



18 July 2020

Dear Saints Community

As a College, we always endeavour to address all matters concerning the school with a spirit of cooperation and transparency. This communication serves to address a number of important issues we have been dealing with and to keep you updated about where we are in these processes.

Student Disciplinary

On the 31st of May, the school was made aware of disturbing video footage being widely shared on a number of social media platforms. The videos featured College students whose behaviour brought the name of the school into disrepute. Our immediate response, on the 1st of June, was to send a letter to our community and then to initiate a formal investigation based on our Code of Conduct. The investigations indicated that a disciplinary process was warranted and charges were drawn up. Disciplinary hearings have been held and sanctions have been issued. We must bear in mind, that as these proceedings involve minors, we are legally obliged to maintain the confidentiality of the students involved. The sanctions have been accepted by the students, although one student has asked for leave to appeal.

Throughout this process we have relied upon the expert assistance of well-respected lawyer Mrs Shamima Gabie from Cheadle Thompson & Haysom Inc, and Adv Hamilton Maenetje SC, who also drew up the terms of reference for the disciplinary process. We appreciate their considered input and highly professional oversight of this sensitive matter. Mrs Ntombi Langa-Royds, Deputy Chair of Council chaired the hearings. We are deeply grateful to Mrs Langa-Royds for the considerable time this has taken (remembering she is a volunteer) and for the objective and fair manner in which the proceedings were carried out. There has also been careful supervision by the Chair of Council, Mr Carel Nolte, who has kept the Council, including the Chair of our Trust, Mr Gary Morolo and Nerine Kahn, Chair of our Governance Committee, informed during the process.

As per our Governance requirements we will be reviewing a number of College policies including the codes of conduct for staff, parents and students. The review of our code of conduct for students in actual fact began last year and a second draft will be ready to be shared with all our stakeholders within the next two weeks. We will be engaging with all our stakeholders as we would value your comments on these important policies.

Engagement with our Alumnae

As has been communicated, the College and Council have been engaging with a group of alumni who have shared their lived experiences of racism, which has resulted in the College issuing a public apology and writing a detailed report in response to the memorandum received from the alumni. This report is available on this [link](#).

After high level discussions and further engagements, we have put together teams representing all areas of the College and representatives from the alumni group. We appreciate their commitment to transformation, and we look forward to meaningful interactions with them. The teams constitute the following proposed groups:

1. **Curriculum Transformation:** Ms Mangaliso Luthuli; Ms Nomalanga Luthuli; Ms Sheriffah Arewa, the OSA rep (to be confirmed); Parent rep, Mrs Thabang Phayane Oliphant; Church rep, Father Matthew Charlesworth, School reps, Dr Gladys Ayaya and Dr Adrienne Watson (Chair). Dr Watson is the Chair of our Learning and Teaching Committee and, as such, will be able to report to this structure.
2. **Student Care:** Ms Hlubi Mvinjelwa; Ms Hillary Wanjohi the OSA rep (to be confirmed); Parent rep, Mrs Lindiwe Kwele; Church rep, Rev Dix Sibeko; School Psychologist, Mr Sean Tunmer; School rep, Mr Leluma Posholi. Mr Tunmer (Chair) will feedback into our Support Services Committee.
3. **Discipline and Mediation:** Ms Nkosiphile Shange; Ms Nondumiso Shange; Ms Sanda Nyoka the OSA rep (to be confirmed); Parent rep, Adv Menzi Simelane; Church rep, Rev Jenni Samdaan and School rep, Mr Jakes Fredericks (Chair), who will give feedback to the Code of Conduct Committee.
4. **Staff Transformation:** Ms Nadine Acheamong the OSA rep (to be confirmed); Parent rep, Mrs Lebo Biko, Church rep (to be confirmed); School reps, Ms Noluthando Nkuna and Mr Lukhanyiso Msutu (Chair), who will give feedback to the Staff Forum and the Staff Equity Committee.
5. **Accountability and Transparency:** Ms Fiona Nzau; Ms Vontner Ayaya; Chair of the Council Transformation Subcommittee (which already consists of school reps and parents), Mrs Reshma Lakha-Singh, additional school reps, Mrs Denise Vythilingam and Campus Director of Diversity and Transformation, Mrs Noma Shange; OSA rep(to be confirmed); Church rep (to be confirmed); and Chair of this team, Mrs Lakha-Singh, who will give feedback to Council.

Even as these structures are put in place, we acknowledge that we have a long journey ahead as the anti-racism discourse will require our ongoing focus.

