Distinguished guests, staff, parents and the amazing students of Hornsby Girls High School, in this our 81st Year, I welcome you to our Annual Speech Day and Prize-giving ceremony – a showcase of the efforts and achievements of our students throughout 2011.

I am absolutely delighted to welcome back Professor Christine Jenkins AM as our special guest this morning. Christine is a Clinical Professor at the University of Sydney, a Thoracic Physician at Concord Hospital and a Hornsby Girls High School Old Girl. Welcome, Christine – and I look forward to hearing your address later in our ceremony.

I am also delighted that our former principal Mr Rob Phillips is here with us today. It is a great honour to have him here with his wife Penelope. Rob said when giving his farewell speech, at the Selective Schools Conference in November after he had already retired that he has and I quote “... had more farewells than Dame Nellie Melba and Johnny Farnham combined” consider this another one! Rob would you mind standing up so that everyone can see you – students, ladies and gentlemen please join with me in thanking Rob for his nine years of exceptional leadership of Hornsby Girls High School.

Today, Speech Day belongs to the wonderful young women of Hornsby Girls High School, who are deservedly receiving the rewards for their hard work, fantastic efforts and outstanding achievements throughout 2011.

There are many facets to our school which deserve to be celebrated, but it is not possible to address them all, so today I would like to highlight a few aspects which merit special mention as we come to the end of the 2011 school year.

As an academically selective school, our core purpose is academic excellence, to maximise each student’s intellectual potential while also developing her social and emotional intelligence. ONE measure, and I do stress ONE measure, of the school’s success in this regard is our external examination results, which continue to be outstanding.

In the 2010 HSC:

- HGHS students were placed FIRST IN THE STATE in 2 subjects.
- Twelve Hornsby girls were in the top ten places in the State in 6 different subjects, including SECOND and FIFTH places in the State in SPANISH, SEVENTH and NINTH in Visual Arts and SEVENTH and TENTH in Society and Culture
- Twenty seven of our girls received Premier’s Awards for scoring 90% or above in 10 subject units.
- Thirty Two of our students gained ATARs of 98 – 99.9
And while the 2011 HSC results will not be released until tomorrow, there is every reason to believe that our HSC successes will continue. We know already, for example, that 3 students have had their Bodies of Work pre-selected for Art Express by external HSC Examiners with one student selected for the Art Gallery of NSW exhibition, and at least one student has had her major project selected for TexStyle, the state-wide exhibition of HSC Textiles Works; 2 students have had their compositions short-listed for Encore, the Opera House concert of the top Music compositions from the HSC. A number of our 2011 Year 12 students have already been offered prestigious cadetships and scholarships.

Our Year 10 students will today receive their School Certificate Results, and those results are absolutely outstanding, in Mathematics and Australian Geography almost 100% of our students are placed in bands 5 or 6, in English, Science and Australian History 100% of students are placed in bands 5 or 6, and in Computing Skills 100% of students are graded as ‘Highly Competent’ by the Board of Studies. Congratulations Year 10!

These achievements are mirrored in the fact that the majority of the prizes being awarded today are for academic accomplishments. It is only fitting that we acclaim the highest achievers, in a school filled with high achievers. To gain first place in this school is an exceptional achievement, and deserves to be properly recognised as such. But without underestimating the significance of our academic accolades, we must remember that they are not the ONLY measure of our school’s excellence.

We must always be focussed on our essential role in encouraging and developing well-rounded individuals who will be responsible, articulate, and community minded-citizens, who can think for themselves, form their own opinions, and who will be empowered to take their place in leadership roles in our ever-changing society. They could be leaders like Professor Christine Jenkins who is a wonderful role model for our students. They could also be leaders in sport such as Sally Pearson who was named international female athlete of the year or Sam Stosur who won the US Tennis Open this year. They could also become leaders like Nancy Wake, an Australian hero from World War Two or Margaret Olley, an internationally recognised Australian visual artist who were both farewelled by all Australians this year. Girls there are so many opportunities for you to become leaders. Your time at Hornsby Girls High School will empower you to develop the leadership skills you will need in your life.

At Hornsby, we continue to educate and empower our students through our holistic approach to teaching and learning. This holistic approach is where our
curriculum emphasises five areas of learning. At Hornsby Girls High School we learn to know, we learn to do, we learn to be, we learn to live together and we learn to live sustainably. Our girls are given a wide range of opportunities through our curriculum and co-curriculum activities to develop their individual and varied talents. As you can see on today’s program, along with the distribution of academic prizes, there are also awards in many other fields, particularly citizenship, leadership, school and community service, sport and the creative and performing arts. These awards demonstrate that at Hornsby our focus is not only on intellectual development but also on developing our students’ social and emotional intelligence, their creativity and their sporting prowess.

It is particularly pleasing that the number of awards in these categories is increasing, especially since they are linked to our whole-school Minerva Awards Scheme. The scheme continues to grow and Year 7 have taken it up with great enthusiasm. This year we are also awarding Gold Minerva medals to three year 8 students - the youngest recipients of this level to date.

We must remember that there are many others in our school who may not be receiving prizes because they haven’t come first in a subject, or been a sporting champion, but who nevertheless tried their hardest and achieved their personal best in all their endeavours.

