



Dear Parents

Welcome back to Term 2, 2013 after an incredibly hectic start to the year! Oakhill certainly celebrated its 21st Birthday in style and a huge thank you to all who were involved in making the Birthday weekend a successful one. I would particularly like to single out James Cross, who chaired the committee which organized all these events, and Susan Kotze, who selflessly gave of her time and energy to ensure success.

Not only did we celebrate our 21st Birthday, but we celebrated the breaking of ground on the new Oakhill Sport Campus. You can only imagine the huge amount of work that has enabled this project to get off the ground and I would like to pay tribute to our Planning Committee, chaired by Paul Kotze, for seeing this project through. Ian Brymer and Dave Hall, who consult to this committee, have also been instrumental in the success and Jon Salters and Gordon Shutte from our Finance committee have ensured that we have the finance in place to proceed. I am sure I speak on behalf of our whole community when I say that we appreciate what these men and women have done for us in the last while. I have no doubt that we will be even more thankful for their efforts when our young men and women step onto those fields later in the year to celebrate their first fixture on their own facility.

Our Grade 10 Odyssey also took place last term and, once again, this facilitation has played a pivotal role in the way we approach things at Oakhill. Riaan van Straten needs to be thanked for all his efforts in ensuring that all our kids were kept safe over the 400km journey and I know that all the Grade 10 parents, particularly, are appreciative of his painstaking efforts. We talk often about allowing our young men and women to grow and learn for life in the real world but after reading all the Grade 10 letters to me while they were in solo, I am even more convinced that this facilitation has an important place in the life of our school. One young man thanked the school for the opportunity because it allowed him to understand that he has far more potential and ability to achieve things than he ever dreamed of. He indicated that he had pushed himself beyond the boundaries which he initially thought were impenetrable. If we can only unlock this thought in all of our young men and women, I have no doubt that they will go on to achieve their dreams and aspirations in the future.

Term 1 also saw us hosting an Open Day, as well as our Scholarship process, which drew more candidates than ever before. Not only did we have many candidates but it has been extremely difficult to differentiate between the amazing talent on offer and I am hoping that those who have narrowly missed getting a scholarship will still consider Oakhill as the school of choice for 2014.

We live in challenging times. Our children are facing many pressures that we, as parents, certainly did not have to deal with when we were growing up and this has caused our anxiety levels to rise. These pressures range from the political situation in our country and the levels of corruption, nepotism and lack of moral courage to the crises in education. Pass rate levels go up as if they were linked to inflation and the standard of education continues to plunge to all-time lows - 30% is now considered a pass. Universities have to find new ways of benchmarking matric results and admission to our top Universities is now extremely difficult to come by. The economy which is placing pressure on all of us continues to emphasize the importance of a good education, but as the financial squeeze continues, fewer of us can afford Independent schooling.

The world has made some fundamental shifts and many of us are struggling to accept this fact. What was good for us when we were schooled, must surely be good for our kid, is a concept that is now more irrelevant than ever! It is incumbent on schools like Oakhill to prepare kids for a world which is turning out to be nothing like the one I grew up in in the sixties and seventies. Our world is fast-paced, we have to make split-second decisions as a result of being digitally connected and instant gratification is the order of the day.

I had lunch with an Old Oak last term: Alistair Pott who works for Amazon.com as their Senior Product manager for Zappos, who are the biggest online retailer of shoes and clothing, all over the world. I asked him what he thought the most important skills for life after school were. At an assembly earlier in the day, he indicated that the real world was not a fair place and that you had to have the self-discipline and confidence to persevere. Resilience and hard-work are what it takes to succeed. There are no quick fixes!

So what are the most important skills that our children will need in the future?

Modern skills include integrating creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and innovative collaboration to ensure we produce real and energetic thinkers for the future. The days of leaving school, getting a degree and being employed by a large corporate are over. Our young men and women are going to have to create their own destiny. They are going to have to collaborate with each other and network with the world to ensure success and significance in their lifetime.

So, when I hear parents say that they do not agree with peer teaching or group work, I cringe, because they are speaking from their own mindset of industrial era thinking. We should be celebrating peer teaching, we should be celebrating the fact that our young men and women are creatively and innovatively solving problems. A parent showed me a video of their son teaching another member of his class via skype - we should see more of this, we should encourage it and we should certainly celebrate it because these are the skills that they will need for the future. Teaching a concept is a great way of learning it and it develops our critical thinking skills.

Another comment I hear from parents is that their children are bored. This once again speaks to our fast paced world of instant gratification. Our generation has also fallen into this trap - we demand to be entertained and if we are not enjoying a particular movie we flip the channel to the next. This mind-set is brought to school and teachers often get blamed for their children's poor performance or results at school. We somehow think that because our children are not enjoying a certain section of Mathematics or Art History, that it is the teacher's fault. We forget that to master something takes hours of painstaking

work. Hours of trying and failing, hours of hard slog and this unfortunately is not necessarily fun. The fun only materializes once you have dedicated a significant amount of time and effort to the task at hand, which in turn gives you the results you aimed for.

Teachers are human beings and in a small school like Oakhill, our pupils will often be taught by the same teacher for a particular subject year after year. We cannot, like the media and other sectors of society, press the remote and change the channel, or just get rid of the teacher. Our young men and women need to learn to adapt and collaborate with the people around them. When I compare our teaching team with teams from other like-minded schools I am honestly encouraged by the level of ability and professionalism shown by our staff across the board. Education is in a crisis simply because we do not respect and trust the teaching profession any longer. As a parent and a teacher I am beginning to see the fault-lines that cause this break of respect and trust.

As parents, I would encourage you to respect and understand that teachers see your sons and daughters in a different light to the way you do. We see your kids for a large amount of time each day and I would urge you to listen and consider the comments made by teachers in the same way in which you would respect advice from a lawyer or doctor. Teachers see things which could help your young child to grow and develop appropriately and I certainly do not know of one teacher at Oakhill who would not want to see kids thrive in a happy environment. We do not naturally like to hear negative feedback about our children, but if you do hear some criticism, I would encourage you to see it as a positive from a teacher who has been bold and courageous enough to care enough about your son or daughter, to tell you.

Oakhill teachers are innovative and connected and I would like to congratulate Sheila Pasio and Debbie Nicoll on the publication of a collaborative article they wrote about a reading project they undertook with Grade 3's and 8's. Please see our webpage if you would like to read the article.

I am aware that there is a Justin Bieber concert on the 8th May and I announced at an assembly in Term 1, that we would not be making **ANY** exceptions for disruption to our academic programme for this event. Not only is it unfair to the families and children who do not attend these concerts, but it is disruptive to the academic rhythm of a particularly important academic term. Please be aware that Wednesday the 8th is a Cycle test day in the Prep School and a Standardised test day in the College. We will not be allowing anyone to write this test on another day and should you miss school, to attend this event, you will be doing so without our permission and will receive a zero mark for the test. Grade 4 - 7 will be writing a Natural Science test that day and the College Standardised test programme is as follows:

Date	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
08/05	HSS	Afrikaans	Maths	Life Science	Afrikaans

Please do not phone in asking for permission to miss these tests - it will not be allowed and we appreciate your cooperation regarding this. Furthermore, please take note that should your son or daughter be involved in a sporting fixture on Wednesday the 8th May, they will be expected to fulfill their commitments.

We have a balanced and evenly paced Term ahead of us and I would encourage you to ensure that your children find a pleasing rhythm to all they do here. I have seen immense growth in so many of your sons

and daughters since the beginning of the year and I look forward to supporting you and them as we grow together in the months ahead.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'S'.

Shane Kidwell