

RADLEY

26 March 2024

Dear all,

It has been a remarkable few weeks. I begin to lose count of the number of times boys have secured significant success at a national level in a whole variety of things and I am delighted at what has been achieved. In the midst of that, however, it is important to reflect on what we are proud of and why; not for us, I hope, the pursuit of trophies for the sake of them.

Firstly, the balance matters. I love the fact that at the very moment that the Junior Colts XV were securing their 24-12 win over Northampton School for Boys to become national rugby champions, two boys were also winning their categories in the Oxford Classics Reading competition. I love the fact that alongside rugby, we have seen a guitar quartet, representing three different year groups, reaching a national chamber ensemble final, a team of Removes securing second place in the National Vex Robotics tournament, with the world championships in Dallas to come, and a team reaching the finals of the ESU Mace Debating competition.

I love the fact too that, unlike many schools, we see success in a range of sports: in addition to the rugby we have seen gold medal rowing success at 16.2 at Schools Head and 14.2 in the Scullery equivalent, the golf team reaching the Independent Schools' Matchplay Final, the J14 hockey side reaching a national final, numerous real tennis successes, and another triumph at Queen's in Rackets with the J15 doubles winning the title and the College finishing narrowly second overall in the Faber Cup (awarded to the best school over the annual singles and doubles competitions). It is an exhaustive list but the fact that it covers academic, sport and the arts is what matters: true balance.

Secondly, I am very proud of the fact that we have not achieved success at the expense of other things. One of the victorious Rackets Pair was declaiming in a local Shakespeare competition here at Radley the previous evening. The rugby squad, unlike some rivals, did not play extra matches to prepare for the final rounds but continued with rowing, hockey and football commitments throughout the term. The guitar quartet had to work hard – and often independently – to find time to rehearse. We want to take such success in our stride as part of what we do, not to be the be all and end all.

Thirdly, there is no doubt that the success is down to hard work. We are fortunate to have a huge number of talented boys but there is no substitute for hard work and I know just how many hours have gone into each of the above. That hard work, of course, is replicated and overseen by the staff involved, with many of them working well beyond the call of duty. I am very grateful to them.

Fourthly, I have really enjoyed the sense of boyish excitement and fun at the heart of the achievements. To hear a boy sitting next to me at dinner talking with infectious enthusiasm about the robotics tournament, trying (and failing, but admirably) to explain the complex rules to me was a delight. To watch the rugby team running over to their parents and their peers at the StoneX was to see joy unconfined by too much sense of image – they were just happy (though they did repeat it a lot of times!). And, in similar vein, it was wonderful to watch the soloists in our recent concerto concert – every bit as impressive as the achievements above – perform their pieces, accept the applause and turn to the conductor to say thank you . . . all with a boyish grin on their faces. It is so easy for success at an elite school level to be

accompanied by an air of pompous, institutional self-congratulation and entitlement. I am very glad there is little of that here.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is not just about the elite. I know that for every boy with the accolades, there are those who just missed out. There are those that worked as hard with perhaps less talent but with just as much sense of achievement. I know that is modelled by staff too: the music department celebrates the first halting effort at a concert; the sports staff celebrate the success of the lower teams just as much as the higher and all dons take as much pride in the boy who struggles to the B grade as those that 'walk' the A*. That is how it should be.

Amidst all the headlines, therefore, it is important to remember all the other things that have been going on. There have been two major drama productions - the Remove and 6.1 plays (*Where the World Ends* and *Our Country's Good* respectively) - with approximately thirty boys in each: great ensemble pieces. There have also been auditions for the College Musical – *Les Miserables* – in November and a successful inaugural 'Shakespeare Shorts' competition with local schools, with a Shell duologue achieving joint first place. As ever, the Lent Term saw the annual declamations competition, another example of an event which is as much about the participation rounds as the elite at the end; well done to all boys (and parents?!) who struggled through their piece as well as to the winners who treated us to a wonderful reprise evening of their performances.

In addition to the recent concerto concert (which also saw excellent performances from Orchestra, Chamber Choir and Choral Society), we have had the Battle of the Bands, the Gunn Cup (woodwind) and Guitar prizes. In sport, the football 1st XI has had their best season ever and in hockey, there were particularly good seasons for the 3rd XI, JC1 and M1 (all unbeaten in regular school fixtures). The Boat Club has had a tricky head season with the weather meaning river outings have been very limited. In that context, the Schools' Head performances were sound at all levels and we are confident we will be in a good place come the Summer.

On the academic side, I am delighted to have been able to present at today's assembly the inaugural prizes for the Serpentes Essay Prize: the brainchild of this year's academic prefects. Seventeen awards were made, representative of the breadth and quality of the work produced. Boys continue to shine in Languages, Science and Maths Olympiads; one Vth former is now in the final stages of possible team selection in the UK U18 national Maths team and a 6.1 is in the final nine for one of four places in an equivalent Languages team. Extraordinary. Eleven boys received offers from Cambridge and Oxford, including two prestigious organ scholarships (one of which also won the national School Organists Association competition).

Well done to those 6.1 who have been awarded honorary academic scholarships for their hard work and high levels of achievement. Eight boys were fortunate to have perhaps the most unusual trip of them all... to Iowa for the Republican Caucus. There was a highly successful Art trip to Florence and the Classicists left for Greece yesterday. As ever, we have had a huge array of distinguished speakers, with a particular highlight being the inaugural Rathbone Lecture by Danny Kruger MP. The more academic of the inter-social competitions saw L triumph at Chess, G in the Spens Trophy (general knowledge), K in the Junior Debating and G in the Senior equivalent. I am delighted to see the academic side of the College firing on all cylinders.

