

## **St. Columba's School**

*Education Audit Report  
(Summary)*

*26<sup>th</sup> March 2017*

# **The Hearth Education Advisors**

Research and advisory services provided by an experienced international team

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# Education Audit

FOR: ST. COLUMBA'S SCHOOL

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## Background

St. Columba's School is a highly acclaimed Christian Brothers institution, located in the heart of Lutyens Delhi. St. Columba's, which began in 1941 with a small complement of 32 students, now has 3,190 students. The school is celebrating its 75 years in 2016-17.

The Hearth Education Advisors is a leading consulting firm based between Europe and Asia, with offices in London and New Delhi. From its origins as a consortium of reputed professionals with expertise and passion for education, the Hearth has grown into a flexible and broad education consulting practice that delivers operational advice and innovative, research-led thinking.

St. Columba's School engaged The Hearth Education Advisors to conduct a detailed Education Audit that would lead to a School Improvement Plan.

### *The Education Audit Process*

The team deployed by The Hearth for this project consisted of the following persons:

- Mr. Shashank Vira (Partner and Project Leader)
- Ms. Zelmira Koch Polk (Senior Specialist and International Partner)
- Ms. Suchita Ohri (Senior Consultant)
- Ms. Disha Malhotra (Research and Planning)

The audit was conducted in five parts:

- (a) Relevant tools and formats were developed after review of the initial documentation about the school (these included an online survey).
- (b) The online survey was kept open for responses from the stakeholders over a period from 15th October 2016 to 15th December 2016. There were 1,452 valid response sheets received from stakeholders.
- (c) The tools and questionnaires were sent to the school and returned to The Hearth along with other material, which included diaries, calendar, timetable etc.
- (d) The Audit Team visited the school on several days in November and December 2016 and spent time with the various stake holders. They conducted focused group discussions with different groups of stakeholders.
- (e) Following the initial study and analysis of data, a follow-up set of meetings were conducted in January and February 2017 by the Senior Partner of the Hearth for further clarifications and elaboration of certain areas.

The Hearth Education Advisors audit team would like to thank St. Columba's School, the School Management, Principal, Administrator/Headmistress of each wing, Staff- both Academic and Administrative, Parents, Students and Alumni for their support during the audit process. Mrs. Reena Bhatti, a former teacher of St. Columba's School, superbly fulfilled her role as liaison between the School and the education audit team and was instrumental in the success of the consultations.

The team visited the school, observed classes and had small group, focus group, large group and individual meetings with the following stakeholders:

- Management Committee
- Executive Committee
- Provincial Leadership Team (PLT) – Br. Ralph Sequeira and Br. Augustine Jairaj
- Ministries Office (MO) – Br. Simon Coelho and Br. Bernie
- Alumni, including the Old Columban Association (OCA) and Old Columban Trust (OCT) and some year-groups
- Enrichment Centre – Sr. School
- Learning Centre – Jr. School
- Principal - Br. Erle V Miranda
- Administrator (Sr. School) and Headmistresses (Middle and Jr. Schools)
- Staff – Teaching
- Staff – Administrative
- Class IV Employees – permanent, on contract and outsourced
- Students
- Parents

## ***Structure of the Education Audit Report***

The report is a snapshot of St. Columba's School on the days that the audit team was present and is indicative of the present status of the school.

The Education Audit Report for St. Columba's School is in several parts, as below:

- 01: Main report of observations and recommendations that are of a transactional nature or are tactical (i.e. these can be dealt with through regular operations of the school and do not require a structural change in the functioning of the school). Some aspects are highlighted that take a longer-term strategic perspective of the school. There is a summary of ratings and benchmarking against standards.
- 02: Strategic improvement and development plan. This report focuses on important structural changes and recommendations for the future growth of the school.
- 03: Analysis of the online survey (including a main summary report, and annexures with the verbatim general comments of stakeholders and detailed survey analysis).

## The Strategic Direction: Planning for a Changing World

St. Columba's School commissioned The Hearth Education Advisors to conduct a School Education Audit, leading to a School Improvement Plan.

