From The Green Couch

Term 3 - 2026

The Green Couch
STUDENT WELLNESS CENTRE

Are We Raising a Generation of Exhausted Children?

As another academic year draws to a close, perhaps it is time to pause, take a breath and reflect on something that has become increasingly common in the lives of our children: the pressure to constantly do more, achieve more and be more.
As parents, we want the very best for our children. We want to give them opportunities we may not have had ourselves. We want them to discover their talents, develop their interests, build confidence, make friends, excel academically and grow into capable, independent young women who feel equipped to take on the world. We want them to have choices, to experience different things and to know that they are capable of achieving wonderful things.

And so, with the very best intentions, we fill their lives with opportunities. There are extra lessons, additional academic support, music lessons, sporting commitments, cultural activities, leadership responsibilities, enrichment programmes and weekend activities. There is always something to work towards, something to improve, something to prepare for or somewhere else they need to be.

One activity leads to another, one commitment is added to an already full diary, and before we know it, our children's weeks are scheduled almost as carefully as those of working adults.
Of course, none of these opportunities are inherently problematic. Sport teaches discipline, music develops creativity, academic support can build confidence, and extracurricular activities provide valuable opportunities for growth. We want our girls to experience these things. They matter.

But perhaps there is a question worth asking as we close another busy school year: In our efforts to give our children every opportunity to succeed, are we sometimes raising a generation of exhausted children who feel that they constantly need to be doing something to be enough?

When doing more becomes the expectation

There is a subtle difference between giving a child opportunities and creating an environment in which they feel they must constantly take advantage of every opportunity.





Sometimes the pressure is explicit. There are expectations around marks, sporting achievements, university prospects or future careers. But often, the pressure is much quieter. It exists in the comparisons we make, the conversations we have, the activities we encourage and the messages our children absorb from the world around them.

Perhaps we enrol them in another extra lesson because we worry that they might fall behind. Perhaps we encourage another sport because we do not want them to miss out on an opportunity. Perhaps we feel that if other children are doing more, our own children should be doing more too. Sometimes our decisions are driven by genuine concerns about their futures. Sometimes they are driven by fear: fear that they will not be competitive enough, prepared enough, accomplished enough or successful enough.

And sometimes, if we are honest, it is difficult to know where healthy encouragement ends and unnecessary pressure begins.

Our girls are growing up in a world that constantly communicates the importance of achievement. Social media offers carefully curated glimpses into the lives of other young people who appear to be excelling academically, performing on sporting fields, travelling, volunteering, leading initiatives and seemingly managing everything effortlessly. It can create the impression that everyone else is doing more, achieving more and getting further ahead.

For a young person still developing her sense of identity and self-worth, these messages can be difficult to navigate. The danger is that children begin to associate their value with their productivity. They start to believe that being busy means being successful, that resting means falling behind and that there is always something more they should be doing.
We need to be mindful of the message this sends.

The invisible pressure to be everything

Our girls are growing up with an extraordinary number of expectations. They are encouraged to be academically capable, socially confident, physically active, emotionally intelligent, resilient, kind, creative, independent and ambitious. They are expected to manage friendships, navigate social pressures, maintain their academic performance, participate in extracurricular activities and begin thinking about their futures. We want them to be strong, but we also want them to be kind. We want them to be independent, but we also want them to make good decisions. We want them to work hard, but we also want them to look after themselves.

These are all valuable qualities. However, when everything becomes a priority, it can become difficult for a young person to know where to focus her energy. Sometimes what looks like a lack of motivation is actually exhaustion. What looks like procrastination may be overwhelm. Irritability, emotional sensitivity, difficulty concentrating and a reluctance to participate in activities can sometimes be signs that a young person has simply run out of capacity.

We should be careful not to interpret every struggle as a need for more intervention, more structure or more support. Sometimes the answer is not another appointment, another lesson or another activity. Sometimes the answer is a little less. Our children need time to process their experiences, recover from demanding days, work through friendships, explore their interests and discover who they are outside the expectations placed upon them.

The value of doing nothing

Somewhere along the way, we have become uncomfortable with the idea of our children having nothing to do. An unstructured afternoon can feel like wasted time. A free weekend can feel like a missed opportunity. When our children say they are bored, our instinct is often to find something to occupy them. Yet boredom is not necessarily a problem that needs solving.

Unstructured time allows children to develop creativity, independence and problem-solving skills. It gives them an opportunity to follow their curiosity, entertain themselves, experiment, imagine and discover what genuinely interests them. It allows them to learn how to manage their own time without an adult constantly directing the next activity.

