



I thought that I had done my duty on this stage.....but Sister Francis has other ideas.

First, I would like to congratulate all the award winners and the staff – I know that a lot of hard work has gone into the accomplishments achieved. Year 12, this is particularly your night and I hope that you have enjoyed all seeing each other again and that you are all enjoying the opportunities that you have all taken up post-16.

Everyone else – as you approach your GCSEs, so particularly Year 11, next summer, even if results are not entirely as you would wish, trying and failing is fine. Failing to try, isn't.

I read a very interesting article recently about education stating that the world has moved on and we, as a country and as educationalists, have not. I found that in many ways I agreed, yes, we all need a certain level of literacy and numeracy but in some ways our education today does not play to people's strengths. We live in a world where wonderful, creative personalities have their enthusiasm and talent for art, music, sport, cooking, history, RE (and dare I say geography), dismissed, because their efforts have to be concentrated on the subjects demanded by the government for their statistical analyses of 'how well' a school is performing. As a nation, we seem to be going too far down a road of producing a convenient 'factory product.' We keep working on those square pegs until we can fit them rather uncomfortably into round holes rather than educating individuals so that they develop into caring, happy, articulate adults, willing to challenge when they perceive a wrong and able to express and make their own choices without resorting to the base standard of behaviour and debate we have seen from some of our national and international 'leaders' this year.

May I say '**Not so**' at the Sacred Heart. Yes, this school acknowledges that everyone needs basic skills, to be able to measure, to work out if they have the correct change, to know their tables and be able to add, subtract, divide and multiply, to be able to read, write and spell, but here, your children learn far more than that. The school motto is not service before self for nothing, selfless care for others brings its own rewards and satisfaction. Academic subjects are valued here but the creative side of these students is also nurtured and the product of their efforts is valued and praised in whatever way they express their talents.

I'm sure that you, like me, have groaned sometimes at the 'challenges' that Sister Francis loves so much, in fact, I must confess that I have in the past pleaded with her to reduce the number of them - however now, looking in from the outside, I begin to recognise their value. Your Head teacher here recognises the tremendous value of being creative and how this helps to develop the whole person and gives balance in a world that moves faster by the day. We are now experts at multitasking, phone in hand and choosing our new outfit at the same time, visiting a friend but continuing a conversation on text with another. But is this 'good' for us and particularly is it 'good' for our mental and physical well-being? Is it good that we are always 'available'?

Pupils, parents and staff, I am the first to acknowledge that – technology is just fantastic, (I love my iphone and my ipad, and my laptop.) Technology has revolutionised our world and given us so many benefits in terms of health and well-being, communication and education. How children learn has been changed completely and when they have their phone in their hand they have a research tool that can tell them facts about anywhere or anything in the world in an instant.

However, I also have to acknowledge that I, like so many people can easily allow my technology to eat up my time and energy and dominate my life. Today we can all access any programme or film we want, we can contact our friends any time of the day or night, check up on our children (or our parents) but are we more rounded individuals? I fear not. Are we happier or more secure? We expect instant answers and instant gratification, not only from our phones but from those around us. The question is, are we allowing technology to take control instead of serving us? We waste hours checking Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp while making little direct, face to face, contact with our colleagues, friends and family. Our phone has become our quasi companion, replacing human contact and emotions.



You may wonder why, and maybe find it a frustration, that this school collects in mobiles at the beginning of the day when others allow pupils free access to their phones. This simple act by the school is not out of spite, or because the school is 'old fashioned'. It is because it believes that human interaction works best face to face and so each day, your child at least has an oasis of peace when they are not gazing at their screen and, if a message needs to be given to them it is through the auspices of the school office where there is always a friendly, supportive face. The demands of mobiles are irresistible, we all fall victim to their charms, (my exasperated husband sometimes has to tell me to 'put the phone away') How often do you see family meals, even when people are out at a celebration, with half the assembled group having their concentration firmly fixed on their iphone or Galaxy.

Am I advocating giving up your mobile/tablet/laptop? Relax, NO. I'm not contemplating it! However, what I would say is, I am going to try to put some time aside to spend being sociable with friends and family without my little bit of technology in my hand. I'm going to try and have some down time when I enjoy relaxing – believe me it is hard when you are used to moving swiftly from one task to another and takes practice! Learning to be 'in the moment' is a hard lesson. Four months in and I have nearly been through all the cupboards in the house!) We all too often see relaxing as 'time wasting' rather than time to recuperate from the demands the world puts on us. Try this - Make an agreement with your family that no technology is in the room when you are eating, say your supper, there may be awkward silences to begin with (silence can be very scary) but, as humans, we so need to feel nurtured and that people care for us and we learn that through quiet communion with our family and friends– which brings me back to the Sacred Heart. This is a place where pupils and staff alike know that they are cared for and about. It is a place of family. Like all families there are disagreements and hurt feelings at times but there is also a love and a generosity of spirit which lifts it from the ordinary and makes it a rare and special place.

