

Paul Taylor's final address in full:

The Chairman's famous husbandry of resources and instinct for economy has landed me with two roles this year, leaving me to speak to you this morning as both Headmaster and Guest Speaker: now time will tell whether that doubles the length of my speech or halves the sentence of your listening!

Joking apart I am very grateful for the invitation to share a few thoughts on my last Speech Day and I promise not to keep you too long. I'll try not to make it too much of an Oscar-like acceptance speech of thank-yous, but you will understand that there will have to be a bit of that!

*As I take my leave of Fram, I am reminded with trepidation of Oscar Wilde's words: **'Some people cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go'**: I will live in my little bubble of optimism regarding which of those is more applicable to me! However, I have no doubt that it is the former of these that applies to this year's leavers, and of course today sees an important rite of passage for them, and it is only right that they take their formal leave of a place that will have done much to form the people that they are now. I always set the challenge to each top year to leave this school a better place than they found it, and I have no doubt that this year's leavers have done just that. They have worked hard (well, most of them!), played hard and set a fine example of how to set about life at school. I will look forward to their company this evening. They have been exceptionally well-led by a fine prefect team, who I would like to thank for their work and for their constancy throughout the year. Liberty's classy address earlier will have given you a glimpse of the quality of the outstanding leadership she has provided all year – she really has been exceptional in every regard – and it has been a real privilege to work with her, Joe and Rose as the senior prefect team this year: my gosh they are an impressive team who personify so much of what we value here at the College. Thank you.*

There is one other departure that deserves mention this afternoon. Bob Skitch retires after a remarkable 31 years of service, during which time he has contributed enormously to the academic and co-curricular life of the school. His commitment to sport across all three terms has been particularly valued and generations of 3rd team players have benefitted from his enthusiasm (and some would say from his umpiring!). Bob is a proper schoolmaster who does not give a second thought to giving his time at weekends and holidays (he is a CCF and DofE stalwart); instead he simply does not question that such dedication is just part of the job. In fact I cannot think of many teachers who have so generously given up so much of their time for the benefit of our pupils and I know that Bob – like me – would argue that he has got so much more out of the job as a result. Bob has also built up an enormous reservoir of expertise on Further Education, running the school's universities programme for longer than any of us can remember and I know that Miss Cranmer, who succeeds him in this role, is very grateful for his offer of being on the end of the phone should she need him next year! Suffice it to say that it will be hard to imagine this place without Bob Skitch.



Above: Paul Taylor delivers his final Speech Day address as Headmaster

And as I come to the end of my time here I can reflect with real warmth on the privilege of leading this community for 10 years. I recognise that a Head is only ever a temporary custodian of a school. Heads are not the College – it is the Bob Skitches of this world and so many other staff in front of me who are the real critical mass here. It was clear to me when I joined the College in 2009 that this was a school with a very strong soul, and one that had proved over time its ability to adapt and to evolve in response to changing priorities and challenges. It's why I am so pleased with the development of Paul's Court and the Sixth Form Centre that we completed a few years ago as a physical expression of this: I love the fact that the old external walls are now internal, showing that the school knows where it comes from, but then the wonderful glass façade illustrates that we are an outward and forward-looking school. Architecture speaks a language, and that tells the story of a balance between change and continuity. A Head's job is to respect the founding principles of the school – to be true to its soul – but also, Doctor Who-like, to regenerate it and to perhaps reinterpret those principles and apply them to the pupils of today and to the world into which they will be graduating.

With this in mind, and for what it is worth, I am delighted to be passing on that custodian baton to [Louise North](#), who I have got to know very well over the course of this year on her many visits to the College. Louise has made a wonderful effort to get under the skin of the school and with every meeting I have become even more confident that i) she 'gets' Framlingham and ii) that she will do a terrific job in taking it forward and making this school (even) better. Thank you for supporting her in her request for the recent parents' survey – she is quite right to find out what our key stakeholders feel about the school (I did the same in my first year), and the company that ran the research said the response levels were way above the norm – a very positive sign. I know that this warm, strong community will welcome and support Louise in the way they have me, and I feel so pleased to be leaving this dear place in such capable and accomplished hands.

Louise North will be inheriting a school that is in very good shape and in very good heart (I would say that wouldn't I?!). The word holistic is greatly over-used by schools when describing their offering, but if we are to remain true to the famous dictum that 'Education is what remains when what has been learnt has been forgotten', then it is essential that we continue to develop and nurture the whole person, and not just the exam candidate.

