



14 October 2015

Good evening everyone, it is a joy to be back in Hamer Hall celebrating another year in the life of the Overnewton community.

This time last year, you might remember that I had no voice. My voice is back with a vengeance this year and time will tell whether I am making up for lost time in my speech this evening!

It was a joy to be able to announce to the College community that we have purchased the land adjoining the Keilor Campus this evening; returning that Campus to its original size before it was subdivided into Overnewton College and the Lowther Hall Sports fields back in the mid 1980s.

It is a particular joy that Lowther Hall allowed us to make that announcement this evening and that it could be made by Andy Matiszak, a man who is matched by very few others for the amount of time, wisdom, advice, expertise, love and passion he has given to our school since the time before the first student walked onto the Keilor property in 1987. Along with Manny Stamatopoulos, Andy has looked across the fence between our two properties for many years longing for the day when that land might be ours.

In following our *Thinking first* theme, it is important, I believe, to talk about the thinking that has gone into the purchase of that property. It would be fair to say that discussions between the two schools have been ongoing for much of the last eight years. However, for the last two years, the negotiations became more intense.

Before the Board would seriously consider the purchase of the property there were several levels of investigation that needed to take place.

We spoke with town planners to find out what the State Government, airport and Brimbank Council would allow us to do with the land; could we build on it for instance or would it only ever be a sports field? We sought Indigenous reports, topographic and vegetation reports, and safety reports. We worked with our quantity surveyors – what might it cost to do some major works on the property?

The Board was also keen to ensure that the purchase would not delay the building of the new Middle School at Keilor Campus, nor could it impact on the current approach to fee increases.

Clearly, we did not speak with Lowther Hall, learn that they were open to selling the property, find out what they wanted and then settle the following day...this has been two years of carefully thought through negotiations and planning. We will take possession at the end of next January - it is not ours until then so, no, we cannot climb through the fences tomorrow!

We are not planning to do terribly much to the property in 2016, other than some minor paving, cleaning, signage and safety rectifications. Certainly, there is a new source of work for our buildings and grounds committee but there will not be an ACS footie game on that ground at least until 2017.

I mention this at length to exemplify the sort of thinking that happens first before any major project is undertaken in the College. Thinking is hard work and requires much energy and time.

On our list of priorities, we know we need a new Middle School at Keilor Campus, and it would be nice to have a new Junior School at Taylors Lakes Campus, a Music school at Taylors Lakes Campus, a Chapel on either of our campuses, and of course Food Technology centres just to start the list. Oh, and that swimming

pool.....but that is a long, long, long way down the list! In very crude terms, all of these possibilities require a lot of money to build, therefore the Board has very carefully thought through their priorities.

As a community, we must be indebted to our current and past College Boards that have been very careful governors, who think seriously about our mission, have set prudent financial plans in place, and that constantly focus on ensuring the longevity of the College for many generations to come.

Obviously there will be some new thinking at Keilor Campus because of the new property and where we might site the new Middle School now that there is more land on which to build it, as well as better ways of reducing traffic on Overnewton Rd.

But my talk until now has just been about building. The really important thinking that we undertake is about the learning that goes on in our classrooms.

Every year and in a constant cycle, College staff assess how our children are performing on a range of indicators and seek to ensure that we are providing programs that are best supporting the learning and developmental needs of Overnewton children.

Our staff research best educational practise, they look at what is happening really well in other schools, and, most importantly, they know Overnewton students and what programs will best support them.

It is such thinking that has led to:

- Introducing THRASS through the Junior School and Year 5, and into Year 6 next year
- Targeted approaches in numeracy
- Appointing a College Head of Gifted Education
- CLIL Mandarin
- Middle School teachers undertaking the Harvard University Visible Thinking program
- Middle School review that has just commenced following very successful Year 9 and Year 10 reviews
- Continuing to roll out thinking curriculum across the College from Prep to Year 12

And of course, all of this careful thinking has been rewarded with our students' strongest VCE results for twelve years in 2014, and strongest ever NAPLAN results in 2015.

But a quality Overnewton education is not just about academics; crucially important and central though they are.

