PRIZE GIVING SPEECH – 2012

Good afternoon everybody and welcome once again to our annual prize giving ceremony in the magnificent setting of the Liverpool Cathedral.

I should like to welcome the Chairs of both the Academy Trust Board and Local Governing Body, Professor Sue Iversen and Rob Gillies, representatives of both our governing bodies, members of staff both past and present, parents, special guests and, of course, the Belvedere girls, again both past and present. In particular, I should like to welcome our very special guest of honour, Lord Andrew Adonis.

Lord Adonis is a remarkable man who has had a major impact on education since around 1998 when he joined Tony Blair’s Number 10 policy staff as education adviser and then, after 2001, as Head of Policy Unit. He was Minister of Schools from May 2005 until October 2008 and became the chief architect of the Academies movement which began in 2000. He was, of course, heavily involved in the radical, and at the time, controversial decision to turn the then independent selective, fee paying Belvedere School into the independent non selective, state funded Academy it is today, and, as the plaque in the Outer Hall says, he formally opened the Belvedere Academy on 5th October 2007.

At the time there were less than 100 Academies in England but this figure has now grown to over 2300 Academies with over 50% of secondary schools either already an Academy or planning to become one. Belvedere is, in fact, one of 501 sponsored Academies and I am pleased to welcome representatives of our sponsors, the Girls’ Day School Trust and HSBC to our Prize Giving today.

So, Andrew, welcome back to Liverpool and thank you so much for taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to celebrate Belvedere’s success and, in particular, the remarkable success of our first Academy cohort, a theme I shall return to later.
I would like to begin by, once again, attempting to sum up a year in the life of Belvedere which, as ever, will prove to be completely impossible. All I can really do is pick some of the highlights from what was a momentous year in Belvedere’s long and distinguished history and I apologise as usual to all the people and events I miss out during my review of the Academy year, 2011-2012.

The core subjects of English, Maths and Science go from strength to strength, all gaining outstanding examination results, both at GCSE and at A level. In Maths, 87 girls successfully gained not one but two GCSEs in Maths with 30 girls achieving two grade A’s or better. 99% of Year 11 achieved a grade C or above in Maths and 36% achieved a grade A or A* - a remarkable result for the girls and their teachers.

As one of our two specialisms, Science continues to grow and prosper with larger numbers than ever opting to study science subjects at A level, with around a third of Year 13 leavers now studying scientific courses at university. Science were particularly proud of one of their students, Ninghui Shi who, after achieving A* in both Biology and Chemistry is now reading Natural Sciences at Cambridge.

Another of our top scientists, Eleanor Moubray, our current Head Girl, was awarded AS Physicist of the year at a prestigious event at Liverpool University organised by the Ogden Trust.

The English Department, which has been one of our strongest areas for some time, received the dreaded brown envelope from Ofsted containing news of a subject inspection over a two day period in November.

Following a rigorous programme involving lesson observations, scrutiny of marking, interviews and meetings, judgements were made across four categories; quality of teaching; quality of the curriculum, achievement and leadership and management.
The department achieved Outstanding in all four categories as well as Outstanding for overall effectiveness, a fantastic achievement. The inspector said: “Throughout the academy, all groups of students make outstanding progress and the quality of their learning is very high. All of the teaching observed was at least good and much was outstanding. A key factor in students’ success is the Academy’s ethos of high aspirations which has a very positive effect on students’ attitudes and achievement. They are eager learners.” Congratulations, therefore, to English on a superb achievement which follows the Academy’s outstanding Ofsted, a year earlier.

Our PE department also enjoyed a hugely successful year with our Year 7 netball being crowned City League Tournament winners and the Year 11 netball team coming runners up in the extremely competitive Liverpool City Tournament.

Year 11 were also crowned Liverpool City Rounders Champions and our Key Stage 4 badminton team were Liverpool School Sports Partnership South champions.

Belvedere girls also excelled in a relatively new sport, Tag Rugby, with Year 7 winning the Merseyside County competitions and Year 8 coming runners up in their event.

Belvedere was also proud to host the annual GDST Northern Trust Rally in September 2012 where girls from GDST schools as far apart as Newcastle and Northampton compete in a high quality festival of sport. Despite the typically atrocious weather, everybody enjoyed a fantastic day of competitive action of an extremely high standard. Belvedere girls held their own throughout, winning the Table Tennis Group B competition and coming third in an exciting volleyball competition. We were well on course to win the Senior Rounders competition before the weather became so bad play had to be abandoned. We was robbed, as they say.
And, hot of the press, gymnast Rebecca Tunney, who joined us in September in Year 10, has just been named as Merseyside Young Sports Person of the Year. In the summer, Rebecca became the youngest member of the Great Britain team at the Olympics Games in London.

