



ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

**REPORT: SCHOOL IN A MIRROR
An Evaluation of St Stithians College**

Overseen by the Independent Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA)

SEPTEMBER 2007

REPORT: ST STITHIANS GIRLS' PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

Internal Evaluation Team

1. The Girls' Prep team consisted of:
 - 1.1. Kim Roberts (team leader)
 - 1.2. Tracy Aitken
 - 1.3. Claire Eskinazi
 - 1.4. Lisa Grainger
 - 1.5. Thandiwe Nxumalo
 - 1.6. Bronwyn Peake
2. Mentor appointed by IQAA: Paul Channon

Background

3. Girls' Prep has 30 full time academic staff members and a number of part time or private academic support staff, music teachers and sports coaches. We cater for a maximum of 420 girls with a wide range of ability. There are 28 girls per class and 3 classes per grade.

Distinctive features

4. We take pupils from grade 3 to grade 7. From grade 3 to 6, there is a class teacher, while in grade 7, there is specialist teaching. In addition, grade 7 girls are divided into smaller tutor groups
5. We are part of a coordinate model and the girls have a combined break with the Boys' Prep

Means and methods for gathering evidence

6. The following was used for gathering evidence:
 - 6.1. Opinion surveys were completed by staff, pupils and parents.
 - 6.2. Three focus group discussions were held for pupils, parents and staff.
 - 6.3. Classroom and meeting practice was observed.
 - 6.4. Additional questionnaires were drawn up and completed by relevant stakeholders.
 - 6.5. Interviews were held with:
 - security staff,
 - cleaning staff,
 - front office staff
 - private academic support staff.

FOCUS AREA 1: TEACHING AND LEARNING

Curriculum

7. Strengths:
 - 7.1. Implementation of RNCS is area of strength
 - 7.2. There is a healthy balance between academic, sporting, cultural and spiritual activities.
8. However:

- 8.1. Some teachers feel that spiritual activities in our school are not meaningful enough.
- 8.2. Some teachers feel that cultural activities are not given enough time.
- 8.3. Our sporting staff feels very strongly that they need extra time as the poor physical condition of South African children, low muscle tone and obesity is cause for great concern. On the other hand, there were a few staff members who felt that sporting activities take up too much time in our school.
- 8.4. Insufficient time for additional languages due to multi-lingual approach
- 8.5. Other teachers feel that there is a tendency to under-value academic time in our school. Both staff and learners regularly disrupt other classes by knocking on classroom doors, entering and making trivial requests or announcements, often at a crucial time in a lesson.

Teaching and learning

9. Strengths:

- 9.1. Generally lessons are well planned and presented. Instructions are clear
- 9.2. A range of activities is offered and they are generally appropriate to the needs of the learners. A degree of differentiation takes place
- 9.3. Questioning is stimulating and encourages critical thinking. Progression is evident during the lesson. Girls are both challenged and given a lot of positive re-enforcement.
- 9.4. The physical environment is generally optimum for the objectives of the lesson, with a good arrangement of desks and stimulus on the walls.
- 9.5. Learners are given an opportunity to work with the subject matter.
- 9.6. There is an atmosphere of enjoyment and caring in lessons which promotes learning.
- 9.7. Most teachers make appropriate use of resources and teaching methods are varied.
- 9.8. There is learning outside the classroom and places of interest are visited and appropriated guest speakers are invited to address the pupils.

10. However:

- 10.1. Recognition of prior knowledge is not always evident or adequate.
- 10.2. Some teachers tend to give too many instructions at once, which confuses the girls and instructions are often repeated too many times. In addition, some teachers talk too much and disrupt the learners when they are concentrating
- 10.3. Some differentiation is happening in our school, however, this is an area in which our staff needs to be developed. Strong students are not challenged sufficiently.
- 10.4. It appears that not all teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils.
- 10.5. Facilities shared by the schools are problematic, as bookings and arrangements made by Girls prep are not always respected by the other schools.
- 10.6. The computer lab is often booked up. All media facilities are not used optimally. Training is required in the use of IT facilities and more IT facilities are needed in classrooms.
- 10.7. Homework is inconsistent.

