



ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

REPORT: SCHOOL IN A MIRROR

An Evaluation of St Stithians College

Overseen by the Independent Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA)

MAY 2013

REPORT: ST STITHIANS GIRLS' COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

St Stithians Girls' College
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Principal: Mrs Ivanka Acquisto

Internal Evaluation Team:

Bernadin Bango	French Teacher
Loredana Borello	Deputy Head, Geography Teacher
Ruth Everson	Leadership Director, English Teacher
Linda Galanakis	Head of Department - English
Marie Jacobs	Head of Department – Additional Languages
Rachel Manyathi	EMS and Zulu Teacher
Sanele Ndaba	Intern – English Department
Karen Prinsloo	Deputy Head, CAT Teacher, IQAA team leader.
Liza Rakobila	Receptionist
Veronica van Rooy	Tutor Director, Maths Teacher

Mentor appointed by IQAA: Lynne Rivett-Carnac

Date of Evaluation: May 2013

Model used: Core model

DESCRIPTIVE BACKGROUND

An established school of 18 years, accommodating 530 girls and 70 staff. Several of the staff are part time specialist teachers. Sports coaches, music staff and administrators form our support staff.

Distinctive features:

- One of five schools situated on a campus of 123 Hectares, it is considered to be a co-ordinate model of education.
- The Girls' College caters for girls from Grade 8 to Grade 12.
- The College is a member of the Round Square International organisation, ISASA and writes the IEB examinations.
- A distinctive feature of the Girls' College is its vertical tutor group system. Instead of register class teachers, each learner is assigned to a tutor teacher. Each tutor group consists of approximately 15 girls, consisting of two to three girls from each grade group. The Grade 12s are given mentoring and leadership responsibilities. Grade 12s are replaced by new Grade 8s coming into the school. This system creates a tight-knit, caring family within the school.
- The Girls' College has a dynamic broad-based and inclusive approach to leadership with an emphasis on choice and service. Each girl chooses to belong to one of thirteen different leadership committees. The committees have a vertical structure and are made up of girls from each grade. The committees are run by democratically elected chairs and assisted by a member of staff. Student affairs are run by a Head and Deputy Head Girl, a Student Leadership Committee and the Students' Representative Council.
- The girls now receive outward recognition, in the form of pockets and a white honours blazer. What is interesting is that the girls may choose to wear or not wear their outward recognition. Some choose not to.
- The school aspires to contributing to the creation of strong women being: "So strong on the inside that they can be gentle with others." We have identified our top line values to be: happiness, balance, integrity, resilience and excellence. Bottom line values that we aim to minimise are: narrow-mindedness, arrogance, selfishness, materialism and disrespect.
- We encourage commitment, creativity, character, contribution, compassion and confidence in our girls.

REPORT ON COMPLIANCE (Compliant as assessed by our mentor)

AREAS OF OPERATION EVALUATED

1. Teaching Learning and Attainments
2. Functioning of the School

MEANS AND METHODS FOR GATHERING EVIDENCE

The following methods for gathering evidence were used:

- Collection of policy documents.
- Letters and correspondence (see IQAA file of evidence), in addition to books of references on display in the foyer.
- Focus group minutes (see IQAA file of evidence).
- Opinion surveys, statistics and comments.
- Observations in the classroom and playgrounds.

OPINION SURVEYS SUMMARIES

Learner Opinions

- Girls feel that they can speak to their teachers and feel that their confidences will not be broken.
- They believe that the academic standards are high and that teachers help to facilitate their learning.
- They are encouraged to consider different points of view in discussions at school.
- Learners felt very strongly that there is a culture of respect between staff and girls.
- They make friends regardless of their skin colour, gender or disabilities.
- The girls expressed pride in their school.
- They felt that the facilities are of a high standard.
- They feel supported with extra lessons in maths.
- They like that there is a school counsellor on hand to help with personal problems.
- Career guidance opportunities and internet facilities are provided by the school.
- They do not feel that they are bullied at school.