I think Rebecca and all our sporting successes and champions deserve a warm round of applause.

APPLAUSE

In Music, one of the highlights of a busy year was the inaugural Musical Soiree where the drama studio was transformed into a sophisticated cafe style venue. Parents and guest enjoyed excellent performances by A level and GCSE music singers and instrumentalists whilst sitting around tables sipping wine by candle light.

The evening proved excellent preparation for external examinations where the girls performed very well, with all three A level students involved going on to study music at university.

One of the true highlights of the year occurred when Music combined with Drama to produce a memorable version of Shakespeare’s comedy, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’. For two nights our increasingly versatile Drama Studio was transformed into a magical world of fairies and magic. Girls from all year groups were involved and some boys were even brought in from Miss Poole’s Saturday drama group to take on the male roles. Mr Woolley made his acting debut to critical acclaim and the play was a sell out, with everyone agreeing that it had been an outstanding success.

In March, the GCSE Performing Arts class took over the Palm House in Sefton park to put on a fantastic production of ‘Bring in the Clowns’, and our annual Performing Arts Showcase again highlighted the wonderful talent and ability of so many of our Belvedere girls as packed audiences over two nights were treated to a variety of
performances ranging from choirs to gymnastics displays, monologues to street dances, and from orchestras to Monty Python sketches.

Another drama highlight was the annual London trip when 121 Belvedere girls and 12 members of staff descended on the capital and hit the West End going to see The Woman in Black, Billy Elliot, Dirty Dancing and Wicked. The girls were also given private dance and singing workshops from members of the Billy Elliot cast and the musical director of Wicked. Another London Theatre trip is planned for this year with over 90 girls already signed up.

A long standing tradition of Belvedere, the annual drama festival was, as always, a huge success, with 7K’s Elf winning the main award for best play.

Last year we decided to create a new curriculum area, Social Sciences. This was largely due to the increase in Sixth Formers opting for new subjects such as Psychology, Sociology, Health and Social Care as well as Geography. The new curriculum area, under the leadership of Mr Marshall, has got off to a flying start, with Psychology proving the most popular AS subject attracting almost 50 students in Year 12.

The first examination results for the new curriculum area have also been extremely encouraging with AS Geographers being ranked 6th across all GDST schools, for value added and an amazing 87% of A2 results in Psychology graded A*-B.

Humanities students also performed brilliantly in their external examinations with outstanding results in History, Government and Politics, Religious Studies and Citizenship. A number of students have now gone on to read History, Law or Politics and International Relations at university and we were delighted when Amber Page Moss secured a place at Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge.
Examination results were particularly impressive in Religious Studies with an amazing 92% of grades at A*-A at GCSE and 44% of all grades at A*-A at A level – an incredible achievement for the girls and their teachers.

Sixth Form History and Politics students were also fortunate to visit the Palace of Westminster in September last year and were able to watch the procession of the Speaker into the House of Commons as well as being given the opportunity to see both chambers in action.

Our other specialism, Modern Foreign Languages also had an extremely busy and successful year with an Easter trip to a chateau in Normandy, a particular highlight.

A group of our Year 8 Spanish students became teachers for the day when they went to St Austin’s Primary School to teach the children some basic Spanish. Most of our Year 12 language students completed a week’s work experience in France or Spain and a group spent a long weekend in Paris.

Again, the girls performed well in their external examinations with A level Spanish results outstanding with the best added value of any school across the GDST in this subject. One student, our former Head Girl, Katie Oliver, secured a place at Oxford to read French and law and Sunny Italia achieved a languages hat trick at A level languages passing in 3 subjects, French, Spanish and Italian.

Art, once again, produced a stunning display of students’ work in their GCSE, AS and A level exhibition which illustrated well the incredibly high standard of work achieved by our artists. Examiners were suitably impressed with the department once again gaining superb results.
IT students were also particularly successful last year with over 110 Year 10 girls taking the First Award in OCR national Level 2. 75% of the cohort gained a distinction, which is equal to an A at GCSE. ICT students also visited the Jaguar plant at Halewood to study how ICT is used in the car manufacturing process.

