

**FOUNDERS DAY SPEECH**  
**JULY 2023**  
**Laura Griffiths, Acting Head**

Good morning and welcome to Founders Day 2023.

I am honoured to be speaking to you this morning as the first woman to lead Frensham Heights in 98 years.

So, what is it that makes Frensham special; What is it that makes us different from other schools?

I believe it is the foundation of a school that makes it distinctive. Three women, Beatrice, Elizabeth and Isabel founded our school in 1925, all three were theosophists and saw Frensham as a demonstration school for the New Education Fellowship. Their ideals were earnest and high minded, with an emphasis on moral and spiritual education and the full and complete personal development of each individual child.

They believed that schools should share a philosophy of “faith in human nature and the spiritual powers latent in every child”. The practical application of this philosophy was to guide the child’s instincts and impulses into creative activities; something reflected today in the equal status we give to the performing and creative arts.

I am passionate about the arts. As a young person, my dream was to become an actor, dancer, singer or all three. I loved performing and I had the privilege of performing at a number of wonderful theatres. I always remember the Bristol Old Vic, as one that felt smaller than it should and smelt older than I could ever imagined.

However, back then the X Factor had not been invented (nor had the internet). I did have an agent of sorts, but I lived in a little village in Somerset, and it was all a bit rural. I remember being invited to audition for a 'girl version of Take That' after my audition tape was put forward. I liked Take That, although I thought a girl version of them would be cheesy, so I didn't go. Little did I know of the success and impact the Spice Girls would have.

This was a missed opportunity, a regret, an opportunity that I may or may not have been successful in, but I will never know as I didn't try. I am a Christian, and I believe that there is opportunity in every disappointment and that strength can come from failure, had I become a Spice Girl, I would not have become a teacher or be standing here today.

Then I was asked to take on the role of Acting Head. At that time, I was happy and comfortable in my role as Deputy Head, so why would I change that? I thought back to those times in my life when I had said no because I thought that I wasn't good enough, or wasn't qualified enough, or thought it would be too cheesy. Girls often think they are not good enough... and this is not good enough.

So, I said yes. I stepped up, with confidence, courage and the conviction to stand firm in who I am and make a difference. As the first woman to lead Frensham Heights since our Founders, I strive to be like them - women who were not afraid to challenge and disrupt.

So, coming back to my love of the arts. I am proud to have created and launched the Arts Award. This initiative puts the Arts back at the centre of Frensham. Frensham has been known as a centre of excellence for the arts and as we look forward we must keep the arts as the heartbeat of

Frensham. The Arts Award is our programme that provides world class enrichment opportunities to our students, and I am delighted to announce to you today that we have confirmed our partnership with Kahli Lewis Dance Company.

Kahli choreographs for Youth America Grand Prix, Ballet Grand Prix and Dance World Cup. She has taught vocationally for 25 years at Elmhurst, Urdang, Central School of Ballet, Bird College, Tring Park and the Dance Division in New York. I can also announce that we have established a partnership with Ben Lewis, a world leading musical director. My vision is to grow this Award into a world leading programme.

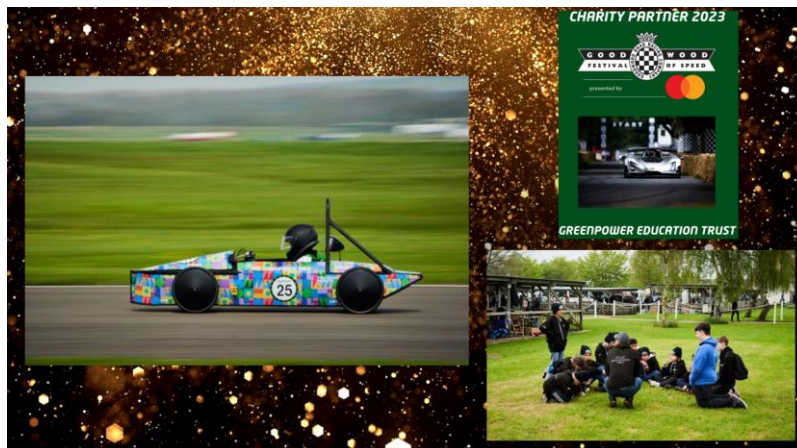


It is also the ethos of any school which makes it distinctive. What is it about Frensham that appeals to those of us who work and study here? There are many factors that contribute to this: the absence of hierarchies of age, gender or talent; mutual respect; a sense of community; an absence of cynicism; an enjoyment of learning and the freedom to develop as an individual – but not of course the license to do as one likes. Our ethos is brought alive each day by our extensive curriculum and co-curricular which enables our students to grow knowledge, grow skills and develop character.

