

Discrimination at Bishops

Enough is Enough.



Preface:

Mr Pearson, it's unfortunate that this must happen in your final few days at Bishops. However, this is a culmination of decades of inaction and complicity by parents, teachers, the Executive, and boys, coupled with a global shift towards finally ending discrimination and inequity. We are all responsible in some way or another. We appreciate everything you have done for Bishops, and regret that it must come at this time. However, the fact that the Matric body is still willing to do this, even given the circumstances, is a testament to the scope and severity of this issue.

Racism, and greater intolerance, has loomed over Bishops since its inception. While we, as the Matric group of 2020, applaud the individuals who have actively taken steps to dismantle this underlying discrimination, we are forced to realise that greater strides need to be taken. Racism is a systemic issue, and not one overcome by superficial Codes of Conduct and disengaged reminders of zero-tolerance, but rather through a united desire for change. In order to achieve such change, this desire needs to be felt in every corner of our school.

Bishops is an institution that commands the respect of not just the educational sphere, but society as a whole. This is because we have achieved excellence in all explored avenues, and have delivered to the highest standards since our genesis. However, once inside our gates, discrimination runs rampant. It is perpetrated by the boys, staff, and parents, with the whispers of inequity echoing through the corridors and classrooms. While many choose to remain blissfully ignorant of this reality, the damage it has wreaked on the psyches of those subject to its wrath, is inexplicable.

It is a stain.

However, despite the deep-rooted nature of such a threat to our community, we believe that Bishops is still able to achieve tangible change. We are all immensely proud of our school, and in protesting, we are not trying to hold a single individual or authority responsible, but rather accepting that we are all to blame for perpetuating a system that has undermined boys and staff of vulnerable groups at our school for years. It is the duty of Bishops, as an establishment, to pursue such changes in social equality, as it holds a responsibility to ensure that the environment they promote is accepting of everyone within it. This is not the current reality.

The following is what we demand of Bishops. We write this, as a collective, in the hope that the systemic oppression so many students face will finally be properly addressed. While this has always been present, and left to lurk in the shadows, we are taking the opportunity presented to us to make our voices heard. This opportunity is the growing intolerance of inequality that is finally surfacing around the world.

People have had enough. *We* have had enough.

We are approaching you as a Matric year in its entirety, and not as a certain demographic or minority, to demand that action is taken to ensure that every one of our fellow students are treated as equals within a system that has, for so long, treated them as anything but.

Demands:

The following is a list of demands that have to be implemented within the school. This was written collaboratively between the matrices. We demand the recipients read the entirety of this document.

1. Ground and cleaning staff's children should have access to the same bursaries and funding schemes that are made available to teachers' children. Ground and cleaning staff should also have access to better quality facilities and food.
2. We demand that there be compulsory discussions and presentations for new grade 8's about the oppression of minority and vulnerable groups. These should be handled by external bodies and not be done "in-house".
3. We demand compulsory discussions and presentations for teachers about the oppression of minority and vulnerable groups. These should be handled by external bodies and not be done "in-house".
4. We demand discussions and presentations for parents about the oppression of minority and vulnerable groups. These should be handled by external bodies and not be done "in-house".
5. We demand the elimination of a hair policy - no policy is free from discrimination.
6. We demand a more equitable representation of minority and vulnerable groups on the executive board, and in the OD union committee.
7. We demand that a system be created which allows students to regularly engage directly with the executive committee. The SRF is a farce.
8. We demand a separate, diverse disciplinary committee which deals with issues pertaining to the oppression of minority and vulnerable groups. This should not be done "in-house" to avoid cover-ups.
9. We demand that staff face repercussions for any actions which oppress minority and vulnerable groups.
10. We demand that students face harsher repercussions for any actions which oppress minority and vulnerable groups.

11. We demand an official statement from the school condemning racism and all oppression of minority and vulnerable groups as well as acknowledging its history of racism and negligence in dealing with social issues.
12. We demand the expansion and endorsement of isiXhosa at Bishops.
13. We demand a system in which students can report teachers for racism, sexism, queerphobia and other forms of discrimination, either anonymously or not anonymously, so that more students are willing to come forward about these actions.
14. We demand certain LO lessons be put aside for discussions around contemporary social issues (Racism, feminism, queer identities etc) in the world, but more specifically South Africa.
15. We demand our Syllabus be decolonised. Historical events such as Colonialism and Apartheid can no longer be taught as historically neutral, but must be recognised as what they were: the invasion and terrorisation of native African and non-white people. This should apply to the Prep and College.
16. We demand that teachers and students should not be allowed to say “the N-word”, “the K-word”, or other oppressive slurs pertaining to protected identities, in academic/literary readings/discussions, or outside of the classroom. This would not apply to people victimised by these slurs.
17. We demand safe spaces and forums for minority students or students from vulnerable groups. These spaces should serve the purpose of being a space where vulnerable students can seek refuge from the harms Bishops confronts them with. Under no circumstances should white people enter POC safe spaces, and non-LGBTQI+ people should not be allowed in queer safe spaces.
18. We demand the establishment of a Pride society at Bishops in order to provide a safe space and a platform for our LGBTQI+ students.
19. We demand the establishment of a feminist society to promote womxn’s empowerment, and the eradication of rape culture at Bishops.
20. Our final demand is for all teachers, and people in management positions in Bishops, to pledge to enact and uphold our demands. Each teacher and person in a managerial position must individually sign these demands, and present their signed copies to the matrices to show their commitment to bettering this community. This must be done by the beginning of next term (June 28 2020). These demands are non-negotiable.

- The Matric Class of 2020