The best way to motivate ourselves is through focussing on our personal bests and by finding enjoyment in everything we do. The following are some examples from 2011 where students have done their personal bests:

- In the Duke of Edinburgh Awards there are currently 280 students enrolled in all 3 levels - Bronze, Silver and Gold with 31 Bronze awarded this year, 14 Silver and 4 Gold to Rachel Harrison, Wendy Cheng, Andrea Spencer and Zdenka Marinov.
- As part of our innovative Senior Accelerated Independent Learning Program, our High Resolves group of 38 year 10 students worked on a community project to improve the access to education for girls and young women in developing countries with the United Nations Women’s Association, Room to Read and the Girls Effect. The Year 9 High Resolve group of 23 students’ project boosted self-esteem and promoted positive body image with all students from Yrs 7 – 11 writing positive messages which were made into mobiles that now decorate the corridors of the school.
- On December 3- 4, our Chess Team again represented NSW in the Australian Schools Chess Championships in Sydney
• Cara van Wyk from Year 11 received the Marie Bashir Peace Award from the Governor of NSW in September 2011. The award acknowledges the contribution that Cara has made to peace, harmony and social justice in both the school community and beyond.

• Ten of our girls joined the, ‘For inspiration and recognition of Science and Technology’ or ‘First’ Robotics Competition which in March this year was held in Hawaii to compete in a regional competition. They won the chairman’s award the highest award at the competition. This achievement made our team eligible to compete in the world championships with 400 other teams from around the world at St Louis Missouri in June 2011. Our team then proceeded to win the Judges Award, one of only 13 awards given at the world robotics championships.

• In Aerobics our team had 18 girls compete at the National Championships in Melbourne this year achieving a 1st place (& National Champion) in the Level 2 Senior Individual to AURORA CRAIN from Year 9, a 3rd place in Level 1 Intermediate Group Division and a 5th place in Level 2 Intermediate Pair

• In Dance our girls were in the Rock Eisteddfod in 2011 coming fourth in their group. Their dance was choreographed by an ex student further deepening the bonds between the school and the community.

• In Debating, our teams won the Zone competition in 3 of the 4 Divisions contested, the highlight being the wonderful result for our Year 11 Blue Team who won their way through to the State Semi-Finals. In Public Speaking we had Regional Finalists in the Rostrum Voice of Youth, NSW Plain Speaking Award, and the Legacy Junior Public Speaking Award. The highlight was Jehannah May of Year 9 with her success in competing in the State Final of the Legacy Competition for the second year in a row.

• Over 180 students participated in our Instrumental ensembles – i.e. almost a quarter of the whole school - and they continued to gain many awards at Festivals and competitions across the state

• over 100 girls performed in the Musical ‘Annie’ a combined production with Normanhurst Boys High School.

• There are over 100 girls in the junior, senior and chamber choirs and the new house choirs saw all 726 students involved in choirs. This is a wonderful initiative for the school.

These examples demonstrate the diversity and range of opportunities at our school and the wonderful achievements of our girls.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and students I commend the staff of Hornsby Girls High – the teachers, the office staff, the support staff. Their dedication is uplifting, not only in the classrooms, but in so many other aspects
of school life as well, and they are wholeheartedly committed to the personal well-being and development of each of the girls. The demands placed upon teachers continue to increase. They must not only facilitate the students’ learning, but must also play an essential welfare role in supporting those students who sometimes bring life’s little problems to school with them. The outstanding success of this school in so many fields is due to their individual and collective skills, their commitment and sheer hard work in nurturing the multiplicity of talents which our amazing girls possess, and I thank them for their devotion to the students of Hornsby. We also thank and farewell four of our teachers who are leaving us at the end of the year. From Technology and Applied Studies Mrs Cathy Davies will be taking up a position at Willoughby Girls in the TAS Faculty. We wish Mrs Davies all the best in her new position. From Science Ms Rebecca Smyth will be leaving us to move to Hong Kong. We wish her all the best in her new and exciting venture. Mrs Penelope Phillips from the English faculty will be retiring after many years of service. Her contribution to debating and public speaking has been outstanding. We wish you well. We also farewell our Head Teacher Mathematics Mrs Cath Whalan who has been promoted to Deputy Principal of Manly Selective Campus. We wish her all the best in this well deserved promotion.

Also fundamental to our students’ success is the educational partnership with our parents and caregivers. Research studies have shown time and time again that a significant feature of maximising student success at school is the participation and supportive engagement of parents as partners in their children’s education.

I thank our hard-working P & C Association which has maintained such consistent and constructive support for the school in so many ways. I thank all our parents
- who tirelessly assisted with grounds maintenance and working bees
- who invested so much time in organising and supporting the Multicultural Fair, the raffle, the Mother-Daughter Movie Night and other social activities.
- who have supported the Band and Orchestra Committee, and
- who have contributed in their own individual ways to the overall success of our school. Might I also say that this year, Mrs Neelam Nagrath of the Hornsby Girls High School P&C association, received the Northern Sydney Regional Parent of the Year Awards for her long-standing service to our school.

As in all things about Hornsby Girls High, our community is multi-faceted, and we should thank all members of our community for their efforts on our behalf. In particular, to all those who have donated prizes for today, and to our wonderful Old Girls Union whose enduring commitment continues to maintain the great traditions of our school, to the service clubs such as Rotary, Lions and
the Soroptimists, and to the Hornsby Shire Council, to our local NSW parliamentary members, School Education Director and community agencies that assist the school, all of which have been outstanding supporters of our school. And it is the support of all these groups that continues to forge the remarkable community that is Hornsby Girls High School.

It is no wonder that the strength of our educational partnership between school, home and community produces the beautiful people who are the young women of Hornsby Girls High School.

We should all be proud to be part of the Hornsby Girls High School Community: proud, not in the sense of feeling superior to others, but proud because we not only respect the past but we also share in the joy of today’s celebration of the extraordinary abilities, accomplishments and admirable qualities of our multi-talented students who are ready to embrace the future with all its extraordinary opportunities. My congratulations to you all on another magnificent year. On a personal note can I thank the whole school community for the wonderful welcome I have received these past few months. My best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to everyone.

And to all our fabulous students, as I believe is always said to you at this time every year, ‘I know Santa will be good to you’.

Dr Justin Briggs

Principal