



HOLY CROSS SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT



2023

Overview

2023 was a year of stability despite change. With a new principal at the helm and a number of staff changes we aimed for and achieved consistency and predictability in other areas. We introduced some exciting new initiatives (STEM camp); brought back some old favourites (Reading Camp and Pumba trips); ventured out more often; but above all, kept the academic programme running smoothly.

Highlights

PLAYS

Our Foundation Phase Play has always been a highlight at Holy Cross, and this year was no exception. We reworked an old favourite based on the story of Mr Hare and Mr Mandela. Interwoven with song and dance, Mr Hare's adventures in the city of readers were greatly enjoyed by our school community and children from two local primary schools.

Last year saw the beginning of a tradition of performing a separate Senior Primary play. Once again, this year the Senior Primary team opted to workshop the play. This year's play was based on traditional tales of the jackal and the wolf. Jackal's scheming ways proved thoroughly



entertaining.

Both plays were performed at the theatre at Amazwi literary museum. We thank this institution for its ongoing support of our school.



SPECIAL DAYS



We celebrated Heritage Day, Spring Day, Africa Day, and Home Languages Day. We also held our annual Country Fair and Holy Cross Day celebrations to mark the opening of our Foundation Phase and Senior Primary schools respectively. Valentines' day and Halloween marked times for civics days and the unusual opportunity to buy sweets at school from the Grade 6 tuck shop.





READING CAMP

Reading camp is back!



With the expert organisation of Ms Joice, ably assisted by Ms Zim and the rest of the team, and with generous sponsorship the Grade 3 and 4 learners got to experience a week at Assegai Trails and an intensive reading intervention.





Mirrored on the United States summer camp model, Reading Camp is plenty of fun and plenty of hard work. We were helped and supported by international volunteers Mary-Jane, Rev Kirk, Tony, and Bishop Stacy; and by former principal Kary. Our student teachers from Rhodes worked themselves to the bone as councillors, and our staff were on duty 24/7 but (after a little rest) nobody minded because the value of the camp is so plainly evident.

STEM CAMP

Love Must Act brought a team of US University students studying in the sciences as well as a teacher and learner trio from a robotics award-winning US High School to offer a STEM camp to kick start the year with vibrance and hands on learning. This initiative of Anna, a volunteer student from the University of Buffalo in New York State. The children covered topics from engineering to genetics to robotics and coding.





GRADE 7 FAREWELL

Our Grade 7s planted trees as part of our Heritage Celebration, the tradition of tree planting was started last year with our first group of Grade 7s.

In the last week of term, they combined a day of fun leadership activities hosted by Manezi Mbeju (a parent of one of our Grade 4 learners) and a farewell lunch at Cold Springs which the staff which the Grade 7s prepared under the watchful eye of the Senior Primary teachers.





Academics



We have had a solid academic year. We have participated in external moderation processes and are constantly striving to offer the best possible foundation for our learners. We have upped our use of technology for teaching, and our struggling Mathematicians have benefitted considerably from the use of the Matific programme.

We were extremely pleased to have scored well in the city-wide reading assessment (conducted for the first time this year). 82% of our Grade 4 learners were assessed as being able to read for meaning which compared to the 19% national average and the 40% city average is a wonderful feather in our cap. This rating has led to us being categorised as a high performing school by local Education NGO GADRA. Although we have always been confident in the work we do at Holy Cross, it is comforting to have external affirmation of this nature.



Our top Grade 7 academic this year was Lethu Simayile followed closely by Siyamthanda Menze.



Spirituality and Wellness



Love is at the heart of Holy Cross. We celebrate divine love in our assemblies and chapel services and are blessed to be surrounded by the beauty of unspoiled nature which serves as a constant reminder of God's presence. Rev Rachel and Richard Clarkson from DSG bring a message and worship service every week on a Wednesday. This forms the anchor of our spirituality but is supported by daily prayers



and grace, and assembly messages and songs. The observations of Ash Wednesday and Ascension were particularly significant this year.

A less traditional aspect of our spiritual practice is a nod to the contemplative order which founded the school, and that is our mindfulness practice. This has (through the generosity of the Flourish Foundation) become a weekly staple for our grade 4 to 7 learners. The weekly practice is repeated in Senior Primary assembly on a Thursday morning which always begins with a few minutes of silent time with the focus being “Be still and know that I am God”. Our mindfulness programme was featured in a quadruple-page spread in the ISASA spring edition of *Independent Education*.

