

SJI old boys mull over school's future

SINGAPORE – While St. Joseph's Institution (SJI) alumni would want their sons to go to their alma mater, SJI “magically disappears” from their choice of schools when their sons do well in their Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE), and in its place appear schools such as Raffles Institution and Hwa Chong Institution, said an SJI alumnus.

In addition to those who obtain an aggregate above 250 points and do not further their education in SJI, there are also those who score below 230 points and want to get into the school.

These were some of the views expressed by about 250 old boys who discussed the school's future at the SJI Old Boys Association (SJOBA) Annual General Meeting (AGM) held Mar 26 at SJI.

The discussion was set in motion when Jeffrey Heng, an alumnus and former member of the SJI Board of Governors, proposed that the school should primarily cater to Catholics, and those from SJI Junior and other affiliated schools.

He suggested reserving half of SJI's Secondary One places for SJI Junior and another 25 percent for the other Christian Brothers schools.

Meanwhile Mr Chan Keng Luck, representing the SJI Board of Governors and the school, presented the view that SJI has to reposition itself to attract and cater to top-performing boys.

Mr Chan argued that SJI has to stay relevant in an education system that emphasises results and meritocracy so as to continue producing future leaders with the Lasallian values of caring for “the last, the lost and the least”.

The evening concluded with a decision to form a committee

to research the issues raised and to make recommendations to the school principal and the Board of Governors.

The AGM was a closed-door discussion which barred media entry, but some old boys have made their voices heard through the media.

One of them, Anthony Lim, told CatholicNews that there was a general sentiment among the alumni that inclined towards Mr Heng's position that SJI should not be results-oriented but at the same time aware of the competitive environment that the school operates in.

In a Mar 18 letter addressed to the members of the SJOBA, Philip Seah, the president of the school's Board of Governors, noted that SJI “cannot be exclusively for only boys from a certain faith or certain schools... admitted based on affiliation rather than merit”.

This, he wrote, would create “a sense of entitlement” among boys from SJI Junior and other Christian Brothers' schools, leading to complacency on their part.

The letter stressed that a more effective solution to cater to a wide spectrum of academic abilities is “a family of schools, not a single school, in the same way that different products cater to different market segments”.

The AGM revealed that there is a need to look into how SJI-affiliated schools can help students achieve results needed for entry into SJI.

Presently, about 40 percent of the school's intake comes from affiliated primary schools, with SJI Junior forming about 20 percent, said Noel Hon, chairman of the SJI Board of Governors, in a letter to TODAY newspaper on Mar 31. □