

Dear Parents

At the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind - from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems caused by someone or something 'out there' to seeing how our actions create the problems we experience. (Peter Senge)

We continue to talk much about the journey we undertake as individuals, as communities and as a country. Journeys offer so many opportunities for learning and as Oakhill endeavours to be a true learning and thinking organization in all that it does, it needs to keep in mind that this journey will not be a gentle downhill stroll, but that with all Odysseys come wonderful opportunities for growth, making mistakes and ultimately adventure and danger.

Oakhill School continues to grow in stature (and numbers) and as we endeavour to become a world-class learning institution we need to continue to embrace excellence, remain connected to the broader South Africa as well as remaining true to our values and mission in terms of ensuring young men and women are prepared for an ever-changing world. Ultimately though, we want our young men and women to be engaged with the issues of the day, to feel they can make a difference and to be true to the values enshrined in our constitution. Peter Senge says in his book 'The Fifth Discipline': *Learning is not just taking in information. Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we recreate ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life. There is within us a deep hunger for this type of learning.* Our journey as a school and as a community needs to reach out and embrace this type of learning.

I have been talking much of late, to parents, scholarship candidates, and pupils in both the College and Prep School about what it takes to make a great student or learner. What is the true essence of a great thinker and scholar? There are so many articles about this and many of them mention the obvious and we all have our own personal opinions of what creates the foundation for success. Nevertheless, I believe that to allow young men and

women to grow and develop and ultimately be prepared for a 21st century world we need to encourage parents to embrace certain key principles in supporting this learning.

Firstly, parents should encourage their sons and daughters to endeavour to **sort out their own issues at school**. I for one, know how tempting it is to get involved in solving a problem for my son or daughter. I know I could save them so much pain and emotional turmoil and when I think back to my childhood I would definitely love to have not gone through this pain. Our first instinct as a parent is to protect from harm, whether it be physical harm or emotional scarring, but unfortunately this does more damage than good. Our kids, despite our loving concern, need to experience the heartache of conflict and more importantly conflict resolution. They need to work it out for themselves.

I'm not suggesting that there is not a time when parents need to step in. There is no doubt that kids cannot resolve all the problems which get thrown at them and often need adult help, but I have experienced an extraordinary amount of parent intervention this term, in a variety of issues. This unfortunately has damaged the learning process for the children involved and often our expectations and dreams for our sons and daughters get caught up in this emotional whirlwind.

Oakhill certainly does not always get it right, but I can assure you that we want to solve issues and, more importantly, we want to encourage the young men and women in our care to learn about the complexities of solving emotionally charged issues.

Secondly, one of the secrets of success in life is **controlling impulsivity** and just as I encourage the pupils at Oakhill to embrace this difficult skill, I would like all parents to consider honing the skill as well. I have been involved in numerous emotionally charged conversations this term which ultimately could easily have been resolved by the kids themselves, had the parents controlled their impulse to react, and the child would have also learnt a precious life lesson in the process.

Thirdly, **parents need to trust the process**. Education is not a 100 metre sprint, it is more like a marathon - it takes time, it's arduous and there are times when you feel like you can run forever, but there are also times when you cramp and collapse. I have had the good fortune of teaching Grade 11 English this term and have been reminded that we should try not to assess too often, because true learning actually takes place in the process of discussing, collaborating and researching. This of course takes time and is messy and uncomfortable which is great, because this means that your sons and daughters are growing. One of Oakhill's strengths is that it has wonderfully committed and passionate educators who understand the educative process and what it entails. You not only need to trust the process, but you need to trust the educators in the process of nurturing and developing the young minds in their care.

Lastly, **parents need to listen** but remember that they are emotionally biased toward their sons and daughters. There is a big difference between listening, empathizing and supporting, to overreacting and exploding to a given set of circumstances. Attending school

each day is exhausting - it's hard work emotionally, socially and academically and often all kids need is for you to hear and agree with the way they have interpreted a given set of circumstances. They do not necessarily want you to react! I know that my beautiful wife often refrains from telling me things because she knows I'll explode and react in a way which is completely inappropriate and out of context. We all have to learn to listen and ignore the deeply ingrained assumptions and generalisations we make because of our childhood experiences.

