



Founders' Day Assembly Morning Comment

Friday 13 March 2026

Head of Development and Community Relations, Tomo Yee



Good morning staff, students and invited guests. A special mention to our 60 Years On Old Collegians. You don't look a day over 67! Thank you for being here!

It's a privilege to be here on Founders' Day and reflect not only on my time here as a student, but how this place has changed since I was wearing a uniform.

On my first day back as a member of staff, it really felt like I was back at school. I walked into the staffroom, didn't know where to sit or stand. Ms Bigford and Mr Faulls, over to the side whispering away to each other like gossiping teenagers... couldn't sit there! Mr Wilson literally made me stand up in front of the staff and wave to everyone. The new kid on the block. First day nerves are a real thing.

It had been a long time since I'd been here, and as part of my orientation, I was taken on a tour around the College. And I thought "I don't really need a tour, I know where everything is. Strowan House is here, school cafe is there, I know where Scrupp's office is."

But as I was shown around, I was amazed with how this place has changed. Some out of necessity such as the rebuild of our Centennial Chapel and the Boarding Houses after the Christchurch earthquakes, and others because St Andrew's can offer students incredible opportunities – I'm talking about Ngā Toi Performing Arts Centre, the StACFit Fitness Centre that supports our Athlete Development programmes, our Media Department Studio, Esports Centre and hockey turf – just to name a few.

We didn't even have Wi-Fi when I was a student. It literally got installed the year after I left. I remember Mr Adams taking us for a computer class in Year 9, where the IT Helpdesk is now located, explaining to us about how Google searches worked, and that if you search 'dolphin,' you're just as likely to find results for the Miami Dolphins NFL team as you are the endangered species.

I was blown away by the support and services that St Andrew's provides now. The Well-being, Guidance and Counselling teams that are there when we need to feel safe and supported, our Learning Support team that help one in every four students, an onsite physiotherapist – that I've sadly already visited more than I would like to admit. The offering and opportunities that you have access to today, puts you in a position to try and succeed at things other students are literally on a waitlist to come here and access.

And the results speak for themselves. As we've all recently heard in our academic assemblies, you students are achieving incredible results in NCEA and Scholarship outcomes.



There's also strong literacy and numeracy levels in the Preparatory School. Shout out to all your teachers doing amazing mahi and giving you the tools to do amazing mahi yourselves. Also, low-key teacher superpower: remembering students' names. Look around, there's a lot of you!

St Andrew's College is also now more diverse than ever. Our school roll is now almost 50/50 boys and girls, and that's awesome. I certainly felt my life was better for being in a co-educational environment. Our 60 Years On Old Collegians never got that opportunity. Today, we have students from more than a dozen countries, representing 14 different nationalities. The integration of Te Reo Māori, PolyFest groups, and the International Club shows the incredible diversity which I think has enriched the culture of this school for the better.

When I was in Year 13, we had 15 non-white students in a yeargroup of 175, just over 8.5%, including me! And I was born here. When people ask me, "where are you from?" I say "Halswell". I know what they're asking, some days I just choose to be difficult.

I often get asked "what's it like being back at school?" And my honest answer is that it's a little weird, but it's great. I tell them that a lot of things have changed, yet a lot of things are still the same.

There are still quite a few teachers who taught me that are still teaching here today. It's been wonderful to reconnect with them, see them regularly and learn their first names. Some teachers were also students when I was here and that's really cool to see them inspire the next generation. Some of these teachers, and I won't say who, are now actually the age I thought they were when I was a student – turns out they were way younger than I thought. Shout out to Mr Leota's skincare routine.

And I also say that the rhythm of the school year is still the same. We still have amazing productions every year. We'll still have a Boarders' Assembly. Rutherford is still the best house. Prefects still wear their kilts on Friday. We still sing the *College Song*. Strowan House is still Strowan House.

Because as much as St Andrew's has evolved, what hasn't changed is just as important. And that's really what Founders' Day is about: celebrating everything that has grown, and everything that has stayed true. The vision that started this College 109 years ago is still here in the culture, the spirit, and the people.

And look, I know that this place isn't for everyone, and that's ok. As students, when you're here every day, you might not think about it all that much. School is a bit like toilet paper: you only really miss it when it's gone. One day you'll look back and realise how much of who you are was shaped here, often without you noticing it at the time.

Part of that is connection. Christchurch has this unique thing where one of the first questions people ask you (apart from "where are you from"), is "What school did you go to?" It's a bit like asking what hall you're in if you're studying in Dunedin, or what suburb you're from if you're in Auckland. Some people use it to figure out social status (let's be



honest), but whenever I get asked, I always think it's because Christchurch is small enough that they're trying to find some sort of connection.

St Andrew's is a place that creates connections. No matter how much this place changes, whether you're 16 years old or you're here for your 60 Years On Reunion, it stays part of your story.

As someone who has been where you're sitting and is now back here again, there is still a certain feeling about this place that makes it special. Beyond the bricks and mortar. More than the physical things you can touch, taste, feel, see, and smell. It's the things you can't quite put your finger on, but you know are there. That sense of connection, identity, and belonging is what makes this place special, and what will continue to make St Andrew's College special for years to come.

Thank you.