

## Graduation Representative Speech Class of 2026 by Esme Kalovcova

Good evening dear guests, teachers, students, families and friends.

Before I begin, I would like to say that I am honoured to be speaking to you this evening as we celebrate the graduating class of 2026.

When I told my grandma that I had to start writing the graduation speech, she told me that that's wonderful and to just "thank everyone for a nice time". When I told her it needed to be five minutes long, she told me to just talk really slowly. But once I started writing, I found it hard to condense almost six years of memories, lessons and thank-yous into five minutes.

It really has been a nice time. The past six years haven't been only about our academics. We made sure to make the most of as many trips as we could, making the school's Slalom Trip more of a yeargroup ski trip. For most of the trips we largely chose our cycling and ski groups based on friendship, rather than ability, leading to Mr Klaus' spirited pep talk on the Year 4 cycling trip, where he told us his grandma could cycle better. Our CCC, Camping Cycling and Canoeing trip, involved little canoeing due to some last-minute logistical complications, but we still had fun in the water when half of our tents flooded due to rain.

But our journey hasn't always been easy. The parents, guardians and teachers of our graduating class can attest to this, having seen us struggle and stress for the past two years, not always knowing exactly why. As our history class tried to illustrate the year six IB experience to Dr Vassogne when she asked us if it was "really that hard": the last year of high school kind of feels like a marathon. Except you're sprinting, everyone is in front of you and you don't have shoes or water.

Luckily, we are a stubborn, resilient and confident year group, as demonstrated by the sizeable number of us who insisted on taking physics, keeping Mr Bale on his toes. We survived being in the annex, then in elektra, then back in the annex, then partly in the new building and the annex. Although we were *supposed* to be the first year group to experience the renovated extension of the school, we still had a memorable, although less traditional, ECP experience.

While, for the past year, I have waited very very eagerly for this day to finally come, I suddenly find myself wanting to stay here for a moment longer to delay big decisions and the uncertainty of my future. To those who feel similarly it might be comforting to remember that none of us are supposed to have everything figured out today. We are meant to make mistakes, change our minds and try new things to discover what we are meant to do. High school is just the beginning. I don't want to stand up here and tell you that high school was the best time of our lives, like they do in movies. I don't believe that's true. In fact, I've heard some of us describe these years as some of the hardest they've experienced. I hope that stays the case and that if these years were difficult, they leave us better equipped for whatever comes after them. And I hope we all reach success. Success not defined by wealth or status but happiness and inner peace.

But what do I know, I don't even have a high school diploma.

Before I finish, I would like to thank everyone who helped us reach this moment.

To our teachers, thank you for your patience, encouragement and for continuing to believe in us, even when we occasionally gave you reasons not to.

To our tutors, Ms Smith, Dr Vassogne, Mr McGrath, Mr Ibbitson and Ms Bucharová, thank you for answering every question and watching us grow. The upper school team and senior leadership, especially Mr Hill, Mr. Hudson, Ms Reardon and Ms Švejdová, thank you for the limitless support and guidance. Thank you to our senior tutors, Ms Baťková, Mr Bleaks, Ms Sartain and Mr Wyllyams, for your direction and care. Thank you to our Headmaster, Dr Brown, Our Chairman of the Governors, Mr Denis Keefe, and our Governors, for leading our school. A special thank you belongs to tonight's guest speaker, Sir Nick Gibb, for taking the time to join us this evening. And thank you to the rest of the staff working behind the scenes for making opportunities like this evening possible.

To our parents, guardians and families. Thank you for the support, sacrifice and encouragement; for giving us the opportunity to attend this school and for listening to us.

And lastly, thank you to my year group. A year group as capable of being fun as we are kind. A year group that, when someone was missing a CAS project shortly before graduation, provided suggestions, ideas and support instead of judgment. A year group that stuck together in a particularly difficult time. Over the years we have watched each other change from Year 1 students into the young adults sitting here today. And I look forward to seeing all that we achieve and who we become. So thank you all for a nice time.