"Thinking first" at the Keilor Campus Welcome Assembly

The following is an excerpt from the speech given by Akshat Chopra and Tegan Lam, Middle School Captains, at the Welcome Assembly

As you may already know, the College theme for this year is "Thinking first". Tegan and I discussed together what first came to our mind and what the motto/theme means to us. We not only thought about this from a Middle School students' perspective, but also a Junior and Senior School perspective.

The first thing that came to my mind was the difference between Thinking first and think first. Thinking first is present tense and it is the process of thinking before you act or make a decision. While on the other hand, 'think first' is in the future tense, however it is more necessary to be judging your decisions at that moment.

We thought of many ideas and to both of us 'thinking before you act' stood out the most. For some people, if a teacher asks you a question like "Why are you wearing the wrong uniform?" they don't think when they respond, but may say something that is inaccurate without thinking that it could get them into more trouble. Thinking before you act helps you to make the right choice. You may or may not know, that on average a human being makes thousands of choices and decisions daily and sometimes they can be really clumsy due to not thinking first.

We also believe that Thinking first means thinking worldwide and where parts of the world are in crisis, we thought that Thinking first was not only about thinking about yourself, but also about other people. Thinking about your thinking is one of the school's '16 Habits of Mind'; students study and use these during class. Habits of Mind is a development series that successful people have used and are using, created by Arthur L. Costa. Thinking about your thinking is being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others. Thinking first, to us is not just thinking, but thinking positively.

As Zig Ziglar has stated in one of his quotes, "Positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will."

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I have added some examples of Habits of Mind that support our theme of "Thinking first" and are worthy of consideration in our school context.

1. **Persisting:** Sticking to the task at hand; Following through to completion; remaining focused.

Last week the Year 12 students were able to hear from Tristan Miller, an inspirationally persistent man, who completed 52 marathons in the 2010 calendar year. Senior School staff and students will also hear Mrs. Rufus speak about a related quality, which is grit, an important characteristic of successful people. Persistence and grit help people overcome challenges in life; successful VCE students show grit when they will themselves to complete homework, prepare for SACs so that they perform to the best of their ability and not just pass, whilst continuing to
enjoy co-curricular activities and life outside of school. Life does not stop for the VCE.

2. **Managing Impulsivity**: Taking time to consider options; Thinking before speaking or acting; Remaining calm when stressed or challenged; Being thoughtful and considerate of others; proceeding carefully.

   This is a Habit of Mind that stops us from starting arguments and breaking down relationships; it tells us that stress is both avoidable and manageable and not an excuse for failing to consider others and their stress.

3. **Thinking Flexibly**: Being able to change perspective; Considering the input of others; Generating alternatives; Weighing up options.

4. **Thinking about Thinking (Metacognition)**: Being aware of our own thoughts, feelings, intentions and actions; Knowing what I do and say affects others; Being willing to consider the impact of choices on myself and others.

   Learning about ourselves, our patterns of thought and how it affects others is a skill for all of us to develop. Metacognition is a good topic to discuss in class at all levels.

5. **Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations**: Use what is learned; Consider prior knowledge and experience; Apply knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.

   This habit of mind is very important to the process of science.

6. **Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision**: Strive to be clear when speaking and writing; Strive also to be accurate when speaking and writing; Avoid generalisations, distortions, minimisations and deletions when speaking and writing.

   This is a Habit of Mind that is well used by our public speaking and debating teams, who are very successful when competing against other schools. It is also something that teachers often talk about with their classes, as thinking and communicating with clarity and precision are keys to becoming successful students.

7. **Creating, Imagining, Innovating**: Thinking about how something might be done differently from the “norm”; Proposing new ideas; Striving for originality; Considering novel suggestions others might make.

   Our art teachers are great examples of being creative and we have many examples of student projects that show great innovation.

8. **Thinking Interdependently**: Being willing to work with others and welcome their input and perspective; Abiding by decisions of the team makes even if you disagree somewhat; Being willing to learn from others in reciprocal situations.

   This habit of mind is what teaching and learning are all about in schools.