

6 December 2012

Dear Parents

So, if this were a letter from 2020, what kind of world would we be reading about? What would our children be making of the world we handed over to them? And, what aspect of their education would prove to have been the most telling?

Lessons are more easily understood looking backwards, but we live in a world that's redefining the way it works – and what constitutes work – in an uncomfortably unrelenting way. We need to imagine the future to make sense of the present, and that challenges the incremental planning orthodoxy that many of us have grown up with.

Reading and writing, an understanding of where we came from and the physical nature of the world we live in, adding and subtracting, multiplying and dividing --- these are all necessary elements of education, of preparing for the future. But teaching what we know isn't enough to prepare for a future that is in many respects unknown. Information, and how to use it, relationships and how to leverage them and white space thinking --- these are some of the elements needed to make a way into the future. We think they are just as important a part of education as the formal curriculum, and this school works hard at making space for innovation and creativity to work with knowledge, discipline and leadership. It's a kind of 360 degrees approach to education that builds confidence to make the future, rather than merely coping while being swept up by it.

So what are we doing today to make in impact on 2020? It's been a hard year, in many respects, and disappointing too, given the grubby politics we have to endure. Many within our community have found no refuge from the chilliest of economic winds, and we have seen it in our enrolment numbers, which have stalled for the first time in many years. We hope next year brings better times for all in the towns from which our students come. It has been a hard and sad year for the Andrews and the Ovenstone families: Celia Andrews, a past parent and board member, and mother of Holly and Jonty and wife of Mark , and Neil Ovenstone, father of Georgina and husband of Susie, passed away this year. We remember both with much love.

It's been a disappointing year in that too much of our politics has been stripped of the morality and integrity of the immediate post-apartheid era. Where once there was service, there is now self-enrichment; where humility was a virtue, there's now arrogance born only of entitlement, nothing more. Two contrasting global magazine cover stories capture the essence of our paradox. While *Time* magazine salutes "Africa Rising", the world's next economic powerhouse, *The Economist's* "Cry the beloved country" reminds us that South Africa is no longer the hope of a different, more

successful Africa; rather we are looking more like its failed past, and this ironically at a time when the failed states are moving quickly in the other direction.

And yet, the contrasts between Africa and South Africa, between growth and decline, between right and wrong, are just passing moments that contain within them rich cause for optimism and hope. South Africa has choices to make, and a future to chart. We are resilient, brave, hard-working people who cannot surrender our fate to the greedy ruling elites: we need to be engaged and act decisively and wisely because, ultimately, it is our children's future that is at stake.

And for inspiration, we need look no further than our children ... they are making their voices heard, and helping define the kind of future they want. Education nourishes the minds that make the decisions that build the future. Students at Oakhill do this every day, and our alumni are now making their way around South Africa and beyond, creating and shaping the kind of world they want.

There has been much creating and shaping at Oakhill too, and for now it is worth mentioning just two developments: we announced recently we had reached agreement to buy nearly 18ha of land we need for sports fields, and so the end of a search, and the beginning of something much more exciting. Allied to this, we have also reorganized our fund-raising structures to make them more efficient and connected to the demands of the time. The PTA has therefore come to an end in its present form and we consolidate fund-raising in a board sub-committee under the direct lead of Shane. It makes sense in that we align strategy with fund-raising and investment, and Shane will be able to better drive and coordinate this increasingly important aspect of Oakhill's life. In time, a Parents Association will emerge, to meet quite different needs. Shane will deal with that in the coming months.

The many magical moments this year have been captured in the various celebrations of excellence and at other school occasions. The overriding sense that comes from all that takes place both on and off campus is the joy in the breadth of what we do --- it is the ultimate tribute to Shane and all those who work at the school that such a diverse range of subjects and activities are offered. We are in so many ways the school we want to be --- in many ways, we are more than the school we should be given size and financial strength. This is possible because of the extraordinary efforts of many people:

- **Teachers** do more for and with our children than many of us realise. They teach, inspire, encourage, push and cajole, discipline ... they are often the difference between a pass and a fail, helping children develop their passions and maximize their abilities. They are the people who help children get into (what Sir Ken Robinson calls) their "element".

