

Where is home?

One of the pleasurable aspects of being a Principal is that I get to meet many interesting people. I seem to spend a great deal of time waiting at the main entrance to the College greeting guests as they arrive. This pleasure also extends to meeting and greeting our students when they arrive at school in the mornings.

The Discipline Master at one of my former schools, who happened to be the Rugby coach, welcomed the senior boys on a Friday morning with a bear hug and 'good morning'. Such a unique approach highlighted the importance of boys being allowed to express their feelings in a caring and meaningful manner. It probably also explained why many of the boys tried to use another entrance on Fridays, leaving only those who had forgotten the day of the week having to endure his vice-like grip. By contrast, I limit my welcome to a simple greeting!

The first boys to arrive gather at the Bonham Road and Pokfulam Road entrances waiting for the doors to open at 7.25am. As the boys enter the school, I always think about their journey to school and where they might live. Most of our boys travel by bus and MTR, with only a handful coming by car or taxi. Those living close by will walk from home. But where is home?

Each September, I analyse the demographic profile of the new Form 1 boys. This provides important longitudinal data that can be used for long-term planning. Before the College changed from the Aided to the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) most of our boys lived in the Central-Western Districts, that is, a short distance from the College. Many came from Kennedy Town and Sai Ying Pun and had attended the local primary schools. This pattern all changed after we became a DSS school in 2002. Boys now traveled from all points on Hong Kong Island, mostly from the Mid-Levels, Aberdeen and North Point, with a growing number making the journey from the Kowloon side.

When the College delinked from the Central Allocation system for 2010 the number of applications for Discretionary Places increased markedly. But it was the Form 1 demographic data for 2010 that showed a significant difference to previous years. Our boys are now coming from across the Hong Kong SAR, with the local residential areas accounting for fewer and fewer of the new boys.

This year's Form 1 intake of 192 pupils came from 55 primary schools. Of course, our own Primary School accounted for the highest percentage (36%). The other 54 schools were headed by Raimondi PS, Kowloon Tong School, Sheng Kung Hui St. Peter's PS and Kau Yan PS. In most cases, only one or two boys from any one of the remaining primary schools gained admission to St Paul's College. Furthermore, almost 10% of the new boys had attended 11 different primary schools of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui. The spread of the Form 1 intake across schools was great indeed.

It was the decision of the College to delink from the Central Allocation system for 2010 that has led to greater diversity in the residential location of families. Almost 39% of the latest cohort of Form 1 lads do not live on Hong Kong Island.

A breakdown of the three regions in the SAR reveals that 61% live on Hong Kong Island, compared to 87% in 2002, the year we changed to a DSS school. Families living in Kowloon now account for 21%, compared to 8% only eight years ago. Those residing in the New Territories total 18% of the Form 1 intake, significantly different to the 6% of 2002.

Clearly, St. Paul's College is the school-of-choice for a growing number of families across the Hong Kong SAR. The College will continue to monitor any possible detrimental effects on the boys and their studies due to the increased distances between home and school. However, the opening of the MTR West Island Line in 2014 will cut travel time by franchised bus services between Central/Admiralty and the College. We are all looking forward to this date as the new MTR stations at Sai Ying Pun and the University of Hong Kong will certainly make the daily commute far easier for students and teachers alike.

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