



THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF KUWAIT

FESTIVAL OF ACHIEVEMENT 2016 PRINCIPAL'S SPEECH

Your Excellency, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Fahd Al-Salem Al-Sabah; 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.

Last month, my colleague, Adam Al-Saleh, and I were invited by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science to join a working party whose aim is to support the reform of schools in the Kuwaiti State sector.

In collaboration with the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals' Association and Boston University, the team attended a series of workshops, visited state education centres and schools as part of a fact-finding mission and to consider next steps.

We are honoured that the Kuwait Foundation has seen it fit to include a number of schools from the private sector to lend their expertise and know-how to the project. As the only British system school invited, BSK feels especially honoured.

Massachusetts was chosen, by the Kuwait Ministry of Education, from a small number of world-leading school systems that include also Singapore and Taiwan for the quality of educational provision.

We were delighted to find that the curriculum being followed by Massachusetts is remarkably similar to the National Curriculum of England even though it was constructed independently. The principles of active learning, problem-solving, formative assessment, broad-based curriculum and a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics are common.

Everyone involved in the project agreed that, at the heart of the educational process, there must be a vision for the kind of society and economy the state should aim for in the near future, perhaps in twenty, thirty or forty years' time.

Nearly forty years ago, Madam Vera Al-Mutawa had the vision to create a school that would be rounded in the breath of its curriculum; rigorous in its demands on the students and relevant to the kind of society and economy that would prevail in the 21st Century.

So that today, BSK is recognised nationally and internationally as a centre of educational excellence whose graduates move on to the best universities and to demanding and fulfilling careers in advanced sectors across a broad range of disciplines.

Now, throughout this presentation I will mention the word STEM quite often.

In educational jargon, STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. And STEM is the focus of most of the planning and educational research taking place in the world's leading school systems.

BSK, as we all know, offers the broadest curriculum of any school in Kuwait and we are justifiably proud of our achievements in other academic subjects; in the arts; in sport and in our huge extra-curricular programme. Before the end of this presentation I will report on achievements in those areas also but as a main theme, I will concentrate on STEM because these skills are vital

The learning journey starts at The Sunshine Kindergarten where the Early Years Foundation Stage focuses on discovery and working in teams. Active learning takes centre stage as our youngest students strive for independence and confidence, led by Principal Joanne Wild and her team.

In Reception, students have access to Mathematics Challenge areas where using resources such as Numicon, they can start to solve problems using a variety of techniques.

In Year 1 as throughout the Primary phase, students learn key skills in Design Technology and make a variety of products in specialist classrooms.

In Year 2, the learning journey has taken the students on an exciting adventure of discovery and investigation including the programming of robots to find the shortest distances between locations in the UK.

In Year 3, the creative curriculum utilises iPads across a wide variety of subjects with students applying their knowledge and understanding to solve problems.

In Year 4, the students have been using their iPads in their learning for nearly three years. The use of QR codes sends students to resources such as websites and videos which are suited to their personal learning needs. Of course, they also find time for the healthy lifestyles initiative with lots of innovative activities such as rock climbing.

And in Year 5, one stimulus for learning has been life in Victorian times. Thematic learning is a most useful approach. It requires students to think 'outside the box' and to consider a variety of approaches. Most importantly, it teaches the skill of empathy, placing oneself in someone else's shoes.

Outside the academic work of the Junior Department, the main production of 'Kids in Space' enthralled audiences in February. The students were treated to a fabulous display by the Band of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, as well as contributing to the annual 'Pink Week' charity drive for cancer research and a host of other exciting events.

The Primary phase held a series of excellent Sports Days at the Messilah Sports Ground and joined with students from the Secondary phase to celebrate the Festival of Music and the marvellous Art and Design Technology exhibitions in March.

At BSK, the Secondary phase and full specialist teaching commences in Year 6 and I'll take this opportunity to review a small selection of achievements in the broad range of specialist subjects on offer, once again starting with the STEM subjects.

In Mathematics, a record 72 students are studying AS and A-level in the Sixth Form with 11 studying Further Maths. The team held Pi day, nothing to do with apples, mince or meat and potato but instead a student versus staff competition in preparation for BSK defending, in April, its 2015 success when the team won the Gulf University for Science and Technology championship.

