

Mr Chairman, Lady Shiela, MP for Epsom, Mr Seymour, Hon Paul Goldsmith, members of the Board, special guests, young men, staff and parents, it is my pleasure and privilege to present the 2018 Headmaster's report in Auckland Grammar School's 149th year. We join together this morning to celebrate achievement, respect talent, endorse the value of perseverance and to reflect on 2018.

We have been preparing for the School's sesquicentenary for over 4 years, and it is equally daunting, incogitable and exciting that the 2018 Prizegiving signals the conclusion of our School's 149th year. In clichéd fashion I think we as parents and as educators turn to each other at this time of the year and share disbelief that another year has passed.

This year's Form 7 are sitting in the Great Hall as students for one last time, and you too will share disbelief that that sun is setting on your secondary education.

If we buy into the hype that time is passing us by quicker than ever then you are probably either getting old or you are more innately aware than you probably should be. Either way you would likely also endorse the phrase "the only constant we are facing is change".

Those looking from outside our gates in, without a connection to Grammar or an understanding of our educational philosophy believe that time has actually stopped here, and we continue to teach and treat boys the same way they were in 1869.

Now the uniform may not have changed, and we may be sitting on the same hall forms, but the reality is somewhat different. We believe in planned and purposeful change that improves upon what we have done. The success of Grammar through time has been due to its progressive approach linked to the unequivocal belief in the quality of education provided here. The reason that many believe time has stopped is because, like an election in the United States of America, there are growing disparities and views in New Zealand society, particularly about education.

I think the disparities have grown to such a point that even agreeing to what is considered common sense would be argued. Wikipedia, the very simplest and easy access sources states that,

"Common sense is sound practical judgment concerning everyday matters, or a basic ability to perceive, understand and judge that is shared by nearly all people."

I would say it is common sense that secondary students should follow School rules without questioning, and be accountable for their own performance and attitude. Rather for many outside our gates it is quite the opposite - just weeks ago 2000 Form 7 students actually protested that their Level 3 History examination used a word that they didn't know the meaning of. Ironically, that word was 'trivial'.

I would have said it would be common sense that every 7th former would have the word trivial as part of their basic 10,000 word vocabulary. Perhaps the need for a 10,000 word vocabulary is no longer common sense.

I have used this simple and real example to highlight how important it is that we are engaged and informed about the educational pathways being reviewed and that School's like ours are a leading voice for the retention of disciplinary knowledge in all programmes taught nationally.

What we are implement and regularly review at Auckland Grammar School is thoroughly planned, it links to the well- articulated Strategic Plan, and (in my initial thinking I wanted to say) are all just common sense.

But they are not! 'Common Sense' is perhaps now anachronistic term or for those 2000 students who protested I'll offer them the synonyms of obsolete or out-dated. Therefore, for the sake of progression we will describe Auckland Grammar School's philosophy as 'Good Sense'.

We have entered a phase of the liberalisation of NZ education that the English writer G.K Chesterton would pass off as, "A fallacy doesn't cease to be a fallacy because it becomes fashion'.

The fallacy our country faces (as presented by the government) is that we no longer need to teach subjects at NCEA Level 1. The Minister did this when he approved a discussion document to initiate the review of NCEA. It proposed that at Form 5 or NCEA Level 1 students no longer need to learn subjects and big projects and the teaching of literacy and numeracy would replace them.

Auckland Grammar's School's approach was and is to reinforce quite the opposite. An approach we have made public. The more we can develop academic disciplinary knowledge in our young men, the more options we provide them later in life. Disciplinary knowledge includes developing a basic 10,000-word vocabulary.

We have told this government that NCEA presents untapped potential in terms of assessing students' achievement. NCEA level 1 could be reframed to assess knowledge and skills developed across years 9, 10, and 11.

I have no doubt this would raise achievement for all students, reduce disparity, develop social capital and cultural literacy, and build a knowledge-based foundation for Forms 6 & 7. But, this is not fashionable, nor would it be seen as common sense. After all, why would we want to challenge students to commit (as an example) basic mathematical, scientific, language skills and vocabulary to their long-term memory?

As a student and parent community you are aware we have made our point and we are privileged to have quality specialist staff who have driven the introduction of our own Form 5 curriculum and assessment system next year. This has been a considered and progressive change focused not on fashion or a fad, but on good sense, because we know we will be able to better educate our young men, and better prepare them for their external qualifications – NCEA or Cambridge. We are closing the gap not widening it. We are growing their knowledge base.

