

# Speech Day 2016

[This address should be read in conjunction with the appended PowerPoint presentation]

Madam Mayor, Mr Chairman, Dr Edmondson, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, members of the School.

Those of you who were listening to the backing track of the video playing in the final few minutes before we started this evening can't have failed to notice the word happy.

Not, perhaps, the first word to spring to mind in relation to 2016.

Appeals to our common humanity go unheeded in Aleppo.

Britain is a nation divided.

And across the pond, politics seem to offer no hopeful answers.

Migrants continue to pour into Europe; we continue to pour billions into arms deals.

Terror stalks the streets of the richest countries on earth

And ecological disaster hits some of the poorest.

How can anyone in their right mind talk about happiness?

Pharrell Williams must be mad.

Coincidentally, MAD was the three-letter acronym with which we began last academic year.

M stood for several aims:

M is for Mercian:

Our ambition to form a multi-Academy Trust with QMHS, WSS, Aldridge School and Shire Oak Academy met with approval last July from the DfE.

There are still a few hurdles to negotiate, some i-s to dot and some t-s to cross.

But we are moving purposefully to the formation of something new and exciting in the education landscape.

M is the Roman Numeral Mille:

This gave us a target for our school expansion.

One thousand pupils in Queen Mary's School.

With £5M of investment in new and refurbished buildings; thanks to the amazing imaginative work of Phil Lines and all the Site Team; thanks to purposeful and proactive recruitment, we are nearly there. 8 years ago, there were 722 Marians; now there are 940+

M is for Mandarin:

Building on our Confucius Classroom status, we were accepted last year as Founder Partners of the Government's ambitious Mandarin Excellence Scheme.

More of that later.

M is for Mawddach – the extraordinarily beautiful Mawddach Estuary, where Walsall goes to Wales. Today we celebrate once again, the vision and generosity that, during the course of last

academic year, raised £350,000 to allow us to purchase two properties neighbouring the Coach House at Farchynys. What memories will be forged in the great outdoors!

A is for the A Team. Sorry!

But it is right to celebrate together the teamwork that underpins every aspect of Queen Mary's School life.

As Headmaster, I am deeply humbled by the generosity of spirit of so many: the prefects, the staff (Associate and teaching), the Governors, the QMA - all those parents who choose by their active contribution to make QM less of a commodity, more of a community - the QMC, all those former pupils who ensure that whoever is in charge in Whitehall, the same great Marian spirit is alive and well in Walsall.

Yes, I am both deeply humbled and grateful beyond measure for teamwork through another year. And perhaps, more than ever in 2016, that includes Richard Langton and my colleagues on the Senior Leadership Team. To them personally I owe a tremendous debt. Thank you.

D stood for dialogue and dirt and dabbers and, no doubt, other inventive ways of relentlessly focusing on the bread and butter of daily work. It seemed to pay off.

When it came to GCSE, boys on this side of Barr Beacon proved why the Queen is a more powerful chess piece than the Bishop.

Yes, in high summer, on results day in August, we thought we had it MADE.

So what did that E stand for in 2015-16?

Let me tell you.

It stood for Eudaimonia.

Eu - the Greek for Good: Eulogy (good word), euthanasia (good sleep), euro (good currency)

Daimon - the greek for Spirit.

E stood for Eudaimonia - a good spirit informing everything we do.

Reminding us that maximum output - even in the form of record equalling exam results - is not the true purpose of our enterprise here at Queen Mary's. The real end, goal and purpose is fullness of life and personality in community.

It is an important reminder in these cash-strapped and target orientated times.

Nothing economic (*or even academic*) is a true end.

What really counts is Eudaimonia. A good spirit.

Or let's keep it simple.

What counts is living life to the full and being HAPPY.

Perhaps Pharrell Williams isn't so mad after all.

So what has made us happy in 2016?

Lots of things.

The sound of music making in Walsall Town Hall as the Joint Orchestra reformed after a quarter of a century.

Success on the sportsfield with silverware in the trophy cabinet.

A glowing report from the CCF biennial review and glowing cheeks after routine air experience flying.

Fun at Farchynys for the Fusties.

Exciting trips to every corner of the globe – to the mountain tops and, for the first time, to the ocean depths.

Mr Hughes ensuring that the word Skiffle is used more in Walsall than anywhere else in the Western World.

Life transforming mentoring programmes.

Learning that proves even the sky is not the limit.

Oh yes, Mr Williams, we at Queen Mary's can clap along knowing full well what it is to feel like a room without a roof.

But sometimes, for me, happiness at school is found in unlikely places.

In a conversation, perhaps, with someone at risk of going off the rails; in the restoration of a mind or a relationship, in the demonstration of an act of kindness.

In the small things too, as our Charter reminds us, there is always hope. And where there is hope, there is life.

It's not only State side that they hold *this* as an inalienable right: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That's what we are about at Queen Mary's too.

As I close, one final thought.

The Hebrew book of Psalms is an anthology of 150 poems.

As Shakespeare did, millennia later, those poems sweat the big stuff. They grapple with the big issues of life - love, death, greed, jealousy, hate - in ways that shock and surprise as well as inspire us.

The Psalms begin with some advice about the pursuit of happiness.

The first two poems are like a gateway into the rest of the anthology.

Psalm 1 is intensely personal. Psalm 2 is public and political. As a pair, they begin and end with a declaration of who is really happy.

They offer a choice through the pairing of a word that I have highlighted in red. In the original Hebrew, it's the same word.

In our translation, it offers a choice - either to reflect and savour and mediate on that which is right and good (Psalm 1); or to gossip, conspire and plot in a way that doesn't make anyone happy (Psalm 2).

My hope is that we will choose to opt for Psalm 1. (change slide)

Those that pursue happiness in this way will find that they are like a tree, planted by streams of water. A tree that yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

The Mercian Trust has taken a tree as its logo.

A good choice.

(Final slide). I like the idea of fruit in season and a leaf that does not wither.

Not withering: it's a good ambition for old age. But it is hardly a rousing finale to a speech.

So let's go instead for the positive equivalent: flourishing.

That's my hope and my prayer for MAT, Mercian and Mary's that they will flourish.

Floreat Reginae Schola Mariae!