

CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH NIGHT ADDRESS  
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Parents and boys, members of the teaching staff, Headmaster Peter Lennox and his wife, Sandra, Guest Speaker this evening David Rose, and other distinguished guests welcome to the 134<sup>th</sup> Speech Night of Brisbane Grammar School.

We wish this evening to give you a brief overview of the State of the Nation of BGS, and, pleasingly, the strength and vigour of the Grammar nation across the enormous breadth of its activities. My overview will be expanded on by the Headmaster's Address, and in the Annual Report which is before you tonight, and which I commend to you.

Our Guest Speaker, David Rose, will then add some wider insights.

Our Guest will then present the Prizes, which is the central purpose of the evening - A recognition of some of the special efforts of many of our boys in the past year. Recognition which could have gone to many other boys who have performed to extremely high levels, and recognition which I am confident will come to many more of them either while here at School, or as their lives unfold. It is the great depth of performance by the boys at Brisbane Grammar School which I think gives all of us all our greatest satisfaction.

This programme of events will all be inter-spersed with some short musical presentations by some of our outstanding musical groups, and an address by the School Captain just before we close the evening.

Before we overview the enormous strength of our position at Grammar tonight, I want to say something of one of our failures. Indeed, I have promised a significant number of our past students that I will do so.

We all fail from time to time, both personally and corporately. Indeed without failure we have not tried sufficiently. We learn from failure, and try again, or adjust our sights appropriately.

But it is not such failures I must speak of. It is of a systemic failure which affected a significant number of our boys between 1975 and 1988, which we must openly acknowledge, apologise for, strive to heal, and learn from.

We informed you in May 2000 when it was discovered, and when it received wide publicity, that the School had failed to detect the activities of a pedophile teacher and school counsellor, Kevin Lynch. Now deceased, and unfortunately unable to face the consequences of his actions. Kevin Lynch betrayed the confidence of many boys who were entitled to be and feel safe at Grammar, but were not. He betrayed the trust of those boys' parents, and the trust of his fellow teachers whose confidence he courted assiduously, but deceitfully.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to definitely ascribe fault after all this time. And because of that, it has also been our duty to protect the fabric of the School as it operates today, but to do so with creditability and compassion.

It has been an agonizingly painful task to find a fair and proper response amidst an incredibly complex matrix of sometimes competing legal and ethical principles.

We are now well advanced in achieving what I believe are fair and proper mediated outcomes with most of the boys concerned, but I promised them all that we would not sweep these painful events under the carpet, that I would inform our community of the facts and outcomes, and that we would do our very best to learn from such processes so that future generations of boys would be safer.

I do want to pay tribute to these young men who conducted themselves with dignity, and fairness, as they too grappled with the complex moral, ethical, and legal issues confronting us all. They accepted that neither of us can turn the clock back, as much as we wish that we could do so, and that even unlimited monetary compensation, were it available, which it is not, would not deliver a complete solution. The great majority of those young men have, or will I believe, agree with us a package of monetary, medical and moral support, which will hopefully be the trigger to restoring their lives to what it might have been but for Lynch. I salute them again for their dignity and reason, and apologise to them again publicly on behalf of all of us at Brisbane Grammar School.

The cost to the School will be significant, but not one which will affect the fabric or performance of the School as you know it today. No school assets will be sold to fund the School's contribution to the package, contrary to some rumours being mischievously peddled around the City. Our contribution to settlement will be funded by a special borrowing which is within our prudential capacity to make. Fees will not rise to accommodate the School's contribution, because that would not be fair to the current school community which played no part whatsoever in these sad events. Fees will rise next year by 6.5 per cent, which is within independent school norms and broadly in line with cost increases in the education CPI Index. The real financial consequences for the School will be a delay in the commencement of our next major project, a new Resource Centre to replace our ageing Library, which was scheduled for commencement in 2005. The extent of the delay necessary to pay down this unbudgeted cost of funding the Lynch settlements will be addressed in the new year when the full cost is known. I cannot promise a successful outcome with each and every boy, and it is quite possible that there will be some ongoing litigation. But if that is the case, which would be disappointing, we will continue to use all our efforts to reach outcomes which represent a fair balancing of the legal and ethical issues, the proper interests of our insurers, and the school community of today.

