



04 December 2015

Dear Parents,

Term 4 is a wonderful time of celebration on a number of levels. We celebrate our children's achievements at our 'Celebrations' and we take part in a number of rites-of-passage in both the College and Prep schools as Matrics and Grade 7's move on to the next phase of their lives. There is also a sense of anxiety around the campus as College children begin to write their final examinations, Grade 6 students prepare for their first ever, set of examinations and our Grade 7's contemplate their results as they enter the next significant phase of their school careers.

These celebrations take place at a time of uncertainty and anxiety as we watch another tragedy unfold in the USA, Paris and Beirut. Even at home, we are filled with thoughts of frustration as politicians play politics at a time when we are desperately in need of strong leadership and decision making. In a time of economic downturn, protests and terrorist acts we can easily become pessimistic as parents and adults. It is incumbent on us to ensure, for the sake of our children, that we remain positive and optimistic about life. Our children model our behaviour and they listen to our throw-away comments about a range of issues whether they be important or not.

As we go into our final holiday of the year, I would like to remind all of us, as I remind myself, that we should be mindful of the conversations we have with each other and in the presence of our children. I am not suggesting that we are not honest and realistic but I am suggesting that children need not be burdened with pessimism and negativity. I love this Winnie the Pooh quote: *Supposing a tree fell down, Pooh, when we were underneath it?" "Supposing it didn't," said Pooh after careful thought. Piglet was comforted by this.*

We should comfort each other with the fact that the worst may never happen and as Parents, we should create learning environments which enthuse and allow children to flourish. **David Landes (the wealth and poverty of nations) said: The optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when wrong they are positive and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement and success. The one lesson....is the need to keep trying. No miracles. No perfection. No millennium. No apocalypse. We must cultivate a sceptical faith, and dogma, listen and watch well, try to clarify and define ends, the better to choose the means!**

Oakhill has recently been included on a list of schools deemed to be innovative. The following criteria were used and we are humbled to be considered in this way. See the original article here:

- A sincere child-centered approach which puts students' needs above the curriculum
- Innovative approaches to pedagogy
- An emphasis on personalised / individualised learning
- The building of independent reasoning and critical thinking skills
- The nurturing of creativity (in a meaningful sense), as well as a focus on discovery based learning and problem-solving
- A different take on learning spaces
- A rethinking of timetables
- Questioning and debating the role of standardized testing, assignments and homework
- Rethinking the role of parents, teachers and students
- The meaningful use of technology
- How happy the students are
- The emphasis on life-long learning
- Structures which allow staff to try new things
- Social upliftment and environmental awareness initiatives
- A real and clear inclusion of students' ideas, opinions and concerns

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The one thing that stands out for me is the fact that our children are really engaged in meaningful learning. Having said this, there is no doubt that we also need to continue to work on many of these criteria if we are wanting to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context and we will certainly shape our thinking as we progress into 2016.

At the end of a really busy year it is wonderful to be able to announce that the appeal against our Environmental Impact Assessment at the Oakhill Sports Campus has been thrown out by the Minister of the Environment.

This is what she had to say:

*I am furthermore satisfied that the EA strikes an appropriate balance between environmental, social and economic impacts and benefits. The result thereof is an approval for a school that will benefit hundreds of students for many generations to come, on land ideally suited to that use, without any significant environmental harm but with major social and economic benefits for the town, the region, and the country.*

*In light of the foregoing, this ground of appeal is accordingly dismissed.*

This is an affirming decision which complements our Board's long-term vision for the school and we are grateful to Nicci Mander for all the work she has done to ensure this process is a success. I would also like to thank Paul Kotze for his steadfast perseverance and support in this endeavour – we certainly could not have achieved this without his help.

Each year I endeavour to write a report comment for each child and it gives me an insight into your children. I do not take this process for granted and whilst the majority of our teachers' comments have congratulated your children on an affirming year, there are those instances where I have encouraged a student, to look within themselves before the return for the new-year and to ensure that they find a solid work ethic which will take them forward positively. This holiday period is the ideal time to reconnect with your sons and daughters, to really understand what makes their hearts' beat and to encourage them to find their true selves on this journey called schooling.

**Oakhill welcomes 78 new pupils into the school in 2016. 48 in the College and 30 into the Preparatory School** and I am confident, as always, that they will integrate meaningfully into our Oakhill family. We also welcome four new staff members who add to an already strong team:

**Matt Withers** joins us in the Geography department in the College

**Ryan Habib** joins us to add to an already strong Mathematics department

**Lisa-Marie Beukes** joins us in the Prep Afrikaans department

**Lynette Petersen** joins us as our Music teacher in the Prep

I am aware that there has been an inordinate amount of communication from the school of late but I would lastly like to thank all the parents for their support of the staff at Oakhill. Your kindness and encouragement is what has kept us going and on behalf of all of them I would like to wish you a wonderfully peaceful Christmas and optimistic new year!

Yours sincerely,

Shane Kidwell  
HEADMASTER