

HM Final Assembly 29th March 2019 – Preamble

Morning all – and welcome to the last day of term! What a stunner. It's been lovely to enjoy such benign and spring-like conditions this past week.

As you came in to the Alington Hall this morning, you had a chance to consider this list of creatures on the screen.

pigs, badgers, bears,
coatis, civets, hedgehogs,
opossums, skunks, sloths,
squirrels, raccoons,
chipmunks, mice and rats.

A random list, perhaps? Or you might have spent some time wondering what they have in common? Is there some common factor to thread between a pig, a skunk and a hedgehog?

Well, they do have something in common.

I'll let that sit just for a moment and consider an example by contrast. An animal that most certainly would NOT be on this list.



The Giant Anteater. This marvellous beast is brilliantly specialised for his chosen diet: ants and termites. Mark the long nasal implement! It is from this magnificent protuberance that a mobile and sticky tongue darts, at high speed, to gather ants for the convoluted innards of termite hills in South America. The Giant Anteater is very good at eating ants. He is what he does. That's why they call him an anteater. Nobody does it better.

But, the strength of the anteater is also his weakness – he is a brilliant specialist. But if all the ants in the world disappeared overnight, he'd be in big trouble. He couldn't suddenly start chasing down gazelles and battering them with his oversize snout. He can't move quickly enough; his eyesight is appalling so he couldn't spot a gazelle if, as in this case, his life depended on it. He's a solitary animal so he wouldn't team up with fellow anteaters to solve the food problem. Even if you gave him a freshly caught gazelle, he couldn't get any of it in his mouth; and his stomach couldn't digest it. The anteater is brilliantly, wonderfully, perilously good at just one thing.

Whereas, all the animals on the first list are omnivores: they don't depend on any single food source; they can work with what's available seasonally; what they're able to get hold of to survive. They'll try pretty much anything.

As we look back at another term of vibrant endeavour in the classroom and wide-ranging activity outside it, I like to think of you as being educational omnivores, foraging for the nourishment of knowledge; seeking out the wholesome food of wisdom; thriving on the balanced diet of personal development that comes through willing engagement with a diverse co-curriculum and is supported by a strong and supportive pastoral foundations.

A school is, of course, a place of academic learning, first and foremost. As we close this term, I hope that you can each reflect on many a nourishing academic feast and that there is a strong appetite for more. Much more broadly, a school is a place of foraging. Exploration of ourselves and what we can achieve; exploration of the community in which we live; exploration of the deeper meanings of life.

Much of our learning goes on outside the classroom – through social interactions; in house; through the co-curricular and extended curriculum. I suppose you could call the aim of education, at least in part, as being the cultivation of educational omnivores.

And what better example of such omnivorous creatures than our Heads of School, Emma and Harry, Abi and Koby. Talking together in our regular weekly meeting this morning, we ran through the term and picked out some of our favourite moments: they were all different. Mixed hockey; girls house basketball; ShrewsMUN3; fencing championships; Rosslyn Park rugby sevens; house open air cinema and countless other house- and school-based events and happenings. It's a broad and wholesome diet here.

And so, to the various end of term reports from colleagues across the academic and co-curricular menu.

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