

13 April 2004

Dear Bishop,
S. Thomas' College, Gurutalawa

Ever since the appointment of the present Headmaster, the OBA with the best will possible, have taken a pro-active role to assist him in the discharge of his duties, mindful of the fact that he was inheriting a School which had slipped and degenerated in almost every aspect.

These past two years, we the OBA, have done all that we could within our limits and abilities and we have now reached a stage that further remedial measures required are beyond our competence and impinge on the administration of the School, strictly within the ambit and scope of the Headmaster, the Manager, and the Board's responsibility.

We are therefore making this representation to you, as Chairman of the Board of Governors to initiate, with minimum delay, such action as is required. In our view, in the first instance, it is felt advisable, to investigate in depth, the School's functioning in the areas we have highlighted in these submissions under broad heads.

Further, any investigation should also look into:

- The School & Boarding Fees: The present adequacy, allowing that this is the only income, and number of students that can be accommodated on the present infrastructure and steps taken to increase the number of students.
- The Security Service: Whether the expense incurred is justified and whether it should be replaced by an organization with no connection or links to present staff, at all levels, for better security and internal discipline.

Finally, we would state that the fall in numbers on the roll, is clear evidence of the lack of confidence, the public and parents, have in the School – that is the lack of concern for the welfare of the students, the entrenched indiscipline at all levels, the failure to face up to the issues with firm resolve – these being indicative of a lack of coherence in the Managements' vision for the School, if any, and the Managements abandonment of responsibility to the machinations of elements within the School and who have no love for it and have absolutely no sensibility to its ethos, which was endowed and nurtured by its Founders and the traditions set, but only pursue their agenda of personal advancement.

We are very apprehensive that if no action is taken, the School would grind to a halt, one way or another, if it does not collapse suddenly like a house of cards, though it could possibly limp along as a monumental travesty of what it was and meant to be.

If you wish us to elaborate on any matters referred to generally or in detail, we look forward to an opportunity to meet you, to this end.

Yours faithfully

Hony. Senior Vice President

Hony. Secretary

Hony. Treasurer

SUBMISSIONS

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GENERAL :

1. The OBA at the outset, commissioned well-known consultants to study & report on the improvements to the administration and finances of the College with a view to arrest any shortcomings and effect improvements in these areas of vital concern. In their report, the main thrust was for an Administrative Officer and an appointment was made with the OBA paying half his salary. Unfortunately, the **Administration Chart** that was recommended was **not put into effect** and the appointee's position is virtually now of an extra Staff Member. He is countermanded in areas, which should have been his sole responsibility while he is burdened with functions not envisaged in the report.
2. The HM has virtually no rapport or personal contact with the Staff. No social contact in the form of a Tea Party or his visiting them to find their living conditions. He does not supervise any Games though now, recently, he takes a few periods of class. Thus there is no interaction with Staff, Minor Staff and Students in his expected role as head of a community and a centripetal force.
3. Guru is essentially a Boarding School, and in this respect, it must serve as a nursery for inculcating House Discipline & Competitiveness to build team spirit in a narrow sense but within a higher loyalty to the School through the School Teams. This should be fully encouraged. However, the students **are not allotted to the dormitories on the basis of the House system.**
4. The dorm masters are very seldom if ever, present to supervise after lights out. It is not unusual to hear loud singing after even 10.30pm. **As recently as three days before this term-end, a Senior Boy had 'escaped' from a dorm & was found aimlessly wandering. Apparently, he had taken some drug or smoked ganja, and in the wee hours of the morning, was dispatched to his parents in Negombo.**
5. When dorms are not house oriented, there is confusion & enmity, as House Masters are not encouraged in the dorm by Dorm Masters, and even arguments between house & dorm masters have taken place in front of students. The boys complain that before a sports event, they like to meet together to discuss to build up team spirit, sometimes with their Housemaster as well, but there is no privacy in the dorm, where all are together. Even dorm tidiness can be improved if segregation is by House, as then they will be proud of their dorm identified with their House.
6. A Dorm Master, who is seldom there at night, has been made a Senior Boarding Master. At the last OBA AGM weekend, not a single person from the following were present in the premises : Senior Boarding House Master, Prefect of Games, Prefect of Discipline and many Games Masters, even though there were many events arranged ahead with selected School Teams. Everything was therefore arranged ad-hoc at the last moment. **This is symbolic of the contemptuous attitude of these Masters for the Headmaster and possibly their enmity to the OBA for their watchdog efforts to expose what is amiss, let alone their lack of any feeling for or loyalty to the School. These unusual and extra 'titles' are only to draw extra allowances !!**
7. The activities of these dorm masters leave room for very serious concern. **They are seldom present at night, leaving the premises on hunting sprees as the Security Staff is**

silenced because Police Officers from Welimada join them. They have entertained female single parents in their rooms and this is an open secret as far as the Students are concerned. On one occasion, the visit lasted three days at a stretch.

