

**Maiden Speech of the Bishop of St Albans in the House of Lords
Thursday 5th December 2013**

This House takes note of the contribution of high quality education to economic growth – Baroness Morgan of Huyton

My Lords, as a bishop I regularly find myself standing up in unfamiliar buildings – usually ones with long and distinguished histories – and holding forth to people I barely know. I do this every Sunday when I visit one or two of the 400 churches in my diocese. But rising to speak in this venerable House evokes degree of apprehension. On the day of my introduction, I managed to break rule one by standing up at the very point when the Lord Speaker had risen to her feet. As the noble Lord, Lord McNally said to me afterwards: ‘Well, I can see you are starting as you intend to continue – causing havoc!’

My Lords, I trust that in the coming years not only will I create minimal havoc but perhaps make a modest contribution to the deliberations of this House. I am conscious that my predecessor but three made a significant contribution to the business of this House, and indeed to the nation. I refer, of course, to Archbishop Robert Runcie. But I also recall that *his* predecessor as Bishop of St Albans, who for most of his twenty-four years was a member of this House, reportedly spoke here only once and that was to argue for the welfare of pit ponies in the coal mines – not a subject which evokes a great deal of passion in the highways and byways of Hertfordshire nowadays.

My arrival here has been greatly helped by the generous welcome of members of the House and also the unfailing courtesy and support of the staff, for which I would like to record my sincere thanks.

I am glad to make my maiden speech today in a debate on the contribution of high quality education to economic growth. As you may know, I live next to one of the oldest schools in the country: St Albans School was founded before the Norman Conquest by Abbot Ulsinus in the year 948. Over the centuries it has produced many eminent alumni, including the only British-born pope, Nicholas Breakspear who took the title Hadrian IV, Professor Stephen Hawking and indeed several members of this House.

The diocese of which I have the privilege of leading covers the counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Luton and parts of Barnet. As well as many independent schools with a Christian foundation, we also have 135 church schools serving their local communities with distinction.

As your Lordships will know, Ofsted grades schools on a scale of 1-4 which corresponds respectively to 'outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory'. I am proud to say that none of the church schools in my diocese is deemed 'unsatisfactory', 18% are graded 'satisfactory', and the remaining 82% are either good

or outstanding. So let me pay warm tribute to the headteachers, governors, teachers and parents who together work so hard to produce schools of such excellence.

Of course, detractors of church schools sometimes claim that our excellent academic results are the result of us creaming off the best pupils. My Lords, the facts do not support the assertion. Our schools are spread across a wide range of neighbourhoods and we are proud to have schools in some of the most difficult and challenging communities. The latest national data published in the Department for Education's 2013 schools' census shows that 15% of pupils at Church of England Secondary Schools are eligible for free school meals, which is the same as the average for non Church of England schools. The same census reveals that we serve almost exactly the same percentage of black and minority ethnic pupils as non Church of England Secondary Schools (Census published 31 October 2013 by the Department for Education).

Let me share one good news story which I hope illustrates this well and which takes us to heart of today's debate on education and the economy.

Northfields School in Dunstable has a chequered history. Ten years ago it was put into special measures and re-named by the local authority as Northfield Technology College in an attempt to give it a fresh start. But to no avail. In August 2009 it was decided that the school should close. However, on 1 September I am glad to say that it re-opened as All Saints Academy. The academy is sponsored by the Diocese of St Albans in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire. Today the school specialises in science and business, and is housed in brand new buildings.

The improvements in academic standards were not immediate, but since 2009 they have been steady and impressive. Over the last four years attendance has increased from 87% to 93% in 2013. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*- C grades has also risen from 23% in 2009 to 40% in 2013. Our partnership with the University of Bedfordshire has generated a tangible rise in the aspirations of its pupils, with increasing numbers of students considering the possibility of going to university. I am glad to acknowledge publically the huge contribution made by the head, Tom Waterworth, and his team to achieve such a change around in only four years. This is a success story of which we are rightly proud.

It is too early to know what difference this dramatic improvement in exam results will make to economic growth in Dunstable. Certainly everyone loses out if we cannot translate academic success into productive outcomes. Andreas Schleicher, a special adviser on education policy at the OECD, commenting on the first international survey of adult skills, makes the depressing assertion that young English adults aged between 16 and 24 are some of the lowest ranking in literacy and numeracy in the industrialized world. He concludes that deficiencies in our school system over a lifetime will lead to an unbelievable £4.5tn loss in economic output. In bald economic terms this is the equivalent of living in a permanent recession. His analysis makes for unpleasant reading.

Having said that, I do want to pause and ask what we really mean by the phrase 'high quality education'. It sounds impressive and no one would dissent from it, but what I

wonder does it mean in practice? What is its personal and social content, and dare I say spiritual content, as opposed to its crude 'cash value'?

I ask this because although we need to ensure that our pupils achieve academic success, education is more than this. If we concentrate solely on academic prowess to the exclusion of other aspects of education we will do our young people a disservice.

In classical Greek culture the concept of *paideia* constituted a holistic understanding of education, embracing body, mind, and soul. It was a vision picked up and developed in Cardinal Newman's seminal work, *The Idea of a University* published in 1852. In today's world where so much stress is placed on individuality and the need to realize one's inner self, there is vital role for education to develop a sense of social responsibility and the need to contribute to civil society and the common good. And if education is to be truly 'high quality' then surely it will also produce people with a rich emotional hinterland, whose souls have been expanded as they have explored beauty and the arts.

Perhaps even more important is the question of whether or not our education system is able to help those who may never reach the dizzy heights of academia or who will never become leading entrepreneurs. Here I have in mind young people whose mental or physical health problems mean that they struggle in mainstream education and need special help and support.

It is good to have high standards and to celebrate the achievements of our academic high-flyers. In my diocese we are proud to have several leading academic institutions in the shape of the Universities of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cranfield and the Royal Veterinary College campus in Potters Bar. Instinctively our attention is drawn to them, but I do not want us to lose sight of the unique contribution that Special Needs Schools also make to our society. So let me conclude with another example, this time from Hertfordshire.

In June this year the University of Hertfordshire, in partnership with HCS Careers, organized for the sixth year running, a two-day event for 14 to 19 year old students from Special Needs Schools. The purpose of this un-sung annual event which sadly never achieves headlines is to enable these young people to meet those working in business and industry to help them develop appropriate skills and to grapple with issues of employability. With the right support, many of them are also able to contribute to economic growth.

I am proud of our educational system and the contribution it is making to economic growth, but equally I am proud of those who enable our young people to grow in self-esteem. My Lords, in speaking in support of this motion, I hope that we will ensure that every part of our education system is given help and support so that *all* our young people, whatever their academic ability, are equipped to make their contribution to the flourishing and thriving of our nation.