

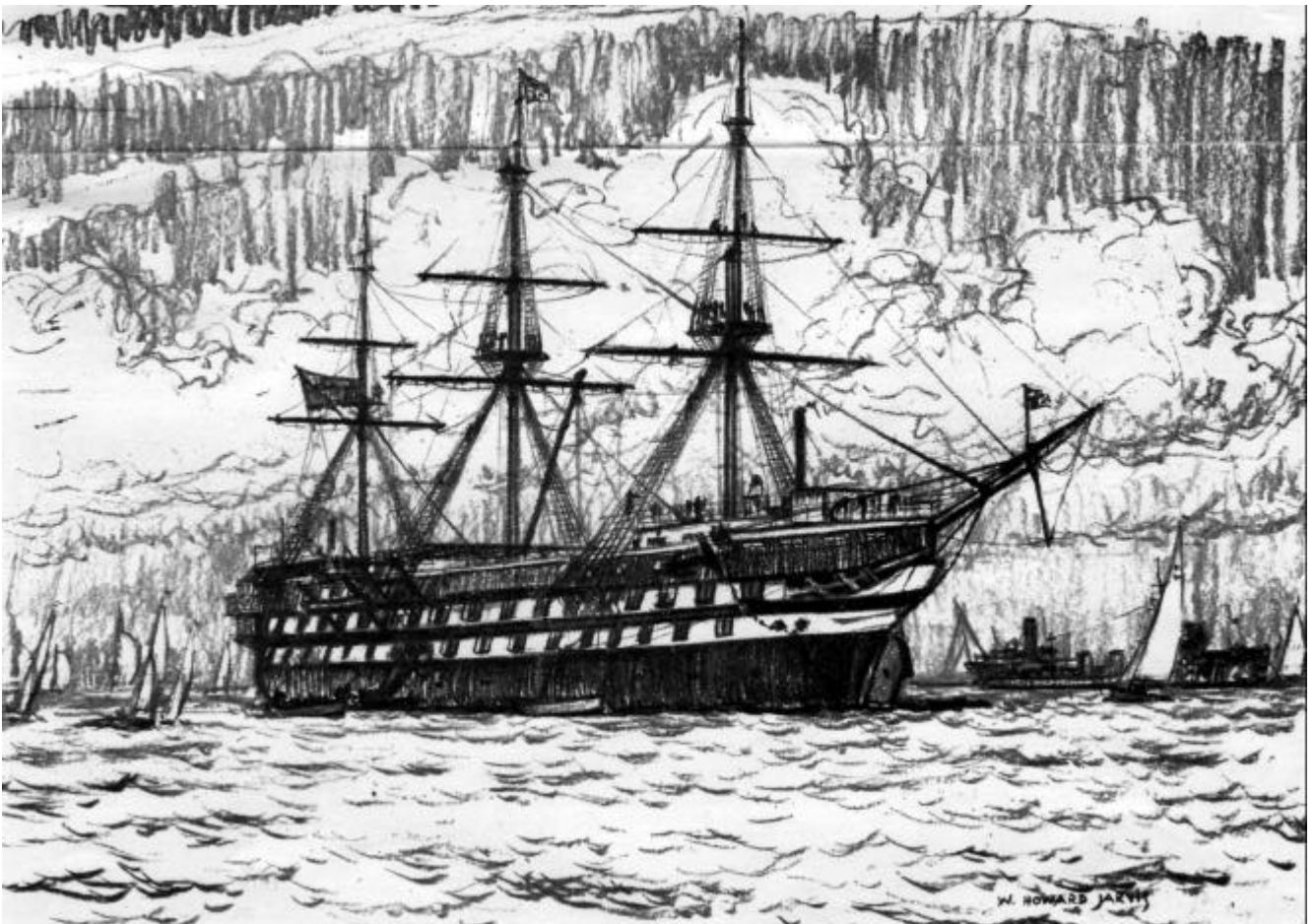
# Century Attained by Pre-Sea Training Establishment

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## History and Education Aims of H.M.S. “Conway”

*In July 1959 H.M.S. “Conway”, the training establishment for the Royal and Merchant Navies, attained its century and to mark the occasion the following four short articles on its history and the facilities it offers were included in the “ANNUAL REVIEW” of Shipping and Allied Industries published by “THE JOURNAL OF COMMERCE AND SHIPPING TELEGRAPH”.*

*The writers are all men who have interested themselves in pre-sea training.*



HMS “Conway” as she was in 1920, specially drawn by W. Howard Jarvis, F.R.S.A., S.M.A., S.A.V.A.  
The drawing depicts the scene of Rock Ferry on Regatta Day of the Royal Mersey Yacht Club

## STORY OF THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

By BRIAN HEATHCOTE O.B.E., M.Sc.

