

ST STITHIANS GIRLS' PREPARATORY



An internal evaluation conducted under the auspices of the Independent Quality Assurance Agency

March- June 2013

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INTRODUCTION

School's name: St Stithians Girls' Preparatory

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Date of evaluation: 11 June 2013

Date of previous evaluation: 2007

Model 2013: Core

Model 2007: Comprehensive

DESCRIPTIVE BACKGROUND

St Stithians Girls' College opened in January 1995 with classes ranging from Grade 0 to Grade 3. The new buildings rose rapidly at their site on the other side of the rugby fields, looking across to the Boys' College and Preparatory School towards Sandton in the distance. 1996 saw the school grow dramatically to offer classes from Grade 0 to Grade 6 and Grade 8 to Grade 12, with a total of 517 pupils. 1997 was the first time Grade 12 girls wrote the Matriculation Examination. At present, the Girls' Preparatory is independent from the Girls' College, where girls enter at a Grade 3 level and leave at the end of their Grade 7 year. St Stithians Girls' Preparatory has a total of 394 learners and 45 staff members. The Girls' Preparatory is nestled in the heart of a 105 square meter campus, where girls have access to a wide variety of facilities from sports fields to tennis and squash courts, a gymnasium, Astroturfs, an aquatics centre, an extensive resource centre, a bird sanctuary, nature trail, chapel, labyrinth, and the recently built Higher Ground restaurant and One and All function venue.

St Stithians College offers an alternative educational model, the co-ordinate model, which offers pupils the best of both worlds. This means that the Girls' Preparatory maintains single-gender schooling, while integrating the learning experience with boys, where this would be educationally beneficial to both schools. The Girls' Preparatory is committed to upholding the Christian values and principles, as established by its Methodist founders. The girls attend chapel once a week and receive weekly 30 minute religious education lessons. The school also observes all events on the Christian Calendar. The Girls' Preparatory, together with the other schools on campus, engages the learners in community service opportunities, through our unique Servant Leadership Programme. Learners at the Girls' Preparatory develop an understanding that they have responsibility to be in the world, contributing to the well-being of others.

Members of staff are expected to be committed to the school's teaching and learning policy, which underpins the school's practises around inclusive education where all learners are given the opportunity to learn and reach their full potential. The staff has also been expected to incorporate thinking skills or cognitive education into their

daily teaching practises. In 2010, collaborative workshops were introduced to teach thinking and leadership skills each term to every grade. From 2012, thinking skills became a timetabled lesson once a week. These skills are integrated into daily facilitation and staff development and currently the Girls' Preparatory is working towards accreditation as a thinking school from Thinking Schools International, Exeter University.

COMPLIANCE

St Stithians Girls' Prep is fully compliant with the ISASA requirements for membership. The compliance form was completed by Lynne Rivet Carnac and Jill Wheater for all of St Stithians College schools.

AREAS OF OPERATION

- **Teaching, Learning and Attainment**

Curriculum

Learning

Resources and support

Ethos

Assessment

Attainments and attitudes

Teacher development

Support

Progress

- **Functioning of the School**

Policies

Finance

Facilities

Conduct

Security and safety

Health care

Communication

MEANS AND METHODS

The team used the following means and methods to obtain evidence:

- Opinion surveys
- Class visits
- Focus group discussions

OPINION SURVEYS

Opinion surveys were handed out to pupils and parents on Monday, 4 February, 2013. The learners were given the opportunity in class to complete the forms, while parents were requested to return the forms by Thursday, 7 February. Parent forms were handed out. Parents were notified via a detailed email and sms as to the process and required deadlines. Due to absenteeism, we received a 98% return of pupil forms, while the return from parents constituted approximately 90%.

In general, most parents were of the opinion that their children were happy at school and that all their academic needs are being met by teachers who are professional, caring and fair and who communicate well with both learners and parents. Parents also believe that their children are highly involved and appropriately stimulated beyond the walls of the classroom, where facilities are perceived to be of an exceptional standard. An area of concern that emerged was that some parents felt team selection was not adequately communicated by outside coaches and the variety of extra murals was possibly not wide enough to cater for the diverse needs and interests of the learners. Coaching was questioned by a small percentage of parents and clarity was offered by the Sports Director at the Parent focus group. Better understanding of the school's motivation to employ outside coaches needs to be further communicated.

