



THE JOY OF LEARNING

HEADMASTER'S NEWSLETTER

3 December 2013

Dear Parents

2013 has been an unbelievably significant year for Oakhill. It has been our 21st Birthday year and we celebrated this fact at the start of the year with a beautifully affirming dinner on Thesen Island. Allan Graham, our founder Headmaster, and his wife Val returned for that occasion and we attracted many other Old Oaks joined us to celebrate.

21st Birthdays are significant rites-of-passage and Oakhill's 21st birthday has been just that. We have had a year filled with wonderful reminiscing, meaningful celebration and many heartfelt thanks to those who started us on this journey 21 years ago, but as we ponder the past and the future, we need to remain steadfast in focusing on the now and as we come to the end of another year we celebrate the students of 2013, who are talented in their own way and they make Oakhill an amazing place to live and work.

Oakhill has purchased and started developing 17 hectares of land down the Welbedacht road. This was made possible through the generosity of a grandfather at Oakhill and I have no doubt that this purchase and development will change the life of the school forever.

We have now completed the construction of the field project, on this land, and our boys and girls will play their cricket, hockey and rugby fixtures on these fields in 2014. Furthermore we have started the construction of a full-size Astroturf hockey field which will be ready from the end of March 2014. Our first festival on this facility will be the Independent Schools Co-Ed Hockey Festival on the 1st of May and we look forward to celebrating this facility in the new-year as well. This project was also made possible by a current parent who has taken a R6 million debenture to ensure success in the future.

Our Master Plan process allowed us to plot our fields and Astro in the correct place and we are looking forward to being able to start other projects on this land in the future.



Great schools are made up of great teams and lest we forget – it has taken a super-human effort to get to this place and we could not have done it if it were not for the commitment, vision, determination and perseverance of a team of parents and staff who have toiled on our behalf.

Paul Kotze has led this process in all respects and, as Chairman of the Planning Committee, has held us all accountable to achieve the goals set. Future generations will perhaps have forgotten who Paul is but when they read our school history they will know they are indebted to him for his wisdom, insight and time.

Ian Brymer has also helped on this committee, as has **Phillip Stewart**, our Estate Manager, and between the two of them they have ensured that we will have a magnificent facility.

Dave Hall, who sits on our Board, is also an engineer and has kindly project managed the Astroturf project as well as overseeing the groundwork for the fields.

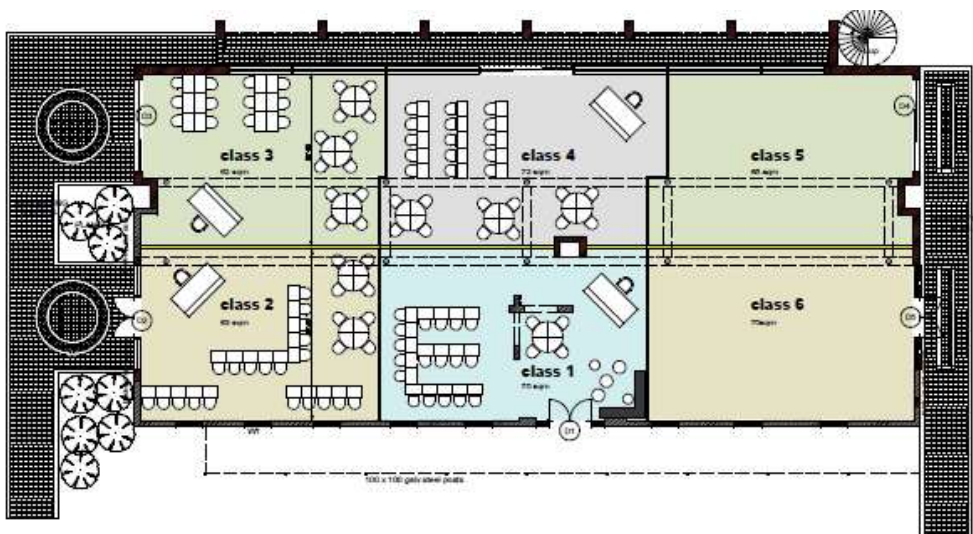
I would also like to personally thank **Gordon Shutte**, who sits on the Board, the Finance Committee and the Board Planning Committee. I have personally relied on his advice and expertise in ensuring that we move forward knowing that we have done what is best for our school in all respects. He devotes an enormous amount of time to Oakhill and we would certainly not be announcing these developments were it not for his support.