Morning journaling is now also become a regular practice for Senior Primary learners. We hope that this combination provides our learners with a strong skill set with which to manage the turbulence of their pre-teen years.

In addition, for those individuals in need of additional support we try to work with families and local health care providers to facilitate the support that is needed. Nurse Jenny is invaluable in this regard in addition to the love and care that she provides on a daily basis for everyone with bumps and scratches. As part of her service to the school she has facilitated eye testing of all new learners, dentist visits for the foundation phase, and two sets of vaccinations. She was once again assisted by her friend Marrian in term 1. A real success of the year was getting Avenathi Ntonto’s new hearing aids. This was a joint effort between nurse Jenny, the family, and the provincial hospital in PE. It has really made a difference to her.



Can mindful awareness help to make South African children flourish?

BY NICCI HAYES

‘I think their lives would change if they were able to handle their emotions’. This was the reason given by one of our Grade 7 participants in a mindful awareness programme when asked if ‘Feelings Friday’ (our name for the programme) should be offered to other children at Holy Cross School in Grahamstown/Makanda in the Eastern Cape.

Tracey, a teacher at Holy Cross, was looking for a way to “boost” her sometimes limited definition of success in schools. I started reading around the topics of happiness and joy, and looking at happiness indexes and wellness studies. A couple of themes came up again and again. In particular, service, self-awareness, and the feeling of security, caught my attention as aspects of happiness and joy that could be within the scope of a school to influence.

I started to move towards the idea of using the word ‘flourishing’ as a broad umbrella for what I was wanting to measure. This led to a retreat in nature from the United States to introduce me to the Flourish Foundation (FF) in Idaho. Within a week or two, we had chatted over Zoom and agreed that we would run a South African pilot of the FF Mindful Awareness Programme at Holy Cross in 2022 for the Grade 6 and Grade 7 learners.

I was a little apprehensive about importing a curriculum from the US. Would it speak to our children? Would it match their needs? Would it translate in the different socio-economic circumstances of the Eastern Cape? In the era of decoloniality, these questions give a person pause.

On the other hand, the FF curriculum was fully developed and scripted, and, with seven other subjects to prepare for, I knew this was my best chance of bringing mindfulness to my classes. I was also confident that the practices behind the programme are in line with the values and practices of such people as the Dalai Lama and the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Also, the notion of *ubuntu* runs through the course, sometimes even expressed in African terms. It probably doesn’t hurt that Flourish has done a lot of work in both India and Morocco.



Although Holy Cross is an Anglican Christian school, the FF Mindful Awareness programme is secular and could be used equally well in a secular school environment.

Flourish stepped in to assist.

In 2022 I was lucky to have both a Flourish staff member and a former Flourish volunteer to assist me in launching the pilot programme, which consists of a weekly lesson of 45 minutes for 26 weeks. Each session introduces a concept. The introduction is followed by a game that illustrates the central idea and then a guided mindfulness (or meditative) session. The concepts include: understanding and being able to label one’s emotions, thoughts and desires; introspective; and, being kind to one’s self, others and all living beings. The concepts build incrementally over the year and the successive years.

Roughly half of the sessions were shared between a volunteer and myself, with one person facilitating the introduction and game, and the other guiding the mindfulness practice. I ran the rest of the session alone and was blown away by how much the children engaged them and grew from them.

Despite the Flourish Foundation’s openness to adaptations and adjustments, very few were necessary. Some changes included a few instances when the examples of possible causes of stress were changed, as these seem to have particular socio-economic resonances (though in other South African schools even this change may not be necessary). In one

lesson, when children were asked to indicate if they had experienced certain trauma, the severity of the trauma mentioned was adjusted, as the facilitator felt that the level of trauma likely to have been experienced by these learners in a South African context was probably extreme and they stood triggering intensely painful memories.

A further adaptation in the last school term of the year was to add three minutes of silence (for mindfulness practice or silent prayer) at the end of 12 minutes of morning journaling for the Grade 7s.

The impact
At the end of 2022, the Grade 7s were asked to fill in Flourish’s standard evaluation form. Although (as the first Grade 7 class ever at our school) the data sample of this class’s 7-observing learners was small enough to have made ‘flourish’ point, it was clear from discussions with the Grade 6s that they felt similarly.

