

## **PRESENTATION NIGHT 2013**

### **SPEECH BY PRINCIPAL JIM LAUSSEN.**

Good evening everyone, it is terrific to be back at Hamer Hall and to celebrate our year together in one of the world's great concert venues, one, as residents of Melbourne, of which we can be extremely proud.

Standing on this stage 11 years ago, I threw out the challenge to those present that we would know we had matured as a community when we sent Overnewton students to Zambia to work with the orphans of the community of Chibobo. That challenge was taken up in ways that continue to delight and surprise me and it is truly lovely that this year we celebrated our tenth year of partnership with that community.

It was incredible to read last week that a container containing almost six kilometres of metal framing for the new school; 150 tables and 600 chairs, 9 filing cabinets and other assorted furniture; 120 bags/boxes of uniforms, new and second hand clothing, shoes, books, bibles, fabrics and stationery; a large range of tools; 30 bolts of new fabric and even a second hand old cement mixer with spare motors, was filled at Taylors Lakes Campus and will arrive in Africa in December. The changes being made to the lives of the people of Chibobo, as well as the things we learn from them, are mind blowing.

I must acknowledge the work of Mike Lampard, who continues to drive this partnership and who builds a fantastic team of supporters from across the College and from St Mary's in Sunbury.

So 11 years down the track, I throw out a new challenge to our community, a challenge that is primarily directed to our students, but one that will need the full support of staff and parents, if it is to be as powerful as I believe it can be.

It may not immediately seem to be a grand challenge like supporting those less fortunate than ourselves on the other side of the world. However, as we move further into the 21st century, it is a challenge that I believe to be of immense and fundamental importance going forward.

It is a challenge that relates specifically to our theme for this year, iRespect, and it impacts how we relate to each other and the digital footprint we each leave behind.

During Term 2, I met with our Middle School leaders and said to them that if we are to improve anything at all about how OACC students relate to each other online, it will be only when they take the lead.

All current research tells us that the intervention of adults, teachers and parents, when poor behaviour happens online, has a short term and short lasting impact at best; the most effective programs that are working in schools at the moment across the country, are happening in schools where students are setting their own social media policies.

Overnewton is a school built on a strong set of values underpinned by the Christian faith. We aim to provide students with a strong values based education that provides a foundation on

which to make decisions. Every classroom in the College has our values posters on the walls: Community, Respect, Learning, Environment....they are ever present as reminders for students and staff about what we stand for and how we should relate to each other.

Our Taking responsibility document states very clearly that:

Our College needs to be a place where individuals are supported and loved as their identities unfold and they seek to realise their potential.

The focus of this policy clearly is on the individual taking responsibility for their actions.

At the lunch with Middle School leaders, Ali, one of the Taylors Lakes Campus leaders, said:

“The internet is an awesome tool if you use it wisely”:

And of course I had to agree with her, it is an awesome tool.

Access to information, connection with others, entertainment and learning are unprecedented and will only become faster and better....it is a great age in which we live.

When chatting to a staff member recently, he reminisced about getting his pen licence....and he made a really curious comment about getting his licence.

He said that the moving from pencil to pen meant that you commit. You commit your ideas with ink and in a more permanent and deliberate sense.

When you commit online however, it moves committing things to text into a completely different level. A piece of paper can be shredded or burned, destroyed in other words. But we can't do this online....so committing in digital text is setting up a digital footprint, that will be carried with you possibly for the rest of your lives.

Earlier in the year, I reread some email and SMS exchanges I had had. When you reread things no longer in context or indeed have someone else read them, you may find it confronting. If you are not careful, the context in which the exchanges occurred is lost ..... and so the meaning could change.

One of the other incredibly wise points made by one of our Year 8 leaders, Ben, was in relation to SMS. He said:

“You don't see the face on the other side.....you can't see the reaction to what you have written.....there is no one to moderate the internet”

When we used to post letters, we had time to reflect on what we had written and reconsider what we were sending. In the digital world, our exchanges can happen very quickly, or when we are doing a number of other things and we may not consider how our message is being received. Likewise, the receiver may not fully understand the intent in which we are sending a message either.

