

OBSERVATIONS & REPORT ON VISITS ON JUNE 01,02, & 03,2002

A. Pilferage of Groceries

1. Information continues to be received from several sources that groceries are pilfered on a large scale from the pantry stores by those working in the pantry/kitchen area; that the Food Matron does not have proper custody of the keys, which are entrusted by her to an employee instead of having the keys in her personal custody at all times.
2. We are informed that there were 03 Security Guards and 01 Officer in charge on duty at any given time working on 2 shifts. The Security Posts were located in the front lawn of the Head Master's Bungalow, at the main entrance gate and at the Keble end of the Campus. The O I C would be patrolling. It is a fact that there is no boundary fence around the Campus and students and minor staff have by regular use, made several foot paths to exit from the Campus from various points particularly beyond the Head Master's Bungalow. We observed minor employees who were going off duty finding their way to these various paths **HEAVILY LADEN WITH CLOTH BAGS AS IF THEY HAD DONE THEIR PURCHASES OF GROCERIES FOR THE WEEK FROM THE CO-OP STORES.** Nobody was there to check them. If pilfering on a large scale is being done, there is no evident discouragement to this practice. The Security did not check the bags.

B. Quality of Food

1. We spoke to the Head Master about the quality and nutritional value of food given to the students. He stated that the food bill of the boarding exceeded the money collected therefor.
2. Students pay boarding fees around Rs. 1,800/-. Members of the Staff and Minor Staff who partake of food supplied by the boarding, are levied a subsidized rate deducted from their emoluments. Even if a student pays Rs. 2,000/- towards boarding fees, he is in fact paying only Rs.66/- for a day. This cannot cover breakfast, lunch, evening tea and dinner. The Rs.66/- is also used to cover the salaries of all employees involved in boarding activities, i.e. kitchen, pantry, dormitories, toilets, gardens, and security, Rs.66/- must also cover the cost of Electricity, water service, telephone. It must also cover all repairs and maintenance and upkeep of the kitchen, pantry, dining hall, dormitories, play areas, swimming pools, sports activities etc. It does not require much imagination to realize how impossible it is to provide all of these towards students with Rs.66/- per day and subsidized meals given to staff and minor staff.

3. We watched children putting aside their books and homework after evening prep at 7.15 or so and sitting down to dinner. A few did not do so but picked up their bags and came out of the Dining Hall. We asked them why they were not waiting for dinner. At first they were reluctant to answer. When pressed, they said they had placed the dinner order with the Canteen Manager as usual and they were having rice and curry cooked well instead of stale bread. We found that dinner consisted of bread (most often very stale) and dhal.
4. We met the Canteen Manager who informed us that a minimum of 35 students would order lunch in advance. The boarding menu is known and students make sure that food is available elsewhere as they do not wish to partake of what is dished out.
5. We also came across the case of a parent bringing along his son to the canteen and instructing the Manager to supply rice and curry dinner daily to his son as the food supplied by the boarding was atrocious and he offered to pay the Canteen Manger in advance. There are several parents who have placed standing orders with the canteen Manager for supply of food both lunch and dinner and settle the monthly bill. These parents also pay boarding fees to the school for food, which the students do not partake of due to poor quality.
6. Purchasing a Maggie Noodle packet from the Co-op stores and even from the Canteen Manager, which are taken to the dormitories by the students to be eaten IN THEIR RAW FORM when the pangs of hunger overtakes the students, is the most common feature and part of Boarding life. Maggie Noodles as every body knows are meant to be cooked and eaten. We also came to know that parents when they bring their sons to the boarding after holidays or mid-term holidays or regular week-ends, bring with them a large supply of packets of Maggie Noodles which the children keep with them in their dormitories and eat IN THEIR RAW FORM. Thus Maggie Noodles is the most popular hunger releaser and is available in plenty both in the Co-op stores run by the School and in the Canteen given out on contract.
7. A parent who accompanied his son to the Canteen requesting the Canteen Manger to provide dinner to his son, was heard to say that on 3 different occasions, there were cockroaches in the white gravy given to have with bread and he had vehemently refused to partake of any more food from the College kitchen because he had starved on those 3 occasions.

