



October 28, 2016

Dear Parents

Today is a good day, a day filled with anticipation, excitement and opportunity. It is the day that our new Headmaster, Jannie de Villiers, his wife Suzanne and their kids, Alida and Jean join us for a visit. As always, with change there is a plethora of emotion sweeping over the campus. Many of you have stopped me on the pathways or at a sport fixture to express your gratitude and to gauge my reaction to our new Headmaster.

To be honest, I am filled with excitement and anticipation on your behalf because Jannie is a wonderfully honest, open, engaging gentleman and I have every confidence that you will connect with him when you meet him in person. I am most excited because I intuitively sense his positive energy and I know that this will carry the school, we have all grown to love, forward positively and sensibly into the future. We have a wonderfully strong and able team of staff members at Oakhill and I can see Oakhill progressing and growing in stature as we move forward into this next era.

It is a difficult time for me and my family as we attempt to remain focused on finishing well and ensuring a smooth and seamless hand-over in the next few months. As I focus on this important task I am becoming acutely aware of how one grows and becomes part of a community over time without realising how important relationships are. Only this morning was I mindful of these relationships as I greeted the Plett contingent of our school as they filed into the hall to be addressed by Jannie. These are beautiful young men and women who are self-aware and at the same time aware of their surroundings and their impact on it. I was greeted enthusiastically by Annie-Rose Thompson, Sean Riley, Ben Pama and Sabrina Rupert and it dawned on me that our school is in good hands with these young people in charge. Yes, our children can look a little scruffy, not always be polite but they are extraordinary, wonderful, interesting individuals and I will sincerely miss the interactions I have with them on a daily basis.

Another task I had this morning was to have a chat with our talented and interesting Grade 8 group, who you can imagine are bursting with excitement about moving on to Grade 9 as they progress on their journey through the school. I had to talk to them about a serious matter: one that goes to the heart of our school ethos - ensuring that we always take cognisance of how others are feeling and interacting with us. I reminded them that human nature is not always kind and that we unfortunately have the propensity to be unkind and hurtful toward each other. The magic is recognising this in ourselves and being mindful in making sure that we purposefully engage positively with each other no matter the circumstances. That wonderful quote about the fact that people will not remember what you say or do but will remember how you made them feel is a truism and one that we need to be ever mindful of. Grade 8's you see are learning about these issues as they grow older and it is our responsibility to make sure that we model this behaviour and discuss it when it raises its ugly head in our context. I know from experience that they will learn, they will become more resilient and they will reflect on how they make others feel as they grow older and ultimately this is what education is about. They will become kinder, more aware, empathetic young men and women as they grow older and this is our task, to ensure they do!

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As I slowly pack my office in preparation of my departure, I come across photos, letters and momento's which remind me of specific incidents and situations over the last eight years. It has been wonderfully fulfilling, beautifully engaging, immensely challenging and ultimately rewarding in every way. I think Oakhill has taught me more than I could ever have shared with it and for this I am grateful. It has taught me to broaden my mind, to respect others and to challenge mediocrity but most of all it has taught me to be more respectful and more tolerant, except of course when someone challenges the very foundations on which Oakhill was founded and it is my sincere hope that I have been true to the founders' wishes of enabling an environment where every person is valued and encouraged to build within themselves a hunger and thirst for learning. It has also taught me to defend and protect our beautiful ethos with all of my being and this process has shaped the future me and for this I am grateful.

So, as I walk our pathways for the last time, interact with you, watch the last of the sport fixtures at the OSC and embark on incidental conversations, forgive me if I am a little reflective, distant and misty eyed because it is extremely difficult to unwind yourself from something that is immensely personal and built on relationships over a long period of time. This, ladies and gentlemen is a magical place and it is so because of the magical people which make up this community. It is a good place for kids, a beautiful space for thinking and learning and now a good man, Jannie de Villiers and his family take up the reigns and I know, for sure that you will give him your utmost support.

I feel proud and privileged to have been part of this team. The magic is going to continue. There will be happy times, sad times, achievements and disappointments but one thing is certain, every child who is touched by the magic of Oakhill will be changed forever.

Kindest regards

Shane Kidwell  
HEADMASTER