



Robert Clack Alumni Association Newsletter

Issue 24

October 2018

Welcome to the first newsletter of the 2018/19 academic year. The summer started in style with another talent packed music evening, and ended with celebrations as pupils enjoyed success with the best ever GCSE results in the school's history - both of which feature in this newsletter. We also report back on a range of events in the school - the Aim Higher Day inspiring Year 8s, an English Excellence Day motivating students in the classroom, and the creative new Words for Work programme helping our young people develop the communications skills they need in the classroom - all supported by our brilliant alumni, together with visits from globe-trotting former students, and a special reunion for our Class of 2011 and 2013 cohort. Enjoy!



Update from the Trust

The trustees rounded off the last academic year in style at the brilliant summer music evening. Events like these showcase our students' talents - whether they are on the stage, introducing acts, or welcoming guests to the school - and remind trustees how important their work is and how special Robert Clack students are (not that they need reminding, of course!). It's looking to be another busy year in the school, not least with the school's exciting building programme, and the trustees are looking forward to helping to identify even more opportunities for our alumni community to support current students.

Keep in Touch

If you have any suggestions for newsletter articles, things that you would like to share with the Robert Clack Alumni community, or would like to know more about how you can get involved in the work of the school, please contact emonk@robertclack.co.uk

Celebrations for the Best GCSE Results in School History

The hard work and commitment of Robert Clack pupils, together with the professionalism and dedication of teachers and support staff, was richly rewarded this summer as the school celebrated the best ever GCSE results in their history. Despite the government's exceptionally challenging new curricula in all subjects, and the significant demands of high-stakes final examinations (with a retreat from coursework assessment), almost three quarters of entries were graded 9 to 4 (equivalent to A* to C), whilst seven in ten pupils achieved the national standard in English and Maths.

A number of pupils performed exceptionally well: eight achieved straight 9 to 4 (or A* to A) grades, and 15% achieved straight 9 to 6 (or A* to B) grades. The new, coveted grade 9 - only awarded to the top 2% of pupils nationally - was attained by 32 pupils across a range of subjects, with 20 achieving the grade in English or Maths. Furthermore, there were some excellent achievements from pupils who have faced considerable personal challenges during their GCSE years.

Headteacher Russell Taylor said: *"As always, I am exceptionally proud of our pupils and staff. Our shared values of mutual respect, compassion for others, discipline, hard work and high aspirations continue to sustain our cohesive community, and have ensured that our pupils in Year 11 have fulfilled their potential this summer. We look forward to welcoming them all back into our highly successful Sixth Form in September."*

Huge congratulations to our pupils - the school and the Alumni Association are very proud

A Musical End to the Summer Term

On Wednesday 18th July Robert Clack School and the Alumni Association welcomed alumni members, trustees, friends, and family to finish the school year on a musical high note at a Summer Music Evening at the Gosfield Road Upper Site.

After drinks and nibbles with guests, the concert opened with the Robert Clack School Orchestra playing the theme from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, followed by a Year 8 girls group singing *The Cup Song* (accompanied by an impressive and intricate hand beat), and a mesmerising Spanish Guitar solo by Year 12 student Najim Seddique.

The first half continued with an array of acts from our talented and diverse group of Clack musicians - from flute and horn concerto solos to country and western vocals. The first part of the evening's show concluded with the boys' choir singing *I Wish I Knew Him* by Nina Simone, accompanied by Mr Collins and conducted by our very own Ms Brennan.



After a short break and refreshments, the second half opened with the school's string ensemble playing *Habanera* conducted by Mrs Rook, followed by a rendition of *Havana* from the impressive school orchestra, conducted by Mrs Davis. Year 9 student Madison Roovers and Year 11 student Esther Steel each blew the audience away with self-penned songs accompanied by the ukulele - an increasingly popular instrument amongst our musicians. Sisters Karimma Belkhir (Year 13) and Yasmin (Year 10) performed a beautiful duet - *Best Part* by Daniel Caesar - accompanied by Yasmin playing the guitar - a truly amazing (and moving) performance! The show was brought to a close with a fabulous version of *Streets of London* - performed by the school's fantastic mixed choir.

Deputy Head of KS4 Steve O'Brien finished the evening by praising the staff and students for another brilliant show: *"Many of the performances were so soul stirring that some of the audience were visibly moved, including myself. Perhaps most impressive of all was the number of pieces which were composed by the pupils themselves. The profundity of the lyrics as well as the quality of performance was truly incredible - much better than the nonsense that you hear on the radio these days. At a time when the curriculum in many schools is narrowing, I am proud to be at a school where such incredible artistic talent is allowed to flourish."*

The Alumni Association would like to thank everyone who took part in this spectacular evening. It would not have been possible without the incredible hard work from Robert Clack's music department, students, everyone behind the scenes - and of course our wonderful student hosts who kept the entire show running smoothly from start to finish.