At the core of the plan is the recognition that St. Columba's is placed in a changing world, with a rapidly changing education scenario. The school intends to be true to its founding philosophy and the ideals of Edmund Rice, while developing pathways for success for each of its students. The Hearth Education Advisors has prepared these Strategic Development Objectives, which aim to raise standards and promote equality in the schools. It seeks to the characteristics of effective schooling across the stakeholders of St. Columba's through: effective leadership; child-centred provision; high-quality teaching and learning; and a school connected to its community.

Change and development require investment and financial planning. This aspect, therefore, has been kept as the last but perhaps the most important of the strategic initiatives.

The ten key strategic objectives are:

- Re-energising the Vision of Edmund Rice
- Pursuing the Dual Goals of Inclusion and Excellence
- Outcome Orientation to Curriculum Transactions
- The Wider School Curriculum
- The Last Mile Programme
- Alumni and Development Office
- After School Programme
- Continuous Professional Development
- Infrastructure Upgradation
- Financial Planning

## Re-energising the Vision of Edmund Rice

Edmund Rice based his education philosophy on finding techniques to teach large numbers of children. He developed a system where one teacher, maybe assisted by a monitor, could teach up to 150 children in a single class and produced a manual in which he laid down the way his schools were to operate. Boys were grouped not according to their age, but according to their educational attainment. The three key ingredients of Edmund Rice's approach to education were Presence, Compassion and Liberation.

Edmund Rice's vision serves as a paradigm for re-energising the educational provision at St. Columba's School. It focuses on excellence in scholarship, enabling students to be employable, continuous professional development for teachers, social cohesion and inclusion, a spirit of active social service and contribution, and an outward engagement philosophy.

The first strategic goal proposed for St. Columba's School is to deliver mechanisms to actualise the vision of Edmund Rice in the operations of the school in 2017 and beyond.

## Pursuing the Dual Goals of Inclusion and Excellence

The admissions criteria of St. Columba's School might appear narrow, but they lead to a wide selection of students from the economically weak sections of society, to those in the middle class or the highest income brackets as well.

There are challenges in having a diverse, inclusive intake. The challenges take various forms:

- Language – ability to use English effectively
- Behaviour – what is acceptable and what is not (respect is a two-way street and sometimes it is the arrogance of money and power that leads to disrespect and sometimes it is the insecurity of having little)
- Learning support – many students have little or no support for their learning at home or outside school
- Lack of ability to pay for 'extra' activities at the school
- Learning difficulties and the issues of mixed ability classes

However, the challenges of inclusion cannot be used as an excuse for not focussing on excellence. There are several schools in India and elsewhere with challenges of inclusion that have found solutions and pathways to excellence. Specific steps have been recommended so that St. Columba's School can pursue the dual goals of inclusion and excellence simultaneously.

## Outcome Orientation to Curriculum Transactions

Academic progress at St. Columba's School needs to be tracked from lower grades to the senior school through tangible and measurable means. It is therefore also proposed that the school offer the ASSET (Assessment of Scholastic Skills through Educational Testing) tests across the school to track the progress of cohorts from year to year.

The benefits include:

- Provides feedback on real learning
- Allows students to know they stand and pinpoints areas of strengths and weaknesses
- Allows schools to benchmark themselves against the best and identify areas requiring improvement
- Provides teachers with insights into where exactly their students stand compared to the national average or another section or school
- Allows schools to focus on initiatives like teacher training in the areas where they are needed the most
- Provides concrete ideas for improving assessment methods

The outcome orientation for curriculum transactions at the school would make the teaching-learning process benchmarked and tracking progress would be measurable and scientific.

## The Wider School Curriculum

St. Columba's School has been a strongly academic school, but the curriculum and exposure of the students has narrowed over the year, while the external environment has broadened. To keep pace with the expectations of the workplace and of society, it is proposed that the curriculum at St. Columba's School be broadened to include the following:

- Humanities as a stream for Classes 11 and 12
- A sports and physical education curriculum from KG onwards, that focusses on health, hygiene, personal fitness and sports training
- A broad liberal arts curriculum as a surround curriculum, with every student continuing with art and craft, or music, or the visual and performing arts through Middle and Senior School
- Deeper opportunities for internships and workplace training, perhaps with the assistance of alumni and parents of the school

## The Last Mile Programme

It is proposed that the school introduce a 'Last Mile' programme, which is an intensive tutoring of Class 12 and Class 10 students in the November-February period before their board examinations. This would be done at the school, at no extra cost to the students, as an examination 'boot camp', preparing the students to write effective answers to examination questions.

