

## 2026 Leadership Assembly - Principal's remarks

“As a kid, I used to lie on the dry grass in my backyard and gaze up at the stars in awe.”

That's how Australian of the Year for 2026, Astronaut and engineer, Katherine Bennell-Pegg describes her inspiration.

From curiosity ... from lying in her backyard. Looking up at the universe. And wondering.

That sense of awe — that curiosity — that's where the designing of her future began.

Director of space technology at the Australian Space Agency, Katherine has made history as the first Australian to qualify as an astronaut under Australia's space program. She graduated from Basic Astronaut Training in 2024 as part of a class of six trained by the European Astronaut Centre in Germany – and she was the first international candidate to do so. She was initially chosen for the program from a field of over 22,500 applicants.

Reflecting on her experiences in Astronaut Training, Katherine highlights that she “loved the team spirit. Everyone was there to lift each other up and help each other move forward.” She explained that “A lot of the training was about building trust quickly, and about psychological safety, and leadership, and fellowship.

Katherine had dreams and ambitions of becoming an astronaut ever since she was a young. As a space engineer, she has advanced multiple space missions and technologies. As Katherine puts it: “I have worked on some of the coolest missions I could have hoped for. Exploration missions to Mars; the vehicle that's going to fly humans back around the moon; lunar space stations and so much more”.

She is a genuine trailblazer as a leader in STEM and in Australia's emerging space industry.

With her determination and drive to succeed, Katherine is a wonderful example of:

- Curiosity and wondering
- Optimism about what is possible ... what can be achieved
- Respect for learning and for showing up and getting better each day
- and striving for Excellence

Today as we proudly acknowledge and congratulate our Student Leaders, it is timely to think about what being a leader means.

Our vision as a school is the perfect starting point ... and now is the perfect opportunity to share this vision with our Year 7s for the first time.

As a student at Beaumaris ...

*You belong to a community where to learn is to grow*

*We believe in our CORE Values of Curiosity, Optimism, Respect and Excellence and that these values can change the world*

*You will become your best selves on the journey, and the designers of our future.*

To our new leaders, how you live our values everyday ... how you “show up” for yourself and our school every day ... shapes the leader you will be.

You have shared with us what inspires you as a leader, what you aspire to be. These are great motivators, powerful drivers.

But when you step out of this Assembly, I want you to take with you something else Katherine Bennell-Pegg shared when accepting her honour as Australian of the Year.

During astronaut training, Katherine learned about something called the “overview effect” — the powerful mental shift that happens when astronauts look back at Earth from space.

She explains it like this:

“You can't see borders from up there, just a fragile shared home and a powerful truth — we're all in this together. Because space is not about escaping the Earth, but about helping us see it more clearly.”

From that distance, there are no divisions, no borders, no walls, no differences.

No labels.

No scoreboards.

No comparisons.

Just one planet. One shared future.

And one truth: that we are all in this together.

Student Leaders for 2026, hold on to this ... you have an important, privileged role at Beaumaris ...

And the most important part of that role is to speak for all of students,

... to want the best for all of us, and work towards achieving it

... and to always remember that we are all in this together ... ensure that no one gets left out or left behind.

Of course, the truth is that we are all leaders, whether we have a badge and role, or not.

There is a quote from Mahatma Gandhi in the Steve Pearce Senior Learning Centre:

*Be the change that you want to see in the world*

Through our choices and actions, we make the world, the community we want to live in. Through our choices and actions, we also make the future we want.

Bianca Chatfield was an Australian Netball Captain and Commonwealth Games Gold Medallist. She works in sports media, commentating on Netball, Cricket and Football for Fox Sports. Bianca was the guest speaker for our Year 12s at their camp a couple of weeks ago.

For Bianca, the keys to designing and making the future she wanted for herself were:

**1. One ... Show up!**

Start and keep the habits, routines and behaviours that build success. It's not **only** about inspiration or "feelin' it"! It is about showing up for yourself everyday and doing those things that will help you be 1% or 2% better every day. Her aim: To be better today than I was yesterday; to be better tomorrow than I am today

**2. Two ... Self leadership ... we can do far more than what we think we can!**

The worst toxic trait Bianca had as an athlete was comparing herself to others ... Sometimes, by the time she got on the court she felt so negative, that she wasn't good enough. When she could feel herself doing it, Bianca used positive thinking and positive self-talk to get herself back on track. She reminded herself that she had the power to change it. You are better than you might think, and you can do far more than what you think you can.

**3. Know who your people are**

Who are your allies? Who are the people you can ask for help from; the people who will listen to you? When you have problems – as we all do in life – share the problem and let the discussion happen. Maybe it's family; maybe it's friends; maybe it's a teacher here at school. Whoever it is, reach out to your people when you need help ... and let them in to help you

The final thought I want to share with you today is this ... the most important and yet most underrated quality of leadership – indeed of being a person! – is kindness.

Kindness is knowing that people won't always remember what you say, and they won't always remember what you can do ... but they will always remember how you made them feel.

In our community, where one of our highest goals is that everyone feels like they belong, let us step forward into 2026 embracing and living this truth.