

Date: 24 June 2020

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Good afternoon, Class of 2020

This has not been an easy final year for the Class of 2020, with you experiencing the loss of many milestones you were looking forward to.

Over the past two weeks I have spent a lot of time on introspection. During this time it has also become clear that there are learners at RGHS who have been hurt by racism as well as other forms of discrimination, both systemic and interpersonal, and for that I sincerely apologise.

As staff and governing body, we are committed to anti-racism and we take our responsibility to create an inclusive campus with the utmost seriousness. After a review of your letter, we are more determined than ever to foster an inclusive and safe learning environment that is in line with our society's values and free of discrimination, and I expect the same from our student body.

I would like us to reach the point where learners at this school feel that they are welcomed and belong. That their experiences and opinions matter. That they can approach their teachers and school management with the knowledge that they will be heard. This, however, is not a process that can be embarked on by only a portion of the school, it will take commitment from all staff and learners.

During this process we must also remain mindful that change takes time, dedication and discomfort. Factors such as education and procurement-governing legislation, stakeholder timetables, and the impact of the current pandemic should not be ignored as we consider solutions to the issues you have raised - That said, I would now like to begin addressing them today.

Some of our feedback is lengthy, so please hear us through

## Matric 2020

Demand	Verbal Feedback
<p>We demand that the SGB and <i>all</i> staff should undergo transformation projects and engage in dialogue to ensure change is being made constructively from the top of the pyramid to the bottom. There should be no exceptions for those who are “too uncomfortable” to take part in such discussions.</p>	<p>The staff have undergone transformation projects and have engaged in dialogue in various workshops since January 2016. We regularly have staff inset training, but will become more intentional about these.</p> <p><b>ALL</b> staff are included and <b>have to</b> attend regardless of how uncomfortable they may feel.</p> <p>The SGB have been involved in some of these workshops and we will ensure that they attend all future workshops.</p>
<p>We demand the formation of a committee exclusive to POC and BPOC so that they can safely share their concerns and experiences in an understanding environment.</p>	<p>We have had conversations about the formation of a committee for POC and BPOC earlier this year already and will continue these conversations.</p> <p>We will consult Lovelyn for guidance here too.</p>
<p>We demand the endorsement of decolonised South African history. Time should be set aside once a month for Grades tens to twelve (those who do and do not take history as an elective subject) to engage with the history of this country. It is impossible for us as the youth to see where we are going if we don't know where we are coming from.</p>	<p>With regards to the endorsement of decolonized SA history and setting aside time once a month to do this with Grade 10 - 12 learners - this is a good idea, we will look into it as we plan for 2021.</p>
<p>We demand that teachers make more of a concerted effort to pronounce names correctly,</p>	<p>It is essential that teachers make a concerted effort to pronounce names correctly.</p>

<p>especially if these names are to be read out in assemblies.</p>	<p>We had a professional development session with the staff in Term 1 this year on this exact topic - the importance of names and pronouncing them correctly.</p>
<p>We demand for the singing of hymns to be stopped. The school should have no religious alignment. No other religious songs are sung.</p>	<p>Christian specific hymns have not been sung for a number of years now. Secular and 'spiritual' songs are carefully selected so as not to have reference to a specific deity, however, even though the 'spiritual' songs do not refer to a specific deity, most of these spiritual songs have a Christian background so we can see how it may seem that there is an alignment with the Christian faith. We will have conversations around this so that we find a solution so that we can sing songs that are inclusive.</p> <p>We encourage a variety of religious readings and devotions in assembly. This is carefully managed so that one religious group does not do more than another. This is so that those with and those without a faith are all represented in the style of devotions.</p> <p>Mnr Biermann asks for students to come forward so the onus is on you to step up. In the same way you are holding us accountable for certain aspects we are expecting the same from you here.</p>
<p>We demand the diversification of the school counselors. This will give POC the opportunity to engage with someone who is more understanding of their struggles.</p>	<p>The decision to appoint a person of colour as a counsellor was approved by the SGB at the start of 2020 but was halted by lockdown and the necessity of space.</p> <p>The space that is going to be made available is to refurbish the Cottage near Charlie's Hope, as proposed at the Vision and mission workshop. This has been slowed down as the current Campus Supervisor's house</p>

	<p>had asbestos so we had to correct this and he has moved into that space. This process is nearly over.</p> <p>In the meantime we have appointed a woman of colour for the following 4 weeks, for counselling for learners and staff. This will be extended if necessary.</p> <p>We are in the process of advertising for a woman of colour as a permanent staff member - or on a contract basis if she has her own practice.</p>
<p>We demand that there be a direct line of communication between learners and the School Governing Body (SGB) to ensure that serious issues of discrimination are addressed properly, efficiently and transparently.</p>	<p>Two members of the RCL are officially the learner representatives on the School Governing Body. They have full voting rights and also direct email access to all other members of this body.</p> <p>The current RCL members of the SGB have suggested an orientation programme for RCL reps, as they change annually. We think that this is a really good suggestion, which we will implement. This orientation will include an introduction to the differences between management and governance, which determines the different roles played by the SGB and Management Team within the school.</p> <p>In short, the SGB deals with matters that are more of a legal compliance nature (policies, finances etc.), while the school management deals with matters that affect the day-to-day running of the school.</p> <p>Many of the issues that are brought to the RCL by our students are actually management matters that need to be brought to the attention of the school management.</p>

