



20 September 2018

Dear Oakhill Parents and Friends

Spring has sprung, albeit mostly on the calendar here in Knysna! The change of season is an indicator that our planet has orbited into an exciting position in the solar system. Down South, there is an optimism around this time of the year as the days break earlier and stretch out longer before sunset. We also see this at school. Matrics are getting ready for their final countdown. New house captains and SRC members have been elected and Interact and sports captains have handed over to the new guard. Our Grade R class got a taste of Prep Assembly the other day and Grade 7s are rearing to wrap up this primary school business that they have now outgrown. The regrets about spilt milk during winter exams and in winter sports are put behind us and we all buy into making a clean start and getting it right this summer!

It has been a remarkable term at Oakhill with so many areas of excellence to celebrate. The pupils, parents and staff at this school never fail to amaze me, as every week brings new highlights in all areas of the school. We are an inclusive school where diversity in ability, talent and background is welcomed. While we embrace difference, we have so much to celebrate that was only achievable by setting aside our differences and working together towards common goals.

Our school website and facebook page are rich and visual sources of school news and I encourage you to regularly visit these, as they are constantly updated. This letter is not intended to share the news all over again but rather to be a reflection on the events that inspired me this term.

Academics

Our core business as a school is academics and our philosophy is to build into the learning and teaching much more than what the 'curriculum' requires. Teachers go beyond 'the textbook', as it were, to stretch and support learners and to enable learning different content and different skills in different ways.

Our inclusive approach to learning puts high demands on teaching staff who have to be innovative and stay abreast of the most current research on differentiated learning. We accept classes with a wide spectrum of learning abilities and requirements as the norm.

Some of the highlights I spotted on my walkabouts this term included: * the Grade 4 Genius Hour project, * the Grade 8 bridge building project, * the Grade 10 autobiography cube project, * our Grade 9 International Benchmark results that outperformed the national and international averages for English and Mathematics, * the Prep market days that inspire entrepreneurship, * the Pre-Prep and FP productions that were the end results of rich learning cycles, * the coding and robotics programme in various grades, * the paperless Grade 7



SS and NST classes, * the awards our pupils won in the South African Council for English Education writing competition, * the Grade 5 field trip to Honeychild Bees in Rheenendal * the recent Google Schools Summit held in Cape Town where Oakhill received acknowledgement for groundbreaking work in digitally blended learning.

Thank you to every educator who invested thought, time and energy in stretching and supporting our learners this term.

Sport

We can look back with pride on a hugely successful winter sport season. The most important drivers in our sports philosophy at Oakhill include high levels of participation, all rounded development of athletes at all levels and a balanced approach to competitiveness, team-mindedness and sportsmanship. I have witnessed so much joy on and next to sports fields this season, thanks to coaches, players and parents who worked together to make our sports philosophy a reality.

The dream of our mountain bike track came true with Oakhill hosting two Spur Schools Series events which attracted around 550 riders in all age groups from across the Southern Cape. The Oakhill MTB team climbed the schools series log from nowhere last year to second in the region, resulting in a team of Oakhill riders being invited to participate in the SA Schools National Championship in Magaliesberg in October.

Oakhill Netball, Rugby and Hockey have achieved brilliantly this season. Our U11A rugby and netball teams were runners-up in the KPSSS league. Our U13A boys hockey team won silver at the Eden Hockey League Championship while our U13A girls team were crowned as the 2018 champions. It is quite something that 35 College and 11 Prep hockey players achieved provincial colours this season while 4 of our netball players made it into SWD/Eden play-offs in Oudtshoorn. Oakhill Netball has made significant progress over the past two years. Oakhill hosted our first ever U16 Co-Ed hockey festival in August. The event attracted high school teams from across the country and we received glowing feedback from our visitors who thoroughly enjoyed the festival.

The official opening of our new cricket nets on the school campus took the form of a fun-filled afternoon of activities for parents and players, followed by a braai. Our new nets were built to a high standard, thanks to the collaboration of passionate parents and the Sports Department.

The Water Polo season has started in all earnest, despite the nip in the spring air. Our U15 boys and girls teams competed in the Glenwood tournament against some of the top water polo schools in our region and from Cape Town. Our girls team took bronze in the tournament while our boys were crowned as the tournament winners! This is an astonishing achievement, bearing in mind that their opponents included well known boys schools from Cape Town with up to ten times the number of players to choose from.



Our entire College DotA 2 team was selected for the South African Protea E-sport Team. They were awarded National Federation Colours, and will receive their Protea Colours later this year. Oakhill was recently invited as one of the top three teams in the country to participate in the first ever Comic Con Africa event that was held in Johannesburg. They performed exceptionally well and took the second place overall at CCA.

A number of Oakhill Prep and College pupils recently took part in an orienteering event at Leisure Island. Orienteering aims to provide activities in a non-competitive environment that allow for skill development at a social level while participants also learn about map work, map symbols and control descriptions.

Oakhill recently hosted a 5-a-side Soccer Festival on our mini astro on the school campus in which a good number of boys and girls participated. It was a fun-filled day of football against fellow Knysna and Plett schools. The Oakhill girls teams were unbeaten in all their matches and the boys teams won 8 and lost 6 matches overall.

