Principal’s Address at Presentation Evening

Geoff Wing - 19 February 2013

- Distinguished guests, staff, students, parents and other friends and supporters of Pennant Hills High School.

- Good evening and thank you for supporting our school by attending this evening.

- I would also like to acknowledge the Darug and Guringai people, the traditional owners and custodians of this land upon which we are gathered this evening, and to pay respect to elders both past and present, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal people present.

- It is with much pleasure that each year on this occasion I celebrate with our school community important aspects of our previous academic year. This evening I hope to provide an overview of our many and varied activities and achievements.

- Pennant Hills High School is recognised as an excellent comprehensive, coeducational public secondary school that achieves considerable success in many areas of endeavour.

- This evening is a celebration where we can rejoice in the fact that our school takes all comers, abled and disabled; all abilities and all backgrounds, and that we provide a holistic and inclusive education for over 1000 students. For most students, we are the local community school down the road which achieves extraordinary outcomes via an astounding breadth and depth of programs and activities.

- There were many changes to education which began to impact schools last year, such as the functional realignment of our department of education and communities; the Gonski funding debate; local schools / local decisions; the introduction of the record of school achievement in place of the school certificate, and the national curriculum. Whilst it is relevant and tempting to become involved in comment on these reforms, I know you are here tonight to celebrate your child’s success and participation in our school, rather than to become involved with such debate.

- I wish to begin by acknowledging the wonderful group of highly dedicated, committed and talented teachers who each day work with our young people to challenge, stimulate and support them as they progress through the difficult adolescent years. The teachers work exceptionally hard at this school, giving up many extra hours to ensure we provide the best possible education we can for our students. They are very ably supported by the school administrative staff and learning support officers, working together to ensure efficiency and success. A number of our staff received prestigious awards in 2012 at the Northern Sydney Region awards and recognition ceremony for their outstanding work. Members of staff received the Regional Director’s Outstanding Service to Schools Teacher Award; the Regional Director’s Beginning Teacher Award; and the Regional Director’s School Administrative and Support Staff Award. One member of staff received one of only a small number of the highly prestigious Minister for Education’s Award for Quality Teaching. When combined with awards to students, our school received more awards than any other school in Northern Sydney Region at that ceremony. Ladies and gentlemen, I commend to you all of the staff of our school and thank them for their efforts.
• There are considerable changes taking place in our school staffing as an increasing number retire from teaching. This will increase in pace over the next 5 years in particular. Last year we farewelled to retirement, or leave prior to retirement, a number of longstanding teachers … Mr Joseph, Mr Summers, Mr Williams, Mr Cairns, Mr Lugton, Mr Lowery, and of course, late in 2012, we were delighted for Mr Rudd when he gained promotion to Principal at Northern Beaches Secondary College, Manly Selective Campus. The combined service of these 7 members of staff to Pennant Hills High School is a staggering 144 years. Add to that the retirement of Mr Wally Bower after 25 years as groundsman, and I am sure you can see that we are undergoing generational change.

• Mr Henzler was successful in gaining a permanent position with DEC, at another school; Mr Keegan and Ms Dennis were promoted to Head Teacher positions. We were also delighted to welcome new permanent staff, including Mr Higgins, Mr Williamson, Mr Walters, Mrs Garcia and Mr Crosbie.

• Our most important goal at PHHS is the provision and maintenance of a happy and safe learning environment in which every student has the chance to achieve their personal best. The welfare of all of our students is always our prime concern. I believe our student welfare team is one of the most experienced, competent, talented and committed group of professional teachers with whom I have had the pleasure of working during my 36 years in education. I accept that it would be foolhardy to claim that all of our students feel happy each day while at school, because there are many external factors which impact on that. But I am confident in saying, without hesitation, that we have a safe environment. Things go wrong and there is conflict at times between students and others, but these occurrences are usually minor and are quickly solved. Our ‘Good Friends/Good Learners’ anti-bullying strategy was again implemented with considerable success and it continues to underpin the student welfare policy at PHHS. A significant feature of our Welfare Team’s work is the transition program that enables smooth integration of students from primary school to high school, including students with disabilities placed into mainstream classes.

• In 2012 the team was faced with significant changes to the way in which learning support was provided to students in mainstream classes. We have made the necessary adjustments through the implementation of the ‘Every Student / Every School’ strategies, and have received acknowledgement from relevant regional staff that our systems are first-class. In addition to mainstream students, we have 4 Special Education classes that cater for children who have mild or moderate intellectual and physical disabilities. During a visit to our school last year to look at our learning innovations, the Deputy Director-General of School Education and the Northern Sydney Regional Director both acknowledged the fine work that our Special Education staff are doing to support these students. It is heart-warming to note the fine way in which our mainstream students relate to, protect and respond to, our students with special needs. This was again in 2012 a feature of our school of which we are enormously proud.

