

Mr Chairman, President of the Old Boys' Association, members of the Board, young men, staff and parents it is my pleasure and privilege to present the 2021 Headmaster's report in Auckland Grammar School's 152st year.

2021 will be characterised as a year bereft of the occasions, events and hubbub that make up the fabric of Auckland Grammar School. These are the very components of Grammar life that are often described as being intangible. Intangible because they exist only when connected to people – to members of the Grammar community. They then, not only make sense, they outwardly articulate who we are.

While we responded with online systems, we were quickly reminded about the impact human contact has on who we are, our sense of purpose and the School we are guardians of.

That said, the global pandemic reinforced how well tested our School's educational philosophy is. Tested, not only through sound educational research, but through its ability to operate in the most trying of circumstances– including, some 10 School closures in 152 years.

The School's mission that has stood the test of time states:

- Be aware of the challenges of a changing society
- Measure student performance by competitive examinations
- Encourage students to reach their full potential through competition and for this purpose, use academic streaming on a form by form basis
- Appoint staff of the highest calibre who are dedicated to excellence

These contrast with Ministry of Education ideals, supporting a fashion swathed, glossy education system implementing whimsical change concealing unprecedented levels of student underachievement nationally, under the guise of greater equity and student well-being.

As educational fads passed us by, we faced a global pandemic. Through the School closures, our mission has "been the handrail to guide us": Specialist subject teachers adapted and embraced change, academic competition and accountability through regular assessment and examinations were in place to help keep our students engaged and learning.

Through months of the School campus being closed, having examinations as a target kept students focused. Examinations because they are an independent measure about students' learning. Examinations designed to ensure fairness for all. Examinations that better guarantee comparability and authenticity and are marked with objectivity.

And we continued to stream classes, and will do, even though the Minister of education said so subjectively this year that *"Streaming does more harm than good, it isn't justified, it's wrong, it's discriminatory, it's unfair."*

Generalisations are dangerous. As is politics entering education. There is a difference between doing something and doing it well.

Streaming done well sets high expectations for all students. Streaming done well recognises students' progress at all levels. Streaming done well uses comparable data collected

independently and fairly. Streaming done well provides students at all levels with access to high quality specialist teachers. This is what enables progress, and produces tangible outcomes.

Through streaming, we will today recognise young men who have made significant academic progress across all streams. They deserve recognition by crossing stage today, and should be proud of their progress and achievement.

What message would we be giving if competition and streaming were left exclusively to the realm of sport? Grade competitions are seen as equitable. Streamed team selections are also acceptable. But, measuring academic performance and competing academically in New Zealand, is quickly being deemed inequitable and having a harmful impact on student well-being.

That's not our experience. What we saw from most of you gentlemen was self-discipline, resourcefulness, adaptability and resilience – you continued with your studies through difficulties. Without these attributes that are learnt from working and learning in a meritocratic, examination-based environment, you may well have abdicated your personal responsibility to learn online month after month this year. Many of you would have taken the soft option.

By any measure; attendance rates, retention rates, achievement rates, well-being statistics, engagement levels, the Grammar boys of 2021 proved and endorsed the value of a Grammar education that has stood the test of time. You lived our Mission. We look forward to publicly sharing your results from the external examinations that you have recently sat in NCEA, Scholarship and CAIE.

To our high-quality staff - you set the School's tone and endorsed its culture this year, on-campus and online. In this most disrupted year, I thank you for your understanding, your commitment and your loyalty as you lived the School's educational philosophy so that those in our care could benefit.

The structures that support our School, have been more important than ever this year: The Headmaster's Council ably chaired by Dr Rob Kirkpatrick '64, the Old Boys' Association, in particular, President, Mr Paul Bunbury '90, the Foundation Trust chaired by Mr Jack Porus and the Board of Trustees chaired by Mr Mark Sandelin '75. These groups and leaders have provided us with unparalleled support and stability this year.

My specific thanks to the Board of Trustees. At a time when the School's governance has never been more important, our School has been overseen by a highly professional group who willingly donated their time and expertise to protect, secure and advance our approach to educating and caring for our young men and monitoring the well-being and professional development of our staff.

In particular, my thanks to Mr Sandelin, Chairman of the Board for his stable leadership of the Board of Trustees. His status as an Old Boy of '75, and his nearly 13 years on the Board provides the School with institutional knowledge and an unwavering focus on excellence has

supported the direction of the School and helped to develop strong working relationships with staff and board members.

The Leadership Team implemented operational changes for months to accommodate the COVID-19 restrictions the Government imposed on schools across Auckland. The scenario planning and responses required complex changes to our logistics to ensure the School could operate effectively online and on-campus.

All members of the Leadership Team were critical to the successful operation of the School's operations, communications and health and safety plans.

Likewise, I commend students who have led in a variety of roles this year. The leadership opportunities presented, were readily accepted, however, by the end of August there was not a single opportunity to bring the entire student body together physically.

Head Prefect, Jack Sandelin and Deputy Head Prefect, Akash Mudaliar, joined Old Boys' and Friends of the School in recording video messages. Their influence (and ours) was restricted to being viewed from a device. Along with their fellow Prefects, Jack and Akash stayed engaged and supported their peers admirably. I commend them both for maintaining their academic studies, alongside sacrificing time to care for others.

My thanks to parents who have supported your son's Grammar education and our School's ethos this year. Throughout months of campus closures, we appreciated the written and verbal messages of support.

To our young men, who would have thought we would have been referring to self-discipline through online log in rates, submission of work and Friday Checklists. You also had to put up with my lack of IT skills to run a livestreamed messaging service from my lounge.

But, when the opportunity to return to campus came, we spoke of attendance rates in excess of 92%, we saw active engagement in classrooms, the resumption of multiple impromptu activities being played on segments of asphalt, basketball courts and the top field, as well as live sport via the grass track cycling championships. It was refreshing and quickly reminded us of what had been sacrificed. You responded with aplomb. I hope the piece of memorabilia you each receive today on-campus is a token of recognition from the School to you, that you wear with pride, and a smile.

To our leavers I wish each of you every success as a Grammar man. While many events, activities including the Prefects' Ball, Leavers' Dinner, Final assembly and your final prizegiving were taken from you this year because of imposed restrictions, you have shown resilience and fortitude. You have utilised the network available to you, to get the essentials done, without making excuses or hiding.

While there has been nothing pleasant or motivating about education equating to completing online lessons, submitting work online and completing final internal examinations online, you did it. This is a life skill. In good or ordinary times, you know it is your choice whether you accept learning-related challenges or opportunities, and you know the consequences of your choice. You also know you have ready access to friends, social occasions, informal

conversations that will provide you with renewed motivation, no matter whether you accept the challenges or not.

When operating in a restricted environment, like you have, with a singular focus on work, without a physical friendship network around you and the trappings that come with being in your final year, your outlook has had narrowed to school work, and family. The accountability was to you alone. This has required self-discipline, resilience, and the courage to avoid easy to access soft options.

Reverting to what is essential, what is core business, is sometimes required at different stages of our lives, so that we can forge ahead in good times. In 2021 you lived 'through difficulties' and were forced to revert to core business, at a time that was yours to shine. While your Grammar career is now concluding, your tenure will be recorded in our history books, and the lessons learnt will provide you with unparalleled opportunities, when we no longer speak of COVID-19 related restrictions. May that time come quickly. And may you willingly use the lessons from your final year to accept new challenges and use these to define who you are, and where you belong.

I wish the entire Grammar community a safe and relaxing holiday, with open borders, for a Merry Christmas with friends and family and a happy and prosperous new year.

Per Angusta Ad Augusta