



ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

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

Overseen by the Independent Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA)

SEPTEMBER 2007

REPORT: ST STITHIANS JUNIOR PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Junior Preparatory Team consisted of:
 - 1.1. Gayl Kennedy (Team Leader)
 - 1.2. Alison Ebell
 - 1.3. Morag Williamson
 - 1.4. Amanda McPhail
 - 1.5. Gerda Smith
 - 1.6. Melanie Morrison
 - 1.7. Victoria Goodstein
2. The Mentor appointed by IQAA: Margaret Rudolph
3. Background (general): The Junior Preparatory moved to its current location in 2001. It caters for boys and girls, in a mixed gender environment, from Grade R to Grade 2. There are 19 classes of 23 – 26 children in each class. The school follows an integrated day and is structured to include sporting and cultural activities within the normal school hours.
4. Distinctive features:
 - 4.1. The Junior Preparatory, although part of the greater College, has its own Head. Academic Support forms part of the educational programme and is offered in each class every day.
 - 4.2. Qualified Speech Therapist and Occupational Therapists provide educational support for the children in the classroom.
 - 4.3. The focus learning areas include Literacy encompassing a whole language approach, and therefore a Reading Room supported by “Reading Grannies” forms the centre of the school.
 - 4.4. On the staff is a male sports teacher who is trained in Sports Science and is actively involved in the Gross Motor programme in the school.

MEANS AND METHODS FOR GATHERING EVIDENCE

5. Evidence was gathered from a number of sources:
 - 5.1. *Opinion surveys* were completed by parents, staff and Grade 2 children. *Additional surveys* were completed by staff and children.
 - 5.2. Three *focus groups* were chaired and minutes were taken.
 - 5.3. An intensive week of *classroom observation* took place and photographs were collected as additional evidence.

FINDINGS: FOCUS AREA 1 - LEARNING AND TEACHING

Curriculum

6. The curriculum is according to National requirements and much emphasis is placed on the individual development of the child.
7. *Curriculum is child orientated, suited to child’s age, ability and stage of development:* The children are exposed to a wide variety of curricula: all geared to the children’s specific needs.

8. *The timing of activities is flexible, readily available to adjust to needs and circumstances:* The timetable is structured, but there is flexibility in the individual classroom environments.
9. *Programmes cater for gross motor development:* The gross motor programme forms an integral part of the curriculum; although there is a need for greater emphasis on physical activity both in the classroom environment and at home.
10. *Music, movement and drama form part of the programme:* Music and drama is of a high standard. Specialist teaching is given in this area with an emphasis on movement, appreciation of classical and modern music and exposure to a variety of instruments. Fifty children are part of the Junior Choir which performs at all College functions.
11. *Awareness of the environment is fostered by forms of exploration, discovery and experiment:* Awareness of the environment is encouraged; however more attention to recycling and conservation on the campus would enhance this aspect of learning.
12. *Both indoor and outdoor experience is given:* The children are exposed to different experiences, inside and outside the classroom, using a variety of facilities on the greater campus. The children have full use of the school gymnasium, astro turf hockey field and the Aquatics centre made up of 5 pools including a diving pool. A dam on the campus is utilized for picnics and environmental awareness.
13. *Programmes allow for freedom and guided activity, formal routine and informal spontaneity, active and passive experience:* The teachers are at liberty to be spontaneous within the structure of their timetable.
14. *A holistic approach is all-pervasive:* The Junior Preparatory endeavours to develop the whole child. Life skills play an important part of the curriculum.
15. *There is awareness that the process is more important than the result:* The teachers are actively engaged in the constructivist approach to teaching. The pressures to meet the demands of the following Grade can detract from this philosophy.
16. *There is a healthy balance between academic, sporting, cultural and spiritual activities in line with the school's mission:* The staff and management are fully engaged in the process of education and preparing children to cope with the pressures of life.

Learning

17. *Teachers plan a range of appropriate curriculum activities daily, weekly and annually:* The teacher's preparation is thorough, although annual planning across the grades needs to be addressed.
18. *Teachers have good subject knowledge and skills appropriate to the levels they are teaching:* Specialist teachers are employed where particular expertise is necessary. Class teachers are very knowledgeable and skilled in Foundation Phase education.