Jon Salters, who chairs our Finance Committee, continues to believe and drive us forward practically but also from a visionary perspective. He is an eternal optimist and always finds solutions to complex problems. Jon spent many hours devising our debenture documents and ultimately ensuring that all we have done could be financed responsibly and accountably. Many thanks to him for his friendship and his support.

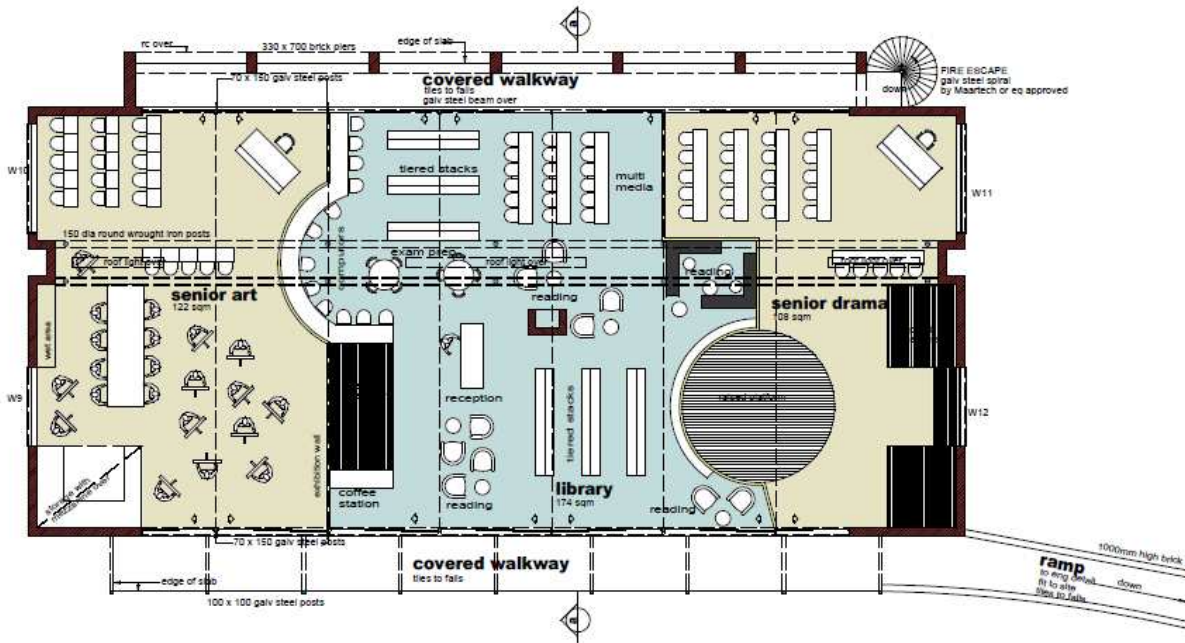
I would also like to personally thank **Jenny Gardy** and her committee who are heading up our Astroturf Fundraising Committee. She has quietly and efficiently gone about ensuring that we will have an Astroturf by April 2014 – thank you! I am also pleased to announce that a current parent has donated R50,000 for the construction of a scoreboard on the Astroturf facility. Please watch out for other opportunities to donate towards this project.

Art Block

Meanwhile back on the current campus we have started making plans to renovate the current art block and we have been given a generous donation of R1.5 million by a prospective parent and we are now only R500,000 short of our target for this project. This should be completed by October 2014.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN 1:100



These are the current plans which are being discussed for this building and we are excited about what this new space will provide as we seek to allow our kids to experience a world-class education at Oakhill.

