



Summer greetings from the Alumni Association

Dear Friends

At the end of the summer term, we take this opportunity to look back on school events during the 2023/24 academic year. I hope you enjoy reading these highlights and continue to feel part of the BRA family.

I am once again indebted to all the staff who have offered a full and comprehensive academic and extra-curricular programme for our pupils, despite pressures created by ongoing financial constraints. This was no mean feat, with a staggering 65 lunchtime and after school clubs offered to pupils.

Under the guidance of Ms McMullan, Director of Music, the Music Department once again excelled themselves during the Spring Concert, reported on in more detail later in this newsletter. The event was a true feast for the ears, celebrating the talents of our wonderful choirs and various music groups. The Chamber Choir also took centre stage in a beautiful video celebrating some of our global alumni with the folk song, *The Parting Glass*.

Sports facilities were enhanced with the opening at the start of the year of *The Foundry Centre for Sporting Excellence* at Roughfort. This new facility will enhance sport provision and coaching for years to come. The school also celebrated achievements on the track and the pitch, with sports day once again a hotly-contested competition for coveted house points.

The School was able to offer pupils a wide range of overseas trips. During the year, pupils embarked upon trips including ski trips to Austria and Italy, a combined Classics and Geography trip to Naples, a hockey tour to Amsterdam, a French trip to Paris as well as a group of pupils and staff undertaking another section of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. These trips help broaden children's horizons and understanding of academic subjects and we are very grateful to those members of staff who provided opportunities for pupils. We have

taken great pride in this year's academic and sporting successes, achievements in music and drama, and the many activities undertaken and competitions entered by Academy pupils throughout the year. School trips were reintroduced during this year, and we are very grateful to those staff who provided opportunities for pupils to participate in a wide range of overseas visits.

This term has also seen us welcome back former pupils for a series of Alumni Reunion lunches, celebrating 50, 40, 30 and 20 year anniversaries. These were highly successful and were thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended, many of whom had not set foot in the School grounds since they left. We plan to continue these reunions next year which will be doubly special as the School marks its 240th anniversary. We look forward to welcoming many more of you back to meet up with former classmates and teachers and enjoy a tour of the school.

At a time when funding for schools is presenting real challenges, we unfortunately are relying more than ever on the support of voluntary donations to help match government funding and additionally fundraise to make improvements to our facilities, purchase new educational resources and equipment and provide pastoral support to pupils in need. To this end, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has signed up as a member of the **1785 Foundation**. Funds from this hugely worthwhile fund contribute to a range of initiatives within school and go towards helping make a significant difference to the lives of current and future pupils, helping to enhance their educational, sporting and cultural experiences. We are extremely grateful for the support and generosity of the School community, enabling us to continue to provide the quality educational and extra-curricular experience you previously benefitted from.

We wish our pupils who have recently sat public examinations all the best for their futures – they are a tribute to our wonderful staff who ensure the children are well prepared and confident in their ability. We wish our Class of 2024 Middle Sixth Leavers a fond farewell and we look forward to seeing them return as alumni of the future.

I wish you all a relaxing and enjoyable summer on behalf of everyone at Belfast Royal Academy and look forward to welcoming you back in person on your next visit to the Cliftonville Road.

Kind regards

Hilary Woods
Principal

The 1785 Foundation

Named after the year the Academy was founded, the **1785 Foundation** continues to grow and is the ideal opportunity for Alumni to reconnect with the Academy and to share some of the pride and ambition that we have for our pupils. BRA was founded to provide an exceptional education for young people from all walks of life, and the 1785 Foundation is one way through which the School demonstrates a strong social purpose and an ethos of caring for pupils from diverse backgrounds. The Foundation was formed to ensure that all pupils at the school have a rich schooling experience and can enjoy full engagement in art, music, sport and extra-curricular activities, regardless of financial background or family circumstances. Members of the 1785 Foundation are

passionate about furthering the School's vision – that all our pupils are given every opportunity and the support they need to fulfil their potential in school and life – and our mission, that we believe education has the power to transform lives. They achieve this by committing themselves to donate small, regular amounts of money, with four different categories of membership available: bronze, silver, gold and platinum. This enables the flexible use of funds to wherever the need is greatest, helping Belfast Royal Academy as we work to build a school that is ever more influential, inspiring and accessible for all. We are most grateful to Foundation members for their ongoing support to enable us to do this. Over the past year, donations have been used to:

- Provide fruit and cereal barriers for pupils who arrive to school hungry, ensuring they can access a healthy snack and avoid the detrimental impact that hunger can have on their learning experience and outcomes.
- Provide funding towards the cost of sports kits, trips and instrument tuition, enabling children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access the full range of extra-curricular activities available.
- Fund counselling and support services, thus tackling mental health and wellbeing issues which have a profound effect upon education.

