

Kanui te Mihi Kia Koutou ki te Whanau Whanui o Waiuku

A big greeting to the students, parents and families of Waiuku College and to the wider Waiuku Community.

My thanks also to all of you who have chosen to attend and be a part of this very special occasion for our school – our special guests, our parents and community, our staff and most importantly, our senior students who are here to both be acknowledged, and to show acknowledgement for the efforts and achievements of their friends, peers and classmates.

Welcome to you all to what is undoubtedly the highlight of our school year, our senior school prize-giving. As a school we have this year worked hard to create more opportunities than in the past to celebrate the efforts and achievement of excellence of our students. And I see this afternoon's ceremony as very much a culmination of that process. As principal I have also done my best this year to encourage both our students and our staff to be the best they can possibly be in all that they do in all the many dimensions of teaching and learning. Something that I am sure that you as students, parents, community and teachers value as highly as I do.

I believe we are well on our way to creating a school where we have a culture that promotes effort and excellence, acknowledges those that display and achieve those goals and qualities, and most importantly ensure that we celebrate what we achieve.

Our term one whole school assembly to recognize student achievement of merit and excellent in NCEA through 2008 was our first new major occasion of doing this and I still have fond memories of how positively and supportively our student body responded on that occasion. We were fortunate to have the team from the education review office present on that day as well as at the next event, our board of Trustees evening event to recognize those same students in the presence of their parents. Many of you here will remember again how successful that evening was and I know that we sent a very strong message at that time to the review office that Waiuku College was moving in a new, a positive and a transforming direction in the education and achievement of our students. The positive ERO report and subsequent media coverage that we enjoyed was a great encouragement to us in our new direction.

In early Term three we held our mid year Excellence assemblies at which we acknowledged all students who had achieved one or more excellence grades in any of their internal assessments. I remember being amazed not only at the huge numbers of students who achieved recognition at those assemblies but also at the outstanding students who had achieved multiple excellences, with one Year 10 student in particular having 20 excellence grades up to only the start of August.

The Maori excellence awards evening as well at the end of term three was a wonderful celebration of the strengths and achievements of our Maori students. This was the first time that such an event has been held at the college and I would like to recognize again the achievement of Year 12 student Tara Coe in receiving the supreme Te Toa award for the most outstanding Maori student. I still remember well the power of the Haka tautoko given to Tara by her peers in the audience that night.

And now today we have reached the final formal event of the year for our senior students in which we recognize their efforts to achieve the school motto of 'Titiro Teitei'. My congratulations in advance to all of you who will receive awards and be acknowledged this afternoon. I know that your peers, your families and our community will be as proud of your achievements as I am.

To our year 13 students in particular, and to other senior students who are departing – thank you for your many and varied contributions to Waiuku College, both big and small, individual and collective. I know you will take special memories with you as you move on and hope that in the future you too can give something back to the school that has helped you on your pathway. A really big thanks to our very special team of prefects and their leaders, the top four of Nina, Callum, Adam and Emma. As young leaders you embody the qualities we aspire to imbue in all our students and we are justifiably proud of you as Waiuku's finest of 2009. Best wishes to you and all our other leavers of 2009.

As a community we should be thankful too, for the quality and hard work and achievements of our present Board of Trustees. I would like to acknowledge in particular the astute leadership, support and guidance provided by our Board Chair, Geoff Mercer. Kiaora Geoff for all your support. As we enter 2010 we also welcome a new student representative, Rebekah Fryer to the Board and farewell a former student rep, Marcel De Villiers. Thank you too Marcel for your fine contribution over the past year. We welcomed co-opted parent, Kay Kendall onto the Board and I look forward to next years Board elections in May when I am sure we will most likely see a few more fresh faces join us in our stewardship of the college. I invite anyone who may be interested in standing to approach myself or any other Board member to discuss it.

I would like to thank the Board also for giving me the opportunity to participate in some overseas professional development recently. It allowed me to pursue in particular an area which I am personally excited about which is our goal to promote and develop independent learning qualities and opportunities for our students. I was fortunate to be a part of a group of international educators who travelled to Canada to investigate and experience schools who are committed to what they call 'self directed learning'. These are schools who have to varying degrees rejected traditional classroom structures and replaced them with teacher supported individual learning programmes where senior students in particular have a say over planning how they will use their time and organise their learning experiences within the structures and confines of the school environment. I believe that at Waiuku College we have very many students with the ability, the aptitude and the self management skills to be highly successful in such an environment and I look forward to exploring and working towards ways to allow more independent or self directed learning to flourish in our school.

*I would like to acknowledge the support and hard work of all the teachers and support staff in the school who make the growth, development and continuous improvement of this school possible. We are fortunate in having a very stable, capable and committed staff at the college and I know that they share in our school goal to be the best possible teachers and supporters they can be of our students here. I know that our departing students will be showing their appreciation to the teachers in their own private way to thank them for the contribution they have made to their educational achievement. But I ask you to join with me in showing your appreciation on this occasion too.
(Aplause)*

I would like finally to express my personal thanks to all the staff of the college for the support and encouragement I receive from you and for your contribution to making my role of Principal a meaningful one in our school and community. Thanks too for the many instances of support and encouragement I have had from yourselves, the parents and community of Waiuku. I still feel incredibly fortunate to be in my position as Principal here at the college and still firmly believe that we are a very special place with the potential to achieve great things! To our recently disbanded PTA members— who are now part of our electronic 'friends of the school network' thank you for the special contributions you have made over the years and especially to Mr Ian White for his long involvement and service. It was once often said that it takes a village to raise a child and I believe that here in Waiuku we get very close to that ideal through the wonderful relationships we often have between the school, you as parents and our wider community. I hope that this will always be one of our strengths here in Waiuku and I will certainly be doing my best to build and sustain such a culture around our school community

And now it is time for us to get on with the ceremony and enjoy the awards and recognition of success that make this such a special occasion.

No Reira, Tena Koutou, Tena koutou, Tena Tatou Katoa

Thank you again to you all for being here tonight.

Tom Vanderlaan