Welcome back to Overnewton Anglican Community College for the start of a new school year. Our community has come alive again this week with the return of students and, as always, this has created a wonderful sense of energy and cheerfulness across our campuses.

At the end of the day on Monday, I asked a student how her day had been. With overwhelming enthusiasm, iPad in hand, she said: “It was awesome”. Whilst I know that not every student will have had this response, it was lovely to hear a student talk with such genuine joy as her year commenced.

We are all grateful to the parents who attended last weekend’s working bees. Both our campuses were cleaned and tidied ready for students to once again resume their places on them. We are grateful to those parents also who watered, mowed, and cleaned the campuses over the break so that the tasks for those on the working bees were less onerous than they might have been.

By now parents will have heard their children tell them that our theme for 2015 is “Thinking first”. We are excited by the very strong academic and pastoral connections that will be made to the theme over the course of the year; my first reflection on it being in my next Whispers article. However, I will say that it is an extremely rare situation where we do not, even at Prep, have the inner resources to complete a task, solve a problem, deal with a particular situation or respond in a particular way when we are “Thinking first” rather than just saying “I can’t do it” as a programed response.

We are very fortunate that Mark Church of the Harvard Graduate School of Education will be working with staff this year to build on our work on visible thinking in the classroom. As a member of the Harvard Project Zero team, Mark is a world leader in this area and we are excited about how he will help us to strengthen our teaching practices and, most importantly, student learning.

Over the last eight years, we have run major reviews of our programs at Year 9, Year 10, Senior School pastoral care, technology, in the performing arts, our libraries, LOTE and learning development and support.

In Term 2, we will begin a two year review of our approach to Middle Years learning. It is fifteen years since a major review of Middle School was undertaken and it is timely to do so again to ensure that our programs are the best they can be for our students. More details of the review will be shared in the coming months; we will be grateful for parent input during the review.

All families will have received the brochure advertising our 2015 Parent Education Evenings. We have managed to book some truly excellent speakers, two of whom, Melinda Tankard Reist and Nathan Hulls will spend the day of their presentation working with students and staff as well. Melinda’s presentations on the sexualisation of children are chilling and confronting. Nathan’s work on developing strong relationships with teens is some of the most inspiring and accessible I have come across in recent times. We finish the year with Andrew Fuller who is an old friend of the College and a speaker I know that parents always enjoy hearing.

Additionally, Paul Dillon will be working with Senior School students again this term on responsible practices.
around partying, alcohol and drugs. This is the third year we have had Paul work with students and his messages are always simple and positive.

Last Sunday a group of students and staff joined in with the thousands of others who marched through St Kilda in the Midsumma Pride March. Marching with other members of the Safe Schools Coalition, it was an absolute joy to hear the acclaim of those watching the march and to know that, as a member of the coalition, we are a community striving to make our school a safe place for all children regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual identity.

In 2015, we have received a grant to work with *Fair go, sport!*, a terrific program being run by the Human Rights Commission. The program is run in support of providing safe and inclusive environments on the sporting arena. Details about *Fair go, sport!* will come in further editions of Whispers.

As our year gets underway, may I again remind all families that, as a College, we embrace the importance of the role of parents in the life of our school. Our doors are always open to you. I encourage every parent to become known to their children’s teachers, and to contact us whenever you have a concern, a query or want to share a good news story. I wish you all a terrific year ahead.