8. We ourselves had lunch on June 02, 2002. The lunch consisted of Rice, Beans and Chicken curry. For those who did not eat chicken there was Soya Meat. The Food was not tasty either. We also had lunch on June 03,2002. Lunch consisted of Rice, Breadfruit curry, mango curry and a fried egg. Once again, the food was not palatable, nor had the vegetables been selected properly. The Weekly Menu available with us is poor in every sense. Green leaves are apparently not being given. We do not think that the food served is nutritious or palatable. Proper boarding fees could be charged and better food should be provided.
9. We witnessed during the short spell of 1 ½ hours we spent in the College office on one occasion, 2 different students refusing to stay on and crying requesting their parents to take them home and when the parents inquired as to when they would come back, they refused to answer. Obviously, these were cases where the children were thoroughly disappointed about the facilities and food provided, and probably they would prefer not to come back to the Boarding.

C. Standard of English

1. There had always been a clamour for better and more English and interviewing a cross section of parents, one is left with no doubt, as to why parents send their children to Gurutalawa. It is firstly, secondly, and thirdly for a sound English education. The recruitment of the new Chaplain Rev. Nihal Fernando is a step in the right direction. Apart from having an ideal person as Chaplain, his ability to counsel students and take English Language classes apart from Elocution, in lower grades is a real asset, plus the fact that he is resident on the campus and a good disciplinarian who is respected by all.
2. Sometime ago, parents in the primary school made a huge protest, a hue and cry that unwarranted tuition is being given to all the students in Keble, that they were not picking up any English despite the tuition and that some students were being charged for tuition when they were not even attending tuition etc etc.....Inquiries were made and tuition was stopped. In our confidential Report of October 01,2001, we recommended, having considered the above and other factors, that the Master who teaches the subject, should he suggest assistance by way of tuition, should not be the person who gives such tuition and benefit financially. Be that as it may, presently, there is a competent English teacher who teaches English to years 1,2 and 3 i.e. Mrs.Anandappa. The Students are happy, the parents are satisfied and the teacher has job satisfaction.....We were informed of this even by other Members of the Tutorial staff in the Primary, Middle and Senior Schools. Unless a firm foundation is given in the English

Language in the Primary Section, these students will be at a disadvantage in the Middle and Upper Schools and later on in life. In certain circles they are not regarded as Thomians because the standard of English is so poor.These are open secrets and everybody talks of them. The Junior teacher who has been in employment for 1-2 years at Guru could be relieved of her position as Class teacher of year 2 and do only English from year 1 to Year 5 because she feels she can deliver the goods and she is quite happy to do as this is the greatest expectation of the Students and Parents in the Primary Section.

D. Sports & Equipment

1. Grounds

The exclusive use of the Main Grounds is permitted by the villagers when a polite request is made to them. That half of the grounds which was used for Hockey is thoroughly neglected and a good part of it is overgrown with grass/weeds. In fact, the information is that Hockey as a game is not played or coached seriously. Mr. Ellepola the Cricket Coach of the under 15 team suggests that if on the balance area of the playground where the pitch is not there, grass is laid that area can be used for hockey, soccer and rugger. In addition there are two cement laid cricket pitches next to the tennis courts which are being used for practice.

2. Tennis

Tennis is not played. The tennis courts have been abandoned and are in disuse. That area is used for cricket practice and Hockey practice. Students of all ages also use this area to play these games even at unsupervised hours.

