



Dear Parents

*An optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity; a pessimist a calamity in every opportunity.*

- Winston Churchill

Pessimism abounds in the coffee shops, in the Boardrooms, in the grocery stores and the hair salons of our country at the present time. It is easy to be pessimistic when we see the very values we aspire to, being trashed in the press on a daily basis. It is easy to fall into a conversation about the hard economic times or the lack of leadership in our country but as I was reminded last night by a wise sage, Dr Dereck Jackson, the world is shifting under our feet and if we are not prepared to change with the times we are going to be left behind. If we are not prepared to make a difference, through our actions and the way we converse around our kids, they too will lose hope and the consequences are dire.

Young men and women, who feel there is no hope, resort to drastic measures to be heard and ultimately they have nothing to lose. Young men and women, like those at Oakhill, will express their lack of hope through their work ethic, their performance in the classroom, on the stage and on the sports fields, and if our kids are anything to go by they are certainly not affected by this plague at the present time. The young men and women of Oakhill are engaging, debating and making a difference. The problem is that we, as parents, are often guilty of fomenting an atmosphere of doom and gloom and it is incumbent on us to learn from our kids in this regard – we should be engaging with them about the negative as well as the positive.

When last did you mention that South Africa's debt to GDP ratio is 32% (USA 100%, Japan 200%, UK 90%). The World Bank recommends a maximum ratio of 60% or that the South African Rand was the second best performing currency against the US Dollar between 2007 and 2011, according to Bloomberg's Currency Scorecard.

The number of tourists visiting South Africa has grown from 3.9 million in 1994 to 11.3 million in 2010. South Africa is ranked among the top 5 countries in the world in respect of tourism growth (growing at 3 times the global average). Cape Town was named the top tourist destination in the world in the 2011 Traveller's Choice Destinations awards.

OR Tambo airport is the best airport in Africa, according to the World Airport Awards 2010/11. It was also in the top 3 most improved airports in the world for the same period.

South Africa's learner to teacher ratio has improved from 1:50 in 1994 to 1:31 in 2010.

SA's population is the 27<sup>th</sup> largest in the world (there are 230 countries, only 80 have a population in excess of 10 million). South Africa is not listed as one of the 49 fastest growing populations. Our population is set to stabilize at ± 50 million for the next 20 years. Population sizes remain the same when there are 2.2 births per fertile female. In South Africa the figure is 2.3 births per fertile female. The average in Europe is 1.7 (Economist).

Since 1994, 435 houses have been built each day for the poor.

I have recently been visited by one of my life mentors: John Boje. I was fortunate to start my teaching career in the company of some intellectual giants who understood kids and education. John was one of these teachers. He has translated the English poet Chaucer into Afrikaans – this has been his life's work and informs me it is nearly complete. He taught Classics, Latin, English and Biblical Studies and in his later years has published a work on the Anglo Boer War and completed a PhD in History at the University of Pretoria at the age of 75. He is 77 now and although he has lost much of his hearing he is enthused about South Africa and the potential it holds for the future. He has asked the University of Pretoria to renew his student card, even though he has stopped studying, so that he can, 'walk around the multi-cultural campus and engage with the new South Africa'. He is a wise sage and I can only wish that his experiences, wisdom and knowledge are passed down to the next generation.

Our children look to us for leadership, motivation and hope. Jonathan Jansen said: Children don't listen to us but they emulate our actions. We have a responsibility to ensure that we are positive enough to encourage them to want to learn, grow and engage with the future.

- **Odyssey and Spain Art and Hockey Tour**

We have two firsts at Oakhill of late and we are extremely proud of them. This year's Odyssey was the first time we ventured forth into the wilderness with 40 odd Grade 10's and it was a wonderful success in all respects. Riaan van Straten, who coordinated this event, is an extraordinary organiser and I am extremely grateful for the way he went about ensuring the safety and well-being of our students at all times on this 400km journey. If you have not visited the Oakhill website to peruse the photos and read of the experience I would encourage you to do so. The Grade 10's returned more self-aware, more confident and proud of their achievements and we are certainly thrilled with the positive impact this facilitation has had on the life of the school.

Another first was the Spain Art Tour which joined the Hockey Tour to the same country. We have taken part in many sports tours at Oakhill before but this was the first tour of this nature and it was a resounding success. My sincere thanks go to Vanessa Eyre for her organisation and to the staff who accompanied these students: Dave Pryke, Chicco Ponela, Terry Pautz, Amy Nuttall and Peter Bishop.

