

7 February 2020

CURRO
Helderwyk

NEWSLETTER

Dear Parents / Guardians

HOW DOES OUR GARDEN GROW?

I have spent the past 15 years at two of the top Boys' Schools in the country. As is the nature of such institutions, sport receives a place of prominence in the holistic education on offer there. If sport is prominent, it is of utmost importance that the facilities that are used for these pursuits are in a condition that allows healthy and enthusiastic participation by the learners. Of course, it also goes without saying, that if one is an institution that promotes academic excellence, that excellence has to be physically seen in how the buildings and grounds are maintained and looked after.

It therefore caused great pain to me (I do not exaggerate when I say that this was not only an emotional pain, but a physical one) that the campuses of CURRO Helderwyk looked the way it did when we opened on 13 January. Of course, Support Staff arrived on the 6th already to prepare the campus for Opening Day, but a week is not sufficient to deal with the backlogs that finally caught up with us at the beginning of the year. The weeds were growing between the paving stones, grass on the fields were overgrown and carport nets were coming apart and poles rusting.

This of course was not a surprise. I knew it was coming and I knew the systems we were putting in place would not prevent what was going to happen. But I was more concerned about ensuring that we stop the downward trajectory and ensure that it never happens again than merely applying cosmetic solutions. Sometimes one has to sacrifice short-term gains for long term success. I have to admit to being an impatient person, so long term in this context means three to six months, not three to six years!



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#Learners2Leaders

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Why did we get to this point in the first place?

Our staff were not appropriately trained to maintain a campus of this size and complexity. The rapid growth of the school over eight years from under 200 learners to close to 1 400 today, has meant that buildings have been erected, fields established, and increasing wear and tear on those facilities built. The high percentage of fees arrears (close to 15% in June 2019 now reduced to less than 3%) has meant that equipment needed was not always purchased or kept in good order.

That is historical. What is more important right now, is what have / are we doing to address this?

We appointed an experienced Estates Manager, Wikus Weber, who started on 6 January. As you can imagine there was quite a rude awakening for him when he arrived! Mr Weber (or Oom Wikus as he has become known) has already made a difference in how he has organised the Support Staff and the new sense of pride and commitment he has engendered in them as a team. While dealing with urgent matters that have accumulated over time, is a priority, he also understands the importance of putting systems of control and accountability in place to ensure consistent productivity. We will see the benefit of this more and more as time goes on.

Service Providers who have not been delivering the quality of health and cleaning services that they should be are now being held to close account and area and regional managers have already been called in. We are already seeing an improvement in their deliverables and will ensure that we keep up this level of accountability.

We have repaired all the machinery and equipment that could be repaired and they are all back on campus. This will enable our staff to perform their duties responsibly and safely. In addition, on Thursday we took delivery of three John Deere lawnmowers as well as industrial strength bush-cutters that can deal with the size of our campuses. You will see a noticeable improvement in the quality of our fields, because how it is cut is as important as watering and feeding it.

While maintaining our campuses is important, we do not want to neglect the safety of our learners and broader school community as well. We are fortunate that both Mr Weber and Mr Oldknow (Teacher at the High school) have extensive experience in Health and Safety standards and we are currently re-looking at access control of adults to our campuses as this is not to our satisfaction. Yesterday we completed the audit for the Primary School and will move on to the High School and Castle over the next two weeks. Some physical changes will be made to some campuses as well as changes in routines and habits for parents, learners and teachers to heighten our awareness and responsiveness to safety concerns for our learners. More information around this will follow shortly.

I want to thank the parents of CURRO Helderwyk for your patience with us as we address these matters. I speak openly about our problems because I am speaking to family – family must be able to speak about the hard things openly and honestly. As family, we need one another, to hold one another accountable because we are focused on the same end goal, our children flourishing and reaching their full potential.

Yours in education,

Mr R Hellenberg

Executive Head

Delivery of our new lawnmowers



THE BEST TIME FOR
A NEW BEGINNING
IS NOW

