



18 February 2015

BY EMAIL

Dear Parents

We have recently celebrated our first ever dance production at Oakhill School. The 'Circus of Dreams' was a wonderfully affirming show which celebrated our students' talent in the area of the arts. Congratulations need to go to Robyn Humphreys and Cheryl Wolf for a wonderful collaboration between our Prep School and the College. The show took place on the same evening as a circus of another sort, the State of the Nation address in parliament. I have to say, I was relieved to be watching our circus which reminded me of the talent and potential we have in our country at present, juxtaposed by the irresponsible leadership of politicians, of an older generation who seem intent on their own selfish agendas.

As adults we can easily be drawn into the negativity we read in the press regarding a range of issues across the world. I am truly fortunate because I engage with bright young boys and girls, men and women on a daily basis who give me hope for a brighter future. There is no doubt that our thoughts and conversations as parents and adults affect our children and students and I would caution all of us to be aware of what we are saying and doing in the presence of our children. I am not suggesting that we should hide them from the reality of what is unfolding in our country but I am implying that our reaction, thoughts and actions will determine the well-being of our children's existence in a world which is very much in turmoil.

It's common to say that 'oaks' come from seeds. But how could a tiny seed create a huge tree? Seeds do not contain the resources needed to grow a tree. These must come from the medium or environment within which the 'oak' grows. But the seed does provide something that is crucial: a place where the whole of the 'oak' starts to form. As resources such as water and nutrients are drawn in, the seed organizes the process that generates growth. In a sense, the seed is a gateway through which the future possibility of the living tree emerges. (Peter Senge, adapted by Shane Kidwell)

At the start of 2015, I have been witness to exciting future possibility as Oakhill has geared up for another year. I have been reminded again and again at the start of this term that our school is fertile ground for young 'oaks' of all ages. I have seen young seeds of three or four starting their journey here and I have engaged with older 'oaks' who are generating a real sense of momentum as they live the joy of learning. I have also engaged with parents who are grappling with the rigours of raising healthy, balanced, confident young people and I am again reminded that we should not doubt ourselves as we nurture our sons and



daughters as they endeavour to develop and learn. Our world has become obsessed with perfection: we have perfect fruit and vegetables on the shelves in Woolies, we live in an almost perfect, idyllic piece of paradise and we are bombarded with fake perfection of friends and family on Facebook and other social media sites.

Unfortunately we live in the real world which is imperfect and we need to remind ourselves not to be lulled or fooled into believing that our kids should be perfect. Perfect students, perfect sportsmen and women, perfectly behaved, or perfect dramatists or musicians. Striving for perfection is noble but we all know that it is actually foolishness and a figment of the imagination. It is after all not the destination but the journey that counts.

We have started the year in a magnificent fashion. I have been overwhelmed with the positive attitude and academic focus around the campus. Our children are happy and thriving on their journey of entrenching the joy of life-long learning but as in all imperfect environments there have also been some hiccups at the start. Perhaps your son or daughter has experienced hardship or challenges in the first few weeks and as parents we immediately move into protection mode. But 'as the future possibility of the future tree emerges' we should remind ourselves that the strongest 'oaks' are those who have developed resilience and who face difficulty head-on with courage and perseverance. It is our job as parents and schools to provide the 'resources and nutrients' which generates growth - and this means ensuring that our kids continue to learn and grow through good and difficult seasons.

We have started our year with a full complement of students and have **welcomed 82 new students to the campus** and as a result our school continues to grow! We are indeed fortunate that this is the case but growth also brings raised expectation and continual change. As we grow we need to employ new teachers and we have welcomed a number of new and exciting personalities onto our staff team this year.





I am also pleased to be able to announce that we have appointed **Anneke Lamont as our new Director of Music in the College**. Anneke is an accomplished musician, a concert pianist and an experienced Director of Music having worked at Treverton College, Pretoria Boys High, Crawford and St Mary's DSG amongst others. She also has a PhD in Music from the University of the Free State. She joins us from the beginning of Term 2, 2015 and I have no doubt she will bring a consistency and depth to our music department across both schools.

