**26th June 2020**

**Upper School Prize Day Speech**

Good afternoon and welcome to our Upper School Prize Giving Ceremony. We have much to celebrate and we will do so in a moment. But, before I come onto your successes, I would like to reflect on the past year.

As always, life at St Mary’s is extremely busy and filled to the rafters with opportunities. A St Mary’s girl truly lives the St Mary’s way and follows the four Rs – both in and out of the classroom. Over the course of the past few months, this really has been put into practice during these difficult times.

The girls at St Mary’s have so many wonderful opportunities and this has continued across this year. Music and drama are always an integral part of life at St Mary’s and Mrs. Day has spent the last nineteen years bringing so many wonderful ideas and events to the girls at St Mary’s. Over this time, many children have flourished under her guidance and completed countless concerts, performances, music exams and drama performances.

I cannot thank Mrs. Day enough for all of her hard work and dedication. She will be sorely missed, but we wish her well in her new adventures in Cornwall.

Over the course of this term, Mrs Day has worked endlessly with staff and the Year 6 girls to ensure that they still put The Lion King on. As the saying goes, “The Show Must Go On.” However, in this case, it will be “The Movie Will Go On”. Please join me in thanking Mrs Day. You are amazing. We are going to miss you. Please come back and visit us very soon.

Sport has continued to be ever so important here at St Mary’s and I would like to thank Mr Halsall and Mr Richardson for continuing with all the excellent sporting activities and clubs that you have organised across the year. I’d also like to thank you for running the Sports Days to ensure that all children were able to participate and I look forward to announcing the winner of the Sports Cup shortly.

I cannot thank Miss Fehmi enough for all of her hard work and dedication to Art and Design at St Mary’s. Miss Fehmi combines the more traditional methods of art with some amazing new technologies. Her talent and passion clearly rub off on the children. Thank you for everything you have done this year.

As you know, every week at assembly, I read the children a story. At the beginning of the year, I chose a book that supported our theme for the year, ‘Taps, Toilets and Trash.’ The book itself was called The Water Princess and it tells the story of a young girl who has no access to water in her village and has to walk many hours a day to collect water.

As she is having to do this on a daily basis, she has no access to education. I would like to read you a few pages now. This is at the end of the day, just before Princess Gigi goes to sleep.

Maman brings one last cup she has saved just for me.

“Drink, my princess. Sleep, my princess. Tomorrow we journey again.”

“Maman”, I say as I close my eyes.

“Why is the water so far? Why is the water not clear? Where is our Water?”

“Sleep”, she says.

“Dream”, she says.

“Someday you will find a way, my princess. Someday.”

I am Princess Gie Gie. My Kingdom? The African sky. The dusty earth.

And, someday, the flowing, cool, crystal-clear water. Someday….

This story has inspired us to raise funds to support communities less fortunate than ourselves. As a school, we have raised enough money to buy a well for a community and provide that flowing, cool, crystal-clear water that Princess Gie Gie so wished for. My thanks to all the girls, boys and parents at St. Mary’s who have supported our efforts in ensuring that as many children as possible are provided with this basic need.

And now, I’d like to move onto the Year 6 girls. I am delighted that you have all gained places at the most remarkable senior schools. Schools that will help you to continue to thrive and to flourish and to grow into incredible young ladies. However, before you embark on this next path, I’d like to take some time to reflect on your journey at St Mary’s. A journey you may have started when you were in Pre-Nursery, or joined us as recently as this academic year.

During your time at St Mary’s, you’ve learned so many skills both in and out of the classroom. In the classroom, you’ve learned to be passionate about books, to have a desire to solve mathematical problems, to be scientifically curious and to explore the world around you.

I believe that more importantly, however, outside of the classroom, you have learned to engage with others and discuss problems amongst your peers. You are young ladies with a desire to help others and this is seen throughout the year. I am so proud of your empathy and your capacity to think about the needs of those around you.

As a year group, you will be truly remembered for all of your fundraising efforts over this year. At Christmas, you hosted a party for members of Age UK, Camden. I did not believe I could have been more proud of you at that time. The visitors that came to the school were overwhelmed by your generosity, your kindness and your beautiful singing.

However, you continued to astound me with your kindness and thoughtfulness. It was a day back in January, when two members of Year 6 came to me to ask if we could support the people and animals of Australia during the horrendous bushfires. The next day, the girls raised over £2000 to send to the Australian Red Cross. Not only did you think of others, but you inspired other members of the School community.

A day later, a girl from Year 1 brought me a card to send with the donations, which simply said, “Please come to London. We will take care of you.” I think that truly sums up a St Mary’s girl.

Each and every one of you is special and possesses wonderful gifts to share and to shape the world around you. You are a unique set of girls who will be very much missed, but it is time for you to start the next part of your journey. Remember that every step forward makes you into the person you are. Continue to be kind and loving of others because that’s what makes you truly fabulous.

Congratulations, Year 6, and all there is left for me to say is well done.