

Dr Edward Pooley and Dr Claire Bloxsom – Key Speakers Prizegiving 2023

Hello to you all. Hello to the students, parents, Doctor Barsham, the staff and trustees within our Hollygirt community, and although I don't think they are here tonight, hello to our Hollygirt dogs, Dottie and Rusty.

And it is that word community that is at the heart of what we want to talk about today. And how community can enable us to have choice. How this community of belonging can encourage us to become detectives of our own lives as we work out who we are, what matters to us, what makes us feel good, what gives us a sense of purpose, so we become someone who is both part of something and someone who is distinctively unique in the beautifully diverse cultural world in which we live.

So we want to talk to you about choice: The decisions and actions that have led us to be sitting here where we have the privilege to hear about all the achievements and growth that the students have had over the last 12 months, and the choices they and we have made that have had an impression on us all.

As parents, choosing this school for our child has been guided by the belief that success is not just about academic excellence, but about nurturing and expanding the hearts and minds of the people most important to us - you! [look around at the children] - the students of our Hollygirt community.

When we decided to bring our son Noah to this school, we were drawn not just by its reputation but by its energy and by the energy of the people who run it. We were inspired by the dedication and warmth of both the teachers and non-teaching staff. We were struck by the passion, the knowledge, and the colourful creativity of the leadership team, where our voices can be heard and decisions can be co-created. To us, Hollygirt is like an extended family that provides not only a tailored education but also encourages compassion, empathy, an understanding of difference, and the encouragement to thrive in our own distinctiveness.

Life is about choices: We can make choices based on what we know and how they make us feel. Sometimes we need to make choices based on our best guess or on gut feelings. Often the choices we make will go well, sometimes they will go less well. The choice you make to find out how to complete a challenging maths problem or to understand the interpretation of a complex piece of poetry, may seem small... but these choices shape how we behave and contributes towards our attitude to life. How we tackle the smaller things in life can influence how we overcome the big challenges in our future.

Choice gives us opportunity. We can choose not to do things. We can choose to not treat people differently based on our inevitable differences, we can choose to guide others to achieve what they want to achieve. We can choose to learn from everyone we meet, especially from those who are different from us. We can choose to learn from our mistakes and our disappointments or our 'bad choices', and we can choose to turn this energy around into motivation and determination to achieve our ultimate goals, even when things get tough. This we can do when we feel we belong, and when we feel we have a community that we belong to.

Everything we do is an opportunity to learn, to experience something new and different, to enable us to become a meaningful part of the complex and ever evolving

tapestry of being human. Knowing how to cope with our inevitable mistakes (and let's be honest we all make them) teaches us how to make the best of ALL of our choices and has the potential to strengthen our resilience for the future.

So... today is a celebration of choice - the choice we made as parents to enroll our children in this school because of its heart and the people who run it. It is a celebration of the fact that education is a journey along winding roads, sometimes rocky, sometimes plain sailing, but always changing, and the choices we make on that journey WILL shape our destination.

And if we find ourselves at the wrong crossroads, we have the choice to keep pushing forward or learn, revisit our choices, and change the where we travel. Take the road less travelled or carve a new path.

Tonight is a celebration of the incredible potential lying within each and every one of our children.

So-to the students, I say, keep making choices, keep being curious, keep pursuing your dreams, keep being YOU - and keep believing in yourselves. The world is waiting for you! Your brilliance, your compassion and your uniqueness.

To the parents: let us continue to make choices that prioritise the growth and happiness of our children... our future, recognising that our choices today will influence the world of tomorrow.

We want to conclude with a quote the Harlem Renaissance writer Dorothy West from her book "The Living is Easy".

"There is no life that does not contribute to history".