

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 College.

You join us at a significant point in our journey, for our college is transforming – whether it be the raising of expectations, improving the academic offer or modernising our facilities and resources. Rye College is now experiencing what it has needed for some time – serious investment.

Our mission is to ‘create bright futures for all’. With this in mind, we work hard to ensure that every child is happy and well supported during their time 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 recognised as an environment in which everyone feels happy, valued and safe because we know a happy learner is a successful learner.

What defines success? Well, high aspirations, exemplary 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”.

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.

In today’s complex world, children need both knowledge and skills to compete in a global market place but also need a sense of their own humanity – the ability to respect, to empathise and to be caring and compassionate individuals.

We know a child’s mental health can either support their growth as a learner or prove a barrier to a rewarding education. Positive mental health is a challenge we take very seriously and that is why I’m pleased to announce a strategic partnership between Rye College

and Place2Be – the country’s leading children's mental health charity to provide school-based support and in-depth training programmes to improve the emotional well-being of pupils – a whole school mental health strategy. Our reputation for supporting youngsters, nurturing the whole-child and helping them go on to lead fruitful and productive lives is well-deserved and remains central to our mission.

As Executive Headteacher, I have the honour of leading Rye’s schools at a critical juncture – whilst we pursue a transformative programme, it is also important we respect the college’s history and reputation and recognise the community we serve.

Here, we 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 develop the strength and courage to become respectful citizens... to become good people.

I know many of you will be visiting other schools over the next few weeks, some with swanky buildings, stacks of tech and plenty of

glass staircases. You will see some of that here too but I ask you to keep in mind we are but a couple of months into an 18 month renovation of site and facilities. We are invested over £4 million pounds to make our college fit for high-quality education over the next decade. Where possible we have attempted to illustrate our plans for the buildings including our toilets – but please keep in mind in a year’s time you may barely recognise us – we are being transformed.

Having said that, whilst this investment is important, for us what is more important than the quality of our classrooms is the quality of what goes on inside them.

But, 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. So this evening actually belongs to our greatest assets – the students. You will meet many of our ambassadors – students who have returned 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. Not only have we recently appointed a head boy and head girl but also a student leadership team to ensure our transformation involves those we are improving the college for – our children. Last year, working with them we unpacked the notion of ‘Rye SMART’ – a concept

established at our partner primary school. Together we decided that what matters to us all – both teachers and students – are high Standards, positive Mindset, good rates of Attendance, being part of the Rye Community and the quality of Teaching and Learning. And so we focus on these things – relentlessly.

And it is through a sense of ownership 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 Year 11 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 Emmie-Lou and George, the college's Head boy and Head girl for this academic year who will bring alive their experiences for you...

Thank you Emmie-Lou and George. Hearing them speak, it is evident 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 – with adults nurturing their potential.

The size of our community means we can honestly say that here everyone is special and known to us by name. Our students can 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 endeavor.

It's an age-old adage but our leadership is about being 'firm yet fair'; youngsters are here to learn from their mistakes, indeed we would prefer that some lessons are learned inside college than outside in the wider world. We believe deeply in forgiveness 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 opportunity to introduce our next speaker this evening. Mr Downes is our Head of College who runs a tight ship. Keen to welcome your children in September, Mr Downes will tell you a little more about how our college works on a day-to-day basis...

We are ambitious for our college and our children. 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. Regular reporting to families and a laser sharp focus on the performance of each and every student means we improve the college by getting the best out of individuals.

This brings a close to my part in the evening. I'll take this opportunity to point you in the direction of our website (ryecollege.co.uk) 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 collect a map, take a tour by leaving stage right... to speak to our students and to talk to my colleagues about what we do here for our transformation is well underway.

Thank you for coming, I truly hope this evening is the start of our journey together - and you join us in “creating bright futures for all”.

Goodnight.