Year 8s Inspired to Aim Higher

On Tuesday 17th July Robert Clack welcomed over 50 guests to the Lower School site for our annual Aim Higher Day, encouraging Year 8 students to start thinking about their future. Throughout the day pupils travelled around different sessions, each accompanied by a member of the Alumni Association who was on hand to answer questions, offer advice, and observe pupil engagement, with the most impressive receiving prizes in the final lesson.

The day included presentations from thirteen former students who spoke about their experiences, career paths, and aspirations throughout university studies and beyond. This year's event was particularly diverse - with subject areas spanning chemistry, history, and medicine, together with a range of creative and unique career paths including former pupils Mitchell Diggines (now an apprentice groundsman with West Ham) and Andrew Faulkner (a successful dancer and performer). The day also offered an international perspective from Rob Jones, the school's first ever student to attend university in the USA with the help of the Sutton Trust.



Lecturers, students, and representatives from the University of East London and Barking College were also on hand to discuss the broad range of further education courses on offer, together with a team from Savills and Construction Youth Careers who promoted apprenticeship scheme opportunities.

The Aim Higher Day was a really valuable opportunity for Year 8 pupils to start thinking about their skills, talents, and interests, and the types of university courses, apprenticeships and careers that will allow them to use these. For our fantastic alumni guests, Aim Higher was a chance to reflect on their studies and careers to date, and share experiences back at their old school. Our pupils were on top form throughout the day with Andrew Garrett from Construction Youth Trust commenting on them as a credit to the school and their teachers (we agree!)

Thanks to everyone who took the time to come back to school to support and inspire our students. Your experiences and stories really can make a difference to their lives



Alumni at English Excellence Day 2018

On Wednesday 11th July students enjoyed the third annual English Excellence Day, celebrating the success of past students and inspiring current ones to strive forward in their English studies.

As usual, the event was supported by our fantastic alumni who came back to school to share their experiences and expertise. This year we invited freelance journalist Colin Freeman, who also works for the Daily Telegraph, to speak about his many adventures as a foreign correspondent - including being kidnapped in Somalia by modern day pirates.

Calling all Fundraisers!

Can you help to give the next generation of students a 'helping hand' and ensure that potential and not background determines their future? We are looking for people to help us fundraise for the Alumni Association. This will include helping us to scope fundraising ideas, develop relationships with businesses, identify and pursue potential sources of income, and plan applications to grant awarding bodies. Perhaps you've got experience of fundraising in another voluntary or professional capacity, have key contacts that may be able to help, or just have some time to spare and want to get involved.

Whatever your experience (whether it's lots or none at all), however much time you are able to give (from a regular commitment to one off advice/support sessions) get in touch at emonk@robertclack.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you and we'd love you to join us on our brilliant journey to helping Robert Clack students be the best they can be.

The agenda for the day included opportunities for students to take part in a range of exciting interactive workshops which found them exploring autobiographies, writing press releases, creating film trailers, and examining horror and gore!

We also welcomed some of our wonderful English graduate alumni to the day to share their varied careers from PR professionals and learning centre managers, to journalists and bloggers. Students were clearly inspired by our formers students' stories and how their English studies have supported them throughout their careers. One student commented: *"I enjoyed the talk from Colin Freeman about his adventure. It was interesting to see how English helps with journalism. Colin's story gave me a new insight into journalism. The journalism class gave me very valuable information"*

A huge thank you to the English Department and our fantastic alumni who helped make this very special event possible



Alumni Around the World

Although our Clack pupils start off in Dagenham and the surrounding areas - not all of them stay there. On Monday 10th September brother and sister alumni Liam (Class of 2006) and Sian (Class of 2011) Tillet were back in school - and a long way from home. Liam now lives in Cape Town, South Africa and Sian in Sydney, Australia, but the pair still found time for a Clack visit before flying back to their respective new countries.

Sian and Liam were welcomed back to school by Alumni Development Officer Ellen Monk and had a tour of the Gosfield Road Upper site, visiting some of their old classrooms and teachers along the way, including Headteacher Russell Taylor. Liam even found a pencil pot in one of the classrooms with his name written on it. As we always say - our former pupils remain part of Robert Clack history forever!



We love to see former pupils back in school. Whether you are still local or now living in a far-flung destination - drop us a line. We'd love to hear from you!

Words for Work - Exciting New Alumni Supported Programme for KS3 Clack Students

The Words for Work programme aims to support secondary school students with the communication skills they need to be successful in the workplace.

Developed and led by the National Literacy Trust - and supported by some of our fantastic alumni volunteers - Words for Work workshops demonstrate the importance of literacy in employment, helping to improve oral and written communication skills, give students confidence in their abilities, and raise their career aspirations.

Following an initial training session for alumni volunteers, our first Words for Work programme ran over a five-week period throughout late September and early October.

