



Closing Function Address – 22 September 2010 – Paul Cassar

Mr Klopper, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

So 2010 is almost gone. You've been the 2010 matrics since Gade 8. I wonder if you remember being invited into my office, probably in 2005, and being asked to sit in the 'hot seat', just there on my left. And look at you now! VIPs in the front seats. I probably said to you, "Welcome to Eunice. I look forward to seeing you in green!" And if you were a rather tall Grade 7 I'd have warned you that we don't take Grade 8s taller than the principal! It's a little ritual that interview, that first day of high school; part of the Eunice right of passage. Kyk hoe lyk julle nou. Ready. Ready for exams while most of the country is unready. Ready for life. And I see proud parents. Proud of that passage, proud of that readiness. And proud teachers, too. Our job is done.

Parents, I'm afraid your job is only starting. The safety of school is coming to an end. Life beckons. University, travel, work, marriage and dare I say grandchildren. I love the true story I read in a British newspaper – an interview with an old lady who had just turned 100. It was one question in particular that I remembered. “



Ma'm, you're 100. Can you tell us which was your favourite year?" "91," the old lady replied without hesitation. "Isn't that a little old to have a favourite year?" "Not at all," she replied, "that was the year I got my third and youngest daughter safely into an old age home!"

My topic this evening is Excellence; feel it, it's here.

So 2010 is almost gone. And the World Cup is well and truly gone and as the Mail and Guardian commented: " we are not living in the country that we cheered for on football Fridays or in gleaming stadiums, and the most striking new features on our landscape are not new highways or speed trains." No, the most striking feature of my 2010 is a picture of 200 dancing striking teachers from other schools pushing at our gates and calling on me to close this school!

I may be old school. Certainly too old to understand the concept of teachers on strike, but I cannot understand that striking teachers don't understand that there's no such thing as a one day or a one week strike in South Africa. A teachers' strike means goodbye term, goodbye exam, goodbye matrics. Earlier this month, while SA teachers were on strike the World Economic Forum rated most African countries better in terms of education than South Africa even though we have much more money. Even Zimbabwe, which has literally nothing left, scores 80 positions higher than SA. In Mathematics and Physical Science we score second last in Africa. And we strike for more. How do you pay

the poorest performer more? And behind all the stats and strikes are boys and girls who deserve better.

Excellence is something they can only dream about. Sure, Eunice is an advantaged school with adequate resources, experienced teachers and access to much needed school fees. Because the education system is failing, South African schools like Eunice are widening the inequality gap and inviting criticism that they are elitist. This is true. But what's the answer? Dumb down to a more acceptable, less conspicuous standard or strive for excellence, for a world class public school which serves as an example, which opens its doors wide, which reaches out with sincerity and which is producing a new generation of Eunice graduates ready to become the movers and shakers that South Africa so badly needs. So let's describe and define and try to understand excellence so that it can be emulated by others.

To my mind excellence needs to be something one feels in a school. It's that high impact leadership in the best classrooms and in the best initiatives and that team commitment which over time earns the confidence of a community and provides hope to learners who are fortunate to have a school which expects excellence, inspires excellence and supports individual commitment to excellence.

So, if excellence is something one feels it follows that one can feel strongly about a place that's excellent. The attraction of being a student at Oxford or

Cambridge or Yale or Princeton has lots to do with the reputation, ambience and personalization of the place. The bottom line for our matrics is that they're lucky to be in this place - feel it, it's here. I love this word "place". It brings to mind a strong sense of identity, of belonging and it speaks of the character, the meaning the place has for us and what it is which makes it distinctively different.

I love the stillness of our quadrangle in the evenings, especially after a busy school day. It's a place which holds so much of the school's spirit as if it's absorbed all the hopes and highs and lows of the girls who quickly and not so quickly passed through that day. Feel it, it's here.

I love the comings and goings at the shady entrance of Eunice House. I love my front seat in the theatre, my sideline view of the Astro and my quiet moments at the wall of photographs in my office. I also love my vantage point right here in front of the sea of green – an image which has defined my life. Wonderful paces made strikingly personal and memorable by successive generations of girls who learned about life right here. Each of them have a sense of this place: If you love it here, if you can feel it here, you'll flourish. The point is you have to give of yourself to allow this place to become something you can feel. If you love it here, you have what 95 % of South African teenagers would give their lives to have.

Excellence is a word we try to make synonymous with Eunice. Let me share with you some Eunice excellence. See if you can feel it.

