

Prize Distribution 2018 Headmaster's Report

Glenlola Collegiate School was delighted to welcome back former pupil Dr April Heaney as the Guest of Honour at this year's Annual School Prize day. April attended Glenlola from 1976 to 1983 and was School Games Captain. She attended Queen's University Belfast, graduating in 1990. Completing her training in General and Geriatric Medicine in Northern Ireland, she obtained a Doctorate in Medicine from Queen's and a Master's in Business Administration from the University of Ulster.

After her medical training in 2001, April spent a year working in Australia before taking up her current post as a Consultant Geriatrician in the Ulster Hospital.

Her additional roles since then have included management, teaching, education and representation of our Society nationally.

In recognising the outstanding achievements of the pupils, Headmaster Eric Thompson commented that,

“Glenlola Collegiate is a high achieving grammar school. The challenging academic curriculum that is available to our pupils, coupled with high expectations and support ensures that each year, on average, our pupils perform better than pupils of the same ability in other schools. But education and personal growth are not just about academic study and we recognise that young people must be given the opportunities to develop in their own unique ways. It is for that reason that our staff give willingly of their time to facilitate the broad range of extracurricular activities available in the school. At the last count this totalled 64. In these times of financial hardship this fact bears Testament to the commitment of our staff to their vocation and to the pupils in their care.

Those who receive prizes today have taken full advantage of the opportunities that have been offered to them and understand what it feels like to reap the rewards of hard work and dedication.”

He thanked the School's feeder primary schools for the key role they also played in helping pupils to achieve such high academic standards:

“We are fortunate too that the excellent feeder primary schools in the Bangor area prepare their pupils so well for the next phase in their education and in recent years we have worked to develop our links with them further. Each year Glenlola sends between 70 and 80 Senior girls to local primaries weekly for a period of 6 months in order to provide literacy & numeracy support for their pupils and I thank those primary schools for providing such opportunities which are so valuable to our girls in terms of their personal development and, in some cases, their subsequent career choices. In addition, last year a Glenlola hockey development programme for local primary schools was also established.”

Turning to the challenging issue of financial cutbacks, he continued,

“Prize distribution is a happy occasion but it would be remiss of me not to mention finance – or rather lack of it - in education. Schools have been reducing staffing levels and making efficiency savings for over five years, playing their part in delivering quality education in fiscally leaner times. But there is a limit to how much belts can be tightened and there inevitably comes a point where further savings do not result in improved efficiency, but actually begin to damage the education which schools are here to provide. Schools in Northern Ireland have now reached that point and additional funds must be found urgently if educational provision for the young people of Northern Ireland is not to be damaged.”

Focusing on the outstanding achievements of the pupils, Mr Thompson observed,

“In external examinations I am pleased to report that our pupils have once again achieved excellent results at all levels.

At A-level, the pupils of Glenlola have achieved exceptional examination results, exceeding the Northern Ireland Girls’ average at grades A*-C by 4%.

Over one quarter of all grades were A*-A while 9 in 10 of all grades achieved were C or better.

The results achieved by the Y13 pupils at AS-Level are once again very pleasing.

The overall pass rate has increased from last year to 97.9% which is 2.1% above the NI girls’ average.

With 58.7% of all entries graded at A-B, this has been another very successful year. 83.8% of grades were A-C while a number of subjects recorded 100% in this category.

At GCSE, last year saw our best results in 5 years with an increase of 5.7% on grades A*-A, an impressive 11.6% above the NI girls' average.

84.4% of grades were in the A*-B category while 97.5% of all grades were C or better, an increase of 1.5% on the previous year and 12.1% above the corresponding NI girls' average.

While headline figures of this kind can sometimes help to convey how well we are doing, we must be mindful of the Department of Education's caveat, when they issue examination data to schools and the media, regarding the direct comparison with school averages as a means of gauging standards of attainment:

Their words of warning are this....

'The information contained does not provide a valid basis for comparing performance between schools, since it takes no account of intakes of the schools or of any other factors that may affect pupil performance.

No single measurement can constitute a fair or accurate evaluation of a school, and the figures should be considered in the context of other information about schools and their pupils.'

So, in this age, where confidence in institutions is in decline, where a growing number of us are no longer sure what or who to believe, struggling more and more to differentiate fact from spin, if we cannot really tell how well a school is doing based on the statistics currently provided by the Department of Education, what are we to do?

Several years ago, in recognition of this problem, a system for measuring school performance based on pupil progress was developed in England and is now used there by the government and OFSTED instead of the system which we currently have. Under this system of analysis, schools performing at the average/expected level are given a 'value-added' score of ZERO with a negative score indicating underperformance and a positive score over performance.

We have carried out an analysis of this kind for our pupils and we have found that when their progress and performance are compared with those of pupils of the same ability in other schools, girls in Glenlola Collegiate exceed their predicted grades overall by an impressive 35% at A-level and 50% at GCSE.

Put simply, pupils who go to Glenlola perform significantly better in external examinations than pupils of the same ability in other schools. “