

I was always a huge fan of Nanny McPhee as a child. Funnily enough, Emma Thompson, who plays the lead role, is an old Camden Girl. In this film Nanny McPhee is like a fairy-godmother. She comes into families as a nanny, to help struggling parents, by teaching the unhappy children to stop misbehaving.

There's a scene in the film, where some of the children are at home and in desperate need of help, but Nanny McPhee is taking one of the other children to London to visit his father. One of the girls at home runs up to the space beneath the chimney, cups her hands around her mouth, and shouts: "Nanny McPhee, we need you!" Even though she is miles away, Nanny McPhee hears her cry. With a tap of her magic walking stick, she sends help back to the children.

Right now, I feel like standing by my window and shouting to Francis Mary Buss, our founder: "Miss Buss, we need you!" "We need you more than ever!" We need you patrolling the streets, telling everyone to stay at home, we need you to help us find purpose and keep doing our schoolwork, and most importantly we need you to keep reminding us that this will end, that we've got to keep moving forwards, we have to keep going onwards and upwards.

We need you Miss Buss.

Eventually, when all of the problems in the family are more under control, Nanny McPhee moves on. But she always leaves each child with a keepsake to remind them of something that they've learned.

I don't think of Miss Buss in quite the same way because, let me tell you a secret: Miss Buss is still alive.

She lives on in every creak of every door in our school, in every plant that grows on our premises, in every excited yell and in every winding canteen queue. She lives on in every student, every teacher, every member of support staff, every parent and every alumna. I'd even go as far as to say that she lives on in every single person who sets foot in our school. Because honestly, once you've entered the Camden community, you never really leave.

And here we reach the thing that I've always dreamt of talking about in my Founder's Day speech. Who knew it would be so relevant to these times?

There's only one way that you can really describe it.
It's not an atmosphere, or a mood, or an ambience.
It's a vibe.

Urban dictionary describes a vibe as "A distinctive emotional atmosphere; sensed intuitively".

I've always thought of Camden's vibe as a sort of enthusiastic firework-esk colourful feminist explosion.

Sisters of Camden School for Girls: I call you to attention. Choose your metaphorical, pacifist weapon. We need you.

Because every one of us has a little Buss inside. Every one of us has that spark, and that willingness to fight for what we believe in. We're all full of that incredible contagious compassion and that unique feminist fierceness.

That *passion* still exists outside school doors! Vibes don't need buildings. Vibes need people.

We create our unique CSG vibe together.
And right now we need it more than ever.

So many of us are facing feelings of loss at the moment - loss of purpose, freedom and for some of us, even the people we love.

We need things that we know we will not lose.

I know everything is changing and it feels like there's so much we no longer have, but there's one thing we're not losing, one thing we'll never lose - our Camden Spirit.

Francis Mary Buss lost four of her ten siblings while she was still only a child. She was the eldest of ten and the only surviving girl in the family. I can only imagine how hard it must have been for her.

And on top of her losses, by the age of fourteen she had a job teaching at her school, and when she was sixteen - my age - she was often left in charge of the school for a week.

Miss Buss never had children. But I think you'd agree with the author of this poem that she has more daughters than she could ever know.

“A mother, though no infant at thy breast
Was nursed, no children clung about thy knee;
Yet shall the generations call thee blest,
Mother of nobler women yet to be”
- To F.M.B¹

I think we can look to Miss Buss for inspiration in these times.

Her life was full of adversity, but these setbacks never seemed to divert her from working towards her goal.

¹ Annie E. Ridley quotes this poem at the opening of chapter 4, in her tribute to her friend, *Francis Mary Buss and her Work for Education* c.1923, available as an ebook at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/60820/60820-0.txt>

As we also know, a buss is a type of beautiful wooden fishing boat (the emblem of our school). I imagine we all have a little buss inside us, sailing through the waters we have to navigate every day.

We cannot control the wind, but we can alter our sail so we move in the direction we want to.

I urge you to take hold of your sail and find your direction, always remembering to hold your values close to your heart.

Sailing isn't easy; it takes time and practice, but eventually we will learn how to navigate these rough times. Let's all sail our little boats, with that spark of Miss Buss always inside us, onwards and upwards.

Onwards and upwards.

Chanya Ambalu-Wedell