



Monday May 10th, 2021

Settled in and travelling well @ The Alpine School

Dear Parents, Guardians and Families.

Welcome again to the community of the Alpine School Campus. The time has flown by and we are pleased with how things are progressing at our school. The purpose of these letters is to provide you with a perspective of the *intended program* here at the Alpine School. We will not be writing about individuals, more about the experiences of the community as a whole.

Homesickness can be a normal emotion experienced and at this time within the program, although it does tend to diminish. If you think that your son or daughter is still unreasonably homesick, do call us and we can compare notes, so to speak. None of us can really predict how this anxiety may manifest itself. Our staff members really do make a priority of ensuring students' wellbeing during these first, more unsettled weeks. Moreover, how are you coping with being "son or daughter sick"?

Our experience over the past twenty years, helps us in explaining how students cope and why they behave in certain ways here. We see students (to varying degrees) in their first week or so of living here being very concerned with self. They often ask, "When is dinner?" or "Where do I wash my clothes?" On the inside, we feel students are asking, "Who are my friends and how do I fit in? Does she like me or what does he think about me?" They are concerned about "me". This is a very egocentric period. After this normal and possibly "selfish" time, students find themselves comfortable with this day-to-day concern, and tend to identify with their team very strongly: "I belong to "Pahran High School" or "Merbein P-10 College", or "I am a city/country person". Students tend to be placing themselves in a category so they can find their position in a "new social/school order". They tend to cluster with familiar friends.

For some students letting go of their past and embracing the new is a traumatic period; it is a "rite of passage". This can manifest itself in a whole range of denials and refusals, even to fundamental agreements like mobile phones, chewing gum or hair straighteners! Once these refusals are accepted as part of the Alpine School, and equally so, as time passes, we tend to see students developing a strengthening association with the Alpine School as "home", especially after the visiting weekend. They associate strongly with this place as their own, where they live, and see it as a key part of their identity. This sense of security or anchoring is fundamental to the students' sense of well being and belonging. Parents' visiting weekend is possibly the first time in your and their lives that your son/daughter will be showing you around *their* home.

Another way to describe the experience for students is Bruce Tuckman's model of "*Forming-Storming-Norming Performing and Mourning*". At present, they are past "*forming*" as a group and are beginning to "*storm and norm*". They are testing the rules, and are beginning to see where they fit in the group with their values and beliefs. This often translates into greater familiarity with staff and the routines. The last experience, "*mourning*", will be your challenge as their new world is deconstructed. How will you deal with *that* type of challenge?

Our educational and care programs reflect this knowledge and understanding of the psycho-social development and needs of young people in a setting such as this. What we do at various stages in the program reflect the needs of our students; we refer to this as, a "student centered approach to learning".



We provide this as a way of explaining perhaps why some students behave the way they do, and preparing you for, among other things, a revisit of separation anxiety (*mourning or grieving*) or homesickness after the visiting weekend. The homecoming, while apparently a long way off, is worth considering now. You may also find communication may vary at different times and possibly decrease after an initial burst. You may feel you are totally abandoned after visiting weekend in particular. Please contact us if you would like to discuss this further!

The program is well and truly underway, and the students are certainly becoming immersed. They have their Laptop computers now and seem to be enjoying the access to such a wonderful tool. We hope you get feedback from them. For some it may be day to day, either electronically or by letters, on what they have been up to. Students have been out undertaking their introduction to mountain bike riding, the local environment and alpine expedition skills. They have also been involved in a unique team building activity called "bridge building".

Throughout the term, your son or daughter will receive appraisals and reviews written by us which provide a "360 degree" feedback approach to their time spent here. The combination of their Learning Concepts and iLead portfolio, which includes lesson on goal setting, personal reflection, leadership and personal development, SWAY Portfolio and Basic Food Handling Course assist in formulating their 'report'. We as a staff team have considerable input into many of these things. Reflective and peer feedback is continuously sought from those people in immediate contact with your son or daughter (who could be staff or students, and hence includes 'peer review'), and we highly value this type of appraisal as an integral part of the learning process, not a type of afterthought.

Students will be heading out over the coming weeks on their overnight expeditions, carrying their backpacks and all their alpine camping gear. We start locally with an overnight expedition, and after the visiting weekend, we head out on a more ambitious expedition. Please be reassured that all expedition routes are reviewed for safety and access and modifications made as deemed necessary, to ensure that the safety of your sons/daughters remains as paramount.

Parents / Guardians visiting weekend is approaching and this time is specifically a weekend about you as a family and about your relationship to you son/daughter, and is an integral part of the whole Alpine School separation and reintegration process. Give them your undivided attention and take the interest in their experience here and their return and reintegration over the Summer period will be so much better for all of you.

If you are not able to make the visiting weekend of Saturday May 29th and Sunday May 30th, 2021 or would like to talk to us about any of the matters raised, please do not hesitate to do so.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely

Mark Reeves, BA (Rec.), Grad Dip (OE & PE), Postgrad. Dip (Organizational Change), MACE.
Principal.
On behalf of the School Staff team.

Russell Shem
Campus Principal
Alpine School Campus