

Dihlabeng Christian School - Coping With The Pandemic by Andy Woodage, School Principal 2020

I hope you have all managed to stay well during this extraordinary time. I am writing this at what should have been the end of our second term of 2020. Instead, we are gearing up for the return of most of our learners to the school site.

It was a very straightforward start to the year. As Term 1 hurtled past, I was delighted with the smooth transition from one principal to another (which is testimony to Margaret's outstanding leadership skill and the Grace of God). Although we began to hear about "corona", it had little impact on our day-to-day activity. As we were busy finalising assessment data and reports at the end of the term, the WHO announced a global pandemic, our country declared a "National State of Disaster" and schools were closed. Within days, the Government had declared a national lockdown, one of the strictest in the world, meaning that we would not be returning to school for some time. We were faced with the dilemma of how to continue educating our learners from home. Initially, we set up online learning groups through WhatsApp. However, we found that only about a third of our families could access the content, so I went to our local police and the captain gave us permission to hand out learning packs to our students. These packs proved a great success; we have now issued four for each child, in each grade, over the last 6 weeks.



Work packs for each child awaiting collection

After many false starts and eleventh-hour U-turns, it was agreed between the Government and the Department for Basic Education that schools could indeed reopen, commencing with Grade 7 pupils on June 1st. All schools have had to comply with a number of regulations designed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. That is when our amazing staff team bounded into action! We have had to reconfigure each area of the school to ensure social distancing for every member of staff and every child. We have been extremely fortunate in being able to use the Dihlabeng Church premises to enable us to spread the classes out. We have set up 'sanitisation stations' outside every doorway and painted distancing stars all around the site: red for queuing and yellow for picnicking at break time. We now screen every person who enters the school site, including taking temperatures. This has required staggering the start and end times of the day to reduce congestion. We have also had to rethink the timetable to reduce the movement of learners around the site.



Our Grade R classroom clearly marked out. The children are put into 'bubbles' of 3 to allow them to play alongside each other.



Using the church building as extra classroom space. Tables set out for Grade 5.



Grade 7 have been the first students to return. Socially distanced break times, each child sat on a yellow star or stripe!

As an independent school, we have had a number of monitoring visits from the Health Department and the Education Department. Thanks to all of our hard work, we have been given permission to accelerate the gradual return of our students more quickly than is planned for the state primary schools, so that all of our pupils can begin face-to-face learning with their teachers as soon as possible. This means we can do what we have been called here to do: educate children to lift them out of poverty and give them hope for the future. We are aware that the tremors of this pandemic will be felt for some time, particularly in Clarens where much of the town relies upon income from the tourist trade. So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our sponsors, supporters and benefactors for your kindness and generosity. Without you, we would be lost!

May God bless you, keep you and shine upon you. Andy.

DCS Staff - Teaching Staff, Roles in Term 1 2020



Assistant Teachers and Ancillary Staff, Roles in Term 1 2020

Left to right: Jeanett Mokoena, assistant to Grade R. Mathandela Nhlapo, Sports Coach and Computers. Nthabiseng Tshabalala, Feeding Scheme cook, part-time assistant to Grade 2. Masepetlele Radebe, assistant to Grade 2. Matseleng Mokoena, assistant to Grade 1. Tshepiso Mlangeni, Feeding Scheme cook/cleaner. Clautilda Musango, School Office Manager.

Missing from photo: Suzanne Kirby, assistant to Intermediate Phase. Anna Mofokeng, assistant to Grade RR. Thakane Ntoko, assistant to Grade 3. Matjhitja Mosia, maintenance and groundsman. Sinah Tsomole, part-time assistant in Grade RR, cleaner. Lezanne Roos, part time office assistant.



New Teaching Staff for 2020 - Chantel Badenhorst

'I was born in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa. I studied for a Diploma in Eco-Tourism Management and a PGCE certificate in Education. I enjoy teaching and positively influencing our beautiful nation, through education. I believe in developing the whole child spiritually, emotionally and holistically, to equip each one for their journey to high school. At DCS I am teaching Grade 6 Mathematics and Natural Science and Grade 7 Afrikaans, Natural Science, Life Orientation and Creative Arts. DCS is one big family, a lovely school community which is making a huge difference in the beautiful town of Clarens; truly a beacon of hope'.

Reino Lathleiff *'I am 32 years old, originally from Ficksburg but now living in Bethlehem. As a musician I toured with a performing arts ministry called '13thfloor' in 2008. Between 2009 and 2018 I was a youth pastor in two different congregations. I obtained a BTh from the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa and I am currently in the process of being ordained. I have a passion for teaching youth and young adults, whether it be a language, the Bible, or an instrument. I am currently a student teacher, studying for my PGCE through the North West University. I am grateful to be on the staff of DCS, a school which I am beginning to love more and more, especially because of its love for King Jesus, its diversity and its kingdom culture'.*



Elize Ferreira *'I am 25 years old and grew up and studied in Pretoria. I have a BED degree in Foundation phase and Early Childhood Development and I am currently busy with my honours in learner support. This is my first year as a teacher. Last year I was a facilitator to a boy with dyslexia. I am the Grade 1 teacher. I absolutely love DCS; you can immediately feel the calm and loving atmosphere when you enter the school. God has blessed me beyond my expectations when He gave me the opportunity to teach here. It feels like I have gained an extra family'.*

Back row, left to right: Reino Lathleiff, part-time language and subject teacher. Rabson Chatikobo, Grade 4. Naomi Lokkers, Grade 3. John Mokoena, language and subject teacher. Andy Woodage, Principal and leader of Intermediate Phase. Sarah Dunmall, temporary volunteer student from the UK. Chantel Badenhorst, Grade 7. Yolanda Van Den Broek, Special Needs teacher.

