

WESTFIELD SCHOOL
PRIZE GIVING SPEECH
BY TANVEER MAHTAB-AHMED

Thursday 30th June 2022

Good evening students, parents, teachers and governors.

It is my honour and privilege to be a part of your special ceremony this evening.

As a former Westfield pupil I remember how momentous this evening is – the culmination and recognition of everyone’s hard work, sacrifices and dedication – not just of the students but also of the amazing teachers and parents. The old African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child”, I believe the same can be said for education.

I attended Westfield school with my 4 older sisters, and I think I’m correct in thinking it has been the only time in Westfield’s history where 5 sisters have attended the school at the same time! Mr Walker – do we still hold that record?! Fantastic!

Tonight is also one of those rare periods when you have time to reflect, to dream and to plan. Many of you will be entering university or higher education soon, some a new job, apprenticeship or a ‘year out’ to travel or volunteer. Whatever your next step is you will probably be feeling a range of emotions – excitement, apprehension, enthusiasm or uncertainty. I know this is exactly how I felt when I was sitting right where you are now - and to tell you the truth it is still how I often feel at times now whenever I reach a crossroad in life.

No matter how difficult or overwhelming these crossroads may be, it is crucial to remember that we need to be grateful for these crossroads – because these are opportunities and we have options - something which is denied to millions around the world today.

I want to use my time with you today to speak about my journey and what I have learnt working with multinational organisations, leading departments and managing teams.

I am proud to say that my time at Westfield School prepared me for the real world out there! The teachers were extremely supportive and I’ll forever remember them. After 3 years studying Accounting at Northumbria University, I worked at Stokoe Rodger - an accountancy practice in Gateshead & Hexham for 6 years. Whilst working full time I studied towards the ACCA professional accountancy qualification.

Shortly after qualifying as a Chartered Accountant, I decided it's time for me to start the next chapter of my life and settle down with my partner. Married life led me to London but even though I knew I was going to miss being a Geordie, I wasn't complaining as the career prospects were vast in the City! I was lucky enough to have secured a job before relocating down south, spending 6 years at TMF, a global financial services company where I was heading up the UK Accounting and Tax department across multiple offices.

I have a daughter, Kamilah, she's now almost 3. Being a full time working mother is my toughest and most challenging position yet! However it is definitely by far, the most rewarding!

A year later, my role at TMF got made redundant due to internal restructuring of the operating model. It was a huge blow at the time but I can now say that it was the best thing that happened to me because it led me to take up an exciting opportunity as an Associate Partner at Haines Watts, a Top 15 Accounting firm in the UK.

The reality is that no matter how much we plan and prepare, how much we sweat and sacrifice, our path may not be smooth and that is fine and that is normal – nothing is guaranteed in life but remember that within every obstacle there is an opportunity to grow and improve ourselves. Embrace these challenges and be grateful for them. A positive energy will always attract a positive outcome. Each challenge will give you more strength, wisdom and character.

My sisters, who all attended Westfield School have experienced their own journeys and professional successes. My eldest sister is a Barrister in London, two are dentists with their own dental practices in Manchester and one decided to stay local and is the Lead Consultant for Breast Oncology at Northern Centre for Cancer Care at Freeman Hospital.

You can see from our choice of career paths we all have a passion for helping people and/or businesses in my case. We understand how tough it can be to choose a career path and how competitive and challenging it can be and so we had a vision of creating a platform where we could inspire, guide and support students from all backgrounds to achieve professional success. This is why last year we founded 5 Diamonds Mentorship – an organisation providing students with career guidance, work experience, mentoring and networking.

For students interested in pursuing an accountancy related career, I am hosting an Accountancy Workshop next month. The day involves providing first hand insight into the industry, discussing different routes to accountancy, students will have the chance to hear from various accounting professionals on their role, we provide tips on CVs, covering letters for work experience and some practical exercises to get a feel of what a typical day in the life of an accountant involves. Ongoing mentoring and work experience support is also provided. Please feel free to reach out if interested or want to find out more.

Finally my last piece of advice is - pay attention to the things you are naturally drawn to in life. They are often connected to your path, passion, and purpose in life. Have the courage to follow them. Step out of your comfort zone and make a difference.

I wish you all the very best with whatever you go on to do. And I look forward to seeing the difference you will make.

One thing for sure is that you are all worthy prize winners.

Good luck and thank you for having me.