

ETHAN CORNISH (2019 DUX) — TOP ACHIEVERS' ASSEMBLY SPEECH

After listening to six of these speeches there is not a large amount I can remember about the content from each of them. However, one message I do remember was from when I was in Year 7 by the Dux of 2013, Matt Farrugia-Roberts. Matt's message was 'with the right attitude, school is not work — it is an opportunity to learn'.

I believe this is an excellent message. Excellent but, in my eyes, incomplete. I believe this as it does not give any reason as to why you should have the 'right' attitude or why you should want to learn what school is teaching. I believe these are very fair questions. Having gone through 13 years of sitting in classrooms, I know it is often asked 'why do I have to learn this?' or, the more cynical variant, 'when am I ever going to use this?' These questions raise a very good point regarding 'what does school teach us?'

When I graduated 75 days ago, I took with me all the things school taught me. Yes, this included algebra, calculus, how to write essays, history, science and everything else high school had hammered into me for six years. But, that wasn't all I gained.

Often we, as students, tend to focus on what is right in front of us; leaving any larger purpose unknown. This is what leaves us wondering how we are going to be prepared for the real world. Yes, it is true I never had a class where I learnt how to lodge a tax return or get insurance. Furthermore, when I did graduate, I couldn't cook for myself or change a tyre.

So, if school doesn't teach us what we need to know, then why should you have that 'right attitude'? What did Matt know that we don't? Well, I believe I have an answer as to what that larger purpose is. And it relates to some of the crucial things school CAN teach you every term, every week, every day and every period. These things are known as soft skills.

Problem solving is one of the most valuable skills I have learnt throughout recent years. It's an essential skill used frequently in everyday life. While it can be learnt in a variety of ways, for me, nothing does it quite like maths. Even if you don't realise it, maths is just problem solving. While you may not be dealing with ordinary, common-place examples, the problems you are made to solve in maths can teach you good skills and strategies. Like how to look at a problem from a different perspective, how to persist with a problem and, with some persistence, maths can show you how to take something that might seem impossible to solve and try to solve it. For this reason, maths was and continues to be my favourite subject. So next time you're confronted with a problem that is too difficult or you think you can't be bothered, remember there is a point. Even if maths is your least favourite subject, and you never intend to use maths again in your life, there are still lessons to be learnt.

Another important ability to have in modern life is to be able to discern fact from fiction, to realise where news ends and opinion begins and know where bias is present when being given supposed information. This, I believe, is why we are made to complete language analysis in English and study Science. While there is a good chance you will likely never sit down with a pile of highlighters and analyse a random news article or time how long it takes for water to boil on a Bunsen burner in real life, there are skills to be learnt here.

By analysing how an article argues its perspective you can better learn how to make informed decisions on issues and determine if what you are reading or listening to is unbiased factual information – or a report with a hidden agenda trying to influence you. Through performing science experiments, using the scientific method throughout high school you can become better at realising when something has an inherent bias. This is incredibly important in modern society where it has become commonplace to claim that 'science has proven x' as a way of convincing people. Now this doesn't mean that you shouldn't believe anything, rather it can allow you to take the facts in a story and create your own opinion with

solid reasoning instead of being a sheep and agreeing with the first video or opinion you see or hear. Today, more than ever before, the world needs people who can discern fact from fiction — people who can make up their own mind.

For me, the one thing from History I will use is referencing. A painstaking, yet unavoidable task in university. But, not everyone is going to need this skill. So, what does history have to offer us? I believe Winston Churchill put it best. For those who aren't aware, he was the British Prime Minister during the Second World War. He said "the farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see". Put simply, this means that the better you can look at the past the better you can understand the future. The reason people study History is to prevent it from repeating itself. However, you can also do something similar for yourself on a smaller scale, your own scale. You can look at your own life, your own history, in the same way and use it to prevent yourself from making a mistake twice.

One of the most important skills I learnt throughout high school was during my least favourite subject — yes, there is something to be learnt in this lesson, too. That is patience. Specifically, I'm talking about the ability to push through something you don't want to do, simply because you have to. Everyone in this room, from students to staff to the people up on this stage, have had to perform tasks at this school they would rather not do. Take a moment to think of something you dislike doing. It may be a subject like Maths, English or something outside of the classroom, like sport. While you may only have to push through these things for six years, unfortunately there will always be tasks throughout life you will have to do that aren't fun, entertaining or interesting. So, take the opportunity during high school to learn how, because there is a skill to it and it's a skill you will need.

Hopefully, today I have given a little insight into what school can do for you. At the end of the day school is not for everyone, and that's OK. For, those that don't want to be here I can put it plain and simply — you have to be here for five days a week, 40 weeks a year, six years straight. So, if you keep some of the five things I mentioned today in mind then you might just get a little bit more out of these six years than you expected. This is my answer as to why you should have the, 'right' attitude. And, with that attitude you can turn the work, you may not like or understand the reasoning behind into an opportunity to learn. Thank you for listening.