

ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATES AND AWARDS

19TH NOVEMBER 2007

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT 2006 – 2007

INTRODUCTION

Chair of the Board of Governors, Governors, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Girls, I welcome you all here this evening to my seventh Annual Presentation of Certificates and Awards. I would like to add my own words of welcome to Julie Healy and thank you her accepting our invitation to present the awards which celebrate the successes and achievements of our students over the past year.

Julie is a past pupil of the Girls' Model and, like our previous Guests of Honour in recent years, she is an extremely positive role-model to all of our girls. I know she is very supportive of the school and has been involved in our specialist School initiative as Barnardo's are one of our sponsors and partners and I thank her for coming along this evening and look forward to hearing from her later on.

I am extremely pleased to report that 2006 – 2007 was a most enjoyable and successful year for the school and this reflects the hard work of both staff and pupils. The teaching and support staff have again worked as a team to produce the positive ethos necessary to challenge and motivate pupils throughout the school and this encouragement has led to many pupils achieving excellence and success in many different fields. I congratulate the pupils on these achievements and thank all of the staff for their effort and commitment over the year.

It is important to stress that 2006 – 2007 was the first year of our ICT Specialist School and Full Service Extended School designations and these extra dimensions to school life have enriched not just our own school community but also the wider community and has set the school at the heart of wide-ranging partnerships across North and West Belfast as well as further afield. I will be touching on these developments in more detail later on.

STAFF CHANGES

We said farewell to five members of staff last year and I would like to acknowledge the highly significant contributions they made to the school. Miss Kate Irvine joined the staff in 1979 and over the years since then has played a full part in school life latterly as Head of Physical Education.

Her enthusiasm, imagination and insight as well as commitment to extra-curricular activities gave huge support to staff and pupils and we wish her well for the future and hope to see her helping out in school on a regular basis.

Kate Johnston started teaching in the Girls Model in 1989 and played a major role not only in the Mathematics Department where she was Senior Assistant but also in Key Skills and Outdoor Activities where her expertise in Expedition work was invaluable to the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Her professionalism and commitment will be sorely missed and we wish her well as she fills her newly found freedom with travelling and other leisure pursuits she now has time to participate in.

Miss Emma McWilliams has left to take up the post of Head of Art and Design at Monkstown Community School after 9 years at the Girls' Model. She has been a very successful teacher of Art and Design and has also helped in organising cross-country as an extra-curricular activity throughout the school and will be greatly missed in the staffroom. We wish her every success in her new post and know she will lead her new department well. Miss Vici Topping took up the post of Head of English in 2003 after 15 years teaching in the Boys Model. She led her department very effectively and was fully involved in school life, especially school productions. We wish her well in the future and thank her for her contribution to school. Mr Johnny Palmer has taken up a post in Rainey Endowed School after one year in the Design and Technology Department and we wish him every success in his new role. The staff and pupils would like to send their best wishes and gratitude to all the members of staff who have left and I, personally, would like to thank them for their commitment and support.

New appointments to the teaching staff are Miss Julie Cullen (Design and Technology), Miss Dawn Watton (Art and Design) and Mrs Carolyn Green (Head of English) while, as part of our Full Service Extended Schools programme, Miss Dawn Fryer and Mrs Carole Dillon were appointed as Transition Teachers to work in the Girls Model and local feeder primary schools. Mrs Fiona Ward has just been made a permanent member of the Art and Design Department after covering a career break last year while Mrs Karen Chivero and Mrs Jackie Johnston have returned to school after career breaks.

Mrs Tonya Warwick and Miss Natalie McLaughlin are covering career breaks in Sociology and English, Miss Norma Wilson is covering Mrs Janice Clarke's secondment as Full Service Extended School Co-ordinator while Ms Elaine Patterson, Miss Ruth Crymble and Miss Alison Pulford are covering maternity leaves in R.E., I.C.T. and English.

On the support staff, Mrs Lorraine Houston and Ms Leigh Braiden have joined the Full Service Extended School team as Family Attendance Co-ordinator and Parent Co-ordinator respectively while Mrs Marion Patterson has joined the Classroom Assistant Team. New clerical officers in the school office are Miss Emma Bell and Miss Carrienne McLaren.

New additions to our school family are Erin Ashe, Ben Clarke, Ava Frazer, Joel McBride, Megan Reilly and Jack Stuart and we are delighted that all mothers and babies are doing well.