- The FS Dept of Education recognized our excellence in 2010 by awarding us the Top School Trophy for the 8th time.
- Our 2009 Matrics confirmed our girls', our teachers', our school's excellence not by the 100 % pass for the 24th year or the 20 girls with 5 or more distinctions but with the matchless statistics that 153 of our 155 matrics earned a university or bachelor's pass.
- The National Department of Education recognized us as the Province's top performer in Mathematics and Physical Science for the third year succession.
- Microsoft chose Eunice in November last year as its South African pathfinder school in a world community of 42 schools.
- On Friday we heard that we have now been made a Microsoft Mentor School charged with the responsibility of working with six schools from throughout the world both at the Innovative Education Forum in Cape Town next month as well as by means of regular virtual meetings all hosted and sponsored by Microsoft.
- Anglo American's Epoch and Optima Trusts have rewarded our excellence in Mathematics with a R 700 000 grant over two years.
- Standard Bank recognized Eunice's performance in Physical Science with a R 50 000 grant in 2010.

- The local Performing Arts Trust, recognized the excellence in Eunice's approach to theatre by investing R 50 000 in our productions this year.
- Our tennis, hockey and swimming teams were top performers on the national stage in probably the best sporting year in recent history.
- Tonight you'll see excellence in the personal achievements of our girls as they walk across this stage. Eunice's 2010 year will be detailed in their successes.

Transforming the tragic failure that education is in South Africa will require bold leadership on many levels, a strong will to work especially in our country's classrooms and a national switch on of positive energy by authorities, principals, teachers and learners. In a word it's a mindshift that's required and that's what excellence is.

So to strive for excellence this special place needs a spirit you can feel, an ethos all of its own. I firmly believe that there's a serious correlation between excellence and ethos. In a modern world it's not just grounds, facilities, and technology that need to be constantly upgraded, but more critically, it's been Eunice's ethos, its traditions and its spirit which have grown with age in a world class school which reflects both a new century and a new democratic South Africa.

Let me share with you 13 short features of what I regard as the Eunice ethos. Firstly its one of excellence and I've explained it in detail.



It's one of **expectation**. You feel it on your first day at Board Medal Assembly.

It's one of **can-do femininity**. We're girls. We can do and can be anything we want to be.

It's one of **opportunity**. That's Eunice's hallmark. A busy school with a full programme. Monday night Maths, Midmar, our Astro, computer literacy, European Tour, Cradle of Mankind.

It is one of **innovation**. You see it in our classrooms, our approach to theatre, to Christmas Market, to Leader Projects, to Hotel fundraising, to grounds and security management. Even hostel week.

It's one of **diversity**. Eunice has always strived to find common ground and to promote understanding in times past between English and Afrikaans girls and in times present between all South Africans in our rainbow society.

It's one of **individuality**. Sure there's conformity, but our girls can be themselves, our teacher too. There's place for all.

It's one of **joy**. You can feel the schools' personality in the way we and our girls love to give colour and character and fun to hostel life, and to our school day.

It's one of **questioning**. It's how we teach and how we encourage a critical attitude and how we expose our girls' to speakers of all persuasions.

It's one of **service**. You cannot deny the schools' inclusive emphasis on reaching out in sincerity and generosity. Our teachers and our girls serve with such kindness.

It's one of **style**. You cannot but notice the style Eunice gives to occasions throughout its calendar.

It's one of **camaraderie**. You see it not only in the making of lifelong friends, as is the case in most schools, but we had a formal visit from Sutherland High School this term and their number one observation was the way our girls support each other in the real business of classroom learning.

It's one of **respect**. You see it in 60 seconds flat in any visit to Eunice House.

Now let's look at the real No 1 secret of Eunice's excellence. There's nothing more distinctively different about Eunice than its all girls character. It's a key ingredient in the success of this school. In the UK's annual league table of schools all girls schools often make up two thirds of the top twenty schools. In a girls' school girls have all the opportunities: for learning, for participation, for achievement and for leadership. If we had boys in the classroom who do you think would be shouting out the answers and demanding the teacher's attention? Imagine having a young Mr van Wijk in your class! It is true that girls can allow their anxiety to influence their performance but in a girls' school issues such as self esteem, assertiveness, self-confidence, resilience, identity, self-reliance and high expectation are so much more positively reinforced and reaffirmed on a daily basis.



In a book entitled *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls*, Myra and David Sadker claim that girls in single sex schools stop being the audience and become the players and are then more interested in subjects like Mathematics and Physical Science and are less likely to stereotype jobs and careers. They are intellectually curious, serious about their studies and achieve more. You can feel it. It's here.