So the internet can be an awesome tool but, as Ali says, “only if we use it wisely”.

At the start of Term 3, all of our staff were addressed by Ehon Chan a young IT guru and he was invited to speak to us about living in the digital age and link it to our theme.

He started with the idea that people don't have an online world and an offline world he said:

Who you are offline, is who you are.....

Who you are online, is who you are..... In other words, the way we behave online is in fact, just a normal extension of who we are as people.

It is not unusual for some people to experiment in the anonymous online world with behaviours that we may not use were our friends or parents standing along side us. But we know that the more we practise and use such behaviours, the more those behaviours will be the ones that become who we are.

So students, your challenge is to take charge of the College social media policy and set the framework and expectations around how we relate to each other across social media and the footprint we leave behind. You have to take the lead and exhibit behaviours online, where you make it clear that inappropriate behaviour and interactions are not acceptable.

Of course, picking up on the idea that who we are online is who we are, developing a strong social media policy is just a logical extension of how we should treat people on a daily basis or how we want to build our own reputations and it is, after all, why we selected the iRespect theme for 2013.

The challenge for parents and staff is that instead of jumping in to sort things out for our children at the first sign of inappropriate behaviour online, we need to take a deep breath and ask our students how they are going to take the lead instead. This is not something that we will find easy to do, because our first inclination is often to rescue our children.

However, children are quite rightly taking charge of their own learning in the digital age, therefore they must take charge of their behaviour too – adults will help, but we must sit back from time to time, to allow our students to make mistakes and learn from them.

It may appear that I am abdicating my and the College's responsibility to protect students online by not being police. Far from it. The College will do all it can to support students as they accept this challenge. However, appropriate behaviour will only occur online, I believe, if students accept the challenge to do something about it.

Students, it was Ghandi who said "be the change you want to see in the world" theme from 2005.

I look forward to seeing how our students take up this challenge over the coming months and years and I know that you are all up to this task.

In conclusion, let me say that I am truly privileged to work in this great community and alongside some incredible groups of people.

Under our new chair, Mark Ruff, the Board works tirelessly behind the scenes. Although not building at the moment, they have possibly worked harder than they ever have before this year, upholding the values of the College and working to reduce our debt. One can never question their passion for or commitment to the College and whilst they are concerned about today's students constantly, their focus is on working to ensure that the College is here for future generations of students too.

The Parents & Friends committee, also under a new chair, Carolyn Barbuto, are a terrific group of parents who are passionate about the College and provide great opportunities for our students and support parents through their fundraising efforts. Their overseeing of the Family Contribution Scheme continues to be the crucial defining character of an Overnewton education and I continue to be inspired by the physical giving of time, by every family in this room tonight. Thank you.

The Old Collegians' committee is a small group, but they lead a strong group of old collegians that provide connections beyond the College through reunions, Stay Connected, careers evening and mentoring of current students. Of course, the donation of the bursary for a Year 12 student at the 20 year reunion each year, is an invaluable act.

Staff – you work in an exciting time in education, when teachers are no longer the founts of all knowledge, as knowledge is so quickly accessible online, but where the relationships we have with students is more important than ever before. I thank you for your commitment to the students you teach and the care you show to those you don't. It is an honour to work alongside you.

Students – you provide us with the joys, challenges, surprises, interactions, and personal achievements that make working in schools truly the best profession that we can have. As I say every year, you are why we are here. You are very fortunate to attend this College and we are fortunate that you do. Please continue to grow into the stunning young women and men that you have the ability to be.

And finally, our graduating class of Year 12 – what an extraordinary year you have all had. As you leave the College this week, let me finish with a quote for you, one that I have shared at this occasion in the past:

Never lose sight of the fact that the most important yardstick of your success, will be how you treat other people, both online and offline – your family, friends, and co-workers, and even strangers you meet along the way.

