



THE ORYX

The weekly newsletter of Windhoek International School

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Schooling in a Time of COVID

Annually, it is so nice to welcome everyone back for the new school year but this year the welcome must perforce be virtual. It is no less sincere for that.

Indeed, our sense of community and shared endeavour is more important now than ever. And that was very apparent on Wednesday and Thursday evenings this week when we held information sessions for parents to explain how we will be teaching remotely from Monday.

There were more than 80 Primary parents on Wednesday and upwards of 50 Secondary parents yesterday. Sensible and relevant questions were asked (and answered) and the feedback we have received is that parents found the sessions very helpful and, dare I say it, reassuring.

We also shared the plan we have been working on for when all Grades are again allowed to return to school. The decision will, quite properly, be the Government's to make but we all hope that face-to-face teaching can resume soon. And when it does, we are ready.

The presentations that Mike Parsons, Director of Teaching and Learning, made on each evening have been made available today to all parents. And if you were unable to attend, please be advised that there will be weekly sessions where the school will invite feedback from parents that will help us to refine the programme as it evolves. These dialogues will be on Wednesdays for Primary and on Thursday for Secondary.

A question that has been asked a number of times concerns fees and whether any reduction may be possible. It is true that we have made some small savings in terms of, for example, reduced electricity and water usage but, in terms of our annual budget, these amounts are tiny. Moreover, we are facing quite significantly increased costs in a number of areas. For example, we are contractually obliged to fly departing teachers out of Namibia and fly new ones in. The prices we are having to pay for these irregular flights are far more than we had anticipated. And the collapsing exchange rate is hurting us because quite a few of our costs are in Euros or US dollars. What I can tell you is that we are strenuously looking for every way in which we can make further savings. Thank you for your understanding.

On Wednesday and Thursday evenings Mike made the point that in some ways we are better off than many international schools. Almost all other international school Heads I talk to are struggling with their teachers, and often students, being spread all over the world in time zones that are far apart. If remote learning is a challenge here, try doing it at 3am. Indeed, many Heads themselves are trying to run a school in, say, Kenya from their home in, say, California. I don't envy them. By contrast, all of our admin and SLT, almost all of our students, and all but three of our teachers

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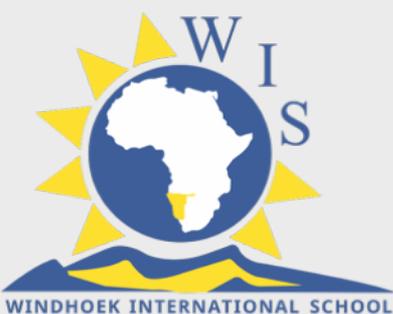
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are here in Windhoek. And even the three teachers who are waiting to fly in are in the same time zone (1) or just one hour behind (2).

Let me introduce them.

Laura SMITH is British and will be teaching Visual Art in the Primary School. She has most recently been teaching in South Korea but has also taught in Thailand and Qatar. She has many years' experience of teaching the PYP and, indeed, was the PYP Coordinator in her last school.

Jane HARRISON is also British. Her long career has taken her to Egypt, Mexico, Malta, the Ukraine, Peru, Russia, Kazakhstan, China, Kuwait, and, most recently, India. She will be bringing her vast experience of the PYP to Grade 5.

Lize van RENSBURG is from South Africa. She will be teaching IGCSE and IB Diploma Chemistry. She has also taught (and may yet teach again) Biology and Physics. She has taught in IB MYP and DP schools in the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Mozambique.

I am excited that three such experienced international school teachers will be joining WIS.

Needing little or no introduction are **Gisela BARRION** and **Annemarie McNAB**. Both have taught in the Primary School in the recent past and it is wonderful to be able to welcome them back. Gisela will be teaching in Grade 3 and Annemarie in Grade 5.

So, we start the new year fully staffed and with more or less everyone where they should be. Not many international schools can claim that.

The Car Park

If you have visited the school in recent weeks you will have seen the progress we have made in the car park.

The new arrangements will enormously improve our ability to control who has access to the school campus. The key to the new concept has been to move the decision point further onto our own property. Cars (and pedestrians) can now be stopped without causing an inconvenient and potentially dangerous tailback on Scheppmann Street.

Take a look.



Once the work is finished (and that should be this month), **ALL** vehicles will **ALWAYS** enter by the Main Gate and **ALWAYS** exit by the West Gate.

Electronic barriers have been installed at both the entrance and exit gates. CCTV will be installed at both gates too.



Guard houses have been built at each gate and will be on the school’s internal telephone network.



What this also means is that 2020-2021 windscreen stickers will be required for all cars that are admitted to the school premises.

These have been available from the School Office since June. If you do not have one, please collect one (for each of your cars) as soon as possible.

Until this work is finished, please enter the school via the ‘middle gate’ close to the PLC. We apologise for the inconvenience now and for a few more weeks but I am sure you will agree it is a price worth paying for considerably improved security.



Strange Times

I suspect that no one reading this has ever known a year like 2020. Everyone is anxious and confused and no one knows when, or if, we will be able to return to something like normality.

Routines are upended. Being worried is normal. Frustration is understandable. Relationships may be strained.

But I think we need to remember that everyone is in the same boat. No one is finding this easy. That parents are apprehensive is unsurprising but we are really trying to do everything we can to ease their concerns while still delivering the richest and most challenging education we can.

However, and perhaps strangely (in these strangest of times), I am cautiously optimistic. People have been saying for decades that the traditional model of education needs a radical overhaul. Various initiatives and brilliant (or not so brilliant) ideas have had their day but the essential paradigm is still much the same as when I attended school in the 1960s and 1970s.

Is this the moment when the world is forced to reassess what children learn (and why) and how that learning is achieved?

Let’s hope so. The pandemic has given us an opportunity. If we are sensible, we will take it.

Stay safe.

Peter MacKenzie
Director