

Prize Day 2011

Thank you, Mrs Bell and **good afternoon and welcome to the Antrim Grammar School Prize Distribution**. We are delighted that you have been able to join us this afternoon to celebrate a year of considerable success for Antrim Grammar School and, in particular, the achievements of our young people.

The achievements of our pupils and, indeed, our past pupils in many walks of life reflect what is best about this school so this year I am especially pleased to welcome as our Special Guest **Mr Lloyd Hutchinson**, a past pupil of the School and star of stage and screen, and we look forward to his address later. We also look forward to contributions from pupils and past pupils who will relate some of their experiences from last year.

Once again we were delighted with the **excellent results** achieved by our pupils in external examinations last summer, in particular at AS and A level, where we achieved our **best ever results**, reinforcing our growing reputation as one of **Northern Ireland's top performing schools**.

At GCSE we repeated last year's excellent performance, with **almost half** of all examinations sat resulting in **A* or A** grades and **92%** of students achieving **7 or more** grades at A* - C. It is also noteworthy that we currently have **nineteen** subjects exceeding NI grammar school averages for A* to C grades and that, once again, at a time of focus on Literacy and Numeracy, all our pupils achieved grade C or better in both English Language and Mathematics. We have already recognised the success of the whole year group at our GCSE Celebration of Achievement evening in November but today we recognise those individuals who achieved A* or A in **all their full GCSE examinations, Grant Addison, Sarah Armstrong, Rory Brown, Claire Cullen, Rebekkah Duff, Rebecca Ellis, Connie Murray and Charlotte Nelson** and, in particular, **Rachel Heyburn who achieved 10 A*** grades in her 10 GCSE examinations, a phenomenal achievement. We also offer special congratulations to **Rachel** on receiving **full marks** in GCSE

History and to **Dani Kansanaho and Matthew Simpson** who were placed 1st and 3rd respectively in Northern Ireland in GCSE Engineering.

The results at **AS Level** were particularly pleasing with a significant increase in the number of examinations resulting in **A grades** and also **A to C grades**. Outstanding individual performances included those of **Amy Alexander, Dylan Barry, Stephanie Bond, Tony Boyd, Lewis Brammeld, Christian Cameron, Paul Duncan, James Fulton, Anna Gardiner, Gareth Holden and Lauren Patton** who attained **4 A** grades while **3 or more A** grades were attained by **23** students. Further congratulations go to **Gareth Holden** who received **full marks** in AS Level **History**.

At A Level, there was also considerable improvement on the previous year with well over **three quarters of the students attaining 3 or more grades at A – C**, indicating **excellent performance** across the whole Year group. Once again, despite the increased application for places, the results obtained allowed our young people to access **quality courses** in many disciplines in the UK's top universities. Our percentage of **A and B grades** was up by **5%** on the previous year and in an almost identical statistic to that at GCSE, achievement in **18** subjects at A* -C exceeded NI Grammar School averages. There were also some terrific individual performances –

16 candidates achieved 3 or more A* or A grades with particularly noteworthy achievements for **Carrie Ingram** who attained A* in **all her** subjects, **Alexander Arrell and Matthew Murray** who achieved **4 A* or A** grades and **Alexander Arrell and David Lucas** who were placed 2nd in Northern Ireland in Religious Studies and Further Mathematics respectively.

We are indebted to both the Northern Regional College and CAFRE for their support and this year for the first time, and a first in NI, **Andrew Patterson** completed, and gained a distinction, in the National Certificate in Agriculture alongside his A Levels.

This is an appropriate time for me to hand over to Mr Brown who will interview **David Lucas** and **Andrew Patterson** on how their experiences with us have prepared them for life beyond Antrim Grammar School.

Thanks

David was also our Head Boy last year and I wish to pay tribute to him, and to our Head Girl, **Helen Peden**, for the excellent job they, and all our prefects, did in representing the school last year at a variety of events.

Of course our school, despite our **excellent academic reputation**, is about much more than results and curriculum and our mantra of “**Educating for Life**” emphasises the importance we place on **personal development, relationships and thinking about others**. Central to success in this area of our work is our highly regarded pastoral care programme and the wide range of extra curricular activities which play a big part in enhancing our pupils’ experience of school.