• Programs to support our mainstream students, such as the ‘10% on top’ mentoring program; Year 7 orientation camp and peer support were again very successful last year. We commenced a homework club after school in the library; and a ‘Learning to Learn’ program for our new Year 7 students to help them assimilate into high school learning practices more quickly; we also commenced operation of a ‘learning centre’ which is housed in a renovated section of the lower library. This facility is staffed by a specialist teacher, funded by Our P&C association and the school, who provides remediation, enrichment and consolidation work for identified students. Usually, these students are ones who have become disengaged from their learning due to learning difficulties or interruptions resulting from illness or absence, thus resulting in them being behind in their work.
A team of 12 teachers, including myself and the two Deputy Principals, worked throughout 2012 on the development of a program known as PBEL ‘positive behaviours engaging learners’. This is designed to identify and embed across the school the accepted behaviours that are expected of all students. The key values of ‘responsibility, integrity and achievement’ now provide an important framework for our school. This work is continuing in 2013.

There exists a very strong sense of social justice among our students. They strive for equality and the maintenance of human rights, as well as focusing on the dignity of every human being at this school, and in society at large. This feature of our school is well-recognised by the wider community. There are many ways in which our students support others. Here are but a few from 2012:

- Bandaged Bear Day
- Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal
- Best Buddies Program
- Wrap With Love, where 820 completed wraps and an additional 4600 squares were donated to help people living on the streets
- Jeans For Genes Day
- RSPCA Cupcake Day
- Asthma Foundation
- Breast Cancer Council
- Cancer Council Daffodil Day
- White Ribbon Day
- The Year 12 Variety Concert for Senior Citizens
- A school Youth Mental Health Awareness Team was formed. They decided to do something for our own students by developing and giving to every Year 12 student a HSC survival kit containing support material, resources and motivational aids.
- Four Year 11 drama students again assisted the University of Sydney with the training of medical students and registrars by developing and presenting role plays.
- Of course we continued to commemorate significant days such as ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day by holding ceremonies involving the whole school.

Investment of funds in teaching and learning was very significant last year as we continue to focus on the pedagogy of teaching and build capacity with our teachers. Many teachers undertook professional learning activities both in school time, and in their own time outside hours, in order to develop new skills. Approximately $46,000 was committed to professional learning last year. Our School Development Days for teachers to upgrade skills continued to be creative and relevant. For example, well-known social researcher, Michael McQueen was the keynote speaker at the first School Development Day of 2012. His work focuses on teaching and engaging Generation Y children. Leading expert on autism, Sue Larkey, trained every teacher and SLSO in strategies to cater for students with autism. Our staff are now highly trained in this area.

Planning was completed late in 2012 for our current Year 7 students to be housed in home rooms. The fact that Year 7 students have to travel less around the school has led to a smoother and more settled transition to high school and there is an increased sense of ownership and identity by our new students. A major initiative throughout 2012 was the development of a Learning Hub. Dividing walls were removed between 3 general classrooms and modern furniture and resources which are conducive to greater collaboration among students and project based learning were provided. Thirty-five staff were trained in this type of teaching and
learning and now that Year 7 has settled into high school, we will soon commence team teaching (2 teachers with 2 classes in a 3-classroom sized learning space). The focus will be on the development of problem solving skills, critical thinking, enquiry learning and other 21st Century skills that were identified in the Melbourne Declaration as being critical to contemporary education. Not only has there been funding invested in this exciting initiative, but there has also been great enthusiasm and commitment by staff, and parent support for the concept.

- Our curriculum continued to be very broad, attracting students from other educational sectors. We introduced taster courses in Mandarin utilising the connected classroom video conferencing facility located in our library. The courses were taught to some Year 7 students via remote connection to Chatswood High School. This led to the employment of a temporary teacher of Mandarin to teach all Year 7 classes onsite at PHHS this year. This year we will also develop a sister school relationship with a school in China.

- Our curriculum structure was adjusted with the formation of a CAPA faculty which brought the creative and performing arts areas under one umbrella. Now we have Music, Visual Arts, Drama and Dance all supported by one Head Teacher.

