

Good morning Mr Leddie, Colleagues, friends and students and staff of Waverley, St Clare's College and St Catherine's School.

Today I am honoured to speak at this assembly about an issue close to my heart. For myself and many other men and women in this room, International Women's Day on March 8, is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

Historically speaking, the day has been observed for well over a century, with the first IWD gathering in 1911 supported by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Prior to this the Socialist Party of America, United Kingdom's Suffragists and Suffragettes, and further groups campaigned for women's equality.

It's a call for all to stand up and challenge behaviours and practices that make equality more difficult to achieve in all walks of life for countless women everywhere.

There have been many leaps forward in gender equality, however, reports of gender inequality still exist between young women and young men, and is evident by the issues of the past few weeks surrounding positive, respectful relationships and consent, making this international women's day even more important for our community.

Students in my classes often hear me preaching about gender equity in health and the sporting arena and also my choice to be a feminist. These discussions are mostly positive and confirm Waverley students awareness and understanding of gender inequity issues facing some of their peers.

However, at times, these discussions are met with "yeh yeh miss, come on, get over it, you've talked about this a million times, you're a feminist, so what?". As Elliot Page, an actor and transgender advocate, said just last year, "I don't know why people are so reluctant to say they're

feminists. Could it be any more obvious that we still live in a patriarchal world, when feminism is considered a bad word?”.

Sometimes this saddens me, it also makes me determined, as some students have seen, to work harder to challenge others to be feminists like myself, and countless other men and women I know in this school and our Waverley community.

And so as I have been given this great privilege today, I would like everybody to get a reminder as to why we should be inspired by the following women I will speak about, and why we should all be feminists. Men and women together.

Feminism is one of the oldest movements in global history. There's no single definition, but feminism boils down to ending gender discrimination and bringing about gender equality, which is precisely what International Women's day is all about.

Malala Yousefzai, the world's youngest Nobel prize winner and a passionate advocate for girls' education, says that, “Feminism is just another word for equality.”

Australia's 2021 Australian of the Year, Grace Tame, is another young feminist leading positive change and in her speech on January 26, proclaimed “Change is happening, and it's happening right now.” She is a survivor and advocate for victims of sexual assault, particularly those who were abused as children and uses her media profile to advocate equity for other vulnerable groups in the community.

An Australian feminist scholar, who happens to be a close relative and significant influence for me, wrote this statement about feminism and I think it sums it up well. Please read it on the screens to let it sink in:

“Feminism has fought no wars. It has killed no opponents. It has set up no concentration camps, starved no enemies, practised no cruelties. Its battles have been for education, for the vote, for better

working conditions, for safety in the streets, for child care, for social welfare, for rape crisis centres, women's refuges, reforms in the law.

If someone says, 'Oh, I'm not a feminist', I ask, 'Why? What's your problem?'"

A theme of International Women's Day 2021 is Choose to Challenge.

- Please watch this spoken word poem.

And so today I ask you in this room, after reflecting on these words, **stand** and choose to challenge the inequality that women still experience in your world. (hand in the air pose)

Choose to challenge behaviours and advocate for equality for all.

Choose to challenge the structures and systems that reduce equity across industries and in governments.

Choose to challenge and be an positive ally for your friends, sisters, mothers, aunts and teachers, all women, and help us move towards a fairer world.

Thankyou for listening.