



St Leonard's College
An education for life.

From the Principal

Peter Clague



A Very Happy Birthday

As this packed term draws to a close, it has dawned on me that I am now officially one year old (in Leonardian years anyway). A year ago this week, I arrived to the crackle and hum of life at St Leonard's, a world away from my previous school in rural Worcestershire. Thankfully the transition was easy; both are prestigious schools with a proud history grounded in shared values. Both were also tackling the post-COVID rebound with hope and good humour when I made the move. But as I reflect on the daily nature of my role over the past year here, a subtle yet significant difference is evident.

As in previous leadership positions, my days at St Leonard's are filled with a myriad of demands related to running a large and complex organisation.

In recent weeks, I have met with:

- A sustainability expert who led me through an exhaustive proposal to install solar panels at the College
- A campaigner advocating for better access for people who are hearing impaired,
- A group of planners suggesting a more efficient utilisation of current assets to promote the College's service agenda, and
- A group of senior educational leaders who run professional seminars on topical issues.

Pretty familiar meetings that would appear in the diaries of most Principals who lead large schools, except for one thing. All of those experts and advocates were students. Our own students.

Meet the Experts

The energy guru who produced a 20-page technical report detailing the outlay, potential yield, and consequent return on investment if the College increased its solar panel array, was entirely accurate in all her calculations. Not to mention extraordinarily compelling in the way she argued the case for her proposal, and fearless in conducting her site surveys. She was also 8 years old.



The advocate for a Hearing Loop to be installed in the Leonardian Centre was equally persuasive. Not only did he deliver a polite yet powerful presentation in my office to request better access for the hearing impaired, he also wrote an erudite letter to the Premier, questioning why such a simple technological aid was not automatically provided in every school hall and auditorium throughout the State. I don't know about Mr Andrews, but I was impelled to act straight away, and St Leonard's now has that technology enabled. As for the confident campaigner, he is 11.



Meanwhile, nine of his Middle School compatriots decided that if they weren't yet of an age to go out on excursions in the College's renowned Lennie's Van, they would instead contribute by growing some of the fresh produce that the van delivers to local people each week. Cue weeks of hands-on research into the propagation of seedlings, optimal growing conditions, and harvesting cycles. Followed by negotiations to utilise the rooftop garden of the Year 5/6 building, and some pretty hard bargaining techniques brought to bear on the local Bunnings staff. Culminating in a highly professional pitch to the College's own Amiel Society to acquire the remaining funds necessary. Did this group of youngsters need a teacher to assist them with such a large-scale project? Well yes, but she was a 16-year-old senior Social Action leader.



And then there were the professional seminar presenters. None other than our four College Captains, who proposed, prepared, and produced a sold-out panel discussion involving five senior politicians, who they then grilled for an entertaining two hours as to the reasons why young people should bother engaging in political discourse. As she waited in the wings to go on, one senior MP commented that our students' event was better organised and more professional than her regular appearances on Q&A. Only just old enough to vote themselves, the foursome brought more clarity in an evening than many seasoned pundits manage in a year.



Keeping It Real

So, what is the subtle difference at St Leonard's? What is the secret revelation that has made my first year here so enjoyable? A shared belief in the power of authentic experiences. Hundreds of them across the College every day. Opportunities at every year level, not to simply learn by listening and seeing, but to learn by doing. A wealth of genuine chances for adventure and action, on the leadership, and the pursuit of face-to-face. Collaboration on the stage and sports pitch, getting hands-on in the classroom, and offering service pass-to-pass. People beyond our gates. Through experiences that are controlled but not contrived. Where the real-life possibility that things might not go exactly to plan makes the learning last longer. Where students learn as much from making a mess as they do from making magic.

And the best thing of all, as I reflect upon this past year and my first year, is that Bec, Ethan, Aidan and Lola, Maddie, Harry, Lauren, Elliot, Sascha, Billie, Ella, Noah, Lillian, Elliot, Lucy, and Eve are but a small handful of the young people at St Leonard's who have enjoyed the sense of agency and accomplishment that comes from experiential education. To arrive in a place where everyone has equal access to authentic experiences every day has been the best 1st birthday gift I could have hoped for.