

News

Some old St Joseph's Institution boys want PSLE cut-off points to be lowered

'Don't be elitist, SJI'

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Elitist. That's what some old boys of St Joseph's Institution (SJI) believe the school has become. Lower the cut-off point. Take in more students from its affiliated schools, they say.

But the SJI board of governors does not agree. (See other report.) While it wants to continue to cater to boys from affiliated schools, it also wants to open its doors to top students.

The issue is set to figure at the Old Boys' Association's annual general meeting (AGM) on Friday. The association has more than 4,000 members.

The matter was first raised in a discussion paper by Mr Jeffrey Heng, 65, at the 14th AGM in March last year.

Mr Heng, a former board member, felt there was a need to build a strong alumni. To achieve that, he suggested that three quarters of students entering SJI should be from SJI Junior and other feeder primary schools.

The other feeder schools are St Stephen's, St Anthony's and De La Salle.

Mr Heng and other old boys "expressed disappointment" that students from the affiliated schools comprised "less than 30 per cent" of the total enrolment.

This was between 1996 and 2004, when Mr Heng was on the board. He feels SJI should reserve 50 per cent of its places for boys from SJI Junior, and another 25 per cent for boys from feeder schools.

Mrs Sara De Souza, principal of SJI Junior, declined to give exact percentages of her students going to SJI, but said that it was "lower than 50 per cent over the last five years" and that the figure was constant.

Speaking to The New Paper over the phone yesterday, Old Boys' Association president Philip Seah said its ex-co had agreed to Mr Heng's request for the matter to be raised at this year's AGM.

"I'm excited," Mr Seah, 55, said. "This is the first time we're having a forum to debate this."

He declined to say which side he supported but stressed that the forum was to "let old boys give vent to their feelings" and that "people should go with open minds to listen".

He added: "It's meant to be a discussion. No votes will be taken."

When contacted, Mr Heng said he was for a more affiliate-based admission policy as he believes that attracting boys with higher PSLE scores would not necessarily elevate the school's ranking. SJI is ranked among the top 20 secondary schools.

Mr Heng said: "I care about the school and I want it to do better. Who would argue against seeking excellence? But I feel we can attain excellence through other means, even if we lower the entry point."

He wants SJI's cut-off point for affiliated students to be revised to between 220 and 225.

The current cut-point for affiliated students is 238, while that for non-affiliated students is 244.

Mr Seah is looking forward to a lively debate.

"I'm confident that the old boys will conduct themselves with a sense of decorum," he said.



The SJI crest.



FOR THE BOYS: St Joseph's Institution students at the Bras Basah Road school.

FILE PICTURE

'SJI must be school of choice'

SJI should reposition itself as a "Catholic school of choice", the board of governors believes.

Board member Chan Keng Luck said that those who share this view feel that there has been a drop in the number of boys with a PSLE T-score of 250 and above who pick SJI.

The board said in a letter on 18 Mar that "top boys from our Christian Brothers' primary schools are not selecting SJI as their secondary school".

The board feels that "SJI must be repositioned to strike a balance between being able to attract a fair share of high-ability boys and being able to cater to boys from the Catholic community" and affiliated primary schools.

The Board refuted Mr Heng's notions that SJI had grown elitist. It said "about 10 per cent of SJI's Secondary 1 intake this year had a PSLE T-score of below 230".

Many of these boys were from affiliated primary schools, and sons of old boys and Catholics.

"Some preferential treatment is shown to affiliated boys but SJI cannot accept all the 300 or so appeals it receives every year," said the board in the letter.

The board added that "a primarily affiliate-based admission policy would be a step down a slippery slope".



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