

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 2019 Headmaster's report in Auckland Grammar School's 150th year.

We can today reflect and know that the preparations over the past 6 years were put to good use as 3000 Old Boys and Friends of the School joined with us to celebrate 150 years of a Grammar education.

At the Special Assembly to open the celebrations I said:

Auckland Grammar School has grown and become a meritocracy. In 2019 it is a meritocracy. Our modern times are in stark contrast with the Auckland of 1869, when our school was opened. The style of education we offer 150 years later has progressed, through its people. It stands today as a unique state boys' secondary school in New Zealand focusing young men on the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge across core academic subjects and building in them resilience and values that will allow them to be contributors to New Zealand society.

A meritocracy. One that has been led by its people. People who have a belief in the School's philosophy and principles. A School which has kept young faces before us daily. You should have no fears for the future.

In our 150th year I too commend the student body and our staff. You have taken the responsibility bestowed upon you to be "better than before" and in the years to come we will reflect on 2019 as a year of achievement, one of celebration, one of great contest and a year that we have had to rise to face difficulties – including the actions of some within our community as well as external pressures including the government.

Through that we have had to reflect, work fervently and connect with members of our wider community and courageous educationalists to protect the very establishment of the New Zealand education system while being grateful for everyone who has stood tall for the principles and philosophies that this School was founded on in 1850 and opened in 1869.

It was right that before we did anything else in our 150th year, we gave back to Auckland. I commend you, the student body for embracing the opportunities to act in community minded ways within 6 Regional Parks, and the Puhinui Stream and its surroundings reserves. The act of each class donating 150 hours of their time to our Auckland community will be recalled as one of the most meaningful deeds in our 150th year.

Likewise, Old Boys joining us in daily assemblies daily for seven consecutive School days had an impact on us all as we listened to the stories told and the messages shared.

The positioning of The Grammar v King's annual fixture as part of the 150th drew the community together. Put the rugby briefly to one side and know that this event was unparalleled – a full School haka dressed in 150 t-shirts, the chants, and spirit and the pride along with the tension of a closely contested game of rugby, it was unique and will unlikely be repeated.

It was the history and rivalry around the game that drew the crowd, but you the student body led our community in such a way that made the intangible spirit of Grammar quite tangible that afternoon.

Music too was critical to the 150th. We were privileged to see talented Old Boy professional musicians play alongside today's student musicians and hear the two commissioned pieces for the 150th.

The School's history was recorded for time immemorial by the Scotty Stevenson authored book, the video documentaries and the recorded summaries of 150th events.

It has been an absolute privilege to serve this community and together we have played a role in the guardianship of Auckland Grammar School, in this passage in time.

While we celebrated there have been numerous difficulties for us to overcome throughout our sesquicentenary year. This started with the Ministerial Taskforce's review of our national qualification.

Auckland Grammar School joined other Schools to challenge the government on its proposals to soften NCEA by introducing what were described as 'Big Opportunities'. The report proposed these opportunities would eliminate the need for assessment in specific curriculum disciplines.

We were joined by over a hundred Schools across the country and formed the NCEA Coalition of Schools to send a clear message that academic rigour and subject based disciplinary knowledge needed to be at the heart of assessment in our national qualification. (If this applied across our country our PISA results would soon improve too).

What was proposed would have exacerbated problems for the teaching and learning of knowledge and this would negatively impacted on the opportunities for all students to access further education in equitable fashion. We were on the cusp of the soft bigotry of expectation ruling the national qualification framework and the equity gap being widened. Thankfully this looming disaster was averted.

We also needed to challenge the government on its proposals to reform the education system. The Tomorrow's Schools report specifically proposed to remove Boards of Trustees across the country and introduce hubs and the recycling of Principals around groups of Schools.

It took further action to influence The Reform of Tomorrow's Schools report published just last month. Hubs have now appropriately disappeared without trace. We will need to be active in our submissions to the Education Select Committees on the centralisation of enrolment scheme management and on the oversight of School property and procurement.

These external challenges posed grave concerns for the provision of quality education not only in our School, but in our country.

As we conclude the academic year it is heartening to have peace of mind about our future and the independence to act in the best interests of those before us, and future generations of Grammar boys.

Academically, we focused 'in School' on the introduction of Pre-Q this year. The development of curriculum and assessment practices occurred in parallel to the external education debate about the future of NCEA. Grammar Pre-Q saw the introduction of high-quality programmes designed by subject specialists.

This personalised curriculum aimed to develop foundational skills and competencies to prepare students for their external qualifications in Form 6. In Year 1 it has been successful. We look forward to year 2 of this programme and thereafter consider its certification and use by interested Schools.

National educational reviews, the testing of our values and philosophies of sport through the 1A Rugby debate, the challenge of our School rules and the introduction of a new curriculum and assessment system all in just 12 months have melded together at a momentous time in our School's history. Perhaps it was just meant to be. We have been challenged. On each occasion we have accepted that challenge and fought to protect and our principles and our educational philosophies. It's the Grammar Way.

The School has faced many challenges throughout its history. Through these it has progressed on its own terms to become very comfortable in who it is and its ethos has become well supported by our community and in turn, universally recognised.

It has benefited from the people who have led it, acting as its guardians for each moment in time. They have ensured the philosophy of this School, its ethos, has been at the heart of all decisions made. It is this common belief and the strength of character of these people, over 150 years, that has allowed us to be the School we are today. I thank them for their service and duty.

We have looked back, we have respected our past, we have acknowledged those who have endorsed and strengthened the very fabric of Auckland Grammar School through time, we have thanked Auckland for allowing us to be an integral part of this city, we have fought to retain autonomy in our schools and the principles by which we can operate and we celebrated 150 years of quality education. A sesquicentenary year to remember. Now is the time to look forward.