Our co-curricular offerings are broad and strong too. In particular this year, we have enjoyed enormous success in public speaking and debating, our strongest sporting successes in Years 5 to 12 to date, music success, college musicals, successful motions at youth parliament, the solar boat challenge, our ongoing work in Zambia and a wonderful commitment to community service.

Anybody who has experienced the joy of being in a Senior School House Debating or Public Speaking final, or who hears the Year 9 Ensemble perform, to highlight a couple of areas in particular, will know that there has been careful thinking and planning around providing the excellent co-curricular programs that we offer too.

It is an honour that Christine Durrige and the two delightful students from Sunshine Harvester are with us this evening, to present this specially commissioned painting, a particular acknowledgment of the incredible community service selflessly given by so many in our graduating class this year to the children of Sunshine Harvester and so beautifully described by Zach Harper earlier.

In thinking through the possibility of partnering with Melbourne City FC, we did say that we would not enter into an agreement with them unless there was a program for both our elite male and female footballers. So how wonderful to have the two jumpers signed by the new women's and the men's teams presented this evening as well.

In all of our thinking, we are mindful of the following priorities: our College mission, our College values, our Christian faith, our unique community, best practise in education, our strategic plan *Overnewton 2020*,

financial prudence, equity of opportunity across our two campuses, and most importantly, the learning needs of our students. Consciously and subconsciously, we think with these priorities every day.

Year 12s: I was at a wedding on the weekend and there were some 30 people there connected in one way or another to this community – Old Collegians, past parents, current staff, photographer, florist, musicians, and the wedding party on the bride's side were all Old Collegians. What a great time of celebration we all enjoyed and what an incredible connection back to the College.

This is not an unusual story; I hear it time and time again.

I think about your Year 12 tops that have become such an important item for you. Long discussions and planning are already in train for the class of 2016; why is this? I believe it is because they are a vital connection to a place and, more importantly, a community that has been such an integral part of your lives over the past thirteen years.

As you leave us this week, Year 12s, I wish you every success in the future and hope that you also will enjoy ongoing connections with your peers and others of this community. Long may you have connections to your old school.

This year, there is only one permanent member of staff leaving us at the end of the year, although four long serving staff members left during the year due to their retirement. Mrs. Wilma Fielding, teacher librarian and Taylors Lakes Campus Junior School home room teacher; Mrs Jenny Lawrence, Head of Mathematics Years 9 to 12; Mrs Victoria Dixon, pathways assistant; and Mrs Margot Clarke, Laboratory Manager. We farewelled these staff at the time of their departure, acknowledging the incredible contributions by each.

After eight years serving as Taylors Lakes Campus Chaplain and then Middle School home room teacher, Mrs Alison Stephens retires. Alison has been a great friend to many at Overnewton and her compassion, support and care will be a legacy she leaves in the lives she has touched.

Although not leaving the College, Lauren Old has decided to step down as the Head of Senior School. Lauren joined Overnewton in 1997, as a graduate teacher and in 2008 became Head of Senior School. After eight years as Head of School, Lauren has resigned from the position to pursue further study in her passion area of student welfare. She takes leave from the College to commence her Masters at the University of Melbourne. Although we do not say farewell to Lauren from the College, it would be extraordinarily remiss of me not to acknowledge the wonderful work that she has done leading our Senior School. There are few people with the pastoral skills of Lauren and her leadership of her part of the College has created a wonderful place of learning for many Overnewton students.

Please join me in wishing Mrs Stephens, Ms Old and also our graduating class of 2015 well for the future.

My thanks go to our wonderful families whose ongoing giving of their time creates the very fabric of our community. We are a private school with an open door, embracing all of our families and imploring them to be involved with their children and their children's education. It is a constant delight to work in a school with this value at the core of what it believes.

Thank you to my wonderful staff who constantly strives to provide the best learning opportunities they can for every child in their care.

And, most importantly, thank you to the students, both past and present, who continue to give our thinking a sense of purpose, because it is the thinking that you do that is going to determine our future direction both within our local community and probably on a global scale too. Never underestimate the power of the thinking that you do and are learning to do in a deeper fashion.

Of course, thinking is hard work, it requires much energy and much time but the best thinking produces immense and valuable benefits.

The long-term health of Overnewton depends on the wisdom of the decisions and efforts we put into our school today. I am confident that the careful thinking that continues will ensure the long-term health of our great school.