



EST. 1967

RUNNYMEDE COLLEGE

Delight, Ornament, Ability

Ladies and gentlemen; welcome to our annual speech day and Prize Giving.

So, congratulations for being here: pupils because you have shown yourselves to be excellent and parents because you are providing the support without which excellence cannot thrive. In awarding you prizes, the school is making a public statement about the values it cherishes.

First and foremost we value and reward academic excellence. Excellence unlocks the freedom to choose a university, a country to study in and eventually a country to live and work.

Our moral obligation as a school is to stretch you to the full extent of your potential; we expect a lot of you because we take your potential seriously; you only get one opportunity to develop it and your parents have entrusted us with that sacred obligation.

Secondly we reward the qualities which you need to achieve excellence, first amongst which is determination.

As Runnymede pupils you have exceptional opportunities: the best teachers; brand new facilities; unstinting parental support. All in an English-speaking environment with international horizons where you live and breathe high aspirations. Nobody at Runnymede doubts they will go to a top university and, for the most part, they are right.

This privilege is nothing to be ashamed of nor does it need defending, provided we put it to work not only for ourselves but for our community.

A school committed to intellectual rigour must also be committed to intellectual freedom. The country we live in and love has in the last forty years gone from being a model of civilised and peaceful coexistence of people of widely differing views, to an alarming battle ground where profanity, insults and obscenity have become the norm on radio and television shows and, worst of all, in parliament.

At Runnymede we strive to rise above all that: pupils must learn to disagree, profoundly at times, without hating one another. They must be able to test their ideas, challenge assumptions and hear arguments they do not agree with. We must all be capable of thinking, arguing and be open to the possibility of changing our minds when faced with arguments more powerful than our own, or when presented with new, irrefutable evidence. This is the essence of the liberal habit of mind we foster at Runnymede College.

Our objective is to raise youngsters who are capable of standing their ground with intelligence, wit and vigour. They must leave Runnymede capable of navigating woke policing of speech and fashionable orthodoxies; to resist the pressures to narrow permissible debate to what is politically correct and the temptation to confuse disagreement with enmity. In this new world, I beseech young people to remember that the extremist answers are seldom answers at all but temptations offering the false comfort of blame.



Runnymedians must leave knowing how to think, argue and change their mind; they must leave educated, not indoctrinated.

And very importantly, they must understand there is no right not to be offended.

Runnymede is not only an institution; it remains a family business. More than any other business a school is built on trust; the trust of families. Family is the cornerstone of society and family is the cornerstone of Runnymede College: our family and your families.

For almost six decades, the school has been shaped by continuity of affection, memory, duty and personal commitment. We have not regarded it so much as a possession but as a responsibility. With my family now firmly into its third generation As custodians of the Runnymede flame, I can say no ownership structure can easily replicate the affection, memory, loyalty and responsibility that comes from a family's long commitment to a school.

The massive acquisition of English-speaking schools by private equity groups and the turmoil caused in UK by the change in the tax status of independent schools has generated a lot of interest in the ownership structures of private schools.

In the UK the withdrawal of tax privileges has put many schools in a very difficult position; tragically, schools are closing and the survival of some of them beyond a few years is uncertain. It has also raised questions as to the wisdom of schools investing lavish amounts of money in extravagant sports facilities which are perhaps not essential for the provision of first class education. After all, the soul of a school lies in its teachers, its standards, its pupils, its families and its values.

At Runnymede we have learned a simple truth: high standards are not delivered by sports halls, stadia or fashionable technology. They are won through reading, writing, revision, practice and concentration. Screens, addictive by design, were weakening those habits and standards were slipping; so we removed iPads in Prep School. That is what I mean when I say one must be capable of changing one's mind when faced with new, irrefutable evidence.

In a recent article in The Times in which Runnymede was mentioned, someone speaking for the largest private equity group operating in Spain rhetorically asked "What is better, a small family-run hotel or a chain of high-class hotels"?

I think no comment is required.

Although they are not here today because they have their own prize giving ceremony in a few weeks, I want to wish the graduating, the class of 2026, the very best for the future and to thank them for having done us so proud.

Earlier this year a representative of Oxford University told us we have been the school which sends the largest number of pupils to Oxford in Spain. This year there are four going to Oxford. Although final decisions have yet to be made, we have 11 offers from Imperial, seven from LSE, 25 from UCL, Bath and 23 from St Andrews. In the US we have pupils going to Stanford, Yale, Columbia, UPenn, Northwestern, Brown, NYU and UCLA.

Before I hand over to my brother, I want to repeat a message HM Queen Letizia has been delivering on television with the firmness and finality few are capable of: **Fumar mata**. A number of you smoke and vape. I know because you do it in the bathrooms at school; some of you get caught, the majority don't. Tragically, some of you are probably already addicted. Stop now.



It is my pleasure to introduce our distinguished guest of this year: my brother Dr Charles Powell.

Charles was educated at Runnymede and Oxford, where he obtained his BA and DPhil. Subsequently he was a tutor, Fellow and Lecturer at Oxford. He has also been a visiting professor at the Hebrew university of Jerusalem and the Catholic University of Portugal.

For 24 years he has been director of Real Instituto Elcano, Spain's leading think tank.

He has published seven books; most recently "El Rey Juan Carlos y la proyección exterior de España."

He holds honours from Italy, England, Rumania, Poland and Spain.

Most importantly, when at Runnymede he was in Keynes.