One of the cleverest things around is the computer, but would you regard it as male or female? Well, the girls would say computers are male because:

1. In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on.
2. They have a lot of data but are still clueless.
3. They are supposed to help you solve your problems, but half the time they ARE the problem.
4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that, if you had waited a little longer, you could have had a better model.

The boys, however, regard the computers as female because:

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic.
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
3. Even your smallest mistakes are stored in their long-term memory for later retrieval.

4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your pay check on accessories.

I doubt the architects of girls' schooling ever considered the possibility of a gentleman headmistress. It took Eunice 111 years to take that small step with a small man but it turned out to be a giant leap as Eunice now has eight wonderful specimens of male masculinity. We add a little balance and perspective and versatility to the staffroom and we can do things that ladies can't do: like drive golfcarts and drive for long distances without stopping.

This evening I have invited Mrs Caroline Dibeco to distribute our prizes. With 43 years of unbroken service Mrs Dibeco is Eunice's longest serving employee. She is not a teacher but a member of our support staff who, over the years, has fulfilled various cleaning, cooking and laundry duties both at Eunice and Eunice House. It may be a little unusual to have Mrs Dibeco as our guest of honour at an academic function, but I want to highlight the role of our support staff to our community and I want each and every one of them to feel that their service indirectly contributes to the excellence our girls receive. I want them to feel that their life's work creates opportunities for our girls to become successful. Not a single one of our school or hostel workers joined the strike last month and that says something about their commitment to this place. Caroline, you've always regarded these girls as your girls. Thank you for a

lifetime of service to Eunice. Tonight you can shake their hands on behalf of Eunice.

As always I include just a few 2010 moments which made me smile:

I loved the lady who phoned the day before our Nunsense 2 production opened. Either she was clueless or she had a unique insight into staging a major musical at Eunice. "Can I have tickets for Nuisance, please?"

Eunice girls have style. Two of our seniors, Joanne Kridiotis and Dominique de Gouveia asked Saints boys to their Dance by going to Mr Thomas's office and persuading him to call the boys down on the intercom. They thought they were in trouble. Wrong. In luck, more like it. Times have changed. Principals are real people.

During my Grade 7 interviews I asked one EPS girl: Are you looking forward to high school?" She answered with such great enthusiasm. "Oh Yes, Sir. I can't wait". "Why are you so keen to come to high school?" "Well Sir", she replied, "My mommy says: When I get to high school I can shave my legs."

Mr Volsteedt and I walked into Caramello's for tea after a cancelled meeting. Mrs Ioannides the owner who had 2 sons at Grey and a daughter at Eunice years ago came up to greet. "Hello Mr Cassar. Nice to see you. Welcome!" 'You're from Grey aren't you? What's your name again? It just confirms that my special touch is with the ladies!

I visited my wife Moira at her Grade 00 class. When I came a little too close to the teacher one little 4 year old girl looked worried. I tried to reassure her. "Your teacher is my girlfriend". "She can't be your girlfriend," she said, " She's too tall!"

Dinki Kroukamp makes the most dangerous cupcakes. She made one for Dr Paine. It slid. No it didn't really cause Dr Paine indigestion. It caused Bloemfontein traffic congestion.

Allow me some necessary thank yous:

What is it that drives excellence? It's the collective dedication of teachers who add so much value by bringing energy, expertise and experience to learning and ambition, promise and possibility to teenagers by simply going the extra mile, giving of themselves. In so doing they influence the future of your daughters who, hopefully, will weave excellence into the fabric of their own lives. What can be more important than quality education and teachers who care, who care and who inspire? Our girls are in good hands both in our classrooms and at Eunice House. I thank each and every one of them.

Thank you to our headgirls, all four of you. Nnete you led Eunice in 2010. You could lead this country in 20 something else. Nika you earned the respect and love of Eunice house through massive sacrifice. Dinki and



Nkuli, you are shining examples of individuality, of treating others with dignity and of academic example.

My three deputies:

Dr Don Paine turned 65 on Monday. He is not ready to remove his lab coat just yet. Although he has to retire from government service next week, he'll continue to teach, to lead teachers, to interrogate the ever changing curriculum and to put his technical skills to use in the interests of our girls, our teachers and our grounds. Please join me in honouring d lifetime's service to quality teaching. I think he wants to stay to check on Mrs Paine.