Lwando Bantom, who teaches Xhosa in the Prep School, will be leaving at the end of February as planned. I want to assure you that we are in the process of appointing someone to replace him on our team and I will be able to announce this in the next few weeks.

Infrastructure

I started this article by mentioning the chaos at our State of the Nation address and the poor example set by adults in our society. It is easy to get lulled into negativity at the present time and I would encourage all of us to ensure that we remain positive and focused for the sake of our children. The potholes on the way to school really annoy me and although we have not been able to get the municipality to repair them I want to assure you that we have a plan to get them fixed in the near future. This places pressure on our ground staff team but we are determined to solve these issues for the good of our community.

We have also been experiencing load shedding which has influenced the efficient communication with our Intranet and Database: ADAM, for which we apologise. We are currently working on a system which will alleviate these issues but ask that you are patient during a difficult time which is affecting us all.

As mentioned above: the school continues to grow and one of the key areas of concern is to make sure that we have enough space for our kids to relax and enjoy a quiet moment or a ball-game with friends at break or before school. To ensure that we do not lose our 'feel' of space as we grow we are currently doing an audit of play spaces around the campus which includes ensuring that our current jungle gyms are in good working order and provide the necessary physical activity for our different age groups. We will also be installing new jungle gyms where necessary.

We will also be creating a whole new 'green' space next to the Learning Commons building which will look much the same as the pathway up toward the administrative block. This will provide a new area for relaxing under trees and on the grass and tables provided in that



area. This project will commence at the beginning of the holidays and be completed by the time your children return for Term 2.

As in the past, we will be providing the **opportunity to purchase a tree** on this walkway. There will only be 20 trees available on a first come first served basis and I would encourage you to speak to Terri Pautz on t.pautz@oakhillschool.co.za or click on the link below which will take you directly to the order form on our webpage. The cost of a tree is R2500. - <http://www.oakhill.co.za/indigenous-tree-initiative/>

Our Grade 5, 6 and 7 classes have moved into a wonderful new building and we are in the process of completing the furnishings in our new Learning Commons as well as our Art and Drama studios. After a few hiccups these furnishings will be completed by the end of this week and we look forward to inviting you to the opening of this new facility in Term 2.

Homework classes

It is my belief that this new space will help us to organise homework and learning sessions more effectively in the afternoons. We will also be monitoring how it affects the way we research, set homework and encourage collaboration. A new schedule of what your children can expect for homework and support classes in the afternoons will be communicated to you before the end of Term 1 and the new schedule will be implemented from the beginning of Term 2. The plan involves providing Maths and English teachers in the Learning Commons for collaborative interaction as well as a remedial specialist who will facilitate productive and enjoyable learning. There will also be the normal homework sessions which will be administered in classes with teachers present but the one difference is that we will not be tolerating kids messing around in these sessions. This needs to be constructive time for learning and thinking and should a child not be self-disciplined enough – we will not allow them to join these classes. This session will run for an hour in the afternoon where after we will facilitate a holding class in which children can sit quietly and read should they want to before a sport session.

The Library or Learning Commons has required a huge investment by the school and although we have many hard-copy books for the library we would like to begin a drive to ensure that we have enough books for all our children to enjoy, explore and discover. We are also investigating an on-line library which will also supplement the hard-copy books which we purchase but this will be the second phase of this development. The reason I raise this issue now is that we are celebrating World Book Day in March and I would like to encourage each child to donate a book to the library. Our English Departments will have selected titles on display and it would be wonderful if we could place 520 new books on the



shelves in the library in March. Please watch out for communication on this issue in the near future.