What can we learn from all this?

Much is said and written today about the decline of past notions of common civility: the basic respect we must show for each other if our society is to function in a way which develops, rather than diminishes our social capital. Civility to one another is multi-dimensional, and any judgment we make about whether "overall" levels of civility in society are improving, or deteriorating, will depend on how we measure and rank the many dimensions of civility. Our conclusions will inevitably reflect our choice of indicators, and the way we weight them against each other. Such concerns, and debates about the correct indicators and weightings have emerged regularly over many centuries, and we ourselves only need to cast our minds back to the bemoanings of our own parents of the passing of traditional values.

However, I believe that some changes are on the whole extremely positive, and will, today, create a context in schools like Grammar where a Kevin Lynch could not operate. I refer in particular to the marked changes in the norms governing the relations between generations. Traditional hierarchies of inequality have been removed, and relationships of power and deference have been over-turned. In particular, young people have cast aside many of the inhibitions and formalities which once used to surround their inter-actions with their elders and those in positions of authority over them, and the dialogue is characterized with so much more frankness and honesty. So while many understandably bemoan the loss of the golden ages of civility, where etiquette, authority and conformity reigned, they were in fact not a golden age for our minorities or for the oppressed.

Perhaps our greatest risk, and our greatest challenge, is that in many of our key institutions, in our universities, in our schools, with our business and political leaders, even within our churches and families, we do not sufficiently address and debate our civic responsibilities. It is a challenge we believe we must take up at Grammar, because some considerable degree of moral renewal within our elite institutions is, I believe, the key to social cohesion at home in Australia and abroad. We will not, and should not, adopt solutions which seek to eradicate anti-social behaviour at the expense of fundamental individual liberties and expression; but rather through dialogue within our community which does not demand conformity of ideas, but seeks common agreement upon the fundamental values by which all in our community are expected to live. Core values which are accepted as the necessary criteria for membership in the Grammar community.

A possible outcome of such debate could well be that the failure of a Grammar boy to give up his seat on a bus to a Grammar girl does not necessarily mean that there has been a decline in our standards of civility. The key to this debate is reaching agreement upon core values which we cannot allow to be compromised and which will inevitably include the right to be safe from physical or mental abuse.

And I believe we are well advanced at Grammar in the development of processes and philosophies which would prevent abuse of this nature recurring at Grammar, but I urge all parents to join with us in instilling these core values in day-to-day family life.

Indeed I believe we are poised at Grammar to move to new heights.

The Headmaster will touch upon some of the current initiatives which continue to flow from a management team and staff which respond to the Board's challenge to be the best, and I have time to touch only on two things which are exciting me about 2003 at Grammar.

The opening of our Middle School in February will bring new vitality and energy to the whole Grammar community. It is an exciting challenge for our educators to do things differently and in a way which delivers better outcomes from Grade 6 to Grade 12. I know we will succeed. And a nice side-benefit will be a considerable tidying up and beautification of the front door of the School which is long overdue.

And combined with the extra thrust and vitality the Middle School will provide is the initiative of the Curriculum Cadre within the School to bring Art Costa, a prominent

American educator, to the School for one week next April. He is widely regarded as being at the forefront of some key educational thinking regarding positive habits of mind which we think blends perfectly with what we are trying to achieve at Grammar. You will hear more about this as 2003 unfolds.

In closing to our boys.

For those of you not leaving us, the time honoured cliché that you get out what you put in has never faded in its application, and, if you do, your days at Grammar will be amongst the best of your lives.

For our Year 12s who leave us, you are ready to go forward confidently onto the next stage of your life. Don't forget where you came from, and you will be welcome at Grammar when you are ready to come back.

Good luck.