I usually prefer not to mention individual names in my letters but it will be amiss of me not to mention five of our top achieving athletes this term. Aimee Canny and Sophia Trollip were nominated as finalists for Junior Sportswoman of the Year at the 2018 Eden Sports Awards - Aimee for her swimming and Sophia her water polo and hockey achievements. Hannah Verrier represented South Africa in the SA U16 Girls team at the Pan Pacific Youth Water Polo Festival in New Zealand. Julian Bunge has excelled on his mountain bike to the top position in the Southern Cape Spur Schools Series in his age group. He also took the second position in the Western Cape Championship, only seconds behind the South African champion. Paul Kotze is one of Oakhill's unsung heroes. He was placed in the top 25 in the country for this past equestrian eventing season - an excellent result, especially considering that Knysna is far away from the major competition areas.

The Prep Inter-House Athletics Day is always an uplifting event, as it shows the magic of mass participation and symbolises the collaboration that makes Oakhill sport successful. Needless to say, we owe much gratitude to our Sports Department, teachers, coaches and parents who often venture beyond the call of duty in service of Oakhill sport.

Culture

On the cultural front, Oakhill has produced breathtaking work this term. We strive to strike a balance between sport and culture in our co-curricular offer. I am therefore proud to celebrate the productivity and quality that was produced by our culture cultures this term.

Oakhill took the George Eisteddfod by storm and returned home with a list of superb achievements in Art, Drama, Music and Dance that is too long to be included in this letter. However, special congratulations are due to Victoria Still who won the highest award of the Eisteddfod - the Junior Cup - the second year in row!



The Pre-Prep's production of *The Lorax* was an astonishing event. The seamless performance demonstrated the immense amount of effort that went into rehearsing. The discipline of our little ones on stage confirmed the rumor that pre-prep teachers possess the superpower of cat herding! The performance was complemented by the beautiful costumes that were sewn by a team of creative mothers. The show drew a full house of parents and grandparents but my overwhelming instinct was that it should be seen by a much wider audience. I was therefore pleased to hear that *The Lorax* was then repeated for the IP and College pupils.

Two weeks before *The Lorax* show, the Foundation Phase staged their tribute to Nelson Mandela which celebrated the 100th birthday of our iconic leader. The Grade 1-3 pupils treated us to a deeply moving experience as their production reminded us of the extraordinary life of Madiba and the values he taught us. Again, the quality of the production, and the profound message that it shared, begged for the FP show to be seen by a wider audience.

The Music Department, supported by the Drama and Art Departments, hosted the Kaleidoscope gala concert to showcase the best work by Oakhill musicians, dancers, actors and artists. The event attracted a capacity audience of 530 people who were treated to a concert that could only be described as exceptional. More than 120 children participated in the 35-item programme. It filled me with pride and humility at the same time to realise how much planning, effort and time teachers, pupils and parents must have spent on reaching such a standard across the board.

This term will end with the College 36-Hour Drama Festival. Next term we have the Matric Drama Showcase and Matric Art Exhibition to look forward to. Details to follow shortly.

Community and environmental involvement

It is appropriate and important that our school takes initiative in making a difference in the broader community and the environment. As an Eco-School, Oakhill keeps initiating projects to bring greater awareness of, and make a positive impact on, environmental matters. The environmental initiatives this term included the eco-brick project and beach clean-up that is always part of the Spring Walk.

On LO day, the Grade 11s visited Vermont Centre, Knysna Animal Welfare, Eyethu Educare Centre and Pledge Park as part of their community involvement. Interact had a productive term too, with their regular Friday community involvement outings including visits to Vermont Centre, Hlalani Creche and Knysna Animal Welfare. The Interact Fashion Show in collaboration with clothing businesses in town was a fun-filled fundraiser for future community projects.



Our Grade 7 pupils are busy collaborating with three township schools, namely Chris Nissan Primary, Fraaisig Primary and Sunridge Primary in a reading programme that will eventually end with a joint literary quiz to be held on 19 October.

The Prep School was a beehive of activity on 6 September when approximately 1000 cupcakes were produced by Prep pupils and distributed to people in the community who serve others. This was done to acknowledge what they do for Knysna. Each child brought 6 home-baked cupcakes to school where these were iced and decorated by our learners as part of their 67 minutes for Madiba. Cupcakes, with messages of thanks, were distributed to emergency services, the municipality, charities and other organisations that serve the community. The best part of this story is that the vision for the cupcake drive came from one of our Grade 5 learners.

Other special events this term included the unforgettable Matric Dance which coincided with the total lunar eclipse on the night. The Prep Spring Dance was another social highlight that was thoroughly enjoyed, despite the fact that it took place in the pouring rain. The Spring Walk (usually on the first Friday of September) had to be postponed due to the weather but eventually Prep pupils, staff and parents started the following week with a glorious Monday morning walk from Brenton-on-Sea to Buffalo Bay. Our College exchange students to Germany departed recently and will be away for a couple of weeks as ambassadors for our school and country. The College hosted a group of Argentinian exchange students this term who reported that our school has made a hugely positive impression on them.

It is hard to believe that this letter does not nearly contain the full story of term three at Oakhill. The truth is that countless beautiful things are happening every day in classrooms, on the playgrounds, on sports fields, on stages and between people within our school community and in our interaction with the broader community. This letter is by no means an attempt to suggest that everything is perfect at Oakhill. We keep striving to do better next time and learn from our mistakes. We count ourselves extremely fortunate that we can build our success on the amazing partnership between staff, parents, pupils and friends of Oakhill.

Wishing all a pleasant vacation before we tackle the final school term of 2018!

Kind regards

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Head of School

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