We are hopeful that these teams will be able to feedback into the current structures of the College. We look forward to sharing with you in the future, the work emanating from these groups.

Allegations against Staff

On 18th June, the Girls' College instructed attorneys Cheadle Thomson & Haysom Inc. to assist with an investigation into various allegations made against staff as shared by the group of alumni in their memorandum to the College. The attorneys determined that only allegations that were contained in the official memorandum provided to the College ought to be investigated. Further to that, the anonymous submissions would not be considered as staff members could not be expected to be confronted with accusations devoid of all the details that they would need in order to defend themselves. Those who made anonymous submissions were invited to share their evidence with the attorneys in a confidential manner, but this opportunity was not taken up by any of the alumni.

In respect of these allegations where the student appended her name, the attorneys have been able to reach out to the alumni and are engaging with them. The attorneys are in the process of determining the next steps, once they have considered all the evidence.

We reiterate and appeal to our alumni and all stakeholders to please use the platforms available to them to raise any concerns and or recommendations they may have. We will not engage on these

issues on social media as we believe these matters are important and require a depth of engagement and discussion which social media does not enable.

Please feel free to contact any of the following members of our community:

- Rector, Mrs C Gilardi - email: rector@stithian.com;
- Chair of St Stithians College Endowment Fund Trust, Mr Gary Morolo - email: gary.morolo@akacapital.co.za;
- Chair of St Stithians College Council, Mr Carel Nolte - email: carel@cnandco.com;
- Deputy Chair of St Stithians College Council, Ntombi Langa-Royds ntombil@yebo.co.za;
- Campus Director of Diversity and Transformation, Mrs Noma Shange - email: NShange@stithian.com;
- OSA – Director of Diversity and Transformation, Mr Gavin Tilo – email: gavin.tilo@gmail.com.

Onsite Schooling

The decision to revert to online teaching for all students, with the exception of our Grade 12s, has been made after careful consideration for the safety of students and staff.

A number of our Operational Staff have been affected. Given that this department is key to enforcing and supporting compliance with COVID-19 SOPs and health measures, recent developments and the closure onsite of Ops presented itself as a risk to our ability to maintain the health and safety of our stakeholders.

Many staff members are not available for onsite teaching owing to chronic comorbidities or illness, themselves, or due to at-risk or ill spouses, children, or other close family. Our staff can be relied upon to go above and beyond the call of duty, but we have never before had to confront the levels of stress that we are all under with the rapid spread of Covid-19. We must consider the risk staff take by being onsite. Should their health be compromised, we would then be unable to deliver our online programme.

With more and more positive cases being reported in our community, we were concerned about our staff and students, particularly when we were sometimes only informed, by families that their children had been in touch with someone who had tested positive days after they had found out.

Importantly, the World Health Organisation has warned against the opening of schools while transmission of the virus is on the rise.

In some of our schools, our students were only attending onsite schooling for 1 or 2 days a week due to health and safety protocols, we believe the risk far outweighed the possible gains. Furthermore, we have observed a decrease in the number of students attending onsite schooling even though they had registered that they would. This resulted in a higher number of students online than anticipated and fewer teachers to teach them online as they were teaching the onsite group.

The College Executive and their teams are exploring different educational offerings for the third term and we look forward to sharing these with you. The commitment to offer an excellent online programme continues and the schools will be sharing with you some of the enhancements they have in place for the last 2 weeks of term.

In Gratitude

We thank the many parents who have acknowledged the outstanding quality of work being done by our staff, and who have taken the time to thank them. Such gestures mean a great deal. We thank you, in return, for your support, understanding and commitment to the future of our children.

Today a small group of College representatives will be opening and naming a few of our facilities. We have had to keep the group small in order to comply with all COVID-19 Health & Safety protocols. These openings will be filmed and will be included in our online Founders' Day Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving on the 1st August.

It so happens that one of the venues which we will be opening is the iMadiba installation: how appropriate that we are able to do so on the birthday of our great leader and sadly in the week of the passing of his daughter Zindzi, whose grandchildren are students at St Stithians.

Madiba reminded us that, "There can be no greater gift than that of giving one's time and energy to help others without expecting anything in return", I am deeply grateful to all in our community who continue to make a difference and in so doing are having a positive impact on so many.

Wishing you a blessed Madiba Day.

Warmest wishes

Celeste

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Gilardi', written in a cursive style.

Celeste Gilardi
Rector: St Stithians College