

Principal's Address at Padworth College Presentation Day 2008

Guests, Trustees, staff, students and your families and friends – all members of the Padworth community – a very warm welcome to our Presentation Day.

I'd like to thank everyone for their support over the past year – in my 2nd year here, I feel I've got to know you all much better – and one of the good things is that in a small community such as Padworth, it is easy for us all to get to know each other and to feel well settled here.

It has been a real pleasure to receive emails from past students – those who left last year and are now studying at university to those who came many years ago. One thing they all have in common is a sense that there has been a warmth & friendliness here that has enabled them to succeed confidently. Sophia Ting, one of last year's A level leavers, writes:

'I remember my first few days so clearly and also how the two years at college were so different. To put it simply, I miss my boarding school life. Who would believe that you were with the college for only a year when it seems like you were there since the beginning. Time then passed really quickly. Also, do thank everyone in Padworth, from the academic staff to the cleaning staff for their wisdom and kindness that they have offered when I was there. Every single bit of it has helped me to grow as a person which means that whatever I achieve in life, they played a part in helping me.'

Last week, I showed round an old girl from 30 years ago – it was fascinating to hear her stories as well as a pleasure to know that she is now sending her daughter to us in September. She emailed to say that she had such a beneficial time here and is delighted that her daughter will be following in her footsteps.

I'd like to mention a few highlights of the year. A major event for us in September was our Independent Schools Inspection and I am delighted that we had such positive comments and that the inspectors really appreciated what we do here. Since starting at Padworth, I have been keen to develop music here, so I am delighted that Jo Messenger has done so well with resurrecting the Padworth Singers as well as encouraging & nurturing musical talent in the college generally – this has made such a valuable contribution – at Christmas, for International Evening and indeed, today. One of the pleasures is the real way that students and staff work together on such occasions. Students have also benefited from wonderful events – from the delights of Florence to more locally

arranged trips to support the work of departments, from Reading law courts to Dorset, to last night's Leavers' Party on a boat in the Thames, to name but a few.

Last year, I was most impressed with the quality and creativity of the art work produced, so I do encourage you all to visit this year's exhibition in the art room next Thursday between 3 – 4 pm, when a cream tea will also be served – a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach!

For a small college it has also been encouraging to see sport developing, with Padworth footballers having played their first matches this term – there is plenty of talent to be developed there and I'd like to thank Tomasc, Adrian and John for their encouragement of the boys. Padworth also has intellectual muscle, with our new debating society producing teams of a high calibre, winning rounds of John Redwood's parliamentary debating competition for schools.

Today is about celebrating achievement – there are those of you who are winning prizes and certificates, but also there are those who have improved themselves, their approach or their work in smaller yet nevertheless significant ways. This year we introduced a rewards system, so at each half term and end of term, it has also been rewarding for me to be able to publicly acknowledge those of you who have improved, either in class, or who have gone out of their way to help others.

Another new venture this year has been to have College leaders. Padworth, in the past, prided itself on not having a prefect system, no doubt because it was once purely a 6th form college and so was thought not to be needed. However, if our students are to do well in a broad sense and have leadership opportunities that will be valuable to them in life, it is vital for older students to have this experience – I thank this first cohort for their support and enthusiasm. It is not always easy to balance the demands of responsible leadership with being popular with your peers and no doubt many challenging lessons have been learned and will stand you in good stead as you leave us to make your way in the world. I ask our current leaders to stand for a moment, so we can show them our appreciation. The new College Leaders will be coming up to collect their badges later in the proceedings. I would also like to thank the Student Council for their work, and David Smith who chairs the committee meetings – it is very important that all students, in each year group, have the chance for their views to be represented and for suggestions for improvements to be considered.

I am sure the staff will agree that one of the joys of being a teacher is seeing the progress of your students and one of the greatest joys of being a Principal is to be

able to praise that success and our Presentation Day is just about that: academic success, personal effort, improvement, strength of character, thoughtfulness, the ability to make sound judgements , to distinguish between right and wrong and to choose the most appropriate path. Students, you are all talented and you have your lives ahead of you. To our leavers, I say, work hard, be dedicated and follow your dreams. You will always be welcome at Padworth. Let us show our appreciation of all the Padworth students, both past and present – and look forward to future success.