

Headmaster's Graduation Ball Speech 2026

Well ECP Class of 2026 - here you are ... in your finest. You look amazing. Your ball, your creation, your night. The grandeur of Old Hollywood comes to Lucerna in 2026. I am honoured to be here, in my tenth Graduation speech hoping, as your sashes say, to wish you well on your way to the stars.

The Czech Graduation Ball tradition of having the sash is a speech writer's dream. It gives us all here tonight a common language of what we are feeling and what we are trying to do. You have chosen Per aspera ad astra "through hardship to the stars". There is a poignancy to this year's sash, especially as I am holding what would have been Karel's sash and his flower and at Karel's family request I would like to say a few words about him tonight.

On December 8, last year, it was with great sadness that we received the news that Karel Otto Tlustý, had passed away. Karel's family would like to sincerely thank everyone who attended the humble and touching farewell at the Břevnov Monastery a few days later, and for many other expressions of sympathy. They especially wish you, his classmates, graduates, a heartwarming graduation ball and a successful end to the academic year.

They know Karel was a popular student, and that his teachers loved him for his humility, kindness, and sense of humour. We know he enjoyed

History and Biology, loved sports and playing the drums, participated in volunteer projects, and took part in the DofE programme. He loved going to school mainly because of - you - his friends.

It is a truism to say our lives will never be the same without him, but his family firmly believe he is watching us now from the stars, curious to see how the band he was meant to drum for will perform and how the lovely ball, that you've prepared for us tonight, will unfold.

Please remember him with love, enjoy the evening, and be happy, as Karel would have wanted. I will keep his flower and sash safe and make sure the family has them as a memory of tonight.

While having this hardship in your story, we are not defined by it, we are defined by the journey we take in reacting to that hardship. You have been beautiful, courageous and compassionate - and I'm sure you will continue in this way your subsequent journey - **ad astra** - to the stars.

Those of you here from Year 1 may remember our journey not to the stars but our Mission to Mars, so you know my interest in space and **Ad Astra** can only lead me to one thing, the eponymous Hollywood film *Ad Astra*. In the film Brad Pitt voyages deep into the isolation of space ... the film's themes are family, separation in the vastness of space and of course the passage of time.

I want to explore for a moment if you allow me your impending journey to the stars.

For you, the young, every second is heavy with the G-force of new experiences - your first love, your first heartbreak, your first loss, your first success, your first failure and more and more your first tastes of real independence.

Because everything is fresh (and of course you all have exceptionally high performance machines in here), your brains process them with a speed that makes us teachers and your parents dizzy.

For us we made that journey long ago. Teachers have seen many graduation ceremonies, we've all seen even more summers and winters. So to us, try as we might, there isn't space to capture the richness of your experience. Your experience of these times is vivid, intensive and with an immersiveness better than any Hollywood film even in IMAX.

Also today you live in the "instant transmission" of the present - every social moment or personal discovery is biologically wired to have a high-priority - except perhaps adherence to a few IB deadlines here and there it would seem

When your journey starts you'll travel further and further from home. In both physical and emotional terms, your perspective will alter and the lasting impact of what you do will become more apparent.

As teachers and parents we are grounded but have the joy of watching your journey and in some cases your little blue dot venturing into the unknown. Be mindful of this increasing distance, remember we are still sending the same signals wishing you well, occasionally advising, and asking you how you are, and whether or not you've run out of cash!

But our "signals" will take longer to reach you and may even get lost on the way. Enjoy your journey but keep one eye on messages from home And remember the distance will never dull our interest in what you are doing. Come visit when you can.

Now what of the theme of **Old** Hollywood - when we talk about **Old** Hollywood, we're usually referring to the "Golden Age" of impossibly beautiful or handsome stars of the silver screen - think Audrey Hepburn or Cary Grant.

However old Hollywood wasn't just an era of film; it was an era of **physicality**. Before digital design and FX wizardry, every title card you saw on screen was a handmade piece of art, from the lettering artists who hand-painted title credits onto glass, to the carpenters who made sets from plywood and paint, to special effects using real explosions, steel wires and stuntmen and of course to the imposing hulk of the hollywood sign itself.

So I would ask you to honour this theme of physicality in your future lives. Enjoying the sheer physical nature of living, competing, caring and loving. A life lived in the digital world looks beautiful - but a life lived in the real world is actually beautiful.

Go and have that real, beautiful life and fill your time to the absolute max - like only students graduating from ECP can do!

Thank you all.