Mr Keith Lynch, members of the School Board, The Right Reverend Dr Peter Stuart and The Very Reverend Stephen Williams, special guests, parents, staff, and students – good morning. It is a pleasure to address you today as we celebrate Speech Day together, recognising the many achievements of our students during the 2014 school year.

As we sit in this Great Hall – a testament to an educational vision and a desire to create a world class learning environment in Newcastle – it is hard for us to appreciate that just 50 years ago people campaigned to achieve an independent University here. The vision of a GREAT Hall and its development reflects the growth of the modern educational landscape in this city.

The history of NGS has followed several patterns of growth and development and the experience of our students today, is shaped by many factors, including the modern facilities that they enjoy and the subjects they study.

School curriculum – what students learn and how they learn it – is fundamental to the educational experience and for the first time in this country’s history, all Australian state education systems were brought into line in 2014.

Themes in this new Australian Curriculum, such as engagement with Asia and environmental sustainability, are integrated throughout the disciplines.

The Australian Curriculum aims to respond to current Australian conditions and trends. In 2014, the Australian Government’s free trade agreements with Korea in April, Japan in July and most significantly China just a few weeks ago, herald a shift in business opportunities and a stronger Asian focus for this country.

This global market, new ways of working and work force positions are just some of the pressures the generation of students sitting here today will face. And one role of education is to ensure that young adults can operate effectively and respond appropriately to these changes.
For my generation and for that of the majority of adults here, the career that lay ahead looked pretty straight forward – you chose a profession and you trained for it. If you grew up in Newcastle you had every chance of getting your first job here in the Hunter... or in Sydney and your career, despite having some turns, had a fairly predictable future.

In contrast, Generation Z – all of our K-12 students who are now at school, are predicted to be more mobile than any other generation – living in fifteen different homes and having seventeen different jobs in their working lives.

They will be the global generation – and boys and girls you are currently part of a group that numbers 2 billion world-wide.

You will be the most educated generation and many of the jobs you will do don’t yet exist. So while you may choose to run a highly successful enterprise from your own home, it is not hard to imagine that our Year 12 cohort this year will move, cities, states and countries, to further their careers.

Our current Kindergarten classes - who are no doubt feeling a bit restless at this point, will leave school in 2026 and of course potentially have very different futures to many of the older students in the room. Their ability to utilise different technologies is already evident and this technology is perhaps the greatest agent of change in the modern world.

An average student using an iPad or similar device in class, opens a door to a world of learning and an interactive experience...that the adults in this room in their school experience, would never have dreamed possible.

More information is available instantly in greater quantities than ever before. Knowing how you make sense of this and being able to test its authenticity is an increasing challenge.

How do you know information you access is reliable in a world where anyone can generate knowledge? How do you keep thinking widely when advertisements, news stories and even some of your favourite stores bombard you with items they assume you will like because you have purchased or viewed something similar in the past?

These are questions that our students will need to think carefully about because their ability to evaluate and synthesise information are skills necessary for the modern world.

How young people negotiate the world of social media is also important. Making sense of what is real and not falling into a self-absorbed world that is
determined by the number of “likes” or the number of online friends, that challenges your sense of worth, is vital.

Values have always been central to the Newcastle Grammar educational experience. In this time of such vast change they are, I would argue, even more important for each individual to understand.

Values will help an individual negotiate their world. At NGS the values of:

- Christian living
- The self-worth of the individual
- The individual, family and collective achievement
- Our tradition and heritage
- Our interaction with the wider community
- Authentic Leadership

are displayed in the way the school is structured, the academic and pastoral programs and in everyday interactions. The essential purpose of the School is to develop the potential of our students so that they can lead a satisfying life and make a positive contribution to society.

This year we have seen numerous examples of students embracing the holistic education on offer at NGS and living these values. This holistic education enables students to

- develop talents
- explore spirituality
- extend academic understandings
- Work together
- gain confidence
- develop leadership skills
- participate in future based activities
- explore new challenges
- And serve others
This is an education that helps promote academic excellence and student well-being. I congratulate all the students who are prize winners this year and just as importantly congratulate all the students here today who have tried their hardest, conquered new concepts or skills and have contributed positively to our School this year. You may not be receiving a prize but feel proud of your efforts. Year 12 – I sincerely wish you all the best as you receive your final results in just over two weeks’ time and as you prepare for the next stage of your lives.

The staff at NGS also operate in this climate of change and this year in a very real sense they faced a significant shift - when they farewelled one Headmaster and welcomed a new Head of School in Term 4 this year.

I sincerely thank the teaching staff for their professional approach to what has been a demanding schedule. I thank them for their support of their students and their willingness to openly discuss the School's future with me. Their continued commitment to improving their teaching practice, subject knowledge and willingness to share with others are positive features of this School.

I also thank the School's operational staff and the School Executive for their individual and collective achievements for the School this year and thank them for the support they have given me at the start of my Newcastle Grammar journey.

Education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realise our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims. I look forward in the years ahead to build on the strong foundations here at NGS, while at the same time, ensuring that each student has an education that enables them to leave School confident that they will be able to participate fully in their worlds.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a relaxing summer break. To those who are leaving us today I hope you will always feel part of the Newcastle Grammar community and I look forward to seeing everyone else at the start of the 2015 school year.