

## AGM Headmaster's Address: 14 March 2017.

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of our new members of staff wrote me an email in which he wondered if I had heard of the International Boys School Coalition because, having just arrived from an all-boys school, he felt that we could benefit from a closer study of the adolescent male. Heather, my wife, and I were fortunate enough to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> IBSC Conference that was held in San Francisco in 2000 and surprisingly enough, the whole focus was on boys in secondary schools and the challenges they faced being neurologically wired as they are (neuroscience was quite new in its application to education at that stage). I was pleased with his email for two reasons: First, it was the kind of question that we should be asking all the time at our school because we can never know enough about what makes our pupils tick and teachers should constantly try to increase their understanding so that they can become even better teachers. Second, it made me visit the IBSC website where they are advertising for the 2017 conference that is to be held in Baltimore, Maryland. One of the Keynote speakers is Dr Ronald J Daniels, President of Johns Hopkins University, arguably the most prolific research university in the United States. I was interested in his published 2020 goals for Johns Hopkins and they are three fold: to enhance interdisciplinary collaboration; to promote individual excellence and to explore community engagement. I am delighted that our goals for 2016 were not dissimilar and I would like to spend some time this evening elaborating on our vision.

First, much attention has been devoted to bringing about interdisciplinary collaboration, especially in the College. In the Intermediate Phase subjects like Natural Science combine exploration of Physical Science and Life Science. HSS combines Geography and History; EMS, Accounting and Business Studies. At College level, too often we separate the subjects as if they are silos that remain distinct from each other. In 2106 we experimented with what we called Integrated Studies in which Grade 8s and 9s were given the opportunity to use the various disciplines together to solve entrepreneurial problems. In 2017 we are refining this process so that our pupils do what are called Focus Tasks that allow them to apply the various disciplines in rich tasks and above all, to learn to make connections and to think for themselves. In order for this to happen effectively, teachers have to meet to find synergies in the tasks and to ensure that skills being learned are not repetitive and that time is used effectively. This requires teachers of high levels of skills and engagement if it is to be effective. I am happy to say that increasingly we have such teachers and we are beginning to retain them. We are also seeing excellent evidence of the results of this collaborative effort: we are told by other schools who accept our children into their high schools that they are really well prepared; parents come and tell me of the success our alumni have at universities in competitive courses like physiotherapy, medicine and accounting; our pupils do well in skills –based assessments that require them to think on their feet rather than to learn things parrot-fashion. Results like the Australian Council for Educational Research in Grade 6 and 7 Maths show us how successful our pupils can be in an international benchmarking test. The same can be said for the Thinking Skills tests with the IEB and the Science Olympiad results.

In the JP we have introduced Time 2 Read, an innovative and neuro-scientifically backed reading programme that I am confident will yield results in the future.

In the College, apart from adding History to the elective subjects pupils may choose, our most recent Matric results are arguably the best we have had. More importantly, our pupils gain access to the best universities in South Africa and thrive there. This thrills me and should thrill you as parents too. In line with our 2014 Strategic Plan we are “Attracting quality staff, developing and retaining them. We continually research, assess, implement and enrich our pupils’ learning.”

Second, we like Johns Hopkins University, wish to promote individual excellence. We have never had more Limpopo representatives than last year (28) and this goes across all sports codes. We even had a sporting first: a National Champion in High Jump. Our Sports Director, in conjunction with The Ranch, has organized a soccer clinic just before the start of next term where members of the Polokwane City team will assist with coaching.

Academically, we had our first Honours Award in Tamron Saais and she was joined by Khanyisa Baloyi by her performance in the Finals, both achieving 6 distinctions. We enjoyed a Choir tour to Marseilles and our Choirs did brilliantly in competition on their return. We look forward to a full drama production

from the College this year and if their movement studies and one act performances are anything to go by, we are in for a treat. Our Cricket Team played in the semi-finals against schools whose numbers should have made us feel daunted. Our Science results in the IP continue to be astonishingly good: 2<sup>nd</sup> in Gr 5, 1<sup>st</sup> in Grades 6 and 7 in the Science Olympiad. One of our Grade 11 lads, Dauda Shen, has been selected to represent SA in the International Physics Olympiad in Indonesia, a follow-up to Rithik Samuels success in the Maths Olympiad last year. Although we can hardly take credit for it, we had two published authors from our ranks and so will take credit anyway! I am increasingly confident that should your child exhibit excellence, he or she will be able to find it nurtured at MH. By increasing our classes from two in Grade 0 and 1 to three we hope to offer this excellence to a wider number of scholars in the future.

Third, our engagement with the community has taken two giant leaps forward in 2017. As a result of lengthy discussions, a dream of mine has been realized this year. Anglo-American has seen fit to sponsor fully 10 pupils from the Mapela Circuit, one of the weakest educational districts in Limpopo, to attend MH for their entire secondary school careers. They have recognized the value of this education through our Spring Residential Camps for Grade 12s in preparation for their Finals in Maths and Science. The Anglo Scholars have started in with us and there is no telling what the outcome for good that will result from this initiative. We have also entered into a memorandum of understanding with the University of Limpopo who will link with our Outreach programme for Computer Literacy. In its 15<sup>th</sup> year of operation, MH shares its computer resources with teachers from less-resourced schools every Saturday under Mr Daniel Sempe's guidance. We, with the assistance of CoLab will upgrade Mr Sempe's skills and in turn offer those who so faithfully come to his classes a more practical approach to computer usage. Several less privileged schools (Siloe School for the blind, Lefatane and Progress Academy) have approached us for assistance with how to run their schools administratively and we have enjoyed day visits from them and their governing bodies. Later this year we will be hosting a Teachers Day to which all our neighboring schools are invited.

The creation of a Garden of Remembrance, a moving tribute to those who have died whilst being at Mitchell House, curiously made me feel as if our school and its community had come of age. It was the result of cooperation between the Board, the PA, our staff and pupils and our community, united in its diversity in the common calamity of death.

It is a great privilege to lead Mitchell House and I consider that this work is some of the most important in my career. It could not be done without the support, advice and assistance of a wonderful Board led by Mrs Broderick, an energetic and disruptive management team, an emboldened Parents Association and staff that can be counted upon to go the extra mile.

Of course we are not perfect and there are challenges yet to be overcome. We need to be more courteous and law-abiding, especially in traffic. We need to support our sports teams more actively. We need to communicate more accurately. We need to guard against the growing tendency in South Africa to polarize along economic and racial lines. Our children, who are tomorrow's leaders, need to shoulder their responsibilities, and I am confident that with God's help, they will.