



From the Principal

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A Journey Of A Thousand Miles...

Wominjeka and welcome to all in the St Leonard's community as the new school year commences. And to those who began 2024 with some New Year's resolutions, good luck. According to research, despite our best intentions, 80% of us don't last until February. As the old joke goes, New Year's resolutions go in one year and out the other.

Hardly surprising really, given that we tend to set overambitious goals for the year ahead during a long languorous summer holiday. There is nothing like sleeping-in and the absence of deadlines to make regular exercise or a better diet seem simple. Committing to a daily step count, or the number of stubborn kilos we will shed by the end of the coming year, somehow seems easier from the comfort of a deck chair. And so we unwittingly choose impossible mountains to climb in the year ahead.

The challenge of chasing one big goal is that it is usually only achieved by overcoming hundreds of small ones, each of which requires the same level of motivation and excitement to attain it. Which is why, although we always start the new school year by encouraging students to set their sights on lofty peaks, we also plan to teach them the skills for daily success in scaling the foothills.

In that, I take inspiration from the wonderful Tim Minchin. As a successful comedian, actor, writer, musician, poet, composer, and songwriter, he is clearly no stranger to achieving goals. Yet, in a superb address to the graduates of his old University, he is sceptical about the concept of chasing distant dreams in life. "To dream of the person you would like to be is to waste the person you are," he says as he lists his "9 Life Lessons". Instead, Minchin advocates passionate dedication to the pursuit of short-term goals. Something he calls being "micro-ambitious".

It is a marvellous phrase, signposting the route to success and happiness in goals both large and small. Being micro-ambitious, putting your head down and working with pride on whatever is in front of you, is excellent advice, especially for a young person. Brain-scanning in modern neuroscience has confirmed what teachers and parents have long known; that young people's minds are a work-in-progress, in particular, their still-forming frontal lobe, where executive decision-making occurs. They live in the moment because that is, literally, all they can foresee.

Understandably, we adults try to help those young brains mature by giving them increasing amounts of practise at picturing and planning for the future. Designing experiences that demand long-term logistics. Activities that reward delayed gratification. Incentives to work towards distant milestones. Why, then, might we heed Minchin's advice to focus exclusively on the here-and-now? Because, as anyone who has successfully upheld a New Year's resolution knows, attaining a big goal usually only comes from a succession of small, daily triumphs. Which, in turn, are the result of mastering the habit of being micro-ambitious.

I will leave the last words to Tim Minchin. If you are micro-ambitious, he says, "you never know where you might end up. Just be aware the next worthy pursuit will probably appear in your periphery, which is why you should be careful of long-term dreams. If you focus too far in front of you, you won't see the shiny thing out the corner of your eye."

As the new school year commences, all of us at the College will be striving to teach our students to take pride, and find joy, in every new experience, every day. We will do so confident in the belief that acquiring the habit of being micro-ambitious will serve them well, long after they leave our care. And also in the hope that throughout each child's journey at St Leonard's, we might help them spot some new "shiny things" that captivate their interest and let them flourish to their full potential.

Happy New Year.