



Folkestone School for Girls: Cloud Busting - a powerful production that packed a punch

As an NSTA representative, it was a privilege to attend the Folkestone School for Girls production of *Cloud Busting* on the evening of Tuesday 12 February 2026. This was an entirely pupil-led production, thoughtfully directed and performed with talent, packing a powerful punch that had a lasting impact on its audience.

Cloud Busting is a stage adaptation of Malorie Blackman's 2004 novel, written by Helen Blakeman. Specially commissioned by the National Theatre for the Connections Festival 2011 involving 200 schools and youth theatre groups across the UK and Ireland, the play is part of a collection of new plays for young people suitable for performances in schools, colleges and youth theatre groups. *Cloud Busting* explores the unlikely friendship between school bully Sam and his unique and creative peer, Davey. This powerful performance masterfully presented themes of bullying, friendship and individuality, immersing the audience, urging us to reflect on the key messages about society today, and think about the roles we choose to adopt within it.

Head of Drama Paul Ferguson, who opened and closed the evening, relinquished responsibility for the performance, emphasising that this production was pupil-led. The confidence and expertise demonstrated by directors Amy, Arabella, and Daisy clearly reflect the strong foundations established under his guidance, empowering them to apply their skills independently. These young women deserve high praise for their captivating and professional approach. Every element, from movement, expression, and stage positioning to lighting, set, costume, and vocal choices, was delivered by a cast and crew working cohesively as an ensemble to create a truly extraordinary and memorable piece.

Sound designer Cyrus engaged the audience from the moment we entered the space, transporting us into a serene natural environment with light breezes and birdsong that created a calm and reassuring atmosphere. This worked seamlessly with Max's excellent lighting design, which was bright and uplifting, featuring edgeless moving projections representing clouds and mirroring a positive, sun-kissed day. Subtle accents highlighted the clouds suspended above the audience, while lighting framed the larger clouds at the edge of the proscenium, establishing a carefree tone and ensuring we were fully invested in the story about to unfold. Hollie, as Lighting Operator, enhanced the opening with a smooth execution of Max's design, projecting a sharp window frame onto a rectangle of green grass where we were introduced to Sam, played by Arabella, gazing at the sky. This was one of many innovative choices made by Max during this production.

Arabella delivered a flawless and outstanding performance. Her commanding and mesmerising stage presence created an authentic character and guided the audience through Sam's journey of self-realisation across a wide emotional range. At times her delivery was sharp, deliberately gruff and unkind, capturing the teenage bravado often displayed by young people struggling to find their place



in society. This contrasted beautifully with moments of gentleness and reflection, achieved through superb timing, carefully judged pauses, subtle gestures and precise vocal choices.

Her relationship with Davey, brilliantly portrayed by Jaxx, lay at the heart of the narrative. Jaxx's performance stood out not only through his confident use of space but also in the way he fully inhabited the role. Davey's individuality and creativity were conveyed through nuanced facial expressions, fluid yet sometimes restricted body language and an assured use of stillness and pause.

Ultimately this was a truly ensemble performance, with each cast member integral to the storytelling. Every moment was choreographed with impeccable timing. Characters displayed individual action and reaction, yet these were delivered collectively, emphasising the routines and relationships within this recognisable teenage dynamic. Agnes, Annabelle F, Blossom, Faye, Evy, Ida, Jessica, Lilian, Mirabelle and Niamh should be congratulated for their committed and supportive performances.

The named cast members Poppy, Ella, Jasmine, Theo, Grace, Mollie, Emerald and Maria played their roles with confidence, convincingly capturing teenage excitement, indignation and enthusiasm as required. Grace, as Alicia, was particularly noteworthy. Her exaggerated and outraged self-obsessed characterisation provided moments of light relief and proved highly engaging. Daisy and Xara offered mature and sensitive portrayals of parents navigating relationships with their children and with one another. Georgia, as Headteacher, was assured and authoritative, while Annabelle S's Hoodie Boy made a striking impression with a dynamic entrance that propelled the narrative forward.

Technical teams, led by Mr Andrews, alongside the Prop and Costume Team of Isabel, Lexie, Mia, Liliana, Marli, Esme and Star, and Stage Manager Annabelle B, were also essential to the success of this superb production.

Folkestone School for Girls presented a play that would not have looked out of place on a West End stage. This exceptional school production demonstrated how pupils can successfully lead their own creative work to powerful and impressive effect. These young people undoubtedly represent the future of the arts through their commitment, skill and passion. The performance stood as a testament to the enduring power of theatre and live performance.

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