Jon Salters, our Finance Committee Chair, also undertook to investigate the design of a new Music Centre at the entrance of the school and no sooner had we seen the plans than someone volunteered to help bankroll this project as well. This is what it could look like:



Thank you to **Martin Young** and his fundraising committee, who are looking at raising funds for the music department specifically. These efforts will ensure that we grow this vital part of our organisation.

We also have amazing new plans for the construction of a new parking and entrance area for the school. If you would like to get involved in this project or make a difference in this area please contact me.

You may ask why I have shared all of these stories. Simply because I have been **overwhelmed** by the generosity of many in our community who have bought into the vision of creating a great school right here in Knysna. 2013 has been a watershed year: we have raised close to R20 million to ensure that your sons and daughters can experience the facilities that we have always dreamed of.

It is no coincidence that Oakhill is turning 21 at a time when much is being said about 21st century skills and ensuring that we prepare our students for the future. Bernie Trilling, at the beginning of his book: *21st Century Skills*, says: *this book is dedicated to all the 22nd century learners who will surely wonder what all the fuss is about and why it was so hard for everyone in the 21st century to do the obvious.*



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We are doing the obvious by taking the decision to upgrade our wireless network in 2014. We would like to take this next step on our journey to becoming a 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) school. We have started this process by introducing iPads in the Prep School and laptops in the College and we have managed to iron out many of the problems encountered on the way. The time is now right to install a wireless network which will support our dream of being a truly online school, and my thanks to the Board for approving this next step in the process.

2013 has been a year to reflect, but in true Oakhill style, we have not been able to do so for long - our gaze is once again on the future and I am excited by the overwhelming majority of parents, pupils and staff members who have allowed us to dream, to plan and then to carry out these dreams. We have a beautiful school in so many ways and this era in Oakhill's history will be littered with stories of generosity.

Staffing

Altogether there have been 4 new additions to the staff team this year and another 6 for the beginning of 2014. All of them will have had a remarkable impact and their uniqueness has added to our diversity of thought, culture and experience.

Adolf Groenewald has added some wisdom in our Geography department and joins the House Mentor team in the College; **Terri Pautz**, our Girls' Hockey Coach, joined us as a full-time Graphic Designer; **Carika Rademan** joined us as the Director of Music from Woodridge in PE; **Ian Melliar** joined us as our Water Polo professional and has made an immediate impact.

Karine Trollip joins us from the beginning of 2014 as our new Marketing and Commercial Manager, as does **Andrew Browne**, who has been appointed as the new Senior Master and HOD Mathematics in the College. **Zachry Viljoen**, a young graduate, joins us to give flexibility in the Science and Maths departments, and **Robyn Humphreys**, a talented musician and dancer, joins us to help in the Drama and History departments. **Liam Bell** joins us from Chesterhouse to run our Business Studies department and **Ilze Schoeman** joins us to take up the position of HOD Sciences, and has vast experience in the teaching arena as well as a stint as a Nuclear Physicist.

There were a few departures this year too, but recently, after 20 years here, **Sheila Pasio** decided to spend some time with her family who are located all around the world! She was an expert teacher and has left an indelible mark on this young institution.

I've had many good laughs with **Moira Schady** who has served Oakhill for 14 years. She has joined her husband's business as the accountant and her smile and professionalism will be sorely missed. She will be replaced by Dawie Botha, who has always been a great Accountancy Teacher but has been hiding in the shadows of the Deputy Headmaster's office.

I remember interviewing **Kyle Langman** three years ago and we were impressed with this young man's enthusiasm. Kyle and Monique have taken up an Assistant Housemaster position at Maritzburg College and we wish him every blessing.