3. Cricket

Mr.Ellepola, is of the view that the Turf Wicket should be redone if the standard of Cricket as well as results are to show improvement, particularly in competing against other schools with better facilities. He says now there is adequate water to maintain the turf and as undertaken by Mr.Gerald de Alwis, if the "Groundee" is given adequate training for a week by Ranil Abenaika at the SSC, he will be able to deliver the goods. It can also be ensured that the villagers will not harm the turf wicket or damage or permit their cattle to graze anywhere near the Cricket Grounds. It is worth meeting Mr.Ellepola and having a chat with him about this matter, irrespective of what decision is made ultimately, (this subject being a very sore-point with previous Ex-Co's of the OBA in view of the background to the setting up and opening of the Turf Wicket). Mr.Ellepola also informed that no sports equipment (particularly cricket gear) is made available by the College and that the students bring their own equipment if

they wish to play the game. College does not have the finances to purchase sports equipment. Those students who are keen and who wish to participate in these games bring their own equipment. However, Rs. 200/- is charged from all the students who come in for practices irrespective of whether they play for the team or not. This charge is only for 5 months. All essential equipment is brought from that collection. The school is badly in need of equipment. Furthermore, the Matting that is used gives way before long and proper practice cannot be had. He requested that a Matting strip of quality be ordered.

4. **Swimming** :

Swimming is permitted in all types of attire, mostly knee length and even longer shorts. There is no uniformity. Bathing trunks are hardly used. One is reminded of a weekend picnic to Bopath Ella, not students at the Gurutalawa Swimming Pool. There is a need of a pool cleaning brush and erection of the Diving boards. Also the shallow end is rather deep for students of the Keble section as it was not meant for students of that age group.. It needs to be raised a little so that the children can stand up in the water with their heads out at the very beginning. A few boards also would be helpful for the very new and young students.

5. **Badminton** :

The College Hall had been used for Badminton practice and an area on the floor the size of the Badminton Court is completely damaged and has to be re-done.

6. **Karate**

We were informed that Karate is also being taught somewhere in the hall. This should be looked in to in order to ensure that the area is appropriate for the sport.

7. **Scouting**

Scouting has just commenced. A visiting Master does Scouting on Sunday mornings. Almost 50 students are participating. This activity will keep the students occupied. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a requirement that the students should be in some uniform. Hence, they are like a rag-tag band. As a swimming class has been made a part of scouting, it is attracting many students. It would be good to insist on a proper attire both for scouting and swimming. This will also improve the standard of discipline and decorum which is necessary in later life.

8. **Rugger**

There are only a couple of rugger balls available. No Jerseys or boots are given by the school. There is no separate fee charged from a student unlike in cricket. The team members buy their own Jerseys and boots. In the case of a tournament, all expenses are charged from students. The expense is

divided amongst them except for meals. There is a lack of participation in friendly matches due to lack of funds. There are also no other competitors in the Uva Province other than S.Thomas' Bandarawela.

E. Clean Water Supply

In September, we found that the wells supplying water did not have adequate protective cover. Students were using a shortcut (to the old class room block) immediately below the old dining hall adjacent to the paddy fields. The Head Master stated at the last Ex-Co Meeting on May 17, that he had made this path and shortcut out of bounds and that he was going to erect a small fence at both ends of the short cut to prevent usage. We found thereafter too this footpath being patronized heavily by senior students, without any hindrance or objection.

F. Furniture

We observed in all part of the Campus, broken beds, tables and chairs and all types of furniture stacked in unused rooms in a very haphazard manner. They should all be removed to the carpentry shed and the Carpenters will have sufficient work to keep them occupied for quite some time so that the furniture can be repaired and rehabilitated and put back for use instead of begging the OBA for unlimited material assistance.

G. Library

Almost all the Library books are said to be out dated. There is no good reading material available in the library at the moment, especially for the children who are doing literature. There are no books to do any extra reading and research.