8. The policy adopted is one of abject appeasement of the very vociferous and demanding. Even those directly rude to the Headmaster at Meetings, are pacified this way. Special positions to draw further allowances is one. This has eroded the morale and confidence of those who like the School to do well and who are trying to instil some semblance of discipline.

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9. Boarding House students should not be allowed leave except for special reasons and there should be control by the housemasters who should also be the dorm masters. At present, the leave is granted by the Secretary to the HM and students can leave even every weekend. There is no intimation to reduce food requirements depending on leave being granted, resulting in wastage. Leave must be recommended by dorm masters & allowed by the Prefect of Discipline on the basis of the existing structure.
10. Similarly, the parents now visit the students willy nilly but there should be specific rules on this, like say week ends for a limited time only, except for a special short visit due to exigencies. **Also they should not stay overnight in the school premises (as at now some Mothers even stay with students in the Keble dorm).**
11. The School Time Table should be prepared in advance and the students then can start classes at once. This should be the HM's responsibility as it is a very important function. **Presently, the Time Table is finalized two to three weeks after School commences** and is now prepared by Mr.Sumanapala. He takes the minimum number of periods himself and only in the morning at that and leaves School in the early afternoon on most days. Mr.Nesaseelan does a good job of preparing the Tamil Section on time and he or Mrs.Sita Jayasekera, can prepare the entire timetable if given the opportunity.
12. **There is a notable disparity in the periods of each staff member.** The fact of overstaffing emerges when it is observed that about ten teachers in the Senior School have only about 15 periods a week. But in the Tamil Upper School, there are six classes and six Teachers, which means they have over 35 periods a week. It is reasonable for Teachers to have a minimum of 32 periods a week. For the Years 1-5 in the Tamil Medium, there are only two teachers who have their hands full. The Sinhala Medium for Yrs 1-5 has eight Teachers !
13. Miss Nilanthi has been recruited to teach English for Years 6-9 in the Middle School, reportedly without proper qualifications or experience. There is student dissatisfaction on this. But it is further common knowledge about her relationship with Mr.Ekanayake.
14. Mr.Dikkumbura who was recruited to teach Agriculture from Grade 6-11, now takes only Yrs. 10 & 11. He is the Keble House Supervisor and has only eight or ten periods a week. A re-arrangement whereby Mr.Nesaseelan who is the Senior Tamil Master is made the Keble Supervisor, can relieve the overworked Junior Tamil Staff, as he can take a few of their classes.
15. Strangely the practice is for the senior students who do not receive prizes, to be left out of the College Prize-giving. The reasons are not known. But they should be present to cheer their peers & it also makes them to strive to get prizes themselves.

STAFF:

1. As pointed out earlier, the non-segregation by house in the dorms, has resulted in a verbal clash between a housemaster & dorm master on one occasion, while the students were helplessly looking on. The OBA made this a point to ask the HM indicating all the problems, and who said he will do it but has not done to date.
2. The Prefect of Games & Prefect of Discipline (same person !!!) has been known, even to students, for his proclivity on matters concerning the fairer sex, and is said to be too close

to a female staff member living alone, as her husband is in Kandy. This appears to be an open secret. In fact at the last Sports Meet in February, when there was an altercation, one female parent went so far as to publicly accuse a couple of Masters as having 'used her' in the hearing of many who had come for the Sports Meet.

3. The Admin. Officer has been appointed Master of Discipline to further complicate matters.
4. As pointed out earlier, the dorm masters leave the premises and the Security is helpless. **This begs the question, whether there is any purpose in employing Security staff at**

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such expense. It has been reported that even College property is taken out without entries in the Log Book as maintaining the Log Book is done haphazardly