Our students were outstanding and we are extremely proud of the way they conducted themselves on and off the field and in and out of the art galleries. Your sons and daughters are wonderfully polite, engaging young men and women and they were certainly wonderful ambassadors for their school and country.

- **Communication channels**

We have had many changes to our structures in the past couple of years and I would like to remind all parents of our communication channels in both the College and the Preparatory School.

### **College**

If you have an issue of any nature in the College I would encourage you to speak to your child's **House Mentor** as a first port of call. The House Mentors take responsibility for ensuring that each of our students is engaged academically, socially and physically. **Sheila Pasio** ([s.pasio@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:s.pasio@oakhillschool.co.za)), **Lee Raynor** ([l.raynor@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:l.raynor@oakhillschool.co.za)) and **Juliet le Fleur** ([j.lefleur@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:j.lefleur@oakhillschool.co.za)) will also point you in the right direction should you have a further query. They can be contacted via **Barbara Finch** in the College office on (044 382 6506).

Should you have a specific query please follow these channels:

Academic issue: **Sharon Brown**, our Academic Director  
Sport related queries: **Dave Pryke**, our Director of Sport  
Social and emotional issues: **Linda Lifson**, our School Counsellor

It goes without saying that should you have a query related to a specific subject please contact the relevant teacher. All email addresses can be found on the school's webpage.

Lastly, **Dawie Botha** is the Deputy Headmaster in the College and should you want to speak to someone about a disciplinary issue or you have a general query, please contact him at the school office or via email on [d.botha@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:d.botha@oakhillschool.co.za).

### **Preparatory School**

Your first port of call in the Prep School is the class teacher.

Should you have a specific query please follow these channels:

Academic issue: Gr 000 - R **Caroline Payton**, our Academic Director Little Oaks  
Gr 1-3 **Barbara-Ann Hayward**, our Academic Director in the Foundation Phase  
Gr 4-7 **Herman Hardick**, our Academic Director in the Intermediate Phase  
Sport related queries: **Stefan Weyers**, our Director of Sport  
Social and emotional issues: **Linda Lifson**, our School Counsellor

**James Cross** is the Deputy Headmaster in the Prep School and should you want to speak to someone about a disciplinary issue or you have a general query, please contact him at the school office or via email on [j.cross@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:j.cross@oakhillschool.co.za).

Please also always feel free to contact the Headmaster's office should you want to make an appointment with him.

- **ISCHF**

Many of you might not be aware that Oakhill School is the founder member of the Independent Schools Co-Ed Hockey Festival. Oakhill College hosted 17 teams from around the country recently at the Astro turf in George.

Both our 1<sup>st</sup> XI's played extremely well and the results certainly favoured Oakhill in their six matches. The results vs. Oakhill were as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Boys Results:

**vs. Chesterhouse**

Won 3 – 0

**M.o.m:** Leo Thesen

**vs. CBC St. John's**

Won 6 – 0

**M.o.m:** Josh Pama

**vs. St. Dunstons**

Won 3 – 0

**M.o.m:** Shared by Caleb Bell and Chris Marrow

**vs. St. Georges**

Won 8 – 0

**M.o.m:** Jake Read

**vs. Cannons Creek**

Won 7 – 1

**M.o.m:** Jono van der Merwe

**vs. Elkanah House**

Won 6 – 0

**M.o.m:** Chris and Thomas Marrow

**vs. Glenwood House**

Won 4 – 0

**M.o.m:** Joshua Pieters

1<sup>st</sup> Girls Results:

**vs. Heron Bridge**

Won 4 – 0

**M.o.m:** Kristi van Staden

**vs. CBC St. John's**

Won 5 – 0

**M.o.m:** Emma Horn

**vs. St. Dunstons**

Won 4 – 0

**M.o.m:** Anola Walk

**vs. St. Georges**

Won 9 – 0

**M.o.m:** Cara Nicoll

**vs. Cannons Creek**

Drew 0 – 0

**M.o.m:** Lulu Read

**vs. Elkanah House**

Lost 0 – 1

**M.o.m:** Mikayla Oliver

**vs. Chester House**

Won 6 – 0

**M.o.m:** Shared by Samantha de Kock and Lulu Read

**vs. Glenwood House**

Won 1 – 0

**M.o.m:** Shared by Amy Williams and Hannah Laughton

- **Parent Forums**

**Linda Lifson**, our resident School Counsellor, continues to organise world-class speakers to address staff, pupils and parents. Dereck Jackson was no exception and I look forward to hearing Michael Griffin, a world renowned educator and emotional intelligence expert in Term 4. The details of this talk are posted on our webpage and I would encourage you to join us on this occasion.

