

PREPARATORY SCHOOL



FROM THE HEADMASTER'S DESK



Dear Old Boys

Greetings from a very busy but happy Merchiston.

It has been quite a while since I last communicated with you and time certainly has passed quickly. It is seven months since my heart attack on the golf course and subsequent open heart surgery. Golf always wins and as much as I was feeling the 'pinch' on the course, I was determined to complete my round. I count myself very fortunate and know that Someone was looking out for me.

I have been on incapacity leave but with the COVID-19 virus imposing itself upon all of us, I have reported back for duty to extend my expertise and experience. Merchiston is very blessed to have the calibre of staff that it does have. The school continued to operate in my absence and those designated to manage the school did so with aplomb and a high level of professionalism.

This proved to be very comforting for me for a number of reasons. Firstly, it proved that our structures and protocols are sound and well-ordered and the school continued to operate unabated. Secondly, it afforded me the opportunity of recuperating without any worries about the school. Finally, it reassured me that the school is in good hands and that I need not worry myself about my impending retirement in April 2021.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

No human being or business/institution has been unscathed by the COVID-19 virus and subsequent lockdown. We are all aware of the collateral fallout and I have no doubt you have all been affected in one way or another.

We are yet to measure the impact the lockdown has had on our Mudrats as a whole. The school opens today for the Grade 7 cohort, with the other grades being phased in over a period of time. Staff and our school psychologist will be monitoring the progress of our boys and they shall leave no stone unturned in their efforts to re-orientate the boys and ensure their health and well-being.

I believe the biggest challenge facing us is ensuring the emotional well-being of each and every boy. They have been under lockdown and it is not in their makeup to be isolated from their friends. I am not overly concerned about the academics as Merchiston continued with teaching and learning via a number of platforms during the lockdown period.

Merchiston's communication with the boys and their families was very sound and voice-notes, videos and messages were the order of the day.

Merchiston is acutely aware of the financial burdens that its families are under at present. Our finance department is monitoring the situation very carefully and decisions regarding school fees are made with considerable empathy and foresight.

The essence of our future model at Merchiston will be with a clear focus on the opportunities that the lockdown and the pandemic has presented to us as a school. In my correspondence with the parents, I have made reference to the Merchiston Renaissance on a number of occasions. This entails looking at opportunities to do things differently and to seize the many opportunities that present themselves as we move forward. An example of this, are the various teaching and learning platforms that are available to schools such as Merchiston.



FROM THE HEADMASTER'S DESK



Merchiston staff utilized many teaching platforms during the lockdown in order to make the teaching and learning experience that much more practical for the parents and the boys at home. Many hours were spent formulating different ways of presenting lessons. It was truly amazing to see the creative ability of so many staff.

It is important that Merchiston grows from these enriching experiences and builds on these new concepts and initiatives. This is but one aspect that contributes to the Merchiston Renaissance to which I refer.

An aspect of our education programme that requires our focus going forward, is extra-curricular activities. Currently, this is not permitted and we do not know when we will get back to 'normal'. In order to compensate for the loss of sport practices and fixtures, Merchiston will be building more physical education time into its weekly programme. We are able to do this as teaching and learning continued during lockdown and by all accounts the boys are on par with the expected academic requirements.

Merchiston is fortunate in the extreme in that it can accommodate all its boys at school with all social distancing protocols being observed in every classroom. We have managed to do this by utilising the school hall, the media centre and some of the facilities otherwise used by aftercare. Class sizes will be less than 20 boys per class and we are very fortunate to not have to hire any extra staff.

Other options that we might have had to revert to would have been alternate days or weeks [the option of one day at school, one day off; or, one week at school, one week off. We could have used the platooning system – classes in the morning and some in the afternoon. Imagine how taxing this would have been for the staff. Fortunately, Merchiston can keep its normal daily routine.

Now that I am back at school, I will ensure that news is conveyed to you on a regular basis. As I have mentioned before, it is very important that we continue to keep you abreast of developments at Merchiston. I am looking forward to seeing you folk in the not too distant future.

Wherever you are and whatever your circumstances, you are always on our minds and are important to us.

Warmest wishes and kindest regards.

Dave

DAVE BEETAR
HEADMASTER

