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**Annual Reunion Lunch 2023**

**Vicky Bingham’s Speech**

Welcome back to the **Independent Girls School of the year**! I really hope that today you will feel proud of your school and proud of the amazing community of women that you are all part of.

I am not going to spend time telling you about all the wonderful things that are happening here and have happened over the last year –a glimpse at the year in view section of Resplendens magazine on your table will give you a taste of how busy we have been.

But I do want to take a brief moment to reflect on how you all embody our school values of **Aspiration, Creativity, Kindness, Commitment and Courage, AND** how important you have been as a community in supporting the school and me in my role as Headmistress.

I hope you managed to glimpse the *Towards 150 timeline* in the atrium as you arrived. It is a story of **courage** : the **courage** of the Girls Public Day school trust in supporting education for women; the **courage** of the suffragettes; the **courage** of the refugees from Europe who joined the school and the Alumnae who served (and lost their lives) in World War 2; the **courage** of my predecessors as they battled with planners to make sure this school was never left behind.

History is never static, and we want this timeline to evolve to reflect *‘who we are and why we are the way we are’* . The timeline has been put together by Jo Coates and the Philanthropy team – Thank you - they would love you to share your memories and comments so that they can be incorporated as we prepare for our 150th Anniversary in 2026.

I also want to thank everyone involved with the event today, our alumnae representatives, the estates team, the catering staff and particularly to our newest recruit Sophie Creswell who joined the school just 4 months ago and has put this lunch together. This is a nerve-racking event for the most seasoned hand, and she has shown real South Hampstead **Courage** in diving right in and learning at speed. Thank you and well done!

We want all our students to be **aspirational** and our Alumnae are all fundamental to this through the way you share and model your own **aspiration**.

It was wonderful to host some of our partner state schools at **the Aspirational Futures Fayre** earlier this year – more than 50 alumnae and parents came to share their experience at this event so thank you to everyone who joined the fayre or who has come back to speak this year, to share their careers advice, conducted university interview practice or been featured in our **‘Motivational Monday series’**. We depend on your partnership in this area.

South Hampstead is sustained by these sorts of partnerships and you have been hugely influential in helping us **creatively** extend our collaboration with other schools and organisations.

Some of you will remember volunteering with Pensioners link & JW3 when you were students and I am delighted that pupils still give up time for these and for other organisations like The Royal Free, The Winch, Spear, and several local primary schools thanks to the connections made through parents and alumnae.

One of our most **creative** partnership programmes is to spread oracy and public speaking skills through our Debate Hub. Thanks to the support of one of your fellow alumnae through the Rangoonwala Foundation, we have been able to extend this programme across more than 50 state schools. I am delighted to see you all here in our Waterlow Hall today but there is nothing better than when this hall is filled with 100’s of primary school pupils, fidgeting and giggling, as they prepare for their first competitive Debate Hub debate.

The Hall today is full of **committed** people and no one has shown more **commitment to South Hampstead** than our former staff. Madame Hugh retired from the school last year after 28 years of service, but I am delighted that she has taken on the task of helping us to keep in touch with our Honorary Alumnae. There are more than 30 of you here today including 3 former heads of the school.

One of those is Jean Scott who, back in 2000 organised for the construction of a Millennium garden. Parents and alumnae purchased personalised bricks to be featured in the garden. When the school was redeveloped in 2010, we lost the garden, but thanks to Jenny Stephen and a careful member of the estates team, the bricks were preserved. 23 years later we are delighted to reinstate them in the sixth form garden where they now line the curved paths.

At the end of lunch today there will be an opportunity for you to look around the school and we have a group **of committed** Sixth formers here to take you on a little tour following our Artwork Trail which includes the Millennium bricks! But I do have a confession – as the bricks were re-instated, the builders found that they need to cut one brick to make a curve on the path. Rather unfortunately they chose the brick that read AVERIL BURGESS – HEADMISTRESS 1975-1993. It now reads BURGESS - MISTRESS.

Today, Averil, we would like to rectify this mistake so I am delighted to make a small presentation to you of a new, fully intact brick!

And so finally I come to **Kindness**. Our Towards 150 timeline is full of examples of our community helping those less fortunate – from knitting mittens for prisoners of war, to raising money for bursaries.

In the spring last year, pupils, parents and alumnae came together to help families from Ukraine. Thanks to your support we were able to find and fund places for eight Ukrainian refugees and I am delighted to tell you that they have been a hugely positive addition to our community.

Likewise, our Opening Doors bursary programme is founded on **Kindness.** Bursaries open up opportunities and help us to make South Hampstead a truly diverse community. Our aim is to have doubled our bursary support by 2026 so that at least 1 in 10 of our pupils can have access to means-tested funding.

In September, we welcomed 13 fully funded pupils to our Year 7 and I am delighted that next year, 1 in 10 of our new places will be to bursary candidates, including our very first Springboard pupil from their programme for Looked after and Vulnerable children. More than 100 of you give to our *Class of Bursaries,* so thank you – you have joined us in our mission and it is thanks to your help that we are making 1 in 10 a reality.

Today, we are launching specific appeals for the Classes of 1983 and 1993 but there are opportunities for everyone to join, including by securing a copy of the Staff Cookery book (more on this later).

My biggest thank you is a personal one for your **Kindness** to me. I have loved my time here at South Hampstead and I would like to think that I have played some part in sustaining the values that lie at the heart of this school. But I think I can speak for all my fellow heads when I say that the real reason South Hampstead is ‘what it is and the way it is’ comes down to all of you.

**Mehr Licht!**