Oakhill continues to stretch itself academically, on the sports field and on the stage. Success builds success and there is now a wonderfully healthy environment within both our College and our Prep School of raised expectations and standards. These raised expectations bring more opportunities for competition amongst peers and more opportunities for growth and development. We should encourage our kids to learn from these circumstances, not to shy away from them.

Finally, we need to remember that true learning organisations are places that continually expand their capacity for creating their future - we need to ensure that we continue to grow as a community, as a school and ultimately as an individual. I know I have still got a long way to go and I would encourage you to join me on the journey - it will benefit your children.

- **Article in the Knysna-Plett Herald**

Many of you would have read the article in the KPH regarding the allegation of bad driving made against our bus drivers and my response. I would like to assure you that transporting your kids is a really important and significant responsibility for us and one which we do not take lightly. We have installed *Cyber Sleuth* in all our vehicles and this helps us track the speed of the buses and driving habits of the drivers. I am pleased with the results and can confirm that we hold our drivers accountable according to these daily printouts. Nevertheless, we also trust these wonderful gentlemen, Ettiene, Claemont and Elvin and support them in endeavouring to do this difficult task to the best of their ability.

I am also pleased to announce that our bus fleet will be replaced by a new fleet of Mercedes Benz buses in November this year which will continue to improve the service we provide to our community.

- **Staffing and advertisements for vacant positions in the press**

There will be an advert in the local press this week announcing that we continue to grow in numbers across the school. We will be advertising for three positions in the Preparatory School, namely a Grade 000, Grade 4 and Grade 7 teacher.

There is nothing untoward about these adverts except to say that we are growing and we need to acquire more staff to ensure we have the capacity going into 2012.

It is with sadness though, that I announce that Sallie Pettit, our current Grade 4 teacher, has resigned to take up a teaching position in Johannesburg. Sallie has made a significant

difference here in the last while and her wisdom and calm determined ways have certainly built strength and stability into our IP phase of the school. Nevertheless, she will be departing at the end of the year to be closer to family, particularly her son who lives in Johannesburg. We wish her every blessing as she takes leave of us to start this new chapter in her life.

We are advertising for a Grade 000 teacher because Caroline Payton, our Academic Head in the ECD phase of the school, will be teaching Grade R next year. We will be double streaming in this grade to ensure that we keep the classes small and intimate at this crucial stage of a child's development.

We are also short staffed at Grade 7 level and as a result we will be adding a position to our IP phase of the school.

Lastly, it is with sadness that we have taken leave of Rose Solomon, our nursing sister, this term. Rose, who always has a smile on her face and never complains, suffers from Lupus and has had a torrid time of late and her doctors have advised that she rests. Rose has made a significant difference at Little Oaks and has always given of her best and her dry sense of humour, her optimism and love of life will be sorely missed on our campus. I wish her every blessing as she endeavours to battle this dastardly disease.

- **Music in the Blue and Light Blue**

We celebrated *Music in the Blue* earlier this term and once again it was a sell-out. No one was disappointed as the young men and women of Oakhill, once again, excelled on every front. Many thanks to Olga Schoeman who heads up our Music department for ensuring that this was once again a success this year.

George Potgieter was not to be outdone though, and his energy and enthusiasm has ensured that we will continue to have talented musicians for years to come. *Light Blue* was staged for the first time in the school's history and there is no doubt that it is here to stay.

Congratulations to all who performed and a special thanks to Danie Brown for the tireless hours spent behind the mixing desk. Watch this space for the CD which will be published in the near future.

