

Dear Parents

When my father was last in Cape Town he wanted Brylcreem (none in Bulawayo – not surprisingly). It took a bit of search to find some but seeing it (and smelling it) again did take me back 30 years or more. We used it to keep our hair in place, partly because we would get into trouble if our hair was not combed but also because we were trying to hide the fact that our hair was long. We were much more interested in long hair than boys are at the moment. Now days many of the “pop stars” have neat short haircuts. In the late 60’s and early 70’s I do not know if any did. Hair length was a battle we fought with the school then with varying degrees of success. I remember one housemaster pushing chewing gum into a boy’s hair so he had to get it cut! I cannot remember if the crime was chewing gum in class or having long hair..... Of course such drastic actions are not an option now but in many ways not much has changed except that now highlights and sculptured styles have also been thrown into the mix – and Gel has replaced Brylcreem. (And a haircut cost us 10 cents in the boarding House – not R100 or more at some fancy hair salon. I wouldn’t have been seen dead in a hair salon back then. Funny how things change!)

Hair, like clothes and various accessories, is an important part of the image a boy likes to produce for his peers (both males and female) to see. Obviously it is more important for some than it is for others and they will push the limits of what their school (or their parents) will allow. For a few it is a way of showing some rebellion against the system but I do not think this is very common. Most boys who try their housemasters and/or parents patience on this issue simply believe their hair length/style/colour is worth fighting for because it is a large part of their identity – their sense of self. They think they look nice like that (and perhaps they do) and it therefore makes a positive impact on their confidence. In a way it is a sign of humility in that they do care what others think of them. The difficulty arises in that they may care more about what their peers think than what you (or I) think – hence the conflict.

An ex-Principal of the school is quoted as saying that if he had his time again he would worry less about hair (and use the energy to focus on other things, I suppose). However, Bishops does worry about hair and in an attempt to help the efforts of the school to keep boys neat you will find that, when your son is told to get a haircut, this fact will be registered on his profile in MyBishopsLife (which you can access through the Bishops website (www.bishops.org.za) under the Information heading). He will be given a couple of days to comply, failing which he will end up in detention. He will, of course, be told verbally to get the haircut. It is still be his responsibility to get his haircut – not yours. Once he has had the haircut and reported to his Housemaster, the “haircut required” sign will be removed.

Most boys came back to school with good haircuts this term, which was nice to see. We always prefer it when parents fight these battles. No boy should return to school at the start of term without a neat haircut. It makes for a far easier start to the term for the Housemaster – and the boy. One less thing to stress about which, with between 70 and 110 boys to look after, is appreciated by our Housemasters.

Yours sincerely

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(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)