*Everyone here will be familiar with my heartfelt belief that a successful education is not only to be measured in examination grades in the same way that no person should ever be **defined** by those grades. Yes – we are so proud this year to have had one of our pupils in the top 0.12% of GCSE candidates nationally; and of our over 20 1st class degrees in the last 2 years (and these are just the ones we have heard about); and we are equally proud of that pupil who secured 7 decent passes having been told by his last school that he would never pass any GCSEs. Yes – we do both here, increasingly well actually. But what we hope to work for – with parents – is to create balanced, happy and rounded human beings; yes we want them to have achieved academically and in other areas at the very top of their potential, but we also want them to have a sense of self; an innate sense of right and wrong and the moral courage to do something about the difference.*

So if I have one parting wish as I take my leave from the profession it is to, please, change the educational conversation and its focus on academic league tables as a measure of a school (and they, by the way, are mostly about selective intake). You know my position on this and I am aggressively opposed to such one-dimensional tables (though we are wholly transparent about our results, as we should be). There is a local school, for example, that demands at least 6 GCSEs at grade 6 and 2 at 5 for their own pupils to enter their own Sixth Form – even if they have been in their care since 11. What is that about? Where is the joint responsibility for those results? Which is why I have always said that if you take a child at 13 you see them through to 18 unless you come to a mutual agreement that there is a better route for them (not for the school) elsewhere. I hear lots of parents who ask about our academic results but this is the key and the formula remains: if they work hard and the teaching is good – which it is here (very) – they will do well. I have worked in far more academically selective schools and can honestly say that what goes on in the classroom here comfortably stands comparison with any of them.

So..... please don't talk to me about league tables and overall results – all that matters is how we are doing for each individual child against their own ability level. Yes – ask me and please even challenge me about that, and about the quality of our teaching and learning and the culture and environment we have here, but please don't tell me that a child who struggles and works hard to get that D grade, or who just loves his or her sport but 'only' makes the D team, or who doesn't get that part in the play: please don't tell me that that pupil is any less valuable a member of this community than our A scholars or 1st team captains.*

Don't get me wrong: the very best possible examination results remain critically important, but they are not sufficient. They also need those personal qualities – resilience; self-belief; creativity; presentation; articulacy; manners; the ability to work with other people; measured risk-taking; flexibility; adaptability; honesty; integrity and – importantly – a ready smile: the fact that such qualities are less easy to measure than pure academic achievement does not mean they are less important educational objectives; not if we are to enable our leavers to enter the adult world excited – rather than daunted – by the challenges that lie ahead. To do that we have to protect the breadth of education as it is the sport, the performing arts, CCF, DofE, chapel and chaplaincy, community service and the huge range of activities in schools such as ours that foster these qualities. These are not just fripperies to pass the time: they are absolutely core to our educational philosophy. Please protect in particular our creative subjects against the current tide of educational directives that militate against them: this is where pupils can explore who they are and what they think: creativity is one of the things that make us human; what Victor Hugo said about music in my view applies to all the creative arts: that 'Music expresses that which cannot be said and

on which it is impossible to be silent'. I will always cherish those moments when I see children who might be reticent in the classroom or awkward socially come alive on stage, in a concert or play, or through producing an outstanding painting, film or artefact. And then to see that child walking that little bit taller the next day. That is what it is all about and it is good schools like this that unlock such things.

Another thing that distinguishes us as human is an appreciation of the spiritual. Now wherever our charges come out on their faith – and that is a question solely for them – we must make sure they engage with this element of their humanity. We live in increasingly uncertain times and I would argue we therefore need – even more than usual – to look to less transient things; eternal truths and values; a strong moral compass; a spiritual appreciation based on knowledge, respect and emotional maturity. Schools have to play a central role, alongside families, in providing this framework and those boundaries (even if that is a framework against which they could rebel). This is a school for those of all faiths and none, but the values that permeate this community are unequivocally Christian and our charges need to recognise and understand that before deciding where they stand on such things.

As I leave the profession I know I do so when independent schools are facing challenging times. Without a political or media ally in sight (publicly at least!) they have become easy targets for cheap political point scoring. I also have to say that I do not doubt the sincerity of some critics, and even admire their ideological motivation, and I even admit to feeling conflicted myself at times. But every time I do I remember how strongly i) I believe in the right of people to spend their hard-earned money as they choose and ii) my profound belief in and passion for the educational product here at Framlingham – that has very few genuine equivalents in the maintained sector – and we must not apologise for that. I hope you understand my meaning when I say that it should be the aim of every Secretary of State for Education to make independent schools unnecessary but please, in the meantime, let's use our schools – alongside the many excellent schools in the state sector – as aspirational Highest Common Factors to share good practice and educational philosophy rather than run the danger of succumbing to the Lowest Common Denominator model of education.

