



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NICHOLAS LEARNING CENTRE

Friday 1st November 2019

Ms Diana Vernon, Principal, MLC

Mrs Marjorie Nicholas OAM, Chair, MLC Foundation

Ms Elida Brereton, MLC Board Director

Mrs Alisa Bennett, President of the Parents' Association

Ms Gabrielle Lim, President of the Old Collegians's Club

Students and Staff

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this morning.

Tony and I are delighted to be here for the opening of the Nicholas Learning Centre.

It is a magnificent new building. But it is poised against the backdrop of a long history.

I wonder what the founders of the school would think if they were here amongst us today.

There is no doubt that they would be surprised – more likely, shocked – by the widespread changes that they could never have anticipated 137 years ago.

Then again, not surprised at all by this setting in which the education of young women is so well promoted and respected.

Of course, they could not have envisaged just what the 21st century world might look like.

That classrooms would become configurable spaces for Years 7 and 8, with state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor learning and recreational spaces, specifically designed to foster and develop skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and creativity.

And that young women would be educated to meet the opportunities and the complexities of the digital age, a globalised economy, rapidly changing jobs, career changes at an unprecedented level, the changing face of work and the necessity of lifelong learning.

But the aspirations of the Founders of this school were such that, rising to meet the new raft of challenges in educating girls, would not be foreign to them. They fully expected that young women would be nurtured and developed here with the skills, knowledge and values to equip them for the world that awaited them.

The Founders' goal, to provide a 'high-class' education for girls, comparable with that provided elsewhere for boys, recognised then what we all know now.

That girls deserve the same opportunities as boys. And that to prosper, we need the engagement of 100% of our talent pool, not just one half of it.

And although their 19th century terminology might have differed, the fact that, today, wellbeing – mental, social and physical – lies at the heart of the ethos at MLC, and is intrinsically designed within this new building, sits perfectly comfortably for all that was originally intended for the spiritual health of the girls.

We know too that these spaces will welcome those of all faiths and cultural backgrounds. That is another cultural underpinning of this school.

My husband and I are fortunate enough to have a close connection with another Wesleyan school. We know first-hand how the Founders instilled an enthusiasm for diversity that ensures harmony and confidence in all their students.

It is fitting that the new Learning Centre is named for the Nicholas brothers, whose vision and philanthropy facilitated the development of the facilities at MLC, described in *The Age* newspaper in 1937, as 'probably the finest block of buildings of any girls' college in Australia'.

Those facilities are today further enhanced.

But, of course, it is always what happens inside these beautiful spaces that matters most. That is, the excellent teaching, the care and support, the encouragement and the inspiration of the educators.

And so it is with all those programs for which MLC is renowned. Whether, for example, the laptop computer program that led schools across the country, (and beyond), the emphasis on global citizenship or the celebrated Marshmead experience. All brilliant innovations, but dependent for their success on the sound guidance of the girls by dedicated staff.

Today gives us the opportunity to thank them.

And of course to congratulate all those with the vision and courage to create this wonderful new facility.

To the Chair, Tony Peake, current and former members of the School Board and the Principal, Diana Vernon, embarking on a substantial building project does take both vision and courage. I hope that today you feel proud of what you have achieved.

I would also like to congratulate the Foundation Committee, Parents' Association, and Old Collegians' Club for their tireless work in building and nurturing MLC's place in community life and for making this Centre possible through their philanthropic drive and support. Thank you too to Ms Cathie Ireland, Head of Junior Secondary School, for her role in supporting and transitioning students into this new Centre.

And so it is with great pleasure that I will shortly declare the MLC Nicholas Learning Centre officially open.