



26 March 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, Caregivers, Teachers and Students

Let me begin by saying how much we miss all our College students on campus over the last few days. Nobody could have imagined that we would not have the opportunity to say goodbye and where the words 'the new normal' are liberally used and planning can only be done one day at a time. Notwithstanding, it does confirm one fundamental cornerstone of our school which is that our students are the life of the College! This delightful social media post currently doing the rounds perfectly captures our sentiment: *Dear students, please know that your teachers are not enjoying this time away from the classroom; we think about you, we hope you are safe and healthy. We miss your stories, we miss your smiles, we miss you and we miss our classrooms with the energy you bring. LOVE your teachers.*

Extraordinary times

While extraordinary times may bring about fear, challenges and uncertainty it also brings about great determination, adaptability, resourcefulness, perseverance and grit as we are all united in working towards one common goal of ensuring the best interests of our students. It was with immense pride that I watched our teachers undertake extensive training last week, grappling and engaging with technology aligned to good teaching practice and pedagogy, to ensure that we are ready for the inevitable 'new normal' of online teaching and distance learning at the beginning of the new term until school life, to a certain degree as we used to know it, resumes.

I would like to express my gratitude to our teachers for embracing this challenge with enthusiasm and purpose and to our matric students for being so patient with us when we trialed it over two days within the matric programme. I know that after the initial trepidation and uncertainty, everyone relaxed, became more confident, and thoroughly enjoyed their interactions online. We are certainly living the future today! Anecdotally, if you were privy to the teacher trial video conferencing call last week Thursday evening it would have certainly provided some outstanding entertainment (Netflix watch out!). All this active engagement over the last week further strengthened collegiality amongst our staff as we all bonded together in a common purpose. I would also like to thank our Educational Technology Director, Dylan Langheim for his guidance and support in preparing us for this challenging and exciting learning opportunity.

Oakhill Online

Presently we are gearing up for the first few days at the beginning of the term for online teaching and learning; however, this all depends on when the lockdown is lifted. Term 2 and the online programme is scheduled to start on Wednesday 15 April. We have planned and are ready to continue with our online programme for the term if there is an extension of the lockdown or social distancing measures. In addition, we will be evaluating options to make up for some of the contact teaching time lost and this may include the possibility of adapting the school calendar.



To ensure a successful online programme, we request parents and students to be adaptable and patient. We will all be learning together further enhancing our learning community of students, teachers, parents and the wider Knysna community. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their online learning when the time comes and exercise self-discipline in their endeavours. Change is inevitable and we will communicate any changes via Google classroom and emails.

Google classroom will be our main platform for teaching and learning. It is a digital platform that ties together Google's G Suite for teachers and students. It acts as a digital organiser where our teachers can keep class materials and share them with students. In addition, the following Google G suite APPs will be utilised: Google Drive; Google Docs; Hangouts Meet; Google Sheets and Google Slides. Other educational tools will also be used as well as YouTube. For those parents who would like to experience what your child is experiencing, you will need to sign in to Google classroom using your child's credentials. Your personal Google Gmail account will not work. Further details of how all of this will look like, will be communicated closer to the start of the new term.

Achievements

It is very difficult not to allow the developments over the last few weeks to overshadow what was a busy and productive term. Our sports teams undertook an extensive first term programme of fixtures in the various sporting codes. All our water polo teams did exceptionally well at our Chukka festivals displaying fine sportsmanship whilst flying the Oakhill flag with pride. Successes were also achieved in the tennis and cricket arenas. Tangible house spirit was on full display at our inter-house athletics and swimming at the beginning of the term. At the beginning of March, the winter sporting codes were undergoing a rigorous selection process to be ready for the sporting challenges of the second term.

Our school choir had a successful choir camp in Herolds Bay developing repertoire for their various performances later in the year. The Grade 10 Drama students provided some thought-provoking pieces on what it means to be African in a piece titled *Africanicity*. We look forward to seeing the Grade 12s PoMo, *Masquerade* when it is revitalised in the new term. They had been working incredibly hard on it when it had to be postponed due to concerns around COVID-19.

Furthermore, we had a very successful scholarship day at the beginning of March with an innovative selection process further differentiating us as a school of choice on the Garden Route. Academically, our students, despite the challenges faced, have produced a set of noteworthy results for the first term underpinned by excellent teaching and learning. The online reports will be available later today or on Friday morning. Thank you to our teachers and administration who tirelessly worked on getting all the reports ready for distribution.

Time to reconnect

I would like to encourage our Oakhill community to take this time to reconnect as a family and savour the opportunity to be together as this has become a precious commodity in modern times. This is also the time for us, as South Africans, to contribute to the greater good despite all its immense challenges and

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uncertainties, to support the directive from the President that will ultimately protect the most needy and vulnerable of our society. Life will get back to normal, eventually, and hopefully, our lives will include more appreciation of all our blessings. Should you require any support at this time, our staff would be happy to help in whatever way they can. Anne van Zyl, our College counsellor, is available online for the Oakhill community if they need any counselling assistance during this lockdown. Her email is: a.vanzyl@oakhill.co.za

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to all the Oakhill community as well as the Board for their guidance and support over the last few weeks. I would also like to thank Anndia van Staden, our Business Manager, for her valuable contribution to Oakhill over the last five years and wish her well in her future endeavours in Canada (when she eventually gets there!). A warm welcome to Joy Beggs who is taking over from Anndia. Joy has recently relocated to Knysna and brings a wealth of experience to the role and we look forward to her contribution to Oakhill School.

We wish all our families a safe and healthy time together.

Warm regards

Wayne Purchase
Head of the College