



**HeronBridge**  
COLLEGE

# HeadsUP<sup>^</sup>

*Head's Newsletter*

30 November 2011

Dear Parents

I do not usually write at the end of the year because the annual distribution of the College Yearbook provides a full report of each year's activities. This year, however, it has been decided to publish the yearbook in the new year so that it will reflect the entire year, including the NSC results. In writing now then, I do so for two purposes: firstly, to thank everyone who has contributed to make 2011 such a successful year in the College and, secondly, to write of some very important educational trends that we shall be responding to and so want you to be aware of as we lead the College into the future.

I am firm in my assessment of 2011 being our most successful year to date. We have had good years in the past but this one has been exceptional. The particular results throughout the year have spoken for themselves and all combine to present an overall picture of good development across a variety of spheres and of successes beyond those of the past. I extend my most sincere thanks and congratulations to all who have contributed to make for such a year: pupils, staff, coaches, administrators, Estate staff, Canteen staff, parents, PCF, PTA. I trust only that at the end, looking back on the year, all of you have a sense of pride and fulfilment as you consider your own particular contributions and our combined achievements. Well done!

The closing of a school year is always bittersweet: it has the joys of achievement but the sadness of farewells. We bid farewell to our Grade 12 group. Of course we're pleased to see them go because their final year of school is what we've all been working towards for years. They had better not stay or we'll have failed them! I commend this leaving group on their outstanding contribution to our College, sustained through all the years they have been with us. I do not think it accidental that our best year yet has coincided with their final year. I thank them for all they've done in the College, for the way they have enhanced our school and its reputation, for the spirit they have brought to bear. That latter aspect is nowhere better evidenced than by their leaving gift: the creation of the HeronBridge Outreach Fund and an initial deposit of some R13 000. I'm not surprised that young people who have shown heart in all their years with us have left doing exactly that. The Head Councillors, Tatum Morley and William Samson, have themselves been exceptional in their leadership of an altruistic Councillor body. They launched into the year with the building theme 'Imagine, Build, Unite.' That focused on the Tembisa build but flowed into developing spirit in the College. I thank the Councillors for their lead and the Grade 12's for being whom they were when with us. I wish them well into the future and look forward to many of them becoming significant leaders in our country.

Some teachers unfortunately also take their leave of us: Mr André Black, Mrs Marilyn Fell, Mrs Jozelle Grobbelaar and Mr Khothama Mzolo. I express gratitude to each of them on behalf of the College. They have each given of their best for us and been most effective as staff members. I wish them well in the future as their career paths continue.

I was fortunate enough in May to attend an international conference: The Vancouver Symposium on Christian Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; also to visit a number of schools in North America. My purpose for going was to assess current international trends in education and, especially, the use of technology in the classroom. I came away duly impressed and motivated for us to be adopting sound educational practice as it is developing worldwide. I am convinced schools in twenty and thirty years' time will be radically different to now. We cannot expect appropriate changes simply to happen; we must pursue deliberately what will make our College effective into that future. There are advantages beyond us in the First World context but there is much we can apply.

The style of education we are considering carefully is called 'blended learning.' This is, as the name suggests, a blending of the old and the new, of face-to-face teaching with the developing technology. A second term is 'flipping,' which refers to upending the traditional classroom model on its head. In this scheme, the classroom is no longer perceived to require the major emphasis; learning in other places and at other times can also be recognised. Believe it or not, the classroom can become a place for "homework," at least for practicing what has been learnt. We need to be emphasising learning over teaching, developing collaborative learning experiences and taking full advantage of what technology offers, including the benefits of the various social media.

There is a revolution underway opposing the industrialised model of education that has characterised world teaching and learning since the Industrial Revolution. Serious questions are being asked about a factory mode in which children have been placed in cohorts and common classroom situations to be tested all on the same knowledge at the same time, assessed by common criteria. This utilitarian approach is being challenged by individualised learning programmes, driven and paced by the children themselves; teachers becoming facilitators in the process rather the fonts of all knowledge. The information revolution, with its ready provision of knowledge, is at the heart of the changes and the comprehensive knowledge map it makes so readily available becomes core to the learning process.

The world is asking seriously whether, given a clean slate, we would design the educational model we have currently. The answer is clearly not.