Teacher development

11. Strengths:

- 11.1. Teachers are encouraged to attend conferences, workshops, courses and user groups and these are well attended by staff.
- 11.2. Teachers are asked to give feedback to the rest of the staff where appropriate.

12. However:

- 12.1. Most teachers agreed that there is no effective staff appraisal system at the school.
- 12.2. The majority feel that teachers are not regularly appraised at the school.
- 12.3. The staff stated that there is little time to discuss their needs, wants and accomplishments.
- 12.4. There are no individual skills development plans for staff members.
- 12.5. The staff feels the GP Exec need to be more aware of each staff member's role and what they accomplish in a year.

Assessment

- 13. Most of the staff have successfully completed the IEB Assessors course and are introducing new assessment practices into their teaching.
- 14. Assessment of work is, therefore, regular and varied.
- 15. Reporting to parents on a formal and informal basis happens regularly and parents are given a clear understanding of their child's progress.
- 16. Learning area leaders evaluate the range and content of curriculum activities.
- 17. Moderation of assessment occurs via planning and discussion amongst teachers.

Support

- 18. This is an area of strength in our school:
 - 18.1. There are many resources such as laboratories; media centre; IT and AV equipment.
 - 18.2. There are excellent resources to cater for sporting, cultural and spiritual needs in line with the school's vision and mission.
 - 18.3. Very good provision is made for learning support for students who are experience barriers to learning. The school has clear structures and guidelines in place to provide for students who experience barriers to learning.
 - 18.4. Counselling is available for academic and personal needs. There are three specialised members of staff who are available to counsel learners and parents regarding academic and personal needs. Each teacher has the knowledge to support and advise learners and parents concerning academic and personal needs.
 - 18.5. There are the excellent support structures for students, parents and staff who experience stress, trauma, AIDS, ADD or substance abuse.
 - 18.6. The school is currently expanding the academic support department in line with supporting teachers and differentiation of lessons.
- 19. However:
 - 19.1. More AV equipment needs to be purchased to provide all staff with opportunity to use some equipment in their teaching.
 - 19.2. There is no clear and effective policy on extra lessons.
 - 19.3. The part-time academic support staff feel that they are not included as part of the staff.

FOCUS AREA 2: ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Attainment

20. Strengths:
- 20.1. The staff generally feels confident about children's achievements in the areas such as speaking, reading and writing and expressing ideas confidently.
 - 20.2. Poor listening skills are seen as a generational trend and not specific to our school.
 - 20.3. The student's achievement in most of the course work in their learning areas at each level is linked to teacher's expectation of their learners.
 - 20.4. There was an acknowledgement that the sport department is great and is fully committed.
 - 20.5. Teachers think there are enough opportunities for the girls to develop and enjoy their potential in cultural activities.
21. However
- 21.1. Additional Language teachers feel that they do not have enough teaching time and that times should be allocated according to the Revised National Curriculum. Extra time is needed to improve speaking and reading skills.
 - 21.2. There is a need to work consistently on improving reading and spelling.
 - 21.3. Although some teachers feel that the standard of teaching mathematics is high in our school, it is felt some attention needs to be given to problem solving, enrichment for weaker learners and the lower grades (3, 4 and 5).
 - 21.4. Some staff and parents feel that there are not enough opportunities for all the children to develop their sporting abilities.
 - 21.5. Lack of available time, sports coaches, facilities and opposition limit our extra-mural sports programme.
 - 21.6. Many felt that the extramural timetable needs to be restructured to allow more opportunity for cultural development and fewer clashes with sports times.
 - 21.7. The large number of girls participating in an activity is seen as problematic.
 - 21.8. Private coaches do receive a letter informing them of our ethos, however, many parents felt that the coaches should be under contract.

Attitudes

22. This is an area of strength in our school:
- 22.1. Pupils are able to work well and confidently in groups and as individuals.
 - 22.2. They are critical thinkers, able to find information and reach conclusions.

