

## Principal's Address at 2022 Presentation Night

Good evening everyone. As has been said on numerous occasions already this evening, I too share the joy of being back together in Hamer Hall to celebrate the successes and achievements of our students this year.

I must confess it has been a challenge to prepare a speech for this evening, given that it will be my last in this forum. Whilst where I wanted to get to was easy and, hopefully, predictable, what comes before it has not been as straight forward. In the end, I thought that the best I could do was to talk about who we are as a community and what that has meant to me over the last 27 years.

During Chapel services this year, we have learned about the Anglican tradition being like a three-legged stool of scripture, tradition and reason.

From the time I first came to Overnewton College, I have known that Overnewton is like a three-legged stool too with staff, families and our Anglican identity being each of the three legs that hold up the very important seat, our students. Take any of those legs away and the stool will not stand, our school will not be what it has always been either.

At Founders' Day this year, I spoke about my first visit to Overnewton in 1995, stumbling across a working bee. As with all working bees, it was a hive of activity and it was impressive to see so many parents undertaking an array of tasks. This was a wonderful and pertinent first introduction to this community given the commitment both Bev and my parents had given to our educations, and then the time that Bev and I gave to our girls' educations too.

When I started here in 1996, Sarah was still in Kinder, Lucy was 2. The whole time they were at school and then university, they have known only Overnewton as the school where their father worked. Even though the girls did not come to Overnewton, because I thought that it would be unfair on them and me given I was Principal, they have still attended Annual Fairs, Musicals, Balls and Presentation Nights. Sarah is in London so can't be here tonight but it is lovely to know that Lucy is here, along with Bev, of course, and my sister and brother-in-law who are filling the seats that my parents always filled when they were still alive.

When our girls were at school, between us, Bev and I were on the Kinder committee, the school council, parents' association, canteen rosters, school sports clubs, working bees, and Bev ran the plants stall at their school fete each year. In fact, such is Bev's commitment to plant stalls that she has collected and grown cuttings for Overnewton's Annual Fair for many years and even made sure that I confirmed with the P&F



Committee last Thursday night that the many plants she has amassed for the next Annual Fair can be sold at the Colour Run event on November 26...and yes, they can.

So when I talk with passion about the importance of a Family Involvement Program, I do so with the practical and real knowledge that as working parents, Bev and I contributed more than we needed to, each year, to our own girls' schools. We did it because we wanted our girls to know that education is important, that service to others is important, we wanted to build connections with other parents and staff at their schools, and we wanted to help the schools to be better places. Was it always easy? No. Did it sometimes seem like a burden? Possibly. But most importantly, we contributed because we simply loved doing it and being a part of their school communities. As I say to visitors at every School Alive tour, every school has families who contribute to the life of the school but at Overnewton our families join us already knowing that they want to commit to the life of this school.

The truly beautiful thing about Overnewton, and our unique and defining characteristic, is the way in which we embrace families into the life of the school. Being a private school with an open door, I don't believe that anyone can truly understand what this special character is until you actually experience it on a daily basis. So my thanks to every family in this room this evening. Please never underestimate how important your example and commitment are in helping to shape the characters and futures of your children.

Our second leg is our Anglican identity.

An unexpected delight for me this year has been taking Chapel services for all students from Year 5 to 12. Whilst I could not be more pleased that Rev Dr Theo Van Der Nest has now commenced as our new College Chaplain, I have enjoyed trying to bring College themes and issues into the Chapel space and hopefully provide some additional opportunities for students to reflect and be challenged in their thinking. Being Anglican means we are not told what we have to think or believe. Instead, we are encouraged to reason and challenge and question and to come to our own place of spirituality, whatever that may be.

As Anglicans, we welcome people of all faiths and no faith. It is the basis for our inclusivity as mentioned by Kiana earlier this evening. Our values of Community, Respect, Learning and Excellence, are bound together and informed by our Christian Foundation. All members of the community are encouraged to grow spiritually and explore their faith.

Our approach to relationships, restorative practices, service, pastoral care are all based on the values that come from our Christian foundation.

And now the third leg, our staff.

This year we say farewell to a significant number of years of experience from the College:

John Settle: 6 years (total 17), retires

Chris Edmonds: 7 years, change of career direction

Kirsty Mowat: 11 years, moving to Qld

Diane King: 14 years, retires

Tim Jezard: 15 years, moving full time into his family practice

Rachel Embury: 19.5 years, moves to Lowther Hall as Head of Art

Simon Bowyer: 20 years, moves to Geelong where he will be closer to home

Jim Laussen: 27 years

Anica Gayzer: 27.5 years, after a year's leave has decided not to return and will work in a local catholic primary school

Di Nunan: 35 years, retires

Between the 10 of us, that is 193 years of service to Overnewton or an average of 19.3 years.

When I told someone last week about sharing these figures tonight, they asked me if that was wise because families might be anxious about the loss of history, experience and wisdom from the school. So then I shared with them the second half of the statistics I wanted to provide tonight.