Now is not the time to be concerned about external influences. We know we have the support around us to challenge, to contest, to unite those who share our educational philosophy and to affect change.

We should not be afraid of what is ahead of us, given the foundation we stand on. Young, 2010 said, *"The 21st century will not differ so radically from the past that we can afford to marginalise disciplinary understandings in favour of disembodied competencies."*

Inequalities in education in this country will eventuate if Schools are allowed to accept soft options and PISA results will continue to fall. We still require an agreed national core curriculum and the full utilisation of an independently monitored rigorous national assessment system. In other words, examinations.

As we now look to 2020 and the next two decades taking us through to the 200th anniversary of the signing of Te Tiriti O Waitangi, we are focused on progressing a Grammar education to prepare young men for a 2040 society.

That doesn't have to mean transformational change. What it does mean is defending and protecting our guiding principles, values and mission as the system meanders looking for the silver bullet that will produce statistics showing everyone has succeeded.

For us it means we will continue to expect young men to meet benchmark standards of dress, grooming, attitude and behaviour. It does mean teaching subject content and examinations. It does mean that the place of The Grammar Way will be stronger than ever.

Looking beyond our gates to the world we prepare young men to enter, their ability to communicate, to respect fellow man, to have the courage of their conviction, to live with integrity, to express humility and balance this with pride for their achievements and in the place they belong will be integral to the men they become.

Balance these values with their ability to commit and their understanding of what excellence looks like academically and in life, they will be ready for an unknown world.

We already know the employment landscape is changing as many of today's in demand occupations didn't exist 5 years ago. But what does that mean for education as we look to 2040?

Professor Paul Kirschner's recent piece of research into this very topic supports the decisions we are making about what education of the future must include. It may surprise some. His research concluded, and I paraphrase: *that educational policy should review the curriculum in schools as a 3-stage procedure:*

1. *Take care that students have mastered the necessary knowledge and skills for the future.*
2. *Bring students to a higher level of thinking so that they have competencies at their disposal, can continue to learn and problem solve.*
3. *Help them to think in a metacognitive way and reflect on what they know and can transfer these skills into new areas and think critically.*

This may sound familiar.

As an umbrella over such an approach we must commit to the teaching of values, personal standards and continue to provide the support and guidance required for young men to cope with and fend off the growing societal distractions.

This approach will allow young men to maintain their personal well-being while developing holistically to become a contributor to their school, their family and the society within which they live.

The Grammar Way of The Future.

On that note I thank our dedicated staff who have worked tirelessly in our 150th year and responded in a manner that reflects our School's ethos, vision, mission and values. Together they have exhibited 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.

Likewise, I thank our loyal support groups. The formalized structures that quietly provide unconditional support for the School including - the Headmaster's Council ably chaired by Dr Rob Kirkpatrick, the Old Boys' Association, President, Mr Grant Trethewey, the Foundation Trust chaired by Mr Jack Porus, the 150th chaired by Mr Scott Milne and the Board of Trustees chaired by Mr Jeff Blackburn until June and then Mr Mark Sandelin. These groups and leaders provide us with unparalleled support, objective feedback and a high level of accountability.

My specific thanks to the Board of Trustees. Our School is governed by a highly professional and skilled group of people who willingly donate their time and expertise to ensure that we maintain and better what we do. Their specialist skills and experience will allow Auckland Grammar School to continue to champion boys' secondary education, to challenge mediocrity and to build on the meritocratic attributes that make our School unique.

I wish to recognise Mr Jeff Blackburn, who stood down as Board Chairman as he concluded his 9th year in that role. His leadership provided real stability to the governance of the School and we continue to benefit from his institutional knowledge.

The courage, commitment and unwavering focus on excellence that have been the hallmarks of Grammar Board Chairs are seen in Mr Mark Sandelin who was elected Board Chairman in July. I thank him for his passion for the positive working relationship he has established with me, his fellow board members and staff members.

The Leadership Team has worked tirelessly this year as have Heads of Faculties and Heads of Department who have driven the introduction of the new Form 5 curriculum and assessment pathway, Pre-Q. We are most fortunate to have quality people 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 found a way to finally beat the staff.

My particular congratulations to Head Prefect, Miller Hawkesby and Deputy Head Prefect, Liam Wong, 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. I thank them both for the time they committed to the 150th celebrations as this was above and beyond what is expected of our student leaders in any other year.

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

As we look to our future 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, that 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.

Some 690 awards will be distributed shortly and young men earned each accolade. Know that the height of the bar will not change at Grammar. When earned, it deserves our respect.

To our leavers I wish each of you every success as a Grammar man, and challenge you to have the courage to continue living our values and being open to be better than before.

Finally, to you all, I leave you with the closing lines of my reply to the Toast to the School in our 150th year.

A modern and progressive meritocracy over the next fifty years will not extend a greater hand of freedom to young men. We need them understanding like never before that they are part of something bigger than themselves. We need them to know they have a place where they belong. A place where they can contribute.

We need Grammar to be that bastion of hope, and an exemplar to all about what can be achieved when we expect the best from our young.

From that they learn about the positive influence that comes from being members of a group who have exercised self-control, exhibited character and care for others, learnt to cope in trying circumstances, and then achieved with integrity, whenever their time comes.

That will be the outcome of a modern meritocracy. Winning the Grammar Way. In closing I ameliorated Cooper's words with my own – a touch of our past woven with a view to the future:

“It is in the process of cultivating the Grammar Way that we may teach our young men to stand at the level of our eyes, in the hope that they will see further than we can, and do better than we have ever done before.”

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.