Pupil enrolment is 1007 which is just below the maximum permitted by the Department of Education of 1010 and, like almost all other non-selective schools in Northern Ireland, we have felt the pinch of declining primary school numbers as our intake was down to 133 girls even though the percentage of pupils transferring from our local feeder schools remained more or less the same as previous years. I would like to thank our Primary School liaison team for their considerable efforts and I am hopeful of an increase in numbers transferring next year as figures show there are more girls in P7 this year than last.

I am pleased to report that due to the continued efforts of our Attendance Team we were able to sustain our attendance figure at 90% and hope to maintain, and even improve, on this with support from the Full Service Extended School initiative. We continue to work hard to reduce both truancy and condoned absence including the taking of holidays during term-time and call on all of our parents to help us win this battle.

On a positive note 250 pupils received attendance awards presented by Baroness May Blood at last month's Attendance Ceremony for 98%, 99% and 100% attendance. I would like to congratulate all of these pupils and their parents especially Amber and Danielle Orr who have achieved 7 years full attendance.

EXAMINATION RESULTS

This has been another successful year for the school. At GCE Advanced Level 57 pupils were entered for 129 examinations. The results were our best ever with 64% of all entries gaining A – C Grades, 97% gaining A – E grades and 25% of pupils achieving 3 A – C grades or equivalent. The achievements of some candidates were excellent with Stacey Dillon in first place with 1 A and 2 Bs while close runners up were Robyn Beattie, Lynsay Harrison, Amy Harvey and Gina Walker with 3 Bs or equivalent. Three girls, Robyn Beattie, Lynsay Harrison and Nicky McTaggart had the outstanding achievement of all being placed in the Top 5 overall candidates in the AQA 'A' Level ICT Examination across the whole of the UK out of 1622 candidates.

At GNVQ Intermediate Level there was success in Leisure and Tourism while 8 girls achieved the CACHE Certificate in Child Care and Education, 10 girls were successful in the OCN Certificate in Grant Making through Youth Bank while 31 girls achieved the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (Level 3).

Results at GCSE were also very pleasing with 43 % of subject entries achieving a Grade C or better and 37% of girls achieving grades A* - C in 5 or more subjects while 77%, our best ever performance, achieved A* - E in 5 or more subjects with nobody leaving school without any qualifications.

The top candidates at GCSE, based upon average grades achieved, were Rebeca Hughes and Gillian Orr closely followed by Nicolle Armstrong, Ashleigh Phillips, Lisa Harrison, Laura Buchanon, Christina Avery/Keery, Jennifer Gregan and Gillian Murray.

The Occupational Studies Courses were very popular with 110 entries overall in Office Administration, Design and Construction and Hair and Beauty with 42% of entries achieving Level 2 accreditation equivalent to GCSE Grade B.

UNIVERSITY

Fourteen girls opted to enter university degree courses and, unlike last year when the majority decided to study in England and Scotland, only two have chosen to venture to Liverpool with the remainder studying at Queens University and the University of Ulster. The courses to be studied range from Sociology, Architecture, Business and Marketing, Computing and Information Technology, History, Mathematics and Statistics, Psychology, International Hospitality Management to American Studies. We wish all of them every success in their higher education careers. We also congratulate the rest of the Year 14 leavers who decided to go into employment or other training instead of university and hope they have a successful career in their chosen occupation.

GRADUATES

A large number of past pupils graduated from University with a variety of degrees including Marine Science, Sports Medicine, Computing and ICT, Performing Arts, History, Geography and Sociology. Congratulations to all of them on their excellent achievements and we wish them every success in their chosen careers.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The Physical Education Department has seen continuing improvement in participation rates and pupil achievement especially in exercise for health and sport leadership.

This has been developed through the inter-house and extra-curricular sporting programme, along with the TOPLINK Festival of Sport for local primary and Fleming Fulton school pupils and the Dreams and Teams projects including schools in Sri Lanka who visited us earlier this term.

This year the department fielded 5 hockey teams, 6 netball teams, 2 football teams, 2 basketball teams and a trampoline team in Inter-School League and Cup competitions and 3 cross country teams and 3 Athletics Teams in the District Championships. As well as this there were Inter-house and Inter-class competitions in netball, football, hockey, basketball and athletics along with Dance, Gymnastics and Trampoline festivals which offered a large number of pupils the opportunity to participate in competitive and performance experiences.

Some notable individual achievements included Hollie Johnston who qualified for both the Ulster and Irish Schools Athletics Championships in the Triple Jump finishing 6th in the Irish finals at Tullamore, Co Offaly; Louise Hill who achieved great success in inter-school swimming and Jacqueline McCutcheon, Jade Spence and Katrina Montgomery who all achieved representative honours for Northern Ireland in football while the Junior Football team captained by Annie Chapman won the Fairplay trophy at the N I Schools Tournament.

