Guidelines for Schools

OISESA

Office of Independent
Schools Evaluations
Southern Africa

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Appendices

1. Introduction

The Office of Independent Schools Evaluations, Southern Africa (OISESA) began operating in May 2022 to re-establish the process of quality assurance in ISASA schools, after a two-year hiatus. ISASA's vision, '*Boldly leading the independent schooling sector in its pursuit to provide quality education',* holds its member schools to high standards and requires them to undertake a whole school self-study every six years. As the ISASA-appointed, independent quality assurance body, OISESA strives to establish positive partnerships with independent schools across Southern Africa, using a set of globally aligned *Standards & Indicators* to facilitate institutional reflection for continuous improvement.

Heads of ISASA member schools across Southern Africa were invited to share feedback about the *Draft Standards & Indicators* during June 2022, and several online workshops were held during July to discuss and consolidate this feedback.

OISESA was tasked by ISASA to run a pilot quality assurance programme across a diverse range of member schools during September and October 2022. The pilot programme focused primarily on the relevance and efficacy of the globally aligned *Standards & Indicators* developed by OISESA and sought to establish which types of evidence best enable authentic and reliable data collection. OISESA Mentors gained valuable insights as to what works best for school visits during this phase.

2. The Value of Quality Assurance

OISESA believes that all schools can improve and should constantly seek ways of strengthening their educational programme. The quality assurance process promotes strategic thinking and encourages adaptability – vital for independent schools as they navigate the changing landscape of education in Southern Africa.

Research also shows that for any change to be effective, it needs to come from within. The self-study process encourages schools to examine the relevance of their mission and values by using the *Standards & Indicators* to ask important educational questions and review their current practice. Bespoke *Standards & Indicators* will be provided for ECD and LSEN schools where appropriate.

Working through a process of critical reflection and self-evaluation enables schools to affirm and celebrate their strengths and identify areas of vulnerability. Participation in the process also demonstrates the school's willingness to be held professionally accountable and enhances the school's credibility with its stakeholders and the wider community.

The Mentor works closely with the school to verify the findings of the self-study and provide broad recommendations for improvement, where appropriate.

3. The Quality Assurance Process

These are the steps in the six-year quality assurance cycle:

- ☑ ISASA notifies member schools via email that a quality assurance visit will take place and shares a copy of the *Standards & Indicators*.
- ☑ Schools complete a reply slip to confirm their participation.
- ☑ OISESA communicates the exact dates of the visit to the school and shares the *Guidelines for Schools* and the template for the *Self-Study Report*.
- ☑ The Head, together with the Senior Leadership Team, appoints their Quality Assurance Team and the Team Leader, and begins their self-study.
- ☑ The school sends the OISESA surveys to stakeholders at least six weeks before the visit. Links to the surveys are provided by OISESA and need to be completed within five days. OISESA collates the survey information and shares this with the school to help clarify key focus areas.
- ☑ The Mentor(s) are introduced, and they set up an initial online meeting with the Head to clarify the process, at least six weeks before the onsite visit.
- ☑ The Mentor works with the Team Leader to arrange online training for the team, at least three weeks ahead of the school visit.
- ☑ The school submits their draft *Self-Study Report* to the Mentor at least two weeks prior to the school visit, together with a digital portfolio of evidence.
- ☑ The Mentor completes the onsite school visit over two days.
- ☑ The school submits their final *Self-Study Report* to the Mentor two weeks after the onsite visit.
- ☑ The Mentor completes and shares the *Mentor's Report* with the school.
- ☑ The Mentor submits both reports to OISESA.
- ☑ A Quality Assurance Certificate is sent to the school by OISESA. In addition, schools may add the OISESA logo to their website / letterheads.
- ☑ OISESA sends the final reports to ISASA.
- ☑ Schools complete a feedback report for OISESA.
- ☑ After a period of three years, schools submit a brief *Interim Progress Report* to OISESA.

Terms & Conditions

4.1 Notification & Deferment

- ☑ It is a condition of membership for ISASA schools to undertake the self-study evaluation every six years. ISASA notifies schools of an upcoming visit in the following year, and commissions OISESA to undertake a quality assurance evaluation with each school.
- ☑ OISESA confirms the actual dates with each school. *NOTE:* **These dates are unfortunately not negotiable.**
- ☑ Deferment may be requested by new member schools until the fourth year of their membership. Where a new head has been appointed, a deferment of six months may be requested. Schools need to communicate directly with ISASA in this instance.

