

Principal's Address at 2021 Presentation Night

Good evening everyone. For the second year in a row, my Presentation Night address is delivered to you virtually.

Not being together tonight in the one space is clearly not our preference. Whilst it might have been possible with the easing of restrictions for some of our students, staff and families to be together, we would not have been able to have all of our usual Presentation Night audience and neither was it possible to find a venue with little notice that would allow for a large number of us to come together safely.

Therefore, I am grateful that you have allowed us into your homes again tonight and, for our Year 12 students and their families to be together at the Coburg Drive-In.

As we reflect back on 2021, and, indeed, 2020 in many respects, it would be easy to spend our time concentrating on the trials, challenges and restrictions that we all endured.

However, it would be healthier for all of us were we instead to think about these last two years as times of character building, times where we could enjoy the simpler pleasures of life and where resilience was seen to be a prime quality.

Of course, we should not let the times of lockdown this year erase the memories of those things that we did achieve together. Sporting carnivals, the Year 12 boat cruise, musical preparation, the camps that did occur, Senior School House Festival, the Sustainability Group, fundraising, the opening of our new Prep – 2 building and moving into the new 6/7 Learning Centre to name but a few.

In lockdown, we experienced some incredible success with Chess, public speaking and debating, as well as some exceptional fundraising activities initiated by students and staff. Additionally, our student leaders from across the College continued to provide ways for students to come together and feel connected through online assemblies and events.

One of the positive and, perhaps surprising things for some, that has come out of the last two years is that our student learning has not been negatively impacted. Indeed our VCE results for 2020 were our strongest in 10 years, we achieved above the State in every indicator in NAPLAN this year, this being especially reassuring given that Victoria was the strongest performing State in the Nation, and our post-lockdown PAT data confirms how well our students have been learning.

Whilst our learning may not have been negatively impacted, what we do know is how much we have missed the personal connections that we have taken for granted. We know that our children have not necessarily developed their social and emotional skills in the ways that we would normally see in a year where we were all together face to face.

We know too that we have not enjoyed the daily connections with families that have been such an important aspect to an Overnewton education for our entire history.



As we reflect on our theme for 2021, *Embracing the Future and Honouring the Past*, I encourage you to think about those things of the past two years that were in fact positives that I hope we don't lose:

- Using Microsoft Teams to communicate rather than sending lots of emails.
- The opportunities for parents and staff to meet online thus making it easier for parents to connect with the College whilst at work, and for staff not to be rushed at the end of a day. Certainly, we saw an increase in parents connecting to Parent Teacher Interviews when they were virtual.
- Finding new ways to teach that helped to captivate students learning.
- And of course, the care and nurturing some of us have shown our students and families, the understanding and clear communication between school and home.
- In many instances, a less frantic and busy lifestyle.

I am sure that you will have your own thoughts about what we should not lose from the past two years with regards to our learning.

One of the things that I would add to this list is the wonderful and unexpected family times that we have all enjoyed. I don't believe there has been a time in recent history where families have been able to enjoy such quality time together as we have in the last two years. It has been a delight to hear of the myriad ways in which families have enjoyed their own unique family rituals and connections. Please never stop honouring how important this has been.

And as I talk with you this evening, let us look towards embracing the future. A future that is hopeful now that lockdowns appear to be a thing of the past and a future that is full of opportunities.

For our graduating students that is a future that will see onsite tertiary learning or greater freedoms with apprenticeships and other work related activities.

For those of us at Overnewton in 2022, there is a fantastic opportunity for us to shape a future that is unique to Overnewton. How wonderful it will be to be able to strengthen the word Community in all that we do next year.

Embracing a future that once again sees the unique Overnewton character of families, students and staff working in close alignment to provide the best learning and growth we can is exciting. Being a private school with an open door once again will be a welcome sigh of relief.

I am extremely grateful to my exceptional team of staff who continued to provide outstanding learning opportunities for our students often whilst also juggling their own demands at home.

I believe that teachers have never been asked to work harder nor more creatively than they have before. Their adaptability and genuine desire to provide what was best for every student they taught, whilst teaching in styles and through platforms that none of us were trained to do have been phenomenal. Supported by an amazing group of Education Support Staff who have also had to be incredibly flexible and step outside their comfort zones, I could not be more proud nor more grateful to the wonderfully committed staff of this school.



But I know that this has been another year where parents have been asked to engage in their children's learning in ways for which they are not trained nor been asked to do before. I applaud all of you for what you have done this year too. I trust that in the uncertainty you experienced there were moments of sheer joy with your children as well – a joy that we, as educators, experience as a normal part of our jobs on a daily basis.

I am grateful to our College Board for their unwavering support of the actions required of us this year whilst continuing to plan for the future direction and sustainability of the College. Their work this year has been pivotal in ensuring a strong future for Overnewton College.

In closing this evening, I would encourage you to reflect positively on what you have been able to do, the connections that you have still been able to make, and to be grateful for things that you have still achieved.

It is through this approach that the future you embrace will be extraordinary and it will be a joy to hear about what Overnewton students continue to achieve as they embrace their future.

May God continue to bless all of you.