This is the single biggest change the School has made since the introduction of Cambridge in 2002. It is for the betterment of the education of our young men, but it does concern me that where we have the capability, the capacity and the courage to act in this manner, others miss out, and the “haves” and the “have nots” will be quickly created, because the government and Ministry are fearful of what objective pass rates might look like. This is a significant cost to young New Zealanders being given an equitable chance to advance their knowledge and contents of their long term memory.

While we await the outcome of the NCEA Review, the stubborn and antagonistic behaviour exhibited by the Minister of Education this year has not been in the best interests of generations of students.

C.S Lewis would describe such behaviour as “Chronological snobbery”, where effectively the assumption is that we should uncritically accept what we have today and discredit everything from our past.

This is a juxtaposition to Auckland Grammar’s School approach. We value what our past can tell us, and we use it to guide us. The performances and the actions of those who have gone before us hold us accountable for being “Better than before”.

Fifty years’ ago, the Headmaster, Henry Cooper, spoke at the 1968 prizegiving, on the very eve of the School’s centenary. There is some alignment and synergy as we are on the eve of our 150th. At the time there was significant change being mooted to University Entrance examinations.

He told those present, “I make a plea for the retention in the Lower Sixth of an examination. Without this... too many of us are prone to believe that a change of organisation will solve all problems. That is the illusion of the politician and the theoretical educationalist but seldom of the competent practising teacher. It is important that we continually remind ourselves that good standards are not by any means the accompaniment of any educational system; they are vulnerable and their existence and their integrity must be fought for afresh with every generation and with every change of educational policy.”

If we are looking for the strength and courage to act, we need look no further.

Unrelated, but relevant to every young man in the Great Hall, Cooper said this in the same report, “Some of us... recall a time before University Entrance... when a Sixth Former was aware that he would receive a Higher Leaving Certificate almost automatically, and Forms preparing for Scholarship were referred to as “Old Men’s Rest Homes” – this in an age...when pupils were uncomplicated beings with pretty unsophisticated tastes and little money. Mass media were not a potent force, the motor car, surfboards, pop-groups, coffee bars were virtually unknown.” Some things don’t change.

I wonder what Sir Henry Cooper would think of the rodent like Lime Scooters that have infiltrated our streets, the introduction of addictive smart devices, social media and on-line games like Fortnite.

We are prepared for our academic systems and standards to be tested and measured. The results of our young will be measured nationally in scholarship and internationally through Cambridge examinations. Anecdotally, there are other measures – over 100 of our 442 Form 7 students have applied for direct entry into Australian universities, and at the height of the external examinations this year, 1000 examinations were being sat a day, with an attendance rate of 99.8 %. Such is the level of understanding our young men have in the worth of an external qualification. Of special mention are the two young men who showed enormous resilience by sitting four examinations on one day, finishing at 9.00pm.

I want to specifically thank our dedicated staff, academic and non-teaching who have a belief in the School's ethos, vision, mission and values. Together they exhibit a passion that helps us to hold true to our founding principles while advancing the academic development and general well-being of our young men. You know 'better never stops' and that has been seen this year through your unanimous support of establishing Grammar Pre-Q.

There are many structures that support our School and our teachers. These structures incorporate the Headmaster's Council ably chaired by Dr Rob Kirkpatrick, the Old Boys' Association, in particular, President, Mr Grant Tretheway and immediate Past President Mr David Dickinson, the Foundation Trust chaired by Mr Jack Porus and the Board of Trustees chaired by Mr Jeff Blackburn. These groups and leaders provide us with unparalleled support, objective feedback and a high level of accountability.

My thanks also to Mr Scott Milne who continues to lead our 150th planning, which will begin in May 2019. It will be an exciting and historical year, and I thank you for the hundreds of hours you have given to leading the 150th celebrations and fundraising for the capital project, Te Ara Matauranaga. My specific thanks to the Board of Trustees. At a time when everything is being reviewed in education, including the place of Boards in the Tomorrow's Schools Review our board is a shining example of what has been achieved since Tomorrow's Schools was introduced. The direction of our School is overseen by a highly professional group who willingly donate their time and expertise for the betterment of a Grammar education. Their specialist skills and experience has allowed Auckland Grammar School to continue to champion boys' secondary education and challenge mediocrity.

