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HERSCHEL SENIOR SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

Dear Parents and Guardians

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will not take over our jobs, but people who use AI might. (source unknown)

There has been much written about Artificial Intelligence and its impact on education. AI has the potential to address some of the biggest challenges in education today, innovate teaching and learning practices, and accelerate progress but it also presents multiple risks and challenges, not least ensuring that its application in educational contexts is guided by the core principles of inclusion and equity.

As with anything new, there has been uncertainty and a tendency to focus on the challenges associated with AI. How do we address the issue of plagiarism, for example? While there is a need to look closely at the challenges AI might pose and its ethical use, it is not going away and therefore we need to look at the many advantages it brings with it. We need to work with it and put it to good use.

Many pupils and teachers are making use of ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) which is a large language model-based chatbot developed by OpenAI. It is easy to use and assists with a range of writing, allowing users to specify their requirements and to produce textual responses within seconds/minutes, saving time.

Many recently published education articles show clear advocacy for a human-centered approach to AI, emphasizing the importance of its role in addressing current inequalities regarding access to knowledge, research and the diversity of cultural expressions and

reinforcing the need to ensure that AI does not widen the technological divide within and between countries.

We have just appointed Meghan Anderson, ICT innovator, to guide the process of integrating technology into education in the senior school. She will start in January, and it is my hope that this department grows under her leadership, providing support for teachers so that they can employ technology and AI to enhance the educational experience for pupils and explore smart assessment, rich resources and integrated administration systems.

There are many applications which can assist practically in terms of administration, such as the use of **Otter.ai** which generates written transcriptions of speech and supports minute taking, for example, and **Jenni.ai** for generating policy and academic writing. Both tools are extremely useful and can save valuable time for teachers. **Fetchy** is a generative AI-powered platform designed specifically for teachers which allows them to streamline the myriad tasks they face.

As they become more 'conversant' with **Fetchy**, teachers can refresh their teaching methods, optimize time management, and make confident and informed decisions. Other useful tools for teachers include **Khanmigo** (for informal formative assessments in classroom use) and **midjourney** (AI app for teaching idioms). AI is being leveraged for assessment and can design rubrics.

Both teachers and pupils are using **ChatGPT** which follows simple prompts to generate text responses across a range of subjects/topics. There are also numerous coding tools and personal assistants.

User-friendly AI tools which help to develop personalized learning pathways for pupils are **Gradescope** which enables pupils to assess each other while providing feedback and **Cognii** which is a virtual learning assistant relying on conversational technology to help pupils form open-format responses and improve critical thinking skills. There is also **Querium**, an AI platform that helps students master critical STEM skills via a series of personalized lessons and **Plaito** which acts as a coach, giving prompts and suggestions to move students forward as they write, debate and collaborate. By leveraging AI, the tool brings the benefits of one-on-one tutoring, deep understanding, confidence, clarity, and empowerment. **ICentury** helps pupils to accelerate learning and improves their levels of engagement, while Carnegie Learning's Platform mimics human tutors, providing one-on-one personalized learning experiences for each pupil. Other useful and accessible apps for pupils include **Foondamate** (access to past papers via cellphone) and **Watcha Wizard** (Maths tutoring).

With respect to learning support, **Nuance**, a speech recognition product can transcribe up to 160 words per minute, helping students who find it difficult to write or type. This is a useful tool for pupils diagnosed with dyslexia, for example. Additional apps are **Llama2** and **Telegram** which assist pupils through generating images from text prompts. There is no doubt that AI has the potential to close the gap for pupils with barriers to learning.

Of course, there are risks. AI can produce inaccurate or biased responses based on faulty data it draws from, and it has the potential to cause huge data privacy problems. It is important that pupils learn to verify information, assess accuracy and recognise bias. In this regard, critical literacy is an important foundational skill and we need to develop critical reading skills, which is in itself challenging as we find ourselves in an increasingly visual world with moving text! Time spent reading is now spent scrolling!

In looking ahead, universities will need to become more practical to prepare their students for the future workplace. Theory is important but the practical skills needed in industry will become increasingly important. We need to bear this in mind as we develop our campus for futuristic teaching. For example, our laboratories need to be designed with geo-coordinates to support augmented reality as a tool for teaching.

We need to look at designing flexible learning spaces that support collaboration, problem-solving and the inclusion of technology. We can disrupt the traditional notion of each teacher having a dedicated teaching space and move towards shared spaces, smaller collaboration rooms (collab spaces) and flexible spaces which allow for a variety of learning experiences to take place simultaneously, optimizing the teaching and learning experience.

Technology will never replace great teachers, but in the hands of great teachers, it's transformational.
(George Couros)

At this busy time of the year where teachers take the concept of multi-tasking to new heights through having to continue teaching junior classes, set exam papers, mark exams, capture results and write reports, plan for the following year and reflect on the past year, I want to acknowledge the Herschel staff team and to thank them for the work that they do to support the academic programme that we deliver. This quote sums it up, better than I can: ***You laugh, you cry, and you work harder than you ever thought you could. Somedays you're trying to change the world and somedays you're just trying to make it through the day. Your wallet is empty, your heart is full, and your mind is packed with memories of pupils who have changed your life. Just another day in the classroom.*** (venspired.com) Teaching is a calling. Thank you for heeding its call!