And perhaps just as importantly, it gives them permission to rest. Rest is not simply sleeping or taking a break from physical activity. It can mean having an afternoon without commitments, spending time with family, reading a book, listening to music, being outdoors, chatting to a friend, enjoying a hobby without the pressure to perform or simply sitting quietly. For some girls, rest might mean being active in a way that feels enjoyable rather than competitive. For others, it might mean having no expectations placed on them for a few hours. There is no single formula.
We need to remember that children do not have to earn their rest by first completing an impressive list of achievements.

What are we teaching our girls about success?

Perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves is what our children are learning from the way we structure their lives. Are we teaching them that success is about constantly pushing beyond their limits, or are we also teaching them to recognise when they need to slow down? Are we teaching them that every opportunity must be taken, or that it is perfectly acceptable to make choices about where they invest their time and energy? Are we teaching them that their worth is connected to their achievements, or that they are valuable simply because of who they are? And when they tell us that they are tired, overwhelmed or no longer enjoying something, do we listen? Or do we immediately encourage them to persevere because we believe that giving up is not an option?

There is certainly value in teaching perseverance. We do not want our girls to walk away from every challenge when things become difficult. Learning to tolerate discomfort, work towards goals and remain committed to something is an important part of growing up. But perseverance and overextension are not the same thing. Teaching resilience does not mean expecting children to function without limits. In fact, recognising when something is no longer sustainable is itself an important life skill.

We want our girls to develop ambition, but we also want them to develop self-awareness. We want them to work hard, but we also want them to understand that their wellbeing matters. We want them to pursue opportunities, but we want those opportunities to enrich their lives rather than consume them.



A different kind of preparation for the future

As adults, we often think about preparing our children for the future. We want them to have strong academic foundations, valuable skills and the confidence to navigate an increasingly demanding world. But perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can give them is the ability to recognise their own needs, establish healthy boundaries and understand that they do not have to say yes to everything.

The world they are entering will undoubtedly demand a great deal of them. There will be deadlines, responsibilities, competition, expectations and difficult seasons. They will need to know how to work hard, but they will also need to know how to switch off. They will need to know how to manage their time, but also how to protect it. They will need to know how to strive for excellence without allowing their achievements to define their identity. These are not skills that develop simply because a child has a full timetable. They develop through experience, reflection, supportive relationships and opportunities to make decisions for themselves. Perhaps we need to place as much value on raising girls who know how to look after themselves as we do on raising girls who know how to achieve.

As we head into the holidays...

The December holidays offer us a wonderful opportunity to step away from the usual routines and expectations. After a year of early mornings, school commitments, assessments, sporting fixtures, deadlines and extracurricular activities, our girls deserve an opportunity to breathe.

This does not mean that every day needs to be unstructured or that all activities should come to an end. It simply means being intentional about creating space.

Perhaps this holiday, we can resist the urge to fill every available moment. We can allow our daughters to sleep a little later, spend time with friends, enjoy family traditions, read for pleasure, play, explore and occasionally be bored. We can let them enjoy activities without turning every interest into something they need to excel at.

We can also have conversations with them about what they have enjoyed this year, what has felt overwhelming and what they might like to do differently next year. Rather than assuming that every commitment needs to continue, we can involve them in deciding what genuinely adds value to their lives.



And perhaps we can model this ourselves. Our daughters are watching how we manage our own responsibilities, how we respond to pressure and whether we allow ourselves time to rest. We cannot consistently communicate the importance of balance while demonstrating that being constantly busy is the only acceptable way to live.

A final thought

At Brescia House, we want our girls to have opportunities to discover their potential, challenge themselves and pursue their ambitions. We want them to experience the satisfaction of working towards something meaningful and the confidence that comes from recognising what they are capable of achieving.
But we also want them to have the freedom to discover who they are beyond their academic results, sporting achievements, leadership positions and extracurricular commitments.

We want them to laugh until their stomachs hurt, spend afternoons with friends, develop unexpected interests, make mistakes, change their minds, have quiet days and enjoy the simple experiences that make childhood memorable.

We want them to understand that they do not need to be exceptional at everything. They do not need to participate in everything. They do not need to have every hour accounted for. And they certainly do not need to constantly prove their worth.

As we close the academic year, perhaps the most meaningful question is not what else we can add to our daughters' lives, but what we might need to take away to make room for the things that matter just as much.

Let's give our girls opportunities, but let's also give them time. Let's encourage ambition, but also teach balance. Let's celebrate achievement, but never allow our children to believe that achievement is the price they have to pay to feel valued, loved and enough.

After all, we are not simply raising future university students, professionals, leaders and high achievers. We are raising young women who deserve to enjoy the lives they are living now, not just the lives they are working so hard to achieve in the future.
And sometimes, the most valuable thing we can give our children is permission to do a little less, breathe a little more and simply be.

