

Dear Parents

My brother is four years older than me and the poor man had a really painful little brother forty years ago. I am told that I would interfere when he was playing with his friends. One day, in an effort to get away from me, he proposed hide-and-seek as a game. This, I thought, was an excellent idea as I was good at this game and could hold my own in the company of his peers. So off I ran to hide in a superb place and waited patiently – and waited and waited.... I never fell for that one again.

Rev Nikki Ing pointed out to us at St Thomas that children love hide-and-seek. It is exciting (especially when the person is so close you dare not even breathe) but it is also just the knowledge that someone is looking for you and cares about finding you. Of course people play hide-and-seek in many different ways and some of our sons play this game with us at times in their teenage years. They do not hide behind curtains but they do sometimes hide themselves behind certain behaviours (both passive and aggressive). The temptation is to control the behaviour and be content with managing that. Certainly, that is basically how things were done when I was at school. Some boys seemed to be beaten almost every week. They developed leather hides! I wonder what we would have done with them at Bishops now? Could we have saved them from this weekly bruising? It did not seem to help them. (It may have helped the housemaster's stress level, though!)

The psychologists of the Bishops Support Unit spend a lot of time playing hide-and-seek with the boys who are sent to them or who voluntarily take themselves along to the BSU. On occasions it is quite easy for them because the boy is tired of hiding and wants to be found. Matters are dealt with and the boy moves into a better space. Sometimes boys really do not want to be found and make it difficult for those trying to find them. Great patience and persistence is required and, because our resources are limited, we quite often have to direct parents to take their son to someone off campus. This can have the added advantage of making the boys feel that they are in a safer place because there is no connection with the school.

The longer the BSU has been in existence the more the boys and staff have come to appreciate its importance to the school. Increasingly we see boys (and staff) taking themselves off to it to talk about various issues in their lives, from the trauma of a death in the family to the stress of expectations around sport. We have come to see that it was an inspired decision to open this unit. We have plans to extend it over the next couple of years, both in terms of physical space and personnel. For the physical space we will need to compete for rather stretched resources but for the personnel Mr Bantjes plans to make Bishops a site for Intern Psychologists who have completed their university courses. This has huge potential benefits for us as well as providing a service to the community.

I hope you have a happy holiday with your sons and that all will be safe.

Yours sincerely

Peter Westwood
(Deputy headmaster Pastoral)