- A long-overdue upgrade to our school kitchens was made possible through a $200,000 grant under the NSW Government’s Public Schools Upgrade Program. The construction of a full commercial kitchen was completed late last year, enabling our fully accredited and trained teachers of Hospitality to deliver courses at our school instead of students having to go to TAFE during school hours. Our students then receive advanced standing in TAFE courses once they leave school to pursue careers in hospitality. The P&C generously supplemented funding by $30,000 enabling us to include additional equipment, such as a commercial combi oven.

- Upgrade and renovation of our facilities continued through The Great Penno Reno, held in October 2012. This saw some 350 volunteers comprising students, staff, parents and former members of our school community working tirelessly over one weekend to plant more than 1500 seedlings, install irrigation, mulch garden beds, paint classrooms and clean walls and buildings. The sense of community was tremendous and the efforts to improve our school facilities, which are nearing 50 years of age, were a tremendous boost to the school. I take this opportunity to thank our community for their wonderful support. This includes the efforts of our P&C association in all that they do for the school, including the provision of funding for special projects, and the running of our school canteen. Our canteen staff also provide wonderful support at many school functions.

- Our links with partner primary schools were further developed in 2012. There are many activities across KLAs in which our students and staff collaborate. Through gala days, the Science GATS Program, Premier’s Sporting Challenge and combined bands the younger students gain an insight into our school and are supported and mentored by our high school students. The upcoming musical Beauty and the Beast is a good example of this collaboration. I
thank our partner primary schools, and especially the primary Principals and other representatives here this evening, for this supportive relationship.

- Tonight’s program highlights the depth of academic ability at our school. We remain well above state average in most areas, but we also recognise that we can do better in some. This remains a focus as we implement improvement programs and strategies to raise our literacy and numeracy levels and try to lift every student into higher performance bands at the Higher School Certificate. The Annual School Report for 2012 will be provided to our school community in a few months’ time and it will contain detailed analysis of our NAPLAN and HSC data. A quick overview showed some excellent results in last year’s HSC.

- Three students who achieved results which placed them at or near the top of students at the 2012 higher school certificate deserve great praise for their outstanding achievements. Congratulations to the Dux of Year 12, Reyland Szeto, who achieved an ATAR of 98.50, which placed him near the top of the 70,000 HSC candidates. Emilie Lowe was recognised by the NSW Board of Studies as an All-Round Achiever for her excellence in being awarded marks of 90 or above in all 10 units of study. It is worth noting that Pennant Hills High School is one of only 13 comprehensive, coeducational high schools in Northern Sydney Region to boast an All-Round Achiever. Two of our students were placed in the top ten of their course in NSW at the HSC. These achievements resulted in Pennant Hills High School being one of 22 Northern Sydney Region schools to have a student or students named as ‘distinguished achievers’ for placing in the top group of students (usually top 10) in NSW in a course. Simon Begg placed second in NSW in Industrial Technology, continuing the fine tradition of outstanding results in this subject. I wish to congratulate Simon’s teacher, Mr Dwight, for the great support he provided him during the HSC course. Matthew Miller placed first in NSW in the 2 Unit Automotive School Based Apprenticeship. I know Matthew received invaluable support from our Careers Adviser, Mrs McGlade, who encouraged him throughout the course. These results were well deserved and are a true reflection of the enormous effort that each of these outstanding students applied towards their studies in 2012. The 2012 HSC data shows that there were 49 of our students, or 33% of the cohort, who achieved a total of 86 Band 6 results (E4 in extension courses). This was a significant increase over the number of students achieving Band 6 in the previous year. One hundred and seven students, or 70% of the cohort, achieved a total of 254 Band 5 results in 21 of 33 courses, many narrowly missing out on a Band 6 result by only one mark. While this information is not supplied to schools by UAC, from ATAR information obtained from students it seems we had at least 19 students who received an ATAR of 90.0 or above, which is 13% of the Year 12 cohort (an increase of 3% on the previous year).

Last year’s HSC results mean that we remain one of the top 200 schools in NSW, from all sectors, based on HSC achievement.

Another exceptional achievement in the HSC in 2012 was the fact that we had six Year 11 students who were accelerated to sit the 2012 HSC examinations in one subject one year ahead of their cohort, thus successfully completing 2 units of study for the 2013 HSC. Two students sat the Drama HSC course and four sat for Industrial Technology. These students produced 5 Band 6 results with marks of 90 or above, and one Band 5.

