PRESENTATION TO THE PARENT FORUM BY THE DIRECTOR OF STUDIES

I will take the broader view of the term “curriculum” tonight.

The Curriculum Framework at Edmund Rice College sets out the 'knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to acquire' while they attend the school.

We must ensure that the learning and teaching programs we design provide meaningful learning opportunities for the boys.

What are the factors that influence the curriculum that we offer the boys at Edmund Rice College?

This is a Catholic School in the Edmund Rice Tradition so our curriculum revolves around the touchstones:

- We open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences
- The Curriculum fosters a community that is accepting and welcoming,
- The Curriculum invites all people into the story of Jesus and strives to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community.

These are not just words in a manual. These are the ideals that pervade the whole Curriculum at Edmund Rice College.

I make these points clear because it is what helps us to differentiate ourselves from other schools.

What are the other factors that influence the Curriculum at Edmund Rice College?

- We are a comprehensive school. This means that we must provide a curriculum that caters for a diverse range of abilities – from the students who attain ATARs of 98 in the HSC like Nick last year to the students who have learning disabilities that provide a struggle for them in most of their lessons each day. We need to provide a Curriculum that is diverse and accessible for all of these students. This in itself is a significant challenge.

- We are an all-boys school. Over many years we have developed our expertise in the education of boys. We have tried to determine structures and strategies that will help boys learn more effectively. We know we need to engage boys. We know we need to develop positive relationships. We know that we need to provide structure. We know that we need to provide lots of opportunities to do and be active rather than sit and be passive.

- We have a long proud history in the Illawarra. Founded in 1926, the College has developed a history and traditions that help direct its development. We have long established community connections (I m now teaching the sons of the boys who I taught before)

- We are a school of the Illawarra and hence have a unique culture quite distinct from Sydney, Campbelltown or Dubbo.

Externally, there are significant pressures on our Curriculum.
The NSW Board of Studies instructs us on what we should teach by providing detailed syllabuses. The Board of Studies prides itself on the fact that their curricular is “content driven”. Thus students are being presented with an increasing body of knowledge to learn alongside a comprehensive set of skills to develop.

Next year English, Mathematics, Science and History introduce to Years 7 and 9 the new much anticipated Australian Curricular. To give you an example of why a national approach is needed – today we started two new boys: one from Queensland and one from New Zealand. The introduction of the Australian Curriculum means that the College teaching and learning programs are being rewritten and our resources are being revised and renewed.

The NSW Board of Studies has introduced the RoSA (Record of Student Achievement) to replace the old School Certificate. Students will receive a record of their grades achieved up to the point they leave school. The College will need to submit to the Board of Studies Grades A to E for Year 11 students for the first time this year.

NAPLAN is becoming increasingly influential on the curricular of schools. A great diagnostic tool providing useful information but unfortunately in danger of being used for the wrong purposes.

Technology is certainly influencing the development of the Edmund Rice Curriculum. The boys now live in the “GOOGLE” culture. If they want to find out about something they look up the Internet. Social media plays a significant part in their lives. Electronic communication is the norm for them.

In this electronic world, however, the elephant in the room is the Higher School Certificate. Don’t underestimate the influence that the Higher School Certificate has on the design of the curriculum. The Higher School Certificate is old school. You don’t “GOOGLE” the answers. You are required to answer the questions by the old-fashioned READ, RECAL and WRITE method. This requires rote learning a large body of knowledge, study and revision. These are not skills that come easily to the modern adolescent boy.

So how do we deal with these issues at Edmund Rice College?

We have passionate Heads of Departments who have a deep understanding of the subjects offered by their department. They are well read and keep up to date with curriculum issues from the Board of Studies and the Australian Curriculum.

We offer a diverse range of learning opportunities for the boys. The current Year 10 into Year 11 2014 Handbook that I am about to issue to the boys contains 35 different courses for the boys to choose from. These courses range from the most challenging academic subjects to subjects most suited to students with a more vocational bent.

We offer differentiated lessons for the boys. This differentiation may take the form of graded subjects or lessons modified by the teacher.
• Our teachers are continually involved in professional development to ensure that their knowledge and skills are continually refreshed and expanded.

• We have expanded the use of technology in the school through programs such as the carefully considered introduction of the ipad. This student device is allowing teachers to expand their use of the technology in their teaching practices without the technology “swamping” the lesson. Thus technology becomes another teaching and learning tool rather than a dominating focus.

• We have very experienced teachers who teach the HSC classes. They are open to new techniques and technology but they also know the methods required to effectively assist the boys to achieve the best results they can. The problem these days is getting the boys to adopt the “HSC” world approach rather than the “GOOGLE” world approach.