The Holy Cross learners’ experience also mirrors findings from other small mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs). While it is difficult to conclude, independently, that the use of MBIs in the educational environment universally benefits students and teachers, it can be stated that MBIs have been demonstrated to be of benefit in many environments, including humanitarian settings. The fact that students report enjoying mindfulness exercises, parents see their children using the skills at home, and teachers report increased tranquillity in the classroom suggests that participants, either consciously or unconsciously, are gaining skills that promote their mental wellbeing (Cherry, 2017; Doherty, 2019 as cited by Hammer, 2022).



In the setting of a school it is never possible to say for sure that one specific element or programme or person has had a particular effect. There are too many changing variables and no control groups. However, in this case, the subjective ‘control measure’ was the principal’s prior knowledge of the children in the years before 2022. Despite other factors (such as natural maturing, and a new class teacher) of which she was cognisant, the principal felt sure that the mindfulness programme was having a positive effect on the two groups. In particular, she noted a feeling of calm and an ease in terms of moving into and through lessons. At the beginning of this year she observed that there had been a rapid maturing process since the start of the programme in 2022, and the children showed increased empathy in their conversations and on the playground. The strongest objective measure was the fact that discipline issues arising at her door dropped to almost zero over the course of last year.

The Flourish volunteer noted that, in comparison to pupils she had worked with in the US, the Holy Cross children were more adept at being still, despite noise from the adjoining classroom (which is only separated by a door). She felt that perhaps this might be a result of children being used to noise in their living environments. In the conversations she conducted with the learners, they reported being extremely positive about the programme.

Comments that occurred over that they looked forward to the lesson every week and that they enjoyed relating. Of course, it’s not surprising for learners to enjoy a lesson of education under a busy school week, but learners also repeatedly mentioned finding the programme beneficial in

Of course, nurse Jenny doesn't limit herself to just nursing, her sewing lessons are a favourite and she is game to help with anything.



The recipients of the LOVE award this year were Zince Gaqa (Senior primary) and Khayone Mfabana (Foundation Phase). This award is the most prestigious award in the school. It is given to the kindest, most loving, most friendly child in each phase, and is voted for by the learners. Zince was also our top academic in Grade 4.



Co-curricular activities

Once again, we have been very lucky to be able to join the Saint Andrew's Prep rugby teams with our grade four to seven boys benefiting immensely from this experience. In the DSG sports skills development sessions there's been a strong focus on netball this year as well as support for our athletics programme.



We participated in the district athletics trials for the first time this year and Azizo Dandile made us proud by coming third in the 100m sprints at district level.

This year we took a slightly bigger group to participate in the PJ/Raportryers fun run. All our learners received spot prizes and were invited to a free session at CrossFit Gym.



In the last term DSG junior invited us to a fun day of girls' soccer. All of our senior primary girls participated and the final result across five games was a draw with Holy Cross winning two matches; DSG 2; and one match being drawn. We look forward to even more such events in 2025.

Our internal cross country and athletics were strengthened this year with skills development by Mr Noel ready who was our mindfulness coach and intern.

On the cultural front, other than the two plays mentioned in highlights, and the marimba band, our preparations of traditional songs and dances for Heritage Day celebrations were greatly enjoyed, especially by the Foundation Phase

Senior primary teachers offered clubs again this year on a Tuesday afternoon and their offerings of robotics, crafts, yoga, gardening, and computers were enhanced by two volunteers: Sambesive who ran a music club for us and Lesley, who offered knitting.



Outings

Something we are really proud of this year is the extent to which we have managed to take learning out of the classroom. From trips on the grounds through the forests to excursions to Pumba, our teachers have really been creative with outings and excursions. We've been to the Rhodes libraries, to dairies and dams; to police stations, fire stations and the power station, we have seen four shows; we have been to the bible monument, the Grahamstown monument and the Egazini monument. We have visited Port Alfred, pineapples, and penguins, we have searched for fossils and visited the Coelacanth; and each trip has proved a valuable learning experience with strong memories being built. (If there were a prize, it would definitely go to Ms Joyce who is our greatest adventurer.)



Staff Matters

Ms Anelisa Mfenyana during the staff at the beginning of the year and has proved a firm favorite with the senior primary learners. Mr Mdu Ngcozana was with us until the end of August when he received a permanent appointment at Good Shepherd School. He was replaced by Ms Thando Tshunungwa and we thank them both for the services and their love of our grade 1s.

