



THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF KUWAIT

FESTIVAL OF ACHIEVEMENT 2017 PRINCIPAL'S SPEECH

Futouh Ballroom, The Regency Hotel, 09 April 2017

Your Excellency, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Fahd Al-Salem Al-Sabah; Dr Khaled Al-Rasheed, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Facilities and Planning; Your Excellency Matthew Lodge, Her Majesty's Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the State of Kuwait; Your Excellencies; Honoured Guests; Mr Chairman; Madam Vera; Parents; Graduating students.

You will be aware that BSK was awarded the top ranking of 'outstanding' school following a full inspection in March 2016 on behalf of the UK Department for Education.

In the words of the lead inspector, BSK is a 'very, very, special school'.

Given such an outcome, a good question to ask is, 'where do we go next?' How do we continue to take the school forward from the highest ranking?

Those of you that have known Madam Vera and BSK for some time will understand that there is never a question of standing still. To stand still is, in reality, to move backwards.

The first focus has been to improve further the standards of teaching and learning taking place in the school. The inspectors identified that most of the teaching is outstanding and suggested we give support to teachers though, while good, would benefit from the skills and experience of their outstanding colleagues.

To enable this, BSK has embarked on something quite astonishing. We have trained 36 of our team as qualified school inspectors and will be raising that total to 60 by the end of September this year. No other school in the world will have as many professionals on its staff qualified to undertake this most important of duties.

These colleagues are able to observe classes, make sound judgements and liaise with teachers to offer advice and training opportunities for the benefit of our students and their own careers.

The second focus has been to improve further the facilities and infrastructure of the school. This has included:

- The introduction of the huge new playground and sports area that, in the tradition of BSK is named after an iconic British building, in this case, 'Wembley'
- The construction of 4 large new workshops for the teaching of Primary Design Technology
- The construction of 7 new classrooms as the home of Year 1
- The construction of 4 new classrooms as the base for Secondary History
- The construction of a further 4 classrooms as the base for Secondary Geography
- The expansion of our Computer Science facilities by the introduction of an additional laboratory
- The complete refurbishment of the Britannia Sixth Form Centre and the construction of new private study facilities
- The refurbishment of the Euston Arts Building and the introduction of an iMac Centre for Graphic Design, here graced by the visit of His Excellency Lawrence Silverman, the Ambassador of the United States of America
- The construction of a new Staff Marking Room and Training Centre
- A whole new look for the Lower Phase learning environment with the creation of a Georgian-styled street and the 'Wembley Way' underground station.

And in the pipeline there are a further 3 fully equipped science laboratories and 7 new Primary classrooms, as well as a new Staff Common Room.

So confident are we in the progress that has been made that BSK has taken the decision to do a quite astonishing thing. We have volunteered to be fully inspected again, by the UK Department of Education, in May of this year. That is two years before we are required by law to do so.

And what will the inspectors find?

Their journey will begin at The Sunshine Kindergarten, where our new Principal, Miss Heather Holsgrove and her team have introduced Parent Workshops, allowing them to experience the learning activities with their children.

In Reception, the key focus is on Phonics, the ability for students to identify sounds and link those sounds to the corresponding spellings. The teachers use a pioneering technique called 'Cued Articulation' to enable hand actions to mimic how we make sounds.

In Year 1, to stimulate engagement with a brand new topic called KAPOW, teachers and students dressed as superheroes as part of the entry hook into the subject.

In Year 2, new Head Teacher of the Lower Phase, Mr Mike O'Sullivan joined in with the key cross-curricular theme of the Great Fire of London where a variety of skills and techniques were used to bring History alive!

Moving to the Junior Phase and Year 3, the students created a most remarkable Egyptian Museum, filled with antiquities that they used to develop their leadership skills.

In Year 4, the cross-curricular approach continued, linking studies in science on 'Moving and Growing' with physical activities such as climbing and negotiating obstacle courses in unusual ways.

In Year 5, the creative and practical approach to learning championed by Head Teacher, Mr Mark Brisbane, included the technique of method acting to enable students to empathise with school-children's lives in Victorian times.

When students reach Year 6 at BSK, all of their lessons are taught by subject specialists.

In English, during Book Week, BSK students enjoyed spending time with students at TSK promoting a love of reading. A group of students also attended the Emirates Literature Festival in Dubai.