Exam Season

This week, Grades 10 and 11 started their year-end examinations and I hope that these have gone smoothly to date. There is no substitute for hard work. Those who have applied themselves with consistency and diligence deserve improvement and success. Academic progress is the result of consistent effort and application over time, and it is important to approach examinations with growth and progress in mind and not to be fixated purely on results. Writing examinations presents an opportunity to identify areas that require more input and focus and to feel affirmed where there has been progress and achievement.

To the girls, remember that it is important to pace yourselves, to approach the examination period in a structured way, to make sure that you get enough sleep and rest, that you nourish yourself to support rigorous application and sustained focus over the two-and-a half/three week writing period and that you balance your family and friendship activities with studies. This is an important life skill, and it is important for your sense of wellbeing. A recent Instagram post from *teachergoals* gave the following advice to parents and teachers: ***Students are not adults – they need help with time management, study skills, prioritising tasks, social skills, character development etc. Instead of assuming immaturity or irresponsibility, assume they need help.*** Surely an important consideration!

As part of the Transformation, Equity and Belonging journey the SRC Exec has written a constitution for the SRC (Student Representative Council) with input from Advocate Adam Ismail who has kindly given of his time and expertise in guiding this process. I would like to extend my gratitude to Adam for the role he has played in this process. Keryn van der Westhuizen, outgoing Chair, has played a major role in driving this process and hands over the reins to Erin Meyer whose first task will be to see to the ratification of the SRC

Constitution to support its implementation effective January 2024.

Last week, some colleagues and I shared some thoughts on the escalating crisis in Gaza and on the impact that this volatile and violent war is having on so many families who have been affected and who are involved. This is an exceptionally charged narrative which is difficult (heartbreaking and complex) to engage with. There have been comments leveraged about it being “easier” and “safer” not to participate; and I think that it is important to respond to this. It is not “easier”. It is a considered choice; not because we do not care – far from it – but because as a school we believe that all pupils have an equal right to belong at Herschel and we do not want to amplify division in any way. Our role is to provide a safe space for all pupils and to encourage curiosity, dialogue and questioning, and respect, while praying for peace and for a resolution that protects innocent civilians who are victims of war.

And so, amid global crises and the storm in Gaza, we pray, cognizant of all who are traumatized, homeless, bereft, hungry, fearful and in pain; for all who are suffering:

Dear Father of all

***Help us to see the world through your eyes,
without dividing lines,
To see just land and water, mountains, trees
and skies.***

***Help us to lay aside our class and skin, our
background and race,***

***To know our shared humanity, to see a
brother or sister in every face.***

***Help us to wear forgiveness, to lay down our
pride and pain,***

***To seek first to understand, Lord may peace
and reconciliation reign.***

***Help us to feel your compassion so we can
freely forgive.***

*May we weave new threads of grace and
cause seeds of hope to live.*

*Help us to play our own small part, with acts
of kindness and of care.*

*May we arise as your children and seek out
what is just and fair.*

*Cause us to make new bonds of trust with
neighbours near and far,*

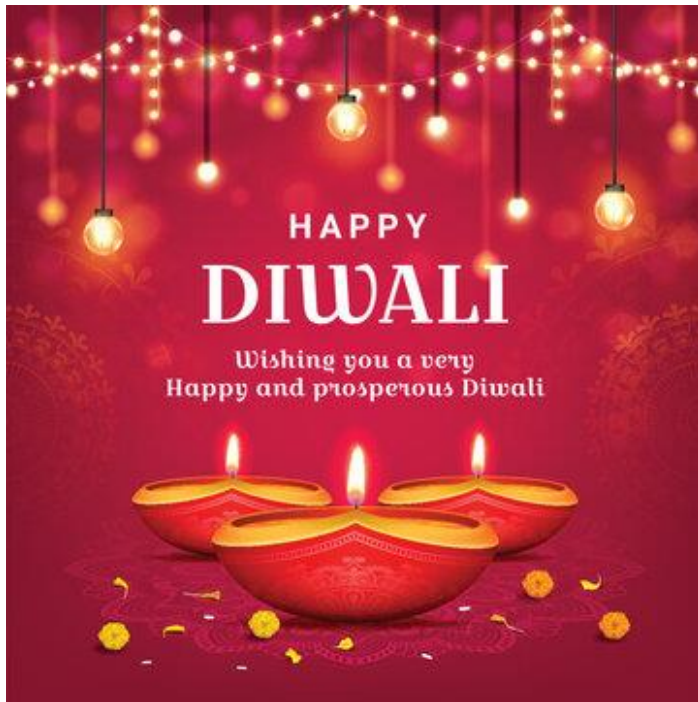
*And so to fashion a world where peace
comes to Earth in this hour.*

www.lordsprayer.com

And at a time when the world really needs light,
lightness and love, we extend our best wishes to all
members of the Herschel community and their
families who are celebrating Diwali this weekend:
*May your Diwali bring peace and love to your life; may
it be free from darkness and abundant with light.*

Warm regards

Heather



We are pleased to introduce the **HGSapp** as a base app to access all digital offerings at Herschel. The **HGSapp** has replaced the D6 Communicator. The **HGSapp** is a user-friendly app where parents will be able to receive notifications, view calendars and sport fixtures, read newsletters, access policies and more. Get the app!