4.2 Confidentiality & Ethics

- ☑ During the online training, Mentors will discuss the need for confidentiality with the Quality Assurance Team. Confidential information is any information, relating or belonging to the school which is not generally known to the public and could reasonably be regarded as confidential, and includes information for example about employees, customers, finances, research, and survey data. Discussions in focus groups, interviews and meetings are also to be treated as confidential.
- ☑ As this is a self-study process, Mentors do not need access to personal data or sensitive information in the shared digital evidence folders. Should the school wish to share any sensitive information, it is recommended that this be done in hard copy format, during the onsite school visit, and retained by the school.
- ☑ No individuals will be named in the *Self-Study Report* or in the *Mentor's Report*, other than to outline roles in the Quality Assurance Team.
- ☑ Mentors undertake always to act in the best interests of the schools they work with and take reasonable steps to ensure that the school's confidential information is not disclosed or distributed. They agree to certain confidentiality provisions as part of their contract with OISESA.

4.3 Costs

- ☑ There is no charge for the online training day or the onsite quality assurance visit, as this forms part of schools' annual ISASA membership fee.
- ☑ In addition, OISESA covers any travel and accommodation costs incurred by Mentors. However, should a school cancel or change the dates of the onsite visit for any reason, they will be responsible for any additional charges impacting travel and accommodation.

4.4 Ongoing Support

- ☑ ISASA contracts OISESA to complete each quality assurance visit, for a finite period. For this reason, Mentors are unable to provide ongoing support to schools they have worked with.
- ☑ Should a school need further assistance with implementing some of the changes, they are encouraged to reach out to the relevant Regional Director or to the ISASA offices. Contact details are available on the ISASA website.

4. Setting Up the Quality Assurance Team

- ☑ The process of the self-study should be inclusive and collaborative, using as wide a range of staff members as is feasible. The Head, together with the Senior Leadership Team, appoints the members of the Quality Assurance Team.
- ☑ The Head plays an important role and is included in all aspects of the process – as much as time will allow.
- ☑ The Head elects a Team Leader to ensure the smooth running of the process, to arrange focus groups, and to coordinate the evidence collected by the team members for the *Self-Study Report.* The Team Leader works closely with the Mentor and is the primary point of contact between the school and OISESA.
- ☑ The Head and the Quality Assurance Team allocate areas of responsibility for evaluating each of the standards. This will vary widely depending on the resources available, and may for example involve the whole staff, or only the Senior Leadership Team, or a mix of HODs, Grade Heads and Classroom Teachers. OISESA encourages the school to use this exercise as a rich professional learning opportunity for staff.
- ☑ The Head elects a Report Writer who will write and refine the final *Self-Study Report*, using the template provided by OISESA.

5. Beginning the Self-Study

- ☑ The Quality Assurance Team familiarise themselves with the *Standards & Indicators* and meet to discuss the school's alignment with each standard. They may suggest including other focus areas, depending on the mission and the needs of the school, the results from the surveys, as well as recommendations from previous quality assurance reports.
- ☑ The **standards** focus on the important aspects of the overall concept, whilst the **indicators** are used to show that a standard has been met. Schools might choose to use different indicators where appropriate or decide that a particular indicator is not relevant. Any variation must be discussed with the Mentor and mentioned in the list of evidence provided.

- ✓ The standards use general terms like 'effectively' and 'appropriate'. These terms are applied within the context of the school's mission and values, as what applies in one school may not mean the same in another context.
- ✓ The school may decide to review their existing Mission Statement as needed.

6. Collecting Evidence

The Quality Assurance Team begin to gather and review evidence to ascertain the school's alignment with each standard.

- ✓ Data collected will consist of both **quantitative** and **qualitative** data. Quantitative data include, for example, the analysis of numerical data like test scores, rating scales, checklists, and surveys. Qualitative data include, for example, observations, interviews, and surveys, and are often more narrative in format. Existing documents and records are also relevant, such as attendance records, minutes of meetings, lesson plans, policies, student portfolios, and so on. A list of examples of evidence is provided in *Appendix A*.
- ✓ The Quality Assurance Team is encouraged to use a variety of data collection techniques, to ensure that the evidence provided is authentic and reliable; however, it is not necessary to provide copious amounts of evidence for each standard.
- ✓ In addition, evidence collected via an alternative quality assurance process is acceptable, for example, a current NOSA Certificate would suffice, or recent UMALUSI accreditation documents, where appropriate.
- ✓ Schools are encouraged to provide as much of the evidence as possible in digital format at least two weeks before the onsite visit. There is not sufficient time for Mentors to check all the evidence thoroughly during visit itself. This will also allow the opportunity for informed questions during the visit.
- ✓ It is not necessary for schools to share personal or sensitive information with Mentors. For example, a letter from the school's auditors confirming a recent audit would suffice, rather than providing access to financial statements, and so on.
- ✓ Mentors will not check every individual policy – a signed statement from the Head confirming which policies are in place and up to date will suffice. However, they may request to see a particular policy if it is needed as part of the discussion for a particular standard.

