



A Message from the Principal

Covid 19 has changed our lives in the short-term. Whether it shall have a lasting impact hereafter is a matter of opinion. Bubonic plague, Spanish Flu and small-pox wreaked havoc in the particular decades in which they raged. They are now a part of history, revisited with interest in this time of new pandemic. On the other hand, those of us who have the luxury of health, safety, access to privilege and technology look for the continuance of those elements which make our existence seem normal. Among these elements is school education.

The College has been watching developments in methods to reach out to pupils in this time of national crisis. Various options have been examined. Internet companies have already in place excellent platforms for the dissemination of knowledge and the processes required for this. Some of them are very effective. These have been examined with caution. This College has a history of 175 years and has been in the vanguard of learning. The College needs to choose cautiously what adjustments need to be made to the academic methods to be employed. In an age of quick fix solutions, the essential ethos and character of the institution has to be maintained. This is to be examined judiciously, without recourse to knee-jerk reactions. Among the philosophical questions that each of us ponder are:

Will these changes replace traditional systems that we have followed till a few weeks ago?

Can 175 years of practice be overturned overnight?

Shall we fall into despair and feel that an entire system must be rapidly replaced within a few months?

Can the College, by providing reading material and work sheets ever substitute the holistic education traditionally offered and required even today?

Let us be realistic – We must keep our children occupied, ignite curiosity, use the best features of technology available and make the best out of a grim situation, hoping that change will come.

As with every new venture, there are problems of adjustment to a new system. Among the areas that this College is conscious of is:

1. All children might not have access to the basic requirements for distance learning, such as a computer with easy access to the internet.
2. The cost implications to install such devices for learning may seem an extravagance when families might be coping with other financial challenges.
3. Junior children are still to learn basic skills, such as recognition of letters and numbers. A computer screen and keyboard might not be able to replace the basic requirement of a slate or copybook.
4. Our children come from diverse social and linguistic backgrounds. Many are first generation learners. Some have parents who might not have the skills required for basic academic teaching, or challenges in language for English as a medium of instruction.
5. Levels of interest, discipline and concentration, difficult even in a formal classroom situation, might be hard to come by in the informal setting of home.
6. Some over-zealous parents are likely to make learning platforms opportunities for criticism of school, academic content, methods of teaching and so on.

Realistically, nothing can replace the experience of attending school physically. The current arrangements are at best, a stop-gap arrangement, with limited benefits. Let us make use of these limited benefits and hope that with the cooperation of all, systems shall evolve to match the requirement of changing times.

I am confident that what we shall achieve by trial and error in the initial months of groping, shall be integrated and incorporated as a suitable support system for the teaching-learning process when things return to the new normal.

The system we are installing through our WhatsApp communication has its limitations. I tread with trepidation as the advantages or damages are to children in excess of 3500. Rather than swamp our school system with a glut of information and slick learning models, the College shall be commencing with conservative systems of providing reading material and traditional response sheets. With daily supervision, this is likely to expand to make the system more creative and participative. La Martiniere shall hasten slowly in this regard.

From time to time, it might be necessary for me to share with you the vision of the College and its teachers. I shall also address the expectations that parents have and consider whether these expectations can be met by teachers. Course correction, especially in these incipient stages, shall be made by a process of discernment which cannot be hurried.



(C. A. McFarland)
Principal

Lucknow
Thursday, 30 April 2020