

23 June 2017

Dear Oakhill Parents and Friends

I am writing to you with immense gratitude for things that we usually take for granted here at school but also for the kindness and generosity which were the first green sprouts to grow out of the ashes of devastation that was left by the fires.

This is a follow-up letter to bring you up to date with the situation and progress at Oakhill since my last communication and to help make the remainder of term a bit more predictable.

### **Academic and extramural programmes**

After commencing with academic classes last week, the Prep school proceeded with the usual extramural programme as well this week and it was much appreciated to even have a mid-week sports fixture against Elkanah House.

The College exams commenced on Monday 19th June, after these were postponed for a week. I have spoken to various pupils and teachers who indicated that the exams were running smoothly, albeit the distraction of the recent events. Our academic director, Mr Browne, sent out a very reassuring letter to College pupils and I encourage parents who have not seen this to ask your child to share it with you. Although we decided to proceed with exams, we have been sensitive to the needs and challenges of individual pupils who had suffered loss and trauma and engaged with each according to unique needs.

### **Trauma counselling**

With the help of a team of volunteers, our support team at school were able to offer trauma counselling to a number of pupils, staff members and parents over the past two weeks and this is still continuing. The structure of returning to normality at school proved to be therapeutic in itself to the majority of pupils. We are grateful to the qualified counsellors (many of them parents) who stepped forward to help out with counselling sessions and advice to our staff and parents.

### **Affected families**

We have spent the past two weeks determining how many Oakhill families were affected, what their immediate and longer term needs are and how best we can support them or facilitate support to them. Although much progress has been made in terms of offering emotional support, sourcing immediately needed supplies and finding longer term alternative accommodation for families who lost their homes, there is still a long road ahead. We have made every effort to determine which Oakhill families were affected and to what degree the fire has impacted on their lives. Please notify the school if you are aware of an Oakhill family or individual who was 'missed' in this process.

### Support offered or facilitated by the school

It might be useful for you to know what support is on offer from the school's side. We have had an unbelievable demonstration of support from families within the Oakhill community and from countless schools, organisations, businesses and individuals around the country who offered help in many forms. Thanks to this support, we were able to...

- Source and distribute immediate and urgent necessities such as clothes, groceries, bedding, toiletries, school uniforms, sports gear, stationary and health products
- Offer ongoing trauma counselling to children and adults
- Connect families in need of housing with those offering such housing
- Set up a relief room with donations of clothing and other goods available to affected families from Oakhill and other schools
- Offer a reliable drop-off point for goods that were sent from around the country, specifically for Knysna schools
- Take the responsibility for distribution of donated goods to other schools in Knysna, including Knysna High, Concordia, Percy Mdala, Chris Nissen Primary, Riverwood, Fraaisig Primary, Knysna Primary, and Knysna Montessori
- Facilitate help with meals, lunch boxes and laundry through our network of class moms
- Connect businesses in town that offered help and services with affected families
- Procure household goods for long term needs of families who had lost homes (ongoing)

### Financial support

The financial contributions by various people and organisations have been most helpful in enabling us to meet certain specific needs of affected families. Further financial assistance will be greatly appreciated and appropriately spent. Please see below the Oakhill banking details, should you want to make a contribution. Please ensure that you use the correct reference. Some donors have specified the purpose of their donation, which is welcomed. If you would like to do the same, please follow up your deposit with an email to our Business Manager, Anndia van Staden ([a.vanstaden@oakhill.co.za](mailto:a.vanstaden@oakhill.co.za)).

Account Name:	Oakhill School
Bank:	FNB, Knysna
Branch code:	210214
Account number:	62002099605
Reference:	FIRE_SURNAME

### The one magic donation

There is one ingredient that was (and still is) offered in such abundance that we had no hope of storing it. From within our school community and beyond we were overwhelmed by the outpour of love to those in

need. It is my hope that the flame of compassion that was ignited by this tragedy will never be extinguished. I know that my analogy might sound a bit corny but I do mean it.

### **Wrapping up the term**

Term two is nearly wrapped up, with only one week to go. Prep parents are reminded that there will not be any afternoon sports practices in the last week of term. One week of exams to go and then we can put our tools down for a winter holiday breather. I hope that you will be able to find time for silence and regrouping with family during this time.

### **Information session for College parents**

Our care committee at school met with Prep class moms last week to brief them on what has been done and how parents can be of assistance, going forward. We would like to extend an invitation to any College parents who would be interested in getting more information on how they could be of service to keep supporting those in need. A meeting will be held on Monday morning, 26th June, in the Music Block, from 08:00 to 09:00. No need to RSVP; just arrive!

### **Thank you**

In our hour of desperation we were able to draw much courage from knowing that we were not alone. So, let me end this letter by saying thank you for the compassion, love and generosity with which so many schools, organisations, businesses and individuals rushed to the aid of Oakhill School in particular and Knysna in general. It is not taken for granted and it will not leave us unchanged!

Kind regards and best wishes



Jannie de Villiers