- **Shane and Robyn Kidwell** have been with us for four eventful and defining years ... for the school and for all those students who pass through the entrance every day. Being a headmaster is many things in one --- part teacher, part psychologist, part disciplinarian, part businessman ... but always a leader. It is a roller coaster ride of emotional highs and lows, and couldn't be done without Robyn's support. We thank them both for an extraordinary year of passion and commitment.
- **The Board's** Laurent Belet, Jackie Kalani, Guy Thesen, Eric Watson, Suzi Giliomee, Jon Salters, Gordon Shutte and Susan Kotze make up a strong team whose collective will reflects a diversity of opinion. Jon's leadership of a demanding finance portfolio was as insightful as ever, and we were pleased to welcome Gordon Shutte to share the load. Apart from the school finances, there has been the capital raising project and negotiations with the seller of the land. Both the latter processes have required much time and diligence and we are fortunate to have had Jon and Gordon to guide us through this process. Suzi Giliomee ends a six year term of office in March, and I cannot thank her enough for starting what has been an interesting journey with Tracy Boomer and me. Soon after, Guy Thesen and Eric Watson joined, and they will soon start their sixth year of service. Anne Clarke also served for six years and it's important to acknowledge this because the time given over years creates the consistency and certainty of purpose that precedes confidence. In addition to the elected or nominated representatives, Shane sits on the Board, and is supported by Suzanne Griffin, our Bursar, and teacher representatives James Cross and Melanie Cloete. In addition, SRC president Lulu Read and her colleagues have attended meetings. The input of a diverse Board, key staff members and student leaders ensures decisions taken are reflective of a wide range of interests that have children at the centre, and are aligned with the objectives and philosophy of the school.
- **The Planning Committee** is led by Paul Kotze, and includes Gordon Shutte, Shane Kidwell and Angus Bridge. Consulting to this Committee are Ian and Merinda Brymer, and more recently we have called on the expertise of Dave Hall and we thank them for their committed input. The conclusion of the land acquisition is a tribute to the work Paul and his team have put in, and their thanks ultimately will be in the joy of watching Oakhill students play and compete in what will be one of the finest sporting theatres in the country.
- **The PTA:** Cindy Paggis (Chair), Susan Kotze, Lea Dawkins, Bridget Lupton, Nathalie Belet, Stacey Campbell, Jolanda Meyer, Zelda Vosloo, Debbie Nicoll, Linda Lifson and Debra Seager have produced many fantastic events this year that have raised funds and helped build relationships.
- **Class Moms**, as always, link so many different aspects of our work.
- **Justine Edwards** continues to be here, there and everywhere: the Class Moms co-ordinator, a Class Mom, school photographer, co-ordinator of Oakhill Echoes and Old Oaks newsletter.
- **Vanessa Eyre** has completed the overhaul of our Bursary and Development Office and we are in good shape to build for the future. We cannot thank her enough for turning an adhoc

process into strategically-driven bursary programme. She is also involved in community outreach and manages the MySchool project (which Lea Dawkins will be taking over in 2013.)

- **Petra Quinlan** has continued her community outreach work and photography, and has been joined by fellow photographers **Jo Tanner, Stacey Campbell, Jolanda Meyer** and **Penny Foyn**. Collectively, their efforts mean we have a photographic record of the key school activities. And when Penny isn't taking photographs, she is painting faces for the numerous school events that need her creativity!
- Others who have been involved in the community outreach programme with Rondevlei School this year have been **Stacey Campbell, Liezl Smith, Michelle Spilsbury, Zelda Vosloo, Penny Foyn, Gina van der Byl** and **Lauren Gebhard**.
- **Brenda McKechnie** is again editing our yearbook, along with Sheila Pasio (College co-ordinator) and Julie Stevenson (Prep co-ordinator).
- **Muir Optometrists** for free eye screening of Little Oaks.
- **Oakhill's** administrators keep the engine running for everyone else ... **Barbie Leibbrandt, Philip Stewart** and his team, **Suzanne Griffin, Catherine Brodie, Heather Mayne, Philip Mangiza, Elna Brown, Shobana Moodley** and her team and **Lizanne Hafner** --- heroes all, who provide support to teachers and the headmaster.
- **Janine** has supported me over the past six years; without her love this wouldn't be as much fun!
- A school cannot function without the dedication and support of **parents**, and children cannot grow and flourish without them.

If this time of year is your busy period, we wish you every success. If it is a time of rest, we wish you enjoyment and contentment. If it is a time of religious or spiritual significance, we wish you many blessings.

If you would like to share any thoughts or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me on 083-252-0597 or peterwallington@telkomsa.net.

With best wishes



Peter Wallington
Chairman | Oakhill School Board of Governors