Our pupils continue to perform very well in Athletics with athletes winning **numerous medals** at District, Ulster and Irish levels. Congratulations to their coaches, **Mrs McIvor** and **Mr McKenna**, and to all our athletes with special mention to **Robert Bill, Jonathan Browning and Gareth Holden** who qualified for the Irish Schools finals and also to **Robert** on his selection to represent **NI Schools**.

Individuals have also excelled at national and international level in many other sports including **Ruth Armstrong and Cherie Tinsley** in Trampolining, **Zac Nicholl** in Orienteering and **Chloe McKenzie** in Karate.

Show jumping, under the direction of **Mrs Lavery**, had another successful year with one of the highlights being a win in the Open section of the Ulster Schools’ Show Jumping Championships for the team consisting of **Hannah Finlay, Jade McMahon, Catherine McWilliams and Ellen Wilson**.

There were also many highlights in our more traditional sports. Thanks must go to all those involved in coaching these teams, both members of teaching staff and external coaches, and, in particular to **Mr Baguley, Mr McKenna, Mr Brown** and **Mrs McIvor** for directing and organising rugby and hockey throughout the school.

In rugby we qualified for the second round of the Schools Cup only to lose to Royal School, Dungannon while in both boys' and girls' hockey there were many excellent performances and terrific individual achievements.

Congratulations go to **Rory Brown** on gaining an **Ulster Under 18 Trial** and to **Ross McIvor** and **Emma Clyde** who were selected for **Ulster Under 16 Development** squads and who have since gone onto represent the Province in Interprovincial Championships.

The outstanding team achievement of the season came from our **Under 13** hockey team, under the leadership of **Miss Garvin**, who had many impressive performances and remained undefeated until the last game of the season where they unfortunately lost a league decider to Rainey Endowed. Their achievements will be recognised in the award of the Kathleen Adams Trophy this afternoon and **Emma Oliver**, the captain of the team, is now going to say a few words about hockey and also other extracurricular activities she has been involved in.

Thanks to Emma

The **international experiences** provided for our pupils through school trips were also considerable with opportunities to visit Barcelona, Berlin and Jerusalem and to participate in a World Challenge expedition to Thailand and Cambodia, in addition to numerous day trips and sports trips. Thanks to all staff involved for their organisation of, and commitment to, these trips and to **Mrs Calvert** who participated in a Global School Partnership Exchange with **DEKS school in Ghana**.

We were delighted to reciprocate this when we hosted two teachers from DEKS last June and we were equally pleased to host groups of teachers from Germany and USA throughout the year. This **international dimension** remains a big feature of our work, thanks to the continued interest in this from all our staff and in particular **Dr Byrne**. We were also honoured to host, for the autumn term, two South African students from Somerset College, **Sarah de Villiers and Minette Steyn**.

Other visitors to the school this year included authors **Colin Bateman** and **Bernie McGill, Lord Trimble** as part of the “Peers in Schools” programme and many prospective MLAs for South Antrim during a Question Time organised for Sixth Form students from our school and also from Ballyclare High School. We are delighted that many of our politicians have also been able to join us today.

Students again entered the **All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad**, organised by Trinity College Dublin, with notable success for the school and, in particular, for **Chris Brown** who was placed 8th overall and received a Silver Medal. Similar success was achieved in the UK **Mathematics Challenges** where **Steven Fletcher** received a Silver Medal in the UK Intermediate Challenge and **Ben Collister** a Bronze Medal in the UK Junior Challenge. There were also outstanding achievements for our **A Level artists** whose work was displayed in Hillsborough Castle, our **Year 10 mathematicians** who were placed **first in NI**, out of nearly 80 schools, in the LASCO Maths Challenge and our Year 13 biologists who **won the NI Biology Olympiad**.

It would be impossible to mention the successes achieved in all competitions last year but other highlights included the success of **Stephanie Bond** in Public speaking and **Gemma McAllister**, both in the **Rotary Young Leaders competition** and as being selected as **Vice Chair of the Young Ambassadors for the 2012 Olympics**.