In Biology, as many of our students look toward degrees in medicine and related fields, the Sixth Form attended workshops of the Dasman Diabetes Institute including the structure, function, evolution and mapping of genomes and well as the structure, function and interactions of proteins.

In Chemistry, two of our students, Raghad Al Yousefi and Mridula Moorthiraj obtained the highest scores in Kuwait for A-level Chemistry. Nanotechnology, the manipulation of matter on an atomic, molecular and supramolecular scale, has caught the imagination of a large team of students and we were delighted that our Sixth Form attended the international conference held here in Kuwait.

In Physics, both Head Boy, Hussam El-Nashar, and Ahmed Azam, received merit certificates as part of the Advanced-level British Physics Olympiad organised by the University of Oxford.

At BSK, Science for students aged 10 to 13 is provided with its own laboratories and curriculum. The popularity of experimental science amongst these younger students is reflected in the large numbers taking part in competitions and the weekly 'Whizzes and Bangs' science club.

BSK is replacing the teaching of ICT with Computer Science in which students learn programming and, in many cases, build their own computers from kits provided by the Raspberry Pi foundation in the UK. To promote the new subject, two new Computer Science laboratories have been built and, following an inspection of facilities, the school is being licensed by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Britain's largest examinations authority to conduct Advanced-level Computer Science courses.

In Design Technology, emphasis has been given to students using advanced machines including laser cutters, metal and wood lathes, vacuum formers as well as traditional tools to acquire engineering skills and to manufacture products.

This combination of problem-solving Maths; practical sciences; computer programming and engineering prowess places BSK at the forefront of STEM education in Kuwait. The Robotics Club utilises the team building, investigative, problem-solving approach to learning at the heart of STEM.

But of course, as important as STEM subjects are, BSK prides itself on the broad curriculum it offers so as to appeal to the wide range of talents that are demonstrated by our fantastic students.

Communication is, of course, fundamental. Sir David Attenborough described humans as 'compulsive communicators' long before technology brought us smartphones. Most students at BSK take first-language English examinations and have, de facto, two first-languages. Poetry competitions, Scrabble club, Reading club and Book Week provide continuing stimulus throughout the year. A group of students have been enhancing their skills as news reporters through a BBC initiative and BSK became the first school in the country to take part with the video available on our website.

Entrepreneurship is critical to the success of any economy and our business studies and economics team continue to develop links independently with local businesses as well as through the INJAZ scheme. As well as share-trading competitions, students have been using their STEM skills to create products and then to market and sell them.

In Geography, fieldwork continues to be a vital component. The skills of team-building and problem-solving are vital in the gathering of data in the field. By taking part in fieldwork, new friendships are forged and mutual respect between students and teachers is enhanced. BSK is committed to the view that understanding should be based on scientific methods of evidence and reason. The geography fieldtrips to Wales have proven to be ideal as the basis on which to build these ideas.

One of the key skills in History is empathy, and those skills that were first developed in Year 5 are further enhanced by the study of history in the Secondary phase and in participation of the Model United Nations. We are very proud that our MUN team was awarded the top honour of 'Best Delegation' at the recent MUN championships held at Kuwait English School. This is the first time that BSK has won the event.

In Modern Languages, the continued support of the German government and the Goethe Institut provides rich life-experiences for our students. Not only did four of them experience a three-week all-expenses-paid scholarship in Dresden during the summer; but with visits to the school by award-winning story-teller Katharina Ritter and a language-camp in Oman, the German language is well-served at BSK. Of course, even more students take French and the Embassy of Spain has recently initiated classes in Spanish that are proving very popular.

The quality of students' work in Art and Design and in Design Technology was displayed at a superb exhibition last month in our Euston Gallery. From fine art to ceramics and from photography to graphic design; the skill demonstrated by students of all ages is astonishing. Returning to STEM, the range, invention and quality of articles produced is truly impressive.