This term I was delighted to launch the Worthy Earth partnership. This is an educational programme for agroecological learning, whereby students build a regenerative kitchen garden at Broomfields (a plot of land next to Frensham Heights kindly lent to us by our neighbour). Worthy Earth is a hands-on learning programme that takes students through the theoretical and practical skills of growing food. It is designed to give students an awareness of the social reality of food production, leaving them better equipped to make decisions in a world with ecological responsibilities and helping them to better understand sustainability and biodiversity in their wider curriculum. In September all Year 7 and 8 students will have one lesson of Worthy Earth each week built into their timetable. We are working together to pilot a different way of learning.



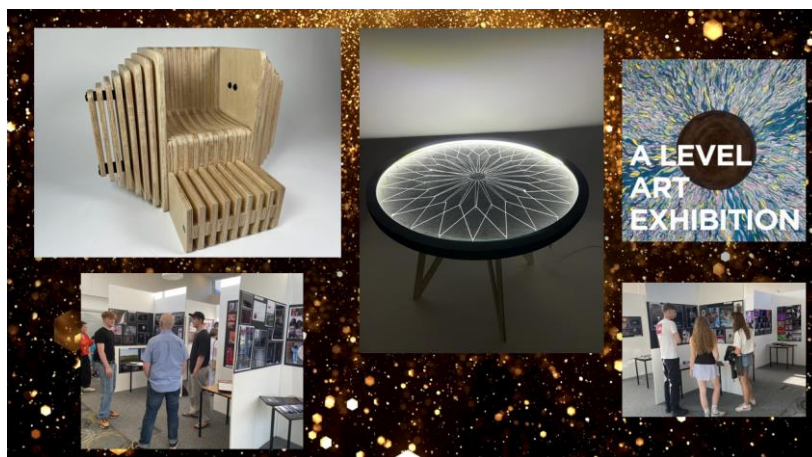
Greenpower's success continues. In October last year we finished second in the international final, competing with over 1,000 kit cars. This season so far, we have finished 4<sup>th</sup> at Goodwood and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Lotus track. We have the last two races coming up at Dunsfold and Castle Coombe before the final in October. Goodluck to the Greenpower team who have designed, built, raced and managed their racing team.



For those of you who were fortunate to watch our musical, Beauty and the Beast, you will agree that once again, the students shone. Our students have demonstrated their talent and commitment throughout the year whether in the student led performance of Back to Broadway, the Dance showcases, Rock and pop gigs, informal lunchtime concerts, Star Warts, Year 6 play in a week, and so much more. Of course, not forgetting Agamemnon which will be performed this Wednesday, please do come along if you are able.



Our creative arts students have challenged and provoked thought through their artwork and design. I believe that we have the future stars of the art world, I know we have a world class furniture maker, I am already on the waiting list and an artist who allows herself to be revealed through her work. I am the next in line for her eye after her mum!



This year we have offered 140 enrichment activities each week, have competed in hundreds of sporting fixtures and run too many trips to name! None of this would be possible without the willingness and passion of our staff.

Our community outreach goes from strength to strength, you will be able to read about it in the Founder's Day programme however I am particularly proud of the work that our Year 5 to 8 students do with Gostrey Bridewells, connecting young with old, sharing experiences and time. This is so important in developing character.

Finally, the Morning Talk programme continues to inspire and challenge. Two of the most powerful talks I have heard were delivered by Greig Trout, a cancer survivor talking about Mental Health and Tim Malton who spoke about the Titanic. I was so impressed; I bought his book to find out more!

And then we have those surprise events, that add to the extra extra curricular. This week we hosted a Year 10 celebration bar b que for students and at the same time, a drinks party for parents. It was a lovely evening and then the students politely asked if they could bend the rules. Of course, as a rule bender and teenager of the 90s, I obliged! So, they jumped in the pool and had a pool party, fully clothed. This is what it is to be a child, to be free and to be at Frensham.



