

## **The meaning and purpose of taking responsible risks**

The audition for this year's musical, *Annie*, is well underway this week and I was delighted to see 38 pupils from Year 7 to Year 12 taking the courage to audition for a role from singing and dancing to crew and tech work. With this in mind, it made me reflect on the success of the *Wizard of Oz* from last year, where four friends set off along the Yellow Brick Road in search of particular things they perceive to be lacking. The Tin Man wishes for a ticking heart in order to love; the Straw Man wishes for a brain in order to be intelligent; Dorothy, an orphan, wants to find the home where she will belong, and the Lion yearns to gain genuine courage.

The musical last year was an incredible feast for the senses, filled with boundless energy and pleasure. We experienced a whirlwind of imagination and wonder, and every aspect of the performance was a testament to the talent and unwavering dedication of the musicians, cast and crew, expertly steered and directed by Mr Nathan and Mrs Marriott.

As I reflected on the luminous performance, I could not help but appreciate the underlying message of *The Wizard of Oz*. All believe that the Wizard of Oz will give them everything they dream of and so they embark on a symbolic journey along the Yellow Brick Road, with sanguine hopes that the wizard would fulfil their dreams. However, the Wizard turns out to be a fraud and the four friends are deeply disappointed until they realise they have in fact gained everything for which they had hoped.

Through a journey beset by challenges the Tin Man has become the best and most loving of friends with a true heart; the Straw Man has developed a brain for problem solving; Dorothy has recognised that there is 'no place like home' and it is back in Kansas with her loving family; and of course, the Lion has proven that he has real courage through defending his friends and triumphing over his fear. All four characters have been driven by an insatiable curiosity for marginal gains, together with the intellectual courage to challenge their most cherished assumptions.

At its core, it is a story about finding the courage to accept our own identities, being true to ourselves, and having the sense to let others do the same. In the midst of our fast-paced lives in the 21st century, it serves as a reminder that what truly matters often lies right before us: compassion, acceptance, and a sense of wonder.

Those who have courage are not without fear but as Nelson Mandela said those who are able to 'triumph over it'. Hopefully few of us will be required to summon the kind of courage needed to overcome serious and dangerous situations but there will be times when we may need to challenge injustice or have the courage of our convictions.

Then there is the sort of courage we need on a personal level and perhaps on a daily basis to face the challenges set for us. Mock examinations for Year 11 and Year 13 students are happening, and as I take time to speak to some of the girls about their feelings and emotions, it is evident these examinations are making some of them fearful. As such, we need to summon the courage to give our best efforts and to be open to learning from our mistakes. I have reiterated to them that they should see the mock examinations as an

opportunity to confirm areas that have been mastered, as well as highlight any areas which may need a bit more attention. Above all - don't fear them. Embrace them (proceed as if success is inevitable!) - they are the best possible preparation for the summer. It is then we will develop greater resilience in order to make progress.

This is difficult, I know, but Matthew Syed (one of my favourite British journalists and authors) used an interesting metaphor in his recent Times column to illustrate it. In order to develop muscles he points out we need to 'really go for it; to lift weights that cause our muscles to hurt, but obviously not so much you drop them on your toes and end up in A&E!. For it is when your muscles tear a bit - when you cause yourself, in effect, minor physical injury - that you get the full blessings. This is when the body responds with powerful metabolic processes that mend micro-tears and lead to stronger, tauter muscles.' Just as the body responds when it is put under a certain degree of stress which makes it stronger, so the mind can also strengthen when it courageously meets certain challenges. This emphasises the need for a growth mindset in life; it advocates for changing attitudes towards failure, and understanding that the only way we learn is by trying things and altering our behaviour based on the results.

It is a question of 'no pain, no gain' and that is why we need to push ourselves through the pain barrier, which of course requires personal courage. But just like the Lion who gains courage and resilience through meeting his challenges on the Yellow Brick Road, we may discover we are made of stronger stuff than we thought!

Northampton High is a really special place and you have heard me say before how proud I am to be its Head, together to share in our students' lives everyday and to celebrate their achievements and successes. In 2024 our students have lots to look forward to, as well as the challenges ahead, and my hope for them is that they will make the most of every opportunity.

From last year's High News, you will know that I am not a big fan of New Year's resolutions. Research suggests that the vast majority of those made will have been broken by tomorrow, which can lead to feelings of failure for having not managed to achieve whatever was desired. Instead, as I said to the school in our welcome back assembly, I am looking forward to 2024 with anticipation for all the opportunities it will bring and I wish all of you health and happiness in the year to come.

With my very best wishes,

Dr Lee  
Head