

Awards Evening 2009

Good evening everyone and a warm welcome to our annual Awards Evening. I am delighted to welcome our guest presenter, Kevin McMahon, Principal of St Mary's College – one of our key partners in the education of our pupils. Over a number of years we have forged strong links with St Mary's and many of our young people progress on to further education at your College enjoying a high level of success. I am also pleased to welcome tonight the new Director of Children's Services, Gladys Rhodes OBE to whom we extend a warm welcome. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Local Authority in this exciting and challenging time as Building Schools for the Future rapidly approaches, but more on that later.

We are here to celebrate the successes of the past year and what a successful year it was, once again. I reported a year ago how pleased we were to break through the 60% barrier in performance at GCSEs in 2008. This year saw our pupils continue in that vein with 62% achieving 5 higher grades which represents a 20% increase over 4 years. This is an excellent level of performance and not one generated by easy fix remedies as may be used elsewhere. However our key gold standard of achievement at GCSE including English and Maths continues to fall close to national attainment at 47% and this reflects genuinely exceptional levels of achievement bearing in mind the starting point at age 11. Every single pupil achieved to some degree at KS4 and 99%, our highest figure yet, achieved 5 or more passes at GCSE representing achievement across the ability range.

Within these results were some outstanding individual performances, many of which will be noted in the Awards to be given out. The high levels of achievement seen at KS3 & 4 are testament to the efforts and team work put in by the pupils themselves, the staff at Pleckgate and parents. We know that there are annual discussions about the relative difficulty of GCSEs, however in school we know the effort that is required to achieve

these levels of performance and it is only through the commitment and effort put in by such a dedicated team of teaching and non teaching staff that produces such results. I am sure that the pupils and parents of this school would want to join with me in extending their thanks and congratulations to all members of the team that make up the staff at Pleckgate which support our youngsters so superbly and I want to use this opportunity to pass on a sincere thank you to all of my colleagues for your support. Thank you.

As a result of outstanding performance in 2008 we were invited during this previous academic year to apply for a second specialism as we had been recognised as a high performing specialist school. As a result we are now a leading edge school with a focus on English as an additional language/literacy. We believe that by putting into place a comprehensive action plan we will be able to continue our excellent work in this area both for the benefit of pupils at Pleckgate but also across the Borough as we seek to continue the process of raising standards.

I mentioned at the beginning of this address the importance of our partnership with St Mary's. This is just one of many partnerships which have proved to be so successful in the last few years and which were recognised during our Ofsted inspection a couple of years ago. St Mary's joins with other post 16 providers in being part of the education improvement partnership whose goals are to secure the highest levels of attainment for all the young people of Blackburn with Darwen irrespective of background, ethnicity or ability level. One outstanding example of these partnerships has been the Independent State School Partnership in which we as a maths and computing college have led a joint programme which has involved all of Blackburn with Darwen secondary schools and Queen Elizabeth's School. I am indebted to the work that has been put into this venture by a number of our staff at Pleckgate which has resulted in so many examples of young people of Blackburn and Darwen working together in residential activities, video conferences, joint Maths projects and which has crossed all cultural and socioeconomic

boundaries. This has been an example of community cohesion at its best and one which we will continue to strive to develop further. In addition we have been recognised as an extended school as a result of the wide ranging partnerships and opportunities for community involvement in the life of the school including family table tennis evenings twice weekly and even the BwD Model Aircraft Club has now taken up residence here!

School isn't just about academic achievement and this has been clearly shown in the wide range of curricular and extra curricular activities that have taken place throughout the year. These have ranged from sporting fixtures to school productions and concerts, a wide array of educational visits, maths weekends as indicated earlier and of course our annual Outdoor Pursuits Week for all members of Year 9. It is important that we continue to enrich the experience we provide for our youngsters and once again this is down to a dedicated team of staff who are prepared to put in that extra effort and go the extra mile. Once again the pupils and staff at Pleckgate have contributed superbly to a host of charitable events which resulted in the school raising over £12,000 to support a range of charities. This total means that during the last 5 years £59000 has been raised towards supporting those in need. This truly reflects the positive and caring attitude of our young people and is a most encouraging part of our school life. Long may it continue.

I reported this time last year that we had been successful in gaining the International School Award and our work in this area continues at pace. We were delighted to welcome children and staff from The Ordrup Skole, our partner school in Copenhagen, Denmark the who visited Blackburn with Darwen and spent time with our youngsters both in school and enjoying cultural and leisure visits to the North West of England. We hope to reciprocate the visit to Copenhagen next summer. In addition two colleagues from the staff participated in a visit to the Ivory Coast to develop curricular links with a school in Grand Bassam.

Obviously as the local media has indicated our key focus during this last academic year has been preparation for the Building Schools for the Future programme. As a sample school in this multi million pound venture we are at the forefront of the planning that is currently ongoing and which will result in a £25 million new school on this site within 2 years. It has been a truly challenging, exciting and time intensive venture but the efforts have realised a design which we believe will truly motivate and inspire the future young people of Pleckgate and will provide not just a state of the art building but will also provide teaching and learning experiences that will ensure continued success for this school in addition to being a superb facility and focal point for community us. As I said earlier this is really an exciting time for us at Pleckgate but obviously not without its challenges as we prepare for different ways of teaching and learning. I am happy to report that progress continues to deadlines and it is likely that building commencement will take place in January with a start date for the new school of 1st September, 2011. However we are also conscious of the fact that every day in this current school is as important as that which may be facing us in the future and we will continue to ensure the highest quality of experience for our youngsters right up to the last day of this current build.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have worked in partnership with us to make Pleckgate what it is today. Particularly I must thank the parents and carers of our children with whom we forge strong links on a daily basis. Once again our Governors continue with their outstanding efforts to support the school and provide the vision and direction for its future development. I value their support and guidance and challenge and in particular the efforts of our Chair of Governors, Mrs Ruth Pimley, who is unstinting in her drive to see the school continue its success.

I began this address by saying this evening is about celebrating another successful year for Pleckgate. It is also of course an opportunity to say well done to the young adults who are here tonight and to recognise your achievements. You deserve your awards be they for sporting or academic achievement because you have demonstrated commitment and you should have pride in your achievements and efforts. I sincerely hope that you continue to enjoy more success in the future and to our leavers please come back and inform us of your future successes.

There are many challenges ahead of us, not just in planning for the new school and everything that it can offer but also those challenges we face during this economic recession and unknown future in terms of funding for education. Whatever faces us I am confident that with the continued partnership and support from the Local Authority, the Governors and this dedicated team of staff we at Pleckgate can look forward to the future with confidence.

Thank you.