

## **Form 6 Graduation Speech - Aoife McNulty - Head Girl – May 2018**

Good afternoon, Board of Governors, Board of Management, Ms. Storey, Ms. Quinn, teachers, members of staff, family and friends and of course the graduating class of 2018. It is my pleasure to welcome you all here today. We arrived here only six short years ago, and now it's already time to leave. On this day, we honour the memories, we honour the past and we look to the future.

I look out here now and can't quite believe our time in Villiers is coming to an end. How did it all go so fast? It feels like only yesterday that we were small, little first years constantly arriving late to class because we couldn't find the classroom – having said that, James Deegan still can't seem to find the right English classroom this year either! We spent our time rushing to Janet to ask for our spare locker keys or generally just looking clueless to all the older years. In my case, I spent all of first year answering the question – Yes, Ms Quinn is my mom!

As the months and years passed we moved from being the annoying, cheeky 1st years to the slightly more mature, still cheeky group of sixth years we are today. Throughout the years we have measured our time here in the number of classes to get through in a day, constantly counting down the hours and minutes to summer and eventual freedom. Standing here in front of you all today, I will measure my time in a very different way. I will measure it in the amazing friendships I have made and in all the life-changing experiences I have been lucky enough to share with each and everyone one of you.

First year was a major stepping stone in our lives as we moved from being children to young adults. We settled in quickly, making friends, navigating our way around the school and annoying pretty much everyone around us. Many of us attended our very first 'Hockey Disco' here in this hall. While they were great fun I must say our clothing choices were somewhat questionable. By second year we were finally learning how to tell James and Gerard apart while also becoming well-established members of the Villiers community. Third year brought its challenges with the dreaded Junior Cert looming, but we put our heads down and tried our best and came out on the other side excited and ready for Transition Year.

For me, Villiers is a place where I have learned valuable lessons both inside and outside the classroom. I'm sorry Ms. Ryan but, while I know learning fascinating facts about how plants make food is really important, such facts will not necessarily be what I think of when I remember my most memorable moments in Villiers.

Undoubtedly, one such moment is our unforgettable trip to Uganda in Transition Year. Here we learned how easy it is to help people and make a change in their lives – sometimes without even knowing it. I'm sure Sadhbh won't mind me telling this story as I believe it sums up perfectly the kind of school Villiers is and the kind of students and young adults they encourage us to be. One evening towards the end of the week in Uganda, we all went to a few small street markets to buy souvenirs for family and friends. Sadhbh spent the equivalent of €5 in Ugandan dollars in one particular shop. All of us, along with Sadhbh were shocked and confused when the lady who owned the shop began crying and hugging us. Little did we know she was about to be evicted from her home and lose her shop but with the €5 Sadhbh just spent there, this lady was now able to pay her rent for another 3 months. To think how much you can do with just €5. It may be true that you can't change the whole world by yourself, but this school has taught me that by even offering the smallest gesture of kindness, you can change somebody's world for the better.

Of course I can't mention Transition Year without talking about the fun-filled yet very, very cold week we spent in Achill. We had the opportunity to go surfing, coasteering and canoeing. We spent our time jumping into bogs of mud, playing soccer matches and going on the dreaded up-hill hike

and overnight camping trip. Although I think Emma Gordon will agree me with, watching Sarah sprint down the mountain after her sleeping mat had blown away definitely made the journey worthwhile. I'm sure I'm not the only one among us to say that Achill was a major highlight, not only of TY, but of my incredible six years here at Villiers. The week was also made that bit better by the daily chants lead by Sophie Moriarty. If I remember correctly, 'Mr. Brightside' by the Killers and 'All-Star' by Smash Mouth were the most popular songs?

Another brilliant highlight of Transition year was the amazing ski trip to Italy where I'm fairly sure we set the record for most crepes eaten in a day! It was all downhill from there! Many of us here took part in Model United Nations, with trips to Denmark, Genoa, Prague, Russia and Cambridge. In Prague I thought I had a hard job representing China in the Environment Committee but looking back I think Lauren had a much harder time representing North Korea in the Human Rights Committee! Although, Craig probably had the toughest time of us all trying to escape the moving bus door he somehow managed to get stuck in. Sorry Craig, I had too!

Another exciting, fun and memorable experience was the incredible Music Trip to London. We were lucky enough to get the chance to tour around London visiting the famous sites, to sing, dance and act with West End professionals and of course most importantly- to shop on Oxford Street! Throughout Transition Year we also spent weeks at a time preparing for both the Fashion Show and the Drama in which 'rehearsing' secretly meant gigantic water fights on the hockey pitch and 'practicing the dance' was just an excuse to stay outside in the sun for as long as possible.

