EOYS – Position the positive context about others, their learning.

Good evening and welcome to the 2015 End of Year Service. Particular welcome and thanks go to our distinguished guests here tonight.

Each year as a school, we acknowledge new innovations in education and consider the implications for Navigator College. This year we wanted to continue to highlight our Positive Education program as the small inroads we had made the previous year was enough to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. We wanted therefore to continue with a purposeful focus of Positivity in the College.

We started with a full day of professional development with an interstate expert who helped to mould the program for Navigator’s purposes, which was to enhance the wellbeing of our students and to focus on their character strengths so that they can feel positive about themselves, their abilities and life in general. Paula Robinson was a powerful presenter and gave us much to consider. We were asked to make sure as we left that day to make at least one change to how we as individuals were going to build aspects of positivity into our own lives, because, in order to highlight positivity in our day to day interactions with our students, we needed to start with ourselves first.

A colleague and I decided to build a Facebook group of just the two of us and to post a grateful statement each day. We would hold each other accountable and would trial it for the first term. That Facebook post started a journey for me. Each evening I would sit quietly, reflect for a minute and consider the happenings of the day that I could be grateful for.

I'm grateful for the opportunity that I have to continue my learning, having others in my life that motive me to consider all that I have each day and to be grateful for the many blessings God gives me.

From there each of us as teaching staff moulded the program to suit our positions. Some went on a school visit, another on a study tour and others finding aspects of positive psychology online to build opportunities for students within their learning programs.

I'm grateful for staff who have the best interests of their students at the forefront of their minds, that includes their wellbeing as well as their learning.

Each evening I would post on the group page something I was grateful for and I would receive a reply from my colleague in the form of a grateful statement too. It's amazing all the many and varied opportunities we have to be grateful each day. Around the College I noticed post it notes from students writing about the many reasons to be grateful posted on the pin boards in classrooms, I heard there were teachers who asked students write positive notes to one another each day to value others in the class. I read posters focusing on positivity and I saw a tree at the back of the room created buy one of our teachers with students positive comments about their learning and each other. Some students started to knit blankets for those less fortunate whilst others wrote in encouragement books and others still made placements for Meals on Wheels to support those in our wider community.
I'm grateful for the open mindedness of our students to grasp the ideas of their teachers and who want to build others up in the best way they can. I'm grateful for the student’s friendships with one another and the way they support those who may not fit in. They are still valued as part of the College family.

I went to Adelaide to hear another champion in the area of Positive Education who shared with the group information about a man who had developed 24 Character strengths, and of the VIA Institute who had worked with him to study character strengths in people. The man’s name is Martin Seligmann. Seligmann suggested that we often as humans look at our faults rather than our strengths. He suggested that when we discover that we may be deficient in a trait it is a natural and admirable human reaction to work to build that deficiency and to become better at that trait. Whilst that is a natural alternative he suggested to turn our thinking around and to consider all that we do well. Seligmann says when we focus on the traits we are very good at, we naturally feel more positive, we naturally build in confidence and we feel much better about ourselves.

I'm grateful for the scholars who undertake studies in order for us to learn more and to improve ourselves.

As a staff we took the test and discovered our character strengths. When we compared ours to others there a variety of differences, however one thing was certain. Seligmann was right. When we are undertaking an activity that used our top character strengths we were happier than if we were undertaking activities that used our lower level character strengths.

I have always said happy children learn. If a child is safe and happy in an environment they will learn. So, considering our learning about character strengths and putting those together within our school environment, it makes sense to me to consider the strengths of our children and to continue to build them up, to encourage them and to value those things they do well. To include their strengths into their learning will encourage them to strive harder because they will feel positive about themselves.

I'm grateful for the children in our lives who need that support from us to build them up, encourage them and to help them see the positives in all of life's journeys.

Navigator College is a place of faith and a place of learning in which students are inspired and equipped to live as active contributors in the community. God has called each and every one of us to build our students, to inspire them to do the very best they can be in order for them to go out into the world actively using their strengths to make a difference to those around them. As parents, and as staff it is our responsibility to continue to make sure they see the value in themselves and to strive to their greatest heights.

The Bible says we each have gifts and talents and that God made each and every one of us as unique individuals with varying strengths which He asks us to use to His glory. We can take those words from the Bible and we can use them with our children. Let's not pour all our time into those aspects they struggle with. Of course we need to support them but let's look at all that they are strong in and lets highlight those traits to them. Let's praise them, encourage them, accolade them so that they know they are very special people, in Gods eyes, in our eyes and most importantly in their eyes.

Incidentally, the grateful posts that began as an idea for a term is still going strong. And I'm grateful for that.

Thank you.