ANZAC DAY SCHOOL CEREMONY

As we meet this morning, we acknowledge our past and the hard lessons it has taught us and we commit to a future that honours the spirit of our national identity.

Anzac Day is a special day that came about to honour the heroism, tenacity and resilience of that group of young men whose units were sent to Gallipoli where it was hoped, by their actions, that the duration of the war – a war to end all wars – would be shortened.

The story, including the human cost of what is now regarded as a military failure, has been told countless times. Of more importance is the fact that the campaign stirred in Australians everywhere, new feelings of national pride and saw the world take notice of us in a new light, not just as a part of a wider British Commonwealth, but as a nation with an independent character and a rightful place in the world.

This view of ourselves continues today thanks to the spirit of those Anzacs who served at Gallipoli and thanks to those who have carried it forward in the conflicts that followed.

Our assembly today therefore is also a special one to remember all those, whether service personnel or civilians, of every nation, who suffered or who continue to suffer through war.

 In particular this morning we remember those who served in the Australian defence forces on active service from the Boer War to Afghanistan and we remember those who paid the supreme sacrifice so that we can live in peace.

Today’s assembly should also be one that includes a moment of quiet reflection for all of us. It is a time to reflect on the freedoms we enjoy, on the courage and resilience of past generations of Australians, on the pride we all should feel for our country and on the respect that we should give to those thousands of ordinary men and women who have stepped forward in those times when the nation has called.

The writer John Hepworth, in his book the Long Green Shore, wrote of our diggers in New Guinea in the Second World War in the following way.
He said:
‘they pinned no medals on him, they made no speeches, we need no medals or speeches to remember him because he was just a good, ordinary bloke, that's the point, the thing to remember, he was an ordinary bloke like you and me.’

So this morning let us all remember those young Australians who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defence of freedom and democracy, who faced up to tyranny and injustice and who embedded in our character and spirit the nation that we have become.

These are the real heroes of war because they taught us to face up to hardship, to show courage, to believe in ourselves and to stick together. They did not glorify war or assert the right of any one nation or race over another.

This morning we should also reflect that heroism and patriotism must be tempered by a genuine love of peace, because history tells us that those two human qualities, when taken to the extreme, can be destructive.

Our Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, on ANZAC Day last year, emphasised the legacy of those who served and our duty for the future when she said:

‘we reaffirm their place and as we do we endeavour to find in ourselves a greater understanding, a more compassionate care, and a heightened wisdom, that will help us to anchor our past, guide our future and see the present more clearly and more honestly.

We have learned a great deal in the new century that has passed. The valour in a good cause, the courage, resourcefulness, comradeship and endurance will always remain in our spirit and in our vernacular.’

Finally, today is a day to acknowledge who we are, the values that define us and the direction that we must follow to ensure a peaceful, tolerant Australia.

As young Australians you should cherish this opportunity to acknowledge what we stand for as a nation and to assert that as we look back, we also walk forward to a brighter future because of the efforts of those who came before us.