Week 1: Emails and Effective Questioning

After a short introduction students worked together in small groups on their first task - deciding a team name. This session concentrated on writing a professional email. Each student was given a template and asked to write an email to the alumni volunteers who would be present in week two, explaining who they were and welcoming them back to their old school. This task focused on effective questioning, using both open and closed question formats.

Week 2: Speed Interviews

This week's workshop was all about interview techniques. After a warm welcome to alumni volunteers, our eager students were straight into planning their speed interviews. Each team reviewed their week one emails and selected four questions to ask interviewees. Students' questions were open-ended exploring their volunteer's workplace - what kind of job they currently do, types of communication they use, and why communication and team work is so important in the workplace.

Each volunteer was interviewed for around five minutes, with students beginning and ending in a formal communication style. Volunteers then evaluated interviews, highlighting positive aspects and areas for improvement.

Week 3: Communication - verbal, body language and appearance

Week three kicked off with a discussion around formal and informal situations before students (with volunteers on hand for help and advice) planned a role play activity in their teams based on appropriate ways to act in each scenario.

If you would like to find out more about events in the school that you can take part in, please drop Ellen Monk a line (EMonk@robert-clack.bardaglea.org.uk).

There's always something going on and always opportunities for you to get involved

We'd love to hear from you and welcome you back to school!

Week 4: Planning and team work

After a quick warm up game and recap of last week's session, students and volunteers were given their final task - planning a presentation to deliver next week. Each team chose their topic from a range of options - What have you learnt about preparing for the workplace? If you could change anything about the world to make it a fairer place, what would you change? How and why would you make this change? Or what is your favourite hobby and what does it tell us about you?

Students carefully planned their presentations, making use of the skills they learnt throughout the workshops and tapping in to the experience of their volunteers around planning and delivering successful presentations.

Week 5: Presenting

After a practice run (with volunteers on hand for support and guidance), each team delivered their presentations in the final week of the programme. All students gave confident, well planned presentations, clearly demonstrating that they had taken on board advice from their mentors - speaking clearly, making eye contact, being mindful of body language, and even adding a little humour! The final session rounded off with time for self-reflection, with students giving mature and insightful feedback on their own successes and areas for improvement.

The Words for Work programme has proved popular with students and volunteers alike, with some glowing praise on end of programme evaluation forms...

Student comments

"I absolutely loved it, and don't want to stop!!! I liked the guidance and wisdom the volunteers gave to us. Thank you for this experience. It was so fun and thank you to all the volunteers and alumni"

"Words for Work helps build confidence and expression"

"I think Words for Work is really good as they have helped me and made me feel a lot more confident about certain things. I liked working with the volunteers as they were very friendly and had ideas that we could all elaborate on"

Volunteer comments

"An enlightening experience with young people who are willing to engage"

"It's really good to give something back to the younger generation - our experience of life and work in an informal way. The staff were very enthusiastic and positive about the programme which made it enjoyable for all. It feels good to build relationships with the pupils and see their progress"

"I could actively see my presentation group taking on board my tips and including them in the way they presented. I thoroughly enjoyed it and was extremely pleased to see the confidence of the students grow"

"They have gained a lot of confidence, especially when addressing strangers"

Robert Clack would like to thank Eve Berwin, Project Manager for Words for Work, and Leo Robertson and the team for giving our KS3 students such a fantastic opportunity.

A very special thank you also goes to Tina Dulieu, Chris Marshall, Jeff Stafford, and Martin Wilshire for giving up their time to come in and share their wealth of knowledge and experiences with our students. We are so lucky to have such fantastic alumni who are willing to help our students to achieve their goals.

Class of 2011 and 2013 Reunion

On Friday 28th September, around 40 alumni got together for an evening of catching up and reminiscing in the perfect venue - Robert Clack's Gosfield Road Site!

And a few of these former students felt quite at home with no less than six 'graduates' of these year groups now members of staff in the school!

Azaan Akbar (who some of you may remember as the charismatic student host of our summer music evening a few years ago) now teaches history, Jess Welton teaches English, Luke Van-Gelder teaches ICT and Computing, Toluwa Dada is a science teacher, Perry Cook a PE teacher, and Lucy Green works as a technician in the Science Department.



Robert Clack is incredibly proud to have a number of alumni working at the school, ably led by former pupil himself and now Headteacher, Russell Taylor. We often say that you never really leave Robert Clack - certainly true for these former pupils!

The reunion was a great success and it was fantastic to have a few familiar faces back in the classroom.

A very special thank you to Ellen Monk for organising a brilliant evening



Support the Robert Clack Alumni Association

Join us Sign up to the Alumni Association at: <https://networks.futurefirst.org.uk/former-student/robertclack>

Volunteer Come back to school as part of one of the many exciting events we run with current pupils throughout the year. Contact emonk@robertclack.co.uk

Donate Alumni can make a real difference to current pupils' lives. You can donate at www.justgiving.com/rcdt by texting RCDT08 to 70070 or contacting emonk@robertclack.co.uk