



THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF KUWAIT

FESTIVAL OF ACHIEVEMENT 2015 PRINCIPAL'S SPEECH

Doctor Haitham Al Athari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education; Mr Abdullah Al-Basri, General Manager for the Public Administration for Private Education; Your Excellency Matthew Lodge; Her Majesty's Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the State of Kuwait; Your Excellencies; Honoured Guests; Mr Chairman; Mme Vera Al-Mutawa; Parents; Graduating students.

The academic year 2014-2015 has been another year to remember at BSK.

In Reception, investment into the outdoor space has enabled active learning to move forward so that students can investigate and explore their world. This scientific method is complemented by artistic expression so vividly revealed at the Little Artists Exhibition in May.

The emphasis on active learning takes a further step in Year 1 where iPads have been used for research, presentations and for communication with a fictional expert known as 'Mr Big Wig'.

The scientific minds of the children are engaged further in Year 2 where students explore materials and their properties, completing numerous investigations to establish the changing states of matter. For example, the elasticity of cheese when heated. Of course, all Primary students at BSK have iPads and have the opportunity to work in a fully resourced teaching kitchen.

Educational visits are very important to broaden the experience of the students. However, visits must link with the school's learning objectives if they are to be of any value. In Year 3, following a 'virtual' visit to the British Museum the students created their own 'Egyptian Museum' complete with River Nile.

In Year 4, the theme of active learning reinforces a critical skill in the study of History; the concept of empathy; that is putting yourself in someone else's situation. To develop the notion to its furthest, Year 4 students and teachers got 'into character' and took on the roles of rich and poor people of the Tudor period. For next year, the theme changes to the Romans and members of the teaching team have already been to Gladiator School in Rome to get into character, what is known as 'method acting'.

By Year 5, the final Primary year at BSK, the students have developed higher concepts of active learning. Maps used to be very two-dimensional but they have become three-dimensional in the hands of our students, creating topographic models of the Gulf region showing the relative altitudes of capitals and countries as well as distances between.

Whilst active learning is the key to the success of our students, it isn't the only focus. The Primary teams have been involved in a number of outstanding events through the year that enrich the curriculum. Highlights include Mother's Day, the Junior Department

Production of 'Eddie the Penguin', the Primary Sports Days and the National Day celebrations.

The Secondary phase, Year 6 to Year 13, is marked by specialist teaching in all aspects of the curriculum, but active learning and problem solving is still the focus of the teaching methodology.

The English team organised a visit by students to the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature in Dubai where students were able to talk to leading authors about their work and the process of writing books. Students from Reception to Year 8 competed in the BSME spoken poetry competition and, during Book Week, Costume Parade proved as popular as ever.

The Mathematics team moved to a new suite of purpose-built classrooms this year and the number of students taking A-level Further Mathematics grew dramatically. In addition to events to mark the achievements of Galileo, BSK teams competed in the Gulf University for Science and Technology Maths competition, gaining first and second places.

Investment in advanced technology has enabled students of Biology to produce genetically modified bacteria containing a protein found in a species of jellyfish to make them fluoresce under ultraviolet light. Another new piece of advanced equipment allows students to detect tiny amounts of DNA in the same technique used by forensic laboratories.

Secondary BSK students took part in the International Chemistry Olympiad and the Kuwait Oil Company's challenge event for students interested in the petrochemical industry. They also found time to demonstrate the dangers of fire working with Year 2 students on their 'Great Fire of London' project.

BSK also competed in the British Physics Olympiad with Head Boy Ethan Harradine awarded a certificate of merit.

Students from the Middle Department, Year 6 to Year 8, study science in new laboratories and held cross-curricular events with the Maths Team as well as starting their own, after school, 'Whizzes and Bangs' Science Club under the leadership of coordinator Mr James Thomson.

In a year that saw the release of 'The Imitation Game', an Oscar-winning movie chronicling the life of British mathematics genius Alan Turing, the father of computer science, BSK has invested heavily in UK-designed Raspberry Pi computer kits to enable students to work on exciting construction projects as part of the reintroduction of Computer Science into the curriculum.

Business Studies and Economics students have been gaining experience on aspects of pricing strategy, customer service and the use of social media in business. BSK was the first school accepted into the INJAZ young enterprise organisation. This year, INJAZ filmed a session at BSK showcasing the contribution they have made in preparing our students for work in the private sector; yet another example of the success of active learning.