Framlingham is, I hope, an honest school. We try to do what we say on the tin. I believe we do it very well. We do not get everything right – who does? – and it is a compliment to our parent body that whenever a parent comes in with a concern, 9 times out of 10 they have a point and we have to be honest enough to admit that: that is how we improve. But I do believe Fram is honest, kind and purposeful, with a strong moral compass. It is also real, which means that there are times when our pupils are not honest, kind or displaying a strong moral compass: THAT is when a school or a community has to prove its mettle and it is in how we respond as a community to such incidents as we have experienced at times this year that we will – rightly – be judged. There is not a school in the land that does not have to face up to such issues and incidents – the key is how you respond, and we have never tried to duck our responsibility or paper over any cracks, and I was hugely grateful to receive so many notes and emails of support from parents and members of the local community in the difficult weeks that we faced last term. I will always stress that parenting is more important than schooling – but both are stronger when they work in harmony.

And this brings me to one important thank-you that I so want to say today: to our parents. We do not underestimate for a moment the trust that you parents place in us when choosing this school, and I do believe we are truly blessed with our parent body. I have always said that the better we know our parents the easier our job is; we are trying to achieve the same thing after all, and for that communication and trust is critical. Trust depends on all parties being honest with each other and I hope you feel we honour our side of that bargain.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the ever-supportive Society of Old Framlinghamians. From our very first day here they have welcomed Amanda and I into the fold. People who care – deeply –

about the College and people who, individually and collectively, have expressed that support financially through their hugely generous donations over the years. There are not many major building projects over the years that have not been financed in large part by the Society alongside individual alumni. I am pleased to say that our relationship is both very close (I hope almost symbiotic) and hugely valued: and I am very proud to have been made an honorary Old Framlinghamian.

Our governing body also contains some OFs among its number. The role of the governor has changed beyond recognition even in my 10 years as a Head. I have to pinch myself to remind me that these people are volunteers! They work so hard on our behalves – and I can't tell you how many times they are in contact from holidays abroad or at home – and long gone are the days when being a governor was about turning up to a couple of meetings and grand occasions. There is now a robust structure that covers all the key areas of school, allowing them to hold the executive to account through regular proactive and supportive scrutiny. They have offered nothing but support to me as Headmaster, and they are in my view the unsung heroes of the College. They know the school so well, are strategic and forward-looking in outlook, and I hope they know how much their wholehearted commitment is appreciated. Thank you.

I have also been blessed with the two Chairs of Governors I have worked with, both of whom have taught me so much in so many ways. I thoroughly enjoyed sharing the last 8 of Andrew Fane's 17 years as Chairman and spoke at length about those a couple of years ago. The first two years of Bill Rimmer's Chairmanship have been equally enjoyable and I have greatly valued his wise counsel, steadfast support, his judicious challenging of my position on various issues and, importantly, his wonderful company. Probably most importantly it was Bill's hand on the tiller of the hugely thorough and professional (and I would say successful) process that led to the appointment of Louise North and it is clear that he and Louise already have a very good working relationship. That relationship with Andrew Fane was critical to my early years here, and I know that Louise will enjoy the same wise support from Bill. Andrew and Bill – both hugely accomplished in their own fields – are very different in the way they operate, but they share a passion for young people and education that means their wholehearted commitment to the school can only come from a true and generous sense of vocation. How blessed are we that they chose to pursue that vocation at Framlingham College.

I think we all know how lucky we are to be working and learning in this beautiful place. I am a great believer that we all respond to our environments – perhaps without even knowing – and there are not many better than here. That said, it will always be people more than buildings and settings that make a school. I can say with confidence that the staff here are outstanding – and by that I mean both support staff and academic staff. Not only are our grounds and buildings kept in quite beautiful condition, and the food here as good as any school I've worked at or visited – so they are all very good at their jobs – but it is the warmth of the smiles that greet you and the willingness to go out of their way to help anyone that makes them so special and such an important and affirming part of this community. And then we have the teaching staff. What quality there is here and how lucky are the boys and girls here to have staff who so routinely go the extra mile on their behalf – both in and out of the classroom. They work hard (very hard actually!) and have been open to a number of new ideas and emphases during my time here. We have had a real focus on developing our best teaching practice in recent years and there are some very exciting things going on in the classroom at Framlingham College at the moment. The classroom here is now an open, undefensive and collaborative space and we are all learning from each other. There should not be anyone on any staff who believes they are the finished article: if you feel you have nothing to learn then it is probably time to stop, and I'm pleased to say that there is a great and growing culture of lifelong learning among the staff here. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them publicly – and personally – for the support they have given me through these past 10 years: they are a hugely dedicated, professional and accomplished bunch and it has been a privilege to work with them.

