

## **Sam Jukes-Adams, KASS Chair of Council**

### **KASS AGM 2024: Report**

In 1897, the King Alfred School Society was formed to provide a new model of education and to influence the educational landscape. Reacting to the selective and exam-focused Victorian school system, one year later, the founders established the King Alfred School whose purpose was to educate the whole child. Learning would take place in a non-selective, co-educational setting, in which staff would work collaboratively with pupils using teaching based on the latest scientific methods, in an environment free from unnecessary pressures.

We marked our 125 anniversary celebrations in June 2023 and there was much merriment on the Field as Old Alfredians, in their hundreds, flocked back to their former educational home, mingling with current families and students, reminiscing about their days and how things have changed yet feel just the same.

It's heartwarming to know that as time marches on and developments occur at KAS, the School maintains its magical feeling. That slightly intangible thing that KAS does for students, realised in the main once they leave the gates and start their lives in the wider adult world - their confidence, their interest and their intellectual curiosity in the material of life.

This past year has felt like the first clear period post the pandemic and, with an excellent inspection report under the school's belt from Spring 2022, there has been the opportunity to feel more settled and at ease.

For this year's exams, however, the government stipulated 'back to normal grading' for GCSEs and A levels which felt harsh for a cohort still impacted by the pandemic. GCSEs were slightly below our historical averages, although value-added showed students made progress in line with expectations. A level results meanwhile were the strongest in the School's history under 'normal' exam conditions, and progression routes to university and other courses were exceptional.

This year has seen us continue to innovate on the education front. The 6-8 curriculum is in its third year, reflecting and modifying as cohorts join; a very KAS-like experience, adapting to the inhabitants each year. 9-11 progresses and this year saw the addition of the KAS Literature School Directed Course (SDC), mixing contemporary and old texts, voices from all parts of British culture, the combination of assessment via essays, vivas, presentations and exams makes this new addition a superbly rounded course for Year 10 and 11 students. Alongside this, the Global Challenges SDC is now in its second year. There has been much work to establish the currency of these courses in the educational community, and we will continue to build our offer to provide teenage students broad and interesting subjects to study alongside their GCSE choices.

A key pillar of the Society's founding aims as a charity was to the commitment of widening access to a King Alfred Education beyond those who are able to afford fees. In the School's current strategy, this is expressed as our 'impact on the world,' and takes the form of the direct funding of bursary places and hardship support as well as our undertaking to share our educational research and practice across the broader educational community.

Our current profile in the national educational debate is strong. This year, we will be a lead partner for a conference on the future direction for Education at Manchester University and we also now feature in reports on educational reform and in particular the Lords' report on 11-16 Education. This has been a long-standing motivation of the founding society and it is exciting to see it happening with the prospect of a new Government on the horizon.

It is Council's role as School governors to set strategic direction and oversee the governance, finance and educational delivery of the School. As a governing body we too must pay attention to our own governance and this year we are undergoing a supported self-review. Reflection is a useful tool, and this process will set us up well for the next phase of Council's life.

School said a sad goodbye to Victoria Heeley and welcomed in Caroline Korniczky. She could not have joined the school at a more crucial time as we, like many other fee-paying independent schools, work towards anticipating a new Labour government and the introduction of VAT on school fees and the removal of business rates exemption based on our charitable status. We will have much strategic thinking and planning to do over this next period in order to work out how to best navigate this new challenge.

The work of the Alumni and Development team continues to grow and bear fruit, and the OAs are particularly enjoying a new addition to their community in the form of KASConnected, our own professional networking platform.

With the appointment of a Director of Communications we are also in the process of introducing a School portal, fit for the 21st century, to aid communication to all parts of the School community. These two departments will be crucial to the realisation of the School's masterplan work.

The School's understanding and work on Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) continues to grow, with parent, student and staff forums in place. It is clear that the community as a whole wants to play a positive role in this area as we work towards growing a culture that more accurately reflects the city and world in which we live.

Financially, the School has ended the year well. The challenges of the current economic climate and the potential impact of VAT on school fees mean that most independent schools will be working incredibly hard to maintain themselves. We feel very fortunate that the interest and applications to join KAS grow year on year and we are able to feel confident about keeping our School full of fun-loving, bright and independent-learning students.

This AGM heralds our annual retirement from and election to Council - this year we say thank you and farewell to Christian Schmidt, Robert Dye and Annabel Cody. Words cannot really say how grateful we are to our outgoing chair Annabel for her 9 year tenure, in which she steered much strategic change, not least the establishment of Development and Comms, educational progress with Lower School, 6-8 and 9-11, and the masterplan. The legacy of her tenure will live on for many years to come. Robert Dye as our co-opted governor to G&B and the Masterplan, brought his architect thoughtfulness and expertise to this work. Christian Schmidt supported the school with work on organisational structure and appraisal. We welcomed in Jo Tang, Lara McCann, Nick Harper and Sophia Senroy. A huge thank you to all the Council members for their continued commitment and dedication to their governor roles and work.

As we look towards some big changes on the horizon, we shall be focusing on what we as a School can do to adapt, thrive and prosper. We will only achieve that with the hugely talented Head, SLT team, teaching and support staff. From Ruth in KASBucks to Robert our Head, their commitment and contribution towards the school and its whole community is outstanding, and for which, we give thanks.

Thank you.

SAM JUKES-ADAMS

Chair of King Alfred School Council