19. *Opportunities for creativity and individuality are given:* Creativity is fostered and individuality nurtured in the Junior Preparatory. Children's work is not only displayed in the classrooms but is evident in the passages.
20. *Needs of different kinds of children are met – auditory, kinaesthetic, visual and spatial:* Teachers prepare lessons taking all learning styles and abilities into account.
21. *Children learn to work individually and in groups:* Group work is evident in all learning with an emphasis on differentiation. Children are able to work co-operatively and individually.
22. *There is interaction and relationship between adult and child, as well as between child and child:* The interaction between adult and child is good. The interaction between children is developmentally appropriate.
23. *There is an understanding of the importance and roles of what are called EQ and IQ:* The teachers recognise the importance of developing children emotionally as well as academically.
24. *Homework is used appropriately to reinforce and enrich the curriculum. (Grade 1 & 2 only):* Homework is of an acceptable amount and content – a perception of the staff and confirmed by the parents.
25. *There is learning outside the classroom and places of interest are visited:* More outings need to be included in the annual planning.

Support

26. *Parents are as involved as much as possible and appropriately:* A willing parent body exists but could be better utilised when assistance is needed.
27. *Parents are helped to understand their children's needs and to act accordingly:* The school continuously educates parents on child related topics via parent talks and individual interviews.
28. *The importance of friends and friendship is understood and acted on where possible by both parents and teachers:* Children are taught to value each other and to nurture positive relationships. Additional Life Skills support groups are offered to learners who have been identified as needing them.
29. *Healthy routine concerning hygiene and eating are encouraged at school:* The school monitors healthy eating habits and hygiene. There is no 'tuck shop' at the Junior Preparatory for this reason.
30. *Teachers are alert to notice barriers of learning – and to notify parents and advise referral where necessary:* An Academic Support team and a comprehensive policy are in place.

Ethos

31. *The atmosphere is happy and fun is common:* There is a happy environment at the Junior Preparatory.

32. *There is a sense of trust, respect, caring and communication between staff, parents and children:* An exceptional relationship exists between staff and children with mutual respect. The staff acknowledges that greater communication between staff and parents is necessary. A “blaming” culture exists amongst the staff at the Junior Preparatory. A greater sense of accountability and commitment to one another is necessary.
33. *Discipline is based on fairness and self-discipline:* Children are made aware of their boundaries and self discipline is encouraged.
34. *There is an awareness of the needs and interests of others – outreach:* The school is actively involved in the Izenzo Outreach Programme and supports all greater campus outreach appeals from the Samaritan Group.
35. *The school lives up to its mission and vision:* The school upholds its mission and vision.

Teacher development

36. *Teachers are given opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation:* Teachers regularly reflect and review their educational practice.
37. *Teachers attend conferences, workshops, courses and user groups:* Teachers are given every available opportunity to attend development courses.
38. *The benefits of the above are shared with the school staff:* Feedback on courses attended is given at the weekly staff development meetings.
39. *Teachers are evaluated regularly and are able to identify areas for their development:* The greater college appraisal system is under review. The Head, Deputy and Directors continually monitor and appraise staff.

Assessment

40. *Assessment of work is regular and varied:* Children are continually assessed using a variety of methods.
41. *Reporting to parents encourages their involvement in the learning process and a clear understanding of their child’s progress:* Reports and/or feedback interviews are structured every term. The written report format is constantly under review.
42. *The range of curriculum activities is regularly evaluated and adapted to meet the needs of the children:* The curriculum is constantly being reviewed and adapted to suit the children's needs.

Academic Support

43. *Provision is made for academic support for children who experience barriers to learning.*
44. There is a full Academic Support team working in conjunction with the teachers in the classroom.

45. *Counseling is available for children:* Counseling is available when necessary, via a qualified Educational Counsellor. The Chaplain is also available when the need arises.
46. *There is the necessary support structure and policy for children who experience such things as AIDS, ADD, and stress etc:* There are cross campus committees and relevant policies are in place.

FINDINGS: FOCUS AREA 2 - ATTAINMENTS AND PROGRESS

Attainment

47. *Children read, write and speak fluently (age appropriately) in English:* The children's language skills are accelerated using the whole language approach to learning. Speech therapy is available for children in need of support.
48. *Children have good listening skills:* The children's listening skills are weak. They need instructions repeated and reinforcement given to them. There is a culture of visual children. Parents need to be more actively involved in encouraging their children to become attentive listeners.
49. *Children manipulate numbers, calculate mentally and electronically (Gr. 2 only) and solve number problems:* A constructivist approach to Numeracy is implemented. Problem solving skills are taught and emphasised.
50. *Children are encouraged to achieve their potential in all learning areas at each level:* The children are encouraged to reach their full potential, through differentiated teaching.
51. *Individuals and teams have opportunities to develop and enjoy their sporting ability:* The Integrated day ensures that all children are exposed to a wide variety of sports. The curriculum concentrates on developing skills and knowledge of sporting disciplines. The philosophy is based on extensive research and focuses on maximum participation in a non-competitive environment. This broad based approach to teaching sport ensures that all children develop the skills and therefore cultivate a love of sport.
52. *Individuals and groups have opportunities to develop and enjoy their potential in cultural activities:* Arts and Culture are effectively covered as part of the curriculum. More exposure to drama could be encouraged.

