

Quakers in Yorkshire

The Mount School presentation 11 October 2025

Good morning, it is a pleasure to be here. For those of you that I have not had the chance to meet properly yet, my name is Anna Wilby and I am the new Head at The Mount School. Having started in January this year I would like to note my thanks to Jo Goudriaan for her term as acting Co-Principal in the autumn term of 2024/25. No mean feat in the first term of your Deputy Head job.

This last academic year saw a clear reaffirming of our Quaker values allowing our pupils to engage more fully with our ethos and I'm pleased to be able to outline some examples of this in practice. The academic year started with a whole senior school focus on peace with our induction day seeing dedicated activities and tutor sessions. Fuelled by the complex geopolitical landscape, we felt it necessary to give the girls in senior school a channel for their views and to express their desire for peace. The resulting display of peace doves in tramlines (our main corridor) serves as an ongoing reminder. We have also been working with the girls to encourage their understanding of Quaker worship and gave guidance early in the year as to how to approach our silent meetings every Monday.

Having completed their Quaker leadership training alongside Bootham and Ackworth pupils our College Leadership Team led an excellent Quaker meeting in the spring term to discuss the school's ongoing use of the social media platform X – following some excellent verbal contributions the pupils recommended that we cease posting on X (in line with the worldwide move away from X by Quaker organisations). As a school we agreed and no longer use X as a social media platform.

Our pupils from Reception to Year 6 have a short Quaker meeting each day at the start of the afternoon with Year 6 pupils adopting the roles of Quaker elders. We have found that this has greatly aided the return to learning in the afternoon lessons.

Academically we had a successful year with more focus on the use of data to ensure progression. Having proudly come into the year with the best A level results in York we knew that we were unlikely to maintain that position this year however we were delighted with what the cohort achieved and even more so of their success in attaining their chosen university places. Of the girls who applied to university only one had to go through the clearing process – and she was successful in getting into a suitable course. Our GCSE pupils achieved a value added of .4 which was very pleasing and we had some exceptional individual performances. As we work to ensure that our subject offerings for exam classes are varied and diverse, we have been pleased to be able to appoint an experienced and talented teacher of Business and Economics to teach both GCSE and A level from this academic year.

Our Performing and Creative Arts have continued to thrive over the year with a wonderful production of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* in the Spring term along with an exceptional Dance Showcase. Our Advanced Dance group have had a very successful year and made the national finals of the Great Big Dance Off having been the runner up in the Regional Heats. Our dance provision remains a strong recruitment tool with girls coming to us in part for our excellence in dance. Our music department continues to be a jewel in the crown. Numerous school

events are enhanced by the addition of high-quality music including our Christmas Meeting, Open Days and our Foundation Meeting. Regular Choc-lunch informal concerts allow our pupils to hone their performing skills and allow for even more successful large-scale concerts such as the Faure Requiem earlier this year. Our Art department is truly exceptional and have continued their consistently high results, achieving 100% A* and As in A level Fine Art and Textiles.

Our sporting provision is engaging and varied under the leadership of a new Director of Sport, supported by a specialist in the Prep area of the school who brings much expertise in football. Our pupils enjoy fixtures in football, netball, tennis, swimming, gymnastics, badminton, athletics and rounders. On a commercial front, we were pleased to go into partnership with the Tom Dean Swim School last year who base their classes at The Mount and benefit our local community.

There is no doubt that all schools need a very keen eye on the wellbeing of their pupils post covid and it is something that we, as with Bootham, take very seriously. While we are known for being a small and nurturing environment, we need to adapt to changing societal pressures and ensure that our pastoral teams are alert to what being a teenager is like in the shifting landscape. We have evolved our pastoral systems and structure to best support our pupils, allowing for mentors who guide, alongside the tutors, both academically and pastorally. For us, as an all-girls senior school, there is a need to be mindful of the research around girls' education which, while showing advantages academically, also point to potential increases in anxiety regarding academic performance. It is important, therefore, that our systems pick up when pupils might be putting too much pressure on themselves in order to support them most effectively. What is certain is that a holistic view of wellbeing is necessary, it will never be enough to simply rely on a pastoral team to support pupils' wellbeing, what matters is allowing the pupils to pursue their interests and passions and feel a strong sense of belonging. Having thriving artistic and sporting programmes, as already outlined, is just as important for the promotion of wellbeing as in their own right.

