

Mrs. Deborah Eleftheriou
Secretary of the Board

Mrs. Janet Theoharakis
School Secretary

St Catherine's British School
Leoforos Sofokli Venizelou 77
Lykovrisi 141 23

9 June 2022

Dear Mrs. Eleftheriou and Mrs. Theoharakis,

Please find enclosed 25 copies of a letter written and signed by a group of 116 St. Catherine's families, representing about 220 pupils, mostly in Lower School. All parents have explicitly consented to their signatures being added.

Please note that this letter was not emailed out to the class contact lists, nor shared in any whatsapp groups, so a significant part of the parent community will not be aware of its existence. It was drafted by a subset of parents, and then more asked to be added via word of mouth.

As Secretary of the Board and the School respectively, could we please kindly ask you to forward on a copy on our behalf to the following persons: Mr. Smith, Dr. Bond, Mrs. Matthews, Mr. Theodosiou, Mr. Soumilas, Mrs. Bougos, Mrs. Peters, Mrs. Shore, Mrs. Salaounis, Mrs. Krasoudaki, Mrs. Allsop, Mrs. Pyett and all Governors of the Board.

Thanking you in advance.

Your Sincerely.

Parents as listed out in the letter.

Mr. Stuart Smith
Headmaster
St Catherine's British School
Leoforos Sofokli Venizelou 77
Lykovrisi 141 23

Cc. The Board of Governors
Cc. The Executive Leadership Team
Cc. Deputy Heads
Cc. Key Stage Heads

9 June 2022

Dear Mr. Smith,

First and foremost, we would like to take this opportunity to recognise the efforts of the school and teachers over the past two years against the backdrop of a highly disruptive pandemic and whilst simultaneously delivering on a large development project.

However, as long-standing parents of St. Catherine's, we have witnessed a steady decline in both the quantity and quality of provisions the School is offering. We are also seeing a serious deterioration in staff morale. As **champions of the School**, we are genuinely worried about the future of St. Catherine's and feel that we (the parents) and you (the leaders), must urgently act and **work together** to make the School one that we can be proud of.

The issues are many, recurring, and have been raised numerous times to the leadership team, with no or limited progress made on most.

Without getting too granular, we believe the problems fall into the below four themes:

A. Disorganisation, inconsistency and poor communication.

The on-going issue with the pool is a useful case in point (sadly only one of many). With the pool unused for the best part of two years during Covid, it is inconceivable that any issues related to the licensing and upgrade of facilities are still on-going. Compounding the frustration of parents is the letter before Easter announcing the re-opening of the pool, only for this to be revoked on the day of school re-opening.

This poor engagement with parents results in a general mistrust and lack of confidence towards the leadership team.

This disorganisation manifests itself in other forms too:

- Limited coordination in emails that are sent out. Work seems rushed and every other email we receive from the School is subsequently re-sent because the dates were wrong, the zoom link wasn't working or the attached document wasn't opening properly.

- Inconsistency or unclear guidelines that teachers and pupils are expected to follow. This applies to the delivery of the curriculum in Greek for example, but also in peripheral items such as lunch. Some children eat in the Main Hall, others in their classrooms, some watch TV, some don't. The same applies for the disciplining of children. The School has a Good Behaviour policy but this is not followed in the same way by everyone. Some children are told off for moving an inch to the left from their line formation, others are not told off for swearing at their teachers or friends. Again, this is an organisation/ centralisation/ management issue.
- General cleanliness and messiness of the school grounds and its surroundings as well as poor maintenance (water fountains, door handles, picnic tables, peeling paint, deteriorating fixtures).
- Hundreds of emails from parents remain either completely unanswered, or have been replied to with 'holding emails' with no clear resolution.

B. Reactive provision of basic services -

Basic School services are provided only after intense pressure from the parent body and according to how many people complained/ who shouted the loudest. Notable examples are: the Field and Residential School trips, Sports Days, Playground Equipment and the re-opening of the Library.

C. Reduction in the breadth and quality of the offering -

Please see below a non-exhaustive list of items that have stopped over the last few years: LS Debate Club, Art classes run by a specialised teacher, dedicated French native teacher for fluent speakers, Homework club, Safe After School, Junior Librarians, Spelling Competitions, Cubs/ Brownies, Dance Club, Chess club, all the Lunch clubs (Ancient Greece, French, Greek Reading, Greek dancing club, Maths, Newspaper, Singing, Ukulele etc), Choir, Orchestra, Playground friends, Skiing trips, Rafting trips, an Annual Yearbook and of course the aforementioned pool.