Indeed, the school 'family' is kind of how I end up talking to you tonight. When Sister knew I was going to attend tonight's celebration of achievements, she cajoled me into speaking by saying 'talk about the fun times at Sacred Heart. You know Mrs Kenny, all the trips you have been on, just a few minutes!' So, family duty prevailed and now I have given my 'thoughts for the day', I will turn to lighter topics.

Ah yes, trips and visits. In the twenty-five years (nearly to the day, today) I was a teacher in this school, I attended many, sometimes leading, often accompanying, other staff

'You teachers go 'free' don't you?' The answer to that is we don't always pay in financial terms. The reality is that there is no such thing as a 'free' trip. Imagine yourself on your family holiday, the care that you devote to your children, take someone else's child and you are doubly careful that everything safe secure – and that they are happy. Now multiply that, up to 30 or so children and some parents and you have a ski trip, twenty-four hours a day care of a disparate group of people. Fun, yes, of course, otherwise why would a group of us done this for many years.

Responsibility – huge. Expectations – huge.

In the early days of ski trips there were only 2 hours of set lessons and then the staff took the children out in the afternoon. One memorable first day was when our first lesson was not due to start until 11. Mrs Young had us on the slopes at 9am and surveyed the area. 'We can take them up this short slope and bring them down to allow them to get a feel for their skis' Mrs Young is not a lady that you say no to. So, we manoeuvre everyone onto the button lift and sometime later all stand at the top of the slope which now looks somewhat steeper than it did at the bottom. Two hours later and the last of the group were finally reaching the bottom of the 100-metre slope ready for their lesson.

As most of the accompanying staff, like me, were not expert skiers we decided that it would be a good idea to have a 'reccy' each alternate year so that we could 'improve our skiing'. So, each resort we visited was inspected and we spent some time skiing too.



Are we good at reading piste maps? Mmm - Not really.

Did we end up at the top of a black run? Yes.

Was Mrs Howarth told in no uncertain manner to 'take off your skis Jane and walk down the slope' when we all panicked and fell? Yes, she was.

Did I have a particular hut that I never failed to fall over by? Yes, I did.

Did Mrs Mansfield end up hanging over a precipitous slope by her fingernails? Yes, she did

When self-catering, did we all agree to take something to eat? Yes. Did we all take a pack of spaghetti? Yes, we did!

So, we used to come back to school after each visit exhausted, but having had a lot of fun and Sister decided that she wanted to organise more overseas trips. One of our first was to the Convent in Prague. A number of us were billeted in the upstairs rooms and we were due to eat supper at a nearby hotel. We shared rooms and three of us stayed behind getting ready and chatting. When we tried to leave the building, the doors were firmly locked and we had no key. We went back upstairs to try another route. The Prague Convent is a training school for nurses so we thought that maybe there was a back door we could open. We went into the training area. There before us was a ward of beds - with people in them! Terrifying or what? It took a few moments for us to realise that these were practice dummies lying in the beds, somehow slightly more sinister than if they had been real people. We scuttled past and down the back stairs.

To no avail.

Firmly locked doors and barred windows.

Mobiles in hand we tried to ring the other staff on the trip. No-one picked up. Sister Francis? – definitely no phone switched on there. In the end, Mrs Howarth rang Sister Thomas More here in Swaffham, who rang a Sister in Prague and our rescue was finally achieved. Were we in trouble when we arrived at the restaurant! A forlorn plate of cold fish and boiled potatoes beckoned and a berating from Sister as to how we could possibly have allowed ourselves to be locked in.

Our next visit was to Krakow. Sister Francis had organised everything but was taken ill late into the arrangements and so Mrs Howarth was detailed to carry out the visit as per Sister's wishes. Mrs Howarth was determined that we would carry out **everything** on Sister's list. 'Whistle stop tours' had nothing on us, we were out from morning to night with poor Sister Danuta trying to liaise between bus drivers, the Polish community and our long list of instructions. In the end, we prevailed on Mrs Howarth that it was **not** incumbent on her to carry out every single thing on Sister's wish list.

There are many memories that I could regale you with but just a taste is probably best! There have been annual visits to Holt Hall, where, irrespective of the weather, data is collected in the field for Science and Geography work

Day visits to London, Stratford, the Battlefields and more. We even had a Physics visit to Alton Towers (Mr Murphy take note).

Retreats and Year 11 leavers' visits

Are these all really necessary? I take you back to the beginning. This school is not just about academic achievement, although this is important, it is about the individual. It is about being known, knowing that you are in a secure environment where you can be yourself and develop at your own rate.



It is somewhere that, if you have a particular talent, this will be recognised for its own worth, allowing your confidence and skills to grow. Many of us here owe a debt of gratitude to this school, not just pupils and parents but also staff – we are all part of the school family and at its head and heart is Sister Francis, ebullient, sometimes irascible with a small streak of stubbornness - a woman whose determination, foresight and love for this school community is a life lesson in service to us all. I wish you all a wonderful and happy future (make room for some meaningful relaxation along the way!)

Thank you, Sister, for inviting me to speak tonight.

Hilary Kenny