The Ski Trip was again a huge success and the Duke of Edinburgh Award continues to flourish with 5 pupils completing their Silver Award, and 9 others working at Bronze Award level. For the junior pupils, monthly Ramble Club outings are well supported and they enjoyed an energetic residential at Ballyeamon Camping Barn.

One of the main highlights of the year was Rock Challenge when over 100 girls were involved in a spectacular performance both on and behind the stage. After spending countless afternoons and Saturday mornings rehearsing, the girls got their just rewards when they won 1st place overall in the N I Finals at the Waterfront in Belfast and then came overall runner-up in the UK Northern Open Finals in Grimsby. Also at the Waterfront Hall the girls won 8 individual awards including Best Stage Crew, Best Choreography, Best Costumes, Most Entertaining Performance and Performers Choice Award while 4 individual awards were achieved in Grimsby – Best Stage Crew, Best Video Performance, Best Staging and the Spirit of Rock Challenge Award for being the friendliest and best behaved group. To top it all off out of 230 schools entered nationwide we won 2 National Awards – Best Staging and Best Video Performance.

Other dance highlights of the year were the Primary School Dance Festival involving Forthriver, Ballysillan and Malvern Primary Schools and our own Dance and Aerobics team, Strictly Come Dancing when the best school dancers and some enthusiastic staff took to the floor to raise funds in 3 live sell-out shows, Teenage Kicks when 14 senior pupils undertook a Dance Leadership Project, taught routines in Currie Primary School and then showcased the performance in front of the Lord Mayor and invited guests at the Waterfront Hall Studio, The Fire Within when 120 of our girls performed at the Waterfront Hall as part of the Greater Shankill Celebration Show and the Chicago Dance Masterclass when 20 senior pupils participated in the Baby Grand Studio at the Grand Opera House. These events all show how dance is helping our pupils to grow in self-confidence and self-esteem and giving them the opportunity to be tremendous ambassadors for the school.

The Music Department was again extremely busy over the year with Model Rock performing at the Art College, then performing on line in the Northern Ireland 'Battle of the Bands' final and later on winning a 'Battle of the Bands' competition in Carrick. Also in Autumn Term, the orchestra, choirs, soloists and bands performed at the Annual Presentation of Certificates and Awards, The Attendance Awards Ceremony, the Strictly Come Dancing competition and the Carol Service while the Performing Arts class performed at the Children's Hospice shortly before Christmas.

After Christmas, musicians performed at the Transfer Evenings, embarked on a Primary School Tour and went to see Cats at the Grand Opera House and the Ulster Orchestra at the Ulster Hall. In the summer term, musicians and the Rock Challenge girls performed at the Greater Shankill 'Fire Within' concert at the Waterfront Hall and the year ended with musicians playing at the Charity Presentation, the Performing Art 'A' Level pupils performing to local primary schools and the Orchestra going away on an Orchestra Residential. A big thanks must go to the parents and instrumental tutors who support the music department so well every year.

It was another successful year in the Art Department with the end of year exhibition of examination work showing a depth of thought and concept which would have fitted well into an Art College environment ranging from photography, jewellery design and sculpture to installation pieces. During the year students worked with paper artist Janet Crymble at Ormeau Baths Gallery, with scenery designer Frank Quinn and with University of Ulster Professor Paul Seawright. Year 13 pupils did work placements in Ormeau Baths Gallery, Catalyst Arts, North Queen Street Studios, with ceramicists and in Girls Model helping to run the Year 8 after-school Art club.

On the competitions front, Rebecca Hume won £1000 and a trophy for coming first in the Fred Malcolm Jewellery design competition while her design has been made up in silver and is being sold in the Lisburn Road branch of the jewellers, Nadine Clarke won a Knife Awareness Poster design competition run by the PSNI and Demi McMaster won the Year 8 category in a poster design competition run by C2K and PSNI on firework safety.

The Scripture Union continues to run successfully throughout the year with meetings being held twice weekly hosting a very varied programme. The Scripture Union Weekend Residential at Cultra was again the highlight of the year. As usual the range of extra-curricular activities available for all pupils across all age groups continues to reflect the school ethos of opportunity for all. The After Schools Club and Computer Clubs continue to flourish and clubs such as the Astrogazers and Drama Club are attracting more pupils each year alongside the well-established sporting and musical activities.

