

The Doon School WEEKLY

"I sketch your world exactly as it goes." -Arthur Foot

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Members of the School Community answer a poll.

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An interview with prominent artist Waswo X Waswo.

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Character or Comfort?

Harshil Makin *debates the extent to which the School should cater to 'comfort'.*

Boarding schools are more than educational institutions — they are crucibles. When students attend day-school and leave at 2 PM, there's not as much expectation of growth extending beyond the classroom walls. Whereas the boarding experience functions with such concentrated purpose that it aspires to become this very vessel of transformation itself. Thus, for generations, the composition of this crucible has consisted of certain necessary hardships, an unyielding level of intensity, and an elevated, nearly celebrated conception of a 'Spartan' and pared-down existence. Now, however, with climate-controlled classrooms and café facilities, we must ask whether the School can maintain its fundamental philosophy of resilience and refined character while adopting contemporary amenities — especially as the case for adopting such amenities becomes increasingly stronger in a changing world.

Doon's culture was permeated with the implicit understanding that it prepared boys to confront a world that rarely offers complete comfort: where one rests in dormitories subject to nature's extremes without climate control; where an intentionally rigid framework cultivates resourcefulness rather than coddling, forming the essential foundation of our shared identity. These principles persist at Doon today — the School Council

Meetings stand as testament that Doon was created not merely as an academic establishment but precisely to serve as that transformative crucible I described, fostering growth in leadership and moral fiber. They reference this 'Spartan Living', not as figurative language but as guiding doctrine.

Yet comfort proves irresistibly appealing. The School is undoubtedly changing. Air conditioning is no longer reserved exclusively for the places outside our red walls; it has gradually permeated into student areas. Café Aquaduct presents an alternative to the customary CDH dining experience. While many welcome these developments — and they may indeed be essential for Doon's progression as a forward-thinking institution and maintaining our standing — they represent more than simple improvements. They signify a shift in our fundamental culture.

This transformation prompts an essential inquiry: What becomes of an ethos grounded in overcoming adversity when that adversity is systematically diminished?

The Doon School has always set itself apart through its dual role as both educator and evaluator. Each frigid winter shower, each physical training session at dawn, each laboring fan during oppressive summer heat served as instruction in adaptation, forbearance, and determination. It

wasn't merely about withstanding inconvenience — it was about normalising hardship so that life's inevitable difficulties could be faced unflinchingly. This, one might argue, represents the variety of social Darwinism our founders embraced — not in terms of ruthless elimination, but as a refining process where character is tested and honed through collective challenge.

When surroundings begin to accommodate rather than challenge, the essential proving ground loses its edge. The tests become adjustable. And gradually, almost imperceptibly, we risk substituting perseverance with preference, and resolve with convenience. This phenomenon manifests similarly in the relaxation of disciplinary measures. While beneficial in certain respects, it presents a paradox: whether reducing required essay lengths or decreasing the number of disciplinary marks students receive, these changes provide students with motivation to transgress further without anticipating meaningful consequences; the penalties they do incur no longer serve as effective deterrents but rather as justifications for their behavior. Students might, for instance, accept the marks after skipping PT, using them to rationalise their actions rather than reform them. Without compelling reasons to improve conduct, and combined

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with the School's increasing comforts, students develop a misleading sense of affirmation suggesting they're performing adequately when, in reality, behavioral issues among students are escalating.

Upon reflection, Doon's "Spartan living" has become more aesthetic than actual challenge in the present day. The "discomforts" Doon currently provides are, at their most severe, mildly bothersome. Even before these modern comforts appeared, the School maintained a modified, more tailored version of this 'Spartan' existence. We receive prepared meals during examination periods, pre-assembled tents when we arrive on campus, care packages containing all conceivable necessities — all of which undermine the independent learning these experiences should impart. If all potential discomforts are mitigated or handled for us, how does this environment differ meaningfully from life at home? This extends beyond just materialistic pleasures, but has also permeated into the amount of leeway that students are provided in certain avenues. The Spartan ideal never intended to create discomfort for its own sake. It meant recognising small challenges that would otherwise become valuable lessons in maturity.

This is not to imply that

modernisation automatically conflicts with tradition. There exists space — possibly even necessity — for Doon to evolve. However, the boundary between facilitating excellence and lowering standards is perilously thin. Doon must confront a vital question: Are we adapting to better serve our students, or to protect them from the very challenges that define the Doon experience?

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the distinction between day schools and boarding institutions. Day schools function within a divided ecosystem: students depart school for homes with parental oversight, personal comforts, and external influences. Doon, conversely, constitutes a self-sufficient world. It is precisely this enclosed, immersive quality of boarding life that enables values to permeate deeply and habits to solidify into identity. If that immersion becomes compromised by indulgences replicating the lifestyle Doon aims to transcend, what distinctive qualities remain?

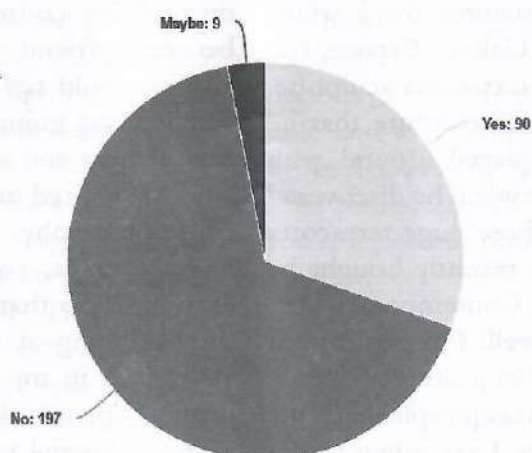
The solution may lie not in outright rejection of comfort, but in its thoughtful incorporation. Air conditioning during extreme summer heat could reasonably be considered a health requirement rather than luxury. Café Aqueduct might function as a space for community and contemplation. But these enhancements must

be implemented deliberately, otherwise they risk becoming symbols of privilege instead of instruments of development.

As Doon navigates this precarious balance — between its uncompromising heritage and a more lenient, comfort-inclusive future — it must revisit its foundational principles. Not all traditions warrant unquestioned preservation. But neither do all changes guarantee improvement. The crucial question isn't whether Doon should evolve, but how it can do so without sacrificing the intensity that shapes its students into individuals prepared for life's challenges. The implications of softening our environment extend beyond mere convenience — they gradually erode the culture of effort, resilience, and shared difficulty. If Doon wishes to remain more than merely another prestigious school with attractive grounds and successful graduates, it must preserve its defining crucible. Ultimately, character forms not through comfort, but through the capacity to persist precisely when the very comfort is absent.

Vox Populi

Has School become too comfortable?



296 members of the School Community were polled.