	<p>The executive management team of the school has a brief early morning meeting to which the Head of the RCL has also been invited once a week, but we are now discussing a way to ensure more substantial meetings of this nature going forward.</p>
<p>We demand the staff, its management and the governing body to display the diversity of South Africa. POC representation needs to increase.</p>	<p>We agree that it is absolutely essential that diversity is reflected in every aspect of school life and the matter of staffing is something that we have been intentionally pursuing since 2017.</p> <p>The SGB appoints the staff employed by the school, while the WCED has to approve all appointments to state posts.</p> <p>An equity score is applied to all shortlisted applicants to both WCED and SGB positions. This practise has been in place for a number of years already.</p> <p>We are monitoring our progress in terms improving staff diversity and the current situation is as follows:</p> <p>On the current staff we have 48% POC: POC make up 32% of the teaching staff, of which POC fill 9% of management positions.</p> <p>Appointments over the past two years reflect the following statistics:</p> <p>General staff appointments have consisted of 57% being POC, 57% of appointments to teaching posts have been POC and 100% of appointments to management positions have been POC.</p>

	<p>SGB representation is currently as follows: 8 POC and 10 white members.</p> <p>Of the 7 elected parents, 2 are POC and 5 are white. Since this body is voted for and we have no way of managing the outcome in terms of the diversity of the elected members, we therefore co-opted 2 extra parent members who are POC onto the SGB to increase its diversity.</p>
<p>We demand that students and learners not be allowed to say the “n-word” nor the “k-word” whether it be in an academic or social setting. This includes English Literature. Failure of this should result in serious repercussions.</p>	<p>We agree that this is unacceptable and will certainly address this:</p> <p>Within the context of literature, we will discuss this with the relevant teachers.</p> <p>In terms of the social setting, we will need to rely on students to either address this as and when it happens or at least to report it so that it can be addressed promptly.</p>
<p>We demand that isiXhosa second additional language should be encouraged and promoted in the school. It should be taken as seriously as any other subject taught and it should be taught by a qualified educator.</p>	<p>This is a process we embarked on last year, for implementation in 2020. It was decided that, in addition to isiXhosa FAL, we would offer conversational isiXhosa for two years until we have enough teaching time allocated to make it financially feasible for a teacher to accept a SAL post.</p> <p>In other words, it wouldn't be worthwhile for someone to take on a job that is only one or two lessons a week; it wouldn't be worth the time and travel costs to come in for such a small, part-time post, so we need to grow the subject in our school first.</p> <p>Conversational isiXhosa is a way of building up towards our goal of offering the subject as a SAL.</p>

	<p>We hope that more learners will be enthusiastic about choosing this subject option in the future, so that it can flourish.</p> <p>This year we have seven Grade 8 pupils who chose Conversational isiXhosa as an option. They are being taught by Mr Nombewu. He is really enthusiastic and committed to offering worthwhile lessons, using carefully selected resource materials. By all accounts, his students are really enjoying the lessons and his teaching. Anyone is welcome to attend a class to see how well this is structured and planned.</p>
<p>We demand that Muslim students should not be required to hand in assignments or write tests on Eid, the day before Eid and the day after Eid. Important topics should also not be taught on Eid Day. Inclusivity must be deliberate.</p>	<p>For the past few years we have actually indicated on the school calendar that no assessments should be done on Eid and agree that Muslim students should not be disadvantaged in any way.</p> <p>Going forward we will be mindful to ensure that the day before and after Eid are also taken into consideration.</p>
<p>We demand the increase in structural support to be provided to BPOC students in terms of financial aid. Scholarships should be provided based on financial need and disadvantage as well as academic excellence.</p>	<p>Academic and Sport scholarships were purposefully scrapped two years ago to make it possible to assist POC to attend our school.</p> <p>We also have accepted more learners from scholarship foundations and NGOs such as Alan Gray and Students for a Better Future.</p> <p>This year we introduced an academic bursary specifically reserved for BPOC, which is means based - the amounts awarded are on a sliding scale, according to financial need. (Based on the process used by tertiary institutions i.e. NFSAS, where parents have to submit specific documentation like proof of income etc.)</p>

We demand that more black students should be admitted into the school for true diversity to be reflected within it.

Since 2019 we have added an equity score to our processing of Grade 8 applications in an attempt to improve the diversity of our learners going forward and, in particular, to increase the number of BPOC.

Last year we got some independent advice about amending our Admissions Policy and looking at ways of shifting the demographics of our school.

We asked that the selection process be audited and this was done by two parents on the SGB who are POC. They made various recommendations to us and we have incorporated their suggestions into our process this year.

While we can ensure that we offer a significant number of places in Grade 8 to POC in order to change the diversity of the students at our school, unfortunately we cannot control who accepts the places that we have offered.

