



WATERSTONE COLLEGE

29 February 2016 (Newsletter 4 of 2016)

Dear Parents

I came across this post on a school's confession page. "I am waiting for a day when everyone at our school is nice to each other. Seeing though everyone is so worried about what everyone else thinks, let's have a week where we don't judge what everyone else is doing and simply smile at 5 random students, parents and teachers to brighten their day. If it's in the reg line, tuckshop line or in the corridors, your smile can change someone's day. Smile, it may not change the whole world but it can change someone's whole world".

#smileatstrangersweek

Every now and again I receive an email from a parent or a visit from a pupil or a staff member complaining about an issue in the school. We tend to find fault with an institution before we actually see the positive side of a school. The other way of expression is via Facebook, Instagram and the infamous "whatsapp" groups. Facebook and social media has in excess 1.14 billion unique monthly visitors. That number of people is more than the entire population on the continent of Africa. There is no doubt that information about topical issues, such as violations of human rights, corruption allegations, animal rights and climate change, is readily available to anyone with a device with internet access.

The most popular means of communication between students, parents and staff members is "whatsapp". This social media tool is used to communicate events, homework, socials and between parents it is a useful tool to keep in contact with other parents via the various groups. However these groups are used for a platform for bullying, malicious gossip and rumour spreading that, because of its pervasiveness and anonymity, cannot be defended. Most of these posts, however, are far more mundane and less informative than they are obviously malignant. Like so much of the popularist platform, the sheer insanity and self-indulgence of the posts can become mind-numbingly addictive, sometimes taking voyeurism to extremes: a stream of meaningless, inconsequential trivia, however compelling the posts may seem at the start. It's rather like the entirely pointless, intrusive and mindless *Big Brother* reality television shows, which are vacuous, superficial and an opportunity to live life vicariously.

For me the potential for good work and upliftment of a school community is often countered by the danger of anonymity. On the one hand, the potential for community building and self-expression is laudable and often helpful (certainly schools can learn interesting and useful information). On the other hand, the lack of responsibility that goes with making a comment about other students, the school and the staff of the school, where there is no requirement to own it or substantiate it, does unsettle me profoundly. The scale and potential for transformational good is vast, so is the potential for colossal and enduring personal and institutional hurt and damage.

The use of social media is not going to diminish in the foreseeable future, for a range of reasons; the human need to create and maintain a matrix of social connections; the desire to have your life experiences and insights witnessed; or the voyeuristic pleasure most of us take in being part of the experiences of other people. We are therefore going to have to come to terms with how we as individuals and institutions make sense of our increasingly digitised world. It seems to me that

while we may not be able to control it or regulate it or tame it, we can make efforts to understand it and use it wisely. We need to come to terms that the teachers are not the enemy, that we have a dedicated set of staff members who are human and do everything in their power to educate your child. Management of this school does not just sit around and never listen to parents. We, the management of Waterstone College take all the issues at our school very seriously and work tirelessly to find solutions.

Let us attempt to simply smile at random students, parents and staff, because as a team we will ensure that the future of Waterstone College is bright.

I have also received numerous emails concerning the new car park and the current traffic challenges. The following has been decided upon:

1. I have requested from the contractors that their trucks do not use the road in front of the school between 07h00 – 08H00.
2. The staircase leading up from the completed car park to the new one to be constructed ASAP.
3. The ERIFEANS committee has given the school an amount of R100K to use to upgrade the two waiting areas of the high school and primary school. We will start getting quotes this week.
4. We are hopeful that the new car park will be completed by first day of Term 2.
5. Mr Ridgway is currently working with the Johannesburg municipality to sort out the traffic issues. We have put forward the idea of a one way in front of the school, extra robots and more traffic control officers.

I am fully aware of the frustrations in the mornings and on Friday afternoons, and I urge you for some more patience as we are doing the best that we can. Hopefully by the start of Term 2 we will be in a much better position to control all the traffic issues.

“The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die. As well the minds which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be a mind.”

Faith. Integrity, Respect, Excellence.

God Bless



Vernon Rorich

Executive Head

Waterstone College