

Speech Graduation June 2011

Year 13, today we say goodbye to you as students of this school. I am confident that the education you have received with us will serve you well at university and in your future careers. However, school isn't just about preparing you for further education and work. It is equally about preparing you for your lives ahead. That is what I'd like to talk to you about this evening.

Your parents all took courageous decisions in deciding on this school for you. You have seen it grow and develop and I very much hope that you are proud of having been pupils here and feel that we have done our best for you.

It matters to me what kind of person leaves this school. It is my hope that our ex-students are people of character and values, that, for example, you are caring and polite, that you defend your opinions and show respect for the opinions of others. However, life is never simple. It's easier to hate or criticise than love or praise and you will face difficult decisions in the future when your head will disagree with your heart.

When you are young it's normal to wonder what the future might hold for you and you think about what kind of job you might do or whether you'll have a life long partner and who it might be. Let me tell you that very few of you will live the life you dream about right now. When I was 14 I told my tutor that I had no planned career but the one thing I knew was that I would never teach. In my second year of teaching I told the headmistress of the school where I worked that I had no specific plans for the future but I knew I would never lead a school. Then, just 8 years ago, I said that I had no intention of ever living in Andalucía. In other words, you don't know what's ahead but you have to make plans all the same.

The Cuban politician and writer Jose Marti is reputed to have said that the three things everyone should do in their lives is plant a tree, write a book and have a child. I hope they form part of your life plans but, like everything else, it depends how you do them. Are you going to plant a tree that will bear fruit for many years to come or are you going to plant the equivalent of the Poison Tree William Blake writes about in his poem of the same name, a tree of destruction? Are you going to write a novel for others to learn from or are you going to write something full of gratuitous violence with the sole aim of earning money for yourself? Are you going to educate your own children to contribute positively to the future of their community or are you going to want them in order to show them off and boast about them? Believe me, there is more satisfaction to be had in giving than taking and that you will lead happier lives if you put others before yourself and recognise the pleasure that is to be had from the simple things that are available to us every day. If you appreciate things as simple as the sunrise, a smile, a small kindness or the scent of a flower in the street then you, yourselves, will fully value life's gifts and give great pleasure to others in return.