Hello to all the children here at Yarralumla Primary School,
Federal Member for Canberra, Ms Annette Ellis,
ACT Education Minister Andrew Barr,
Principal Mrs Sue Nott,
P&C President, Mrs Louise Wills,
Joanne Howard, Department of Education and Training,
Teachers and parents.

Good morning. Marlena and I thank you for your warm welcome.

It is wonderful to be here today to celebrate the 50th birthday of the Yarralumla Primary School.

It is always a good feeling isn’t it, to belong to something which has a sense of history. It gives you a feeling of belonging, of being a part of a rich community.

When you walk along these corridors, or sit in your classrooms, it’s fun to think that 50 years ago, other children were trying to spell a tricky word, or do their sums, or paint the perfect picture of their favourite pet.

And they were living in somewhat different times. There was no lake back then, just the Molonglo River. There weren’t so many houses, there were no computers, no TVs, no mobile phones… a lot of differences.

But what hasn’t changed is why you are all here. Just as those children of 50 years back learned about the world, so you, too, come here each day to discover what life’s all about. To learn about different peoples, and different cultures, to learn about respecting each other, to learn about our wonderful indigenous history, to learn how to do those sums and to learn how to spell correctly.

I loved all of it when I was at school, which was quite a bit before your time.

I went to little school in a very small town called Cannington, just outside of Perth in Western Australia.

And my parents and my teachers always encouraged me to read books, to discover far away places, and to use my imagination – which you had to do quite a bit in my little town! And I loved finding out about different countries, and different parts of Australia.

But what I learned most of all when I was in Primary School is that education is the key that unlocks the doors to a happy and successful future.
It certainly did for me.

After I finished school I went to Duntroon Military College, became an officer and was a soldier for many years. Eventually I retired from that to become Governor of Western Australia for seven years, and three years later on 11 August 2003 I was sworn in as the twenty-fourth Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

And it’s a pretty interesting job!

I make sure the Australian Government does not do anything constitutionally illegal. I have to approve all laws made by Parliament, and when there is an election I have to close Parliament and after the election appoint a new Prime Minister. I am also the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Force. If a leader from another country, or The Queen, comes to Australia, Mrs Jeffery and I look after them at Government House, just up the road from here.

If someone very important dies, like the Pope, I go to the funeral and represent all Australians.

I also give people special awards under the Australian Honours system, including bravery medals.

And another important part of my job, and one which I really enjoy, is to travel around Australia visiting lots of community groups, and going to special days at schools like this one.

So you see, it all starts here in the classrooms and in the playground.

You never forget your own special years at Primary School. You don’t forget your teachers. Those clever, dedicated people who we all respect for their hard work and their great responsibility in passing on their knowledge to us.

You don’t forget your classmates, who might become friends for life. And you don’t forget the wonderful activities you do together.

Look at all the people who have come to visit Yarralumla Primary since they grew up. Look at all the people here today who are proud to have been, or still are, part of this school and what it has achieved.

One day you may also return here, and who knows what kind of job you’ll have, or where you might have travelled? Maybe some of you will become teachers. It is a wonderful vocation, one of the best, and we can always do with more teachers, especially in the male ranks.

And who knows, one of you might return as Governor-General or Prime Minister or a noble prize winning scientist because this country provides each of us with that potential, to be anything we want to be.

One day you, like me, will look around at the various classes of bright, expectant faces and realise that the future is in good hands.

I congratulate and thank all of the teachers, staff, students and parents who have worked to make Yarralumla Primary School a very important community hub within a beautiful, historical suburb. May it continue to thrive and prosper.

A very famous former Governor-General, Field Marshal Sir William Slim – who commissioned me as a junior officer – opened this school 50 years ago and I would now like to unveil this historic memento which features the Yarralumla Primary School logo from the original glass doors in the school, to commemorate a distinguished history.

Thank you. And good luck to you all.

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