



Principal's address at 2018 Presentation Night

Esteemed guests, staff, families and, most importantly, students - good evening. It is a joy to be here this evening and to share with you once again.

Before I deliver my message for this year, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful preparation that has gone into this evening, overseen by Mr Alessandrini, who leads a large group of staff, as well as the incredible number of musicians, performers and speakers who will continue to take to the stage during the night. If today's rehearsal is anything to go by, we are in for a wonderful night showcasing the extraordinary talent of so many of our students. Thank you!

As I thought about what message I wanted to deliver this year, I thought that I could talk about the many things of which I am extremely proud.

I could talk about our NAPLAN results this year being the strongest we have had in our history, with each year level - Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 - achieving above both State and National benchmarks in every category for the first time. Our Year 3 results are particularly significant given that it is the second year that our Mandarin program has been 'assessed' against literacy benchmarks - clearly our students are doing exceptionally well, as we saw in 2017 and see again this year.

I could talk about the College receiving a record number of credits, distinctions and high distinctions in the many ICAS competitions in which students participate. And of course, I would want to talk about Pamela Piechowicz in Year 11, who received a medal for writing, having achieved the highest score in her year level across the state; this being the fourth consecutive year that Overnewton students have achieved such medals.

I could talk about how proud I was to be able to recommend Naoki Woolcock for an inaugural University of Melbourne Principals' Scholarship, which he has been successful in receiving.

I could talk about how proud I was to hear that our College Captain, Bonnie Holman, spoke articulately and with confidence as one of only three students invited to sit on a panel at the recent national conference of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, at which she spoke to a room of 900 educational leaders from across Australia.

I could talk about the four students who are not with us this evening because they are competing in the grand final of the junior State DAV Public Speaking Competition at St. Leonards College.

I could talk about Liam Armstrong being a category winner of the 2018 Redgum Book Club Young Writers' Award. His inspirational stories of acceptance and tolerance are to be illustrated and published by Redgum for distribution throughout Australia.

There are so many other students whose academic achievements have been excellent this year, and I could proudly talk about the co-curricular achievements of our students too. Fortunately, I know that Bonnie and Christian will be highlighting some of these when they deliver their College Captains' address later in the evening.

I could talk for hours about how excited I am about the new direction in which the College is heading, through the changes to its campuses.

But as I think about this evening, it occurs to me that every proud Principal will be standing up in front of their communities at evenings such as this one, saying very similar things about how proud they are of their students' successes and where their schools are heading.



Therefore, what I want to do is talk about what I believe is our most unique and greatest asset, our greatest achievement, year in, year out, and suggest how we can make it even greater.

I asked Bettina Allen to provide me with some data about the make-up of our College community.

Did you know that we have students from 55 different nationalities listed in our database? 55!

Including atheists, we have 34 different denominations or religions listed in the College. Although the 34 groups represent the five major religions, that is a list of 34 different ways of expressing and worshipping a faith.

Did you know that there are 99 students in Year 12 this year who have been in the College for the entire thirteen years of their schooling? These are 99 students who have never experienced another school and do not know what it is to attend a school without an extremely diverse and inclusive population.

In a recent Whispers article, I wrote about attending the national Anglican Schools Conference and hearing keynote speakers talk about the ideal of disagreeing well. This being an ideal that we could learn how to disagree with someone who has a different opinion to our own rather than completely dismissing them.

In social media terms, when we don't like what someone writes on Facebook, or Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter, we simply and easily block them so that we no longer need to deal with people writing about things we don't like.

I have been guilty myself of hearing a person express an opinion that I didn't like and just dismissing that person, almost as a person, and as someone from whom I felt I had nothing to learn. To my shame, what an arrogant stance for me to take.

President Bill Clinton once remarked about his own country: *"We only have one remaining bigotry; we don't want to be around anyone who disagrees with us"*.

