

'Good people make great Victorians'

As Victoria College prepares to celebrate its 170th anniversary, head teacher Dr Gareth Hughes told **James Jeune** that the school was continually evolving – and that nothing short of 'world-class' status would do...

'THE last year has really been about building foundations for the future – that's the key thing,' said Gareth Hughes, who has led Victoria College since the previous incumbent, Alun Watkins, retired last September.

'It's been about working to get the structure of the school right over the last year, in terms of the middle and senior leadership roles so making sure that people are clear in their roles and making sure that students are at the centre of all that we do.'

This he explained, included investment to help students with additional needs, a 're-imagined' student support centre, new staff and refurbishments throughout the school site.

'We have reviewed leadership positions to increase our focus on quality of teaching and student progress and also to introduce a new role, which is to oversee and promote the super-curriculum – so all the stuff that takes place outside of the classroom and which our students really engage with,' he said.

'Something I feel really proud of is that we have over 40 different opportunities every week for the boys to enrich and challenge themselves either during or after school. That's amazing and that includes things like the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the Combined Cadet Force as well as a very popular Warhammer club, climbing club and Socrates discussion club. We have so many different sporting and academic enrichment opportunities.'

He stressed that accessibility was an important part of the school's 'cultural evolution'.

'Our culture is evolving to be inclusive, more about celebration, kindness, altruism and diversity – my word for the year is 'togetherness' and I want our college to feel like a family to everyone associated with it. I want them to be proud to be a part of a warm and welcoming community that aims high. The aspiration is for the school to be world-class. Nothing less than that will do.'

As part of the 'togetherness' mantra, Dr Hughes said that the college had also been doing lots of work with charities and other groups during the past year.

'We have a new partnership with the Jersey Women's Refuge, we have been working with the Institute of Directors, the Grace Crocker Foundation, Mind

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Gareth Hughes

Jersey and many others. We've also committed this year to working more closely with Durrell as a named school charity,' he said.

'We want our young people to be the best that they can be – and kind, generous, giving people make great people. The phrase I have used with everyone in assembly is "good people make great Victorians".'

Dr Hughes said there was also a renewed drive to cultivate 'house spirit' now that the Covid restrictions had lessened.

'The pandemic meant that a lot of events that the boys love, a lot of the inter-house competitions, dropped away. There is a really big push this year on bringing that back, so we want the boys to feel really proud not only of their school but also of their house. That is also linked to that push towards togetherness.'

This includes the return of some of



Victoria College head teacher Gareth Hughes Picture: SUPPLIED BY VICTORIA COLLEGE

Victoria College's historic sporting and non-sporting competitions, such as house drama and house music.

'It doesn't matter what your ability or skill level is; it's about getting involved, taking part and contributing to the school,' Dr Hughes said.

Additionally, the students will take part in their first big production since the pandemic – a performance of *We Will Rock You* – later this term.

'Again, it's a return to the joy of the creative arts, which is great to see and we're all very excited to see how Queen's music will be showcased by our students in our theatre in December.'

The 170th anniversary is being celebrated with a ball next month, but Dr Hughes said the milestone year would also see the school bolster its foundation programme to help provide bursary

funds to students. He explained that the college worked with a number of 'foundation partners' – businesses in the Island which are investing in education as part of their corporate social responsibilities.

'No student that is aspirational should not be able to come here because of financial reasons. A big goal for me in the next few years is to really promote that, while we are fundamentally a Government of Jersey school, we want to make sure that the fee-paying aspect of it should not be a barrier to entry.'

'We want aspirational young men and we want good people. That's what makes this place so special,' he added.

And after more than a century of providing education, Dr Hughes noted that Victoria College would continue to evolve and improve.

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The word for the year is togetherness and the school needs to feel like a community and a family

Gareth Hughes

'We are not a museum and we are not an archive for the past. We build on and celebrate our traditions but we use them in the right way,' he said.

'At the end of the day we want to provide world-class education for our boys in this environment, and ensure they are ready to be good citizens in the wider 21st-century world.'

'It's such a wonderful community and school, and it is a huge honour to be given stewardship of it. We have an influx of some brilliant new teachers and support staff this year and they have made an amazing impression already.'

'The future looks really bright. We have set ourselves up to really push on in the next few years.'



It's such a wonderful community and school, and it is a huge honour to be given stewardship of it' Picture: DAVID FERGUSON