

The Swaminarayan

Education is that which liberates

Dear Parents, Guardians, Pupils and Friends,

Theme for the week

The theme for next week is “**The Power of Prayers**”. I have written about it at the back of the newsletter.

Prep Prize Day.

Parents are reminded that the whole school will close at 1pm tomorrow for the Prep Prize Day in the evening.

The Pastoral Quandary

I wanted to share an article on our Pastoral strategy which was recently published in the ISA Journal...

Somebody’s got to be crazy about that kid. That’s number one. First, last and always, wrote the distinguished developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. Anybody who has been a teacher for long enough and made a difference to the achievement of a pupil will know that the best teachers form a positive emotional relationship with pupils. They do this through a multitude of experiences: they care for the pupils they teach and make it so obvious through their actions; use a variety of techniques to maintain the pupils’ interest; tell stories, never dismiss a question, show patience, are sympathetic, take a personal interest in their lives, make pupils laugh and make the lessons fun. In essence, they form a relationship of mutual respect and trust that propels both of them to greater success.



contribute to the personal and social development of pupils by clarifying their thinking. Good teaching helps pupils to formulate strategies for dealing with identified tasks; listen with discrimination and be polite

Good teaching is crucial in encouraging effective personal and social development; it creates circumstances in which pupils can learn effectively. Where there is high expectations of young people, challenge and mental stimulation, the lessons



in what they have to say; it enables pupils to be accepted as worthwhile individuals. A teacher who has good professional knowledge, who takes an active interest in exploring his or her own self-understanding, and who offers a good example of behaviour is likely to have a valuable effect on the development of pupils' expectations, self-esteem, attitudes and behaviour.

According to the Centre on the Developing Child (Harvard University), *children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development. A positive relationship with a caring adult contributes to the growth of a broad ranges of competencies, including a love of learning, a comfortable sense of oneself, social skills, and multiple successful relationships for a lifetime.*



A caring Early Years' teacher can therefore set the tone for the progress and achievement of a pupil for many years to follow. Their good work can be carried forward through all the primary years in a system of education where one good teacher delivers all the core subjects and has the time to form a close, caring relationship with the pupil. It is what happens in most primary schools. If we start from the premise that all teachers care for the pupils in their charge, what prevents pupils from succeeding in equal measure is the number of pupils in the class, no matter how remarkable the teacher. The delivery of quality in education is often defined in terms of adult-pupil ratios, group size, physical facilities, and more recently, cognitively oriented curriculum.

At secondary level, the tutor system is often used to fulfil the legal duty of monitoring the pupil's attendance in two ten minutes registration sessions in the morning and afternoon rather than a place where the tutor is allowed to make a real difference to the progress and development of the pupil. The division of pupils into forms often reflects the number of forms the school accepts, resulting in large form groups, which once again gives little time to the tutor to help the pupils unless they sacrifice their preparation, lunch or break times to get to know them better. The one saving grace is that the tutor stays with the pupil as they progress through the senior years and in time certainly forms a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

The subject teacher on the other hand has more time to engage with the pupils. A few hours every week, for a whole year, even more during their GCSE and A Level years. They have the time to get to the heart of the pupil, their strengths and weaknesses, interests, aspirations and hopes. It is therefore not surprising that subject teachers often form stronger relationships with the pupils in secondary schools. Yet these same principles are not translated into allowing a similar type of relationship to form between the tutor and their tutees as external examination success take precedence. There is the increasing pressure on Heads from heads of departments to give more time to their subjects to deliver the results. Unable to resist the relentless temptation of rising up the dreaded performance tables, Heads often yield in search of better and better results, often at the expense of pastoral care. So what is the solution?



The answer lies in the model adopted in the boarding houses of the public schools who have learnt their lessons the hard way. Gone are the days when the teachers forced a torturous cold shower on a pupil in the early hours of the winter months; where those dreaded elastic canes have all been burnt in a heap with the ashes placed in an urn as a memento of an era when the harsh militaristic discipline was seen as a way to mould the emotional resilience of the pupil in preparation for adult life.

What has evolved out of the harsh experience however, is a beautifully caring environment where small tutor-pupil groups with an enviable ratio of 1:10 – in some boarding schools even less, supporting the pupils to develop in every aspect of their relentless march towards success. In the absence of the parents, they are *in loco parentis*, providing all the emotional support needed to make the pupil feel at ease, at home. It is a model of pastoral care that has transformed how boarding schools mould the character of a pupil in a caring environment from which day schools can certainly learn.