- **Scholarship achievements**

We have also recently held a scholarship cocktail function for all the families whose sons and daughters have won scholarships for 2012. We are fortunate to have a particularly talented group of young men and women who live the Joy of Learning, are self-disciplined and strive to grow, learn and think. I have no doubt that they will continue to lead our school positively in all areas next year. I would like to congratulate the following for achieving in this area:

Nicolas Reid	Oakhill Prep
Morgan Watson	Oakhill Prep

Kia Rudolph	Plett Primary
Jessica Gebhard	Oakhill Prep
Nicholas Thomson	Oakhill Prep
Louis Maarsingh	Oakhill Prep
Caitlin Bodley	Plett Primary
Chandré Strydom	Knysna Primary
Jake Turner	Oakhill Prep
Callam Tait	Oakhill Prep
Tyler Solomon	Oakhill Prep
Abigail Dunn	Plett Primary
Amy Lupton	Oakhill Prep
Ruby Fisch	Greenwood
Meghan Erasmus	Knysna Primary

- **College SRC**

I am pleased to congratulate the following young men and women who have been elected to the College SRC for 2012. They will be ably led by **Lulu Read**, who has been elected as **President** and has already shown wisdom beyond her years. I am confident that our College is in good hands with these young men and women at the helm.

Vice President: Nicholas Cuthbert

Grade 8

Sonia Moodley

Dean Matter

Grade 9

Fern Wolf

Sean Brodie

Finn Stevenson

Grade 10

Adam Oosthuizen

Josh Pama

Niklas Martin

Grade 11

Luke Bell

Anya Damonse

Rosey Finn

Paul Wallington

- **The future beckons...**

The end of 2011 is now looming and once again, I have to wonder in awe and amazement at how quickly it has slipped by. Oakhill stands on the cusp of a new and exciting era as we head toward 2012 and I am excited to announce that the Chinese Embassy has agreed to provide a **Mandarin teacher to Oakhill in 2012 and 2013**. This is an exciting partnership and I have no doubt that it will allow us to develop a relationship with schools in China and eventually ensure that we take an annual trip to this emerging powerhouse.

這將是一個令人興奮的冒險！

We have also recently held a technology think-tank which incorporated teachers, students, parents and past parents. It was an exciting discussion and one which will drive us into the future positively. These discussions are meant to help shape our thinking as we endeavour to embrace a 21st century teaching and learning style which will allow all students to grow and develop to their full potential. Ultimately, this conversation will ensure that we are preparing our young men and women for the future. One of the outcomes of this will be introduced next year: all Grade 10 students who choose IT will have to have their own laptop to ensure flexibility and growth in this area.

Eventually, all Oakhill students will have to have their own device and will be engaging with our intranet and the world on a continual basis. Watch this space!

Next term is host to our *Celebration of Excellence* for each school and I would encourage all parents to diarise these dates to ensure that they can celebrate the year's achievements with us. The dates are as follows:

College: Gr 8-12	Saturday, 22 October 2011
Little Oaks:	Monday, 5 December 2011
Foundation Phase: Gr 1-3	Tuesday, 6 December 2011
Intermediate Phase: Gr 4-7	Wednesday, 7 December 2011

The Matric Valediction takes place on Friday 21 October 2011.

Finally, (I feel like I've said that a couple of times in this newsletter) I tell you of a story of hope and extraordinary courage and determination. Oakhill is making a difference in the community. Oakhill raised in excess of R50,000 in support of the families who lost loved ones in the Rheenendal bus disaster. Most of these proceeds went to purchasing the meals provided at the funeral services and I would personally like to thank all who donated so willingly to embrace these families at their time of need. We would like to spend the balance of your donations, after consultation with the families, creating a memorial garden for those who lost their lives. There is hope after disaster and heartache and in the words of Jonathan Jansen: "there is the promise of a rainbow that lies behind the rain". Thank you for your generosity, for your love and your trust as we endeavour to provide a learning experience for your sons and daughters here at Oakhill. Enjoy the precious time you have with them now in the holiday.

Kindest regards



Shane Kidwell