



Dear Parents, Old Boys and Friends of Michaelhouse

Please click on the headings below to navigate around the eNews.

Rector's Message	1
Sports Achievements.....	2
Snell Society 2021/2022.....	3
Overnight Leaves.....	3
Mini Break.....	4
Virtual Tour of Michaelhouse	4
Conclusion	4

Rector's Message

As the A Block boys settle to writing their Trial Examinations this week, the A Level and GCSE results, reflecting the endeavours of pupils at the age of 18 and 16 respectively have been announced in the UK. Exactly as I expected, they were the “best ever” at practically every school across the country. Why was that the expected outcome? It is precisely because pupils’ own teachers were able to rank them and apportion marks to them as a result of the Covid pandemic interrupting their studies and because last year an algorithm applied to bring the results down to more realistic outcomes ended up creating an uproar or worse with pupils and parents protesting about “the system”. Teachers’ evaluations of their pupils were then introduced again in this academic year, raising the results to “best ever” levels and, naturally, there is widespread satisfaction amongst pupils and their parents.

It is astonishing to me that these results which are dependent on the teachers’ evaluation of students will stand as the determinant of success in a school career or, in the case of GCSEs, a milestone in it. What teacher would not want his pupil to succeed? Who would rather give a B than an A? What, indeed, are the implications of a whole cohort going on from school with results which demonstrate considerable grade inflation over previous years? Which employers will be so obtuse as not to discredit those students vis à vis other year cohorts? How many students will get results that will lead them into university degrees for which they are not really suited?

I am writing on this topic today not to focus on what for some people is utterly irrelevant since it is an issue in a country halfway across the world, but to draw attention to what an examination system *should* offer. Firstly, an examination system should be one which is reliable in distinguishing those with exceptional ability from those who are good students and then those who are average and below that level. If everybody were to achieve an A for each subject, then you might distrust the system. Secondly, it should offer, through its subjects, significant interest to the students: the content of subjects should inspire further thought and study and, hopefully lifelong fascination with a subject. Thirdly, it should encompass variety. In a school setting, for example, if a system permitted the study only of numerate subjects or only of the arts, perhaps we would not consider it to be educating all aspects of the individual in a balanced way. Fourthly, it should prepare one for the next stage of one’s academic career and allow one to proceed to that stage on a good footing and with the capacity to move up a level with confidence alongside the best in the country or the world.

So where does the Independent Examination Board, the IEB, written by our boys on leaving school, stand on these criteria? Firstly, we find it essentially a reliable examination system in that those who are very able in each particular subject, year on year, have that ability reflected with correspondingly



lower results for those who are less able. The examination system is strict and well-controlled; for example, a video recording is taken of each examination so that any irregularities are able to be investigated. There are clear criteria for the construction of examination papers and the distribution of them. Though there are a few exceptions to this rule, it is generally the case that the results our boys achieve are expected by the school and reflect their ability.

Secondly, the nature of the courses studied are generally interesting and relevant. The subject coordinators and examiners amend courses to take into account matters of national or world importance and boys leave school in an interest in many subjects.

Thirdly, the IEB requires a number of subjects to be studied with some mandatory ones too: so, a student must take English, Mathematics and an additional language and, of course, some other subjects to attain an overall matriculation. Lastly, armed with a successful IEB Bachelor's Certificate, our students move on to top universities in South Africa or abroad: for the majority of our boys, a path to UCT, Stellenbosch, University of Pretoria or Witwatersrand University is the norm with just under 20% setting their sights on universities such as Exeter, Durham, Edinburgh and St Andrew's (all top 10 universities in the UK) or colleges such as Princeton, UPenn or NYU in the United States. The AP (Advanced Programme) in English, Mathematics and Physics is usually taken by those boys seeking admission to an international university and is usually a requirement for such a university. The IEB with AP subjects has been benchmarked against the A Levels by Cambridge University, whilst Oxford doesn't not specifically require AP subjects, but looks for demonstrated excellence in Olympiads and other similar areas.

