OUA AGM – Headmaster's Report
2020 - A Year in Review

It's my pleasure to present this report for 2020 and on the future direction of the Union High School.

Union High School is a different school, and a far better one, than it was in January last year. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented shift in education, which will continue this year and beyond, with the aim of making Union a much stronger and improved school.

2020 showed the skill, talent, and resilience of the entire Union community. In the face of unique and unexpected challenges, Union's educators, learners, support staff and administrators rose to the task.

The year began with a drumbeat of academic and co-curricular events. Soon, however, the world began to turn its attention to COVID-19, and in mid-March, the school, along with all other schools in the country, suspended on-site education on campus, while most educators and support staff transitioned to work from home.

All members of the Union community worked to adapt to the new virtual environment for learning, and to help others dealing with difficulties related to health, economics, education and more.

After months at home, we were finally able to welcome everyone back to school, albeit in a staggered approach. Staff members then had to focus, not only on supporting the learners' academically, but on making the campus safe for all those in their care.

I do not want to dwell too much upon the unprecedented challenges of recent months, as all the letters from me since March 2020 reflect our thoughts and the realities of the various moments. (I invite you to read them on our website – www.unionschools.co.za)

I will, however, broach two subjects that needs to be mentioned:

- 2020 has been a year where finances have been of paramount importance not only for each household but also for our school. This year has required a hands-on, attention to all detail approach by management and administrators.

  In an unprecedented call for aid, the loss of school income necessitated Union High School to launch the Covid-19 Care Fund shortly after 2020's initial lockdown. There are no words that pay justice to the debt of gratitude that we, as a school community, owe the Old Unionites, who rallied together to help the school through this trying time.

Through donations received, both big and small, an amount exceeding R350 000 was injected into the fund to help see the school through the year.

- Then, one of the most notable decisions taken during 2020, was to amalgamate Union's two boarding houses - Herby Arnott House and Arthur Kingwill House - into one co-ed hostel for our Grade 5 to 12 learners. This resulted in Herby Arnott House being closed, with the girls moving over to Arthur Kingwill House. The boys then took up residence in the one wing, and the girls in the other. This was by no means an easy decision, but with the schools being forced to close for several months on end, as well as a reduction in boarder numbers caused by learners studying from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, this move was vital to ensure the survival of the hostels.

With an influx of new boarders this year, and the success experience these past few months with the co-ed boarding approach, the school has since decided that it will reopen Herby Arnott House in the near future as a co-ed hostel for our junior boarders (Grade 5 to 7), with Arthur Kingwill House remaining a co-ed hostel for our senior boarders (Grade 8 to 12).

I would like to thank our parents and Old Unionites for understanding the rationale underpinning the decisions that we took during 2020 and appreciating that it served to safeguard the future of Union. That support will never be taken for granted and will be repaid many times over in terms of the quality of everything that we do this year and beyond.

Lastly, to say that we are proud of our Class of 2020 would be an understatement! These learners have risen to the occasion and grabbed every opportunity presented to them to ensure that they finish their high school career on point.

The Matrics of 2020 achieved a 96,5% pass rate, gathering a total of 61 subject distinctions amongst themselves in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations.

Of the 57 candidates, 80% achieved Bachelor passes.

Union High School also boasts the top 2020 matric candidate in Graaff-Reinet - Katherine Imrie - who achieved an average of 87,43% and a full house of seven (7) subject distinctions.

Despite all of the challenges and obstacles of 2020, Union's innovation, creativity and care for one another brought the community closer together, which can only result in an exciting year of growth and hopefully an engaged, happy and stimulated body of learners.

I, therefore, take great pleasure in sharing with you some of the various new initiatives for the forthcoming year:

• The Union Schools will be entering into a partnership with the Keller Institute, a Cape Town-based educational consultancy firm run by Gavin Keller, which assists schools to re-imagine schooling by supporting, up-skilling and empowering educators. This is an exciting initiative which will no doubt inspire and motivate our educators.

• Three new education spaces will be constructed at the Union Preparatory School.

• Two additional educators or assistant educators will be appointed at the Union Preparatory School for mother tongue tuition and the development of English proficiency.

• The Union Pre-School will secure the services of suitable educators or assistant educators to assist with the English language proficiency of their learners.

• The schools will also be fitted with fiber-optic internet technology to improve the quality of internet connectivity and speed and to allow for improved online learning.

• The high school will improve and create new spaces for mathematics and /or science tuition.

Union High School has endured many challenges since its foundation 102 years ago, however, never to the extent to those that we experienced in 2020 and will continue to experience in 2021. In spite of this, we have not simply survived; we have grown together and thrived together during these most testing of times.

2020 was certainly one for the history books and I am sure that 2021 will be equally a fascinating year.

Warmest regards,

Mr W.E. Pringle
HEADMASTER, Union High School