



## Official Opening Speech, Principal's Address 14 March 2024

Thank you all for attending this official opening as we celebrate the successful transition of Whyalla Secondary College. We started as saltbush and became a world class educational facility in a time frame of 18 months.

Today is a very special and emotional day for me, as the founding Principal of Whyalla Secondary College. I have seen it as an enormously exciting challenge, a great honour and a privilege.

It is a day to reflect and celebrate the hard work and significant achievements made over the past two years and 7 weeks of being open.

A new Whyalla secondary school was discussed at various times for over 20 years. To see it become a reality should truly be seen by the Whyalla community as a high point for both their children and belief in the future of the town.

As a long term Whyalla resident and active community member, I understood the critical need for the new school. I am confident it has delivered positive outcomes for all children and young people in Whyalla.

Through my ongoing professional development, I have come to respect and admire Professor Vivane Robinson. I embrace her focus on educational leadership and believe her following quote demonstrates my leadership style. "The more leaders focus their relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes."

Whyalla Secondary College is an ATRiUM focus school which is evident in everything we do from year 7 to 12. Instead of differentiating the places for education, we focus on providing a personalised differentiated curriculum that enhances student voice, choice and engagement, to make the most of every student's learning journey. In addition to traditional subject knowledge and skills, our curriculum has a central focus on the ATRiUM capabilities where students are actively learning, creatively thinking, relating to others, using language through symbols, ICT and being able to manage self. Competency in all these capabilities assists students in developing effective employability skills, setting them up for success as empowered community citizens.

I am so proud to know that after only two years in operation, we have 22% of our student cohort engaged in an alternative learning program, which is tailored to their individual needs. This means that our vision for the college is becoming a reality.

I spent 15 months planning and preparing for the opening of the college. To do this meant living and working in Adelaide 3 days a week, while still maintaining my home and life in Whyalla. Had I truly known how challenging, demanding and emotionally draining opening a new school would be, I may have rethought my decision to apply for the position.

A real highlight of those first 15 months was working closely with the Sarah Constructions team, who delivered the build with the same vision and passion as the school team.

They took the time to learn and understand what our values and vision was, and went above and beyond to deliver this amazing educational facility. The pride shown by the Sarah Constructions team was clearly evident and showed incredible commitment, to deliver the build on time in one of the most difficult times in construction history.



While the build was being created I was busy working on things a high school Principal doesn't normally have the time to think about. We needed a name for the school, colours for the school, a school logo, uniform for the students, then there was a vision statement, values and a tagline to develop and create.

A significant part of those 15 months was also building the HR profile, developing a leadership structure, writing policies and procedures and working closely with the Whyalla community.

I had 5 key messages that were consistent during this time. They were;

- Opportunities
- Strong foundations
- Community and connection
- Partnerships and pathways
- Inclusion

Now here we are two years later and every single day I witness our three values of Integrity, Innovation and Inclusion in action, which results in students inspiring the range of possibilities available to them.

Key achievements which really stand out for me are;

- Day one at the college when 1,314 students walked through the atrium to begin a whole new era of education. I will never forget the range of emotions I felt that day.
- Making and creating our amazing new learning spaces.
- Running the school with at the one point 7 staff vacancies.
- Seeing our school café in operation.
- Our first sports day, which was the perfect example of ATRiUM pedagogy in action.
- Watching the gym and fitness room being used every single lesson of every single day.
- Seeing Centacare being used and accessed by both staff and students.
- Having Clontarf and Shooting Stars assist staff each day.
- Fantastic participation in various sporting competitions.
- Our very pleasing year 12 results.
- The ongoing success of our SAASTA Academy.
- The introduction of House Madness days.
- Sammy D presentations.
- Encounter Youth presentations.
- The positive working relationship developed with SAPOL, having them visit and be a part of the school one lunchtime a week.
- The introduction of the Young Women Lead program.
- The almost daily use of our facilities by the Whyalla community out of school hours.
- The success of VET pathways at the college which currently supports 36 students on SBAT.

The focus and direction for Whyalla Secondary College is to build on our current achievements, continue to work on our literacy, numeracy and attendance data and ensure that we improve our overall achievement data.



As we are two years into our journey there are some key people that I need to thank and acknowledge.

I would like to thank the LET team, Ms Terry Sizer and Mr David O'Brien for their ongoing support to myself and the college leadership team. Your ongoing help and assistance, along with your belief in our vision is greatly appreciated.

- To Deputy Principal Christina Nicholas. Your work ethic and exceptional curriculum knowledge is a real credit to you. Your friendship and support is appreciated much more than you realise.
- To our Assistant Principals for your hard work and constant focus on our school values and vision.
- To Business Manager Ms Mandy Quinn, your job is enormous and complex. Your dedication to the college is greatly appreciated.
- To the entire leadership team for your acceptance of high standards and total commitment to improvement.
- To Kylie Morris my EA, my right hand, my special friend and the one person who understands me the best. You have been on this journey with me from day one and I truly could not continue in this role without you. You are an exceptional EA.
- To my Mum Maxine Byles, for always believing in me and giving me the strength and courage to never give up.
- To my best friend Rachelle Frigo, for understanding how important this job is to me and for always encouraging me to keep going.
- Most importantly to my husband Phil for your ongoing support, encouragement and understanding and to Tyson and Jade for your patience, love and understanding. I am very aware that this job has meant that at times my family often takes second place.

Thank you all for attending our official opening event. It is such a pleasure to have you all here. Staff and students know that each week I provide a quote for them to reflect and ponder on. This is how I deliver many of my key messages.

My quote to sum up our journey and celebrate this day is;

“If you spend all your time being normal, you will never know how amazing you are.”