

Good evening! A very warm welcome to you all and thank you for coming along to our Prize Night so that we can share, celebrate, reward, and applaud our prize-winning students. At Breda Academy we believe it is so important to recognise student's achievements to build their self-esteem, raise their confidence and motivation for learning, support their drive to pursue what they enjoy, and to further develop their skills and talent.

Therefore, we launched a new rewards system for Key Stage 3 students three years ago, and to-date we have distributed 458 Bronze awards, 297 Silver Awards, 104 Gold Awards and 66 Principal's Awards, and for achieving the Principal's Award, students are treated each year in September to a special day out to Castlewellan Country Park, where they participated in kayaking, archery, wall climbing and maze running. This system has been such a great success that last year we launched a new rewards system for students in both Key stages 4 and 5, and students in Years 11 and 12 will receive their awards in February, and 20 of our current Year 14 students received an honours award and tie in June of this year.

Breda Academy is a vibrant and flourishing school in its 10th year, which continues to achieve, grow, and move from strength to strength! And our school's motto of 'Learners Today Leaders Tomorrow', is truly embodied by our prize winners. I do hope students that you feel proud of what you have achieved because your teachers have specifically chosen you above your peers, to receive your prize tonight.

Breda Academy is a diverse community, and we take pride in building strong relationships with our students, and I am privileged to lead dedicated teachers and support staff who guide, help, and support **all** our unique and talented young people, to meet their needs, support their wellbeing, enjoy school, and make progress in their learning.

At Breda Academy we also believe it is highly important to develop core values such as respect, tolerance, forgiveness, responsibility, charity, and kindness, as we give these 'values' equal importance to attaining academic results. Applying these values will also help our students to be more open minded, tolerant, forgiving, supportive, and caring of each other regardless of gender, background, ethnicity, culture and/or religion. It is our ambition at Breda Academy that when students leave us, they will go on to be future change makers and take an active role in shaping and making Northern Ireland and the world a better place for us all. As John F Kennedy the 35th President of America once said; *“Children are the world’s most valuable resource and its best hope for the future.”*

I am delighted to report that in August, our Years 12 and 14 students once again achieved exceptional examination results and that in the past seven years, due to the combined hard work and resilience of our students and staff, our examination results have continued to increase significantly. In the past three years over 300 Year 12 students have achieved a combined set of record-breaking results with 96% of them achieving 5 or more A* - C GCSEs or L2 equivalent grades, and our year 14 students have also produced much success! with a record breaking 79% of them achieving 3 A* to C A-Level or equivalent Level 3 grades in August of this year.

It is extremely pleasing that these students are continuing their studies on a university course at Queens or Ulster, or over the water in England, Scotland, or Wales, or they are engaged in an apprenticeship with the likes of PWC or Deloitte, or they have begun their working career in a trade of their choosing. Our 6th Form continues to grow and thrive, and we currently have a record 179, Year 13 and 14 students studying A-Level and Level 3 qualifications.

Our partnership with the Northern Ireland Football Academy, who are based at the National Stadium, also continues to grow, and perform highly. They work with 80 of our students who have been identified as some of the most talented footballers in Northern Ireland, and at the stadium they study BTEC Level 3 Sports Management with the aim of either becoming a professional footballer, like Trai Hume who was in our first cohort, continuing their studies at university, or becoming a football coach in America, Europe, or in one of the countries of the UK.

It was an extremely busy year for our enrichment programme with many different clubs and trips being offered to our students in sports, cooking, art, science, technology, RE, music, choir, geography, history, languages, and ICT to name but a few.

And most memorably within the academic year; Students in year 8 were treated to a trip to 'We are Vertigo', given team building activities delivered by East Belfast Alternatives and a workshop on 'safe travel' by the Translink safety bus team. And with Year 8 we continued our partnership with Instonians Rugby Club, to establish and coach the U12 boys Rugby team who went on to win the Lisburn & Castlereagh Area non-selective schools' tournament, and Rowing Ireland also gave many of our students in all year groups weekly high-level coaching classes on the indoor rowing machines, to build up their fitness and strength and to hopefully spot a future Olympian!

GCSE Geography students carried out their river study and fieldwork at the Magilligan field centre and they also took part and supported children from local primary schools in workshops delivered by GeoEnergy. The Home Economics department hosted the Livestock and Meat Commission to run classes for students in all year groups demonstrating how to make healthy meals from local beef and lamb. The Year 11 Hospitality studies classes visited the University of Ulster for 'An experience of the Hospitality Industry Event' which allowed students to see the Academy Training Kitchen in action including one of our past pupils- Sophie McKenzie.

Year 13 Health and Social Care students took part in a workshop with Health Care professionals to gain a greater understanding of what it is like to work in this career. The Year 13 scientists went to the Water treatment works in Carrickfergus to learn how our water is processed and cleaned.

Fifty GCSE Art students visited the Belfast School of Art at the University of Ulster, to see the Final Year Degree Show Exhibition and ex-student Olivia Young's textile and knit design work on display. These students also worked with Sue Cathcart, a local Belfast artist, to create mixed media sculptures. While Year 11 GCSE students enjoyed a series of print making workshops, led by another local artist, Sarah Rountree. Year 12 students Kenzie Mohammed and Ian Dandurand were selected to take part in a Piano Masterclass with International Pianist Richard Meyrick and last December we held our Winter Recital featuring our Choir, soloists, and a variety of different ensembles. Years 11 and 12 students studying ICT won an award at the regional area lego league tournament, and eight Year 13 ICT students visited Belvoir primary school to deliver coding workshops to P7 students as part of the Queen's University Ambassador Programme.

