**CATHERINE MCAULEY AWARD RECIPIENT ADDRESS — HARRISON GEORGE**

Good morning staff, students, top achievers and all other members of this wonderful school community at Mount Lilydale Mercy College. Today I have been asked to reflect upon the many lessons and experiences throughout my schooling life, and share what I have learnt as a result.

Upon reflecting at the conclusion of Year 12, a particular phrase continually came to mind… to be the best version of yourself. Whilst this is cliche and I’m sure you have all heard this saying before, I challenge you to ask yourself: What does it truly mean to be the best version of yourself?

How do you determine if you are being the best you possibly can be?

And, what does your best self look like?

You see, the beauty in this concept, is that there is no set answer to any of these questions. The further we break down the idea of being our best self, the more open we become to our own interpretations. We are all unique, and have many different talents, skills and ambitions to determine our own better self.

For some of you, your best self might be to wake up with a smile more often, or to study hard and obtain desired academic results. It could involve being more compassionate and loving, more appreciative of others, volunteering your time for the greater good of the community or maybe even to complete your homework on time.

Whatever it is that your better self would do, make it yours. OWN IT! Strive to achieve it, no matter how big or small it may be.

For myself last year, in amongst the adversities of 2020, and the overwhelming amount of bad news filling the media, I challenged myself to do something positive. Something that could brighten someone’s day in what was a difficult time for all. Through the guidance of the mercy value of service, I volunteered to mow lawns for both healthcare workers and those who were unfortunately not well enough to do it themselves. As a result, I believe I became a better version of myself.

Now this was certainly not easy, as I had to also balance my commitment to my studies. Often the workload of school seemed endless, as if I had no time for anything else. I often felt overwhelmed, exhausted and stressed.

You see, life will never be easy. We are all bound to face challenges in our life. We will all fail at some point in our lives. That is inevitable, it is a fact of life. Not everything you attempt will guarantee initial greatness.

However, it can offer progress.

A simple concept that I can assure you will direct you on your path to being your best self. Without progress, how can we learn? How can we improve? The simple answer for that is ... we cannot.

So I ask all of you this: How can you progress?

During the difficult moments last year, I often found progression in watching a particular motivational speech, in which Denzel Washington spoke about how to tackle life head-on and achieve your dreams. There is a particular phrase in this video which continually strikes me to this day.

It suggests that when you fall in life, and as I said earlier we will all come across our own hurdles… you must ‘fall forward’. That way, no matter how many times you fall, you will continually get closer and closer to that target. You will indeed… progress.

As Nelson Mandela said: “There is no passion to be found playing small — in settling for a life that's less than the one you’re capable of living.”

So why not live life to the fullest? Why not make the most of each and every day? I encourage you to get out of your comfort zone, try something new or improve an existing skill — and most definitely give everything your absolute best.

Finally, If there was one thing I have learnt from my experience of school, it would definitely be to persevere through the difficult challenges you may come across, and that I encourage you all to treat these moments as an opportunity to progress and improve. Do that, and I guarantee you will have become a better version of yourself.

In the spirit of Catherine McAuley, I wish each and every one of you a prosperous and successful year.  Thank you.