Number of staff, 336. Although I have acknowledged the 193 years of shared experience of those staff that are leaving us this year, it is important to note that the remaining staff have an average time spent at Overnewton of 10 and a half years. We have 154 staff who have been with us for more than 10 years, there are 57 who have been here for more than 20. That is an extraordinary commitment, dedication and experience that remains within our staff body. I trust that it is a comfort to families and students to know that there is such an incredible knowledge of the College, its values, its mission and its families firmly placed amongst our staff that the College will continue to provide the best possible education that we can in the school that you chose for your child's education.

At the recent Australian Council of Educational Leaders conference, we were reminded of the extraordinary body of knowledge and research there is that underlies the learning and work of teaching. Every teacher in our school had a minimum of 4 years of university education and teaching practice before they entered the profession. The knowledge that our staff learn and share with and from each other is quite profound.

It is often said that everyone went to school and therefore everyone knows what the job of a teacher is. One of the positives of lockdown was to hear from families who said they had a new respect for teachers because they had not realised how complex their jobs were. Some may say that it is easy for a teacher, they just hand out a worksheet or direct a student to a STILE page. What isn't seen of course is the thought and preparation that has gone into that work sheet or STILE page, the reworking of material to make sure that it fits the needs of a particular class and student in a class; the hours that are spent, often whilst not at school, thinking and planning of ways that learning can be delivered in a truly meaningful and purposeful way for students to learn at their best and master difficult concepts; and, of course, provide feedback on assessments that is also going to help a student to continue to improve and grow. And this does not touch on the ever increasing amount of compliance requirements that are now placed on teachers and were definitely not there 22 years ago.

Much has been spoken in the media about the impact of the last two years of lockdown on the social and emotional development of our children. I am yet to speak to a school Principal who has not had to ensure that their schools are doing everything they can to transition students back into school routines, help them re-establish social groupings, moderate behaviours that, in some cases, have become extreme, helping students to relearn social niceties and kindness; these have been challenging this year.

But sometimes we forget to acknowledge that, just like our students, our staff had two years apart from each other too. They did not have opportunities to build on their own social and professional connections, to connect with staff who have joined us in the last few years, to deal with their own personal responses to extended lockdown, to relearn how to deal with students who are struggling behaviourally when they have not had to do that when children were on the other side of a screen, to deal with the grief of not being able to be in a classroom doing what they love best, which is looking after the needs of Overnewton students, particularly if they are students with whom they were looking forward to spending their final years in the College. And of course this is on top of the change to our campuses that would possibly have been delayed had we known that we were going to be in extended lockdowns in the first year of trying to build new teams and bring students together.

Being the people they are, our staff put their own situations aside this year because they knew that their focus needed to be on supporting children's reconnection with being at school. This is another extraordinary example of the commitment of our staff to the children of Overnewton College.

We all know that what you see and hear on stage and screen this evening is because of the commitment, skill and passion of the 336 staff that belong to the College and I would ask all families, guests and students to join with me in thanking them for what they give to this community as the third leg of the stool.

And the seat of our stool, that important part that we all work together to keep sturdy, strong and true.



You all know that I love to tell stories, something I learned from my father when my siblings and I were children. I have told many stories over the years at Presentation Night, in assemblies and Chapel. The stories were all used, hopefully, to provide a connection to the key message I was trying to deliver.

Over the years you have heard me talk about:

Beetroot icecream – be brave and try something new, take risks with your learning

Haircut - #2 complain about what it important and what you can do something about – don't let the action define you but the way you respond to it

Spider – unexpected/un explored power

Ants – carrying toe nails – also extraordinary strength and abilities beyond what we ever realise

Pizza – pineapple debate – in this time of cancel culture learn how to disagree well

You never know the face on the other side of the screen – how careful we all need to be in a time of digital media and how kind we need to be too before sending off a message in anger or spite or put down.

And of course, over recent years, the stories have been about our beloved magpie family at our beach house – sharing pictures of my father feeding them out of his hand with them perched on his knee, stories of how they grow and then the horrific stories of how an adult treats its young when it knows it's time to move to its own nest and location. Stories about family, growth, transition, and resilience.

So I am not going to tell you a new story this evening. However, my stories have always had recurring themes that fit basically into the following three messages:

It is not what happens to you but how you respond to it that determines the person you will become.

Someone will probably forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel.

And the third which is, to me, the most important. Whilst I am not always good at living it myself, I do hope that the single message that people will take away from my 22 years as principal is that 'It is better to be kind than right.'



It is so easy to send an angry lengthy email, or to keep talking and talking because you want your point to be the important last one, or to use ridicule, put downs, be dismissive, not disagree well, or simply not take the time to listen to another and meet them at their point of need, whatever that is.

Being kind rather than right takes time, it takes commitment, it requires empathy, and it helps us to always remember to treat others the way in which we would like to be treated ourselves. But it helps us to build better relationships with others and to create a society that is considerate, thoughtful and community-minded.

Please always strive to be kind rather than right.

I will not give individual thank you's this evening as there are too many to give. Instead, I will simply say thank you to every person in this room and to those who have been in it before you.

It has been a privilege and honour to lead this community over the past 22 years.