

Welcome speech for the BWA Annual Prize Giving Event – 22nd September 2016

Staff, students, parents/guardians and families, friends of Brooke Weston, governors and our special guest George Bullard, good evening and can I add my welcome to this event on behalf of the Academy's Governors.

Let me begin with a big thank you to George for his inspiring and motivating speech and for presenting the student awards this year. I'd also like to welcome Peter Kirkbride to the role of Associate Principal and look forward to working with him in the coming months and I'd like to thank Sam Strickland for his year at the helm of Brooke Weston as Associate Principal. Sam has now moved into Corby Technical School, where he will be focused on its significant expansion over the next two years.

The examination outcomes we've seen this summer mark the end of the first year of implementation of a raft of major Government changes to secondary education. This includes wholesale changes to the curriculum, starting with English and Maths; focusing the assessment process onto examinations and away from continuous assessment; changing the GCSE grading structure from A* to G, to 1 to 9... with many more changes as well.

Based on this year's outcomes, staff and students should be congratulated for what they have together achieved..... and Brooke Weston will now do what it always does, deliver improvements this year. The Leadership Team and Governors are already working on this, with our first meeting of the academic year earlier this week.

The Academy's record over this last year, continues the exceptional record of performance of the last 25 years.... yes, it was 25 years ago on the 1st September that the Brooke (later Brooke Weston) City Technology College opened its doors, representing a **bold, new approach** to secondary education, with the clear and determined intention to forge a brighter future for the children and families of this area.

Before the CTC came to the town in 1991, Corby was still feeling the impact of the British Steel plant closure in 1980 that cost around 20,000 jobs across the steel works itself and in other businesses. Unemployment was at critical levels and the schools in the town were in the main failing their students, resulting in **less than half a dozen** students from the whole Corby area achieving places at University.

Initiatives that deliver the biggest impact normally start with one person's passionate belief that things must be better. That person was Hugh de Capell Brooke. Hugh started his working life as a teacher in South London and brought this experience back when he joined the family estate based in Great Oakley. In the late 1980's Hugh was determined to create better life chances through better education for the children of this area and set about convincing the then Conservative Government, that something had to change for Corby and the surrounding area. Taking advantage of the Education Secretary's new City Technology College initiative, Hugh donated the land and some of the funding necessary for Corby to have one of the first 16 CTCs spread across the country, opening a "CTC project office" in the village and recruiting a Principal with a track record of **breaking the mould** in secondary education.

Two other individuals with a passion for improving education were also pivotal, Garfield Weston, Chair of ABF Foods on behalf of the Weston Foundation and Gareth Newman, who opened and became the first Principal of the CTC. Gareth came to Corby with the experience of creating a new model for secondary education to help turn around a seriously underperforming school in Wales. His core principle was to put

the student at the centre of the educational process and like Hugh, Gareth had a vision for changing children's lives for the better and was relentless with his team on its delivery **for each individual student**, indeed past students returning to visit the Academy often say "Brooke Weston changed my life !!"

He brought with him some of the aspects of daily operation that we see today:

- The 8 weeks on, two weeks off term structure
- The longer working day, more akin to the normal external workplace environment
- No staff room, where the staff work, eat and relax alongside the students
- The tutor-based pastoral system
- The rolling lunch hour.....and more, he also a couple of years later, brought Peter (now Sir Peter) Simpson who he had worked with in Wales and who when Gareth left, became Principal.

Today, there are only two members of the team still here, who started all those years ago. Trish Stringer now Executive Principal who started as Head of PE, and Karen Hearn now Director of Science, who started as a science technician. Trish did mention that it didn't all run smoothly when the doors opened – there was no furniture for the first two weeks!!

Ten years ago, Brooke Weston became one of the first secondary schools in the country to achieve 100% of Year 11 students gaining 5 or more GCSEs with A* to C grades. 5 years ago it achieved the "**outstanding**" rating from Ofsted and it now sits at the heart of the Brooke Weston family of schools, providing drive, experience and talent as they progress on their own journey's toward "Outstanding". Sadly, Hugh is no longer with us but his son Alex remains a strong supporter of the Academy as a Trustee on the Brooke Weston Trust Board. We collectively have much to thank Hugh for in that his vision for the CTC has over the last 25 years, had a major transformational effect not only on students attending this Academy, but also on secondary education locally (through initiatives such as the Teaching School) and on the town's broader ambitions for its future.

Back to today ... From the Governing Body membership perspective, I'm pleased to welcome two new governors – Ika Castke and Danielle Jamison who bring new legal and HR skills to the Governing Body - and to thank Bertie Simmonds and Gerry Witt who stepped down from their roles as governors at the end of the Summer Term.

....and finally, a word or two for the students in Years 12 and 13 and their parents. During the last two years in particular we have seen some UK Universities increasing the number of **unconditional offers** made to students seeking University places following A-Levels. In the past, all universities would define the A level grades needed to secure a place on their courses. Now, as most universities seek to grow their student numbers and therefore their income, for a small but growing number of students applying, places are being offered without the need to achieve specific A level grades..... You might be thinking this is good news, that you don't need to work as hard to achieve the best possible A-level grades while you're here at Brooke Weston..... I want to take this opportunity to re-affirm that **A-Level grades and achievements are for life, not simply to open the door to University**. Your A-level grades remain with you as you progress through your career and I can tell you that employers in the past, present and future will always be looking at the A-Level grades you achieved as a strong pointer to your work-ethic and the dedication to

achievement you demonstrated in your late teens. Unconditional offers are great, but don't let them deflect you from your core purpose, which is to leave this stage of your education, having maximised the examination outcomes that will impact **all** of your future life.

Congratulations to all the students who have received awards this evening, feel rightfully proud of your achievements, keep striving to do even better and thank the staff of the Academy and your families for the support they provide that enables you **to achieve your best and live your dreams.**

Thank You.

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Author	Phil Harris-Bridge