Progress

23. This is an area of strength in our school. Most children complete successfully the work of each grade in a year.

FOCUS AREA 3: FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL

Policies

24. The school runs smoothly with well structured policies and procedures, clearly communicated and implemented.

25. Laws and regulations are available, clearly displayed where necessary and implemented.
26. Policies are reviewed regularly on campus and school level.
27. In process of streamlining policies and documents to allow for easier access and implementation
28. All info to be kept in Policy file, updated as necessary by head
29. Numerous policies exist and are implemented regarding Health and Safety and First Aid.

Finance

30. An annual budget is drawn up in consultation with the staff and approved by Council.
31. The GP Exec have determined a 5 – 10 year plan for the school in their strategic planning meetings.
32. The Rector and the Bursar deal with matters of insurance for the school.

Facilities.

33. Strengths:
 - 33.1. There is good surveillance at the main car park
 - 33.2. There are enough dustbins surrounding the waiting area at the main car park.
34. However:
 - 34.1. The school has grown over the last 5 years and the provision of facilities has not matched the growth.
 - 34.2. Increase in number of classes and division of classes due to language choice, there are not enough classrooms to facilitate the timetable and more venues are needed.
 - 34.3. The General Lecture Theatre, which is used for various school functions, can no longer accommodate all the children comfortably.
 - 34.4. Although there is a considerable effort to maintain the facilities, there are some areas that seem to be neglected, like the male toilets.
 - 34.5. The staff was unanimous on the lack of facilities to cater for those who are physically challenged
 - 34.6. Parking areas are congested and signage is inadequate and ineffective.
 - 34.7. In the main Girls Prep parking area, there is minimal shade for cars.
 - 34.8. There is a lot of dust in the Sand Car Park, and there are no formal markings for cars.
 - 34.9. The “in and out” signage in the main car park needs to be clearer as it doesn’t seem to work.
 - 34.10. The pupils are not aware of litter in their surroundings.

Orderliness

35. Strengths:
 - 35.1. A well structured timetable is in place.
 - 35.2. A code of conduct is currently under revision to cut down on duplication of policies.

- 35.3. Both parents and learners expressed that bullying has been/is being handled well at the school, and that it has improved since the implementation of the Bullying Policy.
- 35.4. Learners perceive that their teachers respect them.
- 35.5. Meetings are well-run and the best interest of the pupils and staff is the focus of all decisions.

36. However:

- 36.1. Some learners are not punctual for the start of the school day.
- 36.2. Teachers are mostly punctual for the start of the school day and for meetings, however, some teachers are late for lessons that follow breaks.
- 36.3. Behaviour of learners towards visitors to the school is an area of concern. The learners do not greet visitors, parents and administrative staff.
- 36.4. The girls strongly expressed their concern that some teachers favour certain girls.
- 36.5. Some teachers speak sarcastically to girls which humiliates them.
- 36.6. Some parents felt sports coaches were difficult to approach.
- 36.7. Many girls, as well as parents, confuse bullying with friendship issues and some girls appear to be misusing the hurtful behaviour forms.
- 36.8. Possessions not safe. It was felt that children were careless and were not looking after their possessions responsibly. It becomes difficult to separate 'sheer carelessness' from theft and that 'picking up' lost property is often time consuming.
- 36.9. Classrooms are also left unlocked during chapel times, when there is hardly anyone in and around the classrooms.
- 36.10. PA meeting not well attended, parents feel that they are not always encouraged to be involved.
- 36.11. In some class projects, such as Big Business, some parents are over-involved

Security and Safety

37. Strengths:

- 37.1. The state and safety of school buildings is good and complies with laws and regulations.
- 37.2. Safety committee rep attends safety meetings and staff keep registers which they submit to the safety rep on a monthly basis.
- 37.3. There are regular practiced emergency procedures for fire.
- 37.4. Staff members carry out duties to ensure safety, including playground supervision.
- 37.5. Security officers agreed that the pupils and staff treated the security officers with respect.

38. However:

- 38.1. Often children play on equipment in grade 3 quad after or before school when there is no teacher present.
- 38.2. Security staff raised a concern about lack of understanding from parents, about the importance of gate passes.
- 38.3. Children cross through and linger around the sand car park on their way to and from the field at break. They not always effectively restricted to the playground area. This is a safety concern, as groundsmen and parents drive through the car park.

Health Care

39. Strengths:

- 39.1. There are many resources and staff opportunities available to support and advise students and staff with regards to their emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs.

