

24 February 2020

Dear parents, caregivers, guardians, teachers, and students,

Warmth of welcome

It's just been over a month since commencing my tenure at Oakhill school, and I already have such a strong sense of belonging from this embracing community. It has been such a pleasure meeting everyone at the various Grade get-togethers as well as getting to know some of the staff better whilst participating in the staff play, *Babka without Borders*. The adage, 'don't give up your day job' didn't pertain to these dramatically skilled members of staff – they could quite easily be treading the stage boards of Broadway and the Westend! We are fortunate to have such committed and willing staff and I would like to thank them for giving up their precious time and their contribution to the success of the play.

Good manners will open doors that the best education cannot – Clarence Thomas

I would like to commend the pupils of the College on their continued display of good manners and courtesy. Without fail, every day I receive a multitude of genuine greetings may it be verbal or a handshake. I also received many compliments from parents and spectators over the weekend at the Oakhill U19 Chukka Festival on the noteworthy display of manners and courtesy by our students. And genuine is the 'magic' word! Much is debated about the manners on display at other schools - the tipping of hats, the afternoon sir, the afternoon mam, but how much of it is a rehearsed narrative without substance? At Oakhill, I certainly get the sense that it is genuine, not forced and with substance. It speaks to the values instilled by parents, caregivers, and guardians as well as staff aligned with the ethos of the school of developing respectful, self-regulated individuals ready to embrace the world. I strongly encourage students to continue with their efforts and to extend this genuine display of manners and courtesy to everyone they may meet on the campus, externally and the broader community.

Tradition vs contemporary

When I arrived in Knysna at the beginning of January, I was invited to a few dinner parties and the most common question I was asked, when people heard that I was starting at Oakhill, was my stance on school uniforms especially coming from Johannesburg with its very traditional schools. I think my response did cause some surprise! Oakhill's approach to its uniform was one of the contributing factors in my decision to come to Oakhill. It was an indication of a school that was progressive and contemporary that I aspired to work at. However, I am cognisant that there is always going to be tension between traditional and contemporary thought on various aspects of schooling especially with parents, teachers and even students that went to/ worked at more traditional schools in the past. However, in terms of our school uniform, it is important to note that a comfortable and relaxed uniform does not mean that anything goes. The compliance of uniform guidelines is important as they underpin our values of understatedness, modesty, respect, fairness and school pride that should guide our behaviour and interactions. In addition, one of the underlying principles at Oakhill is to provide students the opportunity to self-regulate and I want to encourage students to assess their appearance every day (before coming to school, after school at sports matches, etc.) to see if it aligns with the uniform



guidelines, and not to wait for a teacher to monitor infringements. Constantly monitoring distracts from their core business of creating learning opportunities for students. I also want to encourage parents to support their children in their uniform decisions. Please see [this link](#) as a reminder for the uniform guidelines for the College.

Another contemporary issue is the use of cell phones at school. Social media posts over the last few years have decried the use of cell phones at school with headlines such as, '*I moved my son to a tech-free school*'; '*France moves to ban students from using cell phones in schools*'; and '*mobile phone bans for Australian school students for term one*'. A very contentious issue to say the least, especially with all the discourse on the skills required by children for the Fourth Industrial Revolution where technology is disrupting the way we live. A lot of these arguments are warranted, however, technology and the use of it is not going to go away. We need to understand that the deployment of technology has immense benefits and risks and how we manage it is critical. Students need to learn how to use it appropriately at school, to be given the skills to self-regulate their usage and the family unit to put in place the boundaries at home. Within the school context, teachers have varied classroom management styles, and this will inform the appropriate use of cell phones in their respective classes as well as providing learners opportunities in the management of such. With the phasing in of chrome books in the junior grades, less reliance on cell phones in the classroom will become the norm. In addition, as a learning community, we will need to continually evaluate and engage with this phenomenon that has become the cornerstone of our lives.

Reviewing and reflecting on practices.

It is inevitable, due to the dynamism of a school environment that situations and discipline issues arise, as well as school uniform considerations, that necessitates us as individuals and as a school to review and reflect on our practices. It can be a very difficult and uncomfortable process; however, it is essential as it develops dynamic and engaged conversations to create an important learning opportunity for us as individuals and as a school to develop further and to make changes in the best interest of the whole school community. With this in mind, over the next couple of weeks, we will be reviewing certain disciplinary structures and processes, as well as uniform considerations, ensuring its alignment with the values and ethos of the school. Once again this will be a collaborative effort with input from all stakeholders.

In addition, we will also be reviewing and reflecting on our offering both academically and co-curricular in an attempt to answer the question of how we are going to further prepare our students for meaningful, satisfying and sustainable lives in a world where technology is fundamentally transforming learning, work, play, and wellbeing. Throughout the year, in incremental stages, there will be opportunities focused on creating a dynamic, innovative and responsive educational environment, aligned with our values, that explores alternative approaches of teaching and assessment to ensure that our students are further successful in the 21st century (we are already 20 years into it!). Not to look towards the future but to live the future today.

Review of the first month

What an incredible last few weeks! Our U19 Waterfront Chukka Festival certainly lived up to its promise of being one of the best yet, celebrating 9 years of water polo excellence aligned with our festival

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THE JOY OF LEARNING

format philosophy of providing young sportsmen and women an opportunity for learning and growth to achieve their best as a team and individually. Our various sporting codes have also had a busy time with playing fixtures in the region and going on tours enhancing their educational experience. The drama department is in full rehearsal mode for their various upcoming performances: the Grade 10 production called *Africanacity : A Celebration of African Poetry* in the Drama Studio on 26 February, as well as the Grade 12 production *Masquerade* (PoMo) on 16 and 17 March. The music department is also in full rehearsal mode working on a repertoire at the choir camp held over the weekend at Herolds Bay. The choir members certainly impressed with their excellent manners and helpfulness.

Thank you to all the Oakhill staff, pupils, parents and the broader community for their presence and support throughout the start of this term at the various sporting, cultural and fundraising events. We look forward to seeing you at the Oakhill U15 Chukka Festival taking place this week from 27 February to 1 March.

Warm regards,

Wayne Purchase