The lovable **Barbie Leibbrandt** has recently also become the CEO of Happiness in Knysna and although she has formally left Oakhill, she will always be in our hearts. **Andrew Meintjes** was educated at Kearsney College and Edgewood Teachers Training College in KZN and recently indicated that he will be returning to his old stomping ground in Richards Bay where Charmaine's parents live. It's never easy to be the counsellor in a modern school and **Linda Lifson** has chosen to take a sabbatical from these duties. She has made a significant impact and leaves behind firm foundations. We would like to replace her with the services of a clinical psychologist and I am currently investigating this.

Finally, **Lianmei Hu**, who has been with us for two years, returns to China to be with her family. She has been gentle, professional and passionate about sharing the richness of her country's culture and language and we will miss her.

Two of our teachers will take maternity leave next year. **Loami Koekemoer**, our Grade 3 Teacher, is expecting her baby in December and **Hanette Bower** is expecting in March. We will be replacing these positions temporarily.

Caroline Payton takes up her new position as Academic Director: Innovation at the beginning of 2014, and **Caroline Cross** has been appointed as the new Grade R Teacher. **Annette Nelson** will step into the role of HOD for Little Oaks, starting at the beginning of 2014. She is a really experienced educator and I have no doubt that she will lead with confidence in this crucial area of the school.



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BA Hayward will also be stepping down as the Academic Director: Foundation Phase and will be taking up a new position which involves working alongside Lizanne Hafner in Admissions. With Barbie's departure we have lost someone who always made people feel special and loved and BA will be fulfilling this role in the Prep School to ensure that we continue the strong tradition of caring, not only for new families, but for those families who are going through difficult times as well.

The Grade 1 numbers have swelled recently and we have decided to split this grade for 2014. This necessitates the appointment of another teacher and we are currently advertising for a Grade 1 Teacher as well as for the position of Director of Academics: Foundation Phase. I am confident that we will be able to announce this appointment early next year.

Marina Kok will join the staff as a full-time class teacher as well as HOD Mathematics, in the Prep School, from the beginning of 2014. Her expertise in the Mathematics classroom and the necessity to relieve James Cross for more managerial capacity has fuelled this decision. Marina will also be the Grade 7 class teacher.

Change in School Starting Times for the Preparatory School

There has been a long debate at Executive level about **Prep School starting times**. This debate was raised by a group of parents, and James Cross and the Prep staff have considered a number of proposals to ensure that we implement the right solution for the appropriate reasons. Firstly, it would be good to give Prep School children more time in the mornings. Secondly, it would alleviate our traffic problem in the mornings if we had a staggered start. We have decided that the new starting time for the Preparatory School will be **08:00** and the class times will be as follows. If you are a Prep School parent please take note of these times:

Prep School Times – 2014

Starting time and line-up	08:00
Period 1	08:05
Period 2	08:35
Period 3	09:00
Period 4	09:25
Break	09:50
Period 5	10:10
Period 6	10:40
Period 7	11:10
Period 8	11:40
Break	12:10
Period 9	12:30
Period 10	13:05
Admin	13:35
End of Day	13:40

Great schools are only great because of the people who believe that greatness is never to be taken for granted. Our staff have been committed to growth, within themselves as individuals, but also as a team, as we seek to continue the magic of the joy of learning in this corner of the Garden Route. Oakhill is an exciting space for students, parents and teachers simply because we confront the issues which concern us. We are committed to resolving these issues and ensuring that we ultimately do what is best for the kids in our care.

Raising healthy, self-aware young men and women is becoming more and more of a challenge. Not only is the pace of life faster but we continue to deal with more and more information and the societal ills of broken families, alcohol abuse, neglect and depression continue to become more and more evident. Parenting is not easy and often we choose the 'low road' in Clem Sunter speak, of just going with the flow rather than confronting the issues of self-discipline, respect, tolerance and good manners.

