Welcome students, to the first whole school assembly for Wilmington Secondary College for 2019. I’d like to first acknowledge the traditional owners of this land we’re on, the Wurundjeri people. I’d like to also welcome back all staff and students from what I hope was a lovely and restful summer break.

At Wilmington Secondary College, 2019 is the year of ‘mindfulness’. Mindfulness means being able to focus in our work, focus on our conversations and interactions with others and notice and wonder about things. There’s a range of activities we’re going to do throughout the year to improve both staff and students’ capacity to be mindful. For example, this term in home group we’re going to be practising ‘minute meditations’ - where we take a minute to think deeply about things. Over the rest of the year, we’ll be sharing other strategies we can all use to help us focus more and to engage better with people and the world around us.

However, there’s one thing in particular that’s happening this year that I want to take some time to talk about: the ban on mobile phones. All of you know that we introduced this ban at the end of last year. I won’t back away from saying that a lot of you were against this ban. We raised the idea at the start of 2018, and throughout the year we met with the school community, ran surveys, debated the idea at staff meetings and finally consulted with the school council. Many parents and students had strong objections to a ban on mobile phones. I want to acknowledge those objections now to show that you have been listened to. Parents and students had two key arguments:

“Firstly, that mobile phones are an important tool to communicate between parents and students - especially in the case of emergencies and sudden changes to plans
“And the second argument was that mobile phones are a basic tool for the 21st century - we should be embracing them and learning to use them effectively, not banning them

When I first started thinking about the proposed ban on mobile phones, these same two arguments occurred to me and, to be honest, I didn’t see how you could overcome these arguments. However throughout 2018, as I talked to lots of people about this issue, looked at what is happening in other schools and countries and thought more about it, it became clearer to me why we need to reconsider these arguments. So I want to be crystal clear now about why this ban is happening and how we’re going to be implementing it in 2019.

Firstly, let’s look at the argument that mobile phones are an important tool to communicate between parents and students - especially in the case of emergencies. My answer to this is that of course phones are and we’re not removing this communication method. Students can still bring phones to school, they just can’t use them during school. Your mobile phones must stay locked in your locker at all times as soon as you get to school. I want to be no confusion about this, so I’ll say it again: Your mobile phones must stay locked in your locker at all times as soon as you get to school - that means before school starts, during class, during recess and during lunch. You’ll be able to check messages from your parents or call as soon as school has finished, but not before. If your parents do need to contact you during school time, they can call the office. This has always actually been the rule and I want to emphasise at this point, that this ban on mobile phones is not really new - you’ve never been allowed to have phones in class.

We’re just making this ban stricter. If you’re caught with your phone during school time - whether you’re using it or not - it will be confiscated - and no, you won’t get it back at the end of the day, your parents will have to come and get it. We will ring them up and tell

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them this, so if there is anything they need to communicate to you, they can do it through the office.

So why are we getting rid of technology when we’re going into a future that will be filled with it? Why aren’t we teaching you how to use your mobile phones effectively? Well, we will be - just not in the way you think. We know - from a tremendous amount of research - that humans are becoming increasingly distracted by technology. You’ve all seen it: people who check their phones all the time; people who are walking along a street, heads down, staring at their phone - not seeing cars, bikes or pedestrians that could bump into them; people who are out for something to eat, not talking to each other, but texting people on their phones instead. So we’ll be teaching you to use your phones mindfully - to manage your use of it and not become obsessed by it to the point where you become antisocial, put yourself in risky situations - or just miss the life that is happening around you. Yes, our phones are useful - but sometimes, not all the time.

I want to finish by emphasising that this mobile ban is for everyone - that’s staff as well as students. We’ll all be making this journey together, me as much as everyone else. It will be hard, but after all our motto at Wilmington Secondary College is ‘rise to the challenge’. So let’s rise to this one together in 2019.