- 39.2. It is apparent that the best interests of pupils and staff are the main focus for any decision making.
- 39.3. The school has clear structures and guidelines in place to deal with bullying and with child drug and alcohol abuse.
- 39.4. The school also has a comprehensive referral list should students or staff need more specialised intervention.

40. However:

- 40.1. The food offered for sale in the tuck-shop does not promote healthy food choices.
- 40.2. Pupils are not given an opportunity to sit and eat their lunch at the tuck-shop area

OVERALL AREAS OF STRENGTH

- 41. The Girls' Prep staff embrace Outcomes Based Education and engage in learner-based teaching activities. Parents, pupils and staff have a fair understanding of continuous assessment, as well as the use of ratings rather than marks. Pupils are encouraged to be critical thinkers and to develop their creative side. There is a good balance of activities and academic, sporting, cultural and pastoral needs are catered for. Support, of various kinds, is offered to the people who need it. Our pupils develop confidence to work in co-operatively in groups, as well as individually. The pupils are motivated to achieve well and all pupils are given opportunities to develop leadership qualities.
- 42. Teachers are given many opportunities for professional and personal growth. They are kept at the forefront of academic research and trends.

OVERALL AREAS OF CONCERN

- 43. The school has grown rapidly and the provision of facilities, such as classrooms and computers is limited. This also impacts on our extra-mural programme. Parents feel there are too many clashes and not enough flexibility in our extra-mural programme. In addition, the teachers' and coaches' skills at differentiating their lessons or coaching need to be further developed to allow all pupils to experience success. There is discrepancy amongst the staff in terms of expectations of pupils, in particular, when it comes to homework. There is a perception amongst parents and pupils that teachers favour certain pupils.
- 44. The pupils do not greet administrative staff and visitors to our school. Pupils are not taking responsibility for looking after their possessions and keeping their school grounds free of litter.
- 45. Pupils and parents do not always understand the difference between friendship issues and bullying. There is still misunderstanding about and debate over participation versus competitiveness. Pupils, parents and staff do not all have the same understanding about our approach to recognition and awards. Parents and staff experience frustration due to the traffic control at the school entrance and in the car parks.
- 46. Communications amongst the staff and the understanding of the various roles and work loads of the staff needs to improve. The staff evaluation or appraisal system does not satisfy the needs of the staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

47. The school executive needs to draw up a School Development Plan. The following suggestions have been made and will be taken into consideration.
48. The school must look at budgeting for more smart boards and technology to be used in classrooms.
49. The school must draw up a clear and effective policy on extra lessons. (Target date: Dec 2007).
50. To ensure uninterrupted academic time, teachers to place a “Do not disturb” sign on the door at certain times. (Target date: Jan 2008)
51. The school should look into the possibility of hiring dedicated, knowledgeable coaches, making more staff available to offer cultural activities.
52. The school must identify areas that could be used or improved to cater for people with disabilities.
53. The sand car park should be paved and more signage in this area would help with the congestion.
54. More benches are needed under the trees in the waiting area to encourage learners to sit and wait as apposed to running around.
55. The school must develop a procedure to follow up on late-comers.
56. A recommendation was made to improve communication on safety and security issues with all stakeholders in the school.
57. A possibility of different colour car stickers each year should be investigated.
58. Fire drills need to be practiced more often and the warning system needs to be improved
59. The school should purchase at least two megaphones so that the teacher on playground supervision can be heard when they spot an incident on the playground.
60. The use of the prep fields as a playground, as well as the pathway to get there, needs to be reviewed.
61. The school should investigate ways to improve the marking of personal items
62. The school should investigate a way to encourage girls to use lockers, either by providing larger lockers or making lockers more accessible.
63. The school must continue to develop a welcoming environment, as highlighted in our Diversity plan ensure.

MAINTAINING EVALUATORY ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

64. The whole school felt that the evaluation process was very positive. The IQAA evaluation team felt that they had benefited enormously from being involved in the process. In future, we plan to continue and develop the evaluation process. A rotation of team members is needed, so that all staff can benefit from the experience. Staff will be encouraged to be more reflective about their practices.