



Welcome to so many parents, past and present pupils, staff and Governors here this evening.

It is wonderful to come together to celebrate the achievements of the school with the crowning glory being YEAR 11'S GCSE results for which we are truly proud.

This year has been no exception in gaining excellent results, certainly 12 A* is a first for the school. I think that Niamh, our former Head girl was determined to gain one A star over her sister and the target she set herself was exceedingly high. Studying Psychology gave her the advantage, but she was not the only pupil to gain an A * in this subject. Ellie also achieved this grade. I know how difficult psychology is because I took the online course as well and then did not have the courage to take the exam. After all it would not look good if the Headteacher failed and her pupils passed. So I know my own limitations. Self-awareness is so important as a life skill.

It is really tough for those pupils who fiercely strive to catch up with the fast learners who are able to concentrate, focus and analyse information easily. They bravely battle daily with the challenges of learning which cannot be easily overcome and it is not surprising if they become disheartened by the ease at which some pupils effortlessly synthesise and apply their knowledge.

At the Sacred Heart, we try to tailor the GCSE load to fit the individual, so that all can use their talents and feel the sweetness of success. God made each one of us to be a power of good to transform this world. We all have much to offer.

GCSE's are incredibly important to future careers but there are few adults who wake up and think, 'Oh I must just solve that algebraic equation before breakfast' - for we are more preoccupied with the daily art of living.

How blessed is the person who can cheer others up, empathise with suffering, offer a helping hand to someone in need, be the person to clear away after an event, organise others, be role models to younger pupils, be forgiving. These gospel values are integral to a happy, and fulfilled life.

We wish that everyone would be content with the building blocks that God has dealt to each one in his infinite wisdom. Samantha, our Head girl will eloquently describe later what we hold most dear in this school. She has lived it and is proof that it works!

We all have hidden fears, moments of self doubt and these are the result of childish fears or inadequacies. Everyone knows that I cannot sing or rather I am not brave enough to sing alone as I will go flat and put others off. I think that this fear stems from an innocent remark made by my mother when I was nine years old and she told me that my singing was out of tune. From then on, I could only sing with a strong group (once at the cenotaph Fr Michael told me to stop singing as I was putting him off).

I believe that if that fear or self consciousness could evaporate, I would be able to sing well, as I do have powerful lungs and quite a good speaking voice. So after many years of pondering on my inadequacy I offer this to you - recognise your problem, trust that you can with help and guidance overcome your fears and own and name these fears, vocalise them and say that with God's help you will overcome them. Do not let them be your master. God wants us to be happy, not stressed, full of joy and love for ourselves and others. I wish to emphasise this as the number of young people suffering anxiety is rising at an alarming rate.

At the ISA Conference last week we heard, the business man, Steve Mallon speak of his son Edward's suicide on a rail track. He recalled his advantaged background in a middle-class family gaining numerous A*, playing sport competitively, being an accomplished musician and Head Boy at the sought-after Hills Road School in Cambridge. His severe depression was 6 weeks in length, unknown to his parents and two younger siblings. This tragic death has led his father to promise that he will fight the apathy and misunderstanding surrounding mental illness, the lack of the NHS's ability to be involved and give an early diagnosis, to move the Government to take action to support young people and to persuade schools to provide good mental health education and recognise the early warning signs.



I tell this real story to parents to be vigilant and seek early advice, to our Exam aged pupils so that they seek help for themselves and friends and to our younger pupils that they are very understanding and notice signs of anxiety and also seek help.

Many years ago, I retold a story at Prizegiving from a Headteacher friend of mine warning of the dangers of drugs; and a parent confronted me afterwards with her own speech on inappropriate subject matter for young people. The year was not out, before that mother would have had cause to regret her indignation – her own daughter became involved in drugs and she did not know how to cope or where to turn.

We need to listen to the current warnings and proceed in faith and be alive to the power of God's love but aware of the dangers that surround us.

We wish these young people every blessing as they share their talents and abilities with their close communities and schools and begin to transform the world, rejoicing in the wonders that our technological revolution is bringing to us but remaining deeply rooted in family and Christian values.

Love your neighbour as yourself or in Sacred Heart terms 'Service before self.' Please carry the values that Samantha will talk about, with you wherever you go.

We are proud of our young people in the room, and those who did not gain an award this year. They have some amazing qualities, a good work ethic, take their responsibilities seriously and are committed to helping others. What we can say about Sacred Heart pupils is that they are always prepared to have a go, they are willing participants in our school community and take the opportunities offered in all areas of school life - sport, art, drama, music, and D of E.

Thank you to all parents, staff, Sisters and Governors who encourage and support our pupils.

Sr Francis Ridler
17th November 2016