

are necessary for loving relationships across cultural, racial and socio-economic boundaries. The Vine School seeks to be a united, diverse, reconciled community, as a testimony to the power of God and the nature of His Kingdom.

This is easy to write but difficult to achieve, given the prejudices, hurts and betrayals of our shared history. We know it is not enough to have racially mixed classes in the hope that our children will grow up “colour-blind”. Instead, we have determined to actively foster a reconciled community. We have not done all that we would like to do – the work of establishing and growing a school has been demanding, and we have not had the capacity to do more. But here are some of the things we have done...



### A diverse staff and affordable fee structure

We sought to appoint excellent teachers from different cultural backgrounds. The racial mix of our teaching staff is 52% coloured, 43% white and 5% black, and there are similar ratios in our administrative and maintenance teams. We are one of few ISASA schools in the Western Cape whose principal is not white. We would love to appoint more black teaching staff but have struggled to attract teachers with strong English skills. Many black teachers who speak English well are strongly committed to working in disadvantaged schools. This we respect, but it is unfortunate for us.

We have tried to keep our school fees as affordable as possible, so as not to become exclusive. As we have small classes with no more than 16 children in each, this has not been easy. However, our fees are relatively low for an independent school. We offer education bursaries to all employees who wish to enrol their children, including maintenance and administrative staff. We also offer reduced fees to families who cannot afford the full fees – typically those who remain disadvantaged by the apartheid legacy. Our great challenge now is to raise sufficient funds to continue supporting such families, thus helping to redress some of the wrongs of the past.

Rules about hair have made the headlines in recent times.<sup>4</sup> Attitudes towards hairstyles are often arbitrary and culture-bound, resulting in different

opinions about what is acceptable. In thinking through the principles that inform these opinions, we settled upon modesty and a self-forgetful attitude consistent with the school’s values. We require that hair colour should be natural, and styles should be neat, conservative and easy to maintain. Braids may be worn, and hair extensions should be the same as the student’s natural colour. Teachers contact parents if their child’s hairstyle is a source of distraction to the child or to other pupils.

### Celebrating and supporting each family

It is an ongoing challenge to arrange parent meetings at a time that suits all our parents. Families who use public transport struggle to come to evening meetings in the week, because trains, buses and taxis are irregular and/or unsafe at night. We tried to have parent meetings on Saturday mornings, but that didn’t work for families who work or shop on Saturday mornings, or who have children participating in club sports. It’s also a challenge to arrange a school event for pupils in the evening. To ensure that everyone can participate, we encourage parents who have transport to open up their homes so that children who can’t travel home at night can sleep over. Out of consideration for families who live far away and have no transport, we schedule only one event during the year that requires all children to attend in the evening. This is one of several areas where we have chosen to give up a benefit often taken for granted by the privileged for the sake of those who have less.

We have arranged multicultural events to promote fun and fellowship. We had a bring and share supper, and asked families to bring a meal typical of their culture. It was a great success – Xhosa families brought *umphokoqo* and *amasi* (crummel pap and sour milk), *umngqusho* (samp and beans) and fried chicken from a fast-food outlet. Shona families brought *sadza* (miekie pap), *korvu* (a vegetable like kale) and stew. One American family brought chili and salsa, another brought takeaway pizza. Coloured families brought bobotie and breyani and *koeksusters*, an Afrikaans family brought *melktert*. Only the white, English-speaking families were unsure what to bring, as they realised that their favourite dishes reflect so many cultures of South Africa and the rest of the world.

