

## Founder's Day Speech – Head Prefect Sixth Form – Paula

Good morning everyone!

I'd like to start by speaking a little about my experience here at Camden.

When I first walked through the gates of this school in Year 6, nervous about secondary schools and being the youngest in a building again, I immediately knew I wanted this to be my second home. I had a blast, joining as many clubs as possible and becoming more and more confident by the day. The friends I made that first month or two are still my friends to this day - shoutout to Amyrah and Malaika. And I believe that this is the foundation CSG is built upon - friendship, support, and letting young girls (and boys in sixth form) flourish and grow, both in confidence and in their approach to life in general. This is the essence of Frances Mary Buss, lending us her mindset and key principles as we learn together - not just the different subjects we take, but also how to be resilient, how to be independent, and how to adapt to anything life may throw at us.

I don't think it came as much of a surprise to anyone that I decided to stay here for Sixth Form too. But I did surprise myself when I decided to try and join the prefect team - I was confident in my competence, but unsure whether the people around me would trust me to represent them! Then a few days later, Ms Camillo pulled me aside.

She spoke with me, encouraging me to aim higher and go for a position as Sixth Form Head Prefect. Though I was a little concerned about having to write and perform a speech for Founder's Day (something Ms Farrow can confirm I hated doing for my English GCSE) I decided to go for it. Organisation has always been one of my strong suits, and I genuinely wanted to make others happy by planning events for them, creating our yearbook, and more generally supporting them as much as possible. It also helped that I didn't think I stood a chance, and so wasn't particularly worried about having to write speeches or do any form of public speaking!

Well -  
Here I am now.

After a few weeks of campaigning, strategic placement of my baby pictures around the school, and homemade fudge deliveries to the staffroom (as staff can also vote) I showed up to Founder's Day last year unsure of what to expect. Luckily I wasn't sitting in the audience, but rather in the school orchestra - which I have been a part of since the beginning of year 7. This meant I had no time to stress about the voting results as I was too busy making music and leading my section.

But once the morning was over, the anticipation hit me. I had half a mind to pack up my things and leave, sending an email to Ms Camillo that I wanted to withdraw from the campaign on my way out. My fingers were shaking so much that I struggled to put my violin back in its case. Just as I finished, I got a call from Malaika, letting me know

that all the candidates were gathered in the common room, waiting for me before they read the results.

I froze, my mind simultaneously blank and overflowing with panic. But here, yet again, the camden spirit showed up. Two girls from a lower year stepped up and wished me good luck, sending me on my way with calls of “I voted for you!” and “you’ve got this!” My nerves settled, and I made it to the common room, where I shortly found out that I had been voted Sixth Form Head Prefect. Knowing that my fellow students, including mainschoolers, as well as the teachers I grew up being inspired by, all believed in me to act for the good of our school was, simply put, empowering. The rest of my story here is, as they say, history.

The sixth form here created freedom for me to discover my interests - my love for STEM subjects shone through with my subject choice of Maths, Further Maths, Physics and Chemistry. I was later able to do some work experience at a veterinary practice, solidifying my interest in the medical field. But the sixth form also created freedom for me to discover who I was as a person - my fashion and music styles developed, I learned that dance was a release rather than just a hobby, and finally my rollerblading skills improved with each hour I spent in the skatepark. As my mind grew and learned to absorb information more effectively, my mind also matured emotionally, and I learned how to provide the very support I had once received. I am also very pleased to share that I can now give (and I quote) “the best hugs” - though perhaps the fact that I am an older sibling shines through for this one.

When Ms Buss founded this school in January 1871, her aim was to offer affordable education for young girls. It is clear that she desired to provide education that was well-rounded both academically and practically. So she offered subjects equivalent to those taught to boys at the time - including Latin, History, Languages, Geography, Literature, STEM subjects and more. But she was also a pioneer in the field of physical education, recognising early on the importance of physical welfare and its direct impact on mental welfare. I would like to think that she’d be proud to see her key aim of versatility still upheld today, and that we are more free than ever to discover our identities.

I’d like to mention a quote by Ms Buss - when asked during an interview whether there should be a difference in boys’ and girls’ education, she replied “I am sure girls can learn anything they are taught in an interesting manner, and for which they have a motive to work.”

But it is difficult to believe that just 155 years ago, questioning this, even downright disagreeing with it, was the norm. Difficult to believe that still today, in some parts of the world there is a common belief that women are intellectually inferior in some form or another. Difficult to believe that even in England there is still a pay gap and the inherent so-called “period tax” that comes alongside being born a woman.

And yet, this very sense of disbelief is a sign of how far we have come, how much we have already managed to change for the better. In Buss' words: "We may not get there, but others will." We may not have reached true equality yet, but with Frances Mary Buss' ethos in us, pushing the next generation of strong women to take their place in society, I have no doubt that we will get there - or at least pave the way for others to do so.

Finally, I think it is important to mention the concept of feminism. Buss was the first person to use the term "headmistress" - demonstrating that it is thoroughly possible for women to succeed in a man's field. But she would not have got as far as she did without her father allowing her to go to a local free school. I believe this shows feminism at its core - a movement including both men and women that pushes for true equality. And it is clear that our school supports this concept too - the boys that join our sixth form are immersed in our positive, supportive environment, where they learn to become advocates for the rights of the young women around them, further upholding Buss' long legacy.

And now to all of you in the audience - I have sat where you sit, and a number of you will stand where I stand. In Emma Watson's words: "There's nothing wrong with being afraid". This means the only person that can limit you is yourself, so if you push yourselves, and encourage the people sitting alongside you just like Ms Camillo did for me, you can get anywhere you want. The essence of Frances Mary Buss lives on in every single one of us, and I know that when you leave this school, every single one of you, even the boys, will be proud to call yourselves a Camden Girl at heart.

Thank you.