With the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, this vital support for pupils is more important than ever. Every small, regular donation to the Foundation makes a difference to a pupil's time at the Academy, so to our members, thank you for your ongoing support for Belfast Royal Academy.

For further information on the 1785 Foundation and details of how to join please click here to visit the [Support Us](#) section of our website.

Alumni Reunions - 50, 40, 30 and 20-year Anniversary Lunches

We were delighted to recently host a series of four Alumni Anniversary Reunions for the Classes of 1974, 1984, 1994 and 2004. It was wonderful to welcome so many former pupils back to the Academy to join us for a celebratory lunch marking the milestone anniversaries of the 50, 40, 30 and 20-year groups. It was a joy to see former classmates being reunited back at BRA, reconnecting with each other and with former teachers. We were so pleased that so many people made the effort to join us at these Reunion events, many of whom had not been back since leaving school. We grateful to everyone who attended, particularly those who had travelled far to attend, with guests arriving from across Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia. Following on from the success of these, we do plan to host similar events marking milestone anniversaries in 2025 as well as a special, one-off reunion for those who have left school 50+ years ago to coincide with the 240th anniversary of the School – dates will be confirmed in due course.



BRA Class of 2004 - 20 Year Reunion
Lunch in the BRA Library - 14th June 2024



BRA Class of 1994 - 30 Year Reunion
Lunch in the BRA Library - 7th June 2024



BRA Class of 1984 - 40 Year Reunion
Lunch in the BRA Library - 24th May 2024



BRA Class of 1974 - 50 Year Reunion
Lunch in the BRA Jackson Suite - 21st June 2024

Gala Fundraising Ball On 27th April, a Gala Ball took place in the beautiful surroundings of Titanic Belfast. More than 300 guests attended the event which was hosted with consummate professionalism by Claire McCollum. The event was the first event to be organised jointly by the School along with the Old Boys' Association, the Old Girls' Association, FoTA (Friends of the Academy) and the 1785 Foundation.



The evening kicked off with a Drinks Reception in Titanic's North Viewing Gallery, with guests entertained by the School's String Quartet.



Formal proceedings in Grand Ballroom began with a fabulous video produced by Aisling Gallagher and her colleague, Emma McAllister – a former BRA pupil – from Hop Skip Studios. Guests enjoyed a fabulous four-course meal interspersed with a series of short interviews with former pupils who had gone on to accomplish great things in their respective careers since leaving school – journalist Faye Kidd, Professor Paul Seawright and Ulster Rugby's Iain Henderson. We are grateful to them for speaking so warmly about what BRA continues to mean to them, and to photographer Tara Torrens for capturing the evening so beautifully. Guests danced into the wee small hours to music provided by The Jukebox Jurors followed by DJ Andy Webber.



The event raised more than £20,000 for the 1785 Foundation from ticket sales and a fantastic raffle, with tickets gifted by MAD Print. We are grateful to the many businesses and individuals who kindly donated fabulous prizes including Galgorm, Leonardo Hotels, AC Marriott, Killyhevlin Hotel, Gordon's Chemist, artist Denise McAuley, Dominic Walsh, Michael Black, Ceroc Ignite and Titanic Belfast. The incredible grand prize was a Tag Heuer watch, generously donated by Lunn's Jewellers. We hope all our lucky winners enjoy their prizes!

Thank you to everyone who attended, and to all members of the Gala Ball committee who worked so hard to make this special event possible.

Spring Concert

The BRA Music Department can always be relied on to provide an entertaining night out, and this year's Spring Concert was no exception. The Ulster Hall was the setting for the event, with the audience treated to a fantastic and eclectic display of musical talent from pupils and staff.



Each of the School's choral and instrumental groups took part, including the Ben Madigan choir, Junior and Senior Choir, Orchestra, Junior and Senior Strings, Wind Band, Junior and Senior Trad, Boys' Choir and the Chamber Choir. Two of the finalists in the School's recent Battle of the Bands competition added a contemporary and rousing touch to the concert.



There was a beautifully expressive solo piece from M6 violinist, Hugo Reilly-Stewart before the Junior and Senior Choirs joined for a finale of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' which raised the roof.