There are always staff leavers to announce at this time of year. I extend my sincere thanks and best wishes to the following:

Liz Bownass-Clark, our longest standing leaver, who joined the school in 1999 and was my much-loved PA when I was Deputy Head, the school will not be the same without her knowledge and her wisdom. She will be greatly missed.

We also say goodbye to teaching staff:

Hannah Manton, Sally Heighington, Bob Keane, Richard Arthur, Olivia Aylott, Stefi Cottle-Bailey, Stef Oliver, John Scullion, Lyall Reynolds, Lorna D'Arcy and Colin Addison

And finally, a goodbye to support staff colleagues:

Sarah Dedman, Lisa Neave, Nicola Riley, Lexi Pepperday and Agnes and Carolina.

It is also the time of year to say goodbye to our exam year students. This week has been very sociable for this 46-year-old!

On Monday night I attended the Year 11 prom. What a spectacular event it was , a time to celebrate and spend the evening with a remarkable bunch of young people. One of our mums, Rachel, worked tirelessly to ensure that this night rivalled the Oscars. Thank you, Rachel and the mum team.



On Tuesday night I attended the Year 13 prom. Year 13, you have brightened up my day on so many occasions and made me laugh! You will always be remembered as the first year group to hold a truly memorable Leavers Day, with flash mob and Morning Talk takeover!



On Wednesday night– sorry, this is turning into a Craig David song! I had the night off on Wednesday!

To Year 11 and 13 students, I want you all to know that you are special, loved and unique, go into the world with confidence, courage and a good sense of humour. Equipped with these three things, life will be that little bit easier.

And to all of our leavers and their families, never forget that you will always be an important member of the Frensham community, please keep in touch.

So, what of the future? I think that we all need to think hard about what education will look like in the future. What are schools? Are they mirrors of society or are they engines of social change? What defines a good school? What are we trying to achieve in education? It cannot be solely the acquisition of knowledge. We need knowledge as a means of understanding ourselves and the world we live in, as a basis for our skills and as a framework for our values. Yet knowledge today is more easily and instantly available, thanks to new technology.

A popular debate asks the question, what value, is learned knowledge when it is only ever a google search away. Most teachers would suggest that it is not the knowledge that is the destination but the development of thinking that is important. At the heart of all of this is the question, what can a computer NOT do? This strikes at the very heart of what it is to be human. In the future we are going to need to understand how we learn so that we can confidently learn anew, several times in our working lives. With this in mind, education will need to move to a much more overtly skill-based curriculum.

As we launch Frensham's skills for life in September, we are setting out a road map to set students up to do what computers can't as we continue to prioritise our flagship unique living experiences that develop resilience, problem solving, independence, creative thinking and so much more.

Whether a Year 7 exploring Hadrian's wall and camping under the stars, a Year 8 facing living in a village in the woods that doesn't exist until they have built it, a Year 9 embarking on the biggest mountain climb ever and camp out in the Peak District or making a difference to a tiny community off of the West Coast of the Scottish Highlands, Knoydart.

Knoydart is a funded Year 12 trip, making it accessible to all of our students. Over the years, Frensham students have built 4 community projects and there is a brand-new forest which will continue to grow, more trees will be planted with the money that we use to carbon offset all of our trips.

And I couldn't not mention Malawi. This trip changes lives.

Our students are finally heading out to Malawi again next week after a 4 year break due to Covid. Please make sure you visit the Malawi 23 Team today in the area near the new classrooms where they are raising money for the materials they need for the various projects. One of our parents has also created a beautiful artwork which is being auctioned in aid of Malawi - the painting is on display here in the Aldridge Foyer.

We are committed to our programme, it is about being human and based around relationships. We do make a difference to lives, we do make a difference to communities, and this does make a difference to our student's futures.



Before I finish, I would like to thank Frensham's staff. Together we have faced some challenging times but throughout them, we have supported each other in true Frensham spirit. I would not be standing here today if it were not for your incredible support.

I would particularly like to thank Nick for being the most supportive Acting Deputy Head that any Acting Head could have asked for and to my Senior Leadership team, Giles, Andy, Jo, Jack, Amanda and Flic, you have been my rock.

To my family, life has been disrupted of late, but your continued love has pulled me through. But particularly to my husband who always stands up for what he believes is right.

And thank you parents, students, staff and families past and present for your continued love and support for our wonderful Frensham.

In the words of our Founders, "we shall continue to strive to bring about the full and complete development of each individual child".

Thank you