*Former Chairman of the "Conway" Management Committee*

It was in 1857 that a group of Liverpool shipowners and master mariners formed the Mercantile Marine Service Association with one of its aims to found a system of pre-sea training for intending officers. Seven years before, Parliament had passed the first Merchant Shipping Act to promote safety at sea: one provision was for the examination of applicants for masters and mates of foreign-going ships as to ability, experience and character. The two events were probably connected.

The committee of management appointed by the M.M.S.A., which in essence is unchanged to-day, persuaded the Admiralty to lend them H.M.S. Conway, a sixth-rate man-of-war. She arrived and was moored off Rock Ferry Slip in February 1859 and the committee fitted her out to take 120 boys at a cost of £1,200 raised from shipowners, shipbuilders, and others interested. A captain, chief officer, and four seamen-teachers, carpenter, two stewards and two cooks, a headmaster and three assistant masters comprised the staff. The headmaster was required to teach navigation, mathematics and the use of nautical instruments, the second master to superintend the English education and instruction in general science, while the chief officer and four seamen taught the practical seamanship.

By combining two such courses it was hoped to make up for the loss of valuable years of study at an ordinary school and to prevent narrow specialism. The reward of two years spent in Conway was a remission of one year in the four years' apprenticeship at sea. It was hoped too, that this training and strict discipline would introduce a better system into ships as the boys became officers, uniting individual advantage with improvement of the service.

Numbers quickly outgrew the accommodation. A second man-of-war and then a third were substituted by the Admiralty, the last ship, the old H.M.S. Nile, renamed Conway, being in commission until 1953, when her loss in the Menai Strait made Conway a shore establishment. By the end of the 19th century, there were some 200 cadets on board.

Mr. John Masfield's admirable account of the Conway gives, through the contemporary narratives of cadets, a vivid picture of conditions and how the ideals with which the venture began were translated into practice in the first 50 years, and how far practice fell short of precept. Conditions of life on board were, by present day standards, bad, though not so bad as those in many ships then sailing. Bad lighting, lack of ventilation, extremes of temperature and the rough life constituted hardships which might have broken many a youth.

What time was left after the ship's routine was finished was not used with understanding. Little interest was taken in boat sailing and the small games field only occasionally used by very few. Conditions for teaching were grim. The main deck was divided into classrooms by canvas and screens and the ensuing babble of simultaneous classes must have imposed great strain on the teaching staff, particularly when dealing with subjects whose usefulness to their future profession is not at once apparent to the pupils. This is no new thing and even today requires an art of high order to overcome.

Yet in spite of all this, boy after boy speaks with nostalgia of the ship in which he spent his formative years and admits learning to do as he was told at once, a smartness and a discipline not to be learned in any other way. Somehow the ship made her mark, toughening and giving training in morale in a hard school. But it is recorded also that no principles were taught and although methods of calculation were memorised, few understood what they did. The seamen-instructors were acknowledged as real seamen, but taught methods out of date in the sailing ships of that day. The system became atrophied as the years passed and no one in authority apparently paused to consider what the training was trying to do. This is not peculiar to Conway. Most educational and training establishments suffer from it at times.

With the advent of Capt. Broadbent in 1903, there was a quickening in the life of the ship. The sports field was greatly enlarged and improved and

Rugby football introduced. Broadbent himself coached the "Bantams" and brought the game to a high level. Tennis courts and a cricket pitch were laid down and every cadet physically able to do so threw himself into the games with immediate results on every side of the life aboard. A physics laboratory was constructed, as was a games room and leisure was filled profitably. Orders were promulgated by bugles instead of pipes and a band formed and drilled for marching off the ship's company at morning divisions, a practice which came to stay.

