



St Leonard's College
An education for life.

From the Principal

Peter Clague



Wominjeka

Some years ago, a video of a teacher in the southern United States went viral. Working in an impoverished community where there was low engagement in schools, the teacher had a unique way of welcoming the students in his Middle School class every morning. Each child had been encouraged to devise their own special handshake and took great delight in greeting him with it as he met them at the classroom door. The test was always to see whether he had memorised the subtle complexities of each routine. It is hard to say what was more impressive, the fact that he had each one down pat, or his sheer stamina performing them all every morning (there was much fist bumping, foot shuffling, and arm waving as all 30 children filed by).

Different countries, different customs. In my own homeland, many adopt the Maori tradition of 'hongi' when meeting or reconnecting. A ritual that involves leaning in to touch foreheads, and then gently pressing noses together. As with the American teacher, that can be a bit of a lengthy process when there are lots of people to greet (not to mention being a bit up close and personal for some). However, its symbolic intention is nice. As your face draws close to another's, you literally share the same air (known as 'ha' – the breath of life).

In Japan, meeting and greeting rituals don't involve direct contact, but they are no less carefully choreographed. You would think bowing would be pretty simple. But where to bend, how low, how often, and to whom? It is all rather daunting. Yet, like learning street handshakes or the rubbing of noses, a willingness to have a go conveys respect, not just for the person but also for their culture.

Even if you are not up for physical gyrations, using the local tongue is equally respectful. One of the joys of being open to different cultures is bumping into words that have no ready equivalent in your own language. Wominjeka is my new favourite. Not merely 'welcome', but 'welcome to those who come with purpose'. Whilst I didn't attempt to shake hands, rub noses, or even bow to the 1670 young Leonardians who returned for the start of the new school year this week, I gladly welcomed them with the greeting that has echoed in this land for over 60,000 years.

Addressing them at our Leadership Induction Assembly on the first morning back, I encouraged them all to do exactly that, every day they enter the College gates this year. Come with purpose. After three challenging years, the "C" and "P" words are now formally banished from the lexicon at St Leonard's. The only justifiable reason for recalling them is in reminding ourselves how blessed we are to be back together again, faced with all the opportunities this place affords. No more disruptions and restrictions (and no more excuses either).

From the youngest new entrant in the ELC, to the Year 12 cohort who are commencing their final year, and everyone in between, 2023 holds great promise for all who are willing to come here with purpose. Perhaps the last word of welcome should come from our own unique St Leonard's College culture, our motto:

Nulla Dies Sine Linea

Never let a day go by without learning/trying/doing something new.