We bid farewell to Ms Ann Smailes and Ms Dom Doyle early this year and we likewise thank them for their love and passion.



Mr Simon Barker and Ms Jess Winkler have joined our team and have worked hard to develop our English curricula. Ms Winkler gave birth to Olivia a short while after joining us. Mr Noel Reddy, our mindfulness coach and intern stood in while Ms Winkler was on maternity leave.

The year ended with Mr Phumzile Kumkhani from our support staff on paternity leave following the birth of his daughter, Awongwa.



Our support staff team has remained stable this year and we are blessed to have staff members who always put the needs of our children first.



Ms Zola Lukhwe will join us as the Grade 1 teacher in January 2024. All three of our new teachers come to us with diverse teaching experiences and we know that they are bringing, and will continue to bring, wisdom and a richness to our teaching team.

Our newly appointed Heads of Department (HODs), Ms Zim Mdingi, and Mr Zanexolo Klaas, have served us well this year, taking charge of learner discipline and moderation in their respective phases. They have also displayed leadership and initiative in introducing changes and improvements such as phase related workshops. They also both completed the Rhodes University Business School Aspiring Leaders Course.

In terms of staff development this year we have had two internal training sessions from Rhodes Psychology postgraduate students and six staff members attended the Kingswood College Teach! Conference in August. WE further benefitted from several ISASA offerings – governance and discipline workshops as well as the principal’s conference in September.



Alumni



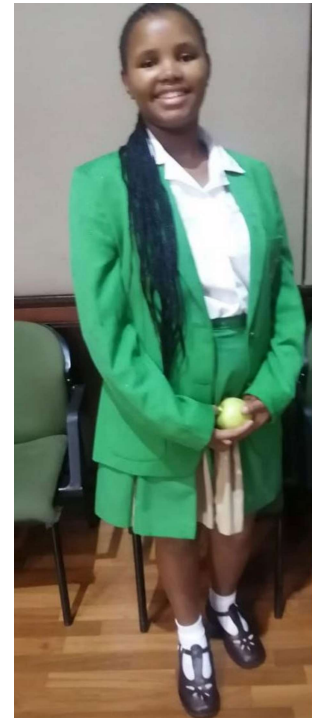
We look forward to hearing results both from our first grade 7 group and from this year's matric class, some of whom were with us 10 years ago in Grade 3.

So far, we have heard that all of our girls from the 2022 Grade 7 class have passed with Aza coming third in grade at Ntsika Secondary school. Awongwa is doing well at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy.

We also know that our alumni did well in the city-wide reading test for Grade 8s. Putting us in 6th position out of 19 local primary schools that were charted by the test.

Governance

Trust and Council have remained stable and supportive in 2004. The only change being the addition of Dr Sam Adjobe as a parent member of council, elected by the parent body who has proved a valuable addition to the team.



Finances

Finances are in good shape for this year. School fees have been coming in steadily from most parents. We received a pleasing audit for 2022, qualified only by the standard school challenge of fundraising monies not being able to be anticipated.

Donors, Sponsors, and Funders

Holy Cross could not be Holy Cross without the generosity of our numerous sponsors. Without government support, Holy Cross relies on very low school fees and generosity to fund its entire programme.

Pre-eminent among our sponsors are our programme partners – Love Must Act. Headed by Bishop Stacy Sauls with Mr Andrew Joyce as the vice-president. Love Must Act works tirelessly to assist us to fulfil our vision of providing quality education as a pathway out of poverty. This year, in addition to providing the means for us to re-ignite Reading Camp, Love Must Act initiated and funded the STEM camp this year as well as contributing the lion's share of our running costs.

The Order of the Holy Cross remain committed to the school and have contributed substantially in kind with buildings and land, as well as with generous contributions to the renovation project that was completed this year and the solar project which is immanent.

The seed money for the solar project was donated by a private donor in South Africa who prefers not to be named but who is a long-time supporter of the school. Also contributing to the solar installation was St Cyprian's Church who also gave a bursary award to the school in honour of Bishop Ebenezer who retired this year.

We are further supported by the Anglican community through our partnership with the Diocesan School for Girls and St Andrew's School families. We regularly benefit from the use of the chapel and other parts of the grounds rented by, as well as from help from the staff on campus, particularly Clinton York. Rev Rachel and Richard Clarkson conduct tailor-made chapel services for us every Wednesday. We have also benefitted in many ways in terms of our co-curricular activities with the DSG grade 11 girls designing and running a sport programme for our Senior Primary learners every Wednesday afternoon. DSG girls also assisted with our STEM camp and Country fair. The children's favourite is of course, the Christmas party which is hosted in the dining hall at the monastery.