Our Duke of Edinburgh girls remain as active as ever and have been involved in various expeditions at Bronze and Silver level; camping, walking, navigating and so on, in often atrocious conditions, once again, supported by brave members of staff seemingly unafraid of what the British climate can throw at them.

So congratulations to all our students on a superb year, rich in quality and achievement and successful in so many respects. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the teachers for their outstanding commitment to Belvedere and their willingness to go the extra mile for their students. I’m sure the girls and our parents would like to show their gratitude to our brilliant teachers through a warm round of applause.

APPLAUSE

Such fantastic results are not easy to achieve and one of the traditional strengths of Belvedere is the support our students, and teachers, receive. For example, Mrs Foley and the Inclusion team do an amazing, often emotional and always challenging job in supporting girls in their learning or in times of difficulty, such as illness or even bereavement. Our outstanding support staff teams, administration, finance, estates, ICT, catering, cleaning, lab technicians, together with our exams officer, librarian, sixth form administrator and Pat, who looks after our car parks and external environment every day, rain or shine, all make a tremendous contribution towards the success of this amazing school. Without them the place simply would not work and Belvedere would not be Belvedere. Please join me in a round of applause to show our appreciation of our fantastic support staff.
In other areas, four sixth form students, Chloe Carter, Roisin Banes, Emily Rankin and Georgina Partington entered the KPMG inaugural Entrepreneurial Challenge and won the final which was held at Goodison Park with a superb presentation about a fund raising campaign for the Oliver King Foundation, which aims to raise money to buy defibrillators for schools. Belvedere now has two such machines following fund raising by the girls.

Indeed, Belvedere girls have a proud tradition of supporting those less fortunate than themselves. Examples of their generosity are Year 8 raising £821 for Marie Curie after a sponsored walk, £500 being raised for Breakthrough Cancer Research by selling bracelets and bangles made out of collected ring pulls from soft drink and food cans and championed by Mrs Rigby, and a remarkable £4,000 was raised by our Librarian, Miss Murphy through many fundraising events to support her trek to Mount Everest Base Camp to raise money for Marie Curie. Also, in the last two years, Belvedere girls and staff have put together well over 1000 shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Another major charity initiative this year has been Belvedere’s support of the British Moroccan Society in its drive to develop a number of learning centres in the Atlas Mountain area close to Marrakech. I visited the area during the Easter holidays last year and saw for myself one of the learning centres which had already benefitted from donations of uniform from our neighbour school, the Belvedere Prep.

Following an appeal and an almost overwhelming response from pupils, parents and staff, we have just sent a container to Morocco containing the following items:

13 complete PCs with keyboards, mice, monitors and assorted cables
71 desks
59 chairs
Various cupboards and drawer units
4 microscopes
51 pencil cases handmade by Year 7 students during their lunch breaks
Over 1,000 items of clothing including 207 Jumpers and cardigans, 79 blazers, 467 shirts, 82 tracksuits, 3 coats and 4 pairs of socks.

We hope to follow the container's journey and the eventual arrival in Morocco of this incredible donation from Belvedere to the children of the Atlas Mountains and we hope to be able to continue to support this very worthwhile cause in the years to come.

Earlier, I referred to last year as a momentous year in Belvedere's long and distinguished history. The main reason for this was that it was the year the first academy intake of 2007 sat their GCSE examinations. This was always going to be the most public test of the transition from independent, selective fee paying school to independent, non selective, state funded academy. How well would the girls do? How would they do compared to their predecessors? Would standards fall? Would behaviour slip? Would attendance drop? Would exclusions rise? Would Belvedere no longer be Belvedere?

The government’s main indicator of examination success is the number of students gaining 5 grades A*-C including English and Maths. Last year, the national figure was 59% with Liverpool schools averaging 55%. Our first non selective Academy cohort achieved as astonishing 98% 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths, equal to that of the cities’ only selective grammar school, a truly remarkable achievement by the girls and their teachers. Furthermore, this figure of 98% was also a phenomenal 28% above our MidYis target of 70%.

Perhaps even more remarkable was that the quality of the grades was also in some cases almost as good, and in other respects, better, than previous years. 11% of
grades at GCSE were at A* with 64% at A* - B, and the 98% A* - C including English and Maths was actually 2% higher than the previous year.

I think all of that deserves a special round of applause.

**APPLAUSE**

Other key indicators show attendance running at around 95%, excellent behaviour with exclusions almost non-existent, record numbers of girls applying for places at Belvedere with over 530 applying for 120 places in Year 7 in 2013 and a sixth form which has doubled in size during the past few years.