5. **On some of these escapades, the persons reportedly use even the College van. The Security is helpless. This was a function that the new AO was supposed to control, but it appears he has lost interest as his orders have been over-ridden in the daytime vehicle allocations.**
6. A student was physically assaulted (instead of being punished) by the dorm master, for a misdemeanor, so that his nose was bleeding. Subsequently, he was 'punished' again in March this year, **by being caned with a wire**, and he was so badly injured, he spent a couple of days in the sick room. **The parent was keen to go to the Human Rights Commission, but he was pacified with an apology.** It would have been disastrous had he not accepted the apology. It appears that some masters take indiscipline as a personal affront when punishment should be limited only to the offence.
7. A group of Staff had endeavoured to have a proper dialogue with the HM, by having meetings, but it ended when the HM walked out at one as he was unable (or unwilling) to give answers to the problems.
8. The daily minor staff are entitled to one meal per shift. But the morning staff have breakfast & lunch, when they should not have lunch, being off by mid day, while the afternoon staff have lunch & dinner when they should go home for dinner as the shift ends in time for them to go home. **So there is no control of food and leads to abuse and resultant loss.**
9. The academic staff pay Rs.750 p/m for all meals or Rs.180 p/m if they take one meal but the latter is often abused, as there is no control. The food is costed for students at Rs.70.- per day. On this basis, even subsidised, they should pay at least Rs.1600 p/m. considering that now it appears the students are subsidizing the staff far too much with a consequential deleterious effect on the quality of the food.
10. **A study of salary increases in the past two years including allowances will be a revealing exercise of whether they were merit or value based.** (Merit of receiver or Value to College).
11. It appears that Staff are shifted around not with proper reason but simply to placate & accommodate. For example the former Farm Manager, who was accused of malpractices in that position, has been put in charge of the Bakery. Similarly, the former Canteen Manager who was originally recruited as the Agriculture Master (and who was found incompetent to teach) has now been made Superintendent of Senior Dorms. The current Canteen Manager is the former Swimming Pool attendant, from the Minor Staff.
12. Mr.Ekanayake was leaving the premises (assigned quarters) in December 2003 (possibly on Headmaster's instructions) but even after the lorry with his belongings left the school, three other Masters prevailed on the HM (how is the question??) and Mr.Ekanayake came back with his belongings. He is a very bad example of teacher and should not be in campus.
13. The students are fed up that about a week before the end of last term, they had openly put up disgraceful graffiti about these four masters implying the worst of behaviour, (on the many stories circulating) on the old classroom block walls. Though it was washed out after all had seen and commented about it, no inquiry or action followed.
14. Very recently in the presence of the Headmaster, a student was hit on the back with hands by Mr. Madawela, saying – "this is the one who sneaks", for having made complaints.

15. Recently the Security had accosted a student with blue films on a CD, and this was confiscated & given to certain staff members, and the impression is that they have not as yet surrendered them to the Headmaster !

MINOR STAFF:

1. Indiscipline and lack of supervision is the order of the day. As stated earlier, they are not supervised regarding meals and this places the 'subsidy' element for food on the students.

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2. In the consultants report, it was stated that for a proper evaluation & co-ordination of minor staff, a form has to be filled by each person. In fact the format was given. **But to date this has not been done and there is under utilization and very low productivity.**
3. Supervisors are selected from minor staff, and who, having tasted the same pie, are averse to any supervision of the former colleagues.
4. The pantry and kitchen staff are burdened unnecessarily by two sittings at meals. The HM stated he did not have enough benches and when these were provided, he said he did not have enough plates & dishes to serve. But no real effort has been made to date to implement this procedure.
5. **In keeping with the policy of appeasement, the minor staff have been leased out with vegetable plots from School Land.** Whether this should have been allowed at all, is now too late to consider. Now for the slightest excuse of rain, even impending, these plot holders abandon post, but are quite happy to attend to their plots, even in rain. Even if they are given plots, they should have been asked to work only outside working hours or holidays. What benefits accrued to the School if any, is anyone's guess, but the loss to the School in man-hours is heavy. Further, we were told it was for a year nearly 18 months ago, but there appears no end to the lease even now. We are sure that there will soon emerge the legal claims, on the basis of continued possession.

DISCIPLINE:

1. **This is of major concern and needs serious attention. There appears to be the lack of it in all areas of the School's administration.**
2. There is no proper check on Boarders leaving the premises. Even if apprehended, the punishment is too lenient. It is not unusual for students to leave the premises to meet Doctors or for other errands. In fact in one case, a student who was meeting a schoolgirl outside the premises, had met a Doctor and obtained sleeping tablets & taken an overdose after a rift with the girl. How he arranged these trysts is one question. He was lying unconscious on the date of the last Meeting of the Board at Gurutalawa and seen by Mr.Chandrasekera & Dr. Ponniah. He was suspended but was back three weeks later.
3. The boarders habitually leave the premises to buy cigarettes and go out even to fight the day boys. This is because no punishment is given or minimal if given. The excuse being that students are required to keep numbers up as otherwise there will be a serious financial crisis. But for every such miscreant, the loss to the prestige of the College and the number of good boys leaving, is unfortunately not even considered. The short term view prevails.
4. **Last year some senior students had assaulted a junior new entrant, so badly that he was hospitalized to treat the injuries.** The punishment did not emanate from the HM, but when Masters disciplined the miscreants, the HM admonished the Masters!.
5. In fact the OBA suggested that at least, the students must keep to certain areas in the campus, and treat others as out of bounds. For example, they use any path for movement, even through vegetable plots to reach classrooms from the dormitories. The OBA suggested

that they stick to the main road in the premises and not use short cuts. The HM agreed but no enforcement takes place yet and it was seen that the previous practice of short cuts is the order of the day.

