

There's a glint in Paul Viljoen's eyes as I ask him to outline his vision for the Durban North boys high school. "It's a fine school and it offers wonderful things," he says. "But I want to make it a great school ensuring absolute quality without disrespecting what has gone before. For that to happen I can't act on my own – every stakeholder is equally important and that means the boys, the parents and the staff."

He recalls his recent speech to the Old Boys in which he quoted actor Will Smith who said, *Being realistic is the most common path to mediocrity*. "We will not be realistic about the school's future. We need to take it to the next level."

There's certainly nothing mediocre about Paul. With qualifications that include a BA Degree in Human Resources Management and a BComm Degree majoring in Economics and Management Science (both obtained from Stellenbosch University) and a Post Graduate Teaching Degree (*cum laude*) from the University of South Africa, he is eminently equipped to lead the school into a brave new future.

Born in Cape Town in 1977, he admits to being a somewhat mischievous child who thankfully landed up at Stellenbosch



LEFT: Paul Viljoen is the proud new head of Northwood School. Picture: Debbie Reynolds

problem-solving and entrepreneurial and creative skills.

"From next year we will be the first school in KZN to offer applied maths in Grades 8 and 9, and we will also increase our engineering offering."

He said parents should embrace their children's creative personalities rather than thinking they should be suppressed in favour of "more academic" pursuits. "We offer arts and music to Grade 12, but from next year will also be offering design and technology as a subject in Grade 10."

Personally, Paul and his family – teacher wife Wendy and children, Mieke, four, and Lihan, 17 months – are thrilled to be back in Durban. "We love Durban, and Northwood is one of the true community schools where everyone gets involved," he said. "I've also been given such incredible support which is something I will always cherish."

He has a promise to parents. "In being given the responsibility of looking after your children, I will strive to do so as if they were my own." *

A MAN WITH VISION

Respect, responsibility and tradition are the cornerstones of the new Northwood School headmaster's value system, but being realistic is not on his radar, writes Debbie Reynolds

University where he studied financial management and political science. Just before he was scooped up to do an internship at parliament, he was approached by a Paarl headmaster asking if he would like to teach accounting and coach rugby.

"And the rest, as they say, is history," he laughs. "My driving force has always been people and serving them and that's what education is about."

After teaching accounting and economics in and around Cape Town for five years, he moved to Nelspruit as head of business studies at Penryn College followed by a deputy head position there at the tender age of 30.

A stint at Nelspruit's Curro School was next until he was lured to Durban as Northwood's deputy headmaster in 2014. His next move was back to Nelspruit as head of Curro until he had the great opportunity of being appointed headmaster

at Northwood in May this year. From day one Paul has dived headfirst into his responsibilities of making sure that what Northwood teaches its boys in five years will ensure they are successful for the rest of their lives.

"I live by the philosophy of treating every boy as significant – each has their own strengths, weaknesses, beliefs and background – but every person is important. I think if you make people feel valued and appreciated – and that goes for our parents and staff too – then you are on to something quite special."

"We need to create men who will be responsible citizens, husbands and fathers who can deal with situations in an emotionally intelligent way."

He stressed how radically life has changed where the traditional values of determination, hard work, good manners and chivalry were as crucial as encouraging innovation,

“ We need to create men who will be responsible citizens, husbands and fathers who can deal with situations in an emotionally intelligent way ”

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