

Dear Parents

How is it that one careless match can start a forest fire, but it takes a whole box to start a campfire? Author Unknown

Our last Principal, Mr Watson, was very keen on the great outdoors and one result of his energies in this area is that we have an outdoor centre at High Noon farm outside Villiersdorp. We have used, and continue to use, this place for a number of activities. It is a nice getaway for groups of less than 50. Many Confirmation, Grade, House, Biology, Maths, X-country, Prep and other camps have enjoyed its tranquil and picturesque surrounding.

Almost all schools of our sort have some sort of outdoor program because educators believe it does children good to get out of the city into unspoilt environs, away from their gadgets and entertainment. Some schools put a huge emphasis on this and it is very much at the forefront of their marketing. Indeed one famous Australian school (Geelong Grammar) takes their children into the mountains for a full year. I wonder what you think of having grade 9 or 10 Bishops on a rustic campus somewhere around Ceres (for instance). One can see some advantages (especially if your son is rather difficult at this time) but there are some obvious sacrifices (competitive sport being one).

At Bishops our camping/hiking program is limited. There are a number of small society or subject based camps (Christian Union and Biology for instance) but we only organise one camp/hike a year per grade for the boys and we only do this for grades 8, 9 and 10. Grade 11 now have a leadership conference in place of a camp which, although in a beautiful place, is not focussed on the "outdoors".

So at present:

Grade 8's go away for a short camp in the 1st term in Houses. The main idea is that the new boys are able to bond with one another. It also gives the housemaster (and/or his assistant) a chance to get to know them.

Grade 9's can choose from a variety of activities at the end of the 4th term. These are largely experiential.

Grade 10's go on the Bishops Epic in the 4th term. This takes the boys away for just over two weeks into the Cederberg and its surrounding areas. Apart from taking them out of their comfort zones it also presents them with a number of challenges, both physical and emotional. Boys learn a lot about a number of things – most importantly, things about themselves.

I know a number of people would like to see us taking boys away far more. However, it is one of those balancing acts a school has to decide on and costs, disruptions to academic and other programs, as well as potential risks have to be considered. Boys at Bishops will get enough of a taste for the great outdoors to know if it is something they wish to get into later in life and, judging from the number of OD's we meet on our hikes, on the water and on the road, I think many do.

Yours sincerely
Peter Westwood
(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)