I wish all the best to those who will spend the break revising for exams; they know, I trust, what to do and how to do it. I encourage them to make sure the hours put in are genuine, focused hours: filling gaps, consolidating knowledge, practising questions and developing confidence. They need to return ready to make the very most of those final weeks of lessons.

I presume those exam candidates know that phones can be a distraction... we know, too, however, that it can be difficult to resist temptation. I hope all – and please help them – have developed some self-restraint; it would be good for them to set clear rules for the revision period (both at home and at school) and stick to them. It is a national debate, of course, and one that will continue; I look forward, for example, to reading the keenly awaited book by the eminent American psychologist Johnathan Haidt on *'The Anxious Generation'* . . . which is published today!

We continue the 'conversation' on all matters digital here at Radley too. Thank you to all those who completed a survey towards the end of last term and to boys who did the same recently. Some headline pointers from those surveys are listed below (neutrally . . . I do not necessarily agree!). We intend to hold some focus groups for boys and parents (online) early next term as well as a staff survey; that will coincide well with the arrival of the new Deputy Head (Pastoral), Ed James, who can then feed into the process. We will then write again before the end of the year with an updated policy approach.

'Headlines' from the surveys:

- 392 parents and 618 boys responded with a slight bias towards the younger years in both
- Ownership of a smart phone is almost universal among Radleians
- 79% of parents were happy with when they had given the first smart phone (78% at 12-14)
- Neither parents nor boys saw the use of devices to view pornography as an issue to worry about
- Parents' top concerns were 'concentration'; 'wasting time'; 'academic performance' and 'sleep'
- Boys had the same top four concerns
- Parents say 76% of them monitor phones in the holidays. Boys say 38% do
- Parents say the previous school's approach was 'strict' at an average 8.18; boys saw it as 7
- Parents say the Radley attitude to devices is 'balanced' at an average 5.74; boys saw it as 5.7
- 62% Parents do not think (or aren't sure) that they model good digital habits
- Parents felt we were doing a reasonable job in our aim of 'balance': the average mark was 3.72/5
- Parents underestimate the amount of time boys spend on their phone at home but not by much
- Consistency between Socials was a cause for complaint for both parents and boys
- Parents had concerns over the relaxation in rules between Shells to Removes
- Many boys (presumably Shells!) felt that the rules for Shells were too harsh
- Parents felt that weekend access to devices was perhaps too liberal
- Boys agreed that they used devices much more at the weekend
- 68% of parents were not comfortable with how much time boys spent using technology
- 53.1% boys thought they spent too much time on devices at home
- 45.3% boys thought they spent too much time on devices at school
- 50% boys felt devices did not prevent other activities; 36% thought 'sometimes'.
- Other themes from comments (parents / boys) included:
 - o there are particular challenges for international boys
 - o there should be more conversation at school about the impact of use
 - o there needs to be greater clarity on policy
 - o Radley is seen as in the 'middle of the pack' compared to other schools on this issue.

As with most surveys, the data prompts good questions rather than proving things. Maybe cynically, we are sceptical about some answers from the boys . . . only a very few boys admitted to ever viewing pornography and, apparently, only a few stay up late! But it has been a helpful exercise and will now feed into a broader discussion in the Summer Term. I have re-attached the 'Digital Dependency' document I sent last term; I hope there will be ongoing conversation in every home about it.

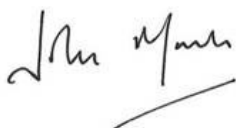
Please can I encourage two things as we look forward to next term. Having been to a superb Radley College Business Networking event (with a focus on AI) in London last week, I was reminded of the value

of such events, the Radley Connect hub and the network in general. Please engage with that; the more you do, the more all boys will benefit and not just during their time at Radley but beyond. Secondly, please do read the Bulletin on a weekly basis. For two reasons – it is the means by which all main notices that are College (rather than Social) in focus are communicated, and it is the best way of keeping up with the latest news.

You will find alongside this letter three other documents. In addition to the ‘Digital Dependency’ document, there is a ‘Strategic Update’ which gives an overview of where we think we are in relation to the goals we set ourselves in 2021. It will be the last such update; we are now starting the process of producing a new Strategic Plan to cover the years 2025-30, to be published in March 2025. Finally, there is a brief letter from the Chairman of Council with some thoughts about VAT; unsurprisingly, we can give little concrete information at this stage given the uncertainty of what is intended and when, but we hope it will be helpful in outlining our thoughts as they stand.

Of course, amidst all the successes of the term, we have as a College had to confront and deal with tragedy. I am humbled by the way in which colleagues have cared for boys and even more by the way in which boys have cared for each other. It is a testament to them and the community. We continue to have the family in our thoughts and prayers. It was a privilege – though a very sad one – to accompany two dozen boys and staff to the funeral; again, to see friends from other schools join together in their mourning to support each other and the family was moving, but uplifting.

As I write, my ankle hurts. Not badly, but a little. The reason is that I fell over walking out of the Barker Gym at the end of the inter-Social Ergo competition earlier in term. It was particularly embarrassing as when a boy in front of me tripped, I made a sarcastic comment about ‘watch out for the step’ and promptly fell as I was saying it, much more dramatically than him. As I lay on the floor with a ripped suit, a cut knee, a throbbing ankle and a wounded ego, three Radleians helped me up, expressed concern and wondered whether they needed to go for help. I think about myself as a teenager. I would have laughed. They were genuinely kind. In some ways, though in other ways clearly not, that was my highlight of the term.



John Moule

Warden

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Please also read:

[Strategic Update](#)

[A Letter from the Chair of Council](#)

[Digital Dependency: A Conversation](#)