

A Strategic Approach to Study – Maintaining a Balance between WORK, REST and RECREATION

Whilst acknowledging that the commitment of our students to their studies and ongoing improvement is nothing short of outstanding, I feel there is a need to realign some of the thinking among some students and parents that 'more work produces better outcomes'. While there are cases of this being true, for example when students are doing little work and expecting great results, eventually we get to a stage where too much work, late at night and without sufficient rest, becomes counter-productive.

There is clear research in many quarters that the students who are most successful in the latter years of their schooling have a balanced approach to organising their commitments. They devote an appropriate time to study and homework, but they also have plenty of breaks, engage their interests by playing sport or a favourite musical instrument, have time for friends and family and some even have a small part-time job. Being able to participate in various forms of activity help young people grow, develop positive relationships with peers and adults, keep them physically and therefore mentally fit, and give them opportunities to develop collaborative skills and teamwork. **All of these skills supplement those they directly need to achieve highly at school, and help them grow personally.**

If students are to perform at their academic peak at important times, for example in an exam, they need to be fresh, mentally fit and alert. This means they need a good diet and plenty of sleep. I have spoken to students who regularly work after midnight, and sometimes long hours into the early morning. Whilst I admire their perseverance, it is simply ineffective to be working so late. The cumulative effect on young minds of several late nights is extreme tiredness, and once that sets in, students will begin to lose their enthusiasm and energy for their studies. Continually tired students are also far more susceptible to illness, so it becomes a really unhealthy cycle to be in. **Ironically in this situation, the more time they spend on their studies, the less effective they will be.** It becomes a case of quality versus quantity – and we would always err on the side of students producing quality work at a time when they are physically and mentally ready to do their best.

In a few cases it may be that students are taking longer to complete tasks than they should due to engaging in social networking at the same time. This is a good way of turning a 2 hour task into a four hour task and is simply unproductive! My advice would be to do your homework first and finish it, then do something else to relax if you want to. Just like trying to do homework and watching TV at the same time is fraught, so too is doing any tasks requiring you to think with your Facebook site open! However I get a sense that we still have people who are up too late at night and not engaging in over-use of the computer. **You need to think things through differently, and soon.**

At JMSS we take the well-being of our students very seriously, as healthy and happy students will perform much better academically than tired and unmotivated students. **Therefore I am appealing to parents to assist with helping their sons and daughters to achieve some balance in their lives, get at least 8 hours of sleep per night, exercise regularly and eat properly.** Young bodies will only develop effectively in these important teenage years if we look after them appropriately.

The weekends are also a time to recuperate from the busy week, spend time with family and engage in activities such as sport which get you physically active. Some students are spending most of their weekends involved with extra tuition, studying at Language Schools as well as doing some homework. The guidelines we have given to parents in the student diary are clear – a maximum of three hours of homework per night and only doing homework on one day in the weekend. Students who spend most of their weekends doing schoolwork are missing out on the social interactions which are so important in growing up. The danger for them is that school becomes a social outlet, rather than a place of work, as they use it to compensate for what they are missing at other times. The trick is simply to get the balance right.

The pressures and stresses which naturally occur during the VCE will be greatly eased with a more balanced approach. VCE is certainly NOT the time to give up playing music or your favourite sport. If you are fitter, healthier and more alert, you will perform better and be more confident in your ability to cope. It is that simple.

If students and parents would like advice with appropriate study schedules, you are welcome to contact your son's or daughter's mentor, House Leader, one of the Assistant Principals or myself. We are happy to help.

Peter Corkill

Principal