The way our Matrics responded to Mr Leon van Rensburg's 50th birthday last week could not but have recharged both his own batteries as a school manager but also those of his shark-decorated trademark golfcart. He's everywhere on the greens or troubleshooting in the rough and taking responsibility for the daily running of the school and for ensuring professionalism, excellence and consistency.

In a girls' school with three men in management (I know it sounds like a disaster but it's actually the main secret of our success) strong and successful female role models are critical.

You don't get stronger and more successful than Mrs Mag Marais. She is simply driven by excellence. She doesn't need a golfcart! She's driven by Market forces, by European rewards, by projects which lead and serve, by uniforms which promote pride and by sounds of singers who rise to the occasion. Her touch is a total commitment and a style which makes magic.

I'd like to thank the other members of our management team – Mrs Maureen Botha, Mrs Karin Kok, Mrs Emsie Bouwer, Mrs Lanelle Kleinhans, Mrs Daisy Munro and Carl Pritchitt. I cannot but single out Mrs June Norval whose commitment to the planning of every week and to this school's girls and to their many plans requires so many extra hours! Excellence isn't easy. It's not magic. It's the attention to detail which drives standards and sets us apart.

Mr Klopper, thank you for your continued involvement, your business acumen, your strong leadership, your balanced perspective and your friendship. You have taken our school forward. To you and to all our governors, especially our Grounds and Eunice House co-ordinators – Mr Kotie van Tonder and Mr Dale Adam I thank you sincerely on behalf of our girls, their parents and our staff.

Thanks, too to the PA. I think Mrs de Bruin and her committee's Father and Daughter dinner will long be remembered. Our parents, led by Mrs Whitehead will keep the Christmas Market coffee on the boil. My special thanks to Mr Marius Whitehead for passionate



support and for strong leadership both of our PA and its staffroom project. Mr Klopper and Mr Whitehead are both Grey boys with green blood. It's a good combination as many of our girls will confirm. Thanks, too, to Mr Rory Hoareau, Mr Danie van der Merwe, Mr Tobie Wiese, Mr Leo de Vries and Mr Paul Mahlakola whose willingness is much appreciated, as well as.

Allow me to mention Mrs Collen Steenkamp whose passing on 1 March signalled the end of an era, the loss of a great source of passionate and practical support for Eunice. Our hockey girls, in particular, were traumatized by the tragic death of last year's hockey captain, Rushna Josiah. Her team played with a black R on their upper arms and with Rushna in their hearts. I record the death, too, of Mrs Ilva Niddrie who was Eunice's bursar before Mr Uys and Mr Jack Niddrie who was one of our estate managers.

It may seem out of place but I would like to pay tribute Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert – academic, politician, thinker and businessman – who died in 2010. He loomed large in my life and I learned so much from him in terms of outlook, communication, analysis, leadership. He had that wonderful ability to go to the heart of an issue with logic, fairness and charisma. I worked closely with him over a period of four years while I completed a Master's thesis on his emergence and impact in opposition politics. To me he stands right up there behind Nelson Mandela as a great South African.

I would like to thank those closest to my daily challenge: Mrs Myra Wienand who shoulders a growing load of computer administration despite a busy office; Mr Pat Uys and his financial staff – Mrs Nelia Niemann, Elamrie Odendaal, Pamela Mayiyane, Mary Paine, Anita Smith and Alta Taylor. Pat, your daily personal support, your sound business management, your lifelong passion for Eunice and your sparkling spirit are indispensable assets; Mrs Liza-Anne Meyer, your office is a haven – a little piece of heaven for troubled girls or girls in trouble. That warm greeting and that broad sincere smile are daily features of a highly efficient personal assistant who works hard to make me look competent. Finally to my wife Moira I say thank you for a lifetime's loyal support, razor sharp insight and sacrifice.

A final word for our girls. You are here tonight because of excellence. When you walk across the stage we'll feel it. But remember excellence in life does not come from prizes and colours. Speaking at his old school Sydney Boys High earlier this year, the celebrated journalist Jonathan Pilger whom I follow on the internet since he received an honorary doctorate at my daughter's graduation said: "What's important above all, is the person you are, the kindness you express, the compassion you feel, and the courage and wisdom you show at every step along the way."

Ladies and Gentlemen. Our girls will now enjoy their tiny taste of triumph as they walk across this stage. Many of them are here because they have a merit certificate. This means they have worked hard in 2010 and have achieved a minimum of 70 %.

Full colours denotes an average over 80 %. We have up to a third of girls in each grade over 70 %. So it's not an unreachable target. All girls can aim that high.