

Lord Mayor,
Distinguished guests,
Members of our two Central Foundation Schools,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's with true pride that I stand in these august surroundings to say thank you to you, Lord Mayor, for your genial hospitality and the warm welcome you've given us. We wanted to let the world know about our two schools at this sesquicentennial moment in their history. I want to congratulate those who are involved in the arcane processes that have produced a Lord Mayor for the City of London since 1179 for their thoughtfulness and sensitivity in choosing the first ever teacher holder of that office in a year that coincides with our celebration. We honour you for your musical skills too. Your arrival in office, and your clear understanding of the meaning and importance of education is cheering. As you say, a rounded education provides the skills needed for a productive and innovative workforce and also endows our civil society with wise and compassionate citizens. It adds value to our commercial endeavours and also to our corporate life.

Until quite recently, the Lord Mayor of London was an ex officio trustee of the Central Foundation Schools of London. He is still (and I say this just in case no one has yet brought it to your attention) our Patron. Hence our affection for your office and our pride at being here tonight.

I'm a clergyman, just as the founding father, the Reverend William Rogers, was a clergyman. I want to model my work on his. He founded one school after another. In those days before the 1870 Forster Act (which made elementary education mandatory for all our children), he founded schools in the poorest parts of his parishes. And he brought his poshest friends to help him launch them. Gladstone laid the foundation stone for a primary school in Golden Lane. Prince Albert opened it a year later. Rogers hung about this place quite a lot. He held a dinner here to raise money for our school and told his wealthy friends that he expected donations of £1,000 apiece from them. Nearly all of them coughed up. He was a great man.

As I look back over the history of our schools, I note one theme standing out. It was Sir Benjamin Phillips, Lord Mayor in 1866, who launched the Foundation. He was Jewish, a founder member of the United Synagogue, a long-term member of the Board of Deputies for British Jews, and a philanthropic supporter of Jewish charities. But not only Jewish charities. He raised a

phenomenal amount of money for the Cholera Appeal going on at that time. Rogers too, raised his money from Roman Catholics, Jews and Quakers. So he refused to make his schools faith schools – he was firmly committed to the idea of secular education. And the latest waves of immigration were almost inevitably the pupils in the schools he founded. He got fed up waiting for permission from those who want the economics or the theology to be propitious. “Hang economics, hang theology,” he’s famously quoted as saying. Indeed, he became known as “Hang-theology Rogers”!

Our schools have continued to offer their services to communities that are richly diverse. They seek to show that, whatever the current public discourse may offer on the subject of immigration, the synergies and the mutual stimulation offered by school communities like ours – pupils from so many ethnic and religious backgrounds – far outweigh any perceived disadvantages. We are convinced that we can contribute handsomely to the creation of a multi-racial, multi-faith, multi-cultural society that drips with brilliance and lifts the spirit. For in achieving this in our schools, we will be offering something extremely important to our society at large.

We have two head-teachers to die for; two bodies of teachers who are as good as any in the land; governing bodies committed to the task of embracing their schools within a framework of justice, mutual respect, and the raising of aspiration. We are visionaries. That’s why coming here tonight is so important to us; and it’s why we want to tell our tale to a larger audience. We look forward to ever-closer ties with the Corporation of the City of London and its educational work. We were joined at the hip from the time we were born. It’s our birth right and we come here tonight to ensure that everyone understands our claim to it.

William Rogers was widely remembered for his Hang-Theology outburst. Better by far to associate him with another remark he made over and over again. “There is no darkness but ignorance.”

And we, Lord Mayor, are committed to dispelling that darkness.

And we’re delighted that you’ve given us this platform from which to sound our trumpet.