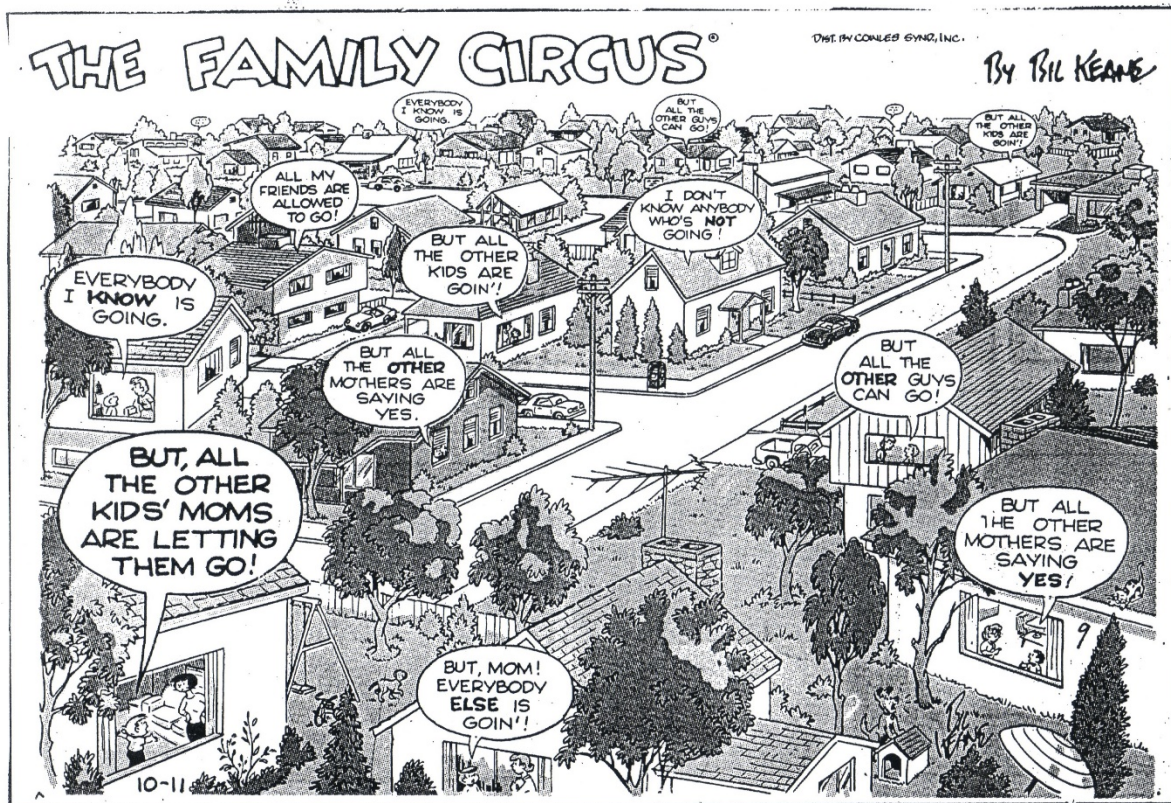




Dear Parents & Care Givers

Parenting is a tough gig and it is not getting any easier. The cartoon below is an 'oldie but a goodie' in that it describes a situation with our children to which we can all relate.



How often are we told as parents that we are the only ones of the parents of our children's friends who try to enforce one rule or another? That said, it's our job. Our job is not to be our child's best friend but to be their parent. And that means making some tough decisions at times.

After reading in Term 2 Newsletter where Mrs Austin-Campbell spelt out the absentee rate for each year level, I emailed you last week seeking feedback on why these statistics look so poor – especially among our senior students. Obviously, young people who are missing significant number of days in class are letting themselves down and adversely affecting their results.

I am grateful to those parents who emailed me and the discussions I had with parents at a recent Board meeting and the P&F meeting. Their wisdom was very welcome on this topic.

