



Headteacher's Speech – Open Evening 2017

There is a long tradition of education in Rye that goes back to the foundation of the Grammar School in 1636. Here, at Rye College, we are proud to be a significant chapter in the ongoing story of nearly four hundred years of learning in this ancient town.

Good evening and a very warm welcome to potential pupils and families – some from Rye Community Primary but also from many local schools in the surrounding area. It is a very great pleasure to welcome you all to the Rye Academy Trust. This evening we meet in the surrounds of Rye Studio – a superb facility that supports the creative arts across the trust's schools. I am sure that many Year 6 pupils will enjoy seeing the great pieces of artwork produced in the studio around the college.

Our mission at Rye College is to 'create bright futures for all'. With this in mind, we work hard to ensure that every child is happy and well supported on their journey with us. We want every child to grow and flourish in our care. We are driven by a pursuit of high academic standards regardless of start points and a desire for all students to experience an exceptional education.

So, on behalf of the trustees, we welcome everyone here tonight and thank you for considering us for your secondary school choice.

First and foremost, here at Rye College we like talking about students, youngsters, children – and their learning. We are proud to be an environment in which everyone feels happy, valued and safe because we know that a happy learner is a successful learner.

What defines success? Well, high aspirations, good conduct and good academic outcomes but also knowing what it means to be a good person, to understand the power of 'being good' – "do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Therefore, we focus on instilling a sense of responsibility in all our students – a sense of ownership of their learning, of their college, of their actions and of their consequences. I'm sure our visiting pupils tonight would all agree they've all learnt at their primary schools that their actions always have a consequence.

In today's complex world, children need both the knowledge and skills to compete in a global market place but also need a sense of their humanity – the ability to respect, to empathise and to be caring and compassionate individuals. Your child's journey to adulthood starts here – our reputation for supporting youngsters, improving the standard of their education, and helping children go on to lead fruitful and productive lives is well-deserved.

As the newly appointed headteacher, it is important that I respect the college's history and reputation and recognise the community we serve. However, here we are talk a lot about rapid improvement – improvement through a relentless focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. We talk about providing a broad and balanced curriculum with an academic core that not only provides a home for the creative arts but also delivers great outcomes across the board.

Call me old fashioned but I believe too that we should seek to provide an education that strengthens character, builds confidence, empowers youngsters to differentiate between right and wrong – and helps them show the strength and courage to become respectful citizens, to become good people.

I know many of you will be visiting other schools, some with swanky buildings, stacks of tech and plenty of glass fronted staircases. I would say to the Year 6 pupils – don't be taken in by schools that have loads of computers – it's what you do with all this stuff that counts. I have to be honest

and say that at present we are less about when our classrooms were built but rather the quality of what goes on inside them. However, to leave it at that would be slightly missing the point – what makes us special is our strong sense of community – we are a one school town – we are Rye’s Community College.

Our work here, our ability to be successful here is something I passionately believe in – and something I personally am keen to take forward into the future.

This evening actually belongs to our greatest assets – the students. You will be shown around the college by our new Year 7s – youngsters who just a year ago were in a similar position to you, facing the same decision, the same ‘big’ move to secondary school. You will also meet many of our ambassadors – students from all years, who have returned this evening to share their education with you and talk about their learning.

Our students are the back-bone of our college and their voice plays an important part in shaping our direction of travel. At the moment we are beginning an exciting project to unpack the notion of being ‘Rye Smart’ – a concept established at our partner primary school. The question we are asking all students is – “what does it mean to be a successful learner here at Rye College?”

And it is through a sense of ownership that we work towards a truly inclusive community. And let me be clear about what that means... here we want all to achieve irrespective of age, ethnicity or status, ability or disability, faith or belief, gender or sexuality. We believe in mutual respect – the right to be an individual but also recognising the responsibilities we have to the community.

This works because students are taught that the ‘sum of the parts is greater than the whole’ – by working together we achieve more than working alone.

This is a good point to pause and to introduce our first two speakers this evening. The honour of being Head boy and Head girl is annually bestowed on students who embody our ethos and possess the skills to represent the college body at a range of high-profile events. I’d like you to welcome Jayden Vicarey and Maisie Cox, the college’s head boy and head girl for this academic year who will bring alive their experiences for you...

Thank you Jayden and Maisie. Hearing them speak I feel that our students truly benefit from the positive relationships they have with the adults here – based on good communication and mutual respect. We strongly believe that children need time to grow and space to learn.

The size of our community means we can honestly say that here everyone is special and known to us by name. Our students should feel proud that they attend Rye College. We insist on respect for the college uniform, the timings of the day and a work ethic that acknowledges success comes from personal endeavour (what we used to call hard work).

It’s an age-old adage but my leadership is about being ‘firm yet fair’; youngsters are here to learn from their mistakes, indeed I would prefer that some lessons are learned inside college than outside in the wider world.

I believe deeply in forgiveness and hope but I make no apology for taking a firm stance in my demand for high standards of behaviour and attendance. I strongly believe these aspects underpin the smooth running of a successful school.

That said, we know that the single most influential factor in a successful education is the attitude of a child’s family. Therefore, we emphasise the importance of a ‘family commitment’ to supporting the college at home and ensuring youngsters come to college ready to learn each and every day.

Now is a good juncture to introduce our next speaker this evening. Mrs Steph Cooper is a parent with children in Years 8, 10 and 11 who has kindly agreed to share her thoughts on the college from parents’ perspective.

Thank you Steph for those important parental insights.

Our curriculum offer is simple: broad and balanced with an academic core. So whatever your favourite subject is at primary – you can study it here. It combines a foundation in the national curriculum subjects, a focus on academic achievement in English, maths and science with a broader offer of suitable academic, vocational or technical qualifications. In recent years, our students have found much success in the creative arts – and this is a commitment we see in our curriculum offer for the next academic year.

Our new curriculum pathways are designed to increase the number of students entered for English Baccalaureate subjects such as the three sciences, humanities and French as well as offering all students the opportunity to study a complementary subject – currently more often than not, in the arts.

Years 7 and 8 are focused on youngsters becoming ‘good learners across a range of subjects’ so that by the time we consider curriculum options in Years 9 and 10 students have a core body of knowledge and skills, an understanding of their qualification choices and are prepared for success in public exams at the end of Year 11.

The educational landscape is changing and rarely does a week go by without education being in the news. Despite the possible disruption of exam reform, I’m pleased to say that standards at Rye College are improving.

This year our Progress 8 score – this is the measure of the progress made between the end of primary and the end of secondary – showed improvement in line with the national average. And whilst we will be judged less on the number of different grades we get and more on the progress each pupil makes, I can still say that this year 63% of students gained a standard pass in the new GCSE English and Maths qualifications compared to 59% last year – again in line with the national average.

Our use of national data to set intelligent academic targets underpins our strategy to move the college from being in line with the average – around the fiftieth percentile – to performing in line with the top twenty percent of schools nationally.

This brings a close to my part in the evening. I’ll take this opportunity to point you in the direction of our website for further information about the college, our prospectus and a copy of this speech. The most important part of the evening is yet to come – the tour.

I invite you to speak to our students, maybe see some pupils you know from your primary schools, and to talk to my colleagues about what we do here.

I hope this evening is the start of our journey together, creating bright futures for all – today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

Thank you for your time.