

## Arkesh Patel's speech

Good evening everyone.

It's a great pleasure to speak on behalf of all the prize winners this evening, as we celebrate some truly outstanding achievements. I have to say that every year that I've attended the CIE awards evening, the number of prize winners and the number of schools receiving awards continues to rise – a testament to the increasing popularity of the Cambridge system and the great success of NZ students within it.

My own school Westlake Boys High began offering Cambridge when I first entered the school in 2004. Much of what CIE was all about remained a mystery to me at the time, but it certainly challenged the students in the year levels ahead of me – encouraging them to think creatively, ask insightful questions and learn new skills. When I went back to school the following year and heard about two Westlake students who had gained 100% in their IGCSE English exams, all I can remember thinking was - 'Wow! How is that even possible?' I guess I underestimated how well NZ students are able to perform compared to those around the globe (when given the chance that is), but the fact is, we weren't really given the chance until Cambridge exams were introduced in New Zealand. It was a daring move to offer an alternative to the national qualification, but I think I can speak for all of the students here when I say thank you for giving us this chance.

Having completed three levels of Cambridge Examinations I now fully understand what people mean when they say the qualification is 'rigorous' and 'progressive.' By rigorous they mean a challenging curriculum and exam. I remember my first ever Cambridge exam – IGCSE History, and how demanding it was, to the point that it was more of a contest of who could write and think the fastest! And it wasn't very assuring that our history teacher claimed boys would never be able to multi-task. The rigour of Cambridge also helped me immensely with scholarship exams – exams which are specifically designed to be the toughest. Furthermore, when Cambridge is described as progressive I think of my science subjects, and how nearly every year they add new content to keep up with the latest scientific advancements in society.

Personally, I've had more academic success than I could have imagined under the Cambridge pathway, and so I am grateful to have attended Westlake - a school which is not afraid to challenge its students. Not only did I choose a school which offers Cambridge, but I chose a school with brilliant teachers who are nothing short of inspirational.

I can certainly attest to this with my own award in Biology. Last year, I decided to self-study A Level Biology, and I looked forward to a study period free of tests or homework. But instead, the head of A Level Bio would chase me up with essays, and drag me away from my math class to sit every test and practical lab he had to offer. Most importantly, he was always there to help answer my questions and without his help I may not have received this 'top in the world' award tonight. Likewise, I am sure that for each and every prize winner here there were extraordinary teachers to guide the way. I really don't think we can thank our teachers enough.

So having finished sitting Cambridge Exams, I just want to finish by saying a great thanks to all the teachers, principals, friends and family in attendance tonight, as well as to the CIE representatives, and to the Association of Cambridge Schools in New Zealand who make all of this possible. And finally of course, a huge congratulations to tonight's prize-winners! You've all made your mark on the national and international stage and you should be immensely proud of your achievements - well done!

Thank you.