

2 June 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Students

On Friday we marked the 8 week anniversary of living, working, and educating our students whilst in lockdown. We are immeasurably proud of how quickly and smoothly our school adapted to these unprecedented and unsettling circumstances. We have the utmost appreciation and respect for our teachers and staff who have shown so much dedication to their students, and to our parent body who have unwaveringly supported our school and our students. We thank you all for this.

The move to Level 3 brings a few changes to Oakhill's **blended learning** approach and I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on this experience.

Oakhill has successfully implemented an online platform for its distance learning during the past 60 days of lockdown. However, this is predicated on 3 key investments; namely its

- i. Development of IT capabilities and functionality, including basic computer literacy and Chromebook experience in students from Intermediate Phase upwards and use of the Google Classroom Suite,
- ii. Passionate staff prepared to go the extra mile, seamlessly switching to virtual teaching (more difficult and stressful, with significant additional preparation, and overcoming personal challenges of lockdown) and still providing care for our kids and their overall well-being whilst they teach remotely, and
- iii. Deep prior learning engagements founded on trust, relationships, and responsibility, built up pre-Covid-19 in the classroom, cultural and sporting arenas.

This combination has resulted in a very effective, innovative, and rewarding **blended learning** approach. It is not just simply an online/homeschooling offering. The pivotal face-to-face teaching that usually occurs in a physical space continues to support students, albeit virtually. Furthermore, the various mentor and class teacher groups in the mornings reinforce teacher-student and student-student relationships and motivation. The teachers remain connected to the pupils as individuals and their wellbeing, not only focusing on the educational outcomes. Blended learning has allowed students to work at their own pace in the safety of their own home, whilst still having skilled and motivated teachers gently direct and encourage them, filling critical content gaps and supporting the varying emotional journeys of our children.

As the lockdown eases and the cautious reopening of the schools commences, the Board is constantly evaluating all information and practicalities whilst ensuring the health and safety of the Oakhill family remains a priority. The Board recently adopted a new Health and Safety Procedures and Protocols Policy for Covid-19 which will guide all stakeholders going forward.

As of yesterday, we are gradually moving back towards the traditional school environment. Whilst we are all looking forward to seeing each other, interacting in the classroom, on the campus, and on the sports grounds, we also know that what we have been through has created a paradigm shift in the way we see the

future of education. This will no doubt be accelerating future trends on how schooling will look in the future.

Upon guidance from the respective authorities we will be phasing in the remaining grades. We do not foresee the return of additional grades this term but rather after the June holidays, in Term 3. We are up to date with our syllabus and thus the children, teachers, and parents will be in much need of a well-deserved break.

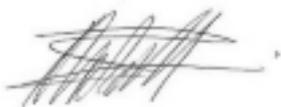
We are cognisant of the pressure points with Little Oaks and the Foundation Phase with parents needing to get back to work under Level 3. This is being carefully monitored and will remain a priority for reopening.

The Board committee is meeting frequently to ensure regular oversight and to monitor the progress, plans and challenges that face the school during this time. Several cost saving initiatives have been implemented together with enhanced operational efficiency measures in response to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Should any parents require additional clarification with any issue, please feel free to send an email to Lyndall Hill (l.hill@oakhill.co.za) where queries in the first instance will be dealt with by the respective Heads, James Cross (Head of Prep) and Wayne Purchase (Head of College), as well as by Joy Beggs (Business Manager).

Any further developments that may impact our school community will be communicated as and when we receive them. We thank you for your support and continued cooperation as we navigate through this together.

Regards



Robin McCall
Board Chairman