Learning should be a joy and as you are aware, we are fanatical about instilling this in our kids. I recently read a wonderful article entitled *Joy: A subject schools lack* and this is an excerpt from it. **SUSAN ENGEL** is a senior lecturer in Psychology and the director of the Program in Teaching at Williams College.

*In his masterpiece essay, Civilization and Its Discontents, Sigmund Freud described childhood as a period of trying to balance primal urges to find pleasure and avoid pain with the growing need to be part of a group. Every piece of research since that essay has shown that Freud was right. **Human lives are governed by the desire to experience joy.** Becoming educated should not require giving up joy but rather lead to finding joy in new kinds of things: reading novels instead of playing with small figures, conducting experiments instead of sinking cups in the bathtub, and debating serious issues rather than stringing together nonsense words, for example. In some cases, schools should help children find new, more grown-up ways of doing the same things that are perennial sources of joy: making art, making friends, making decisions.*

Building on a child's ability to feel joy, rather than pushing it aside, wouldn't be that hard. It would just require a shift in the education world's mind-set. Instead of trying to get children to buckle down, why not focus on getting them to take pleasure in meaningful, productive activity, like making things, working with others, exploring ideas, and solving problems? These focuses are not so different from the things to which they already gravitate and in which they delight.

Before you brush this argument aside as sentimental fluff, or think of joy as an unaffordable luxury in a nation where there is dire poverty, low academic achievement, and high dropout rates, think again. The more dire the school circumstances, the more important pleasure is to achieving any educational success.

Professor Engel seems to flippantly recommend a wholesale change to the Education system around the world by saying: *Building on a child's ability to feel joy, rather than pushing it aside, wouldn't be that hard. It would just require a shift in the education world's mind-set.* We all know that the world's mind-set is a difficult thing to change! It is my belief that Oakhill is an innovator and pioneer in ensuring that we make decisions based on what will be best for children. Joy is important here and the point she is making is what we live, eat and breathe at Oakhill: endeavouring to help kids find the joy in life-long learning and we need to continue to partner with you as parents as we seek to find that place where talent and passion meet in each individual in our school.

Headmaster: Shane Kidwell | BA (UP) HDipEd (PCE)

Telephone: (044) 382-6506 | Fax: (044) 382-5753 | International: +2744 382-6506
Email: s.kidwell@oakhillschool.co.za | Web: www.oakhillschool.co.za



The first question we should be asking ourselves as parents is: are our kids enjoying the learning process, do they enjoy going to school? Learning will have its ups and downs but as we start off another year I would encourage you not to focus on the small bumps in the road but to understand that we are all on a journey of discovery which requires perseverance and love. It is sincerely a privilege to be part of a well-qualified team of teachers, who focus on all 520 individuals in our school on a daily basis and I can assure you we want to continue to develop and establish a culture of joy, hard-work, self-discipline and exciting discovery as we endeavour to raise young men and women who will make a positive difference in the society we live in.

We look forward to connecting with Old Oaks at our first Alumni function in Cape Town on Saturday, 25 April 2015. Alumni, Parents and Students are reminded to visit our website www.oakhillschool.co.za and our Facebook page for details of upcoming events, as well as regular updates and photos of Oakhill life.

Oakhill has a long history of graduates excelling and making a difference and I am excited to announce that Rob Muir, the son of one of our founder families, Andy and Pam Muir has just come top of his Honours class in Geology at UCT. Shivani Moodley, has been on the Dean's list at Rhodes for the last 4 years and was the top of her class last year for Law (LLB). Alex Boomer has just completed his BSc Honours as one of the top 15% of academic achievers at Stellenbosch. Maren Seydack has been placed in the top 10% of academic achievers in her MBChB in Germany and Kate Gardy continues to be selected for the Dean's merit list at UCT, where she is studying Philosophy and Mandarin.

Oakhill students excel once they have left here and I have no doubt that your sons and daughters will follow in the same footsteps.

Yours sincerely

Shane Kidwell
HEADMASTER