I am so grateful for all the incredible, life-changing experiences I gained in Transition Year and I know none of it would have been possible without the amazing Mr. Atkinson. He helped and supported each and everyone one of us every step of the way, even in the lashing rain on the Lough Derg Way walking trips. He never failed to bring a smile to each student's face and we are lucky enough to call him an inspirational figure who made our time here at Villiers that bit more special. His love for life, nature and the world around him was infectious and his memory as a thoughtful, funny, friendly and inspiring teacher will never be forgotten.

While the trips and activities are, of course, a big part of Villiers, I also have very fond memories of the day-to-day school life we have grown accustomed to here. Of course the past two years have had their ups and downs with exam stress and preparation, but (a few meltdowns aside), they have also been two incredible years of growing, maturing and just having fun. There are many aspects of school life here at Villiers that I'm really going to miss - the lunch times spent chatting in the senior café - although I've a feeling the boys didn't enjoy their lunch as much because "hey guys you're not in here"; our pizza party in double Biology last thing on Friday; Dan's complaining in Maths always being met with a '25 extra points' reminder from Ms. Fitzgibbon.; 'Reading in Spanish, thinking in Spanish, speaking in Spanish', - Mr. McCrohan's go-to phrase at the beginning of each Spanish class; Friday morning coffee and freddos in Irish with Ms. Murray Dillon - Thanks a latte for that! ; Saturday study lunchtime break has become the highlight of my weekends for the past couple of months. I can honestly say not a day has gone by here without laughter, although maybe that's just because as many of you know I laugh at everything. I know one thing a lot of people here will miss is my daily puns so don't worry, as you can tell, I've included a few in this speech that you can watch out for!

Naturally, sport was also a huge part of our lives here at Villiers. Boys and girls hockey teams achieved a tremendous amount this year. The senior boys retained the Munster A cup and the senior girls brought home senior A division silverware for the first time in Villiers' history. Our boy's rugby team achieved many successes throughout the years and the girl's rugby team, while new, is growing stronger each year. We have both girl's and boy's senior basketball teams, with the girls winning the 2<sup>nd</sup> division league this year. Sport has provided us with amazing opportunities to meet new friends, develop our skills and, particularly this year, give us a break from our studies.

We all worked tremendously hard to get to this point, but we didn't do it by ourselves. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to all those around us.

To our teachers, thank you for sharing your time, knowledge and talent with us. What you did for us was beyond the call of duty. You took the time to explain to us our homework. You stayed behind after school to give us extra help when we needed it. You played a hockey match against us and unfortunately won. You made our classes fun and interesting while at the same time setting the bar high and challenging us to live up to your expectations for us. 'One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world', as said by the inspiring Malala Yousafzai.

To our coaches, thank you for making school about more than just classwork. Through sport you taught us to give everything our best effort and to always power through, win or lose.

To Miss Storey, thank you for creating such an academic, caring and inclusive environment around the school. You work tirelessly to ensure that each student lives up to their potential (and to ensure each student always has their tie on with their top button tied)! To Ms. Quinn, all I can really say is you've been like a mother to me.

Finally to our parents and guardians here today, thank you for supporting us in more ways than we can even count. You dragged us out of bed each morning, you listened to us complain about homework and study, you came to our Fashion Show, our drama and all our matches. You commiserated over our daily problems, but you always tried to give us enough space to learn how to work things out for ourselves.

As you can see, behind each student here today are so many different people providing help and guidance in so many different ways. The best way we can show our gratitude is to make the most of every opportunity we are given and go forward into the world with the intention of making it a better place. Let us believe in ourselves so that we may reach our goals and fulfil our dreams. Let us always be the best we can be so that we may bring joy and happiness into our own lives and into the lives of all those around us. Let us work hard in our future endeavours so that we may grow and succeed in all aspects of life.

We have already taken the first step by making it to this ceremony today. Now it is time to take the next steps in the journey that is our lives and begin building our futures. Our graduation should serve as a launching point, projecting us to wherever our futures are meant to take us. I am looking out at future doctors, teachers, builders, accountants, artists, musicians, pharmacists or whatever it may be that you choose to do in your future. We may not have the power to inspire the entire world to strive for success, but we do have the power to try to achieve it for ourselves.

To every graduate in this room, I would like to give you my sincere thanks for making the past six years of my life an unforgettable and magical experience. I have so many fond memories to look back on and I'm sure the same can be said for all of you here today. I am so grateful for the friendships I've made, the jokes we've shared, the teachers we've learned from, the times we've spent up on the hockey pitch, the times we've spent eating Gordon's biscuit cake and so much more. Leaving today will be hard, but I know every person here has the ability to go on and achieve incredible things. As Abraham Lincoln said, 'The best way to predict your future is to create it'.

Thank you all for listening.

Aoife