Too often we hear from students and even sometimes parents, that they have taken a day off school because it is their birthday. Or because they needed to do a driving test. Or because their best friend was away. Regrettably, often, parents seem to go along with excuses like these for their child to miss school. Not to put too fine a point on it but this looks like really poor parenting.

At Shalom, I have always stressed with parents, at the point of enrolment that Shalom is not like shopping at Woolworths or Coles where you push your trolley through the aisles and pick out what you want and leave on the shelves what you don't. If you choose to send your child to Shalom – and it is very much a choice – you choose the whole package. That means your child participating in all that we do here, every day. Turning up to class, every day, ready to learn must be a priority. So must buying into the culture of Shalom that is, to a large degree, created by attendance at days like Shalom Day and Sports Carnivals and Retreat experiences. These are not optional extras here. Barring real illness or other exceptional circumstance, we need parents to support us and the decision you made at enrolment, to have your child here on those days. Even when they tell you that they are 'boring' or 'not cool' or their best friend isn't attending. In those situations we need parents to be parents and step up. If you don't wish to do that, Shalom is not the school for you.

I worry that despite everything we say to parents at point of enrolment, that some see Shalom as an 'Aldi Priced Grammar School'. We are not a Grammar school and I hate it when people refer to Shalom as 'Private School'. We are not a Private School. We are very proudly a very public Catholic school – and there is a big difference.

The following absence statistics are from this year –

- Swimming Carnival 615
- Cross Country 207
- Shalom Day 445
- Athletics Carnival 450
- Year 10 Reflection Day 43 / 220 (mostly boys)
- Year 12 Retreat Day 83 / 210

These statistics are awful. But, can I be clear, I have no doubt that there will be a number of very genuine absences on those days. Things happen and people get unwell but the genuine reasons for absence do not go anywhere near justifying those levels of absence. I suspect that students will have cajoled their parents to stay home and parents folded on the issue.

The absences on Reflection Days are particularly disappointing and may reflect a real lack of support for the values of the College.

Interestingly, for some other optional activities, like the Shalom 'Prom', we get close to 100% attendance. Why is that? Particularly when events like that come with considerable expense and dislocation.

Shalom is a great school. We have a great culture here. Students receive the opportunity for an excellent education and we work hard, every day to ensure that when students come to Shalom, they feel safe and respected. Shalom is not perfect and sometimes things go wrong but we work very hard to get things right. We need full parental support to build on that. All of that said, Shalom might not be for everyone. In Bundaberg there are other excellent schools that might be a better fit for families and children who do not want to buy into what goes into being a part of a Catholic school.

Moving forward and after discussion with the P&F and the Board, I am proposing that, from 2023, we will make participation in a marquee event like the Shalom Formal, conditional on attendance and participation at Shalom. This would also apply to those wishing to participate in Bundaberg and Wide Bay sport or be eligible for Leadership positions in Year 12 -

Two criteria that would be in effect from next year for all students from Year 10-12 :

- ***At least 85% attendance over each of the years at 'special days'***
- ***90% attendance at school***

As I mentioned previously, there will be always very valid reasons for absence through illness, injury or other very valid reason. As long as these are clearly and transparently communicated with your child's House Coordinator, these won't be considered in calculating attendance rates to enable a child to participate in the College Formal.

This is a change in our processes and I am happy to discuss this with anyone who would like to see me about this. Alternately, I'm always happy to hear from parents by email.

As we move forward, I really ask that you confirm for yourself that Shalom is the school you want your child to attend. I hope that is the case. But, if it is, choose the 'whole package', not just the bits that your child likes. Our job, as parents and educators, is to encourage young people to step outside their comfort zones – often. And give them the support they need to realize that challenges are there to be overcome, not avoided at all costs.

To the vast majority of Shalom parents who wholeheartedly support the College, thank you. We will only achieve good outcomes for your child if we are working with you. Nothing will be achieved if we are at cross purposes.

In anticipation, many thanks for your support.



Dan McMahon
PRINCIPAL