Attitudes

53. *Children are curious and seek further information and are able to build on information previously learned:* The children have inquiring minds. They are interested, show enjoyment and appreciation of the learning experience.
54. *Children are critical thinkers, able to find information and reach conclusions:* The children are given opportunities to voice their opinions and solve problems within an age appropriate range.

55. *Children are able to work well on their own and manage their time well:* Children are given structured boundaries in which to complete activities depending on their individual level of development.
56. *Children work confidently in groups, co-operating and respecting others:* Children's individuality is catered for and respect for others is encouraged. There is a need for the values instilled and practised at school to be reinforced at home.

Progress

57. *Most children complete successfully the work of each grade in a year:* The school and staff are committed to ensuring the progress and successful completion of each grade in a year.

FINDINGS: FOCUS AREA 3 - FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL

Policies

58. *The school runs smoothly with well structured policies and procedures, clearly communicated and implemented:* Policies and procedures are easily accessible and implemented. Improvement on the communication of policies to parents and interested parties should be formulated and distributed annually. An A-Z booklet of information to parents, staff and children is currently compiled for use in 2008.

Finance

59. *An annual budget is drawn up and approved by the governing body:* Annual budgets are submitted for each department and approved by the Head.
60. *There is adequate provision for insurance of every kind necessary:* Overall insurance for damages sustained by staff on campus needs to be addressed. Present insurance cover needs to be clarified and communicated to staff and parents.

Facilities

61. *The school's buildings, grounds and facilities are adequate for the school's purposes:* The school provides excellent facilities for the children. The Junior Preparatory is currently upgrading the following rooms: Design and Technology/Art, Computers and Music. Ultimately the building of a Zulu classroom, Gym/Hall and Aftercare facility would be desirable.
62. *The school's buildings, grounds and facilities are well maintained:* Regular maintenance ensures that the buildings and grounds are well maintained. The 'pink slip' system is very effective and requests are dealt with timeously.
63. *School buildings and facilities cater for those who are physically challenged:* The Junior Preparatory has a wheelchair access entrance as well as bathroom facilities for the disabled. More wheelchair ramps could be added to the infrastructure of the Junior Preparatory to make it more accessible for disabled.

64. *Class sizes:* A perception exist that the Junior Preparatory class sizes are bigger than other Private schools. However, after investigation this perception proves to be inaccurate. Class sizes are in line with other leading Private schools in the area.
65. *Aftercare Facilities:* Aftercare hosts 70 - 80 children until 15h30, thereafter the numbers reduce to approximately 25 children. Current facilities are inadequate with no running water or nearby kitchen facilities. Drinking water needs to be fetched from the bathrooms which are attached to a classroom. On a rainy day, the room is very small to accommodate the children. There is a request from parents to offer a light lunch after school. Presently a snack and fruit is served at 15h00. Caregivers provide age appropriate activities during the afternoon – indoor and outdoor.

Orderliness

66. *A code of conduct is in place, well communicated and agreed to by staff, children and parents:* The code of conduct, specific to the Junior Preparatory, could be simplified and better communicated to parents and children.
67. *Children are punctual for school, lessons, meetings and other activities:* Some children are late for school. This can sometimes be due to the traffic constraints and the campus traffic situation. However, parents need to be encouraged to be earlier to overcome these problems.
68. *Teachers are punctual for school, lessons, meetings and other activities:* Teachers are punctual each day. They recognise the need to lead by example and being late would impact on fellow staff members and children.
69. *Attendance is regular and controlled, with lateness and absences followed up:* Attendance registers are completed electronically by staff on a daily basis. Children that arrive late at school have to report to the front office. Parents generally phone in to school should their child be ill and this information is then communicated to the teacher. Staff members are required to complete leave forms and submit doctor's notes in accordance with their leave policy.
70. *The timetable is well structured with a teacher allocated to every class for every lesson and provision made for an absent teacher:* A well structured timetable is in place. More that one teacher per class is often allocated to teach and assist. Adequate provision is made for absent teachers.
71. *Behaviour and manners of staff and children are of an acceptably high standard:* Staff behaviour is professional and they are courteous to visitors, parents and children. The children's behaviour is generally of an acceptable standard. To emphasise the importance of good manners, a regular manners week is included in the calendar.

