

Thursday 7th November 2019

English College in Prague Founder's Day

Speech by Alfred Byrne - Student Council President

Dear distinguished guests, Mr. Schwarzenberg, Dr. Brown, Teachers, Parents, classmates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is truly a privilege to be given the opportunity to address such an important group of people. We are gathered here in the Old Gym to remember and to celebrate the people responsible for the founding of this prestigious educational institution: an institution that provides an internationally-minded education in English; an institution that values critical thinking over rote learning; an institution where students not only learn, but they learn to learn; an institution called The English College in Prague.

The rich history of the school begins on the 15th September 1927, when the state-run Prague English Grammar School opened with the aim to "turn out young people who are inspired with the idea of international solidarity."¹ In the first year, 6 teachers and 9 pupils attended. For parents, it must have been a quirky choice and a brave risk to send their children here, but the number of students grew regardless. The school was shut down by the Nazis in 1938, and after being re-opened in 1945, it was shut down again by the Communists in 1954.

5 years after the Velvet Revolution, the English College in Prague opened to replace the Prague English Grammar School. I was not born yet, but I know that if it weren't for the people who founded the school then, I would not have the opportunity to study here today. Without the hard work, leadership and enthusiasm of these people, ECP would not exist. That is why, on behalf of all students of this school, I would like to say thank you. I would

¹ <https://www.radio.cz/en/section/special/the-strange-tale-of-the-prague-english-grammar-school>

also like to thank the teachers. Schools are for learning and teachers teach. Their work is very important not just for ECP students, but for society as a whole.

In my personal opinion, ECP provides the best high-school level education in the Czech Republic. And no, Dr Brown did not instruct me to say that.

When I first came here, I was overwhelmed by the independence I had. I was excited by the fact that I could choose to eat wherever I chose without adult supervision. I did end up eating a little too many cookies from Marks and Spencers, but this experience taught me to make responsible decisions. ECP lets students take the initiative with their learning, which sometimes leads to failures, but ECP taught me that failing is simply part of the learning curve. Mistakes and independence prepare us to thrive in the real world. This is especially important, considering jobs in the future will be totally different due to the rapid development of technology.

In a world where 66%² of Czechs have unfavourable opinions of Roma people, ECP students raise money a full 6-year scholarship at ECP for Roma people.

In a world where 41%³ of Czechs believe homosexuality shouldn't be accepted by society, ECP students accept and embrace each others' differences.

In a world where spending too much time on social media is now a major problem for young people, ECP students spend days away from civilisation on Duke of Edinburgh expeditions.

In a world where young people increasingly believe that the act of being offended is virtuous, ECP students are not afraid to engage in debate and expand their intellectual horizons.

²<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/15/european-public-opinion-three-decades-after-the-fall-of-communism/>

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In a generation of snowflakes, ECP students are potatoes.

Just like potatoes, we are well-rounded. We are strong, resilient and grounded. Some of us will be chips, some of us roast potatoes, some of us bramborové knedlíky, and some of us may go rotten. We are different shapes, sizes and shades, but at the end of the day, potatoes are potatoes.

While politicians try to divide us, corporations try to buy us and when climate emergency, nuclear war, automation and artificial intelligence threaten our livelihoods and our existence, it is important to look past our differences and act together in the pursuit of a better world. At the end of the day, we are all potatoes.

Thank you.