Our under 11 and under 13 boys being included as part of the St Andrew's Prep B and C teams, and St Andrew's College having enabled our swimming club by offering the use of their pool, greatly enhanced our sport offerings. We further benefit from the collegiality between these and other schools in Makhanda. Good Shepherd School donated 4 car loads full of workbooks and library books that they cleared out at the end of the year.

The KVOD trust supports our Grade 6s each year and through their generosity the Grade 6s have had an inspiring year both in and out of the classroom.

The Flourish Foundation has contributed not only their curriculum but also the salary of a mindfulness coach to enable all our grades 4 to 7 learners and our senior primary staff to benefit from the programme.

We are also so grateful to our local community for its support:

Rhodes University lives up to its promise of being part of the Makhandan community.

Community Engagement along with the Flourish Foundation made our mindfulness programme possible this year, and sponsored and end of year events and party morning. They further donated 5 laptops at the end of the year that will be used in our classes with our ever increasingly tech-savvy Senior Primary learners. IT department provided much needed support to get our computer room up and running.

The Rhodes Primary Education Department is a fantastic partner in providing Ready Steady Read Write training to our Grade 1s and in sending student teachers for observation, and teaching practice each year. We benefit from their enthusiasm and up to date training. They benefit from the guidance of our experienced teachers. We also thank the Centre for Social Development for the donation of BookDash books towards our reading camp.



The Music Department lent us a collection of percussion instruments – marimbas and xylophones – and sent a student to teach our learners. Sambesiwe Mavela went well beyond his service-learning hours to offer music as a club on Tuesdays too. This

brought the joyful sounds of traditional music to the bottom school buildings. DSG kindly vacated the stone storeroom which has now become our Art and Music room. Like Sambesiwe, our student teachers (both from Rhodes and Unisa) have gone beyond the call of duty assisting with IT support, being reading camp councillors, and in general assisting wherever they can.





year.

GBS has made an annual donation for many years. This year's donation will be used to help beef up our supply of isiXhosa books. Thanks too to Shoprite and Exclusive books for the discounts, and Noom for accommodating our Grade Rs on an outing.

We are so grateful too to Pumba Game Reserve for their generous sponsorship of game drives for all our learners; and to Amakhala Game Reserve for their environmental education programme and game drives for the grade 5s and 6s. With their help we have been able to put a really solid focus on environmental education this



Ms Lesley McQuaid has given of her time and prodigious knitting talent, and even sent us a postcard from her travels in Scotland.

We say a huge thank you to Dr Jenny Hodgskiss for her literacy support with our Grade 2s and 3s, and for bringing a team of friends with her to whip our Foundation Phase library into shape.



Kary McConnachie has continued to be the most amazing support of the school, assisting with training some staff in memory training skills; volunteering at reading camp; and in general, being available for support of all the staff. She has also continued to mentor Ms Nicci Hayes in her new role as principal of the school. She is never more than a phone call away.

Basil Mills, a long-time friend of the school has continued to support us with wonderful outings to his historical farm.

Gareth Coombes donated a forest full of indigenous saplings which the Presidents' Stimulus Package team and Umthati assisted us to plant.

Amazwi – is always happy for us to visit their exhibitions and have kindly provided sponsorship in kind by allowing us the use of their theatre for plays.

Further afield, Rotary Port Alfred contributed a ton of books from a Texas donation.

Of course, the Holy Cross teachers and staff should not be forgotten in this category as many teachers (and often their family members too) go beyond the call of duty, buying stationery and books and other educational resources to enhance the experience of our learners.

The parents of Holy Cross have been fantastic supporters this year, with dependable fee payments, regular attendance of meetings and support for plays and sporting events. A group of parents even allowed themselves to be coerced into a parents' song during our Heritage Day celebrations.



Educational networks.

We have continued to benefit this year from our affiliation with ISASA, and from the help of Mariette Visser. In addition, we are affiliated to SAHESA and ABESA. We are active members of the Makhana Principals' Forum and the Makhana Circle of Unity Education Cluster.

Conclusion

2023 has been a wonderful adventure full of learning and fun. Thank you to everyone, not forgetting our wonderful learners, for all the energy and joy that they bring into our space.



