Dear Parents,

Schools are fascinating places as they educate in interesting ways; firstly, by explaining content by instruction; secondly, by engineering circumstance for young people to mingle and to socialise in various ways through different circumstances.

Many may argue that with the ubiquity of knowledge and, in particular, the access to this knowledge, the construct of schooling as we currently know it is almost defunct. With the fast approaching and fast developing world of Artificial Intelligence, the requirement of schooling as we know it now, is less and less necessary.

Indeed one of our greatest challenges is in the determining of what a relevant education today looks like, for a world of tomorrow that few of us can predict. There exists a number of opinions as to what will constitute a successful education in the long run. Among these opinions is a strong bent towards a practical subject offering such as Coding which holds the promise of educating for the future world of work. Indeed a similar argument held sway a number of years ago when introducing Business Studies as this was a practical subject too, for assisting young people in the world of work.

I do not deny such claims.

I do, however, want to suggest that an education geared towards purely utilitarian outcomes will surely have a short-lived efficacy. The world is changing too fast for any particular coding language to remain vogue and economically advantageous into the future. In brief, much of what we study may be 'computed' for us in the future such that our input may be negligible and unimportant.

Machine learning is set to redefine our world of work, alongside artificial intelligence, and our education should stand up to this new phenomenon as bravely and as cleverly as possible. A current example of this new world order is in the number of updates required to keep one's Apps current which have multiplied exponentially as the data gleaned from users and their habits and wants dictate ongoing improvements - this illustrates the speed of change and the intelligence behind the improvements.

Young people who have been 'schooled' in the digital era, are au fait with iPads and tech; although they act largely as consumers and as end-users, the vast majority create impressive Instagram accounts and social media posts that illustrate this ability to manipulate data as hoped for by creators of these tools. It may well be a brave new world!

Our challenge then, as educators in a fairly staid schooling system, must be to understand our role and what precisely our particular construct can and should deliver.

To the question of subjects offered, I am a firm believer in ensuring that subjects which demand a learning of creativity and problem-solving skills are critical elements in an education for the future. Every young person should be stretched and developed in their ability to imagine solutions beyond those derived from a 'recipe'. Success in the sciences would be when students explore solutions to problems that require of them to apply certain knowledge in a thoughtful 'new' way. The success should be measured in part by the approach to the process of finding these solutions. Furthermore, our students must be developed in their adeptness to work within and alongside teams from various backgrounds as our world will demand this skill more and more.

This may all sound like common sense but I am often challenged by parents who are naturally apprehensive about the new world we are all entering and the all important question of their sons (and daughters) being employable in the new world order. My hypothesis thus argues for greater focus on honing skills that will afford our children adaptability in their application of sciences, this may include anything from the science of journalism to the science of applied mathematics.

Our boarding school construct, to which I have alluded in previous newsletters, places boys in a particularly good position to hone soft skills that will surely become all the more relevant and essential in this new world. I would suggest that those of us who are adept at forming relationships, at learning to live alongside others, at finding one's individuality within a system, at honouring and accommodating those who are different from us, at leading others at particular times, at understanding something of a community spirit, at working together towards a common goal, are all skills that will set our boys on the path to a successful future.

As our world may begin to rely on machines doing more of the current roles we do, I believe it is essential that our children are adaptable and adept at creative problem solving in teams. Team thinking to some extent, is an affront to the western mindset that has long held that individual pursuit is the most highly regarded and rewarded attribute. Here, I do believe that we hold an exceptional upper hand in our Africanness. The concept of Ubuntu is well established and our varied African heritages, whether ancient or relatively recent, have demanded of us an approach of inclusion and participation. I am well aware that some of the examples of this are deficient and a poor reflection of what could be achieved through an understanding of others above self but great successes have also been achieved - our 'new' South African experience is one such feat.

Hilton's aspiration then, as we craft an education fit for purpose, is to maximise our competitive edges such that we ensure every boy has the tools to succeed later in life in a world that will require courage, compassion and creativity. My encouragement, to you as parents, is to assist in helping your sons to see these opportunities and to embrace all the possibilities for learning.

Regards,

George