



St Mary's School  
Waverley  
Founded 1888

# JUST JUNIOR | NEWS



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24 JANUARY 2020



First day in Grade 1, Grade 0 and Grade 000

## FROM THE HEADMISTRESS' DESK

Dear parents

I would like to take the opportunity in this first *Just Junior* of a new year and a new decade to welcome you all back to school after a long December holiday – a special welcome to all our new families: we look forward to getting to know you and your daughters better over the next few weeks.

Writing this newsletter feels a little like contacting a faithful correspondent after an unforeseen and regrettable interruption in communication. Please forgive any stiffness in my expression as I attempt to reach out to you again and establish contact: in many ways, it is good to be back. I am pleased to see you.

The whole-school celebration of excellent matric results and less public acknowledgement of developmentally significant achievements among the girls of the Junior School was overshadowed last week by the death by drowning of Parktown Boys' schoolboy Enoch Mpianzi on a Form I camp and Keamohetswe Seboko in Laerskool Bekker's hostel swimming pool. Calamities of this nature highlight the profundity of the relation entered into by schools and parents when they undertake to raise children together.

The responsibility is great; so is the trust. We have to work at it daily, unspectacularly, for it to be reciprocated, and earned.

Our first assembly of the year – an assembly that included all the girls from Grades 0 to 7 – explored the seemingly unrelated topic of manners: the daily contact we enjoy with each other, the opportunities we take (and miss) to see each other, and the unspoken duty we have to put each other at ease and to declare, through our treatment of each other, the radical equality of us all.

"Manners" is a surprisingly difficult topic to land well with girls and women, mostly owing to the way the concept has been used to enforce and entrench some of the most unjust gender practices: disparities in pay, suppression of anger or difference of opinion, prohibitions against self-assertive behaviour. I have yet to test my theory, but I wonder if girls intuit on some level what their parents know: at its worst, ladylike behaviour (not wanting to appear rude or hurt someone else's feelings) – good manners, the gendered version – can, in certain instances, endanger their daughters' lives.

In addition to signalling the beginning of a new decade, 2020 is also a leap year. Our chance, every four years, to wish all “leaplings” (those born on 29 February) happy birthday. Leap days are also, according to tradition, a time for the suspension of conventional rules: long ago, “Ladies’ Day” or “Ladies’ Privilege” was the one day when women were free to propose to men. The one day, in other words, on which women could say what they want, assert their preferences, and speak out – without appearing rude. This, then, is what I ended up discussing with your girls: how we adjust perceptions about girls and manners without also giving into the societal pressure on girls to be agreeable, deferential, and likeable, at all costs. How, in other words, we turn every day into Ladies’ Day.

When asked about the well-travelled observation that boys are more polite than girls, the girls pointed out quickly, and fiercely, that boys were “two-faced,” that is, they appear polite when necessary in the presence of adults and other figures of authority; according to the girls, accessories like school caps also make it easier for the boys to appear polite and know what to do (doffing their caps) when confronted with socially awkward situations like greeting unfamiliar adults. Whatever the flaws in their argument, reading between the lines, what the girls seemed to be saying, was that boys do “polite” on their own terms: a perception that is backed up by research into opinions about rudeness among women and men.

## FROM THE CHAPLAIN

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We continue to celebrate the season of the Epiphany, within the church. This is the season between Christmas and Lent (the latter preceding Easter). Within the Western church, the Epiphany has come to be identified with the story of the magi visiting the infant Jesus and his mother and father, shortly after Christ’s birth (Matthew 2). In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the season is best identified with the story of Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3). In both cases, the Epiphany is about the identity of the vulnerable baby born in Bethlehem: God-as-man, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

As we begin this year, I am aware that there is much to pray for, in our country and in our world. The season of the Epiphany reminds us to hope: that God is to be found in the least likely of places; that Christ, God-incarnate, is our source of hope. This season also reminds us that in the midst of all that is, there is always reason to give thanks – we have only to ask God’s Spirit to heighten our senses to God’s presence amongst us. Finally, the Epiphany season also serves as a reminder to pray for the wisdom for us all to make decisions, to speak and to act such that our lives bear witness to the hope we have in Christ.

I have drawn on Laurence Hull Stookey’s *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church (1996)* in the above.

REVD CLAUDIA COUSTAS  
CHAPLAIN

In an article appearing in *The Washington Post* (21 April, 2016) with the title “The incredible double standard of rudeness” Jeff Guo comments on the gendered difference in attitudes to swearing, expressing anger (men appear credible when they speak forcefully, women are judged for being emotional and untrustworthy), issuing commands (women soften them), and advocating for yourself (women are shunned for being aggressive and “unfeminine”). Guo’s conclusion: “[W]omen face harsher consequences for being rude.”

Of course, it’s ridiculous to think that girls and women can overcome these time-honoured practices through reinventing gender norms overnight. I do, however, think it is worth our while to embark on the long, repetitive work of repositioning manners with girls so that they are empowered by the way they engage with the world instead of retreating into ladylike silence and resentment, however adorable. Greeting people; standing back in doorways; offering to help; waiting your turn; trying always to put others at their ease; taking an interest in what other people have to say – all the rebel girl way.

DR SARAH WARNER  
HEADMISTRESS: JUNIOR SCHOOL



# THE ART OF MENTORING

The art of mentoring – a reflection on Grade 6 mentor groups.

“The creative adult is the child who has survived.”

– Ursula K. Le Guin

The sentiment expressed by fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin represents something of a “golden standard” that many mentors and teachers have in mind when they choose to work with young children. It is sound advice that a child’s sense of wonder and innate creativity is something to be cherished and which, all too often, we ignore in our desire to prepare children for adulthood and the “real world”. It would be prudent to heed some more advice from Le Guin when she says that “those who do not believe in dragons, are often devoured by dragons...from within!”

Grade 6 represents a significant step in a St Mary’s girl’s path to realising her independence. As such, the decision was made to organise the girls into smaller focus groups so that mentors could take the time to build meaningful relationships with their classes, set achievable learning goals, and help the girls balance their academic and co-curricular timetables. However, these mentor groups also represent an opportunity for teachers to tap into what interests and motivates the girls they teach. This valuable insight can also help teachers better equip the girls for any “dragons” they might encounter, be they assessments, social challenges, or sleeping away from home for the first time on a school excursion.

Over the last few days, the Grade 6 mentors have been spending time with the girls and providing them with opportunities to think about their attitude

towards the year ahead. The mentors worked on explicitly teaching the girls how to organise their belongings, manage their timetables and set learning goals. The school’s expectations of the Grade 6 girls have been discussed, as well as the expectations that the girls have of their teachers and themselves. We sometimes forget, as the girls appear to grow so much over the December holidays, that they still require careful encouragement and guidance.

We have introduced journals to support the girls in reflecting on class discussions and to document their personal growth. Current educational research supports the use of journals in both honing a child’s writing skills and developing her executive functioning.

Progress is sometimes such an abstract concept for young pupils and, as such, it is no wonder that many of our girls measure themselves against their peers. It is our expectation that, with tailored support and collaboration, the girls will start to realise what it means to give their own personal best. In the words of Zadie Smith “progress is never permanent, will always be threatened, must be redoubled, restated and reimagined if it is to survive” – not unlike creativity itself.

ANNIE THOM, KERRY GIBBONS, LAUREN HOWDEN AND  
ROSEMARY NCOBELA  
SENIOR PRIMARY TEACHERS



Grade 6 girls in their smaller focus groups