Whilst we would expect services to be constantly re-evaluated and adapted, all we have seen thus far is a removal of services with no replacements, nor additions being made. One would expect continuous improvement and innovation from a leading School. Instead, we have now fallen behind some State schools who have Art and Robotics clubs as standard.

The only area where we see a notable effort, despite the lack of facilities, is in the Extra Curricular Sports Clubs.

Note: Some of these stopped well before Covid, but irrespective, Covid is merely an excuse. If there is a will, there is a way. A School with a motto of Excellence should excel in problem solving and finding alternative solutions.

D. Rapid growth in pupil numbers with no matching expansion in outdoor facilities nor personnel -

Based on the latest published financials, the number of pupils has grown **by 24%** over the last 10 years and is expected to grow further as the Upper School slowly transitions into 5 forms. This has not been accompanied by a proportionate increase in staff nor in the addition of all-important sports facilities (which were already stretched to start with).

This therefore results in multiple bottlenecks, a reduction in the quality of the offering **per pupil** (as per theme 3), as well as serious concerns regarding the safeguarding of our children.

All the more disconcerting is that we do not see any moves or **concrete plan** as to how these massive problems will be addressed.

In summary, all the above are not congruent with a School that positions and sells itself as a prestigious leading institution.

It is imperative that the School improves its operations. Most, if not all of the above, can be easily resolved, but will require change on your part and will involve a close collaboration and constructive working relationship between Parents and the School.

We would therefore like to propose an action plan to move the school forward. Please rest assured that we will in turn be there to support you.

We kindly request that:

1. **A Head of Operations** and more admin/ maintenance/ nursing staff are appointed – The Headmaster cannot and should not be spending the bulk of his time doing administrative and operational tasks such as liaising with local authorities, acting as a traffic warden, overseeing a project build and the list goes on, whilst trying to run a School with 1300 pupils. This is to the detriment of his main duties which are to provide the highest standard of education to the students, constantly assessing and improving delivery of the Curriculum, pushing boundaries, and supporting teachers and staff to ensure an overall safe, successful school and happy environment.

The same applies to the rest of the executive team and more importantly to the Head of Key Stages, who are increasingly spending time replying to angry parent emails or trying to address problems which they cannot do anything about as they are all operational and outside their control. Not only is this distracting them from their day job but must also be extremely demoralising. The School's saving grace is its mostly A* teachers, especially in Lower School, so please do not allow their spirit and enthusiasm to be destroyed.

2. **Semi-annual meetings** are arranged between the School, Board of Governors and Parent Representatives. Content and agenda to be jointly agreed.
3. **An annual internal survey** is conducted to pupils and parents as a means of establishing metrics and to guide meaningful change based on facts and actual data.
4. **An operational plan** for the development of the School with clear timelines, milestones, and dependencies is delivered and communicated clearly to the parent body. This should include infrastructure improvements, especially insofar as outdoor space, and staff

headcount plans (both teaching and admin) to match the rapid growth in student numbers.

5. **Parent representation is introduced on the Board of Governors** – The Articles of Association allow for up to 50% of the Board to comprise current parents. *“It is the intention that up to seven members of the Governing Body shall be the parents of children who are for the time being pupils of the School”*. This was worded as such for a reason, yet there are none.

We find it deeply troubling that the Governors, whose object is *“to promote the moral, cultural, intellectual, social, physical and aesthetic development and the teaching and instructions of boys and girls”* have not once asked the parent body whether any of the above is being achieved. There is no successful business in the world, profit-making or otherwise, that operates with no VoC (Voice of the Customer). In fact, confident leaders who trust and care for the quality of their product seek this feedback through meetings, customer advisory boards, surveys, reviews etc.

Our recommendation is for a minimum of 2 parents from Lower School and 2 parents from Upper School.

We do not expect all these to happen overnight. We do however expect to see small steps in the right direction and clear communication as to when they will happen.

Immediate next steps:

We believe that if successfully implemented, these will have a far-reaching and positive impact on parent-school relations. Above all, the situation now provides an opportunity for all stakeholders in the school (parents, teachers, students, governing body etc) to come together and build the foundations for a school community that is happy, engaged and thriving.

We request that a meeting, inviting all the undersigned collectively, is arranged before the end of the School Year, with the aim of creating a working group comprising executives from the school, governors and parents to get these actions - and any others we may all come up with - implemented as soon as possible.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Your Sincerely,

Signed (in alphabetical order),