



From the Principal

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Terms of Reference

A warm welcome back to term 3 for all in the College community. Whether your family spent time on a warm beach, a frozen slope, or hunkered down against the winter weather at home, I hope that everyone is refreshed after the July break. However your children spent their holidays though, it is probably a safe bet that they weren't out labouring in the fields.

Yet the seasonal demands of farm life were the original reason for the timing of our school holidays. Beginning in the UK 200 years ago, school terms were originally driven by the agrarian calendar, as children were needed at home in the autumn to help bring in the harvest. European settlers carried that annual cycle with them to Australia, although, of course, our Southern Hemisphere seasons were reversed, meaning the long summer holiday also aligned with Christmas.

The need for the whole family to pitch in with planting and later picking crops dictated that the school year originally comprised two terms, beginning on January 1st and July 1st. By the 1900s, that had morphed into three terms, each an unbroken 15 weeks in duration. I started teaching under that regime; it was an unforgiving test of endurance. Holidays were more of an exercise in recovery than recreation.

And woe betide schools that didn't stay the course. In the early days of Australian State education, total school holidays could not exceed thirty days a year. The temptation must have been strong, because any Principal who allowed more than thirty days could expect to have their salary docked.

In the more enlightened eighties, a report to the Australian Director-General of Education of the time suggested that a shift to four 10-week terms would be of benefit to students, teachers, and the community as a whole. Accordingly, in 1987 the Education Department introduced the four-term structure we know today, and the four long holiday breaks that divide them.

That may seem a lot, but how much is too much? Working parents who sometimes struggle to occupy their children during those holiday breaks may be interested to know that a recent OECD analysis found that Australian students spend more hours in school than any other OECD country. Across primary and lower secondary years, Australian students are in school for more than 11,000 hours, compared with the OECD average of just over 7,600.

Which is something of a paradox, given how time-poor teachers and students often find themselves during each school term. There is no doubt that we operate in a very regulated environment. Four period days, 10-day cycles, four term years; our timetables are geared to maximise opportunity and time-on-task. Yet even with those efficient systems, sometimes there never seem to be enough hours in the day for many at St Leonard's College. We base our entire educational offer upon the power of giving young people choice, so it can be frustrating when it is time, not opportunity, that limits them.

That is why, as we regather for this new term (a relatively short 9-weeker), I encourage all parents to take a moment to talk to your child about their personal aspirations for term 3, 2024. To see the weeks ahead as something new, not more of the same. Re-establishing daily routines after a less structured holiday is an important life skill (and easier for some than others). But as the household rhythms of school days and work life return in your home, and before busyness overtakes us all once more, perhaps find a little time to help your child identify a specific, personal aspiration or two for the term ahead. Maybe auditioning for a part, trying out for a team, broaching a new friendship, or targeting a test score. Whatever it may be, help them to see the term as a chance to sow and reap their own successes over this next school season. In short, set some short-term goals (pun intended).