Students of Art and Design, under the leadership of our new Coordinator, Mr Jonathan King, have engaged in a number of high-profile events with great success. The 'Kuwait is Beautiful and Green' art competition was the largest event this year with over 11,800

students entering, fifty of them from BSK. Three of our students won prizes in their age groups and Roseanne Ismail in Year 11 won the top prize, 'The Best of The Best' out of all 11,800 entrants. In the Landmark Art Olympiad, three more of our students came first in their age-groups. The Spring Exhibition opened by local artist Jalila Al Qattan was an ideal platform to display the incredible talents of our students.

The Spring Exhibition was also the vehicle to demonstrate the development of Design and Technology where investments in computer aided design, laser cutting and new lathes have been utilised to enable students to undertake complex projects from design to final manufacturing.

A selection of pieces from the exhibition is on display in the foyer tonight and we invite you to see for yourselves the quality of work after the graduation.

Active learning in Drama is an important part of the skill-set of all students. The ability to command a stage with confidence is important in many aspects of a person's life; from giving one's best at interviews; making business presentations; chairing meetings and even making speeches at graduation ceremonies, Drama is an essential component of your personal curriculum.

So far this year, Drama productions have included 'The Lion King', 'Eddie the Penguin', and 'The Twits' by Roald Dahl. The GCSE Drama students also prepared and performed 'Blood Brothers' for film and examination in March.

The Music Team have been as busy as ever. In November, sixteen students performed at the BSME Music Festival and a variety of ensembles and choirs performed at the British Ladies Seasonal Bazaar. Nine of our musicians competed at The Young Musicians of the Gulf competition in Bahrain with success for soloist Hai Wei Li. Our Music Festival Week comprised of four concerts culminating in a public performance at the 360 Mall. The look of astonishment of members of the public not familiar with the level of skill of our students told the whole story. This year 105 students entered for examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Active learning in Geography saw the return of fieldwork to discover the best sites in Kuwait for the development of a solar power station and, for the first time in BSK history, a Geography fieldtrip to Britain with 26 Year 9s and 10s visiting the Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales to learn a range of outdoor skills and collect first-hand data.

2014 marked 100 years since the start of the First World War. Led by Mr Ian Masters and the History Team but with contributions from many teams in Primary and Secondary, the school became the setting for a massive tribute that was breath-taking in its scope and attention to detail. A party of fifteen students visited battlefields at Verdun and the Somme in France prior to the commemorations of Armistice Day on 11 November and Commander Bernard Thompson of the British Military Mission gave an emotional speech at the opening of the tremendous exhibition and cenotaph.

BSK's links with Germany continue through partnership with the Goethe Institute and three of our students won all-expenses paid scholarships for summer courses in Germany. Another highlight was the visit to the school of Mr Horst Blansinger, the German Cultural Attaché who viewed a professionally produced movie on the theme of water conservation, starring BSK student actors. In the recent Goethe examinations, 83% of our students

gained passes at either merit or distinction, including those sitting at the highest level, equivalent to A Level.

The Physical Education teams in Primary and Secondary have certainly had a year to remember. CrossFit was added to the curriculum and has proven popular with both students and members of staff. In January, BSK hosted the BSME Under-13 Games with overseas entrants from Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia as well as six local schools. Over 300 students took part over three days of competition. Mr Calum Erskine's organisation, in particular, has been praised by teachers, students and parents from across the region.

The list of successes in PE competition, so far this year, includes:

- Gold and Silver for the Under 19 Girls Triathlon teams at the BSME Games
- Gold for the Under 19 Boys Triathlon team at the same event
- Champions of the BSME Under 15 Boys Basketball
- Champions of the Under 15 Boys 5-a-side Football
- Champions of the Under 15 Girls Football
- Champions of the Open Age Girls Basketball
- Champions of the Under 15 Boys Basketball
- Champions of the Open Age Girls Netball
- Overall Champions of the Boys Swimming Gala.

As you will be aware, BSK has the largest extracurricular programme of any school. The range of activities available to students in both Primary and Secondary is amazing.

The Model United Nations team performed outstandingly at the national event. Of the many awards, the 'Best Delegate' award was won by Jamil Summaq in our Year 12.

The Debating Teams took part in two overseas events. Last August, three of our students represented Team Kuwait in the World School Debating Championships in Bangkok. In November, six of our students competed in the BSME Tournament in Bahrain and this coming August, BSK will form the core of Team Kuwait for the World Schools Championships in Singapore. The last time the event was held in Singapore, Team Kuwait won the competition for English as a second language, becoming World Champions.

The Robotics Club appeals to our technology and engineering enthusiasts and new for this year will be the Astronomy Club.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International award is set at three standards, bronze, silver and gold. Students undergo weekly training in skills such as camp craft and navigation and then go on a series of treks in the deserts of Kuwait. They must also undertake a voluntary service in the wider community over a long period of time. Finally, they must take part in an overland expedition.