An evening of A Level Performing Arts provided an opportunity for students, led by **Mrs Gilbert** and **Mrs Hughes**, to showcase their examination work

with the performances, particularly the Year 13 performance of “Be my Baby”, leaving a big impression on their audience.

Music continues to play an important part in our school with considerable talent being displayed at Band Jams and our Spring Concert although we unfortunately had to cancel last year’s Carol Service due to the inclement weather we experienced at this time last year. Thanks go to **Dr Reidy** and **Mr Gillespie**, together with the peripatetic staff, for their work and we look forward to the musical contribution from our soloist **Anna Gardiner** which follows.

Of course, one couldn’t mention Music, or Performing Arts, without paying tribute to all those involved in “**Annie**”. Our thanks go to all those who assisted in the production in any way but particularly to the Producer, Mrs Hanna. Having staged our first school musical, “Oliver”, only eight months previously it was a tremendous achievement to produce another outstanding musical reminding us of the unbelievable talent and ability of all involved. To describe some of the experience of aspects of our extra-curricular programme I will again hand over to Mr Brown who is going to interview our Head Girl and Deputy Head Girls, **Rhianna Brown, Amy Alexander and Stephanie Bond**. Thanks

2010/2011 was also the second year of our designation as a **Specialist School for Mathematics and Computing** and we were delighted that our achievements in ICT were recognised through the award of the **BECTA ICT Mark**, an award which is held by a very small number of schools in NI and reflects the commitment shown by our staff to embed ICT throughout all aspects of our work. The Mathematics and ICT departments continued to organise a series of events both inside school and in collaboration with our post primary partners, feeder primary schools, business and the community. Some of those which stand out include the opening of our Digital Creativity suite, community ICT classes, a Summer School for local P6 pupils and two Mathematics Fun Days for over 400 Primary School children. We are indebted to all staff for their commitment to this work, in particular, **Mrs Reid**, our

Specialist School Co-ordinator, **Dr Woods and Mrs Fitzsimmons**, Mathematics and ICT Co-ordinators respectively, and all those who have supported us throughout the year including local schools **and Dr and Mrs Fitzgerald of Radox Laboratories** without whose support our success in this area would not have been possible.

The school also continues to promote many other STEM activities including participation in a **Lego League, Mathematics Masterclasses, the Sentinus Engineering Scheme** and other projects with local Primary schools. It was a testament to our work in this area that it was some of our **Year 11 pupils**, together with those from Antrim Primary School, who were invited by the NEELB to demonstrate their abilities in the area of forensic science during a visit by the **Princess Royal** to Antrim Board Centre.

Of course, none of the excellent opportunities, inside or outside the classroom would be possible without the **unstinting efforts, dedication** and **ability** of our staff. We are privileged in Antrim Grammar School to have an outstanding teaching staff, which is **peerless** in its **commitment** to the school and the development and pastoral care of its pupils. I wish to record my thanks, along with pupils, parents and governors for their work without which Antrim Grammar School would not be the **excellent academic and pastoral** school which it is.

My personal thanks and appreciation go to the members of the **Senior Leadership Team**, Mr Brown, Dr Byrne, Mr Neill, Mrs Reid and Dr Woods, and, in particular, to our two Vice Principals, **Mr Gingles** and **Mr Hughes**, for their support, insight and encouragement.

As always the school depends on the hard work of many behind the scenes. Without the hard work and support of our **non teaching staff** Antrim Grammar School could not function in the way that it does and we are indebted to them for it.

We also pay tribute to the work of **Friends**, under the Chairmanship of **Mr Ian Simpson**, who continue to support us at school events and in co-ordinating fund raising including, last year, a Craft Fair and a Sponsored Walk.