Reverting to the topic of A Levels, when I arrived as a Head in the UK in 2002, the great cry was that A Levels were being devalued and were no longer a good yardstick of academic prowess. Grade inflation became a topic of discussion at virtually every meeting of Heads and, ultimately, an A* was introduced to differentiate between the very top performers and those who were good A candidates because the number of As had risen to such an extent that they were no longer thought to reflect fairly the worth of the very top academic performers. Schools such as mine began to look to the International Baccalaureate (IB) as being a much better determinant of ability and a much more satisfactory examination in other respects and, increasingly, students moved across from A Levels to the IB which, similar to the IEB, requires the study of a broader curriculum (ie six subjects), as opposed to the three that are generally taken at A Level. I do not want to place a "jinx" on our current matriculants, but there is often a tendency to think that what happens abroad is necessarily better than what happens in this country. I think the IEB can hold its head up amongst other examination systems; it is rigorous which certainly fulfils the criteria which I would lay down for an effective examination system and our boys with good results are able to move on to the best universities in South Africa and the world.

Sports Achievements

Canoeing

The Dolphin Coast Ski race is an annual two-day stage race that doubles up as the KZN S1 Surfski Championship. This was held this past weekend, and the results are as follows: U18 S1 – 4th **Jack Shooter** and U16 S1 – 1st **Dominic Furby**.



Rugby

The following Michaelhouse boys have been invited to participate in the Craven & Grant Khomo week trials on Wednesday September 1.

U18: Scott Kirk, Andrew Davis, Nqobile Manyara, Jason Morby-Smith, Jaden van der Merwe, Fortune Mpofu, Alexander Vermeulen, Colm Geraghty and Aya Zakwe.

U16: Oli Von Klemperer, Edrich Van Loggenberg, Chris Silk, Tristan Arde, Blake Neale, Wandile Mlaba, Murray Baker, Campbell Ridl and Leo Muziva.

We wish them all well!

Athletics

Ruben Visagie took part in the KZN provincial champs in the U15 boys age group. He had a tough race in challenging wet conditions, falling 7 times but still managing to get a 3rd place bronze medal. Well done, Ruben!

Snell Society 2021/2022

These boys have been selected to join the Snell Society for the year ahead:

James Asherson, Andrew Davis, Matt de Villiers, Ben Frost, Josh Hadley-Grave, Rupert Hechter, Tristan Hoyle, James Kennedy, Xihluke Marhule, Jack Martin, Lusanda Mrasi, Skulule Ngejane, David Nienaber, Dakalo Nonge, Letlotlo Sekatle, Marc Sidebottom, Christopher Townshend, Ben Turner, Freddie Waller and Peter Woodland.

Overnight Leaves

In keeping with our commitment to boys and parents, we have considered the state of the Covid-19 virus in our Michaelhouse community and, following medical advice, have decided that we are now in a position to grant one Saturday overnight leave to the boys. However, given the Outdoor Education trips scheduled for the last week of term, we are restricting the overnight leave to one of two weekends, namely 28 and 29 August or 4 and 5 September. Please be aware that this leave can only be taken at the conclusion of the sports activity on the particular Saturday and boys need to return to school before 18h45 on the Sunday evening. If you would like to make use of this opportunity then please follow the normal House specific channels for requesting a leave. Having said this, we would still want boys and parents to take all the necessary precautions associated with Covid-19 when away from school in order to lower the risk of bringing the virus back following the time away from school and to understand that our principal purpose in proposing this leave is to support those boys who have struggled with being away from their families since the beginning of the term. Parents of boys who are “first contacts” would, naturally, need to take all the necessary precautions.



Mini Break

In past years we often had a half-term at the end of October and, in the light of our not having a half-term in the 3rd quarter this year, we intend to give the boys a “mini break” Covid-permitting from 12 noon on Thursday 28 October through to the evening of Sunday 31 October. In effect, the boys would miss a couple of lessons on the Thursday and then Friday lessons would be cancelled at a time just prior to the exams in the case of most of our boys. All of our A Block will currently be writing and, as usual, they would be welcome to stay on at Michaelhouse as they usually do over this period as they will, in some instances, have exams on that Friday 29 October.

Virtual Tour of Michaelhouse

Please see below the link for the virtual tour of Michaelhouse on our website:

<https://www.michaelhouse.org/about/virtual-tour/>

You may well know of families who are not able to visit us as a result of Covid, and it would be helpful if you could pass this link on to them so that they are able to experience something of the magic of the school, even if this is not first hand.

Conclusion

I draw your attention to the link below with regard to an article which has been signed by a number of eminent medical practitioners and researchers on *Variants, the fourth wave, vaccines and the unlikelihood of herd immunity: what might happen in South Africa:*

<https://bit.ly/387UHIx>

With my best wishes

ANTONY CLARK
RECTOR