The Last Mile programme would also include a higher level of college and university preparedness, with counselling of options available and methods to access different university options.

## Alumni and Development Office

There is need for a closer involvement of alumni in the school, to support and assist the institution as required. However, control of the management of change and initiatives must be solely that of the school. To create a mechanism for effective engagement, while allowing the school to retain control, it is suggested that an Alumni and Development Office be established at St. Columba's School. This office would report to the Principal, but could be funded entirely by the alumni.

Typical alumni activities that would be beneficial to the school include:

- Fellowship – engaging alumni with present students to allow the boys to seek our role models and to aspire to reach the success that Columbans before them have achieved.
- Mentorship and Internships – formal mechanisms of allowing boys at the school to work with or be mentored by alumni in professions of their interest.
- Incubation Centre – an opportunity for boys at the school to set up micro-ventures and develop entrepreneurial skills.
- Expert Advice – Many alumni are in professions where their advice would be valuable to the school. This could include architects, educators, academics and many others.
- Fund-raising – Assisting the school meet its financial commitments through predictable and genuine funding support, both for capital projects and to meet revenue shortfalls.

## After School Programme

The infrastructure of St. Columba's School is hardly utilised after school hours and this presents a tremendous opportunity. The activities at the school after hours can include many for students of the school:

- Sports and extra-curricular activities for which there isn't sufficient time during the regular school day
- Remedial learning through a peer-to-peer teaching methodology by fellow students
- Job oriented skills training, over and above the school curriculum
- School organised coaching for entrance examinations to professional courses

## Continuous Professional Development

Great teachers help create great students. As a McKinsey & Co study found, “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” and that “The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction”.

St. Columba's School should prepare for continuous professional development with an initial training needs analysis (as much training may be required to manage the change process proposed in this strategic plan). In the medium term, a staff appraisal mechanism needs to be developed, which will produce as one outcome, the training and development needs for individual teachers and the collective cohort of the staff.

## Infrastructure Upgradation

The Education Audit Report has highlighted the need to infrastructure upgradation at St. Columba's School. It is proposed that an architect be engaged to prepare an infrastructure master plan for the school. This would include the following elements:

- Carrying capacity of the school, in terms of the number of students and teachers
- Re-designation of working areas and reallocation of spaces to learning and other activities
- Preparation of a major capital projects plan (including the auditorium, toilets, classrooms and technology infrastructure)
- Redesign of the furniture and interiors of the classrooms and other working spaces
- Preservation and enhancement of the heritage character of the campus
- Minor and major repairs schedule and prioritisation
- Utilities infrastructure plan (electricity, water, waste)

Funding opportunities through alumni and other donors could arise for specific works (such as funding a classroom enhancement) or for a general infrastructure fund.

## Financial Planning

St. Columba's School manages its expenses to stay within the fee income it collects. However, this is not a sustainable position, due to projected increases in operating costs (the 7th Pay Commission, for instance), need to enhance operational expenses in some areas, backlog of repairs and maintenance, upgradation of infrastructure and development of new infrastructure. Furthermore, to maintain the social agenda of the school, a Scholarships and Subsidy Fund is required, to ameliorate cost of fees for poorer students and to enable all students to access activities that may require some additional costs.

The strategic master plan of the school should develop the following projections for a 5-year period:

- Operational expenses of the school based on normal inflation
- Operational expenses of the school with the 7th Pay Commission costs
- Minor repairs and maintenance requirements
- Major repairs and maintenance requirement
- Capital projects – new and replacement of assets

It is proposed that the following parameters be considered:

- The notional fees of the school should cover all operational expenses of the school. The notional fees should, over time, come close to the actual fee charged out to students.
- Freeships and current student fees be protected for those who cannot afford an increased fee. The gap funding should come from a Scholarships and Bursaries Fund, which would also allocate money for extra student activities.
- Capital projects should be started only when 100% of the funds for the project have been committed and when at least 60% of the funding has been received.