With the new headmaster, Mr. Morgan, Capt. Broadbent reorganised both classes and teaching. He increased the number of responsibilities of the cadet captains, hitherto called petty officers, and with their help, set himself the task of suppressing bullying and smoking on board. This extension of disciplinary responsibility to the cadets themselves was a most important and fruitful step in true education.

During the First World War, the ship became crowded with upwards of 220 cadets. Yet the Conway under these difficult conditions, and with a necessarily depleted staff, passed into the Royal Navy almost the whole of her yearly entry of 100, some of whom rose to high distinction - a record of which to be proud. In 1927, Capt. Broadbent retired. This dedicated man left an indelible mark on both ship and all those who had passed through his hands.

But there were clouds on the horizon. During the shipping slump shortly after the First World War, numbers began to decline and from 1929 to 1932 a worldwide crisis and slump hit the country with dire results to the Conway's progress. Economies had to be made in staff and other directions, for Conway had no endowments and lived only on its fee income. The Board of Trade, which had just completed a thorough review of the purpose and methods of examination for masters' and mates' certificates, began to concern itself with standards of training and there was a threat to the remission of sea service, if not to the Conway's very existence.

The committee acted. They invited Mr. Lawrence Holt to become the Conway chairman and he brought to the task an experience of youth training and meticulous attention to detail from his



**Plas Newydd seen from the Menai Strait**

shipowning practice. He took a personal interest in everything and everyone connected with the Conway and, backed by him, the successive Capts. Richardson, Goddard and Hewitt were able to bring the Conway to a high standard of training and equipment. Numbers began to rise until the ship was again carrying over 220 cadets.

It was in this period that Mr. T. E. W. Browne was appointed headmaster and money made available to provide a full graduate staff. In a school-ship, with a seaman in sole command, the position of headmaster is fraught with difficulty, but Mr. Browne, with insight and understanding, made school work the complement of the technical training. With Capt. Hewitt bringing the same qualities to this two-man team, it has today reached its full potential.

The teaching of principles before methods was insisted upon and interests were aroused in the cadets to broaden and educate in the truest sense. The problems imposed by a termly entry instead of a yearly one, as in the ordi-

nary school, were faced and solved and commanding officer and headmaster alike knew their boys intimately.

Although the Conway receives no grants whatever, captain and headmaster sought and obtained a full Ministry of Education and Ministry of Transport inspection, profiting by their suggestions and the criticisms and fearlessly inviting a repeat. The whole training was constantly under review, making it a living thing.

The perils of air attack on Merseyside in 1941 decided the committee to seek new anchorage in the Menai Strait, off Bangor. In most respects, particularly in the facilities for boat sailing, this location had distinct advantages over Merseyside, though the daily pageant of shipping was lost. The surrounding hills were pressed into service and regular expeditions, involving climbing, hill-walking, camping, map-reading and demanding fitness, leadership, discipline, and endurance, became a regular feature of training.

With an increasing demand for

places, search was made for shore accommodation and was found in part of Lord Anglesey's home at Plas Newydd, Anglesey, on the shores of the Menai Strait. With his active help, magnificent playing fields were laid out and the part of Lord Anglesey's mansion leased to the Conway was equipped with classrooms, laboratories, library, kitchens, dining-room, dormitories and bathrooms for another 100 cadets, bringing the training establishment to some 300 cadets.

This gave the opportunity to introduce a three-year course side by side with the established two-year course, which became an integral part of the Conway system. The cadets, numbering 100, spent their first year ashore at Plas Newydd and moved aboard for the remaining two years. Although the ship had long ago had her main deck divided by movable but soundproof partitions to make class teaching practicable, it was obvious that many subjects, particularly those involving laboratory and practical work, were better done ashore.

This, and the daily games, athletic and expedition activities, involved detailed organisation of transport to the ship and no small loss of teaching time. It was, therefore decided to move the ship to an anchorage off Plas Newydd and Capt. Goddard made the difficult move successfully. The change was most effective and one result alone was that at no time in the ship's history was there such a high proportion of cadets sailing small boats. Every Conway cadet today should go to sea with a practical knowledge of handling boats under oars and sail.