I am in particular grateful to my senior team who have been so, so supportive, work so, so hard and who have as open a door policy – to staff and pupils – as I have known at any school. What a difference their professionalism and talent will make to Louise North's start here in September. I should not mention individuals, but I do want to say a special thank you to Susan Wessels as my Senior Deputy: we have known each other a long time, have different – but I hope complementing – strengths and weaknesses but very much a shared fundamental educational philosophy, and it has been a pleasure and a joy – and great FUN! – to work with her. As one parent wrote on leaving last year: 'So talking of Susan.....how long have you got as I could fill a text book! There's good.....there's great.....and then there's Susan whom everyone adores and respects in equal measure.' I can only agree.

And I'd like to finish with the most important element in any school: the pupils. I know that in my teaching career I have learnt so much more from them than they have from me and it is they who make schools such exciting, alive and inspiring places to be. I have always said that the great appeal to me about Fram pupils is how well-earthed they are. We cannot escape that this is a hugely privileged environment in which to grow and learn, but I have always found the boys and girls here to be grounded and unaffected; this is not what I call a 'flicky-blond hair' school and there is no sense of entitlement here (and entitlement is something I rail against). I have always loved the easy relationship our students have with each other and with staff. Many writers have used the analogy of the 'road through life' and the choices that we all have to make at so many points along that road. Whatever our ages in here, we are all on our own personal journey through life, and we can have no comprehension of what triumphs or disasters, what joys or sorrows lie beyond the next corner. You boys and girls here are just at the start of your journeys, but really all that separates you from me is perhaps the benefit of experience and being able to get those triumphs and disasters, joys and sorrows into some greater sense of perspective.

There have been many decisions that I have had to make in my life, each one of course contributing to where – and who – I am now. I am faced with another major crossroads now: I don't know if I have made the right decision to leave Fram; I love this place and my family are happy and settled. Leaving a secure job with no real idea of 'what next' is very scary: but then again, as many of you will have heard me say many times, most worthwhile things in life are a little scary – otherwise we are probably not stretching ourselves out of our comfort zone. So..... I am certainly not claiming that I have got all my decisions right – who does? – but that is not the point; the point is that, having made those decisions, to commit to them and to make the best of them (and, as Sartre said, 'commitment is an act not a word').

With each choice you make about some decision or action you are saying something about yourself and your values, and such little decisions will compound to shape the person you become. There is no text book for this: of course you can take advice from family and friends, but in the end it is down to your judgement. Judgement cannot easily be taught, but the values that underpin that judgement are fostered by places such as schools, families and friends, and to a degree this is what – for me – schools are all about. Once you know the principles that you want to underpin your life then you have a framework for decision making, and you then have to back yourself and, importantly, shoulder the responsibility of the consequences of the decisions that you make. It is never too early to start taking that responsibility. For all its faults, this school is not a bad place in which to form the value-set that will underpin the decisions you will face in life; it is a very special school: cherish it, value it, protect it – and, please, have the confidence always to be true to who you are.

So thank you boys and girls: you are an inspiration – and also great fun! – to be around and you give me great faith for our future. Just make sure that you allow hope to always triumph over fear.

So there we are. 10 years of genuine pleasure and joy for me and while Amanda and I leave here today with a heavy heart it still feels the right thing to do: I've always believed it is best to move on

when you still love your job and – perhaps – when people might just want a year or two more out of you, and we do still love it here: but I sincerely believe that this is the right time for fresh eyes.

And of course my final thank you is the most heartfelt. Amanda. If this has been a successful headship it has been OUR success – very much a shared one – and I would be, literally, half the Head I have been without Amanda – and my family – being behind me. I simply cannot imagine how it could be done any other way. And I don't mean that in any paternalistic way – quite the opposite actually, and anyone involved in this school will know what Amanda has brought to this community: yes through her amazing leadership of FramSoc and the creation of Soul Food – but mostly simply through who she is – both in the school and, of critical importance, in the wider community. When I left my last school the valet message in the school magazine wrote: 'although it is clear that we would lose Paul we feel really cheated that Amanda has to go too' – and I suspect Fram is feeling the same today. Amanda – I just feel truly blessed that we have been in this together, and I look forward to being 'post important' with you.

Thank you.

– Ends –



Above: Amanda and Paul Taylor