CHARITIES

As usual we were able to support a range of charities both locally and abroad during the year. These included sending shoe boxes to Romania, participating in the Blue Peter Shoe Biz appeal, collecting old shoes for UNICEF and continuing to sponsor a 10 year old girl in Rwanda. Also, almost £3000 was donated to local charities and organisations such as the Hospice, NI Cancer Fund for Children, Diabetes UK, GoKidz and Ballysillan Blue Houses. A big thank you to all for their generosity again throughout the year.

The Geography Department organized field trips to Colin Glen where Year 8s enjoyed glorious weather as they dipped their feet into the Colin River while learning river study techniques and enquiry processes. Year 13 AS pupils undertook an urban landscape study of the Lisburn Road, Year 10 pupils visited W5 taking part in a fun day of interactive learning and participated in the hurricane exhibition enjoying the ICT facilities provided while Year 9 students who were judged to be the most creative in their Industry Project were rewarded with a visit to Aunt Sandra's Candy Factory to see how sweets are made, however they needed no instruction in how to dispose of them at the end of the process.

The Science Department have developed a new post-16 A Level Science course in conjunction with the University of Ulster where our Year 13 and 14 pupils have the opportunity to complete scientific investigations in university laboratories, take lessons from university lecturers and enjoy a week long science residential at the University of Ulster Coleraine Campus.

The Department also had a 'Researcher in Residence' working with the Year 11 Double Award Science class for two weeks when ex-Head Girl, Lyndsay Chatham, who is now studying for her Doctorate in Cancer Research at Queen's University worked with them on the use of grapefruit as a natural antibiotic.

The Year 8 pupils had an opportunity to visit Belfast Zoo and 3 year 8 girls came first in the Salters Festival of Chemistry at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown in a very strong field of teams mostly from the Grammar School sector. Well done to them and to all our pupils who took part in school competitions throughout the year.

The Careers Department had their usual busy year with all Key Stage 3 pupils having Employability classes while senior girls had the opportunity to listen to various speakers on careers related topics during their Careers time. They also were able to take part in an extensive programme of courses, conferences and visits while some Year 12 girls took part in the Army Schools Challenge. Overall, the range of careers advice takes all abilities and aptitudes into consideration and prepares the girls extremely well for the world of work.

As I have already mentioned, last year was our first as an ICT Specialist School and a Full Service Extended School. On the Specialist School front, we were one of only 12 schools selected from almost 50 who applied and the extra resources we were able to access have allowed us to employ extra specialist ICT staff and purchase more ICT equipment to be used throughout the school. It has resulted in greater partnership with local primary and post primary schools, community groups, businesses and organisations and we are pleased to state that almost all of our Year 1 targets have been achieved. I would like to highlight a few of our achievements in this area, firstly, the Virtual Learning Partnership which is a suite of resources launched to develop a culture of learning and information for our students, parents and community partners consisting of www.belfastgms.org our website, www.virtualgms.org our learning environment and www.clickgms.org our emagazine.

The website has received over 40,000 hits since its launch in late March this year and provides information on current events and school life and we are extending it through community links such as Falls Community Council to produce drugs and alcohol awareness resources for pupils and parents and also by developing resources to support pupils with Asperger's syndrome. The Virtual Learning Environment has been designed to support pupils 'whenever, whatever and wherever' they are, through an internet connection. It was piloted in June and rolled out to Years 9 and 11 in October with a phenomenal response from pupils and the range of resources uploaded have been accessed at nights and weekends, as evidenced by activity logs. Our e-magazine was produced 5 times last year and the next edition will be 'live' within the next fortnight.

Another area is Promethean Interactive Whiteboard training where Mrs Chism, ICT Staff Development Co-ordinator, has been busy training staff. Over half of the staff have now been awarded Promethean User certificates and several staff members have already completed or are finishing accreditation as Advanced Users. This has benefited pupils who enjoy the reward and challenge of learning through this exciting resource.

Departments have also benefited from the Specialist School resources, for example, in Science all labs now have an interactive whiteboard or data projector, electronic data loggers with sensors are used regularly to ease measurement in investigations and Science and Maths are both trialling the Quizdom assessment tool which allows students to answer Science and Maths questions along the lines of the 'Ask the Audience' on Who Wants to be a Millionaire.

The Full Service Extended School is currently being evaluated and hopefully will be mainstreamed as it is proving to be so successful in many different areas of school life. We had a visit from the Minister of Education, Mrs Catriona Ruane, and the Chair of the Education Committee, Mr Sammy Wilson when they, alone with many other influential decision-makers, were able to view a sample of the activities undertaken and talk with pupils, parents, Community partners and staff about the difference the initiative was making to the lives of the students.