We are very proud of all the pupils for the role they played in the concert, and grateful to the staff who directed the various groups, in particular Mrs Bell and Mrs Chapman (Ben Madigan), Mr Davison, Mrs McCombe and Director of Music, Ms McMullan.

Sporting Achievements

Hockey

The girls' 1st XI hockey team won the Schools' Shield final in March. The match against Royal School Dungannon ended at full-time with a score of 1-1 leading to penalty runs to decide the outcome. The girls were able to hold their nerve and won 4-2. We are extremely proud of Captain Sophie Burns and our team who worked hard throughout the season, especially our M6 players for whom this was their final competitive match. Thank you to our coaches, Mr Stephen Watt and Ms Karen Brady for their dedication and commitment to the team.



Swimming

Three pupils won gold medals at the Ulster Schools Swimming Championships in April. Ines Scott won gold in the 50-metre back event and Jan Boersma won two golds in 50 metre fly and 50 metre freestyle. Amy Murtagh McFarlane, who won gold in the 50-metre freestyle event and silver in the 50-metre fly, also qualified for and will travel to the USSA Tenerife Training Camp over October half-term.

BRA 1st XI vs BRA Old Boys' XI Cricket Match

The 2024 BRA 1st XI annual match against the Old Boys' XI was held on a wet and windy 21st June in Castle Grounds. The unseasonable weather unfortunately meant that play was called off mid-afternoon. Thank you to both teams for an enjoyable match.



Senior Debating Society

On May, the BRA team of Oliver Kulig (Form 5) and Emily Warnock (L6) were crowned the premier debating team in NI following the final against Foyle College in Belfast City Hall. The motion was, "This house believes that national defence in an increasingly unstable world demands massive and immediate rearmament". The teams were informed if they were opposing or proposing the motion shortly before the debate commenced. The BRA team were meticulously prepared and coached throughout the competition by Mrs Tate and Mr Patterson and the adjudicators were impressed by their teamwork, their research, the strength of their arguments and their ability to respond cogently and authoritatively to points of information from their opponents.



BRA have now won the competition on five occasions. We are incredibly proud of Emily and Oliver and have high hopes that they will use the skills developed through the various stages of the debate to have a positive impact on the world around them.

Roughfort Pavilion



Back in January, we were delighted to host the official opening of the new Pavilion building at Roughfort. More than 60 invited guests including Governors, current and former staff and pupils attended what has been called The Foundry, Roughfort Centre of Sporting Excellence. This new multipurpose building provides much-needed additional space for hosting and providing hospitality to visiting teams, and a teaching venue for the teams and staff to carry out analytics and diagnostics. The building is the culmination of the vision of a number of people and in particular, Chair of Building and Estates Committee, Mr Geoff Simon, and former Estates Manager, Mrs Jill Lambert. The branding of the building as The Foundry was the brainchild of Tim McVicker and Alan Beck of Anthology and is based on the school's values and vision that Roughfort as a sporting venue is a place where passion, determination and skills converge to forge individuals into champions.



Artwork of four current pupils engaging in the four main sports played at Roughfort – rugby, hockey, cricket and athletics – adorns the walls, whilst former Head Boy and one of Ireland’s best rugby players, Jack Kyle, features on our wall of fame.



Stephen Warke, Governor and former international cricketer, and Christine McMahon, former Commonwealth athlete, performed the cutting of the ribbon.



Keep in touch

We are incredibly proud of all our former pupils and recognise that their ongoing association with the school contributes to it being the vibrant and progressive school we are today. Our Alumni Association plays a vital role in providing an invaluable resource back to the pupils and the school, volunteering their time, advice, services and philanthropic support in a myriad of different ways.

We love to hear about our alumni's lives and achievements after they've left the Academy. If you wish to send us your news, or to find out more about having an active role in supporting the School with regards to careers advice, please contact alumni@belfastroyalacademy.net

Please also do take the opportunity to visit the alumni section of our website

- <https://www.belfastroyalacademy.com/alumni/keep-in-touch> or follow us on [Facebook](#) or our [Alumni LinkedIn page](#)

Forthcoming Events

Former Pupils' London Dinner – 8th March 2025

Former Pupils' Annual Belfast Dinner – 30th November 2024

Former Pupils' Edinburgh Dinner – TBC

For further information or reservations contact the Alumni office alumni@belfastroyalacademy.net