- The safety of possessions at school was noted although they feel safe at school.
- The girls are concerned about class sizes and felt that some classes are too large.
- Discipline can continue to improve.
- The approachability of staff is an area of concern although this has improved since 2007.
- Girls would like to see more support from parents/guardians at school events.

Teacher Opinions

- Staff experience the learners as being happy and secure while at school.
- They agree strongly with learners that there is a climate of respect between staff and girls.
- There is confidence in the academic standards at the Girls' College.
- All of the staff noted the high standards set academically and culturally and were highly satisfied that the sporting needs of girls were catered for.
- Staff are proud to be at the school where the facilities are good.
- There was a significant improvement in the feeling that homework is meaningful. Teachers are very involved in school activities and support the school.
- Staff are given opportunity for development.
- They get on well with one another and feel that the transition between grades is managed well.
- Staff believe that learners do talk to them about their problems.

- Staff believe that there is a lack of parental support for the school and that parents do not always approach teachers with problems.
- The appraisal system for staff is still not considered to be effective enough although this has improved substantially since 2007.
- Staff would like more say in the way the school is run and feel that there are not enough opportunities for promotion.
- A further investigation via an IQAA questionnaire explored the staff opinion on leadership.
- Staff agree with parents and learners that possessions are not safe at school.
- It was noted that the relationship between the staff and the school council is a specific area where the school can improve communication and approachability.

Parent Opinions

- Most parents strongly agreed with the statements on the opinion survey and only a few concerns were noted.
- Their children are happy and involved at school and that they are making good progress.
- Parents feel welcome in the school and believe like the learners and staff that the facilities are good.
- Children are seen to be well cared for and to be treated fairly by teachers.
- Their child's attitude towards the teachers is good and they felt that the school's disciplinary processes are fair.
- They felt that their child was safe at school, was not being bullied and was being given worthwhile homework.
- They were highly satisfied with the high standards culturally and academically. Although they supported school sport a few parents felt that we were not satisfying their daughter's sporting needs.
- In spite of parents saying that they were happy with the school we note that a percentage of parents indicated that they are critical of the school.
- Parents are also concerned about the safety of their child's possessions at school.
- On the whole parents were satisfied with the leadership of the school.
- There is a lack of understanding of the role of the school governing body.
- Although there is an improvement by the school in informing parents of their child's progress, some parents would like to be more informed.

FOCUS GROUP & FURTHER INVESTIGATION TOPICS:

Staff opinions on Bullying

- Expressed as a problem but only three members of staff attended.
- Where bullying takes place, it's covert not overt.
- Social media is used as a bullying tool.
- Most bullying was considered to be passive-aggressive.
- Bullying takes the form of exclusion.

Staff opinions on Discipline

- The concept of guidance as opposed to enforcement is valued
- General feeling was that the discipline structure works well at Saints for the senior girls but the junior girls need reminding of the high expectations.
- Clarity is needed regarding who is accountable for discipline. Teachers? Grade 12s? Heads?
- There should be a balance between responsibility and enforcement.
- The idea of self-evaluation was proposed

Staff and Learner opinions on Discipline and Homework

Discipline:

- Chapel discipline has improved.
- Teachers are not consistent.
- It was felt that more consequences are required.
- Lack of respect for seniors / staff.

Homework:

- Assessment planners were not always adhered to.
- Homework does not always get checked.
- Too much homework was given.

Staff opinion on Leadership:

- The Principal requested a Leadership questionnaire on her performance. This was done using the IQAA template. The results were all extremely positive.
- An area of development would be translating aims into reality.

AREAS OF OPERATION

Focus Area 1: Teaching, Learning and Attainments

Curriculum:

- The curriculum meets national requirements.
- Opportunities are given to learners to go beyond the curriculum through career guidance and psychometric testing, outings, local and international exchanges, local and international tours, performances, access to information technology and entrepreneurship initiatives.
- Time allocation per subject is according to specific subject needs, staffing and national requirements.
- Issues of transformation are addressed through learning programmes, speakers, community service, recycling, chapels assemblies and grade initiatives.
- The Girls' College strives to be environmentally conscious and is proud to have been designated as a Green Flag school with Gold status.
- Extension is needed in lessons to cater for the range of skills and abilities amongst the learners.
- The extensive curriculum and the rigorous approach to academics, combined with a very broad offering of extra-mural activities, makes it difficult for staff and learners to achieve balance. This is of concern to the school.