Many of our students complete major projects that form part of their HSC program. Our students again had great success, being preselected for inclusion, or actually included, in
prestigious state-wide public exhibitions of the very best projects in NSW. One student had her Textiles and Design major work selected for the TEXSTYLE exhibition; an amazing 11 of the 30 students in Industrial Technology, including all 4 students who were accelerated, had their major projects nominated for inclusion in the INTECH exhibition. While we are yet to be advised of how many will be included, past success would indicate at least 4 or 5 will achieve this honour; one student was selected for display at the Visual Arts ARTEXPRESS display; and one of the Year 11 students who was accelerated into the HSC Drama course had his work included in the WRITERS ON STAGE ON SCREEN presentation; he was one of only 3 students selected for inclusion from all schools in NSW. The photography work of one Year 12 student was also displayed in Japan at the Nagoya Sister City Art Exchange. One student’s English Extension 2 work was also nominated for possible inclusion in Writer’s Showcase. Congratulations to all of these students, their teachers, and ever-supportive parents on achieving these results.

- Our Year 7 and 9 NAPLAN results show encouraging improvement in a number of areas. We remain well above state average in all dimensions of literacy and numeracy. We achieved better results in comparison to the average result of all other secondary schools in the Hills Network in Year 7 reading and Year 9 reading; a significantly higher average in Year 7 grammar and punctuation; and higher results in Year 7 numeracy - data, measurement, space and geometry. Whilst these results are pleasing, we need to concentrate on improvements in all aspects of literacy and numeracy.

- We continued in 2012 to excel in sport. Many students represented our school at Zone, Regional, CHS, State and Australian levels. In Sydney North Region, we were champion school in athletics and champion school for boys athletics; as well as champion school for athletics, cross country and swimming for AWD (athletes with disabilities). For Ku-ring-gai Zone, we were champion school for both cross country and athletics, having won back the much-coveted cross country trophy which we had held for 18 consecutive years. These last two achievements in our zone are indeed very impressive given that we compete against Cherrybrook Technology High School, which is the largest high school in NSW with over 2,200 students, and we compete against them without any handicapping of events.

- Other significant sporting achievements were:
  - We had a recipient of the prestigious Pierre de Coubertin Award
  - Gold medallists at NSW All Schools Triathlon, competing against all state, catholic, independent, and private schools.
  - A Year 8 student captained the Australian Under 14 Years Indoor Cricket team to win the World Cup in South Africa.
  - Medals at the NSW all schools relay championships
  - Gold medallists at the CHS athletics championships
  - Gold medallists at CHS swimming Over 17’s Boys relay and 4x50 metre freestyle relay
  - Great success at the NSW all schools swimming and national all schools swimming championships
  - Most importantly, our students compete each week in zone sporting competitions with great sportsmanship, courage, motivation and application.

Congratulations to all of our students, coaches and our sports organiser for these wonderful efforts.

- Our leadership programs continue to develop outstanding young leaders and citizens of the future. Last year we again received many accolades for the quality of our student leaders. The prefects and SRC continued to flourish and to do us proud wherever they were involved. The
Leadership in the Middle School (LIMS) Program involved many students in a range of developmental activities. A student received the Young Endeavour Leadership Scholarship, sailing for 11 days on the ship. Several students received a day sail on the James Craig for being runners-up in the scheme. Of 2300 applicants for Defence Technical Scholarships throughout Australia, we had an amazing 10 who won scholarships. One student was selected to go to Canada on exchange with the Australian Army Cadets. Four Year 11 students were selected as part of the Director General for a Day Program to shadow senior DEC officials during Education Week – one was selected as Regional Director; one as School Education Director accompanying Mrs Wasson; and two were shadow Regional Managers. In its fourth year at PHHS, the SES Cadet Scheme again flourished, providing students with insights into becoming community volunteers. Fifty-four students achieved bronze, silver and gold levels in the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme.

- I would now like to outline the extensive curriculum enrichment activities provided for our students. This list is long and it highlights just how much we provide to ensure a rich learning environment. Many students also committed to a wide range of activities outside school.

Our students were involved in the following:

- Theatre sports and drama ensembles
- Dance group
- Band camp
- Band rehearsals
- Bands entering competitions eg CB1 was the only high school entrant to be awarded the prestigious diamond award in ‘a’ grade at the Yamaha Festival; Big Band received gold and the John Morrison Award at the NSW School Band Festival; CB2 was awarded silver at the NSW School Band Festival; and both CB1 and Big Band performed at the Sydney Opera House in the Festival of Instrumental Music.
- CAPA Festival including Music Soirée, drama night, HSC Drama Evening, and Visual Arts Exhibition
- Tournament of the Minds
- Model United Nations Assembly (MUNA)
- NSW Public Schools Dance Ensemble
- RYDA (Rotary Youth Driver Awareness) Program
- NSW Public Schools Symphonic Wind Ensemble
- NSW Public Schools Symphonic Wind Orchestra
- Castle Hill RSL Youth Wind Orchestra
- State and national academic competitions such as the Australian Mathematics Competition and the National Science Challenge where we had students place in the top 5% of Australia
- Academic Challenge Day
- School Multicultural Fair
- Robocup Robotics
- School chess club
- The Best Buddies or Great Mates Program
- Overseas student exchange
- School Environment Team
- Sound and lighting crew
- School musicals
- Work Experience for Year 10
- Millennium Marching Band
- Links Café
Arts North Music Festival
NSW debating competitions. Our Year 8 team were zone champions
Premier’s Volunteering Challenge where we had 3 black opal awardees which is the highest achievable category
Premier’s Sporting Challenge
Premier’s Reading Challenge
Schools Spectacular tap ensemble
GP Doctors Program for Year 11 students
Macquarie University Science and Engineering Challenge 3rd place
NSW Public Schools State Choir
Festival of Choral Music Symphonic Orchestra
National Video Competition 3rd place
Champion school and best project at the University of Wollongong NSW Senior High Schools Technology Competition
1st place in district Lions Youth of the Year and 1st place in public speaking
NSW Public School Junior Dance Company
NSW Public School Singers

Clearly there is a huge time commitment from our students, some of whom are engaged in multiple activities which are very time-consuming. The question remains as to whether some students are overcommitted to the detriment of their studies. This is an issue for each family to consider and to resolve in terms of their own beliefs and wishes for their child.

I wish to take a moment to acknowledge the work over the past 12 years of Mr Tony Rudd.

- It was with great excitement for Tony, but also sadness for our school community, when we said farewell at the end of 2012 to our long-serving Deputy Principal from Pennant Hills High School. Mr Rudd has taken up the position of Principal at Manly Selective High School, which is part of the Department of Education and Communities’ Northern Beaches Secondary College. While he will be sadly missed by the school community he has served with such commitment and dedication for the past 11 years, we are all very excited and pleased that Mr Rudd’s many skills, abilities and talents have been recognised, and that through this promotion, he will have the opportunity to lead his own school.

- Mr Rudd was actively involved in most areas of school life during his time here, and he has made many significant contributions to a broad range of school programs. He has, in so many ways, shown amazing dedication to our students, staff and parents. Greatly admired by present and former students, Mr Rudd has always done his utmost to ensure that they achieved the best possible social, emotional and learning outcomes. His unfailing focus on the wellbeing of students was one of Mr Rudd’s most important contributions to our school. He has always devoted endless time, patience and energy to work closely with students and their families. Mr Rudd demonstrated extraordinary commitment to our prefects and other student leaders by mentoring, supporting, guiding and nurtured them in their roles. Our students attract considerable praise for the outstanding leadership and citizenship skills they exhibit, and Mr Rudd should rightly take much of the praise for the development and longevity of student leadership programs at Pennant Hills High School. His contributions to the leadership and management of the school band program, including accompanying our students on a tour of the US in 2011, have also been outstanding. Our school has lost a fabulous teacher, mentor, educational leader and a great bloke who is widely admired and respected for what he has contributed to our school.
• Tony, on behalf of the entire Pennant Hills High School community, I wish you every success in your new position and thank you for your wonderful contributions to PHHS.

• Earlier in this address, I mentioned that there is considerable change occurring within the Department of Education and Communities through what is being termed a functional realignment. This restructuring will result in the abolition of regions as we know them today and there will be other sweeping changes to the way in which support to schools is provided. These changes will impact on the positions of School Education Director throughout the state. It is possible that our School Education Director, Mrs Janet Wasson, may not be associated with our school after 2013. Given the uncertainty surrounding the realignment of functions within DEC, and the fact that we hold Presentation Evening at this time of the year, it would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous support that Mrs Wasson has provided our school over the years she has been with us. I say ‘with us’ because she has always shown great interest in our school and supported, encouraged, highlighted, promoted and acknowledged us in many ways and at every possible opportunity. Her attendance tonight, and at each and every one of our other Presentation Evenings, has not gone unnoticed by our community. To have said that she would have been happy to have sent her own children to PHHS is indeed a great compliment.

Thank you Mrs Wasson. We hope you will be able to continue the association with our school when the changes have been finalised.

• Ladies and gentlemen, students and staff, I thank you for your patience this evening as I have tried to celebrate with you the great talent, dedication, diversity, creativity, citizenship and general excellence of our students. Our students, staff and parents are an inspiration to all and I feel very privileged to be the principal of such a wonderful public school.

• I hope that every one of you can marvel at our school’s achievements and feel enormously proud that you are part of our community.

My congratulations to all recipients this evening.