

Official Launch of the Tanglin Highlands Programme

22 April 2025

Speech by Head of Campus, Tanglin Gippsland, Mark Cutchie.

I wish I had the time to go around the room and find out what each of you students hopes to gain from the Highlands programme. Similarly, I would also like to know what the governors, the teachers and especially the parents, hope the students will take away from the coming month in Australia.

I have thought long and hard about this and I, along with others on the leadership team, am hoping for a broad variety of outcomes.

I know one of Mr Considine's hopes is that the Highlands programme will help students develop grit, perseverance and resilience. With his background in boarding schools, I know one of Mr Seal's hopes is that students will enjoy the opportunity to live in community with others, including the teachers. I know one of Mrs Russell's hopes is that students will appreciate the opportunity to learn in a completely different environment and way in comparison to Singapore. And I know that one of Mr Seller's hopes is that students will develop deeper friendships by not having the distraction of screens.

While I also hold all those hopes for students, if I am really honest, one of the things I hope for the most for you Highlanders, is that the next few weeks will help develop or grow an adventurous spirit in you.

We live in a world that constantly tells us to stay safe and stick to a plan. Now don't misunderstand me, I am not saying safety and plans aren't important things to have and work towards, they are quite important. But if we only ever take the safe choice or path in life, the straight, wide, paved and familiar road - we risk having an ordinary life and missing the very things that can make life extraordinary.

That's where an adventurous spirit comes in.

When I say an adventurous spirit, let me be clear — it doesn't mean you need to scale Everest, jump out of a plane or trek to the North Pole. For some people it will be those things, but for many it won't.

No — an adventurous spirit is something much deeper. It's a mindset, a way of approaching life with curiosity, courage, and openness. It's about having the guts to try something new, the perseverance to keep pushing when things get tough, and the resilience to try again when you fail.

It's about saying yes to opportunities, even when they scare you a little. It's about starting something, even when you don't know how it will end, or if it will end at all. It is about taking the path less travelled even when it might come at significant cost.

I am encouraged because I believe there are many people in this school, including many in this room right now, who have an adventurous spirit. I know Mr Considine and the governors must have an adventurous spirit as they would have never committed the time, energy to launching and financing a new campus and the Highlands programme in another country. I know the teachers who are going to Gippsland have an adventurous spirit because it would be much easier for them to just do their normal job here in Singapore. And I am convinced there are a lot of parents here with an adventurous spirit and want to pass that on to you students, otherwise there is no way they would have voluntarily signed you up to this inaugural programme.

In today's world — where so many people are stuck in routines, afraid of change, and addicted to comfort — an adventurous spirit isn't just valuable, I believe it is essential to thrive in life.

Because here's a truth that many people learn too late: comfort is the enemy of growth.

Comfort keeps us safe and makes life easier, again, not necessarily a bad thing, but it also keeps us small, it stops us from growing by wrapping us up in routine and order. No one grows when they are in their comfort zone. The adventurous spirit is about curiosity over comfort. Growth over safety. Wonder over fear. Staying comfortable might feel good, but it doesn't teach you anything new. It never breaks new ground. It doesn't create stories worth telling and it definitely does not light up your soul.

When you get older and reflect on your life, you won't be reminiscing about the days you played it safe. You won't feel proud of the things that made life easy and comfortable. What you will fondly remember is the times you were brave, the times you were bold, the times you took a risk and the adventures that followed. Just as importantly, you will also value the people you did these adventures with and the way you all came alive when you did something crazy together. I am convinced that you will remember your time in Gippsland decades from now.

Highlanders, I can't promise you that you will enjoy every minute of the programme, that everything is going to go to plan and there won't be any dramas along the way. There will be some tough and challenging days. But what I am confident about is this: even after the challenges, the stretching, the hard tasks—and maybe a few scrapes and bruises—you'll say it was worth it and I'm so glad I did it. I suspect those scrapes and bruises will quickly turn from injuries into badges of honour.

Parents, I want to commend you, say 'well done' and thank you. Well done on setting an example of an adventurous spirit by signing your kids up. As a parent, I understand that tension of wanting to give your children opportunities to be stretched and grown but also the desire to keep them close and safe.

My wife Sharon and I are firm believers in the old African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child" and we want to thank you for the privilege of being a part of your village and assure you that we do not take that responsibility lightly.