

Good morning Sr Mary, Mr DiCamillo, Ms Neil, staff, parents and students,

It is an absolute honour to stand here today and I am very grateful for this opportunity to speak to you all. It seems like not so long ago I was in Year seven, sitting right where you are, listening to the Dux of 2017, yes 2017, give her speech - so being here is truly surreal.

I would like to firstly congratulate the phenomenal Year 12s who are here today on their amazing achievement. We shared the narrow Whyte building hallway, so I know exactly how hard you all worked and how truly deserving you are of your successes. I would also like to congratulate my peers who aren't here today but who got into their courses, my peers who were brave enough to take a gap year, my peers who survived the year and grew in some way and for that I, too, congratulate them.

But we couldn't have possibly done it alone. Thank you to our teachers throughout our entire high school journey who shaped and guided us along the way, gifting us with knowledge and skills. Thank you to our Year 12 teachers for reexplaining things 100 times, figuring out our confused faces, meeting us whenever you could. (I think I saw Mr Tellefson more than my family last year), marking assignments in a matter of hours and for being our biggest supporters. Our successes are not only our own but they are a testament to all of your hard work and dedication. I think I speak on behalf of the entire class of 2023 when I say we are extremely grateful. Special thanks to our amazing coordinator Ms Muller for all of your support and encouragement and Ms Sach for all your help in navigating our futures.

We didn't just gain knowledge from being at Academy. We were able to grow as people and figure out who we are. So thank you Sr Mary and the Academy community for providing us with a welcoming space to do so and for all of the opportunities, life lessons and values so that we were able to exit those gates and go into the world with confidence.

I would also like to thank the people who have been teaching us from the moment we were born - our parents and families. Thank you for sending us to school, packing our lunches, providing shoulders to cry on and for your never ending support, encouragement and love.

So, if you are sitting there wondering, when is she going to get to the tips on how to get an ATAR above 90 and what study techniques I used, I'm sorry to disappoint. I'm instead going to tell you what I have learnt over these past 6 years and what I wish someone told my younger self.

I could tell you that last year was super easy, that I got 100% on everything, that I looked after myself and I was constantly happy. But I'd be lying. I had my share of tears, moments of self-doubt and times when I felt like I was suffocating from mounds of pressure to do well.

But my mum always told me four words which got me through, in addition to lots of boy genius and Noah Kahan, and those were "just try your best".

High school is one step in a long journey ahead and VCE is a bump to overcome in that road.

I know Year 12 seems like the be all and end all but it really isn't. Your ATAR is solely to help you to get into your course. If it does then amazing! If it doesn't that's ok too because there are heaps and heaps of different pathways. Your best may look different to other peoples and your pathway may look different too, and that's completely normal. All anyone asks of you is for you to try your best. That is quite literally all you can do. No matter what happens when you get your results, you will be satisfied knowing you have given it your all.

In saying this, your best is only possible when you look after yourselves which is why I am a big advocate for the 'balance'. I worked last year. I hung out with my friends. I played netball. I truly think it is this balance which kept me whole and kept me going. Yes, work hard but don't sacrifice your mental health, happiness and relationships because these are just as if not more important. Life is much more than grades, sacs and exams. If someone asked me what I remember about high school, I could not tell you what the last question on my bio sac was. I can instead tell you all about matching maths t-shirts, mercy day dances, hallway shenanigans and laughs in the Murray room. And, despite all of the stress, I genuinely had the best year. So please, make all of the memories and look after yourselves. Go to that volleyball competition, do subjects because you love them not because they scale up and spend time with your friends and family. I promise you will reach your fullest potential when you do.

Lastly, never take for granted what a privilege it is to be able to be a student and have the opportunity to learn and grow. I went to India the day after I got my ATAR and I saw too many people working so hard, leading lives they had no say over purely out of chance. I know at times school can seem like the worst thing ever but please make the most of it. Remember that we are so lucky that we get to choose wherever life takes us.

So, to the class of 2024. I am sure you are feeling nervous, excited, scared and everything in between. You have absolutely got this! You all have it in you to try your best, so believe in yourselves and enjoy the wild ride that is Year 12. This is your year!

And to the newest and returning members of Academy, don't ever forget each and every one of you has something to offer. Dream as big as your imaginations are capable. I can't wait to watch you all change the world.

Thankyou.