Teaching and learning:

- The girls feel that they are treated as individuals by the staff.
- Teachers plan a range of appropriate lessons using annual, termly and weekly planners. Subject knowledge is up to date and appropriate.
- A close adherence to national curriculum requirements makes it possible to address skills, knowledge, attitude and values.
- Class observations revealed that activities are level appropriate, lively, purposeful and constructive. There is a concern that some lessons remain teacher driven and learners find some lessons boring. This is, however, the exception rather than the norm.
- Homework is used appropriately for reinforcement and enrichment. There continue to be concerns that homework adds to the imbalance between curricular and extra-curricular activities. Homework could be used more appropriately to reinforce and enrich the curriculum.
- As part of its broader teaching, the school encourages learners to take charge of their own learning. Academic support staff are available to assist those learners who need help structuring their learning programmes.
- There is a consensus that the school would benefit from continuing classroom observations and observing where best practice takes place. There is room to take more cognizance of feedback from learners.
- The Girls' College is in the process of investigating becoming part of the international Thinking Schools' forum.

Teacher development:

- This is an area of strength due to a variety of professional and self-development opportunities through conferences, user groups, workshops, invited speakers and courses.
- Lack of time to share the knowledge gained and therefore to pass it on is of concern. There is also not much time or opportunity for staff to engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation.
- More support from Human Resources would help staff to identify areas where development can take place.
- The staff appraisal system is vital for professional and personal development. Finding a fair appraisal system has been difficult but a system has been trailed and is ready for final implementation in 2014. This is a work in progress.
- The assessment programme of the school is of an exceptionally high standard and covers formative and diagnostic analysis.
- Regular and varied assessment is observed through a cycle testing programme, informal assessments, examinations and portfolio work.
- An assessment plan is drawn up for each grade. Although this allows staff and learners to plan and prepare for formal assessments, it often proves to be problematic as it becomes inflexible. This is an area that needs to be re-evaluated and improved upon.

Support:

- The use and availability of the school's extensive resources, such as: sporting, cultural, spiritual laboratories, media centre, IT and AV equipment continues to be highly effective. Learners are encouraged to use their own digital devices in class and a WiFi network will soon be widely operational.
- Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCO staff), supervise and support those with barriers to learning.
- Extra lessons and the peer tutoring programme address learners with academic needs.
- The school has an inclusive approach to learning and special accommodations are made for these learners.
- The school has grown and there is a need for more space in the form of classrooms and a multi-purpose hall.
- Counselling on all levels is outstanding. This includes peer mentoring, one-on-one tutoring, tutor support and pastoral care. Referrals to other external professional practitioners are made where appropriate.
- A chaplain and Spiritual Committee are on hand to provide spiritual support.
- The support department has grown and is now made up of two educational psychologists, a psychometrist, a part time registered counsellor. The department has been under pressure, but this should be alleviated with the appointment of a learning support specialist.
- The support philosophy has shifted from in-class support of learners to empowering staff to assist the learners in their care.

Attainments:

- Our learners are confident and well-spoken in at least two languages. A number of language options are available. The girls compete in debating and speaking competitions where they do extremely well. They are given daily opportunities to speak in different forums, including chapel, assemblies and meetings. Learners work well in groups and respect the values and differences of others.
- Most learners are not afraid to ask questions and feel that they are safe in the classroom.
- Our learners are numerate and appreciate mathematical concepts in an academic and functional context. Mathematical Literacy is offered for learners who prefer not to take core Maths.
- The school achieves excellent academic, sporting and cultural results, thus setting a high standard for the learners.