Step 1 – Remove D6

Before we get onto the **HGSapp**, please note that the *Herschel Prep Communicator* and the *Herschel Senior Communicator* was discontinued as of 31 October 2023. Please delete the app from all your devices.

Step 2 – Locate app in store and install

The **HGSapp** is available in the **Apple** and **Google** stores. On your cellphone or tablet, open the app store that corresponds to your device (e.g. App Store for iPhone and iPad; Play Store for Android). Search for 'Herschel Girls School' and install the app.

Step 3 – Login

Open the **HGSapp** and allow any notifications. When prompted, enter your email address. This will be the email address of the mailbox in which you receive Herschel 'Notices'. This may be different to the one in which you receive 'Accounts'; please do not use this email address if it is different.

The initial password is **hgs@pp689** Set your own password when prompted. The password must be at least 8 numerals/characters, with at least one being a symbol or numerical or capital.

Accept the Usage Statements. Leave the Privacy Options as is.

That's it! We look forward to the **HGSapp** improving the flow of communication and access to resources.

Culture Pop Up:

Embody You (Figure of 8 Dance Collective)

Herschel welcomed the choreographers and performers from Figure of 8 Dance Collective to the Herschel Theatre as a part of our ongoing 'Cultural Pop Up' series, where the students are introduced to outside, professional productions. The performance, 'Embody You' (Baxter Theatre, KKnK and Woodfees), explored 'the body's role and function in what makes us human...



Every day we experience the body differently and wrestle with issues such as identity, age, beauty, love, pain and sadness. How we deal with this raises questions about who we are - is this truly us, or are we simply embodying the self that the world creates for us?' (Embody You, Woodfees)



Drama Charity initiatives

Last term, our Grade 11 Drama students took on the responsibility of staging their own original one-act plays for our annual Inter-House Play competition. While this is a wonderful opportunity for the students to grapple with the theatre-making process and gain invaluable skills in collaboration and leadership, another important facet of this is that they donate all of the proceeds of the ticket sales to a charity or organisation whose work is important to them.

This year, they split the proceeds (R12000) between two initiatives: the sanitary pad drive hopes to alleviate some of the pressure on young women and empower them to continue to attend school every month. Paedspal is a Western-Cape based organisation that provides care and support for children and the families of children living with life-threatening and life-limiting illnesses.



Music Soirée

On 25 October, the Music Department presented our annual Music Soirée, a prestigious evening of vocal and instrumental soloists selected through an audition process. We congratulate all our performers on an amazing performance.



STEM CLUB EVENTS

The STEM Club has had two exciting events recently. Mr Denton Smith, the Head of the Hospital Engineering department at Groote Schuur Hospital, came to talk to our students about a career in engineering and shared some insights of working in his field.

In the second event the club attended the Phenomenal Physics event at UCT. They watched a show put on by the Physics department which showcased various physics principles applied in different dramatic ways.



Sports Wrap

Squash Stayers Tournament

The Herschel squash team was invited to participate in the Squash Stayers Tournament which took place from Friday 20 October to Sunday 22 October. The team played against Westerford, the girls and boys team from York High School and the Boerland Invitational School. It was a weekend filled with competition, building friendships and playing the game they love.



2nd Team Somerset College Stayers Tournament

The 2nd Water Polo team participated in the Somerset College Stayers Tournament on Saturday 21 October and Sunday 22 October. The team played a total of six games showing great enthusiasm and camaraderie. They placed 10th overall, beating Fish Hoek and having convincing games against Springfield and DSG.



AICT Basketball Tournament

On Saturday 21 October the u16B and 2nd Basketball Teams had the opportunity to showcase their talent at the AICT Basketball Tournament. The teams played a total of five matches each. They faced some tough competition but that did not stop them from playing with passion. The two Herschel Basketball Teams shared 3rd place.



u16B Team



2nd Team

u14A Team Roedeaan Tournament

The u14A Water Polo team traveled to Johannesburg on Thursday 26 October to take part in the Roedeaan Water Polo Tournament. The team showed grit, determination and played some fantastic water polo. They finished top of their pool but unfortunately went down in the quarter finals. However, they kept their wits about them and fought hard to achieve 5th overall out of 20 teams.



1st Team St Stithian's Stayers Tournament

The Herschel 1st Water Polo Team participated in the Water Polo Stayers Tournament hosted by St Stithians College in Johannesburg from Thursday 26 October to Sunday 29 October. They beat Reddam Constantia in the semi-final and went on to beat Roedeaan 5-4 in a nail-biting final.

Special congratulations go to Alexa de Villiers, Emily van Heerden, Amy van Breda and Carla Lampe who made the Tournament Team. Alexa was also awarded Most Valuable Defender.