Dr Chaland van Zyl
Educational Psychologist

Some of what we got up to this term:

Throughout the year, the Student Wellness Team facilitated age-appropriate developmental and life skills sessions across the grades. Each session was designed to address the unique social, emotional and developmental needs of learners at different stages of their schooling journey. From understanding big feelings and building healthy relationships in the Foundation Phase to navigating independence, accountability, decision-making and future choices in the Senior Phase, the programme aimed to equip learners with practical skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Grade R - Big Feelings and Handling Conflict
Helping young learners recognise and understand their emotions, develop healthy ways to express big feelings and begin learning how to manage disagreements with others.

Grade 1 - Did I mean to?
Exploring the difference between intentional and unintentional behaviour, understanding the impact of our actions and learning about taking responsibility.

Grade 2 - It's okay to make mistakes
Encouraging a growth mindset by helping learners understand that mistakes are part of learning, that nobody is perfect and that challenges provide opportunities to grow.

Grade 3 - Transitioning to Grade 4
Preparing learners for the move into the Intermediate Phase by exploring the changes, new responsibilities and expectations that come with growing up.

Grade 4 - Teamwork: Together Everyone Achieves More
Learners engaged in practical activities to understand the value of teamwork. They explored what makes a team effective, the importance of different roles and how working together helps everyone succeed.

Grade 5 – Children and the Law
Introducing learners to basic legal concepts in an age-appropriate way, helping them understand rules, consequences and their responsibilities within society.

Grade 6 – Child Justice Act
Learners were introduced to the basics of the Child Justice Act in an age-appropriate way, helping them understand accountability, consequences and how the law applies to children and their actions.

Grade 7 – Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Be Kind or Shhhh
Exploring the challenges of standing up for what is right, navigating difficult social situations, responding to unkind behaviour and finding the courage to speak up.

Grade 8 – Put on Those Big Girl Pants!
Focusing on the development of independence, organisation and personal responsibility as learners navigate the increased academic and personal expectations of high school.

Grade 9 – Lost in the Wild
Exploring subject choices, personal values, interests and future possibilities. Learners were encouraged to understand that life does not always follow a straight path and that we have the ability to change direction, make new choices and find our way.

Study Skills - Study Skills – Grades 4–6, Grade 8 and Grade 10 learners attended study skills sessions, with a particular focus on developing effective time management strategies. These sessions are designed to support learners in managing increasing academic demands. All termly talks are intentionally structured to build on one another, ensuring ongoing development and reinforcement of key life skills throughout the year.

The Nest

The Nest is a dedicated study and support space for our High School learners, created to provide a calm, structured and welcoming environment where girls can focus on their academic work, prepare for assessments and access support when they need it. Whether arriving early in the morning, using the space during study periods or spending time preparing for upcoming examinations, learners are encouraged to develop healthy study routines, improve their organisation and take greater ownership of their learning. The Nest is about more than just having a quiet place to work; it is about creating a sense of belonging, encouraging independence, building confidence and reminding our girls that they do not have to navigate the academic demands of high school alone. With a supportive environment and access to guidance, The Nest aims to help every learner feel more equipped, confident and prepared to reach her potential.

Community Outreach Projects

Community engagement remained a strong focus throughout 2026, with wonderful support from our school community. Highlights included:

- Socks and Smiles Day: Over R18 000 raised for the Smile Foundation.
- Leave Your Print Campaign: R35 000 raised in support of the Catholic Institute of Education.
- Little Eden: Grade 11 learners hosted a fun day for residents.
- St Ursula's Partnership: Grade 10 learners collaborated on a painting project at Little Stars Pre-School.
- Grade 7–9 Outreach: Upcoming Christmas celebrations at Douglasdale Retirement Village and Cluny Farm, as well as a school improvement project at Immaculata Secondary School in Soweto.

These initiatives continue to provide meaningful opportunities for our learners to demonstrate kindness, empathy and social responsibility through active community involvement.

Drama for Life

Drama for Life showcased a play to our Grade 4-6 learners that highlights the themes and skills explored during their sessions throughout the year. The performance focused on friendship dynamics, positive peer relationships, conflict resolution, and bullying awareness. Through drama and storytelling, learners have had the opportunity to reflect on real-life social situations, demonstrate what they have learned, and reinforce strategies for treating others with kindness, empathy, respect, and inclusion. The play encouraged learners to think critically about their interactions with others and promotes the development of healthy, supportive relationships within the school community.

Meet our Team



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Our end of year quotes and reflections...

“Growth is not measured only by how far we have come, but by the lessons we have learned, the challenges we have overcome and the people we have become along the way.” **- Chaland**

"Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." **- Lerelle**

"What we notice most in others can be a mirror, not a window." **- Ronewa**

“Be kind, you don’t know what people are going through.” - **Codelia**