Front row, left to right: Carolyn Revill, Grade R, Deputy Principal and Foundation Phase leader. Bohlokoa Mofokeng, Grade 6. Elmarie Cameron, Grade RR. Elize Ferreira, Grade 1. Lizzie Mbele, Grade 2, FP Languages, Head of Non-Teaching Staff. Aimee-Leigh Cameron, Grade 5.

Missing from photo: Margaret Grant, International Links. Becky Woodage, part time Grade 2. Nicci Oosthuyzen, part time Grade 7.



Athletics Club - led by Mathandela Nhlapo focused on teaching the progression of skills for long jump, high jump, shot putt and running.



Chess Club - led by John Mokoena. The children used a computer program on our school's network to learn the basic moves and play together.



The centre is a challenging place to visit and we are very proud of the way the children interacted with, and showed compassion for those who were there.



Science Club - led by Carol Goodson. This provided hands-on practical activities in simple chemistry and physics, including heating and cooling, electrical circuits, magnetism and mixing solutions. A lot of fun! This was held on each Monday afternoon.



Netball Club - led by Lizzie Mbele and Jeanett Mokoena provided training for inter-schools tournaments.



DCS Sports and Cultural Clubs

At DCS, we follow the SA National Curriculum but we also build into the timetable as many extra curricular activities and life skills as we can to enrich the children's experience of learning and to develop the whole child. Twice a week the children across the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 - 7) are divided into mixed age groups for sports and cultural/creative activities. The sports are chosen to align with the traditional seasons of sports followed by SA schools and the cultural/creative activities provide experience and skills that would not normally be covered by the academic curriculum.

In Term 1 2020 the sports of soccer (girls and boys) and netball gave training and practice for two of the major sports played during Term 1 and Term 2. The athletics activities provided skills, training and selection for the Provincial athletics competition which was held across the Free State during Term 1. The sports clubs were held on Wednesday afternoons in Term 1.

The choice of cultural and creative activities plays very much to the strengths and interests of the staff. This term they included: Science Club, Chess Club, Eco Club, Book Club, Craft Club, Guitar Club and Community Club. These clubs were held on a Thursday afternoon.

These photos show some of the activities the children experienced and the staff members who were responsible for each club.

Community Club - led by Elmarie Cameron. The group visited the 'Ithuseng Disabled Centre' for children and young adults, located in the township.

Each week they sang songs and provided some stimulation and fun for those who attend there daily.



Art/Craft Club - led by Aimee Leigh Cameron, assisted by Sarah Dunmall. All kinds of creative activities were on offer using different mediums and processes including origami, weaving and making lolly stick puppets.

Book Club - led by Naomi Lokers. The group read through and enjoyed the book, 'Charlie and the Chocolate factory' by Roald Dahl. On the last session (pictured right) they watched an animated version of the story.



Girls soccer (top) - led by Bohlokoa Mofokeng and boys soccer (below) led by Rabson Chatikobo and Matjhitja Mosia.



Eco-Club - led by Yolanda Van Den Broek was concerned with all things ecological and environmental.



The children made recycled paper as a colourful resource for producing greeting cards to sell for school funds.



Guitar Club - led by Reino Lathleiff, an accomplished musician and music teacher. He taught the group the basic chords and techniques of guitar playing.



Rethabile Mokoena and Alan Tshabalala with Mathandela Nhlapo, our sports coach (left), and with their competitors' medals (right).

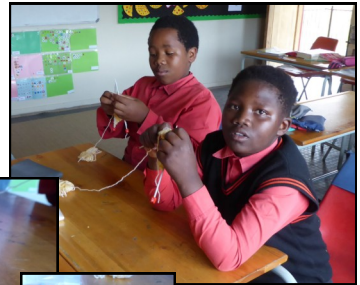


Sporting Achievements in Term 1

During Term 1 several children from Grades 1 - 7 at DCS were selected to take part in the Free State Primary Schools' Athletics Championships which are held each year. This starts as a local competition that widens in area after each round culminating at the Provincial Championships held in Bloemfontein. Two of our boys, Rethabile Mokoena and Alan Tshabalala got right through to the final round. Alan did well in his heat of the long jump and Rethabile, who competed in both the Under 11s 70m hurdles and the high jump, was placed fifth in the high jump and qualified as first reserve to represent the Free State at the National Championships.

The Surrender Hill Marathon 5km Run

Each year the Surrender Hill Marathon is held in Clarens. Three of our students took part in the 5km event, Katleho Mokoena, Daniel Oosthuysen and Thomas Roos. Katleho was placed first, with Daniel and Thomas not far behind him. A fantastic result amongst a field of several hundred runners!



A Visit from Jenny and Derek Woodcraft

Jenny and Derek are friends of Carol and Alan Goodson and members of New Life Church, Biggin Hill. They visited Clarens in March and spent time working with groups of children at DCS on two projects - woodwork and knitting.

Derek, a keen carpenter, had invented a small wooden board game played along the lines of '3-in-a-row'. He taught the older students how to make a game each using basic carpentry tools and working together to complete the project. They then had a lot of fun playing tournaments.

Jenny, an expert knitter, taught a group of boys and girls how to knit and make a small Easter chick with a chocolate egg inside. Those who were more proficient also went on to make a small glove puppet. Time spent together chatting and enjoying a relaxing activity was as valuable as learning a skill. Jenny also visited the 'Ithuseng Disabled Centre' with Community Club to give out some beautiful blankets made by the 'Connect' community group from New Life Church, Biggin Hill.

We are grateful to them for funding these activities and giving their time to the school and we very much hope that they enjoyed their visit.



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