

Rector's Boarders' Assembly Address

Christine Leighton

Friday 23 August 2024



Nau mai haere mai, tena koutou katoa.

Welcome to Cultural Assembly, a time when we celebrate the creative side of ourselves and each other. Welcome to Board Chair, Felicity Odlin, special guest, Kerrin Davidson (Writer in Residence) and parents and guests with us for what I know will be a morning of great entertainment. At St Andrew's College we are surrounded by people with talents in the creative arts; singers, dancers, musicians, actors, film makers and technical

teams, artists, designers, debaters, speakers, writers, poets, song writers, story tellers and composers.

Throughout the year we have many opportunities to celebrate our music, dance and performing arts, with the likes of productions, chamber music, orchestra, vocal performances, jazz festivals and concerts, rock bands, kapa haka and Polyfest, StAC Attack and Film Fest, Dance Revue, and Highland Dance and Ballet performances and productions.

This week we have recognised Cultural Week where the spotlight is on this incredibly busy side of our school and I want to acknowledge the many staff and teachers involved with cultural activities.

This morning our Heads of Culture for 2024, Jenna and Xanthe bring, to you a celebration of St Andrew's arts and culture, featuring the talents of so many amongst us. The creative arts enhance all of our lives in many ways, being a powerful means of expressing emotions, thoughts and experiences. They also are essential to our cultural identity and reflect cultural values, beliefs, traditions and a sense of belonging.

Think of our St Andrew's sense of identity, which comes from Scotland. We can't imagine our College without the sound of the Pipe Band, the image of the thistle or cross of St Andrew, the spectacle of the Highland Games or perhaps even the taste of the haggis. Think of our New Zealand identity, tangata whenua and our commitment in Aotearoa to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Our wider society relies heavily on the inspiration and motivation that comes from creative thinkers. Writers and poets explore ideas and set fire to our imagination, artists challenge our perceptions and make us see some things differently; dancers, actors and musicians, through sight and sound, awaken our emotions and can change our moods.

Through all these influences, the creatives amongst us can challenge societal norms and provoke thought, leading to social change.

On Tuesday evening the annual Film Fest was hosted in our Gough Family Theatre. It was great to see films presented by the eight finalists selected on the big screen. Congratulations to all involved, award recipients and the overall winning film *Knock Knock*, produced and directed by Shaun Cooper and Flynn Rhodes (both Year 13).

I personally feel so blessed to be in a school that encourages and celebrates culture and creativity. By opening yourself up to the world of creative arts, your life will be more rewarding and your understanding of life's complexities so much greater.

Many of our performance students open themselves up to opportunities beyond school and I want to acknowledge Eden Taylor (Year 10), performing in the Court Theatre production of *Fun Home*. Tamaroa Connelly and Xanthe Pearce (both Year 13) are also currently rehearsing for the Show Biz production of *Mama Mia* on in the next few weeks.

There are many achievements in the creative arts to recognise this morning. However, there are two special awards which I wish to present. Today is National Poetry Day and it is thus very appropriate to announce that for the first time ever a St Andrew's student has won first prize in the National Schools Poetry Award. In past years, students have won placing in the top ten poetry awards, but this year a StAC student has won the top award. Chantelle Xiong will travel to Wellington to participate in a Poetry Master Class, a really exciting opportunity for young writers. Among other prizes she receives a \$500 monetary award and \$500 book grant for our school library. Congratulations Chantelle on this incredible achievement.

Head Prefect Meg Simpson also won a top ten placing in the same competition and will be recognised later in our assembly. Congratulations and thank you to Writer in Residence Kerrin Davidson, and Head of English Rebecca Ball, for the incredible inspiration they provide to our student writer's programme.

The second major recognition is to Sea-am Thompson (Year 13). Sea-am is well known to us all for his incredible playing of the organ in chapel. But his talents extend far beyond this. A couple of weeks ago Mr Ferguson and I had the pleasure of going to Wellington to support Sea-am when he was presented his national award for winning the composition competition as part of the NZCT Chamber Music awards. His original piece *Piano Trio No 2* for piano, violin and cello were performed in the Wellington Town Hall for the first time by professional musicians. Congratulations Sea-am.

I conclude with a quote from perhaps an unlikely commentator on creativity, Albert Einstein: "Creativity is intelligence having fun."

Now that's something to think about. So, thank you to all those who contribute to St Andrew's College culture. This morning, we celebrate and salute you.