The pupil opinion survey showed that they are happy at school and that they respect their teachers. Learners thought that the school offered a high standard of education and that they were making good academic progress. There is a general feeling of pride and a sense of belonging within the Girls' Preparatory. Some learners, however, indicated that they found it difficult to approach their teachers with problems. Learners across the grades indicated experiences of bullying and

friendship issues as well as a general disrespect for safety of belongings and others' possessions.

Members of staff are happy at the Girls' Preparatory and enjoy being engaged in the learning process with the girls, as they are allowed the opportunity to teach in an innovative and flexible environment. An area of concern is that some girls have not developed adequate social skills in dealing with classmates and friends within challenging social and conflict situations. Another area of concern is that classroom availability and physical space is compromised and specialist teachers who share venues have difficulty ensuring that the physical environment is optimum for the objectives of the lesson.

CLASS VISITS

A class visit timetable was drawn up and both an IQAA team member as well as a member of teaching staff visited every teacher's lesson during the assigned week. It was stressed that this was not a critical evaluation but rather an opportunity to observe the teaching and learning practises that take place in the Girls' Prep in accordance with the College's Teaching and Learning Policy.

Curriculum: Although the CAPS document is adhered to, teaching and learning at the Girls' Prep is not restricted by it. Classroom atmosphere is characterised by innovative and flexible teaching, where learners are fully engaged in critical and creative learning.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Parents were invited to participate in open focus group discussions around extramurals at the Girls' Prep and the safety of learners' belongings. The attendance by parents to these forums was disappointing. An opportunity for parents to provide written feedback was given. One e-mail was received regarding the extra murals offered at the school. No written feedback was received regarding safety of belongings.

TEAM'S FINDINGS

Through the parent, learner and teacher surveys as well as the classroom observation visits, focus groups and IQAA team discussions, the IQAA team highlighted the following areas of strengths and concern:

AREAS OF OPERATION

- **Teaching, Learning and Attainment**

	Strengths	Concerns
Curriculum	Our curriculum together with the CAPS Document continues to embrace relevant material, encouraging creative, critical thinking based on the South African Curriculum.	In the past, Additional Language teaching was considered to be below the required standard due to the shortage of contact time. This was because learners were required to take <i>two</i> additional languages until the end of Grade 6. This has been reviewed and since the start of 2012, learners have been allowed to take only one additional language, from grade 3, thus allowing additional teaching time and focus.

<p>Learning</p>	<p>Timetabling allows for flexibility and student choice where necessary. In the case where children are coping academically, they may be excused from one school-appointed lesson during the school day to attend a music lesson in an instrument of their choice. Girls in grade 4 are afforded the opportunity to try out an instrument for a set amount of time thereby allowing them to be exposed to various instruments; which they may choose to study further. Another unusual feature of our school is Additional Language choice. Up until the end of Grade 3, the girls are exposed to three additional South African languages; seSotho, isiZulu and Afrikaans. They are then allowed to choose their preferred Additional Language from Grade 4, which will continue to Matric. The school does, however, accommodate the decision to alter their additional language at a later stage, within reason. The timetable is structured in such a way that there is a healthy balance between academic, sporting, cultural and spiritual activities.</p> <p>Learners are given many opportunities to work with materials, both independently and collaboratively.</p>	<p>Shared resources (classrooms, smart boards, Ipads and mini laptops) are not always used to their full capacity, due to time and environmental constraints. Some learning spaces are seen to be cluttered and cramped due to large pieces of furniture, incorrectly sized and placed shelving and general classroom layout.</p> <p>The Science laboratory, in particular, has come under scrutiny as it does not always allow for freedom of movement and adequate scientific investigation to take place.</p>
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<p>Resources & support</p>	<p>Covered outdoor learning spaces are advantageous to the Grade 3's and 4's as they are in a good condition and are used to full capacity.</p> <p>Lessons are differentiated and cater for a wide range of abilities and Thinking Skills and appropriate technology are integrated where necessary. Academic support and in-house counselling are available to all learners. The support department is well established and has a learning support teacher in each grade.</p> <p>Teaching and learning policies are in place and are often reviewed.</p> <p>Technology is improving and enhancing lessons where necessary.</p> <p>Kids' Club is an after-school facility where learners are engaged in meaningful activities while waiting for their parents to collect them. This facility is provided free of charge.</p> <p>The computer laboratory and library is also open until 5:30PM daily for girls to do homework, research and preparation for lessons.</p>	<p>The Grade 4 bathrooms are not in a satisfactory condition as they require maintenance and refurbishment.</p> <p>Teachers prefer to use the main computer lab as opposed to the mobile mini-lab.</p>
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Ethos	<p>The learners are busy and engaged in the learning process in an atmosphere that is positive and encouraging. A focus on the holistic development and wellbeing of the learners is upheld at all times.</p>	<p>Some learners believe that they are subjected to bullying in the Girls' Prep. It seems, however, that the girls misinterpret what bullying is and staff is aware that this title is not necessarily an accurate representation of the situation. There is also a concern that there is a lack of consistent greeting of adults by learners, resulting in the perception amongst teachers, that learners can be disrespectful. It was also found that some girls feel they cannot always approach their teachers. This was far more clustered at a Grade 7 level than in the younger grades and it is thought that this could be related to the learners' age and developmental level.</p>
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Assessment	There is an assessment policy in place, which is continually reviewed, to ensure that assessment practises are continual and authentic. The bi-annual reporting procedure is authentic and allows teachers to give parents accurate feedback regarding the progress of their children. Added to this, teachers are in contact with parents regarding such progress via emails, phone calls as well as formal and informal meetings.	Reporting the progress of children on Modified Learning Programmes is inconsistent.
Attainments & attitudes	One of our means of assuring the delivery of a quality standard is the taking part in Benchmark assessments such as IBT, Core Skills and Shared Assessments. Staff believe that discipline is good and all staff members are committed to discipline and management procedures.	Teachers believe that some girls are unable to listen and follow instructions independently. Not all learners are fully successful in working collaboratively.
Teacher development	Weekly staff skills development meetings are held over two forums, one being a full afternoon where all staff members are present. The other development time takes place during an hour-long staff meeting regarding matters relating to inclusion, counselling and academics. Conference and skills-development opportunities are widely available to all staff. Once attended, the teacher	Continuous teacher evaluation system and teacher appraisal is in place. Staff however are not all in agreement that this system is effective as yet.