It was while the ship was in tow to Liverpool for refit from this anchorage that she met disaster due to unforeseen and abnormal conditions. Again the Conway met the challenge. In record time, under the drive of Mr. Holt, the then secretary the late Mr. Alfred Wilson, and Capt. Hewitt, a miracle was performed by the provision of wooden buildings ashore on the Anglesey estate to house the whole ship's complement. The school went on without a halt.

Deplorable as the loss of the ship seemed at the time, there were advantages to outweigh it. The whole establishment gained in strength and purpose as a result of the fusion into one unit. More time and opportunity became available for seamanship training, while the advantage of concentration of resources made it possible so to organise the school work that cadets could take G.C.E. as in any other school without interference with their technical

instruction.

After a prolonged examination, the committee decided to make permanent the concentration of the establishment in its present site. There were few



**Aerial view of part of Plas Newydd location and buildings**

advantages of a ship as base which could not be equally gained from a land base, so conveniently on the shore of navigable waters. An appeal was made to the shipping industry for funds and a generous response has made it possible to consider commencing work on a new building in the coming year.

The Conway will face her second century well equipped in men, material and opportunity. She will continue to send into our sea service responsible all-rounders, tough yet humane. She will

produce a diversity of types, well used to the discipline of teamwork, though capable of leadership; "Old Conways" should prove adaptable to whatever demands a changing service may make upon them. Her past gives great hope for her future.

## **PRE-SEA TRAINING AT ITS BEST**

By CAPT. E. HEWITT, R.D., R.N.R., *Captain Superintendent*

Although most shipowners and seamen agree in principle that all boys should have adequate technical, and preferably community training prior to going to sea, there are two distinct schools of thought as to how this training should be imparted and absorbed.

One school believes that a boy should continue his general education up to G.C.E. O level and then have an intensive course of technical training, while the other believes that it is better to begin the technical training early, in small doses, and continue it for a much

longer period, side by side with academic study.

The Conway training, like that of its younger sister Worcester, follows the second method, and the results achieved in the past 100 years show how much this system, though it has not remained static, has to commend it.

A boy with a real urge to go to sea, and fortunately for Britain there are still ample of these, often feels frustrated if he cannot see himself making some progress towards his goal and the main purpose of Conway training is to keep

alive a love of the sea throughout adolescence, though not permitting it to distract from general education. The earlier a boy familiarises himself with boat work in tidal waters, the more such boat handling, and subsequently ship handling, become part of his second nature and similarly the practical work about an establishment ingrains pride of ship and profession.

The amount of practical work a young cadet performs in his first few months in Conway, is not dissimilar to the amount of time he would spend on C.C.F. or similar duties, and his academic work is no less than he would be expected to perform at any other public or grammar school. As he grows more senior the proportions of technical and

practical work to academic work do change, but only imperceptibly and a great advantage of Conway training is that there is no sudden transition from academic work to technical training, as even after a boy has obtained his G.C.E. his academic studies are continued.

with clear tidal water running past its own dock, the Conway provides every facility for training or recreation in boats under oars, power or sail; organised games help keep the body fit and encourage team spirit; hobbies and activities that are likely to be useful at

The first 100 years of Conway training have drawn to a close and we face the future with the same confidence that inspired the farsighted body of Liverpool shipowners and shipmasters who, under the auspices of the Mercantile Marine Service Association,



**Cadets of H.M.S. "Conway" on Church Parade**

The Conway, based on the Menai Strait, offers any boy with good health, good sight and the love of the sea, an admirable gateway to a worthwhile profession, and that its value is recognised by the majority of education authorities, is proved by the fact that almost half the 315 cadets at present under training receive some financial assistance from their local education authorities.

Situated in glorious surroundings

sea are encouraged and for those who enjoy mountaineering the Snowdon Range is accessible. The physical benefit of training in such surroundings need no emphasis, but boys also benefit from the atmosphere of Conway's traditions of service, fortitude and loyalty, all of which have developed in her old boys a pride, whether or not they have continued at sea or followed some profession ashore.

founded her in 1859.

As John Masefield the poet laureate, himself an "Old Conway," writes in the concluding lines of an ode specially written for our Centenary Year,

"Up with her Conway's all,  
abandon fears;  
Let us do better this next hundred  
years".

