WE can make the change

Welcoming students back onto our campuses this week has been a wonderful experience. It is only when children are here each day that our campuses come alive with the energy, enthusiasm and challenges that each child brings. I look forward to adding to the collection of holiday stories heard already and watching the excitement of our children as they reconnect with their friends and make new ones.

At the Senior School commencement assembly this week, we celebrated the excellent results of the Class of 2013 as well as inducting the new College Student Executive and Senior School House Leaders. This is a terrific assembly held each year as we acknowledge excellence in many of its forms as seen at Overnewton.

During the assembly, I spoke of my admiration for the new Pope, Pope Francis. You will not be surprised to know that I am not a Catholic, I am an Anglican. I must confess that it takes me most of the time to understand the workings of the Anglican Church and so I have developed but a passing knowledge of the Catholic Church.

However, I have been extremely impressed by the new Pope and the impact he has made in a relatively short period of time.

During his first appearance as Pope on the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica, he wore a simple white cassock, not the vibrant red, ermine-trimmed version used by the previous Popes. Also he wore the same iron cross around his neck that he had worn as the Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires, rather than the gold one worn by his predecessors.

Since becoming spiritual leader to 1.2 billion Catholics around the world he has been on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine and he was Time Magazine’s Person Of The Year in 2013.

To me this is not surprising because he has had significant things to say about sexuality, waste, poverty, wealth, fairness, justice, respect for every human being, all of which appear to have caused people to stop and think and to consider their judgement of others.

In one of his early messages, he said that St Ignatius pointed out two criteria on love. The first: love is expressed more clearly in actions than in words. The second: there is greater love in giving than in receiving.

It is impressive that he has somewhere in the vicinity of 30 million twitter followers, not quite Katy Perry's 50 million announced this week but a fair following nevertheless.

Two weeks ago, I read a very small article about Pope Francis in the weekend Age that was titled: “The Internet is a gift from God”

In the article, Pope Francis encouraged Catholics to “boldly become citizens of the digital world”. He said: "Let our communications be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts. The digital world can be an
environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people. *In a world which suffers from many forms of exclusion, marginalisation, and poverty, media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family, which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all.*

We all know that the internet is a great place to visit; it is an incredibly valuable tool to use; and it has wonderful possibilities for creating connections, building relationships, building knowledge, investigating new things, exploring ideas, creating and so the list goes on.

So, in line with our theme for this year and the message I gave at Presentation Night last year - the hope and exhortation I presented at this week’s assembly and that I write in *Whispers* this week, is that Overnewton students will make the change and build a strong digital voice and encourage others to use the digital world as a place for good.

I have been incredibly heartened in the past when I have heard that students have jumped into discussions on Facebook that were not going in a good direction - the launch of the stand out group last year being a great example, or when they have spoken to staff that they trusted to seek help in dealing with an issue on line or to support a student who is not operating well on line. These are but examples of the great things that I have come to know about and expect of Overnewton students over my 19 years in this community.

There are several aspects to the We can make the change theme for this year. But for me, students strengthening their voices in any forum to ensure that our communications are ’a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts’ could not be more important.

May I wish you all a successful year ahead; and I encourage all members of our community to use the great resource which we have in our teachers and support staff who strive constantly to ensure that they can make a change in the lives of the students of Overnewton College.