As always the academic year saw several changes to staffing. Beginning with the departures we were sorry to say goodbye to **Mrs Sharon Stephens**, our ICT Technician and part-time ICT teacher, to **Mr Sammy Dunlop**, a part time ICT Technician and to **Mr Hugh Woodcock** and **Mr Seamus Conlon** who had covered Career breaks for Mrs Berry and Mr McMahon respectively. Not leaving completely but retiring from teaching after a lifetime's commitment of 37 years to Antrim Grammar School, was **Mr Brian Neill**, our Senior Teacher and the **last original member of the teaching staff**. Many pupils, myself included, benefited considerably from Brian's wealth of experience and knowledge and I wish to record my thanks to him. Fortunately Brian is still working in the school, having taken up a role of Sixth Form Supervisor & Cover Manager, but today we acknowledge his significant contribution to the School in the award of the **Ad Astra Trophy** and we hope this in some way conveys our appreciation for all that he has done for Antrim Grammar School. As one of those past pupils of a certain age who remember Brian as a Latin teacher, one phrase I remember is "Nil satis nisi optimum", nothing but the best is good enough, and this certainly sum's up Brian's attitude to the school.

Others to leave were **Miss Carol Marquess** and **Mrs Betty Morrison** who covered maternity leaves in Geography and Art and we thank them for their hard work and commitment and wish them well for the future.

We were delighted to retain the services of another temporary teacher **Miss Karla Garvin** for another year and to appoint **Mrs Nadine Davison**, **Miss Emma McGrogan**, **Mrs Janette Feeney**, **Ms Lynda Mawhinney** and **Mrs Nora McQuillan** to the non teaching staff. Other arrivals were baby daughters **Darcie** to Mr Baguley and **Amelia** to Mrs Aitcheson and a baby son **Soren** to Mrs Stranney and our best wishes extend to them and their families.

It is appropriate at this point to thank governors for their hard work and for the insight and expertise which they bring to running the school but, in particular, to **Mrs Susan Bell**, our Chairperson. We are blessed to have someone whose interest in the school is reflected, not only in her attendance at all school meetings and events, but in the exceptional standards she sets in all aspects of her work. **Amy Alexander** is going to present Mrs Bell with a gift as a token of our appreciation.

In order to assist with the process of making a very good school even better, governors commissioned a **survey of our pupils, parents and staff** using **Kirkland Rowell**, the leading experts in this field in the UK. We were delighted with the outcomes of the survey both in terms of helping us to **prioritise issues** for our new School Development Plan and also the **excellent overall performance scores** which it gave when benchmarked against over 1000 other schools. Indeed many of the positive scores across various aspects of school life were defined by Kirkland Rowell as exceptional, highlighting the high standards of work ongoing throughout the school.

Post primary transfer continued to feature at many of our meetings of Boards of Governors. As a school we remain resolute in our desire to retain this school as a grammar school with an academic ethos and the interest shown in the school in recent years confirms our opinion. In each of the past three years close to 200 P7 children sat the AQE Common Entrance Assessment in the school resulting in an increased number of applications to the school and Year 8 intakes, if our baseline assessment is accurate, of high academic ability. I must pay tribute to Mr Hughes and Dr Byrne for their organisation and to all those staff who voluntarily came into school on 2, or more, Saturday mornings to assist us in making the arrangements for these assessments as child friendly as possible. We were delighted that not only did the process go smoothly but that we received considerable positive feedback from the children sitting the CEA, and their parents.

At a time where the Department of Education is looking closely at area based planning of schools and at a time where there already is concern within our

community, and its politicians, about the number of young people leaving Antrim for their education, our experience over the last three years shows very clearly that any area plan for this area must include the retention of a grammar school in the Borough. Any other plan will only lead to even more pupil drift out of Antrim than we have at present.

Aside of area planning, the other issue which has been causing us most concern has been the projected financial cuts to be imposed on school budgets.

As we are about to enter 2012 those charged with planning and financing the schools estate have undoubtedly many difficult decisions to make. It is our plea that, in Antrim, those decisions do not result in a return to an “education of the past” of children leaving the town to be educated at other grammar schools as happened pre 1974 nor, in an “education of the future” of reduced staffing, larger class sizes and limited resources which will be the case, even in successful, oversubscribed schools, such as ours, if recent proposals become reality.

Rather we ask that those decisions allow us to build on our “education of the present”, a successful academic grammar school, committed to its aims of valuing learning, valuing individuals and valuing others, and, in particular, providing the very best opportunities possible for our young people. Surely that is the least that future generations deserve.

Thanks again to David, Andrew, Emma, Rhianna, Amy and Stephanie for their contribution, thank you for listening and best wishes for A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.