

REPORT RE DISCUSSION WITH ALBAN FERNANDO

We had a discussion with the retiring Head Master Alban Fernando on August 31, 2001. With a view to ascertain the current problems at Guru, his ideas as to how they could be overcome etc.

He has outlined the present situation and some of the problems at Guru in the following manner:-

1. As regards intake of students as at present, there is no clamour or demand whatsoever for admission. Any student who applied for admission is taken in without any reference to the background etc. Most of the students who seek admission are those who have failed to gain admission to the Well-known schools in Colombo. Thus Gurutalawa has become the last resort. In this process whilst the better students gain admission to the Colombo Schools, the rejects find accommodation in Gurutalawa.
2. About 75-85% of the students are from Colombo. The balance are from other outstations. A very small fraction are from the neighbourhood.
3. In not paying heed to the suitability or otherwise of the students seeking admission, a fair number appear not able to afford the fees payable.
4. It is only about 25% of the student population that are not in arrears of fees. One cannot penalize these students. That will be counter productive. So also the College cannot afford to be choosy about the background of the student. Thus no useful purpose is served in holding an interview.
5. The boarding fee is Rs.2000/-. This is reduced proportionately for the lower Forms. The tuition fees or what the day-boys pay is Rs.1,500/-.

6. At the moment, there are 470 students on the role out of which..... are day-boys.
7. Even students from Colombo find accommodation in private homes situated around the school.
8. These private boarding houses had mushroomed & flourished at the time the student population had been around 1,200. They are still functioning and all out to attract students who are already in the Hostel.
9. Another reason for those Colombo students to prefer staying in private boarding houses rather than the College Hostel is because firstly, the food provided in the College Hostel is extremely poor. When the present Head Master assumed Office for all 3 meals bread was served. Rice was not served at all. The food provided in the private boarding houses is of a much better quality.
10. Another reason is because the Students have much more freedom in the private boarding houses and the rules of discipline of the College Hostel do not apply to them.
11. It is also found that the facilities in the College Hostel are very poor. Even the toilets that have been repaired are not cleaned regularly. The window panes in the dormitories are broken and not replaced.
12. There is no uniformity in the furniture and the lay-out of the dormitories. The school no longer provides a mattress or locker. The students bring their own Mattresses, Lockers and Steel Cabinets to keep their clothes and books etc.

13. They also bring Steel clothes racks and hangers of different shapes and colours which are strewn around the dormitories.
14. The amount of fees taken on account of sports is only Rs.40/=. This is wholly inadequate to meet even the actual expenses to purchase necessary sports equipment let alone maintain the areas in which the games are played.
15. The students do not now pay for their traveling when college is playing any match elsewhere. The entire traveling expenses plus cost of supplying food to the team is met by College. Perhaps the students cannot afford this expenditure.
16. Most of the minor staff are drawing fairly large sums of money as overtime. These claims appeared to be submitted on flimsy grounds. In fact, the person who brought the Head Master's dinner to his bungalow was claiming overtime for that item of work. Hence, the Head Master did away with that arrangement and did his own cooking. He lives alone in his bungalow.
17. Many Masters who had been recruited during an earlier era have not been properly interviewed and selected. There are Masters who do not have their G C E (O/L) passes. Similarly, certain Masters as they were favourites have been placed in certain Grades which appear to have been not very prudent. The lowest salary drawn is approximately Rs.7,000/- and the highest is about Rs.18,000/-
18. The majority of these Masters who have formed a clique have at the back of their minds a plan of action to create confusion and trouble in College, to such an extent that the State will be compelled to step in and take over the Administration.
19. The leader of this clique is hopeful that at that time he will be appointed as the Head Master.

20. There is also found a powerful Trade Union amongst the minor staff who number approximately..... several of these persons are not resident in the College premises.
21. At the moment, there is a bank overdraft of Rs.1.5 Million.
22. Currently, the expenditure for the month exceeds the income by Rs.100,000/-
23. The deficit arose mainly because of a statutory allowance of approximately, Rs.1000/- which became payable to the members of the Staff, since.....
24. The Senior dormitories are in an absolutely un-liveable condition. The roof particularly, requires urgent and immediate attention. Unless these facilities are improved, one cannot attract new students to the School. Perhaps more current boarders will leave.
25. In fact, the students keep securing accommodation in private boarding houses outside the School for these reasons.
26. The main block of buildings find it very difficult to communicate with the Keble Block.
27. It would be useful to have some system by which telephone calls could be transferred to areas like the Keble Block.
28. During this time of the year, there is a severe drought and the use of water from the wells is also restricted.
29. The wells are also in a dilapidated conditions and should be renovated. The availability of water thereafter will also improve.

30. Several Masters are resident outside College.
31. There is a Master-in-Charge of each Dormitory. Their quarters are adjacent to each Dormitory. They are expected to be always available in College even during the week-ends. It is difficult to keep those young Masters indoors. They are always trying to be outside.
32. The Chaplain must be a mature person. The last two persons who held this post were too young. In fact, the current individual incites students against the administration. As he is not getting the food he likes from College, he has his food from elsewhere.
33. As most children also are found to come from broken or single-parent homes, the chaplain's post is very important to give necessary advice and counseling etc.

L.J.

03RD Sep 2001.