Through the extra resources we can offer the services of 2 Transition Teachers to local primary schools, we can provide parenting support through our Parent Co-ordinator, Ms Leigh Braiden, we can give support to families over attendance issues through Mrs Lorraine Houston, we have night classes which are very well attended two evenings per week, we have enhanced Health Services in school and have built up many community links with Janice Clarke, our Co-ordinator, being involved in many community programmes and thanks to her, we have built up a formidable network of support in less than a year. Other activities include Easter Booster Classes, a Summer Scheme, a Community Newsletter, Peer Mentoring and Health Screening Sessions. I am very pleased that both these new programmes have been integrated into our School Development Plan and support us in our vision of providing a holistic education for all of our pupils.

BUILDING MAINTENANCE

We have now moved into the penultimate stage of our new school build with the Final Business Case having been completed and sent to the Department of Education for final approval. We hope to have agreement from them within the next 2/3 months so that construction can start early in March 2008. Planning permission has been achieved and, if all goes to schedule, we will move into the new school early in the 2009/2010 school year.

In the interim I must pay tribute to our Building Supervisors Ed Miskimmin, Rodney English and Thomas McComish and the Cleaning Team who maintain the old buildings so well. The standard of caretaking and cleaning is first class and I am also indebted to Willie Hamilton who ensures that Health and Safety isn't compromised even at this difficult time.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the office, resources, technical and teaching support staff whose commitment to the school is phenomenal. Due to their efforts, the teaching staff can concentrate on learning and teaching in the classroom with the pupil support teams allowing many girls who would not have achieved their full potential to do so. All of these staff are invaluable in fulfilling our vision of Achievement for All.

I would also like to thank the Board of Governors whose advice, support and wisdom I find invaluable in fulfilling my role as Principal. Their time, commitment and support is much appreciated given that it is becoming a more difficult role every year.

CONCLUSION

2006-2007 was once again a very busy and successful year for everyone at Girls Model. We enjoyed the benefits of Specialist School and Full Service Extended School status and I thank all of our sponsors and partners for their support. We are still working our way through the Public Private Partnership for our new school build with all of its community provision and, at last, I can see the horizon when it will actually come to fruition. We have made a good start to the Revised Curriculum and are playing our part in joined-up education by working with all the other relevant child agencies across North and West Belfast.

All of this is only possible through the Model School Team playing their part and I feel enormous pride in being the Principal of such a vibrant organisation. It is a privilege to work with so many professional, caring and highly skilled people and any girl who chooses to come to the Girls' Model can be sure of receiving the best educational experience bar none. I am convinced of this, and as each year goes by, I become even more convinced that our vision of 'Achievement for All' is at the heart of all that we do here in school.

I have already thanked the work of the Governors and I now would like to acknowledge the commitment, professionalism, support and wise counsel of my two Vice Principals, Mrs Heather Mairs and Dr Mary

Pinkerton, whose hard work, caring attitude and empathetic leadership are invaluable in creating an environment where staff and students can succeed.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Senior Leadership Team whose efforts and expertise in carrying out their many responsibilities are much appreciated and the whole staff team, both teaching and non-teaching, whose 100% commitment and professionalism to their work are second to none. They value and care for all of the pupils and give them every opportunity to succeed and take their place in society as well-rounded individuals.

I hope that Government realise how important it is to give stability to schools. We need to know what the future holds, we need a long-term strategic plan for all children so that everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential. Transfer to post-primary schools must be sorted out now so that we are not left in limbo and pupils are disadvantaged due to a lack of planning. Currently some Grammar schools are turning themselves into Comprehensives by admitting a large percentage of D grade pupils and, with the downturn in numbers transferring from primary schools, this means there are less and less pupils for non-selective schools.

This state of “non-decision making” means that everyone is in a state of uncertainty, long-term planning is extremely difficult and we need sustainable, area based, strategic thinking in order to move forward. I feel that the Belfast Model School for Girls with its Specialist School status, the Full Service Extended School programme, its track record both at the high achieving end of the spectrum evidenced this year by having 3 girls in the top 5 in AQA ‘A’ level ICT throughout the whole of the UK and, at whole school level, evidenced by 77% of Year 12 pupils gaining 5+ A* - E GCSEs and no-one leaving without any qualifications, has the expertise, commitment and drive to be part of any strategic plan for educational provision in Northern Ireland. I hope that there is no further delay in implementing the way forward and I have great pleasure on presenting this report and commend it to you and thank you for your attention.