

Remarks of the Hon Justice Finanzio
on the occasion of his acceptance of the
Distinguished Old Paradian Award

21 October 2026

I am very honoured to receive this award. I am here because I was once one of you. I am still, one of you. Each of our stories, yours and mine, are bound together by the common experience of having come to this School.

That's something. Because the story that it tells is as much about me, and what I have been able to achieve in my life, as it is about you, and the potential that exists in each of you to achieve your own version of success.

It feels like yesterday that I was sitting out there among you at assemblies just like this. I remember sitting among my classmates – some bored, some joking around, some completely disinterested, many of them looking blankly into the middle distance. We were a mixed bunch then – just like you. And I'm sure if you look around you'll know exactly what I am talking about.

But I also know that out there, though, sitting among you, is likely to be a number of you who resemble a version of me – but 40 years younger. Not the coolest, not the smartest, not the toughest, not the fastest, not feeling the prettiest or most handsome, not the best...at anything. But curious, and interested. Knowing that there is a future out there for you, but not really knowing what it is or how to find it. I know that unlike some of your classmates, you are listening carefully to what I am saying... and it's to you that I have come here today to address.

The distinguished alumni award recognises achievements of students in their life after leaving the school. Receiving this award gives me an opportunity to publicly acknowledge the important role that Parade played in my story. But I really came here today to talk to you – and in particular those of you who, like me at your age,

are curious about what the future could hold. To those of you who are sitting there listening and wondering - What is my path? What will be my journey? Will I find success? What does it take? What does success even mean? What does the future hold? I wanted to share with you my reflections about the journey that has taken me from where you are sitting now, to standing up here in front of you today.

When I started here I didn't know a lot. I came to this school from a local catholic primary school - like many of you. I was the only one from that school. I started here alone, and a bit afraid. I didn't make friends easily at the beginning. But by the end I'd made lifelong friends.

I have so many memories of this place that it is impossible to choose any one story. When I started at Parade in 1984 the Edmund Rice Campus was still in existence. There were more playing fields than there are now, and less buildings. The school had its own stables and farm. The school's land marked the outward boundary of greater Melbourne. Many of my friends lived on farms in Wollert, or Mernda - areas which are now suburbs of Melbourne - where some of you live.

Both of my parents finished formal schooling at age 14. Dad was a train driver, mum a hairdresser. We were not well off, but we were not poor. We were normal, we considered ourselves middle class. I grew up in Reservoir, which in those days was not an area from which Parade accepted many boys. Indeed, in those days it was statistically more likely that you'd be in trouble with the police than come to Parade if you lived in Reservoir.

No one in my family had finished high school. No-one had been to university. My parents sacrificed a lot. This school was within their financial reach, but it was a stretch. They surveyed all of the available options for secondary school. They chose Parade because at the time they regarded it as the best school in the area that they could afford. They valued education and saw sending me here as their responsibility to give me opportunities that they didn't have. They are here today. I will be forever grateful to them for the opportunities they gave me by sending me here.

In year 11 and 12 I had come to the pretty firm conclusion that I wanted to be a lawyer. It was a pretty tall order. It still is. You needed an ATAR equivalent score of around 98 or 99. I thought about it hard. I loved legal studies, politics and history, but I was sceptical about the risk that comes when there is more than one answer to a problem and that my exam papers and assessments could be marked by people who might not agree with me. So I chose mathematics and physics – because, I thought, there was only one answer. I reasoned that it didn't matter that this was not my first love, I would work hard, learn how to get the right answer, and get a good mark. I was wrong. I got an ATAR equivalent mark of 90. My worst marks were maths and physics. Obviously, I didn't get into law. I got into a teaching degree. I reapplied for law and transferred to Monash in my second year.

I am telling you all of that not to be nostalgic, but to make the point that on paper, when I left here, no one would have said that I was a future candidate to be appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria – I didn't go to Xavier or Scotch or Melbourne Grammar. My parents were not doctors or lawyers. We weren't wealthy or connected. I didn't shoot the lights out with my academic results.

And yet, here I am.

Many things contribute to the fulfilment of our dreams. Rarely is it the case that one thing, over all others, is *the* defining event or characteristic which leads to success. Even more rarely is it the case that a person's success is entirely their own doing. Successful people who say "I did it all on my own" are usually rewriting their own story. Success is usually the culmination of many, many things. Much of what I have been able to achieve in my life to this point is because of the opportunities I was given; and the people who helped and guided me along the way.

That is not to say that we are passengers on this journey. Commitment, effort, diligence, compassion, awareness – these are all personal characteristics that help us recognise the opportunities when they arise, take full advantage of them, and make the people around us recognise that in us there is something worthy of their respect and assistance. Most of us can't do it alone.

Much of what I have been able to achieve can be traced back to the experiences, the opportunities and the education that I received here. Parade was established for people just like me. To take young people in my circumstances, educate them and show them the possibilities that exist in the world. I didn't know it at the time, but being able to come to this school was a blessing. It was my springboard.

Here I was given the opportunity to lead, to learn – but most of all – to participate in a school community that was grounded in values. Values that don't change with the fashions, or with new technology. Values which are timeless. Values that meant that it didn't matter that I didn't go to the most expensive schools, and it didn't matter that my parents were not wealthy, or university educated. Values that helped me connect with people and make an impression in each room that I entered. Values like diligence, trust, reliability and compassion. This place helped me to develop my sense of character. What I learnt here wasn't just in the classroom, but in the playground, on the sporting fields, and in my participation in the broader community of Parade.

In concluding, I wanted to share with you some of my reflections – from the other end of my journey in the hope that it will help you on yours.

What I have learnt since school is that being the smartest person in the room is not enough if you lack empathy and compassion. Physical strength and beauty fade with time – but character and reputation for fairness and honest dealing – these are timeless and invaluable. I learnt that if you pursue the things you love (for me history, politics and the law) success is more likely than if you pursue things as a means to an end (for me maths and physics) – because passion is an intangible but powerful motivator.

If I could go back in time, and speak to my younger self, sharing what I have come to know over the years to help me throw off the things that don't matter and embrace the things that do – I would say these four things:

- First, be kind to yourself – in life we are often our toughest critics. I didn't go well on my maths test, I'll never get this, I'm dumb. I'm not attractive. I'm

not cool enough. The truth is that the faults we find in ourselves go largely unnoticed by almost everybody else. The even greater truth is that nobody, perhaps other than your parents, care as much about any of it as you do.

What does that mean? It means don't be afraid to have a go, get in amongst it, get the experience of trying things that you've never tried, have fun doing it, and learn as much as you can from it.

- Second, embrace failure – if you don't fail your not trying, and most of all – you're not learning. The measure of your success is not whether you win – it is that you had a go – that you put yourself in the mix, in the contest. Taking a step into the unknown to fail gives you the chance to know where you fell short, and to choose whether to dedicate yourself to improving, or to go a different path. The regret of not having tried at all is far worse than failed attempt.
- Third, be kind to one another – the world can be a brutal place. Support one another. Help one another be the best versions of yourselves. Invest in one another's successes and support one another in difficult times. Be prepared to say what's not ok. As a broader community we grow stronger when we encourage one another, and stand against bad behaviour. The type of energy that you put out into the world returns to you in a compounding way. If you want life to be good to you, be good to those around you.
- Finally, enter the world curiously, not judgmentally. Open yourselves to the possibility that there are many ways to be, and much to learn from the experience of others.

Thank you for this honour, it means a great deal, and thank you for listening. Good luck on your journey.