

As we emerge from the clutches of the greatest generational test of modern times, it is only right that we should look forward with hope and optimism to what our future holds. But before we do that, we should not be too quick to dismiss the last two years of toil and turbulence without first distilling the positives.

In school, as we oscillated between ‘bubbles’ and lock-down, it gave many of us the chance to recalibrate our values; separating the noise of everyday living from what really matters most. Relationships and respect, friendships and faith were all viewed through a different shaped lens as we came to terms with a world that was unlikely to be quite the same again.

The Americans have a saying, “turning lemons into lemonade”, and from this I glean we should not be too hasty in jettisoning all, that for a time at least we adopted as the ‘new normal’. I’m talking about students missing their teachers, and vice-versa, the everyday acts of kindness and care that helped people see light through darkness and hold a wider appreciation of the simple things in life. Let us not forget the positivity which shone through these unprecedented times, and instead, use this as a shield to equip us for the challenges that lie ahead; world conflict, cost of living crisis and socio-economic inequality.

As a school community, we may not be able to influence the world stage, but I strongly believe that we can have a voice in how we ‘level up’ the everyday worlds of our students. As uncomfortable as the reality is, we live in a world where choice and opportunity is not evenly shared, and where students’ starting points differ greatly. At Highlands, we are determined to address this and over the next five years this will form one of our top priorities.

Governors and senior leaders will learn from the best and make sure no opportunity is lost in levelling up our playing fields. We want every student to succeed, and in the years that follow to look back with pride on success which was ‘made in Highlands’. Our academic success has been strong, but we are determined to stand out as a school where every student will ‘dare to flourish’. This means that irrespective of ability or background, there is a rung for everyone on the ladder to success, and whilst success may look different for each student, there will be choice and opportunity for all.

To help students, particularly those who joined us this year to not only catch up but to keep up, we have placed a lot of resources into reading. If students are behind where they need to be at the age of eleven, the gap all too often widens as they go through secondary education. Reading is the gateway to the rest of the curriculum and so for this reason I would urge parents and carers to encourage their children (no matter how old) to pick up a book and encourage them to read for fun. Showing regular interest in their learning makes such a difference and even though they may not readily admit it, most students still like to please their parents and carers!

Another key driver to our success-for-all ethos is an absolute commitment to making sure attendance is as strong as it can be. We have done well, but can do better still, and it is for everyone to buy into what we consider a non-negotiable. Illness and exceptional circumstances aside, students must attend every lesson, everyday – simple.

Academically, we have enjoyed our best ever set of A level and post 16 results in 2022 and the overall school performance has been strong over all subject areas. So, a massive well done to all but also a marker to where the bar is now set. Each year we strive to be better than the year before, learning all the while and ensuring we provide the best possible professional development for all of our staff. Perfection does not exist within the education sector but the constant pursuit of excellence is an exacting challenge and one which Mr McInerney, senior leaders and the governing body aspire to.

I would also take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to our school 'make over' programme to mark our twentieth year. It was deferred because of the pandemic, but it was definitely worth the wait and the signage both internally and outside have helped provide a sharper and fresher appearance. We are excited too about the new uniform which will be introduced from September 2023. This will be a cheaper and more sustainable uniform in the longer term and will herald another landmark in the journey of Highlands.

To every member of the school community, and to all extended professional partners I say thank you for your support, remembering of course it takes all of us to get to where we want to be. I am confident that this will be a year to remember.

Matt Miller MBE  
Chair of Governors  
Autumn 2022