

The School Motto

Assembly by Alastair Tighe, Head Master, September 2018

If I asked you to come up with one thing which you think symbolically represents Wells Cathedral School, I wonder what you would choose? Might it be an image of your School House, or the Cathedral? Perhaps you might choose a symbol which represents what you love best about this School - maybe the image of a rugby ball or hockey stick? A treble clef, or even a calculator.

The problem with having to pick just one thing to represent the whole School is that it is very difficult to do. How can one symbol sum up all that Wells means to you?

For centuries, people have used crests and mottos to try and encapsulate the values and history of an individual, family or institution. We have our crest which is a version of the cross of St Andrew, our patron saint. And our motto is well-known - *Esto quod es*. Both the crest and motto stretch back over 1000 years; we are the inheritors of the history and ethos that they symbolise and it falls to us to keep that history and ethos alive and relevant in the 21st century.

Most people inherit their mottos and crests, of course. But imagine that I tasked each of you to come up with a new motto for the School from scratch, or a crest which represented you as a person. I wonder what you would choose to represent your own beliefs and identity.

One person who has recently had that chance is Megan Markel - Prince Harry's new wife. It's one of the requirements of entering the Royal Family that you have your own crest. So the recently titled Duchess of Sussex has chosen to ensure her Californian heritage is depicted - one half of the shield is on a blue background which represents the Pacific Ocean, over which are golden diagonal lines representing rays of sunshine. Beneath the shield is California's state flower - the golden poppy, and Wintersweet - a flower that grows at Kensington Palace and which was also depicted on the duchess' wedding veil. Three quills on the shield illustrate the power of words and communication.

One can only assume that a great deal of thought has gone into the creation of Megan Markel's crest, so that she can express in a succinct way what is important for her about her heritage and beliefs.

When I was considering applying for my role here at Wells, like anyone looking to apply for a job in any profession or organization, I was keen to work out as best as I could what its values were, what it stood for, and whether those values were ones with which I agreed.

One way I discerned those values was by looking at the School motto; in all honesty, I couldn't really miss it! *Esto Quod Es* - Be what you are. A motto as relevant now as it ever has been. For me it's a fantastic indication of the values of a school - it says this is an institution which recognises the individual and recognises that we all have unique skills and talents and interests, and that all are equally valued. It's a motto which boldly asserts an inclusive ethos, and one which celebrates and promotes the diversity which is at the heart of all flourishing communities. And it is a motto which recognises that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' model, but rather the best communities are ones which work together for common aims whilst recognising the importance of the individuals within that community.

But it's always appropriate to keep things under review, and to constantly question yourself - is what I'm doing the right thing? Is what we stand for the right thing to stand for? Is what we state in our motto effective in conveying the core messages we want to impart?

Now I'm certainly not here to suggest that we change the School motto - far from it. But I do want to challenge each of us to consider whether our motto in and of itself goes far enough. You might argue that a weakness of 'Be what you are' is that it could be taken to assume we should simply be content with our innate characteristics and talents; that we should just accept and be tolerant of them. But for me that's rather too passive to be effective. I would argue, that it's not about being what you *are* - but rather about being what you *can* or *could* be.

'Be what you can be' is a far more aspirational motto. It sets up a challenge for each of us, and demands endeavour. It retains the fundamental recognition that we are all unique and to be equally valued, but it requires of us action and effort.

This was the message Jesus was trying to convey when he spoke the so-called 'Parable of the Talents' we have just heard read. The story speaks about a master who rewards the two servants who had used their talents fully and grown them; but the servant who just "played it safe" was condemned.

Traditionally, the parable of the talents has been seen as an exhortation to Jesus' disciples to use their God-given gifts to the full. In other words, don't just be content with the gifts you have been given, but work hard to improve them and multiple them.

So as we start a new academic year, I urge you to resolve to not just be who you are this year, but to be the best version of 'you' that you can be.

Whether it's in the classroom, or on the sports field, on the stage or in the orchestra - ask yourself constantly, are you being the best you can be. And this doesn't just relate to the 'big' things. Being the best you can be in the small things is just as powerful. Taking pride in your appearance, ensuring you are dressed smartly and are wearing your uniform

correctly, making sure you are punctual for your commitments - these are all 'small' things which make a big difference, since they too are symbols of your personal commitment to being the best you can be. I want you to know that the 'small things' like dress and punctuality are things I am particularly keen to ensure everyone in our community holds in the highest regard - because then we say to the world that we are an aspirational and committed community.

But don't just think of it in terms of things you have done or got involved in. It's far more important to ask whether you have been the best *person* you can be - have you been charitable and kind; have you been community-hearted, or have you pursued your own selfish aims at the expense of others? Have you stood up for what you believe to be right when you have seen others being unkind or espousing values you don't agree with - or have you buried your head in the sand and failed to take responsibility?

If we all strive to be the best we can be, then each of us will surely be a force for good in the world - and so will our School.