7. Rating Strengths & Identifying Challenges

- ✓ The Quality Assurance Team meets to identify strengths and challenges and examine ways in which the school might strengthen and improve certain areas of vulnerability. The survey results are helpful here.
- ✓ Using the *Self-Study Report Template*, a summary of reflections for each standard should be compiled, together with an overall self-rating for that standard.

⊘ Standards are rated using the following scale.

Rating	Description
5	Excellent • Consistently exceeds expectations
4	Very good • Consistently meets expectations
3	Good • Meets most expectations
2	Needs improvement
1	Not achieved, yet
N/A	This rating would be discussed with the Mentor and with OISESA before the self-study process

NOTE: The use of half numbers is acceptable.

8. Online Training

⊘ Mentors reach out to Heads to set up a date for the online training at least three weeks prior to the school visit and obtain details of the Team Leader who will be the primary contact. The online training is run by the Mentor.

⊘ The purpose of the online training is to establish contact with the Quality Assurance Team and to begin discussing and reviewing the self-study process.

⊘ The session takes between 5 – 6 hours, depending on the school's requirements. The school may elect to split this into two separate sessions, in discussion with the Mentor.

⊘ It is helpful for the Quality Assurance Team to have read and understood the guideline documents thoroughly. Having printed copies of the *Standards & Indicators* and the *Self-Study Report Template* to refer to during the online session is also useful*.*

⊘ The timetable for the onsite visit will be planned to include meetings with members of the team, interviews, class visits, focus groups, and so on.

⊘ The Mentor will make a recording of the meeting, with permission, and share it with the school if required.

9. The School Visit

- The Mentor undertakes a two-day in-person visit to the school, on the dates stipulated by OISESA.
- During the visit, the Mentor will confirm the findings of the *Self-Study Report* and verify the school's rating alignment with the *Standards & Indicators*.
- The Mentor writes a report affirming strengths and making recommendations for improvement, which is submitted together with the school's report two weeks after the school visit.
- The Mentor will visit a small selection of classes to better understand the school's educational programme. Brief verbal feedback will be given to the teacher immediately after the observed lesson; however, the focus is not on individual teachers' performance, rather on *Teaching & Learning* across the school.
- Mentors will not assess the religious curriculum in faith-based schools. However, an understanding of its impact on the school's mission, ethos, culture, and climate, and so on is helpful.
- Interviews, focus groups and meetings will also be held, in discussion with the Quality Assurance Team. Protocols for focus groups are provided in *Appendix B*.

10. The Self-Study Report

- ISASA requires a separate *Self Study Report* for each phase of the school that has its own Mentor.
- Stand-alone schools will only submit one report.
- Certain sections of the report may be repeated, for example in matters of governance or admissions, but schools need to ensure that each report respects the nuances of different perspectives across the phases.
- The document is submitted as a Word document to the Mentor who may make recommendations and changes before the final version is completed.
- Final reports are submitted as pdfs.
- The report does not include actual evidence.
- *NOTE:* Schools are encouraged to keep their reports concise, with a more strategic focus, rather than listing every detail.

11. Conclusion

- Once the reports have been submitted to OISESA, and approved, a Quality Assurance Certificate will be emailed to the school. Schools may request a hard copy of the certificate from info@oisesa.org.
- The school may also publish the OISESA logo on their website / letterheads, to signify their compliance.

- ☑ Schools are requested to share feedback with OISESA after the visit to help continue refining and developing the process to best suit the needs of schools in Southern Africa.
- ☑ After a period of three years, schools will be required to submit a brief interim report to OISESA, detailing their progress in terms of the recommendations, using the template provided. OISESA will contact schools ahead of this process.

Appendices

A: Examples of Evidence

The following suggestions are merely examples of the type of evidence schools might provide. This list is by no means complete, nor should schools be expected to provide examples of all these types of evidence.