- This year, the Bronze team of 48 students trekked in Ras Al Khaimah and enjoyed some rock climbing and high ropes as part of their adventure.
- The Silver team of 21 students had a three-day hike in the Himalayas of Nepal and did some teaching at the Tawal school where our charity funding has enabled the building of new classrooms.

- The Gold team of 21 students had a four-day trek through the Western Ghats of India followed by a five-day residential project at the Cotelongo Special Education Needs School in Fort Kochi.

These experiences are life-affirming and serve to make students appreciate the fortunate lifestyles they lead here in Kuwait.

Our oldest students comprise the Sixth Form and include Year 12 and Year 13. In addition to their academic programme, it is important they gained other skills and experiences as part of a rounded, holistic education, prior to university.

As well as contributing to the smooth running of the school by working as duty prefects and guides during Parent Consultation days, the Sixth Form organise a number of major events including two for charity:

- Pink Tuesday takes place in November and raises awareness about Breast Cancer. A month of activities raised donations of 3,600 dinars for the Al Sidra Association for the Psychological Care of Cancer Patients in Kuwait.
- The Spring Carnival, in February, raised 2,475 dinars for the Teenage Cancer Trust, the British Liver Trust and a school in the Tawal district of Nepal, previously mentioned.

This particular Sixth Form has been very active and has held numerous other events including the new Socratic Society for presentations at the highest academic level.

In public examinations last summer, our Year 11 students achieved GCSE and IGCSE pass rates at 92%. Outstanding individuals included Alorika Chakravorty with nine A-star grades and Rawan Alhashemi with eight. Seven further students were each awarded A-star in seven subjects. Four students, Dawood Al-Awadh, Hussam El-Nashar, Leena Albader and Preeti Choudhary all passed ten subjects at either A-star or A grade.

In Year 12, at AS Level, the pass rate was 95%. Ali Khajah, Abbas Ali, Farah Abdelhameed, Hee Soo Yang, Mridula Moorthiraj and Ethan Harradine all achieved four A grades.

And In Year 13, at A Level, BSK students had a 100% pass rate for the fifth year in a row.

As a consequence, students from BSK have continued to be accepted at the finest universities in the world, including places at the 'Russell Group' of leading British research universities and their equivalents in the United States, the 'Ivy League'.

Since my speech at last year's Festival of Achievement, The British School of Kuwait has raised its profile on the world stage in two significant areas:

Firstly, in November, our founder and director, Mme Vera Al-Mutawa, was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth and received her award from Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, at a ceremony held at Buckingham Palace.

*Madam Vera MBE, you have touched the lives of thousands of people. Those of teachers, parents and many people in the wider community but **most of all**, you have touched the lives of thousands of students. By building BSK and continuing to invest your time, money*

and efforts into it, you have not just built the biggest and best British school in the world; you have created a world in which children have grown to become great human beings. They are the future. They will go on to do great things in the world and it is you that has enabled that to happen. The legacy is more than school buildings; you will remain in the actions, the hearts and the minds of thousands of people for generations to come. Congratulations on your award.

Secondly, you may be aware that BSK is a founding member of the British Schools in the Middle East, the BSME. Since its foundation in 1982 with just six members, it has grown to an organisation of nearly 200 members and associate schools. At a conference held in Hong Kong in November, BSK has now become a founding member of the Association of British Schools Overseas, a global grouping of schools of the highest quality inspected and accredited by the UK Department for Education directly and granted the right to hire young, ambitious, highly-skilled and newly qualified teachers straight from university.

As such, I was invited by the University of Reading in England to give four lectures on the theme of International School Education and I am delighted that three of their best new teachers will be joining BSK next year. Since then, I have received invitations from other universities to lecture on the same theme and I will do so during the new academic year.

So who knows, graduates, I may be speaking at your new university and embarrassing you there. You haven't escaped yet!

But for this evening let us consider your achievements and your futures. Your days at school are nearly at an end. It is a bittersweet moment. In the years to come you may reflect on your school days as the happiest of your lives.

As for your parents, how proud they must be to see you sitting up here.

How many times have they got you ready for school?

How many times have they helped you with your homework?

How many times have they driven you to events, friends and parties?

How many times have they visited Mr Hakim?

Don't worry, they enjoyed every minute of it, even if they grumbled!

But you are young, and the world is just opening up to you. Now is the time to look forwards at new challenges, new experiences and new friendships. That is what we want for you and I am sure you will make your school friends, your teachers and your parents very, very proud.

Our best wishes to you.

Goodnight.