

Head of School: Jannie de Villiers | BA and BA Honours (NWU); HDE (US); B.Ed Honours (UCT)

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THE JOY OF LEARNING

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Dear Oakhill parents and friends

The dust has settled on the final term of the academic year and I am enjoying the silence that is descending, despite many last-minute boxes that still need to be ticked. It was heartwarming on the last day of term to see children, teachers and parents exchange 'thank yous', 'goodbyes' and 'best wishes'.

Oakhill is a very special school. The less formal approach in our school is often misunderstood by people who do not see the clear thinking, strong structure and deliberateness which underpins everything that we do. It is a powerful combination: The informal tone makes learners feel at home while the structure provides them with the predictability that makes them feel safe enough to explore fearlessly. I love the fact that we truly are a thinking school where children are encouraged to apply their minds, not only to master the content but more importantly to form an opinion. The thinking that we encourage and teach is modelled by the staff, as we also constantly challenge the status quo in our pedagogy, which has led to many significant changes in our learning and teaching since the school's inception but specifically over the past three years. In addition to producing top results at the end of our schooling process, which indicates how firm our academic foundation is, we colour-in over the lines as often as we can to enrich our pupils with much more than, and much different from, what is prescribed by the syllabus. Oakhill pupils learn hard and soft skills as well as attitudes and values aimed at equipping them in the 21st century to become wholehearted, productive global citizens who contribute meaningfully to their communities. In addition to the skills they gain in numeracy, literacy, communication and technology, they also learn about values such as those on the signpost at the front of the school, and many more, such as Growth Mindset, the power of collaboration, the satisfaction of sharing, the enrichment of diversity, the reward of delayed gratification, the beauty of sportsmanship and the joy of learning.

To the parents: People who hear what I do often express their sympathy with the fact that I have to deal with private school parents but I can honestly say that my engagement with parents has been a fulfilling and meaningful part of my job. I have said it often that I deem it appropriate that parents have high expectations from a service provider who is confident enough of its product to charge the premium that we do. What I have learned in my time as Head of School is that parents are always right... and the school is always right! Sometimes either the school or the parent may be ill-informed, misunderstanding, ignorant or a bit too proud, but both are always right. We should, therefore, make a pact that goes like this: If you as parents promise not to believe everything your children tell you about us, we will commit to not believing all the hair-raising stuff they tell us about you! Dear parents, thank you for the partnership I have enjoyed with you over the past three years. You are a great bunch!

To the Oakhill pupils: I love you. You come across as carefree and unphased - and many are - but you are also ambitious, focused and eager to succeed. You are confident but unassuming, tolerant but clear in your opinions. You are inclusive and non-judgemental. Because of your informal appearance, one could be misled to underestimate you. This might be why Oakhill tends to punch above its weight. Oakhillians are people who can think for themselves and I have always enjoyed engaging with you, from the Grade 000s to the seniors in matric. I lift my hat to the pupils of Oakhill and thank you for the respect and courtesy I have consistently received from you. When I visualize the idea of 'the joy of learning', I see you in my mind's eye and it fills ME with great joy!

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To the Oakhill staff:

- Admin: I am the honorary member of that girls' club in the admin block and it was really a delight to work with them for three years. They are a team of dedicated and competent individuals.
- Support staff: Our maintenance and housekeeping teams have a thankless job but if they don't do it well, the school will literally come to a grinding halt. I am a secret member of the housekeeping and maintenance teams. How do you spot the Head on a school campus? Look out for the overdressed worker walking around, picking up litter!
- Bus drivers: Have you ever observed the Oakhill bus drivers next to the sportsfield where one of our teams is playing? They take no prisoners and must sometimes be calmed down, they get so excited. They know every single child in this school and they care about every individual. They are responsible for managing our greatest safety risk as a school and they do so with the utmost professionalism and care.
- Co-curricular staff: The Sports department, Music School, Drama and Visual Arts departments enrich the lives of Oakhill children immensely. It is actually wrong to refer to these as co-curricular, because the sports and the arts, together with the outdoor education, are integral to the holistic learning programme that is the product of an Oakhill education.
- Prep staff: The Little Oaks, Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase staff are simply delightful. If you want to know what true passion, initiative, energy and dedication look like, I would confidently point you in the direction of these three phases in the Prep School.
- College staff: I am immensely proud of the standard of education the College teachers offer our College pupils. We expect from College staff to be as creative and innovative as their colleagues in the Prep but they have the added responsibility of preparing senior students for the most important academic assessment of their school career and for producing the results by which the world out there will measure them until further notice. I am proud to know that our Oakhill College teachers honour this responsibility with distinction, year after year.
- Board: I have appreciated the availability, approachability and trust I enjoyed from members of the Board but also their astonishing competency that is only surpassed by the generosity with their time, effort and concern for the best interest of Oakhill. They are doing a sterling job and I have learned a great deal from them.

We can reflect on a year of excellence at our school, amidst some turbulence in our parent community as we grappled with major questions about the future sustainability, growth and independence of Oakhill. The ownership of this independent school is the precious privilege of our parents that also comes with a huge responsibility. We might not have consensus on the exact way forward with the business model of our school but we do agree that the way is FORWARD, TOGETHER! What is important to note though is that the execution of the educational vision and mission of the school is not in flux. Our educational staff is running an exceptional school that keeps on serving the best interest of our pupils with excellence and a Growth Mindset that keeps them constantly looking for best practice. The various Celebration events and Valedictory functions that took place this term were wonderful opportunities to reflect with pride and gratitude on a very successful year of learning, growth and achievement by our pupils and staff. These events provided an inspiring insight and confirmation that Oakhill offers a brand of quality education that is unmatched in our region and on a par with the most highly esteemed schools in the country.

Kind regards

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