



HILTON COLLEGE

A letter from

The Head

No. 21--01 / 18 January 2021

Dear Parents,

If you seek, you will find...

These times are unsettling. What we know and have become accustomed to has all but evaporated and our way of being has been altered significantly. Some have been using analogies that draw on wartime experience, others invoke visions of the apocalypse, others look for answers from another realm.

I am none the wiser.

Seeking an answer, or a set of answers in a time of need is what makes us human. Very few people can be at ease when the idea of 'being in control' is seemingly taken away from them. The truth, however, is that there is a fine line between having control and lacking control. I think about people who had reasonable lives in certain countries until a political coup happened and they become refugees in a refugee camp, almost overnight...I cannot imagine the anxiety and challenge this must pose for every family in this situation.

I think about those who bet on investments that have been 'as safe as houses' for decades, who see their dreams shattered when something which was not as a result of their doing, alters the prospects of such investment.

The sense of 'being in control' is a flawed state of being.

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Amidst this turmoil how do we respond? What do we hold onto that will provide us with some surety and restore the balance to our lives?

Every industry will have its unique opportunities and challenges, for education - a few thoughts:

The advent of online learning has been a very useful tool at a time when in-person teaching and learning has been largely curtailed. Will it replace the way we teach and learn in the future? I hope not! Ultimately, learning is a social construct. Facts and figures make up a body of knowledge but learning from and with others is the rich experience of learning; online chatrooms, TEAMS, Google Hangouts and Zoom calls remain a shadow of the real thing. I do not deny their usefulness, but I would hate to see this becoming our default choice for learning. A few years ago I met a Finnish academic who was working with a team of tech students on developing an App to take teenagers back into the real world, away from their virtual worlds, to ensure they actually engaged with fauna and flora in reality - the virtual world had usurped their sense of reality - what a tragedy.

Watching our young men enjoy the camaraderie of being together, even at school, reinforces the notion of us as social beings. We would be wrong to undervalue this tenet of the learning journey.

When one thinks about learning experiences in our world, there are those organisations that require attendance at particular places and for particular times. Heading off on a retreat to learn to meditate, or a season away from the noise of the world to find oneself, are bespoke approaches that rely on one being 'fully present' in order to learn those particular lessons. I'm not sure whether this type of learning can be substituted by a virtual experience.

At this time, then, I believe we need to look for the opportunities our particular form of school offers. Although our 'usual' offering has been restricted we should think about what opportunities have arisen as a result of this enforced change.

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Our boys are afforded an unbelievable place to be 'at school'. This is not new but we need to make the most of this extraordinary environment; we need to redirect the energy our boys usually expend on the sports field into pursuits that require similar energy but that may look very different to the mainstream sporting offerings - again, we have a distinct advantage given our location and our people; we need to slow down and focus on developing aspects of boys' character that will equip them for a world that will undoubtedly be one of greater uncertainty and challenge in the future.

2020 taught us that we must learn the art of agility. Here, the online world has been especially helpful, to a point. As a resourced school, our ability to code-switch to an online platform enabled the transfer of information to continue and with it some learning, although we became all too aware that there were inherent shortcomings in this mode, for many of our young men. I am sure the future will involve a mix of that which can be 'learnt' online, in a virtual environment, and that which necessitates a hands-on, participative experience that an in-person schooling experience delivers.

It is easy to allow our measurement of success to be dictated by mainstream markers but real education transcends these oft short-term indicators. We need to be bold in our ongoing endeavour to produce men of good character who will be change-makers in a world that will inevitably require their firm resolve accompanied by brave and innovative thinking that will help to forge a more equitable, fair and sustainable future for all. The traditional schooling opportunities that we are restricted from delivering at this time are but a small part of our real educational offering. Now is the time to major on the other aspects such that a Hilton education can set a boy apart, as he grapples with other aspects of his person.

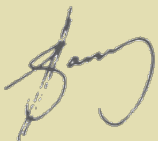
So, in seeking other avenues in this education journey, I think we can yet find opportunities that support an argument that an education 'in person' still supersedes a virtual experience. Our boys remain privileged to be at school in this environment, despite the frustration of not being able to participate in our traditional co-curricular activities. If we focus on what we have: our environment, our superb teachers, our caring community, our collection of wonderful families, then that which we don't have at this time fades away.

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As you prepare for this year of schooling, may I ask you to engage with your son about how he might seek to find the opportunities that do exist, despite the loss of that which he has become accustomed to enjoying. As a team of educators we are working with determination to ensure that we unlock the staggering opportunities we have here at Hilton, outside and alongside our 'normal' offering. This temporary change in our not being able to begin as planned this year, will pass. I do believe we will be back on campus very soon; until then perhaps a conversation about what we do have rather than one only focusing on what we have lost.

In the meantime, please see the 'starter pack' information for each grade in the "Plan for Every Boy" section of the app, explaining how the boys will go about learning remotely. We have learned from our experiences last year and will be even better at facilitating this option for the time being.

Once again, thank you for your ongoing support as we partner in educating your sons.



George Harris
Headmaster