NOTE: Where a policy is provided as evidence, there must also be some reference to the ways in which the policy is implemented.

- Survey results from parents, students, and staff
- Notes and numerical data from any recent evaluation processes undertaken by the school, including focus groups, surveys, and interviews
- Current Mission Statement
- Statement of Values / Beliefs
- Annual Reports
- Newsletters
- School Magazine
- Website information
- Current Admissions Policy
- Example of a Parent Contract
- Relevant information about the Board, including ways in which Board members are elected / Evidence of self-evaluation / Length of service / Training provided / Minutes of recent meetings / Communication from the Board regarding their activities and decisions
- Finance:
    o Management letter from the auditor confirming that the school has the controls and systems in place to manage its finances appropriately / risk matrix
    o A copy of signed annual financial statements
    o Declaration of a 'going concern' from the auditor to confirm the school's financial sustainability
- A letter from the relevant insurance company regarding adequate insurance cover
- Current Strategic Plan
- A statement from the Head confirming that the necessary policies are in place and reviewed regularly

- ☑ Documents and policies relevant to the school's culture and climate

- ☑ A copy of the Curriculum Statement

- ☑ Policies relating to *Teaching & Learning*

- ☑ Examples of assessment tools demonstrating student progress

- ☑ Reports

- ☑ Results

- ☑ Examples of student work: exercise books, tests, photographs, journals, portfolios, digital portfolios, recordings, and so on

- ☑ A copy of the Co-Curricular Programme

- ☑ A list of recent professional learning opportunities provided to staff

- ☑ Examples of communication with parents

- ☑ Examples of communication with former students

- ☑ Documentation outlining Learning Support Services / Counselling and Guidance services / other support structures in place

- ☑ Staff Code of Conduct / Handbook

- ☑ Student Code of Conduct / Handbook

- ☑ Parent Code of Conduct

- ☑ A statement from the Head confirming current employees' compliance with the legal provisions outlined in the *Standards & Indicators*

- ☑ Crisis Management Plan

- ☑ Evidence of up-to-date contact information for students and parents

- ☑ Provision for medical emergencies

- ☑ Records of fire drills and other safety protocols

- ☑ Documents relating to *Health & Safety*, such as certificates, policies, and minutes of meetings

- ☑ Maintenance plans

- ☑ Polices, handbooks and other material relevant to the Boarding Programme where applicable

B: Protocols for Focus Groups

1. The Purpose of the Focus Group

The purpose of a focus group is to explore different perspectives and opinions to obtain qualitative information about a topic. The relevant information that is gathered will be used in writing the school's *Self-Study Report*. Any solutions suggested during the meeting will be reviewed by the school's management and may or may not be used in forming the school's Development Plan.

2. The Ground Rules

The following ground rules should be explained, by the Chair, to all participants at the start of the focus group meeting. These rules are in place to provide a safe structure and to establish a feeling of trust in the process.

- ☒ A time limit will be set, and the group needs to adhere to that limit.

- ☒ All participants are asked to turn off their cell phones, or to put them on silent, for the duration of the meeting.

- ☒ Matters discussed during the meeting must be treated as completely confidential. No one may repeat any opinions or issues raised in the meeting to anyone who was not present in the meeting. The discussion forum must provide a safe space for participants to share their opinions.

- ☒ The meeting will be recorded, with the participants' permission, so that the school can refer to anything said if they require greater detail than provided in the minutes. No other recordings of the meeting may be made.

- ☒ Everyone is encouraged to participate actively, to take turns speaking, to avoid private side conversations, and to treat everyone's contribution with respect. Please share your opinion, even if it differs from that of others – it is important to gather all points of view.

- ☒ Since the purpose of the meeting is to gather general information about a key focus area, participants are asked not to mention any individuals by name. Personal attacks on individuals undermine the integrity of the process. Any personal attacks will be stopped, and the conversation will be redirected.

3. The Role of the Chair

- ☒ The Chair opens the meeting, introduces the participants (or asks them to introduce themselves) and outlines the purpose of the meeting.

- ☒ The Chair then explains the ground rules and checks that participants are comfortable with the meeting being recorded.

- ☒ The Chair hands over to the Mentor who will ask questions about the topic.

☑ Should anyone contravene the ground rules, the Chair will contain the situation immediately and re-direct the conversation. Participants who are unable to conform will be asked to leave.

☑ Chairs should monitor the time and end the conversation before the prescribed period is completely up, if necessary, to ensure that there is time to thank participants.

Contact details for OISESA

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