

Title for assembly: Education

Schools, learning, wellbeing, mental health, public examinations and associated matters have all, rightly, featured fervently in news reports, social media and public discourse since the start of the pandemic. Across the country, pupils and teachers have had to find reserves of fortitude, independence and ambition as they navigated the realities of online learning; whilst parents have become honorary members of the teaching fellowship. On an individual, familial and societal level we have given the concept and practice of education both operational and philosophical attention - forensically so. In this spirit, I share some personal reflections on education.

Every child is precious and deserving, a gift for the now and to the future. Schools should be palaces of humanity, enlightenment and progress. A school must be a community of respect, revelation and opportunity. There is far too much political noise, division and toxicity around education. Education is not simply an expectation, a right or a responsibility - it is, surely, the lifeblood to drive, energise and inspire us to question, to experiment and to progress. Every Secretary of State for Education should spend part of her/his working week in schools to understand the privilege of their position, the responsibility of their office and the opportunity of their tenure.

We have become accustomed to politicians and experts referring to “the science” when it comes to decision-making about how to manage the pandemic. What a breath of fresh air it would be to have the same public officials and civic leaders referring and deferring to “the research” when it comes to decision-making about how to manage education. The paint-by-numbers, dogmatic and binary nonsense of traditional vs progressive, knowledge vs skills, academic vs vocational, etc. narratives continue to narrow the vision, dull the imagination and limit the actions of commentators, researchers and politicians.

The nobility of the educational experience merits less divisive politics and more liberating philosophy because it is fundamental, defining and transformative. I have reached nearly half-a-century of life, and through my experience and thinking I have settled on one lesson about schooling: education is too important, too vital, to be left to the vagaries, vanity and egoism of a five-year election cycle.

When I was interviewed for the post of CCHS Headteacher, I crystallised my thoughts and ambitions for this wonderful community around three words: people, practice and premises. I stand by this trinity of notions as we, together, galvanise a future for our School. The ‘tomorrow’ for this community has to be defined and lived for our students, by the staff and with the parents. As Edmund Burke opined, there is a transcendental relationship between the dead, the living and the unborn. We have a duty and an ambition to both conserve and progress our School community to honour the legacy of the founding generations, to inspire current cohorts, and to safeguard future generations of young women, who have, do and will bring their brilliance to fruition.

In my decade of service at CCHS, it is a privilege to marvel at and celebrate the extraordinary young women who “carry the torch of life” from and for this splendid school community. I think the future is bright, brave and bold because of them.

I leave you with this: when we introduced Philosophy to Year 7 in 2017, I asked students if they thought they could deal with the essence of philosophical enquiry - the meaning of life - their answer was a confidence-building, life-affirming and educationally-inspiring: YES!