It is much easier to dismiss people whose ideas we don't agree with if we don't know them; particularly in the anonymous world of social media or the edited snippets of a person we see in the media. Which is why I believe it is so important to talk with people face to face, so that we have a much greater opportunity to come to a sense of understanding.

I heard a Jesuit Priest recently who said that we should take it as a compliment that someone takes the time to listen to us enough to disagree with us.

On a world stage, we see a strong move to political opinions that are extreme. Instead of trying to reach a consensus or a bipartisan approach to anything in this country, we simply stage a coup and appoint a new Prime Minister. The notion that we could disagree well with another and work towards a common good outcome seems completely foreign as a concept to people who are more interested in their own opinions than learning from others. It is that bigotry of which Clinton speaks.

So, in this interesting world in which we live, I look at our community, a community that I love and ask myself: 'I wonder what it would be like if we could all learn and foster the skills to disagree well?'

And I think about our greatest asset, that asset being that we are an extremely diverse and inclusive community that takes great pride from that word, community.

We are in a unique position because of the diversity of our community to walk in another's shoes, to have respectful and informed dialogues with people whose perspectives and worldviews are different to ours, and to disagree well. I never stop believing that Overnewton students can make a difference in the world.



Christ tells us that we should treat others the way we would like to be treated ourselves. He tells us also to love our enemies, something that we find completely opposite to what we naturally want to do. Perhaps we could alter this to say that we will listen and disagree well with those whose opinions are different to ours.

It occurs to me that if we are to achieve the disagreeing well, then a perfect place to start is with kindness. At a previous Presentation Night, I spoke about the Buddhist idea that it is better to be kind than right.

At the recent sitting of the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand used her debut speech to directly challenge what she saw was becoming a prevailing world view. She called for a different world order - one that puts 'kindness' ahead of isolationism, rejection and racism.

So, I can talk for hours about the wonderful achievements of our students. But, in the case of this evening, I believe it is far more important for us to consider as a community what makes us unique; what benefits Overnewton students receive by belonging to this community that they cannot receive in other communities and strive for the ideal for all of us to disagree well.

Let me conclude by using people far wiser than politicians or adults in talking about how to disagree well. Let me quote from three of our Junior School House Leaders at Taylors Lakes Campus who spoke at their recent *Encore* House event. They said the following:

Daniel

Kindness can be as simple as:

- A nice word of encouragement.
- An act of friendship.
- A passing smile.

Maya

- I wonder what the world would be like if there was no hate?
- I wonder what the world would be like without judgement?
- I wonder what the world would be like with only acceptance?
- I wonder how we can help everyone find kindness in their hearts?

William

The messages we have taken away from this House experience are:

- Kindness is going out of your way to do something nice for someone.
- If we all acted a little kinder, the world would be a better place.
- When given the chance between being right or being kind, choose kind!

How fortunate we are to have such wise and considerate minds in our College.

My thanks go to all of the people assembled here tonight: board members, parents, wider family members, Old Collegians, our bankers and other supporters, my wonderful staff and, especially, our students; all of you play your part in this diverse community.

I would like to acknowledge several long-serving staff who are leaving us this year, either to move away from this part of Melbourne, to move to another school, or to take on a new direction. To Sonia Ashford, Jenny Barry, Geraldine Burne, Robyn Garnett, Suzanna Savic, Deb Sheehan, Cordula Taiwo and Cheryl-Anne White - thank you for the service that you have given to our community and its students over many, many years.

This year, we farewell 95 families who leave us with the graduation of their last child from the College. I would like to thank all of you in particular for the legacy that you have established as members of this community.

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Year 12s as you move on from us, and to the rest of the student body as you grow with us, my encouragement to all of you is that you continue to become people who disagree well and use kindness as your first course of action.

May the strength of our community and the importance of faith and family be things that you take with you, so that you leave the world a better place than when you entered it and you continue to serve as empowered, thoughtful, community-minded citizens.