TANGARA SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Presentation Night 2016 - Address by the Principal

Parents, members of the PARED Board, Tangara staff and students.

Another year in the life of Tangara has drawn to a close. It is impossible to encapsulate a vibrant year of learning, creativity and accomplishment in a short speech - and I promise it will be short!

2016 in Review

As always, this Presentation Night has been testament to Tangara’s exceptional music program. This year our Primary strings and choir have flourished, as well as dance, drama and Secondary ensembles. Music is essential to cognitive development and opens our girls to embrace the true, the beautiful and the good. Preparations are well and truly underway for our 2017 Musical, Mary Poppins.

In debating, Our Primary A, year 8 and year 9 teams represented Tangara at the ISDA semi-finals. The budding legal brains of the Mock Trial team pushed through to the knock-out rounds, winning three of the five trials. Our Secondary students had some impressive performances at the Festival of Speech, honing their talents with girls from across NSW. Our Year 12 leaders successfully completed the first training course at Tangara by Toastmasters International.

I know that you parents might not agree that your daughters need any more assistance in the art of arguing. But public speaking does give them essential leadership skills and the confidence to make their voice count. Two of our veteran public speakers are already leading the way. Public Speaking Captain Clara Fernandez was chosen from hundreds of students to represent NSW at the National Schools Constitutional Convention in Canberra; our 2017 Captain, Taris Watson, will follow her next year.

2016 was also a busy year of sport. Tangara was represented at zone and regional levels in Swimming, Touch Football, Basketball, Soccer, Triathlon, Gymnastics, Futsal, Equestrian, Volleyball and Tennis. Our girls also made it to state level in Cross Country, Athletics and Taekwondo. We even have our own Australian National Champions in Synchronised Ice Skating: Katie Koslow in Year 10 and her sister Nina from the Class of 2015.
In Netball there were 2 Grand Final appearances by Tangara and across the 2 seasons of Basketball, 3 Grand Final wins. The initiation of the Tangara Blue Award tonight is recognition of the outstanding sporting achievement across the school.

**Academic Achievement**

Academically, this was a strong year for Tangara. There were the great HSC results from the Class of 2015. Our Naplan results were also impressive. In numeracy and literacy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, Tangara students averaged well above NSW and independent schools.

While we celebrate our HSC and NAPLAN success, this is not the ultimate measure of academic excellence at Tangara. Our vision is the growth of each and every student, whether she is blessed with extraordinary gifts and talents; whether she is challenged with learning difficulties; or whether, like most of us, she is somewhere in between. In 2017 you will see a stronger focus on supporting the diverse learning needs of all our students.

I warmly congratulate the girls who have been recognised tonight for their academic achievement and effort. I congratulate the Class of 2016 and their parents for the successful completion of 13 years of schooling. Already a number of girls have won early entry into courses such as Law, Teaching and Nursing.

**The Value of Single-Sex Education**

I thank the parents, teachers and tutors who gave their time to the recent focus groups. Your input has highlighted key areas to develop and improve. We will work over the next few months to update our strategic plan.

The focus groups affirmed what makes Tangara special: the living Catholic faith which animates our every endeavour; the collaboration between parents, tutors and teachers via the Tutorial System; the personal attention offered to each child and family.

These strengths are all essential to Tangara’s foundational Mission. So too is our identity as a girls’ school. This is worth pondering.

Single sex education cops regular criticism, by the media and even from respected educators. Sometimes it is actually attacked with a vehemence that rejects freedom in education and the rights of parents.

Recently a leading Sydney school announced that it would be fully co-educational by 2022. The official announcement referred to single-sex schooling as the product of a bygone era, with no place in the ‘modern world’.

What is this ‘modern world’? It’s a world of exciting opportunities for girls and boys, for women and men. A world where women are achieving an unprecedented influence and power in professional and public life.
It’s also a world of contradictions. Mixed with the language of equality is a consumer driven message that ‘hotness’ is a woman’s most valuable quality.

The fake feminists of popular culture use music videos, movies and social media to push a deceptive message of objectification dressed up - or I should say, undressed - as empowerment. This works a treat for their multimillion dollar bank balances, but it is bankrupting girlhood.

There is a tonne of research to link this toxic message with body dissatisfaction, poor self-esteem, depression, eating disorders and even self-harm. In short, it’s a sure recipe for unhappiness.

So the modern world sells our girls the lie that their bodies are everything. And now there’s another message, louder and louder. It shouts that their bodies - our bodies - are nothing. Maleness and femaleness - so we are told - are just choices on a long continuum of possibilities. ‘Gender fluidity’ is apparently the new liberation because our bodies are completely irrelevant.

It’s one thing for individuals to be confused about their sexual identity. But when an entire culture is confused, we risk the loss of our human identity - and much more. The denial of sexual difference denies the entire basis of the family. This ‘identity crisis’ attacks the very cornerstone of society.

This is the ‘modern world’ for which we are preparing our girls.

Our girls need the space during their formative years to be who they are; the freedom to tackle adolescence without the pressure of stereotypes and ideology. They need a place where their intellectual, physical and social talents can flourish. This is partly why, as research shows, girls do better academically in single sex schools. They even have more positive attitudes to traditionally ‘male’ subjects such as mathematics and science.

More important than the academic advantages of single sex education, at Tangara, our girls have strong role models of femininity. They see that girls and women can be leaders. This, we hope, gives our girls the confidence to one day lead change in their families, in their profession and in society, towards the more just and human world we all want to see. A world where girls know that they are precious because of who they are as persons: body AND spirit. Where they know that their freedom is deeper than mere choice, because they have embraced the truth of their humanity.

Girls schools like Tangara are not the problem - we are part of the solution.

**Tangara’s 35th Anniversary**

Now we look towards Tangara’s 35th anniversary on 10 February next year. Like every family Tangara has had its share of joys and sorrows, successes and failures, growth spurts and growing pains. The hallmark of successful families is resilience during tough times, the loving willingness to pull together as one. This is why the big family of Tangara has prevailed through the ups and downs of the last 35 years. This is how Tangara will continue to flourish over the next 35 years and beyond.
Happy Christmas

Christmas Day is fast approaching. With her characteristic wisdom, St Mother Teresa of Calcutta once pointed out that in fact ‘It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you.’ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand.’

That smile, the gesture of affection or small act of kindness are the living spirit of Christmas. Our hearts turn in a special way to those in the Tangara family who are suffering personal or family difficulties. I know how the festivities and rejoicing of this season can add a certain sharpness to the pain. As part of this big Tangara family, know that you are never alone.

Thank you parents, teachers, tutors and staff for an exceptional year. A special thank you to our Music staff for their hard work tonight.

Thank you also to the staff of PARED, and the PARED Chairman, Mr Gary Doherty, and the Directors for your unfailing encouragement and support.

I wish you all a wonderful Christmas filled with every happiness and joy.

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