	Provides colleagues with in-depth feedback presentations and discussion on implementation in the classroom.	
Progress	Feedback regarding academics and confidence levels of learners from the senior grades and Girls' College are favourable.	

FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL

Policies	<p>All policies are thorough and readily available through the school portal for staff and parents.</p> <p>The school is registered with ISASA and Umalusi.</p>
Finance	<p>An annual budget is drawn up. Department and Subject co-ordinators formulate and manage their budgets.</p>
Facilities	<p>Facilities are generally well maintained.</p> <p>Extra ablutions are needed near sporting facilities.</p> <p>Grade 4 ablutions require maintenance.</p> <p>Bigger or more efficient locker space is required for the older grades.</p> <p>Facilities do not cater for physical disabilities at all spaces.</p> <p>Recycling facilities and greening procedures are outstanding.</p> <p>Sporting facilities, although numerous and outstanding, are shared, which can lead to availability challenges.</p>
Conduct	<p>A code of conduct and discipline document is in place and is adhered to.</p> <p>The majority of students are punctual. There is, however, a procedure for latecomers.</p> <p>Attendance is regular and controlled and absences are followed up with parents.</p> <p>The timetable is well-structured and formatted using a reliable computer programme.</p> <p>A substitution policy is in place, where all classes are supervised.</p> <p>Teachers report that class numbers are too big and this could have an impact on discipline. This is, however, not the case in all subject areas.</p> <p>Behaviour of the girls is excellent and very few major discipline</p>

	problems occur.
Safety and security	<p>The state and safety of buildings is good. A staff member is assigned to the monitoring of safety and security of buildings and practises.</p> <p>Fire drills occur termly; all staff are aware of the fire drill procedures.</p> <p>Safety of students is monitored at all times and a break duty list is issued every term.</p> <p>Kids club is available to parents, at no extra cost, for the supervision of girls in the afternoon.</p> <p>The school is supported by an effective security team.</p> <p>A theft procedure and policy is in place.</p>
Healthcare	<p>A school counsellor is available for immediate emotional concerns.</p> <p>A 'Hurtful Behaviour' report is available for girls to complete when necessary, to protect them from deliberate hurtful behaviour.</p> <p>Referral to outside therapists or agencies takes place where necessary.</p> <p>Staff are trained in First Aid.</p>
Communication	<p>Communication of daily procedures to parents is consistent and effective. Parents require an improvement in the communication of academic and extramural strategies.</p> <p>Academic progress and feedback to parents is authentic and effective.</p> <p>Communication with all stakeholders remains a primary focus for the school executive.</p>

THE 2007 SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In 2007, the school undertook a Model B evaluation and identified certain areas of concern. Many of these concerns have been successfully addressed, although there are still some areas which are under consistent and continual scrutiny in order to develop a way forward.