There has been a remarkable increase in the number of students achieving top grades A and A* in IGCSE Mathematics this year, up from 64% of candidates to a magnificent 84% of Year 11 students. Sixth Form students also had the opportunity to compete against teams of teachers at the annual Pi Day.

Our Middle Department Science team have introduced a new course with a focus on investigation and mathematical skills combined with enhanced technical language. Their 'Whizzes and Bangs' after-school club utilizes activities such as finger-print analysis, chromatography and the physics of parachutes to promote scientific investigation. New this year has been the introduction of astronomy with investment in new equipment and plans for GCSE Astronomy to enter the option system in due course.

Our Sixth Form Biologists conducted work on brain development in younger children using a series of stimuli. In these examples of depth perception, many students of a certain age said the spear was pointing at the elephant rather than the antelope; and that the man is drinking from the waterfall.

BSK is committed to the teaching of practical science with students conducting experiments to test the theories they learn. In Chemistry, our students Abdulaziz Hassan (AS Level) and Alorika Chakravorty (A Level), achieved the highest scores in Kuwait during the Edexcel examinations and have moved to the University of Manchester and Imperial College London, to continue their degree studies. Indeed, BSK is the only school in Kuwait to offer students the opportunity to take the new Core Practical Assessments at AS and A Level.

In Physics, 16 of our students took part in the Oxford University British Physics Olympiad, with Firas Diab gaining the Merit Award. The challenge involves a series of open-ended, problem solving questions applied to real-world issues and is highly-regarded by university admissions departments.

Since BSK introduced Computer Science, the demand from students to take advantage of the suite of Raspberry Pi computers has grown steadily. So much so, that 2017 saw the launch of the twice-weekly BSK Code Club where students learn to programme in Python 3. Learning to code has been identified by governments across the world as a key skill and is a major component of our STEM curriculum, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

The Islamic Studies Team has collaborated with their British colleagues to implement critical thinking into the student's learning environment.

In Arabic, the development of the teaching of phonics as the basis of language acquisition continues to embed, and peer-teaching is an integral part of the new approach to learning taking place in examination classes.

The Business Team have been working in collaboration with INJAZ, the young enterprise organisation. Students of Economics took part in a job shadowing programme with Gulf Bank, organised through INJAZ. The Share Trader Competition expanded with Year 10s Monica Di Deo and Gabriela Pickard making a virtual GBP27,893 profit on the London Stock Exchange. And in the Inter-House Enterprisers competition, students used laser-cutters and vacuum formers to produce phone accessories and other items for sale through their new companies.

In January, our Drama students went to Dubai to see a performance of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, 'Cats'. In February attended a workshop of the Young Shakespeare Company and their production of 'Macbeth' with BSK student Daniella Wakim joining the cast.

Last month, our Art and Design and Design Technology teams combined to produce a magnificent exhibition of student's work. Graced by their Excellencies the Ambassadors of Germany and Austria, this showcase was a stunning display of talent.

The iMac suite of 6 high-specification computers, allied with the latest version of the Adobe Creative suite has allowed students to move into the creation of stop-frame animation similar to Wallace and Gromit.

In Design Technology, Primary students are invited to attend the highly successful British School of Inventors and Designers while Secondary students experience a range of techniques including CAD / CAM design.

Not only has the Geography Team moved into a new suite of classrooms but the numbers taking the subject at IGCSE and AS level has risen significantly. Fieldwork has been expanded both locally within Kuwait and with the popular overseas trips to the Brecon Beacons in Wales.

The History Team are justifiably proud of their IGCSE students achieving a 100% pass rate at grades A*-C and even more proud that Shahd Abdelhameed gained the highest History score of any Cambridge board student in Kuwait. 2017 marks the centenary of the Russian Revolution and members of the History Club have been making preparations to mark this world-changing event.

Social Studies has been a developing platform for the study of the heritage, culture and traditions of Kuwait through modern technology. For example, Year 8 students have been creating their own websites in their study of the history of Islam, utilizing the Wix internet creator.

The Modern Languages Team continues to build on our relationship with the German Government with four students joining a German language camp in Oman in October, sponsored by the Goethe-Institute.