Security

72. *The state and safety of school buildings is good and complies with laws and regulations.* Safety and security is a high priority at our school. Regular checks and meetings are held in order to be compliant in accordance with the OSH Act.

73. *There are regular practiced emergency procedures for fire:* Scheduled and non-scheduled fire drills are held on a regular basis.
74. *Staff members carry out duties to ensure safety, including playground supervision:* The staff carries out playground duty to ensure the safety of the children. The children's safety is of high priority.

Health Care

75. *There is support and provision for the emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs of children and staff:* Support systems are in place for the children with emotional, social and spiritual needs.
76. *Children feel safe and cared for:* The children are the key focus for the staff. A staff concern was raised at the focus meeting that some children are dropped off very early in the morning.
77. *The school has clear policies for dealing with bullying and with child, drug and (alcohol) abuse:* The Junior Preparatory bullying policy is being revised in order to simplify and communicate the process. There are clear policies on child, drug and alcohol abuse.

KEY STRENGTHS

78. *Teaching embraces the OBE philosophy:* The curriculum is based on OBE principles and a constructivist approach to learning. It places strong emphasis on teaching children the foundation skills that will be needed in their future educational pursuits. Our emphasis is on "Learning to learn".
79. *Display of the children's work is evident everywhere. Creativity in the children is encouraged and they are very proud of all their work. Display boards around the school are full of work, photographs, art and numerous examples of THRASS (A reading, handwriting and spelling approach to literacy – using phonemes and graphemes.)*
80. *Safety /happiness of children. The children feel secure in the safe environment provided by the school and this contributes to the general happiness of the child.*
81. *Support and provision: Qualified Academic support teachers, Speech and Occupational Therapists provide educational support for the children in the classroom setting.*
82. *Support staff in the classrooms to assist teachers: This same multi-disciplinary team support staff and parents in preparing our children to reach their potential in all learning areas.*
83. *Integrated day: The timetable is structured to include sporting and cultural activities within the normal school hours.*
84. *Izenzo project: The school, lead by our Outreach committee made up of parents, staff and the chaplain, support and assist a refugee school situated in Hillbrow. We support teacher training, resource material, supply materials, gifts at Easter and Christmas and organized visits by the teachers and learners to St Stithians annually.*

85. Reading Room: A whole language literacy room forms the centre of our school. The children read daily to volunteer “Reading Grannies and Grandpas” and have a wide variety of books to choose from and take home. This is in addition to a fully stocked library.

KEY AREAS OF CONCERN

86. Inter Staff relationships –There is a lack of understanding and tolerance between staff members.

87. Curriculum communication – The important aspects of OBE, sport, academic support etc are not fully understood by parents.

88. The Aftercare Facilities are unsatisfactory and therefore the Aftercare does not function efficiently.

89. General communication between the school and parents needs to be improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

90. Communication:

90.1. Greater communication about curriculum, bullying policy and rules of engagement between parents and teachers needs to be put in place.

90.2. Documentation to assist new parents re the procedures followed at school has been reviewed and will be distributed in the Welcome Packs. An A – Z booklet is currently being compiled to assist parents with queries that they have about day to day running of the school.

90.3. The Integrated day, inclusive of all sport and cultural activities, must be clearly communicated to the parents. A question and answer evening is scheduled with the Sports Directors in the Prep schools.

90.4. All new parents need to be informed and existing parents reminded of the general functioning of the school at an Information evening.

91. Staff Team Building:

91.1. There is a need for team building across the Grades. Many teachers have agreed to teach different grades in 2008 enabling them to gain insight into curriculum across the school.

91.2. Extra Academic Support staff to be employed.

91.3. Empowerment of staff- to share responsibilities and portfolios in rotation 2008.

91.4. Workshops:

- “Celebration of Diversity and Identity”.
- “Investment in Excellence” Refresher course.

92. Aftercare:

92.1. The Aftercare facility has been found to be inadequate and the room is to be changed into a Computer room for 2008. The recommendation is to split the children into the three grades and to use the classrooms for homework and to use the Art/D & T Room for the later part of the afternoon, when the children come together

93. This evaluation has been a worthwhile experience for the staff of the JP as they have been reminded of the importance of laying a strong foundation for the pupils at St Stithians and the part which they play.