Successes include:

- There is better communication between staff around homework loads for the learners.
- There is greater fairness and transparency around pupils' needs and as a result, there is no longer the perception that staff favours certain children.
- Pupils are far more aware of the impact on the environment when it comes to waste disposal and are using the appropriate rubbish bins to dispose of waste. An Environmental committee also keeps the girls informed of their role in preserving the school environment. Teachers are to record any learning experiences that pertain to conservation or recycling. This information is then passed on to WESSA and this contributes to the school's 'green' accreditation.
- The staff has been more thoroughly communicated with, regarding other staffs' workloads and there is now a better understanding and less frustration around what each teacher does, in accordance to his/her portfolio.

Concerns include:

- Facility clashes and not enough flexibility in the extramural programme is still an issue. Teachers and coaches skills in the field of differentiating extramural lessons need further development to allow all learners to experience success.
- Pupils did not greet administrative staff and visitors to our school.
- Pupils did not take responsibility for their possessions.
- Parents and pupils still do not always understand the difference between friendship issues and bullying.
- There is a misunderstanding regarding the debate over participation versus competitiveness on the sportsfield.

- Although rewards and recognition policies are well communicated to all stakeholders, clarity and reconsideration is sometimes necessary.
- Parents and staff experience frustration due to the traffic control at the school entrance and at the car parks.
- The staff evaluation or appraisal system did not satisfy the needs of the staff.

THE 2013 SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Concern	Plan of Action	Person responsible	Time Frame
Extramurals: flexibility to accommodate more activities, team selection, communication	Communication of procedures to parents regarding selection criteria.	Sports Director	July 2013
	Improved staff training and development regarding sport.	Sports Director	September 2013
	Flexibility in accommodating range of cultural activities- Report to be compiled	Sian May	September 2013
	Communication regarding frequently asked questions by parents to be developed for website	Kim Lowman	October 2013
Responsibility of possessions and safety of belongings	Newsletter reminder of Facebook page and procedure	Director of communications	September to December 2013
	Reminders to learners regarding management of lockers	Class teachers and tutor teachers	July to December 2013
Friendship issues vs bullying	“Stand Up against Bullying Week’	Counsellor	July 2013
	Bully Box	Counsellor	July 2013
	Class meetings and staff development	Counsellor	July to December 2013
Shared resources (including venues) and improved science lab functioning	Venue allocation	Deputy-Academics	January 2014
	Alterations to Science Laboratory	PTA Fundraising Science Co-ordinator	September 2013
	Technology proposal regarding BYOD (Bring	Deputy Academics	August

	your own device)	Director of Technology	2013
Teacher appraisal system	Receive feedback from staff regarding the new appraisal system after a full cycle.	Deputy Academics	October 2013
	Report to Campus Committee and HR Director	Deputy Academics	October 2013

CONCLUSION

The 2013 IQAA evaluation was a beneficial and successful process for the Girls' Preparatory as it provided opportunity for reflection and the development of an achievable way forward for our school. Areas of strength are the commitment of teachers to the practice of teaching and learning, the variety of resources and the positive nurturing ethos within the school. Communication regarding extramural activities, bullying, shared resources and the teacher appraisal system were identified as areas in need of further development. A school development plan to address these areas has been designed with an action plan and implementation beginning from September 2013.

THANKS

The 2013 IQAA team collaborated well as a unit. Special thanks go to Kim Lowman for co-ordinating the team and for providing the necessary guidance and leadership for the team to conduct the IQAA survey. Team members are thanked for their input during surveys and discussions as well as their individual contributions:

Claire Eskinazi – compiling classroom observation feedback form and arrangement of schedule for classroom visits

Lisa Grainger – co-drawing up of 'hurtful behaviour' survey

Radha Govender – captured and compiled composite numbers from learner and staff surveys

Venishree Moodley – drawing up of 'safety of personal belongings' survey and minute-taking at safety of belongings focus group

Sian May - co-drawing up of 'hurtful behaviour' survey and writing the report

Françoise Blair – writing the report and minute-taking at extramurals focus group

Robyn de Sousa – chaired safety of belongings focus group

Thanks also go to our mentor, Margaret Rudolph for her guidance through the process and her time spent facilitating a focus group with the staff.