- **English Olympiad success**

The Grahamstown Foundation and the South African Council for English Education (SACEE) have released the names of the Top 15 De Beers English Olympiad 2012 candidates. The winners will be announced in their rank order at an official prize-giving ceremony in Grahamstown on 12 July 2012.

**Maya-Rose Torrao**, a Matric student, has been invited to the presentation of prizes for the Olympiad in Grahamstown. She is in the Top 15 students for the English Olympiad out of a total of 7,367 candidates.

We are extremely proud of her achievement and our congratulations go to both her and our English Department led by Mel Cloete.

- **Exchange programme**

I am pleased to announce that we have formalised an exchange with Gordonstoun School, one of Scotland's most prestigious schools. Two of our Grade 9 students will be travelling to Scotland for three months to experience their environment while two of their students will be joining us at Oakhill.

I would like to congratulate both **Callam Tait** and **Nicolas Reid** on being selected for this wonderful opportunity. We are also hoping to formalise other exchanges which will enable more of our students to experience this exciting opportunity.

I would also like to congratulate **Simone Meyer** on being selected to go on an exchange to Germany – we are proud of her achievement!

- **21<sup>st</sup> Birthday celebrations**

Oakhill will be celebrating its 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday in 2013 and we are planning a community celebration which will include our whole town. **Please book the weekend of 28 February to 3 March 2013** in your diary to ensure that we can celebrate in style. All of our pupils will be involved in these celebrations which will culminate with an all-inclusive function on the evening of Saturday 2 March 2013. Details of these functions will be shared with you in the near future.

- **Finally...**

My view of education is far deeper than judging a school or its kids on the rugby results or how well we wear our uniform however important this might be. I believe schools need to be judged by whether they are preparing kids to think and be excited by the prospect of learning something new. Our young men and women need to want to discover, explore, think critically, innovate and collaborate in order to solve complex issues.

When we appoint teachers at Oakhill we appoint the best. We find and attract teachers who are passionate about kids and how they learn and grow. We find teachers who are concerned about each individual in their class and who are enthralled by the prospect of developing the rare talent of encouraging pupils to think, to dream, to learn, to try and to do.

Conservative schools, who worry about crowd control, sport results, winning at all costs and punitive punishment, are perhaps not ideally placed to prepare the next generation for life in the future. They are schools who are living in the past, hoping by some miracle that the kids will survive.

I started this newsletter mentioning the benefits of being positive and I would not normally comment on petty rumours that I hear, but one which irked me immensely this week has to be mentioned. There are some parents from a prominent school in our town who have stated that we have employed an unqualified teacher. Firstly, this is wholly untrue but secondly qualifications are not just pieces of paper which you hang on a wall. A qualified teacher at Oakhill is one who enthuses young men and women. They are qualified by the mere fact that they would not fit in at a bureaucratic, dictatorial school where they are expected to keep quiet and fit in and not think for themselves.

Please be assured that we are not in the business of putting people in boxes at Oakhill. This is a vibrant, dynamic, forward-looking, innovative institution that embraces 21st Century skills and thinking and the age-old values which go with it.

So, if you hear this rumour or any other please engage with me should you have any concerns but even better still, ignore the noise which comes from institutions who know they have to change but are too petrified to.

Lastly, after having vented my feelings, it is important to say that I am wholly aware that Oakhill is not perfect but it is this very reason that drives me to ensure that we give your kids the very best that education has to offer in South Africa. We do not want to be the best at the expense of others but at the same time we will not tolerate petty drivel which seeks to justify poor teaching and crowd control. I have no doubt that you have made the right decision to send your children to Oakhill simply because I have made that decision as well and I'm committed to raising a generation which will make a difference in a world which will be very different from the one I grew up in.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shane', written in a cursive style.

**Shane Kidwell**  
**HEADMASTER**