

Heads Down!

As we conclude the fourth week of term, the impact of the assessment regime is pervasive. Year 11 End of Semester Examinations are at mid-stage with still one week to conclude, and they will be followed in quick succession by Year 9. With little down time, the boys in Year 9 will move from NAPLAN testing to their own examinations, while in other year levels, assignments and research projects are keeping many focussed on their course work and intense revision programs. It is very much heads down at the present time and it will continue to be that way over the coming weeks in preparation for End of Semester Reports. For their part, the boys are asked to allocate the necessary time to ensure that they accommodate the many priorities that compete for space, particularly during an intensive winter co-curricular program, while allowing scholarship and study to be at the centre.

While the boys are busy with their assessment regimes, teachers are also involved in pursuing professional practice through the agency of Instructional Rounds. Derived from medical practice when treating doctors observe and support the professional practice of their peers, Instructional Rounds combine three common elements of improvement: classroom observation, a dedicated and articulated improvement strategy and a network of educators. Using a team of teachers across faculties, including those in leadership and administration, lessons are observed and feedback given about a particular aspect of pedagogy. This may relate to classroom use of ITC, questioning technique to advance learning, variant classroom methodologies, formative and summative assessment, or any of the multi-variant and co-dependent activities that are activated in the classroom on a daily basis. Endorsed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Instructional Rounds are being adopted across the nation as an aid to best practice. And, as a teacher and administrator who spends more time at the secondary and senior secondary level, it was particularly worthwhile to join the Instructional Rounds team at the Regis campus to witness at close range the quality of teaching and student engagement. Having said that, in a school that aspires towards excellence through pursuit of the magis, there is always room for growth and professional learning. And that is the purpose of the exercise.

On Wednesday, the College was fortunate to squeeze time out of a packed schedule to host Emeritus Professor Alan Mackay-Sim, Australian of the Year for 2017. Professor Mackay-Sim spoke to the boys at the College Assembly about his ground breaking research into the use of olfactory cells to stimulate dormant spinal cords, which has enabled wheelchair bound men and woman to gain mobility after years of paralysis. This was a world first in medical research and is now the object of further stem cell research and development. It was clear from Professor Mackay-Sim's address that there have been key drivers in his success: a deep curiosity and a passion for his work, a determination to break through despite road blocks and obstacles that appeared along the way, and the desire to improve the quality of life for those who would otherwise be constrained by life-long debilitation. In the case of the latter, Professor Mackay-Sim has not only made an enduring contribution to Science, but a remarkable contribution to humanity. Special thanks are extended to Professor Mackay-Sim for taking the time to be with the boys and to share his insights, his passion and his vision.

Over recent weeks, House masses have resumed with Cheshire, Teresa and Dalton being conducted in the Dalton Chapel. Each House has its own distinctive character and this is demonstrated when the staff, students and parents come together each year for this liturgical celebration. The life and insights of the House patron are promoted in a way that boys in the House can resonate with, and aspire towards, the virtues of that person. This particular gathering also affords an opportunity to acknowledge the Year 12 boys who have given so much to their House over the years in the form of leadership, witness to the House traditions, support for House activities, as well as modelling of the values of the College. Following the mass, Houses share supper as a way of strengthening the interaction between families at different year levels and building the bonds of community.

The O'Kelly Theatre throbbed last week with the Year 12 play, *The Landscape of Australian Voices*. Combining vignettes from a variety of Australian playwrights and poets including David Williamson, Banjo Paterson, Reg Cribb and Nick Enright (OR 1967), the boys presented an entertaining tapestry of iconic Australian scenes, sounds and sets, including the Aussie backyard where a yarn or two was spun under the watchful eye of the Hills Hoist (for those who aren't familiar with the latter, it is the post-war clothes line that adorned backyards across the nation). The passion, creativity and engagement of the cast and crew was something to behold and clearly showed the commanding performance of the stage these young men have developed during their years of involvement in the Drama program. Congratulations boys, and thanks are extended to a committed group of staff – particularly Mr Conrad Page, who were responsible for Direction, Costuming, Set Design and Lighting.

During the week we welcomed Nicholas Na to the College. Nicholas is an undergraduate student at Georgetown University – a Jesuit University in Washington DC, who has won a scholarship to Australia to research the College's broad social mission and its response to disadvantage in the community. He will be with us for three weeks investigating the local context as it relates to the First Nations Program and also the Year 10 Country Placement Program. Nicholas' placement is part of an attempt of the Society of Jesus to link organisations across the world through justice related activities.

Finally, Week 4 is synonymous with Year 12 Reports, which capture the End of Semester Examinations and the cumulative progress profile. It is important that these are read closely for the way that strengths and weaknesses are highlighted, and what that means for further improvement. Yes, Heads Down will be the corollary of interrogating these documents as preparations are made for the final schooling terms for our Graduates.