In the past 5 years, we have been awarded Investors in People, The Liverpool Inclusion Charter Mark, Artsmark Gold, International Schools Award, Healthy Schools, Eco School, been designated as a National College for School Leadership NPQH development school, gained 28 out of 31 outstanding grades from an Ofsted Section 5 inspection report and 5 out of 5 outstanding grades from our subject inspection of English. To quote the inspectors “The academy, like its predecessor school, is meeting its fundamental aim to inspire girls to high ambition and achievement.”

All this has been achieved largely through the hard work and incredible commitment of the teaching and support staff, and through the seemingly limitless abilities of the Belvedere girls. But I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank our Governing Bodies and our sponsors, The Girls’ Day School Trust and HSBC for their support, challenge and encouragement throughout our Academy journey.

I would like to thank on a personal level my senior management team, Mr Irwin, Mr McGarry and Mrs Jones who are outstanding senior leaders and who have supported me brilliantly for the past few years, and my senior support staff, Mrs Nalis
my PA and senior administrator, and Mrs Donnelly our Finance Director, who do an amazing job in making the Academy work so efficiently every day.

I would also like to pay tribute to our parents and to the strong partnership we have with them. For any school to be successful there must be a strong bond between staff and parents, between the school and home. Attendance at our parents’ evenings is usually around 90%, for example, and information evenings and Academy events are always well attended. There are many parents here today and there will be more at our Carol Concert here next month. Our parents support musical and drama events as well as sporting competitions, and will always come into the Academy if there is an issue to be resolved. We have an active Parents’ Association which meets regularly with senior staff to discuss developments and to give us their perspective on a proposed initiative, for example.

Another, often overlooked factor in the success of Belvedere in the past few years, has been the contribution of the older girls, the girls who had been selected for the original Belvedere School. Throughout the transitional period they acted as role models for the new students and, in many ways, as custodians of the traditions, history and ethos of the old school. They were able to pass on the notion of what it means to be a Belvedere girl, as well as their pride in being a pupil at the school. I would like to thank them for their support and I hope that they feel their work has now paid off.

So thank you, parents, staff, governors and Belvedere girls for helping to make Belvedere Academy so successful. I think you should all give yourselves a well deserved round of applause.

APPLAUSE

To conclude, I would like to take you back to when today’s guest, Lord Andrew Adonis officially opened The Belvedere Academy in October 2007. Those who were
there will remember the highlight of the very grand ceremony was not my speech, nor was it what the Chair of Governors or, with respect, what Lord Adonis said, but the words of five Year 7 girls who were part of the first Academy cohort. As they spoke to the large and illustrious gathering about their excitement on getting a place at Belvedere, their nervousness surrounding their first day, their hopes for the future, how the older girls had looked after them during their first few days, how one sixth former had offered to share her umbrella with a new Year 7 girl who was getting soaked during a sudden rain shower, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house. Most of all they spoke of how proud they were to have become Belvedere girls.

Those girls have grown up a bit now, and I’m delighted to say that they’ve all stayed on in the sixth form and have started their A levels. They did well in their GCSE’s – very well. Between them they gained an incredible 20 A*, 29 A’s, 10 B’s and 4 C’s. 100% of their grades were at A*-C and 77.8% were at A or A*. They are now, as Ofsted said, “Confident, articulate, ambitious young women” studying subjects such as Further Maths, Psychology and Physics and preparing for the next phase of their lives which will take them to university and successful careers. They are wonderful representatives of our first Academy cohort and I would like to invite them to receive a special award from Lord Adonis. Would you please show your appreciation for Olivia Bates, Rebecca Caulfield, Sophie Lavelle, Mia Rose Muldoon and Annie May Walsh.

APPLAUSE

During that opening ceremony for the Belvedere Academy, back in those uncertain days of October 2007, I quoted the words of one of my illustrious predecessors, Miss Isobel Rhys, Headmistress of the Belvedere School in 1905 and I’d like to remind you of what she said about Belvedere.
She said “The important thing in a school is that everyone should regard every single child as an individual, and get every single girl to do the very utmost possible with her life. That is what we try to do at Belvedere.”

Lord Adonis, ladies and gentlemen and Belvedere girls, trying to get every single girl to do the very utmost possible with her life is precisely what Belvedere is still doing today, over 100 years later, and I hope you will agree, doing it very well indeed.