Once again, our young musicians have astounded audiences throughout the region. At the Young Musicians of the Gulf competition in Bahrain Hai Wei Li, in Year 7, won the Piano section and our dectet, 'La Camerata' won the large ensemble section, making it a double-victory for BSK.

In December we were treated to an astounding production of 'Aladdin' where the quality of the acting impressed sell-out audiences. And only last week, the Middle Department production of 'Fantastic Mr Fox' gave experience to teams of student in backstage work and production as well as in acting.

And in Physical Education, it has been a year to remember. But it isn't just the number of championships won but also the manner in which they were won. Some of our teams remain undefeated throughout the entire season; over 800 took part in the Secondary Sports Day and sporting trips overseas included skiing in Switzerland. There are still three championships yet to be decided but at this point BSK teams are this year's:

- Champions of the Under 13 Boys' Football
- Champions of the Open Age Boys' Football
- Champions of the Under 15 Boys' Volleyball
- Champions of the Open Age Girls' Football
- Champions of the Under 13 Girls' Basketball
- Champions of the Under 15 Girls' Basketball
- Champions of the Open Age Girls' Basketball
- Champions of the Open Age Girls' Netball
- Champions of the Open Age Boys' Basketball

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is the world's leading youth achievement scheme.

- This year, the Bronze team of 53 students camped in Ras Al Khaimah, enjoying some rock climbing and high ropes as part of their adventure.
- The Silver team held their expedition on the Akamas Peninsula of Cyprus, testing their navigation skills.
- And The Gold team completed both their expedition and their residential service components in the Kandy region of Sri Lanka.

Charitable work is very important at BSK and students are involved in events throughout the year to raise money for local and international causes.

Of particular note this year was the message of thanks from the villagers of Tawal in Nepal whose crops, homes and school were destroyed by the earthquake in the Himalayas. Look carefully at this banner and you will read their thanks to BSK, among others, who provided the money to completely re-build the village and supply a year's worth of rice to every man, woman and child in order for them to get back on their feet.

All these amazing achievements would be hollow if success in the public examinations could not enable our students to gain entry into the world's leading universities. Of course, the achievement in public examinations at BSK is outstanding by any standard:

- At GCSE and IGCSE, our Year 11s achieved a pass rate of 95%
- At AS level, our Year 12 students achieved a pass rate of 91%
- And at A-level, our Year 13 students achieved a pass rate of 100% for the sixth consecutive year.

Now, it is always gratifying to know that the work you have dedicated your life to is recognised independently by experienced professionals. To maintain its status as a World Class, British School Overseas, a full inspection must take place every three years comprising of a team authorised by the United Kingdom Department for Education.

Three weeks ago, BSK welcomed a team of six inspectors including Miss Nicola Walsh from OfSTED, the United Kingdom Office for Standards in Education.

The report of the inspection team will be released in full on the DFE website for all to read, but the lead inspector has advised the school that it will contain the following judgements. Please understand that the highest possible rating is, "outstanding".

- The quality of the curriculum at BSK is judged to be OUTSTANDING
- The teaching and assessment is judged to be GOOD with MANY, MANY OUTSTANDING FEATURES
- The standards achieved by the students are judged to be HIGH with OUTSTANDING progress since the last inspection.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is OUTSTANDING
- The welfare, health and safety of the students is OUTSTANDING
- The suitability of the owner and the teachers is OUTSTANDING
- The premises and school accommodation are judged to be GOOD
- The provision of information for parents is OUTSTANDING
- The leadership and management of the school is OUTSTANDING

As a consequence of these outcomes, the inspection team will recommend to the Department of Education in the United Kingdom that BSK be re-accredited as a British School Overseas and that the final summative conclusion is that The British School of Kuwait is, in their words, "A very, very special school", judged to be OUTSTANDING.

For those that care for BSK and the work that it does, I urge them not to take it for granted. There are those that do not fully understand or appreciate what it takes to build a world-class school. 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 to the most prestigious universities and to the courses of their dreams.

So finally, let's return our thoughts to these outstanding students sitting up here tonight. How envious we are of you. You are young, smart and full of possibilities. The future is yours and we know that you are going to make us all very, very proud of you.

You leave BSK with our gratitude and our best wishes.

Goodnight.