

Strength in Unity

Each year the College Leaders undertake a period of discernment to produce a theme which acts as a touchstone and a reference point to guide the various activities and events that are listed on the school calendar. In welcoming the boys back to 2016 College Captain, Bennett Walsh, spoke of his vision for the school, encouraging them to apply their many diverse talents, abilities and gifts for the greater good of the community to accord with the theme *Strength in Unity*. This theme was developed at the School Mass by Fr Jack McLain, which was held in the Ramsay Hall last Friday and attended by all staff and students. Such an occasion recognises the faith tradition of Riverview and speaks very directly to the Catholic teaching and Ignatian spirituality that permeates all areas of College life. A formal mass to begin the year has been part of this school's history since its very foundation back in 1880, so the boys engage in Eucharistic liturgy that transcends time and place. What was particularly noticeable about the gathering was the sense of reverence and engagement the boys brought to the occasion, one that spoke to their capacity to associate with and respond to school expectations, be they in the classroom, in worship, in service or more broadly in the public domain. It was a palpable sign that the message of both *Strength* and *Unity* had been embraced on this occasion, one which resides at the centre of school life.

The routines of College life have settled quickly and the boys have shown an impressive capacity to adopt to the rhythm of classes, study, sport training, and for nearly 350 of the young men entrusted to our care, in boarding. In the case of the latter, 35 boys flew from different parts of the world (London, Japan, Vanuatu, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai) in the aftermath of Australia Day to join the other boys who come from remote and rural New South Wales as well as most states and territories across Australia. Those early apprehensions and uncertainties have dissipated quickly as the boys take up their various commitments be they in the classroom, in extra tutorial sessions or home study routines, and in the expansive co-curricular program which sees nearly 1,600 young men pull on the blue and white each weekend to represent the College in a wide variety of activities. I wish to extend my thanks to the parents who have made such comprehensive preparations that have enabled the boys to return fully equipped and ready for classes, and to the teachers who have gone about their responsibilities with consummate professionalism. All augurs well for the term and the year ahead.

While the yard and classrooms have seen frenetic activity over the early days of the year, the weekend saw one of most comprehensive co-curricular programs in the nation go into full effect. While over 200 boys plied the oars on the river, nearly 400 boys graced the basketball courts and participated in a raft of other activities including Water Polo, Sailing, Surf Life Saving, Baseball, Cricket, Tennis, Futsal and Touch Football. For over 250 boys, the Blue and White was donned for the first time, and, new sports and activities were undertaken that had not been tried before. To see the boys engaged in various health and life-giving activities which promote physical activity, team work, skill proficiency, social engagement, not to mention a spirit of competition and fair play, was truly uplifting. As usual, there were some truly memorable wins (1st X1 Cricket and Open Basketball) and some disappointing losses: all part of the sporting landscape that forges character and community. And, there were many parents on the sidelines building their first networks with others at the College, those that will form lifelong partnerships over the years ahead.

Over the coming weeks the boys who spent time on immersion over the summer will be gathering with their parents to reflect deeply on the significance of the experience. In all, 103 boys from Year 11 engaged in the faith in service program in Cambodia, the Philippines, India, Nepal, Micronesia and Timor Leste throughout the course of 2015. While the immediacy of their work saw appreciable benefits for schools, orphanages, residential housing, hospitals and even prisons, some of the long term gains are also being realised. In the case of Nepal, for example, a 'Riverview Scholarship Fund' of \$4,000 AUD has been established that will earn investment interest of 30,000 rupees per year. These funds will be used to educate the very poor children in the mountains from Grade 1 to Grade 10 and will enable some children

to go onto senior secondary instead of dropping out to work on local farms or head to Malaysia as guest workers on subsistence incomes, which reinforces a cycle of poverty and subservience. The Riverview Fund will enable the Principal to support families who cannot afford the fees, which cost 70 rupees (or \$1 AUS) per month, allowing dozens of students each year the opportunity to continue with their education. Far from cultural tourism, the immersion experience brings significant service learning for the boys as well as immediate gains and enduring benefits for the community.

Over the course of the coming week there will be traffic wardens stationed at the entrance and exit areas of the College to remind all visitors to observe the speed limits on the school grounds. As is clear, there are a very large number of residential staff and students and over 1,200 day boys so safety is a priority at all times.

I look forward to reporting on some major school events next week, particularly the Laureate Assembly and the Kircher Collection launch, both of which occur as this edition of the Viewpoint goes to print.

Very best wishes for the week ahead.