We are also delighted that the German Embassy in Kuwait has chosen BSK to help support its global 'Buddy Bear' charity initiative. You will have seen the Buddy Bear designed by our students in the entrance-way tonight. Our sincere thanks to His Excellency Karlfried Bergner and the German Cultural Attaché, Horst Blasinger, for their continued support of the school.

In French, BSK is working with the Institute Francais to prepare students for the French Government's DELF A1 and A2 examinations as well as preparing for the French Song Contest and French dictation competition.

BSK has also received the unprecedented support of the Spanish Government, with Ambassador's wife, Senora Carmen Vazquez, being a regular visitor to the school. BSK now offers five timetabled languages at examination level; English, Arabic, French, German and Spanish.

For 2017 the Physical Education Team have continued to dominate domestic and regional competitions, with the Primary teams took Gold in the KFSAC Year 5&6 football and Unihoc championships.

With four tournaments still undecided, the Secondary teams have already won five ISACK championships:

- Open Age Boys' Football
- Open Age Boys' 5-a-side Football
- Open Age Boys' Basketball
- Under-15 Boys' Basketball
- Open-Age Girls' Basketball

Whilst the BSME Games in Abu Dhabi yielded gold medals in both the Under 13 Girls' 800m and the Under 15 Girls' 800m.

BSK has the widest range of extra-curricular activities of any school in Kuwait. Led by Miss Lindsey Gilmour, and supported by older students, the annual CREST Awards gave our young scientists in Years 9 and 10 the opportunity to work independently on a range of experiment-based projects.

Our Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is offered at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels. This year, the Bronze team held their final expedition in Wadi Rum in Jordan, an area made famous in David Lean's epic movie, 'Lawrence of Arabia'. Meanwhile, the Silver team returned to Cyprus and the Gold team to Sri Lanka with our students working in local schools and experiencing life-changing relationships.

Our 2016 Model United Nations champions returned to the annual conference at Kuwait English School and received THREE best delegate awards for Lauren Lilley, Dylan Peacock and Ali Shamohammadi.

Team Kuwait competed at the 2016 World Schools Debating Championships held in Stuttgart, Germany. In 2017, the team will travel to Bali, Indonesia. Meanwhile BSK took four teams to the BSME Debating championship at St Christopher's School in Bahrain.

Once again, our students have performed in some outstanding theatrical productions. In December, the Secondary Production of 'Scrooge' played to sell-out audiences whilst, in February, the Junior Phase production of 'Pirates versus Mermaids' was a fantastical, musical journey for the young at heart.

Our musicians have had a most amazingly successful year that has included domination of the BSME Young Musicians of the Gulf Competition in Bahrain where:

- La Camerata, our ensemble of 8 violins accompanied on piano, won the 'Large Ensemble Award'
- Hai Wei Li, won the 'Bowed String Award'
- Hai Wei also won the 'Piano Award'
- The chief adjudicator announced Hai Wei as 'someone that all the judges wanted to hear again and whom was assured of a great future as a musician and performer.' In doing so, Hai Wei was awarded the overall title of 'Young Musician of the Gulf 2017'.

And, during March, the Festival of Music of four concerts took place culminating in an outstanding public performance at the 360 Mall to an enthralled audience.

And so it has been another outstanding year of innovation, progress and achievement. Our results in public examinations confirm this and form the basis on which our students make preparations to apply to the world's best universities.

At GCSE and IGCSE, in Year 11, our success rate for pass grades A*-C across all entries stands at 96%.

At AS Level, in Year 12, our success rate for pass grades is 95%.

And at our top level, Advanced Level, in Year 13, our students achieved a success rate of 98%.

Parents are a critical component in the partnership that provides the students with a platform for their studies and other activities. Parents provide the encouragement, the finances and the emotional support to tackle the many challenges of school life. They are the cooks, the taxi drivers, the private tutors, the audience and the editors for much of the work of the students.

Of course, for parents this is not a sacrifice but an honour to help their children on their way to success and independence.

As for BSK, our duty remains the same, to offer the people of Kuwait a school that compares with the best in the world in order for the students to maximum their potential and move on to the universities and courses of their dreams. For our continued inspiration we look to our founder and director, Madam Vera.

Graduates, as your school days come to a close, we hope that you will always look back on your time with fondness and hope that you stay in contact through the social media that you have all become so expert with.

You leave with our best wishes and hopes.

Thank you and goodnight.