So the trends are:

- away from the classroom and into learning spaces;
- placing the emphasis on individual learning programmes;
- creating a freedom from timetabled teaching and testing;
- on finding knowledge;
- on developing communal learning processes: in terms of learning spaces, learning programmes, individual schedules, social spaces and social media;
- on emphasising skills and abilities, rather than regurgitative knowledge;
- on using the constantly developing technology;

- on blended learning, especially in terms of utilising distance learning advantages in concert with flexible school programmes and qualification demands;
- on digital textbooks;
- on emphasising usefulness rather than qualification.

It is our conviction that we need to adopt much of what is being spoken of and developed. There are fascinating and innovative schools across the world, most notably in America, Canada and Australia. We are in touch with some of them, even in daily contact via the social media. We recently hosted as a visitor for a day the organiser of the Vancouver conference (Mr Greg Bitgood, author of 'Discipling This Generation for a Digital World') and intend maintaining contact with him, and others.

The good news is that my various school visits showed that, in the range of digital adoption, we are not far behind. There are schools way ahead of us but there are others which would look up to us. I had an opportunity at the conference to speak of our DigiDays and was then complimented on us developing something unique. That was our own contribution to the conference deliberations.

Ask what we shall do into the future and I'll cost you lunch! There is so much. We are going to emphasise collaborative teaching and learning next year in a phased programme, also we are going to extend our DigiSchool. In the former instance, we have planned some timetable changes so that multiple teachers and classes can be together at times. We are incorporating a distance learning Mathematics module across all Grades. We are varying literature choices within a Grade. Staff training on the themes of the collaborative and the digital is planned.

In the latter digital instance, we are introducing tablets into the learning process. We have been hugely disappointed with the take up from families supplying their children with laptops, as we had asked. The international trend is BYOD – Bring Your Own Device - but in the past two years we never managed a sufficient critical mass to make the general use of laptops viable in class. We still believe that is the way to go, though there is thinking that young people will bypass the notebook in favour of the tablet and smartphone. So we are forced into supplying the equipment if we want to use it in class. To that end we are purchasing tablets but will unfortunately (and obviously) not be able to do so for every pupil. Parents could well help us in this regard by speaking to Father Christmas!

In all of this we shall be careful to maintain an appropriate balance. We have worked hard these past ten years to establish high academic standards and shall not be relinquishing these to fads. I shall personally be taking a lead in developing suitable teaching and learning programmes, in tune with the new dual approach, and in conjunction with our teachers. We shall pace the changes suitably and monitor carefully the effects.

There is a further trend that will be uppermost in our minds: the care of the child in context of a rapidly depersonalising world. As a Christian school we are concerned, obviously, in each case for the wellbeing of the entire young person before us. We decry that in the current digital and social revolution there is more contact but fewer relationships than ever before; that, though we Twitter and Facebook and Google+ and SMS and BBM all the time; though we cross the world in terms of space and time and have overcome these boundaries, we have kids who are lonelier than ever

before and relationships that are shallower than ever before. We have made contact and lost contact.

What do our children need more than anything? They need adults who care for them, who love them and who protect them in a digital age fraught with personal dangers. They will find such adults mainly in the home, the school, the church.

The home is not our province, except as we interact with our homes or are called upon for help. In the school, we are determined to be Christian in fulfilling our responsibility to love others. We assure all parents of our care for your children. That is a first priority for us.

A second priority is to teach in this technologically advanced way, with an emphasis on Christian worldview. Our approach to the curriculum and to the learning process will not be diluted by method. Rather, we trust the new methods will enhance our Christian approach.

The churches of our area have been supportive of our College in all our years. They have advised as members of our Board of Reference, they have assisted with counselling, they have presented parent seminars and they have run programmes for us, most notably by their youth pastors and youth workers in R<sup>3</sup>. We shall continue to depend on them and to associate with them.

I trust this has all been of interest to you and that it has given you a sense of confidence in HeronBridge College. I intended to inform you in this of our future path and trust it will have your support. We certainly intend to educate in a way that is relevant in the current age and attractive to our young people. We intend sustaining an environment that is embracing and nurturing. We intend maintaining an educational paradigm that is characterised by a biblical worldview.

Finally, I wish all HeronBridge families a blessed Christmas. May the holiday period be a happy one for you all and may you all know the joy of celebrating in truth the Lord Jesus incarnate. I pray for safety whenever any of our families are on the road and look forward to 2012 in the College: may we then fulfil what we plan to and should do.

God bless

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Klein', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**David Klein**  
College Head