

Academic Assembly Rector's Address

Friday 13 February 2026

Mark Wilson



Nau mai, haere mai

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.

I'll begin by quoting a Māori whakataukī or proverb...

Ka tūtahi tatou

I te mātauranga he oranga wairua

Kia tū tangata ai tatou

Tēnā koutou katoa.

The words of this proverb encourages people to stand together, valuing education and wisdom as foundations for personal and communal well-being and growth. This proverb echoes our purpose here today.

This morning's special assembly is a time in which we collectively gather together in unity, to celebrate learning and achievement, recognising that learning will enable us as individuals and as a community to grow and flourish in life.

A warm welcome to our parents and guests this morning who have joined us to celebrate the accomplishments of our young people. Thank you to Board Chair, Felicity Odlin, for joining us this morning and to assist with presentations. Also, a very warm welcome to our Year 13 leavers from last year. It is great to have you here today, to celebrate your achievements. In addition, we welcome a special Old Collegian, Harry Withers, who has returned as our special guest speaker for later in this assembly.

To begin my address, I would like to share an important message with you all. Academic progress, learning and development are the core business for us as a school. Yet, here at St Andrew's College our educational philosophy and holistic approach is about developing both the academic intelligence of our young people, and the development of strong and positive character through our wide range of opportunities. We develop the whole person – who you are fully created to be.

St Andrew's College has an amazing record of ongoing outstanding academic outcomes. Especially as we are not an academically selective school, with at least 25% of our students receiving some form of learning support. We are all different. Therefore, outstanding outcomes for some is passing their NCEA, while for others it is gaining some of the top academic scholarships in the country.

How does St Andrew's help our young people to achieve their personal best? After being here for a year, I'd like to put forward my thinking, on why and how I see this.

Some of you may have heard of the Broken Windows Theory. It comes from New York in the 1980s, a time when the city was struggling with crime, graffiti, and neighbourhoods falling apart. The idea was simple: if a broken window is left unrepaired, it sends a message that no one cares. And when people believe no one cares, more things get broken and crime gets worse – literally and figuratively.

One of the authors of the theory, James Q. Wilson, put it plainly:



“Fix the broken windows and the crime goes down.”

But this morning, I'm not talking about policing. I'm talking about care – about the standards we set for one another, and the belief that the details matter because you matter. When we uphold high standards, it is not an act of control. It is an act of love.

When your teachers remind you of expectations, when we push you to do things properly, when we insist that details matter – it's not because we enjoy rules. It's because we care about the type of people you are becoming.

Now let me connect this to something very real in your lives: your learning, your achievement, and our school's strong academic results. It's easy to think that great academic outcomes come from talent or long hours alone. But in reality, they come from something far more basic – our habits. Habits done consistently, done well, and done with pride. This is where the “Broken Windows” idea becomes powerful.

When you get the little habits right by...:

- being in class on time;
- bringing the right gear;
- taking organised notes;
- completing homework properly;
- revising in small, regular chunks rather than in a last-minute panic

... you establish the routines and habits that high achievement grows from.

We recognise not all people are the same, so there is different learning support to meet the different needs. Such personal teaching is deliberate. Excellence isn't an accident. It's the result of what you repeatedly do.

John Wooden, one of history's greatest American basketball coaches of all time was famous for his approach to character, discipline, and personal development. John Wooden said: “Little things make big things happen.” He wasn't talking about perfection. He was talking about the thousands of micro-choices that build success.

As a Basketball Coach John Wooden discovered, this approach does not only produce success on the sports courts but also in the classrooms and in life.

And here's the truth: Our school's academic results – year after year – aren't a coincidence. They come from students who commit to good habits, apply strong processes, and see the benefits of high expectations.

When classrooms are calm, learning accelerates.

When people are prepared, lessons go further.

When deadlines are met, progress compounds.

When the standard is high in the small things, it becomes high in the big things — like NCEA externals, scholarship exams, all academic outcomes.

And the research backs this up: students who develop strong routines and self-discipline consistently outperform those who rely on talent alone. This is what they learnt in New York when they applied the Broken Windows Theory.



When we ask you to tuck in your shirt, to arrive on time, to clean up after yourselves, to speak kindly, to try hard – it comes from love, and it is our way of saying:

You matter.

This place matters.

What you do matters.

The time is always right to do what is right. Because if the small things slip, the big things are never far behind and will slip too. But when the small things are cared for, the culture lifts, confidence rises, and achievement follows.

So, as we move into this new year, I am asking each of you to help protect the metaphorical windows around you:

- pick up rubbish you didn't drop;
- speak up when something isn't right;
- show pride in how you present yourself;
- do tasks properly — not just quickly;
- treat others, and yourself, with dignity;
- don't walk past things that diminish our community;
- and build learning habits that set you up to succeed.

Because this school is not just a place where you learn subjects. It's a place that helps shape who you will become when you leave here.

These skills will not only help your academic results, but also your performance on the sports fields and courts, and across our performing arts and on the different stages in life. The habits you build now – especially the small ones – will echo throughout your life.

My promise to you is that we, as staff, will hold the line because we care too much not to. And I have faith that you will choose to do the same. This is the simple reason why St Andrew's College is such a remarkable place.

Through applying this approach in your life, you will know you belong, you will grow and flourish and be able to make a positive difference in our world.

So, as we all gather here, let us celebrate and acknowledge the hard work, dedication and talent of our top academic students who have diligently got the small stuff right and as a result have shined in their academic studies.

No reira,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.