



Wednesday, January 18, 2017

Dear Oakhill parents and friends

It is with a great sense of excitement and anticipation that I pen these first few words to you. The cyclical nature of our existence is so typical of being human. New beginnings and scary starts tend to cross our paths right through our lives. Although the majority of our pupils are merely entering a new grade, many others are embarking on a new journey at a new school, leaving behind the comfort zones of primary school, previous schools, friendship circles, familiar places and old routines. If your child is finding this point in time nerve wrecking because of having to face a new beginning, outside their comfort zone, they can draw courage from the fact that they are in the good company of many in the same boat. The truth is that they could hardly enter into a more caring environment than Oakhill. Let us spare a thought for the greater schooling landscape in our country where thousands of pupils are still not enrolled yet because they were turned away by overflowing schools. Imagine the anxiety that such uncertainty brings.

Experiencing the butterflies of excitement, mixed with a little fear for the unknown of a new school year, is in order but anxiety is not an emotion I want us to accept at our school. If this is what you or your child are experiencing – now or at any other time – you should not settle for it but call on the support system that is set up around each pupil at Oakhill. Speak to us and let us help. I am learning more and more about the 'Oakhill way' and trying to understand what the essence of this is. One matric pupil summed it up by saying to me, 'Sir, at this school no one is left behind. Our teachers walk many extra miles for their pupils, team members and children in their pastoral care.' With my parent hat on, I instinctively want my child in a learning environment described in this way by one of its pupils.

We are delighted with the matric results. When one has the luxury, like me now, of hearing about the journey completed by each of the 2016 matric candidates, you realise that their success was the result of a whole village of competent, caring people who pulled together over an extended period of time. The success of their stories is not only located in the marks they achieved but, much more importantly, in the broader education they received, the grit they developed, the critical thinking they acquired and the confidence they grew during their time at Oakhill. These pupils experienced the joy of learning at Oakhill, not because it was moonshine and roses all of the time but because they eventually mastered skills, grasped concepts and gained knowledge that was initially above their ability.

The joy of learning is experienced through exploring and discovery but more often through delayed gratification that follows sustained hard work and many failed attempts, which incidentally also develops grit. This is why the credit for the success of the class of 2016 should be shared by all those dedicated teachers who walked alongside each individual, some from their first day in Little Oaks to the final lesson in Grade 12. Our College academic director, Andrew Browne, prepared an insightful analysis of our matric results, which can be read on our website: [2016 Matric Results](#). Although one should caution against overanalysing, there is always something useful to learn from the patterns we detect. As much as twelve years of education should not be defined by seven percentage marks on a piece of paper, the reality is that the matric examination still remains a high stakes assessment and its results a powerful discriminator in our current society. I encourage anyone interested in the information but also in our broader philosophy on the results to read Andrew's letter [\[download PDF\]](#).

In addition to Andrew's letter, I would like to share a thought on what a matric qualification means in South Africa today. Here I want to refer to a remark from Graeme Codrington, who was the keynote speaker at our staff conference last Friday. He warned, 'There is a danger in using these marks as a proxy for the success of the education our children have experienced over the past two decades. Education is what remains when you have forgotten the content you learnt at school...'

A South African National Senior Certificate (NSC), whether acquired through the IEB or DBE, is recognised by South African and international universities as a sufficient qualification to gain enrolment in any tertiary course, as long as the required results were achieved. There is no denying that the very next door after school, namely the one leading to further education, is unlocked by only one key: matric results. How well school leavers are equipped with the necessary thinking skills and work ethic to succeed at university is not guaranteed by their NSC, however, but by what they had gained from their schooling, via excellent innovative teaching, beyond the parameters of the set curriculum.

It is not how successful candidates completed the curriculum that gives them the edge and prepares them for the future but what they learned and experienced beyond its boundaries. This is why we should constantly be searching for ways in which we can stimulate, stretch and ignite our pupils' imaginations, critical thinking, curiosity and appetite for experimenting. We should encourage them to challenge the status quo, search for solutions, and think out the box. They should be rewarded, not only for 'getting it right' but also for 'attempting' and should be helped to lose the fear of failing while doing so. With this in mind, I am immensely proud of the fact that Oakhill appears on the 'Ideas Out There' list of the most innovative schools in South Africa. Do yourself a favour and follow [the link](#) to this fresh blog, packed with thought provoking content around future minded education.

Our children are facing a future of exponential change which can be frightening, unless they are adequately prepared for it. As a school, as parents and as society, we should be applying our minds to help them prepare for a future that will see the survival and thriving of the adaptable and the innovative. I am rearing to embark on my Oakhill journey with every new pupil from Grade 000 to 12, every new staff member and every new parent, as well as all those who are returning to the school for another year. I am doing so in anticipation of a season of growth for each individual but also for our delightful, dynamic school as a constructive influence in our broader community.

I am looking forward to getting to know you well and I trust that 2017 will turn out to be a memorable year for all the right reasons.

Kind regards



Jannie