Raising healthy kids takes time and effort and has to be done in partnership with the school. The Chinese proverb: it takes a whole village to raise a child, is a truism that we often take for granted but needs to be reflected on more often. Oakhill is filled with great kids, who I love interacting with on a daily basis. I see politeness, kindness and genuine happiness but there have been many occasions this term when the young men and women of Oakhill have taken advantage of our self-discipline systems at school. More and more I am beginning to realize how crucial it is to talk about what behaviour is appropriate and what is not. What is disrespectful and what



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is not. More and more I am beginning to see the glimpses of a selfishness and entitled self-centredness which leaves its grubby stains on the relationships between teachers and students and undermines the very fabric on which our school is built.

Oakhill is a special place, simply because it is built on the principles of respect and tolerance. Respect for each other as human beings and tolerance of the fact that all humans are capable of making mistakes and we certainly are no exception at Oakhill. There are many mistakes made here by parents, kids, teachers and headmasters but we will all be defined by HOW we deal with each other when things go wrong, and I am hoping that we will always take the 'high road' when it comes to these interactions.

Pressure

We live in a society which is driven by competition. You have to be the best - coming second is just not good enough and this philosophy drives a wedge between relationships. There are times that a parent's expectations exceed the capability of the child and when this happens we follow the stereotypical reaction of society and try to place blame. It must be the teacher's fault, or the school's, but rarely do we see that our own competitive attitudes are fuelling this blame culture. Why are we so competitive you may ask? In my opinion, simply because we are intuitively realizing what is fast becoming fact. That there are 40,000 students trying to obtain 4,000 places at UCT in Cape Town. That unless you achieve 9 'A' symbols for Matric you have very little chance of becoming a medical doctor or engineer. These are anxious times for parents and our survival instinct kicks in. I have even had a parent ask me to 'improve' the Maths mark of his son to ensure that he will be better placed in this competition for places at University. Survival of the fittest is not a pleasant script - it finds us compromising our values and raises the level of anxiety in families' way beyond normal, acceptable levels. As I indicated earlier, our children watch our every move. They listen to our interactions, they monitor our reactions and in the split second when we make a poor decision because of these high levels of anxiety, they learn and model what is deemed to be acceptable and what is not. Our anxiety levels are also raised because of our financial situations. Parents are traveling more for work and families are split at a crucial stage of children's development. This anxiety is furthermore exacerbated by the political uncertainty in our country, and trust me, our kids pick up on these conversations and deliberations more than we think.

As we enter the last days of 2013 I would like to encourage you to take cognizance of the fact that it is important to maintain the structures and accountabilities you have created as parents. Be aware of the outside factors which impact on your actions and reactions, and most of all please do not make assumptions about issues at school - we have an open door policy here and after a long, tiring year I would encourage you to interact with us honestly and openly if you have an issue you feel needs our attention.

2013 has been an extraordinary year. We have exceeded all expectations and this could not have been possible were it not for the Board's dedication to due process, your enthusiasm and encouragement to all the staff and your children and the time taken to ensure that this young school will stand tall in ages hence. It has not been an easy journey but no journey is and I would like to pass on the staff's sincere thanks to you for your support, dedication and perseverance.

At the end of my fifth year as Headmaster I would like to personally thank **Peter Wallington**. Peter has become a friend and mentor and our school is fortunate to have a servant of his stature leading the institution at this exciting time and impressionable age. His commitment and service to this school is truly remarkable and I have no doubt that his fingerprints will continue to have a significant influence here in generations to come. Good to great transformations never happen in one fell swoop and Peter has dedicated his energy and time for the last seven years to this project. Thank you to him for his care, concern, honesty and support at all times.

These are times of change in our school, and change is sometimes difficult but I am buoyed by the fact that we change only because we do what is best for our students. Thank you, once again, for allowing us the privilege of serving you. I sincerely hope that you will have special times with your kids over this festive season and we look forward to welcoming you and the kids of Oakhill, all 500, back in 2014.

Kind regards

Shane Kidwell
HEADMASTER