6. There are no set rules even regarding dress. Various colours, shapes and fashions are observed after school hours.
7. **As stated earlier, the lack of supervision in the dorms at night, leaves room for increased indiscipline and indiscipline always increases in a group, to breed as it were and become institutionalized. Discipline in dorms is essential.**

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8. **There is damage to school property for which no punishment is given.** Last year an Old Boy, redid the entire Senior Dormitories, spending a million rupees, but within two months, window panes were broken and even window frames pushed out. The student had bleeding fists but little or no action taken even though the culprit was known.
9. The Foster Hall has the name boards with Rolls of Honour. **At the last OBA AGM in March this year, we observed the extremely crude & filthy words written thereon, and were pointed out to the HM.** It appeared that he nor the Staff were aware, even though this Hall is regularly used.
10. The Old Boys constructed Railings in front of the Seniors Dorms to put a stop to the ugly spectacle of clothes being hung out on the grass and bushes in front. They donated 1000 clothes hangers for distribution. But within a few months, there are no hangers (no account kept ?) and the ugly scene represents a dhoby's front garden again.
11. At the Sports Meet in February this year, some students who left last year, came in 3 vans with knives swords and other weapons, to "assault" the tents of the present boys. The Parents, Staff, Students, Minor Staff and some Old Boys who attended the Meet, witnessed the drama. It took much effort by the Academic Staff, Minor Staff and Villagers there, to throw them out. **The villagers did manhandle the Van Driver. Apparently, it is a regular feature for the previous year students to settle grouses the following year.** But again, no further firm action is taken in this regard.
12. There was a very recent incident where a student had used a broken bottle or knife in a fight and injured another. This was brought up at the OBA AGM by concerned old boys, as there was nary a word about discipline in the Headmaster's Report and it was made out as a simple matter. It transpired that an inquiry had been held, but it could not be determined even whether it was a knife or bottle that was used. The Master who witnessed the incident stated this at the OBA AGM. So much for 'inquiries.'
13. The group of conscientious students were very much concerned about falling standards and the lack of discipline and made representations in their private capacities.
14. **The most remarkable incident is that even the place of worship is not spared as now it has come to the stage that stones are deliberately thrown on to the Chapel roof.**
15. **Since the Chaplain is trying his best to maintain some modicum of discipline, there is antagonism to him. Few days before terms end, two boys had used obscene language when the Chaplain was in his room, and when reported by the Chaplain to the Headmaster, the very minor punishment meted out, has completely devastated of the Chaplain. He left before School closed and speculation is that he may not return.**
16. In this context therefore, even the village that has an interest in the College are concerned. Unlike in the past when it was purely a Boarding School, now the village has many past students and a large number of Staff resident outside the School. **Though the many incidents are made out as trivial, their frequency and repetition, must be considered and even though the Management is playing it down, there is a very likely prospect of matters reaching a head and the wide publicity will be the end of the College.** It is incumbent on all of us to prevent the volcano blowing up.

RECRUITMENTS & RENUMERATION:

1. We stated earlier also that the recruitment to Supervisor Grade from Minor Staff is actually detrimental. **In spite of a dwindling budget, there appears to be no end to recruitments and extra allowances and salary increases.**

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2. Very recently, a new recruit has been taken to the Office, when with the reducing numbers of students, there should be a reduction of staff.
3. The Consultants Report gave a format of a form to be filled by all staff to regularize duties and prevent overlaps. But no one in the office has done this, even though the HM sits there himself.
4. The Report was also against family and related Staff being employed but the practice continues. In fact a Mrs. Rasiah is working, while her husband still has a case pending on a matter of misappropriation of College monies.
5. Further, appointments have been given recently to Mrs. Wijesiri and Mrs. Thammita, whose husbands are on the Staff and only because they married recently. In the established private sector, relations working at the same office is unacceptable.
6. A Matron for Keble has been recruited from the Deaf & Blind School and with no knowledge of English. The acting Matron who is competent in English was not confirmed in the post. The Keble House is where English can and should be introduced to the young. Originally, Gurutalawa had boys from Kollupitiya and more from Bandarawela, which were well run Preparatory Schools with high standards of sports and discipline. The young boys had had a good grounding, but Guru now must start the youngest with a good start in English. At present there are no resident Teachers in Keble and the Dining Hall for these youngsters has a horde of stray dogs around. The toilets, which are adjacent to the beds, are not in the best of sanitary conditions, a bad way to start an education. Is it any wonder that nearly 40+ Keble students left last year while only a third of that number joined in lieu.