H. Keble Dorm

The conditions are appalling. No proper night toilets are available. They do not appear to be cleaned regularly. There is no proper play area. Part of the playground is overgrown with grass and weeds. The area that is available can very easily be properly laid out and maintained. In some beds, the mattress is larger/longer than the bed. As a result, it is like a hammock and sleeping in that position could be detrimental for children

so young. The play area of students at Keble is totally inadequate. Mr. Leslie Habaragoda has made a proposal in this connection. The ideal area would have been within the Keble Complex itself. Unfortunately the quarters built for the Head Master's Secretary is slap-bang in the middle of the complex. However, it may yet be possible to have a fairly big play ground in that area at one level. Students of Year 01 to 5 who are within this complex must be compared with the students of Prep School, Bandarawela of Old who had a perfect play ground and teams for every type of sport competed with other schools and did fairly well. In this connection, the sleeping, dining, class room and playing accommodation and facilities at Keble are worse than the facilities available even in a war-torn area of Sri Lanka or refugee or rehabilitation camp. It is no wonder that children admitted are very soon removed from the boarding and the school because of the totally inadequate and hopeless facilities provided which are not at all in keeping with today's standards. There is no point in Old Boys talking big about the hard life they had in the 1940's '50s, or '60s. Parents and students of today compare what is available at guru with other schools of today and we certainly do not come anywhere near acceptable standards in any sphere be it sleeping accommodation, food, classroom accommodation, teaching skills, sports facilities, recreational facilities, general welfare etc. Truly a refugee camp for children from the North and East at Pagoda Road in Nugegoda having almost 1,000 children is far superior and the food more nutritious and tasty than what is provided at Gurutalawa.

I. Mid Term and Weekends

Students appear to be going home regularly, during weekends and even mid week when parents call over for them. There does not seem to be any control over leave.

J. Visitors' Room

Parents are still found loitering all over areas, which ought to be restricted, i.e. dorms and dining hall. No visitors' room has been provided as yet in any part of the school.

K. Security

A Security check does not appear to be made on personnel or baggage leaving the campus from various points. There does not seem to be a rule that all should exit from the Campus using the main gate and be subjected to a search of their person and baggage.

L. Teaching Staff – Tamil Medium

There appear to be 9 teachers in the Tamil stream of the Middle and Upper school although there are only 47 students.

M. Dorm Masters and Discipline

The senior dorms are occupied by students according to their houses. This is not the case in the Junior dorms. The non-availability of a Master resident adjacent to each dorm is a serious drawback. Also the fact that over 90% of the staff are resident outside the campus and the fact that they leave the campus by 2.00 p.m. or so and play no further part in school life and in educating the students. This is also one major reason for indiscipline and failure to operate a successful boarding school. All staff recruited should necessarily be those that are able to contribute to a multiplicity of activities in school and they must agree to reside on the campus. We were informed of instances where some Members of the staff had apparently posed as bachelors and within a few months of employment made their exit from campus life to live with their spouses.

N. Junior Dorms - Quadrangle

The Quadrangle in the centre of the junior dorms, which was very carefully maintained, is now used to dry all wet clothes, particularly swimming trunks and sports jerseys and shorts of students of all 04 Junior Dorms. The entire lawn is littered like a dhoby's backyard or laundry area. This is an ugly sight and should be prevented. Even clothes racks are placed in the center of the lawn and clothes hung thereon.

O. 09 Acre Block - Planting

A part of the 9 acre block was planted with "Campus" plants in the hope that they would be big trees in 15-20 years ready to be felled and sold to fill the coffers. These plants, which had been purchased at Rs.5/- were sold to Old Boys at Rs.500/- at the last AGM. The students were made to plant these on a Sramadana basis. Most of the plants have thrived. A few which may not have been planted properly, had died. The total area planted is very small. The Manager of the canteen is willing to take at least 3 acres of this block on some arrangement from College (perhaps a lease), for the purpose of cultivating vegetables, which he would make available to the College at a reasonable rate. This may be a good proposition. The land will be utilized. He could be made to look after the entire block of 9 acres. College will have a continuous supply of fresh vegetables at reasonable rates instead of the van being misused running to Bandarawela, Keppetipola and other areas in search of vegetables and coming back empty handed as the prices are too high and being satisfied

with mangoes purchased on the way which are cooked and given as vegetables with lunch.