It would not be right to speak of last academic year without mention of the addition of VAT, the loss of Business rate Relief and in inflation of national insurance which came in with the new government. As a school we raised our fees by 15% in January this year, therefore absorbing 5% of the VAT at what was already a challenging time. Pupil recruitment has seen a dip in our Year 7 intake this academic year although this is countered by a larger than average Year 6 and 8. Year 8 we have split into two classes for the first time in 12 years. We have fewer full boarders this year than last with flexi boarding becoming a more appealing option. Overall, our numbers have remained reasonably consistent, only three pupils fewer now than when I started in January. I am heartened that this stability is in contrast to the figures being presented by the independent schools council.

It would also not be right to talk of last year without mentioning the extremely generous donation from Christine Johnson which has reinstated the Stacey Sisters Bursary award at both our schools. This now supports a pupil in our Year 7 and another in our College 1. It was sad that Christine passed away in the summer before seeing the first two pupils at The Mount to be supported by her generosity begin their studies however, it was inspiring at Christine's funeral to hear of the fondness that both our schools hold in the family memory. Our support

of pupils in need is not limited to the Stacey Sister's Bursary and we are currently fully supporting three Ukrainian pupils.

Last academic year was one of significant senior personnel change for the Mount which saw the (coincidental) departure of a Principal, and Chair of Committee and the arrival of a Head (with two newly promoted Deputies) and a new Chair. This has come with it new ideas and direction all alongside the promotion of the history and values that make The Mount unique.

Looking to this academic year we have a number of exciting developments. We have renamed and reinvigorated our primary age provision. To recognise our dual purpose as our own feeder school for girls and, for the boys, a school which prepares them for Year 7 entry at other schools we have renamed as The Mount Prep School. This goes hand in hand with rejuvenated spaces and redecorated classrooms. Following a staffing restructure last year, we have a staffing model based on full time teachers to allow for the development of meaningful relationships between staff and parents along with consistency for the children throughout the day. There is an energy and excitement amongst our Prep School staff as they work hard to ensure our pupils are making academic progress and developing a love for learning.

In College we have launched a new programme entitled 'Ignite'. This is designed to develop in our sixth formers the skills they need to be future ready, both for university and beyond. By completing an EPQ, a life and Ethics course, additional short courses, sporting and artistic endeavours and appropriate charitable service alongside their A levels girls can work towards the Ignite Head's Award. We view it important to reward efforts and work beyond formal lessons as we encourage our girls' holistic development.

In terms of campus development, we are in the process of building a new dance studio. This new facility will be a wonderful bespoke addition and further cement our place as a centre for dance in York. It will also serve as a point of contact with our community, both as a space for use and as the home of the Patricia Veale School of Dance. Following the sale (completion coming soon) of an underutilised and difficult to maintain building we are investing in a new nursery facility and lowering our youngest age for intake to 2-year-olds. Significantly expanding our nursery offering allows us to become a valuable resource for local families. Our new nursery will be brought into the main area of the school with direct access for parents from our carpark. This major development is key to our ongoing business strategy as we look to navigate the difficult financial climate.

In conclusion, The Mount continues its development to be the best version of itself. Renewed focus on academic progress and proactive pastoral care is recognised and valued by parents. Our position as an all-girls senior school is a key strength. This, along with our valued Quaker ethos, is our unique selling point as the girls' education landscape shifts around us, especially in the light of the sad closure of Queen Margaret's and the decision from Harrogate Ladies College to become coeducational. In addition to our education strategy, our attention is firmly on enhancing our commercial standing. There is no doubt that, financially, times are challenging however we are optimistic that our developments will ensure our extended future. This year we have marked our 240th year – here is to another 240!