MEALS, GROCERIES AND BAKERY:

1. The quality of food has deteriorated to such an extent that students leave the boarding citing this as one specific reason. A form of Survey suggested by the OBA to determine preferences, was not done. Now some boys refuse certain foods, resulting in wastage, dissatisfaction and much discontent.
2. In order to prevent abuse in the purchases, the OBA arranged with an old boy who has a grocery shop to provide the necessities, but it appears that this is not done regularly. In fact, produce from the College Farm is refused but the same vegetables are purchased from outside at a higher price.
3. The kitchen and dining hall are lacking in maintenance and appears unhygienic. A case of food poisoning or outbreak of diarrhoea can be disastrous for the Schools reputation. Every measure has to be taken in this regard.
4. The former Farm Manager, who was found to be incompetent and was accused of malpractice when in that position, now runs the Bakery. The students complain of the bad quality of Bread and a comparable study must be made to see if this can be purchased from outside at least to provide students value in food.
5. There is a shortage of cups and saucers. Students were asked to bring their own forks and spoons but this is very loosely implemented. They resent theirs being used by others who have not brought their own.

6. **And now to top it all, the new Food Warden who was recruited very recently, has fallen in line with the way of things, and has developed an open relationship with a female staff member.**

MISCELLANEOUS:

1. Many requests to get an extra telephone line have been ignored due apparently to the extra cost. But this is essential as the School requires it. Priorities are misplaced. As a temporary measure, the HM line could be paralleled to the Office, to at least receive official calls.

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2. The e-mail connection is very necessary but efforts from the OBA in this, have not met the same urgency and responsiveness from the College. The computer master is not interested. In fact, the previous Accountant had misused it and an Old Boy got it disconnected & reconnected with new addresses to erase the pornography already in memory.
3. Though there is a necessity for more furniture, there are heaps of damaged furniture still lying about and only 69 chairs have been cannibalized and reassembled after the OBA suggested this be done. In fact the OBA asked that a carpenter be assigned even full time as in this way a cheap solution is readily available. But the response has been very poor.
4. No effort is being made to apprehend and punish those damaging furniture and this is a reason for the continuation of this unfortunate practice.
5. The OBA obtained half-barrels and kept them in strategic points to ensure that rubbish will not be put all over & requested that students be asked not to litter. But again no proper enforcement is been done. The minor staff, do not appear to be attending to the upkeep of the roads, drains, garden and surrounds.
6. One Old Boy arranged for Fr.Mervyn Fernando who is famed for counselling, to visit the College. He met the Staff and inspected the campus. His Report is gathering dust somewhere as on his visit, not even a cup of tea was served to show elementary hospitality and courtesy. This leaves much to be desired and is the responsibility of the Headmaster.
7. The stray dog menace is of concern. Let not a day come when a stray might bite a student – no effort is made in this regard.
8. Very little attention appears to be directed to sports and outdoor activities. The enthusiasm of some Masters and students feel dampened by the lack of support. Students say they have asked for better food at least a week before important events but have had no response. Visiting teams may suffer in silence but the school's reputation, even in an area, which provides an opportunity to redeem itself, is further eroded. On one occasion even the Van was not given for an outside match, and the keen students hired one.
9. The Swimming Pool was restored a year ago by getting all the filtering machinery working by some in the OBA and who spent much time & energy. At that time it was not working. But it has now lapsed to virtually to its old state. At the recent OBA AGM, it was only after direct efforts by the Old Boys themselves running the plant, that it was made clean for holding the Swimming Meet.
10. A group of old boys who are lawyers arranged for free counseling services hoping to save the Legal Fees. But there are about eight cases for which none has been asked to help. In fact in one case, the Lawyer for Gurutalawa is a parent of a Student. It is hoped he is working without payment.
11. There is a regular drop in numbers and the roll from 364 in January has dropped to 349 by end of March. It is said that a further 15 boys have indicated that they hope to leave when school re-opens in April.
12. The Administration Officer & Farm Manager were recruited on a contract basis, but apparently their salaries have been increased by Rs.1250.- p.m. in January. They had served hardly one year. Is this again misplaced appeasement to win them over ?