Attitudes:

- Learners like that they are part of a relatively new school that is not bound by traditions.
- Learners are able to undertake independent learning. They are curious and keen to find knowledge beyond the classroom. This is evident in their voluntary participation in debates, Olympiads, the *tour de maths* and drama performances.
- The girls are spontaneous and creative and can react quickly and confidently in unusual situations.
- Learners are able to produce exceptional, well-formulated work using research skills.
- Critical thinking and problem-solving underpin the curriculum. There is still need for improvement in this area.
- The Girls' College ascribes to the College Transformation statement and workshops and interventions are organised as necessary. The girls, however, do not see racial difference as a problem, their area of concern is gender difference.
- There are learners who feel that some teachers are difficult to approach. This should be addressed, particularly for the younger grades. The senior girls feel that they have a good relationship with staff and that staff will keep their confidences.
- Girls would like more physical activities that are not linked to sport. The desire for a gym was expressed.
- Girls are proud to be at the school and there is a marked improvement in school spirit. This has become a strong feature of the school.

Progress:

- The school prides itself on the success of its students in every grade. This is as a result of the broad and directed curriculum offered by the school.
- Evidence suggests that most learners are successful in their chosen course at tertiary institutions. There are very few learners who do not go on to some form of tertiary study. The correspondence from

Universities is to be found in the IQAA file. Girls are generally accepted for the courses for which they apply.

- The school has employed a dedicated careers advisor who does psychometric testing and uses tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to assist learners. There are also career expos and information sessions organised for the girls.

Focus Area 2: Functioning of the School

Orderliness:

- A code of conduct is implemented and we strive to uphold expectations rather than to impose rules.
- The policy at the Girls' College is to encourage punctuality without the use of bells. This has led to some learners and staff being tardy, especially after breaks.
- Attendance is regular and control systems are in place. Administration of the registration process is an on-going challenge as staff often forget to complete the register in the mornings. This is an area that needs improvement and is being addressed. Learners who arrive late are required to sign in before going to class.
- The timetable is well-structured with a teacher allocated to each class. Provision is made for absent teachers through a well-administered substitution system. Where a teacher is absent for an extended period of time, locum teachers are used.
- Learners generally know what the expectations are regarding behaviour and manners but a continued focus on greeting and assisting strangers is constantly encouraged.

Security and safety:

- The school is compliant in the following ways:
- School buildings comply with safety laws and regulations and are in good condition.
- The school is aware that the buildings are not easily navigable by persons with physical disabilities. There is need for improvement in this area in the long-term.
- Regularly practised emergency procedures ensure safety. There is improvement in this area.
- Health and Safety representatives and security personnel carry out regular checks on the facilities. Monthly reports are submitted.
- Emergency telephone numbers are clearly displayed.
- Lockers are provided for each learner to secure their possessions.
- Adherence to the use of these lockers requires constant monitoring. Lockers are often a security concern.
- There is a locked cage where lost property is kept. Girls need to take more responsibility for their belongings. Lost property is more of an issue than theft. Items reported as stolen have often been lost and not claimed.
- Key areas of the school and grounds are monitored by CCTV.
- A small group of teachers felt that bullying was of concern but this was not raised by the learners, parents or other members of staff.
- Trained first aid officers and a sick bay facility are available to all.
- In addition, the vertical tutor system and student centre take care of the emotional and psychological needs of learners and teachers.
- It is apparent that parents and learners feel well cared for.

- Many staff and learners have first aid certification. First aid courses are run by the school.