Many will claim that such low tutor-pupil ratios for pastoral care are an impossible dream in day schools under huge financial constraints. I would have to disagree because TSS has transformed the way we support our pupils to grow in every aspect of their development through our House Tutor system. It has meant breaking away from teaching groups being remodelled as tutor groups. While pupils are still taught in two teaching groups, they are divided into three House Tutor groups for pastoral care to reflect the three Houses in the school without adding any extra strain on the staffing budget; where the tutors and pupils belong to the same House which gives them every reason to work together to succeed. What

was needed was the courage to recruit every available teacher into the House Tutor system and place the well-being of the pupils at the top of the agenda. After all, isn't a happy child a successful child?

The small size of the groups raised a greater awareness amongst the tutors of the emotional well-being of the pupils through two short tutor meetings, which served a greater purpose than just to register the pupils. We created a rota of weekly tutor assemblies on a theme of the week to give pupils in each tutor group to collectively come together to prepare an assembly. This enabled discussion, debate, generated ideas, nurtured teamwork whilst highlighting the value of the theme in their life. Whereas in a large tutor group, some of the quiet pupils may have felt lost, the small size of the House Tutor groups enabled all of them to participate.



Tutors meet the parents at the beginning of every academic year to share the programme for the year. We added one meeting per term between the tutor and parents in the presence of their child to discuss their well-being, progress and achievement. This developed a strong bond and trust between the parents, pupil and tutor. Communication between parents and tutors was improved through exchange of emails. With fewer number of pupils to look after, tutors were better able to respond to the questions of the parents which made parents happier. This strong relationship of the tutors with the pupils was further enhanced by the introduction of a residential week in the school calendar. Organised by the tutors in consultation with the pupils, it gives tutors an opportunity to observe and bond with the pupils in a more relaxed social environment away from the pressures of academia in the school.

To ensure that tutors feel supported, all the tutors in each House collectively meet with the Head of House every alternative week to discuss any issues, share their experiences and learn from each other. While the House Tutor system still remains in evolution because there are many other elements we could add to enhance the level of support, there is no doubt that the small size of each tutor group has allowed the tutors to deliver a depth of care to the pupils which could not have been replicated in the larger tutor groups. It has been a positive experience for all, a fact reflected in the last inspection, which judged the school as excellent in all areas. I remember during the inspection, the RI asked me for the register of pupils for gifted and talented. I smiled with glee and boldly replied, "All the pupils are gifted and talented." The RI frowned at me while I held the glint in my eyes. The fact is, I truly believe that all my pupils are gifted and talented. I have never believed in the gifted and talented initiative because it is so alien to schools which should be striving to bring out the best in every pupil.

ISA is made up of some of the most diverse schools. None of us are particularly selective in our intake nor boast huge numbers. Yet it is precisely our small size that makes us so attractive, personal, where every pupil is an individual and has a unique gift and talent which we strive to nurture. It is easy for a school to accept the very best pupils and claim to deliver excellent results. But try it with pupils who are struggling to come to grips with life and take them to places they never thought was possible. Excellent pastoral care is at the heart of that journey, in moulding the finer qualities of life, a good character, which is the foundation for all successful lives. Ultimately, what every pupil craves for is love. It is what propels them to great heights. If a child is loved, they learn to love the people around them, they learn to love their school, community, environment, country, and they learn to love the world. So as teachers, we don't need to be crazy about the pupils we teach, only learn to love them as our own!

Love Yourself

Think

Whenever I speak about love in front of students I have always heard a ripple of mirth pass through the class. However, love is one emotion that everyone wants to feel. The love of family, friends, a boy or a girl; it is all about loving others.

Feel

Yet the most important person to love is yourself. If you do not love yourself, who will? I know sometimes you will feel that you don't deserve to be loved, but don't be too hard on yourself because you are young, and you are still learning and finding out about the world. It is all right to make mistakes, as long as you learn from them. You may make several mistakes before you learn, but that is fine too because there is no greater teacher than experience. Love yourself and you will learn to love others, hurt yourself and you will learn to hurt others.

Do

Love is a beautiful emotion, all good things come from love. Everything you will ever want and need in your life comes from love, but you must first love yourself because when you love yourself everything you do will be done to be good to yourself. This is not in a selfish way but in a way that makes you grow as a person; you will see that everyone else loves too, and you will feel happier inside. This will show on your face as you will smile and laugh more. You will have seen what happens to people who have happy personalities; everyone wants to be with them, be around them and be their friend. The whole world will love you if you learn to love yourself.

Yours sincerely,

Nilesh Manani