

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and good afternoon to all the children and leavers of Avenue House School.

By way of introduction I am Aaron Harris, Avenue House Head Boy 2004 / 2005. It's an honour to be asked to come back and speak today as being Head Boy is still a job I feel proud of and take seriously.....I have made a note of those of you who were late and will be speaking to Mrs Self about it later.

It's been six years since I was last at a Prize Giving afternoon as a leaver and it's really nice to see that some of the fantastic teachers that were around then, are still here. And of course Avenue House would simply not be the same school without Mrs Self at the helm. I think it's a measure of how much affection the school is held in, that old boys and girls, such as myself and Isabella, continue to pop by years later and are always welcomed.

My time at Avenue House began in Year 4 and I felt at home straight away. In a small class it was easy to make good friends and it made a huge difference to me to be in a place where I was both encouraged and expected to fulfil my potential. In Years 5 and 6 I was very lucky to have Mrs Self as my Form Teacher – Yes, in those days Mrs Self used to be a Form Teacher as well as the Headmistress. But I must admit, for any nine year old, finding out you are getting the Head as your teacher, can be a just a little un-nerving! But any fears we had about Demon Headmasters were quickly put to one side as Mrs Self the form teacher was far more funny and friendly than Mrs Self, the Headmistress, ever let on.

During those years I was encouraged to write poetry and develop a love for language. Apart from the obvious benefits to my academic work it also gave me self confidence and opened up a world of personal expression to me. I think it was from there that I developed a strong sense of self and personal identity....and I think I may just have found a way to blame someone else for my hair.

But it was in maths and science that I showed real interest and some sparks of talent and this is where I am incredibly grateful to my form teacher of that time. Mrs Self would set me harder and harder tests, maths challenges to GCSE level, and was always engaging me in new ways to think about the subject. Both Maths and Science continued to be my favourite subjects throughout my senior years and are undoubtedly part of my decision to study Medicine at University.

What really sticks with me though is simply the really good fun I had at Avenue House. Some of my best memories were of Black Mountain in Wales. This fantastic trip was all the best things about being a kid and having adventures – from the high adrenaline experiences of gorge walking and caving to sneaking round the dorm at night for midnight feasts and having to sleep on a bed of crisps and crushed biscuits after diving in at the sound of approaching teachers. Somewhere in the back of my wardrobe I still keep the t-shirt we all earned that weekend and I am sure this year's leavers will have their own great memories and no doubt secret mischief.

I know that all you leavers will be both sad that your time here has come to an end and also perhaps anxious at what senior school will hold for you. To all of you, I would say that I know that the years you have had at Avenue House will carry you well. Your class will be no different from mine and you will go into your Senior schools happy, confident and ready. I wish all the leavers the best of luck and to the Head Boy and Girl, just remember, this job is never done.