KEY STRENGTHS

- The school achieves excellent academic, sporting and cultural results.
- There is a palpable level of positive energy and spirit. This is a school that never seems to sleep, there is always something exciting happening.
- Learners are confident and well spoken in at least two languages.
- Leadership has become a powerful and dynamic core principle. Through the Seriti philosophy of 'cast a shadow, leave a legacy', learners and staff are given the opportunity to test their leadership skills. Each girl is part of the leadership structures through her membership of a vertical leadership committee, chaired by the Grade 12s. Through the Independent Seriti Programme, girls at any level can initiate their own leadership project. The school lives its belief that everyone is a leader in some way and highlights servant leadership.
- Wonderful opportunities are given to learners through our membership of the Round Square organisation. Learners go on international exchanges, host international exchange students, go on excursions and attend conferences. Numerous opportunities are provided for career initiatives, outings, tours, camps, both overseas and local, through entrepreneurship programmes, information technology and sporting and cultural activities.
- Teacher development is an area of huge strength due to the numerous professional development opportunities made available through conferences, user groups, workshops and courses. The school has become more targeted in the development offered in order to meet the needs of the individual and the school.
- New and exciting initiatives are often introduced by staff who have been given the freedom to pursue their areas of interest.
- Counselling on all levels is excellent with busy and well qualified support staff along with tutor support and pastoral care.
- Our school prides itself on the students being successful in each grade and in particular the successful levels of progress attained by girls with barriers to learning.
- A chaplain is on hand to offer spiritual support. There is a very caring attitude towards learners in the school and the girls are also very good at nurturing one another.
- There is also a very strong ethos of community service in the school. Community service commitment is seen as central to the school's essence. Community service is seen as part of servant leadership.

MAJOR STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

PREVIOUS REPORT: SEPTEMBER 2007

Major Strengths

- Girls feel that they are treated as individuals.
- Staff are kept up to date and the curriculum is appropriate.
- Staff are well-qualified.
- School has a good and appropriate assessment system.
- Students are confident, have a good attitude to school and an excellent work ethic.
- Learning support is excellent.
- Learners make good progress and are successful after school.

Improvements

- Expectations for learners and staff needed to be better planned to avoid overload on learners and staff.
- More independent learning was needed in the GET phase. Grade 7 teachers should be included in the planning.
- Homework guideline documents are required.
- Phase planning and communication needed to enhance enrichment programmes.
- Regular 'health' checks would help to remedy staff morale.
- Criteria for staff appraisal would be formulated through HR department.
- Evaluate reporting of assessment to ensure stakeholders are aware of feedback. The assessment policy was to be address.
- A multipurpose hall and drama venue is needed.
- Additional learning support staff is a necessity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION ON School Improvement

Focus Area 1: Learning and Teaching

	RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTIONS	
		Person Responsible	Time frame
	School needs to investigate why some girls, particularly the lower grades, feel that staff are unapproachable.	Pastoral Directors for Gr 8 & 9	End of Term 1 2014
	Class sizes need to be assessed to ascertain if some classes, particularly classes in the lower grades, are too large.	FET Campus committee & Rector	End of Term 3 2013
	The staff appraisal system need to be bedded down and made understandable to all staff.	Deputy Head and New Appraisal Team	½ Term 3 2013
	The need for more space and a multi-purpose hall must continue to be explored.	Head & Ops Director, College Exec & Council	End of Term 3 2014
	A more accommodating and flexible assessment planner needs to be implemented.	Academic Council & Academic Deputy	End of Term 3 2013
	Parents are critical of the school. Better communication and understanding needs to be put in place.	GC Exec & PTA	End of Term 1 2014

Focus Area 2: Attainments and Progress

	More work can be done to enhance critical thinking skills.	Academic Council	Term 2 2014
	More extension work is needed to cater for all girls not just those with learning barriers.	Academic Support Department	Term 3 2014

Focus Area 3: Functioning of the School

	Security of possessions is of concern and strategies to ensure the safety of learners' possessions must be further investigated.	Deputy Head & Campus Security Committee & PTA	Term 3 2014
	There are still occasions when staff and learners are late for lessons. Punctuality needs to be valued more highly.	Head	Term 3 2014
	On the whole discipline at the school works well but the junior	Seriti Directors Gr 8 & 9	Term 1 2014

	girls need to be reminded of the expectations and need a more structured approach to discipline. The approach needs to be more consistent and understood by girls.		
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MAINTAINING EVALUATORY ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

The evaluation process was seen in a positive light.

Staff would like to continue with observation of best practice in lessons.

Learners liked the idea and experience of the focus group and there are plans make more use of this in the future.

The use of Google forms used to gather survey information has been recognised and will be a useful way to generate feedback in the future.

The School Improvement Programme will be kept as a permanent item on the Executive agenda.

Staff development will be maintained as a priority.