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## EDUCATION AIMS IN H.M.S. "CONWAY"

By T. E. W. BROWNE, M.A., M.Sc., *Headmaster*

CONWAY education is vocational in aiming to prepare a boy as completely as possible for a selected profession. This is not necessarily a narrow conception for as Dr. L. P. Jacks reminds us in

"The Education of the Whole Man" the great tradition of our public school classical education "was intensely vocational in its origin. It was intended for those whose vocation would be for the learned

professions - the Law and the Church".

Reduced to its simplest terms the education of a potential ship's officer must provide him with basic knowledge and skills which he will need in



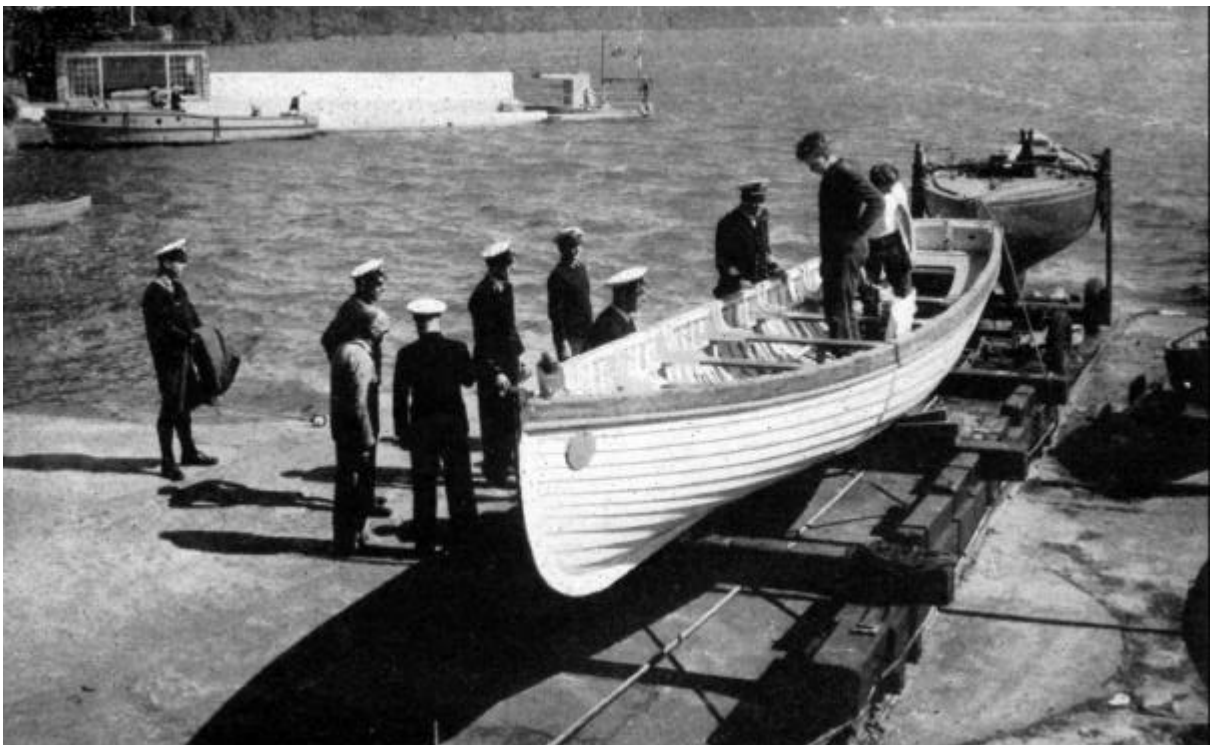
**Preparing some of the private dinghies on the dock side**

his profession; the ability to express himself clearly in his own language, the mathematical skills used in navigation, and the physical principles which will enable him to use scientific equipment efficiently. These, with such a knowledge of the art and practice of seaman-

ship as can be gained without the actual experience of life in a ship at sea, form the strictly vocational foundation of Conway teaching.

The vocational urge can be very strong in boys, especially when there is a hint of adventure in the selected

career. This can be both a valuable educational stimulus and a danger. Its value is great when the urge to succeed in his chosen profession can be linked in a boy's mind with the whole range of skills and knowledge required for that success. The danger is that in his enthu-



**The slipway and dock with swimming pool in background**

siasm to become a good seaman a boy may dismiss as unimportant any aspect of education which does not seem to be directly linked with purely professional skills.

