



PRINCIPAL'S ADDRESS – Foundation Event
28 April 2023

Good evening, it is an unqualified delight to add my voice of thanks to Penny and Rosie's words, and to speak to how I see College proceeding into the future. I have met this week, and over the course of last term, some of the wonderful students who have benefitted from the Foundation's work and commitment, enabling them to access a College education. And it is the students who genuinely benefit, by having access to *this* – to wonderful music, to enlivening discussion, delivered in world class facilities. Students who have benefitted from the Foundation's work have moreover received an invitation to lift their eyes to the horizon of what is possible in their lives, and in many cases this is transformational. Even to this new member of the community, the impact of the Foundation is clearly written in the example of our students, who otherwise wouldn't be here. So, thank you.

I was invited tonight to speak about my vision for The Hamilton and Alexandra College. Indeed, before I'd even started in the job, I was asked by the first College parent I ever spoke to at the very beginning of the year, "So, what's your Vision for College?" That was perhaps a little early in the game to give a good and full response, but I arrive with great optimism about the future of this wonderful school, an unapologetic focus on learning and student achievement, balanced with an appreciation for the place and importance of everything that sits around academic learning and contributes to the richness of a full independent education. We will seek to keep a fine balance between all that has made us a great school – academic focus, breadth of opportunity, community connection and service, and all that will be needed in a future where knowledge is no longer, in itself, currency. We have all become better and more used to working and communicating remotely, wherever we might be. Meetings and classes are no longer necessarily tied to a place. We all know that knowledge is at our fingertips, and, now, that AI can manipulate that knowledge and 'talk' about it, writing our essays and speeches for us (although not this one...).

There have been some loud voices in the press arguing that because of these technological advancements, we should deconstruct and decentralise schools. The argument being that we no longer need a 'Sage on the Stage' imparting knowledge to compliant, if perhaps uninterested, students, nor do we need to be in the same place or even time to learn and take lessons. On a functional, *prima facie*, level all of this is true. A young person *could* attend classes from their bedroom, accessing content and Googling information whenever they needed and asking Chat GPT to manipulate that knowledge into sentences and paragraphs.

So what, then, of a school where knowledge was once currency, and 'place' was crucial? My response to this is that schools have never simply been about knowledge transfer and reformulation. The best schools have always been deeply human places, where connection and the exchange of ideas leads to new knowledge. I believe that there is a great difference between a formulated essay about conceits in John Donne's poetry, for example, and the feeling and experience of reading and coming to understand, through conversation, what his poetry might be about. There is a great difference between a piece of music composed by AI, and the experience and feeling of composing a piece yourself, or of performing in a group such as those we are hearing

WWW.HAMILTONCOLLEGE.VIC.EDU.AU

Senior School 1 Chaucer St Hamilton Vic 3300 E principal@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au P +613 5572 1355
Junior School Cnr Kent Rd and McArthur St Hamilton Vic 3300 E jsreception@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au P +613 5571 1066
Postal Address PO Box 286 Hamilton Vic 3300
ABN 87 006 456 266 **ACN** 006 456 266

this evening. There is a great difference between being able to look up and relay a piece of information, and being able to – mid-conversation – draw on a well of knowledge accumulated over a lifetime and to speak with nuance about a topic of interest or love. My view is that precisely *because* technology has changed the accessibility of knowledge and the importance of place, schools are even more important as human institutions, boldly claiming that connection and conversation matter, ethically and intellectually. People and partnerships will become more and more important in securing College’s place in this future.

So, if this is the base, where to? In short, we aim to be the pre-eminent centre of learning in regional Victoria, and amongst the best regional schools in Australia, and we are well on our way. I don’t say regional as in second tier, as though we will never be as good as a city school, but rather one of the best regional schools in Australia because regional schools are not the same as metropolitan schools; they have a unique character, a unique set of strengths and challenges. Think quickly of the tendrils of connection that exist in this room, and you will – like me – have only just begun to open the lid on the community connection to College. These connections stretch across distance and in time, in intimate ways that few metropolitan schools could ever claim, and support the academic endeavours of the school.

At College, we aspire to excellence in all that we do, with learning and teaching being at the heart of the game. We aspire without cynicism or a chip on our shoulder, but step forth with confidence that our students are as good and kind and smart as any, anywhere, and that our deep connections with one another, often across generations, and intertwined lives are part of the strong character and foundation of College.

So, my thanks again for your collective support of our school. We meet tonight at the beginning of an exciting new chapter for College, one that I’m delighted to be part of.

Thank you.

WWW.HAMILTONCOLLEGE.VIC.EDU.AU

Senior and Middle Years 1 Chaucer St Hamilton Vic 3300 E reception@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au P +613 5572 1355
Junior School Cnr Kent Rd and McArthur St Hamilton Vic 3300 E jsreception@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au P +613 5571 1066
Postal Address PO Box 286 Hamilton Vic 3300
ABN 87 006 456 266 **ACN** 006 456 266