Mr Jeff Blackburn, Chairman of the Board, is in his 9th year in the role. His leadership provides stability to the governance of the School. As status as an Old Boy '67, and his nearly 12 years on the Board provides the School with institutional knowledge that Schools nationally would crave for. His quiet and unassuming disposition should not be underestimated because I while I readily witness this man's humility almost daily, I also see the courage, commitment and unwavering focus on excellence that he knows are hallmarks of Grammar and Grammar men.

I thank you sir for your passion for high quality state education and for the positive working relationship you have established with me, your fellow board members and many staff members. You have my sincere thanks for your support and vision.

The Leadership Team has worked tirelessly to implement the Annual Plan and have delivered deliberate and well-considered initiatives, alongside the complex daily logistics required to run a School with the aspirations we have for 2500 young men and 220 staff members.

In particular, special thanks to Associate Headmaster Mr Watson, Dr Etty, Director of Teaching and Learning, and Heads of Faculties who have driven the planning and preparations for the introduction of our new Form 5 curriculum and assessment pathway (Pre-Q) in 2019.

Thanks also to Mr Dunn, Director of E-Learning for his leadership of professional development for staff on the Learning Management System, SchoolBox, that will be used by all teachers and all young men in 2019.

Congratulations to Mr Skeen on this week being awarded a Woolf Fisher Fellowship for 2020, deserved recognition for educational and teaching excellence.

To other senior staff, including Head of Faculties and Departments, Directors and the wider student support network thank you for your professional leadership this year. The School has an exciting future with the quality of people we have in academic and pastoral advisory roles.

I commend students who have led in a variety of roles this year. The Prefects' again led exceptionally well and were active in all areas, and while a competitive group they struggled on the odd occasion such as a heavy loss to the Staff in the annual rugby fixture, yet shone in their depiction of Mr Simento in this year's Ball Skit.

My particular congratulations to Head Prefect, Felix Marcon Swadel and Deputy Head Prefect, Sam Rainger, who contributed in exemplary fashion to the life of the School this year. I commend them both for maintaining their academic studies, alongside their significant leadership responsibilities.

My thanks to parents who have supported their son's Grammar education and our School's ethos once again this year. We do rely on and appreciate your support.

It is vital to a meritocratic School that we not only respect young men who have participated, competed and striven to do their very best, but also, we recognise those who were the best. We will not shy away from excellence or the purpose in recognising it; to acknowledge high level success, and the attributes of a strong work ethic, sacrifice, commitment and dedication that is often unseen, and for it to be an aspiration for all. Today over 680 awards will be distributed, and each young man has earned the accolade. It is aspirational and I hope every young man has the opportunity to cross stage at least once in his career. But, know that the height of the bar won't change. So, if it is earned, it is truly deserved.

Finally, I have stressed our position on academia, and equally I want to make it clear that our philosophy will openly support the well-being of young men, and this too aligns with our past.

In 1918, Headmaster James Tibbs stressed the place of state education in his annual report. He said, "Boys of different social status ought to learn to know one another at an earlier age than that at which they go to university; they ought to realise a common education and by equality of opportunity that the welfare of the whole depends upon the mutually dependent work and goodwill of each class; and that life without industry is a crime as much in the poor as in the rich. If the well-being of our national life is to be maintained and strengthened, it is impossible to believe men and women will be content in the future to perpetuate a system which helps so much to create early prejudice and for a division with little or no sympathy or knowledge."

These were insightful words in 1918.

I want to thank the student body, the staff and our parent community for supporting the significant educational programmes we have introduced this year to advance student well-being.

These have been varied, planned and aligned with our strategy and values. Some of the work has included courageous conversations about race, the harmful impact of digital pornography, personal responsibilities on social media or on-line messaging, or earning the Rainbow Tick to promote an inclusive environment. All of these programmes aim to aid the development of Grammar boys into Grammar men. They have all required honest, open conversations from the lectern and our classrooms, and sports fields and doesn't it make good sense to treat others how we want to be treated.

In 1918 the Headmaster predicted men and women would not be content in the future to perpetuate a system of prejudice, and division.

I'd hope he would be proud of Auckland Grammar School and our community in 2018.

To our leavers I wish each of you every success as a Grammar man. Embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead of you.

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

Per Angusta, Ad Augusta.