One of the undoubted advantages of life on board the Conway, especially when she was in the Mersey, was the strength and power this life gave to the vocational urge. Boys joining her had a real sense of being launched on a serious preparation for a career. They lived the life of a seaman and the impact of this was reflected in the determination they brought to all their practical tasks. It was typified in the resolution with which they would struggle through to success when handling a cutter in bad weather against the hard running Mersey tide.

But while it strengthened the voca-

tional urge it brought to some a false sense of values. They had a feeling that education was something which linked them with childhood and was, now they had become men on a ship, to be set aside for, and not truly regarded as part of, the robust practical life on board. In time of course most of them came to realise that physical skills, character, and knowledge are inseparable ingredients of success and that any training which did not blend them evenly would be bound to fail.

It would fail, too, if in addition to giving a boy the basic needs of his vocation, it did not introduce him to the great treasures of literature, art and music which we inherit. One of the best tests of the success of a teacher is that he is able to give boys not only the initial glimpses of the things which have, for

him, made life fuller and more enjoyable, but able also to leave with his pupils a continuing urge to explore these treasures for themselves. Perhaps this is a test in which we shall fail more often than we succeed but this must not discourage us from continued effort.

But neither vocational training nor culture can in themselves make the complete man which is the Conway ideal. She was founded at a time when Dr. Arnold's emphasis on the character of a Christian gentleman as the pattern of the new tradition in education was firmly held, and that pattern is part of the Conway tradition still. If we can blend wisely these three elements in our training we need have no fears for the new century of Conway history now opened.



## CHANGES WROUGHT IN A HUNDRED YEARS

By G. DRAKE, *Chief Officer*

“Promotion in the Merchant Service used to be much more difficult than now, and, since I entered that service 36 years ago, it has advanced to such a degree that it has become a delightful and highly remunerative occupation.”

This might be a quotation from a speech by any shipmaster now serving, but it is, in fact, from a speech by Capt. Sproule, chairman of the Mercantile Marine Service Association, made on August 1, 1859, at the opening of the school frigate Conway. The changes wrought by the passage of time are very great, but human beings, though they are affected by these changes, remain very much as they were. The course of training now followed by cadets of the Conway has, superficially, little relationship to that which was so farsightedly instituted a century ago, but the cadets are exactly the same sort of people with like faults and like virtues.

At its beginning the training was suited to the needs of the time, and the divisions of forecastlemen, foretopmen, maintopmen, mizentopmen and after-guard, in their training in the heyday of

the clipper ship, learned to perform their traditional work. Sail drill was not finally discontinued until 1915, but it must, by that time, have become somewhat academic, if not archaic. Today sail drill is applied to the handling of a fleet of small sailing craft of varied rig, which, in the summer terms and on into October, give fine leisure-time employment to as many as 80 cadets at one time.

The daily routine which was established in the first Conway persists with few modifications. It is no longer necessary to lash up and stow hammocks, nor to hoist and secure all working boats between supper and evening quarters, as it was when the ship was the domestic background compared with our daily life, yet the time spent in clearing up and squaring off dormitories, classrooms and dining halls is still logged as 'Hands Clean Ship'.

A century ago all traffic between ship and the shore was conveyed by those essential tenders the 12-oared cutters. Today their lineal successors are still in use, and every morning between

breakfast and morning school, together with the six-oared gigs, they provide fine exercise and good training for 40 cadets.

A heavier accent is now placed on schoolwork and the insistence upon possession of a General Certificate of Education in English, Mathematics and Physics entails more time being spent in school. It is in the occupation of his spare time that the present cadet differs most from his predecessor of 100 years ago. A phrase from Masfield's book, "The Conway"; comes too readily to mind, "Half holidays meant so much time to be killed. One loafed about or looked for mischief".

It is the realisation by authority that loafing leads to mischief that has made the greatest difference in the life of present-day cadets compared with their forerunners. It may be argued that leisure can be over-organised, but it must be borne in mind that the young human is bung-full of energy which, if not given a safety valve, must find an escape for itself. It often finds the wrong one. It is an article of faith with the Conway committee and staff that they have found the right one.

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*Any enquiries regarding the School should be addressed to:-*

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