THE WAY

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FROM THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

What does it mean to truly belong? This is a question that has been on my mind at the start of this year as I have begun a new professional journey here at Thomas Hassall. Not only have I reflected on what it means for me to belong, I have had similar thoughts about what it means for our students to have a sense of belonging.

We belong to many things. We belong to families, friendship and cultural groups, churches and sporting clubs. But belonging is more than just participation or turning up. True belonging suggests a sense of connectedness, reliance, interdependence, pride and identity.

Belonging is integral to students thriving at school. This is identified strongly in PISA data that highlights a direct connection between a student's sense of belonging and their academic achievement, engagement with learning, wellbeing and future aspirations.

(PISA is a triennial assessment conducted by the OECD with 15-year-olds across the world. These assessments measure the extent to which students have acquired key knowledge and skills essential for full participation in social and economic life. Additionally, they assess factors that contribute to student engagement, academic growth and wellbeing.)

As a Christian community, the importance of belonging shouldn't be a surprise given we are created in God's image as relational beings.

So what does belonging look like at Thomas Hassall?

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Belonging is integral to College life! It begins for many of our students as they make their way through the Primary School with the support of their class teachers who seek to create environments of trust, connection, recognition, learning and fun. This doesn't happen by chance. Teachers deliberately structure learning experiences to build this climate and to teach the skills of belonging. The sense of belonging also comes from being part of a House, a sporting team, a lunchtime club and a friendship group.

As students make their way into Year 7 and through the Senior School, the sense of belonging changes. It is completely natural for adolescents to begin to want to form and express their personal identity and independence. At the same time, their experience of College life shifts as they move from class to class and work with upwards of ten different teachers at a time. As this occurs, belonging becomes even more important, whether the students realise it or not. They need somewhere where they can be safe, known and be supported to learn through the academic and social challenges thrown their way.

This space exists in many forms but perhaps most importantly in PC (Pastoral Care) Groups under the leadership of their PC Teacher. PC Groups are a time for students to form connections with their peers, to celebrate one another's achievements and life events and to share experiences. It is a time where students are guided, nurtured and encouraged as they form a close connection with one teacher across the year. In many ways, this is an attempt to replicate the primary class teacher model in an age-appropriate way for students in Senior School.

Over the last couple of weeks, parents may have noticed an increased focus on Senior School students arriving in time for the start of PC Groups at 7:55am. This is very deliberate. We value PC Groups and understand the enormous impact that belonging has on a student's journey at school. We want all students to benefit from this. We appreciate your ongoing support in helping your child to be on time so they can contribute to and benefit from PC Group time.

As a side note, I am feeling a strong sense of belonging here…it's a very welcoming and dynamic community!

> *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*
> *- Genesis 1:26-27*

Mr Chris Wyatt
Deputy Principal

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