This means that, even though we may offer a significant number of places to POC, they may choose to accept a place at another school, which then means that we may end up with fewer POC than we had hoped for in any given year.

We are, therefore, also looking at ways to encourage more POC to apply to our school.

It is our intention to set and publish targets in this respect on our school website as a way of monitoring our progress and so that, ultimately, we can be held accountable for reaching these goals.

<p>We demand that the crosses and school emblem be removed from the prayer room.</p>	<p>We are not sure of who placed the cross in the prayer room but it should never have been placed in there as this is a multi faith prayer space. It was decided at the time of inauguration that there would be no specific religious symbols in the room. The cross has now been removed.</p> <p>The image on the wall that has the school emblem was at the specific request and donation of the father who paid for much of the prayer room to be created as a multi-faith prayer space and has no affiliation to a particular religion.</p>
<p>We demand that halal food be served at the RGHS hostel, even if there is as little as one Muslim boarder. The lack of this dietary requirement creates exclusivity within the hostel. We also demand the allocation of a prayer space for Muslim boarders.</p>	<p>The Hostel Kitchen has served food suitable for a Halaal diet for a number of years - In February this year we consulted with a devout Muslim member of the SGB who confirms that the measures we have in place makes this acceptable. We have also met with all but two members of the Hostel who are Muslim learners and whose parents have confirmed that what we have in place is very acceptable. Two remaining learners were unable to meet, before lock down occurred. Hostel staff are in contact with an independent advisor and in communication with the Muslim boarders and their families. We are investigating ways of offering Halaal-certified meals to boarders.</p> <p>Although there is a school prayer room that is not far from the hostel, as well as a small prayer space within the hostel, we are investigating other options.</p>
<p>We demand that the idling school bus be used to transport the ground staff to and from work. We suggest that a designated driver picks them up at a central point and transports them at a fixed time.</p>	<p>Travel allowances have been in place for many years (more than a decade). In 2018 the travel allowances of all ground and cleaning staff was increased, so as to allow the furthest dweller to get into school at no extra expense.</p>

	Mr Nombewu, our campus manager is once again investigating this.
We demand that the ground staff are given name badges with their marital status (Mr/Ms/Mrs) followed by their surname or preferred name. It is disrespectful to address adults on a first name basis.	<p>The current names that are embroidered onto the clothing of the grounds and cleaning staff is what was chosen by them at the time that it was bought for them.</p> <p>Mr Nombewu will review/discuss this with the relevant staff.</p>
We demand for parents of students to engage in compulsory dialogues in order to ensure transformation is happening not only at school but at home. Parents wishing to send their children to this school should understand that they are subscribing to a culture of equality and change.	<p>As far as compulsory dialogues for parents: We have had evenings for parents to engage (past pupils speaking at Matric and New parent evenings, a book launch for Dylan Wray and Roy Hellenberg, Lovelyn Nwadeyi and the production of My Father's Coat a history of South Africa), sadly these they were poorly attended. Parents have their own social responsibility to inform and educate themselves and while we will continue to provide these opportunities for engagement they are ultimately accountable for their own growth.</p> <p>We are, however, looking into ways to ensure this happens more intentionally. We will include this as part of the Grade 8 parent orientation from next year.</p>
We demand the establishment of an independent board to oversee the progression of transformation in the school. The individuals on the board should have no interests or relations with the school, it's staff members or learners in order to ensure that there is no hidden agenda.	Pending SGB approval will be appointing Ms Lovelyn Nwadeyi, and her team as consultants.

<p>We demand more transparency regarding the disciplinary actions that are taken against racist staff members and learners to ensure maximum accountability.</p>	<p>We do not share disciplinary processes that learners go through with the entire school as they have a right to privacy. It wouldn't be right to belittle learners in this manner. Surely the same is true for staff members.</p>
<p>We demand that the teachers accused of racism, whether it be from current pupils who have logged formal complaints with management or it be in the comments on the Instagram posted on the schools' account on 3 June 2020, publicly apologize.</p>	<p>With regards to teachers accused of racism, I need to explain that there are two employers of staff at RGHS, the School Governing Body and Western Cape Education Department (WCED), which respectively handle disciplinary matters for those in their employ.</p> <p>Proper disciplinary procedures have been followed for accusations that were brought to my attention between January 2017 and May 2020. With permission I can say: Past incidents involving the named teacher, who is a WCED employee, were dealt with by a WCED disciplinary process at the end of 2018, the details of which are confidential due to labour laws and to protect the identity and privacy of the complainants.</p>

I hope that this extensive response will put some of your minds at ease, allowing you to trust us and give us the necessary time as we implement them. We in turn will remain transparent in our actions and provide updates whenever available. In the meantime, we encourage all learners to continue engaging this process and use school channels such as the RCL, school management and direct interaction with staff to raise issues.

As a school, we realise that there is much change that still needs to take place, and believe that this presents us with a valuable opportunity to learn and grow as a community. We remain committed to transforming RGHS for the better with you and future learners.