a genuine accident, and we may protect young people from too many of life's genuine experiences, which ultimately allowed many of us, in older generations to become who we are. The following are some observations of life before the 70's -

WE ate chips, bread & butter pudding and drank fizzy pop with sugar in it, but we were never overweight because we were always outside playing.

After running into stinging nettles a few times, we learned to solve this problem

We would spend hours building go carts out of scraps and then went top speed down the hill, only to find out we had forgotten the brakes

We didn't have playstations, x-boxes, no video games, no videos, only 3 channels on Tv or no Tv, no surround sound, no mobile phones, no DVD's and no internet chat rooms or face book. Yet, we were never bored.

WE fell out of trees, cut ourselves and occasionally broke bones but there were no law suits NOR did we seek anyone to blame.

The generations brought up with these experiences have produced some of the best risk takers and problem solvers ever known. WE had freedom, failure, success and responsibility and we learned how to deal with it all. Today, sadly, it is almost impossible to fail. I don't feel this is a very positive move and it is sad that young people do not experience failure in this world of pass, pass and pass. Failure can be a positive experience in learning. It is my belief that whilst taking due care, we offer a variety of opportunities beyond the classroom which make up for the loss of the freedom and experiences we teachers and parents had as children. They are opportunities to learn how to handle and to cope with success and failure.

At Greensteds, we measure and celebrate success in many ways and achievement takes many forms on the sports field, in the performing arts, caring for and helping others and in our pastoral care system. It involves us all feeling a part of the team. Our pastoral care is integral to all that we do,

woven into the very fabric of the School. At Greensteds, it is not surprising that when students are asked what they like about their teachers, words like, caring, support, helpful and sympathetic are common responses. One said, it amazes me at how willing the teachers are to take out of their time and do extra outside school to help each and every individual. Not only all members of staff but our students too, take key roles in our pastoral care for each other. Relationships between staff and students, among students, within families and with the wider community are important to our students' physical, mental and spiritual health and to their development as rounded contributing members of our society.

Pastoral care is a great strength of the school, but that does not mean that everything is always perfect. Sex, drugs, alcohol, bullying and anti social behaviours are commonplace in schools in the UK. We would be ostrich like if we said students in Kenya do not face similar issues. We have policies, strategies and sanctions to cope with each of these and when we lose some students, even one is too many; we constantly reassess how we approach these subjects with our teenagers. Our greater focus is on enhancing relationships and helping students build inner resistance to cope with inevitable downs, as well as the ups. We seek to develop discerning young men and women who are able to make wise choices, with a strong sense of true North which helps them decide right from wrong and the strength of character which grows from years of gentle nurture at school which here is home from home.

Relationships between school, parents and students always involves a balance of trust and responsibility, a balance that is sometimes very difficult to discern. Clearly, most of our students are worthy of the trust offered by their parents and the school but sometimes students breach that trust. It is then up to the three parties involved to re-establish this broken relationship and I firmly believe that this aspect of nurturing responsible, well balanced, wise choice making men and women is one of the most important aspects of a child's education and so a schools provision.

I have a special job and it is shared with many others at Greensteds. Foremost, we are Schoolmasters, men and women, seeking to support your sons and daughters and gaining much satisfaction from doing so. Certainly, there are moments, sometimes periods of angst, as we strive to help your children make sensible and wise decisions....but our energy and commitment comes from the importance of our work. We are about shaping character, building generations and encouraging the human spirit. We like it when we see them grow up into such fine young men and women shaped by school and family. It's encouraging and gives us desire and drive to do this again and again.

Whilst that hard work to achieve such results has to be done by the students themselves, I am extremely grateful for the dedication and hard work of the teaching staff. It is a common occurrence to see members of staff engrossed in tutorials, extra lessons, clinics around the school and it would be easy to forget that so much of this time is willingly given above the demands of full teaching timetables to enable the student to grasp the concept, practise another question or unravel the complexities of some theory or argument. All of the staff, without whom the changes, developments and progress, over this academic year would simply not have been possible I thank you most sincerely. There have been, naturally enough, moments of real difficulty but many moments of fun and achievement too. As one parent observed, with children at different schools, "The difference about Greensteds is, and always has been, the dedication of the staff." Our continuing efforts to ensure we are the best school we can possibly be places great strains on our staff and I thank them for the way they have responded to change, difficulties and to the education of all students across the School.

To our leavers in Year 13. It is time you went on. Your world needs men and women of calibre. Men and women with sensitivity, strength of character and moral courage to make a difference. Men and women whose spirit has been shaped by our education where academic, spiritual, cultural and physical intertwine to ensure a cultured man and woman, balanced and ready to make a mark. I encourage you to be your own person, to stand by what you believe to be right and to be generous throughout your lives. You are all good men and women and I judge you not by your A level grades but rather by what you are as a person, by what is in your heart, your soul, your very being. The legacy you leave behind is this school. Be proud of it and thank you.

I should like to thank you as parents. Parents and Heads are not always at one but I am relieved to say the vast majority of you have been supportive and, quite rightly when necessary, critical too. Don't mind that as long as the manner in which it is done is appropriate.

There are exciting years ahead for Greensteds. It is our school rather than my school but it is important you all take heed of what I stand for in leading this school. I stand for nothing less than giving your best. I stand for making the most of opportunities. I stand for integrity, self-discipline, responsibility, good manners and loyalty. Those students who exhibit these characteristics could expect to find me a very supportive and encouraging Headmaster.

In addition, what I will not stand for and you would be well advised to listen very carefully at this point: I will not stand for arrogance, being spoilt and selfishness. I will not stand for wilful breaking of rules, anti social behaviour or bullying. I will not stand for poor manners or failing to make the most of opportunities. And I will not stand for indolence, idleness or scruffiness. Anyone ill advised enough to demonstrate these negative characteristics would quickly discover there is a tougher side of me.

Leaving staff this year include Mr Reid, Mr Whidden, Mr Rowe, Miss Wilkin, Mr & Mrs Wood, Miss Matthews, Mr Ellis, Mr Lukose, Mr. Langat and Mr Sawers. I thank all these staff for their contribution. However, I would just mention two; Mr Sawers who has been here for 7 years in various guises. He cheats at cricket, football, golf, rugby and even matching pairs. But, he is father figure for many of you here and his care and concern for the spiritual, physical and emotional welfare of the school has been significant. We wish you well in SA. Also to my Deputy Head, Mr Wood who moves on to take up a Headship in Tanzania. It is not easy being a Deputy and especially one covering for me. However, he has been a tremendous support and an ideal foil for me; an invaluable assistant and completely loyal and reliable. Qualities hard to find in any person let alone a Deputy Head.

Recruiting staff to come to Kenya, Nakuru and Greensteds is a challenge and particularly following the events and bad press post elections. Attracting the right staff of the calibre we require is even more of a challenge. *Am relieved and pleased to report that we have been able to find quality replacements for those that are leaving.*

January, February and March would for us all, go down as memorable and mainly for the wrong reason. None of us want to go there again. Through that period of time I was touched and impressed by the response of all my workers here many, you seldom see, all the support staff, Admin, San, Matrons, drivers, secretarial and teaching staff. Students too remained calm and philosophical. Parents and my Board too, I am grateful for the massive support shown to me through this difficult period of time.

A piece of advice given to me when I contemplated what to say to you today was this: Start with a good and stimulating opening sentence. Finish off with an equally good sentence and make sure the two are close together. I fear I may have failed BUT, I will learn for next time.
So, what now? Onwards and upwards I say!

MP Bentley. MBE

May 10th 2008