The Year 13 Business Studies students worked with Generation Innovation to develop their enterprise and entrepreneurial skills and Year 10 students worked with Young Enterprise to investigate potential career pathways. The Year 14 Psychology students visited Queen's University to learn about their own personality and which careers would suit them best, and Ben Best from 'Tree of Life', delivered workshops on building confidence and resilience to students in Years 8, 10 and 12. We also hosted and delivered a wide range of career focused events and held our annual Careers Fair, with over 55 exhibitors presenting to all students in Years 10 to 14. In addition to this event, we held two Interview Skills Days to provide mock interview practice for all students in Years 12 and 14, and these students were also given talks on university options, college choices, and different types of apprenticeships.

There were employability workshops and exciting STEM events for students in all year groups to further equip them with essential skills for the working world beyond school, and our Years 11 and 13 students went on a work experience week to gain an insight into the world of hard labour, and to make tea or coffee for their boss!

However, the jewels in the crown of last year, were when 67 students went to Bulgaria on our first Ski trip since the Covid Pandemic of 2020, and I am also pleased to report that in March of next year 40 students will be taking to the pistes in Austria. My special thanks to Mrs Sweeney and Mr Campbell for their organisation of these wonderful opportunities for our students.

My special thanks also go to Mr Armstrong, Mrs Scott, and Mr Moss for taking 13 students from Year 13 in June on a global citizenship expedition to Arusha, in Tanzania to work and play for two weeks in a local community school and orphanage. The group also went on safari for the weekend in the Terengeti, where I believe Mr Armstrong had a close call with a large monkey! About that big! And for next year, Mrs Millar has secured funding to take 20 Year 13 students to Panama in June and at the same time Mr Armstrong has secured funding to take 20 Year 14 students to Cambodia. In the new year there will also be a History trip to Berlin and a Language Trip to Paris.

The Years 12 and 14 formal celebrations, because I felt proud to see our students so excited, well dressed, tanned, glammed and blinged-up! celebrating their 5 or 7 years at school with their best friends and realising what a special time it had been for them and how much they will miss their friends, teachers and school, and believe it or not there was a lot of emotion, hugging, calls of, I love you, no I really do, and tears!

And I am particularly proud of the new support group set up by Ms Ferguson for our children living in care, she takes them every half-term to the Newtownbreda Baptist church café for them to bond and connect with each other, while drinking hot chocolate and playing board games. And one of these student's won a prestigious national award, winning a new laptop and a £250 amazon voucher from the American Law firm Baker McKenzie to recognise her education journey despite facing significant adversity.

If you look at our Facebook page, you will see what we do at Breda Academy all year round and be able to view our Hall of Fame section to celebrate the achievements of our students. We started our Hall of Fame 6 years ago and in this time, we have recognised over 60 students amazing achievements. You will see that we have many champions in sports, dancing, martial arts, singing, acting, fundraising, charity work and in lots of other pursuits.

As we continue our journey, it is an exciting time for Breda Academy! We have had a great start to this first half-term, and in September we welcomed 115 year 8 students to the school, and I am also delighted to tell you that we recruited our largest ever cohort of 104 Year 13 students into our 6th form to study A-Levels and Level 3 qualifications, and we now have a school community of 825 students.

As a school we continue to establish close and strong links with our local Primary Feeder Schools, and one example of this is at the end of September, with the support of our Football Academy at the National Stadium, one of my senior teachers, Ms Ferguson organised our second annual inter primary school football tournament for P5 and P6 boys and girls from 14 of our feeder schools, which saw over 150 boys and girls playing football together at the Olympia leisure centre pitches. The event was a tremendous success with Blythfield winning the main Cup competition by beating Elmgrove, and Nettlefield secured third place. In the plate competition Donegal Road secured first place by beat Taughmonagh, and Cregagh finished third.

And in December we will also host our exciting annual 'Breda Bonanza' day for approximately 500 P7 students from 18 local primary schools to participate in a day of wide-ranging subject lessons and activities.

As you have heard it was a very busy and successful year, and my thanks for their invaluable hard work and support are extended to my leadership team; Vice-Principal, Mrs Scott; Senior teachers, Ms Ferguson, Mr Armstrong, Mrs Parry, Mr McConville, and to Ms McMullan who I also thank for organising tonight's event.

To the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, Mr Gibson, and to all the other members of the Board of Governors of our School, Thank you for the support you give me and for your service which you carry out with remarkable commitment and in an entirely voluntary capacity, we are so grateful for your hard work which largely goes unseen, and the interest you take in our school community.

On behalf of my colleagues and the Board of Governors, I would most importantly like to thank **you**, our parents, carers, grandparents, and family members for the generous support you give to the school, it helps to make our jobs a little easier.

My final words go to our Prize winners, I feel very privileged to be part of this celebration of your achievements tonight and I wish you every success in the year to come and in your future life.

Just remember this recipe for success; *"Your future ambitions will be motivated by your desire and supported by those who care for you, protected by your determination and resilience, and achieved by working hard and taking risks to achieve them."*

Thank you for listening.