

From the desk of **Shane Kidwell**



Ladies and Gentlemen and New Boys of 2024, welcome to St Alban's College.

You join St Alban's at an exciting time of its history. We have just celebrated our Diamond Jubilee and the College is poised to differentiate itself amongst boys' schools worldwide and continue its innovative and family-based approach to all it does. Our school had an enthralling infancy, experienced the turbulent teens, navigated early adulthood in magnificent fashion and is finally coming of age and maturing into a wise, thoughtful, energetic and young-at-heart institution.

You may be sitting in the audience today feeling enthused and energized by the people around you. You may feel the adrenalin running through your veins of the expectation to come and this may or may not motivate you because, you see, there are also some amongst us who are not necessarily energized by people and their loud, fast-paced actions and words. There are some young men here this morning who are not outgoing but more thoughtful and reflective and who need quiet moments to reenergize and gain the momentum they need for the road ahead. Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality, as by gender or race. And the single most important aspect of personality – the north and the south of temperament, as one scientist puts it, is where we fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Our place on the continuum influences our choice of friends, how we make conversation, resolve differences and show love. The fact is that in the next few years your temperament will shape your interactions with others and your thoughts about yourself and what you think you can or cannot achieve in the years ahead.

So, as you step out into a new world today, you will experience a new energy and you will be motivated in different ways, but I want to assure you that this is the beauty of the school you have chosen. Our DNA – the St Alban's DNA – is grounded in diversity: diversity of thought, diversity of race and culture, diversity of talent and diversity of temperament and personality. Not everyone sitting here today is the same but as you journey with us you will soon realise that this is where the magic lies. Sameness or society's obsession with everyone singing off the same hymn sheet is deeply flawed. We are all different and we need to celebrate our differences and realise that together we can achieve amazing things. We need to realise that some of us are more talkative than others. We need to celebrate that some of us are more thoughtful and introspective than others. Society ranks fast talkers as more competent and likable than slow ones.





The same dynamics apply in groups, where research shows that the voluble are considered smarter than the reticent – even though there is zero correlation between the gift of the gab and good ideas. So, as you move into this new, exciting space, I want to encourage you to be more aware of yourself and your actions and your words. I want you to ensure that you unlearn some of your bad habits of accepting, for instance, that only velocity of speech counts as well as volume. I would go one step further and implore you to take the time to seek out others who are not necessarily the same as you but more importantly to make time for those who are not as fleet of foot as you or as sharp witted, or as quick with their tongues. You will need to be more observant and self-aware, and you will need to intentionally allow those who are quieter to have a voice. Should you do so, I have no doubt that you will be richer for it, and it will allow you to find a place of belonging.

There are, sitting here this morning, young men who have excelled incredibly at their preparatory schools. There are young men who have scaled the icy peaks of mathematics excellence. There are young men here who have climbed the mountain of sports prowess. There are a few individuals here who have already excelled at performance in the musical instrument of their choice. There are great chess players, public speakers, fly fishermen, coders, gamers and designers.

You are about to enter a new world of achievements and excellence and I am hoping that you will soon realise that your achievements up until now will mean very little should you not want to stretch yourself even more. The only way we learn is by making mistakes and learning from them and the thought of making mistakes is distressing, particularly for those of you who are shy.

We are not impressed by your achievements up until this point, but we are excited by your potential. The true measure of your potential is not the height of the peak you have reached thus far but how far you have climbed to get there and whether you are prepared to look for even greater and taller peaks as you move into this space. Some of you have not yet considered your hidden potential and I am looking forward to supporting you as you continue to explore and discover that you have within you the ability to exceed your greatest expectations.

In Form 3 you will be involved in the St Alban's Journey and each year as our groups depart, I say this to them: If you are feeling a little anxious that is good. If you are feeling supremely confident this morning, I pray that you will find courage when the days are tough, and you feel down. If you don't quite know how you feel, I hope that you will surprise yourself with your clarity of thought and action as the days pass.

I suppose the same applies to you as you start this new exciting and purposeful high school journey. If you are feeling a little anxious this morning – that is a good thing, you may not know it now, but it will give you the impetus not to take things for granted. If you are feeling supremely confident, you are going to have to make sure that you do not stumble and fall without realising it. You will need to reign yourself in a little and encourage yourself not to get ahead of yourself – because that is a dangerous place to be. And if you are not quite sure how you are feeling I would encourage you to put yourself out there, to force yourself to engage and interact when everything inside you is saying that you would like to isolate yourself.





Young men, you will matriculate in 2028 and you join us at a time which is filled with optimism and hope for a bright future. Don't listen to the stories of fear and hate that you read in the formal press. And don't get drawn into the pessimism and toxicity of social media which perpetuates a feeling of divisiveness and cynicism. I am proud to say that optimism and hope are ingrained in our collective DNA at St Alban's, and we do not tolerate negativity.

The positive culture which has long been established here, continues to thrive and grow and develop. This culture has its roots in creating a space which encourages and invites ALL boys to feel like they belong. To feel like they can make mistakes, be vulnerable and develop a sense of trust and understanding with each other. This culture fosters seeing around differences, whether the differences be race, gender, academic ability or sporting prowess. This culture thrives on lively debate in a learning environment that encourages critical thinking and learning to agree to disagree. This culture encourages authenticity and the ability to allow yourself to have vulnerable and complex conversations. This culture is rooted in our Christian values.

Parents, I want to, once again, assure you that we are in this together as we seek to guide, support, discipline and encourage your son as he travels this road to manhood. College careers are slightly different to prep school careers – a young man is emerging and all the energy and love you have invested will now start to pay dividends as he starts to become more independent and focused on his journey to adulthood.

I am often asked, what do the boys of the future need? The boys of the future need what boys have always needed. They need nurturing parents, and so it will be important that we continue to partner and collaborate with us. It will be important to support him in the good and bad times. Boys need a tribe, and I assure you they will find that here. They need a spiritual life, and Father Thabang Bengani and his colleagues will guide him on this journey. They need important work, and I am hoping that they will begin to realise that they are preparing for that, as they choose their subjects and focus on their future lives. They need mentors and male and female role-models, and I am always amazed by my colleagues on the staff here who go the extra mile to know and develop relationships with your sons. These relationships, if valued, will be the glue that holds their complex lives together. Boys need to know the rules and abide by them, and we will insist that they do. Boys need to learn how to lead and how to follow and our leadership programme will guide and nurture them on this path. Boys need an adventure, and I can assure you they will experience this in spades here; not only on the Form 3 Journey but on tours, on trips, during Clubs and Societies, on the sports field and in the classroom. They need a best friend and I pray that they will find one sooner rather than later. They need an important role in life and together we will help them to develop and decide where they would like to make a difference in society. They need to be self-aware, and they need to develop a deep sense of care for their fellow man. (Michael Gurian)

Daniel Doyle said: "While successful culture can look and feel like magic, the truth is that it's not. Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. It's not something you are. It's something you do."

It feels like there is a magic here which is difficult to describe and explain to you on your first day. This magic lives in you if you have been associated with the College as a student, parent, teacher or councilor and I have no doubt that the magic will continue inside of you as you start your journey with us today. The magic is not in the buildings or the bricks and mortar, the magic is in the relationships and the people who have always made a difference here. The magic is deeply





human. There will be happy times, there will be sad times. There will be celebrations and moments to pause and reflect, there will be achievements and disappointments, but one thing is certain, your son and your family will be touched by the magic of this special place and be changed forever. Enjoy the journey and welcome to the family!

IT TAKES A SCHOOL WITH VISION TO PREPARE A YOUNG MAN FOR LIFE

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