



ST BENEDICT'S

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE 2013 CORE EVALUATION
CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
INDEPENDENT QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY**

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1.	INTRODUCTON	3
2.	THE PROCESS	3
3.	OVERVIEW	4
4.	FINDINGS	
4.1	Compliance	4
4.2	Management and Governance	5
4.3	Academics	5
4.4	Homework	6
4.5	Extramurals	6
4.6	Discipline	7
4.7	Relationships	7
4.7.1	Care and Happiness	
4.7.2	Approachability	
4.7.3	Respect	
4.8	Bullying and Discrimination	8
4.9	Parent Involvement and Support	9
4.10	Facilities	9
4.11	Safety and Security	9
4.12	Staff Matters	10
4.13	College Specific	10
5.	MENTORS' IMPRESSIONS	10
6.	RECOMMENDATIONS	11
7.	ENDORSEMENTS	12
8.	CONCLUSION	12

1. INTRODUCTION

An Independent Quality Assurance Agency (IQAA) Core Evaluation was undertaken at St Benedict's during the course of Term 2, 2013 to ascertain compliance with the standards set by the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA) and to evaluate attitudes and standards within the school that may inform the school's development and improvement over the course of the next five years.

The 2013 Core Evaluation focused on two areas:

- (a) Teaching, Learning and Attainment, and
- (b) the Functioning of the School.

The last such evaluation was conducted in 2007 and it is interesting to note that most of the developments and improvements which have occurred at the school over the course of the last five years were highlighted as areas for improvement in the 2007 Reports.

IQAA assigned three experienced mentors to assist the school with the process: Cathy Ablett for the Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3), Cheryl Kondon for the Primary Phase (Grades 4 – 7) and Kevin Tait for the College. Kevin Tait also functioned as the co-ordinating mentor.

Each of the school's three sections established School Evaluation Teams which conducted the evaluation processes. The Executive Headmaster and Headmasters were kept informed but remained uninvolved. The Junior Preparatory team consisted of 4 staff members under the leadership of Marion Mackinnon and the Preparatory team consisted of 7 staff members under the leadership of Deon Oerson. Toby Craig led the College team which consisted of 18 staff members. The co-ordinating mentor reported that the size of the teams resulted in a high degree of "buy in" and "ownership" of the process by the rest of the staff.

2. THE PROCESS

The process began with comprehensive questionnaires being sent to parents, students and staff. The complete surveys were boxed and mailed to the Independent Quality Assurance Agency where they were counted. The opinion survey results were then processed and analysed in order to ascertain the strengths and concerns of the school community. The results were then returned to the school.

The "approval ratings" cited in this report are a combination of the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses on the surveys.

We are very pleased with the strong affirmations received from all our stakeholders; for example, the average approval rating from parents at St Benedict's is in the order of 94.4%.

The survey results have revealed that our boys are very happy and involved at school and that excellent leadership and management has resulted in high standards being achieved in all areas of school life. Our entire community – boys, parents and staff – are proud of their school and feel safe, respected and cared for.

The surveys also highlighted areas that are a cause of concern. These were investigated by the School Evaluation Teams through the formation of focus groups comprising staff, students and parents. Evidence was gathered from a wide variety of sources to identify more specifically what the issue was and to offer potential solutions. These have been included in the final reports with the view to addressing them in the school improvement plan/s over the course of the next five years.

Evidence was compiled in a preliminary self-evaluation report that was given to the mentors before their visit to the school in June. The mentors came as independent assessors to verify the accuracy of the initial findings reports and in so doing, to add their expertise to the compilation of the final reports.

3. OVERVIEW

Norma Winearls, the Acting Executive Director of the Independent Quality Assurance Agency has described the reports as follows: *“All three reports are excellent: they contain commendable detail, celebrating the many strengths of your vibrant school community without shying away from outlining concerns raised in their findings. The implementation of recommendations from the first cycle is wonderful. It is clear that the school takes seriously the task of creating a culture of quality assurance.”*

Norma Winearls also highlights the following from each of the mentor’s reports:

Cathy Ablett comments that the Junior Preparatory has *“excellent facilities”*, that children have *“a very productive and worthwhile day at school”*, and that *“lessons are educationally sound”* and undertaken in classes that are *“both interactive and welcoming”*. She adds that *“a sense of fun and enjoyment prevails”* and that teachers go out of their way to encourage a happy environment where children are confident enough to learn and to make friends.

Cheryl Kindon, the Preparatory School mentor, was impressed by the *“happy, involved and very polite”* children and the *“professional approach of the staff”*. She also comments on the *“commitment to maintaining a strong Christian ethos”* and the *“adoption across the whole community of a common ethos of care and concern”* which characterised the *“close school community”*

Kevin Tait applauds the *“commitment of the staff”*, the *“pride and loyalty to the school”* shown by the administrative staff and the boys and the obvious care of the staff towards the learners. His impression of St Benedict’s College is that it is *“a well-run school with experienced and capable staff”* that offers *“outstanding value for money”*. He refers to the learners as being *“well-mannered, articulate and friendly”* and affirms the excellent school discipline.

The intention of this Executive Summary is to provide an overview of the process and highlight some of the findings in each of the sections of our school. It makes no attempt at being fully comprehensive and attempts to steer away from interpreting the results.

Staff, parents and boys are encouraged to read the specific reports published for their section of the school.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Compliance

St Benedict’s is registered with the Gauteng Education Department (EMIS Registration Number: 161448) as an independent school and all three sections of the school have been recognised as *“confirmed candidates”* by UMALUSI. This is currently the highest classification for accreditation of independent schools issued by this state authority.

The school is fully compliant with the requirements for ISASA Membership and Mr Kevin Tait, the co-ordinating mentor, felt that he could confidently endorse St Benedict’s membership with ISASA. Conditions governing membership of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa are available for download on the ISASA website at www.isasa.org

4.2 **Management and Governance**

Our Headmasters provide excellent leadership for our three schools. There is 97% parent approval and 100% staff approval for the role that Graeme Edwards plays as Headmaster of the Junior Preparatory and Preparatory Schools. Grade R parents surveyed also returned a 100% approval rating. Dave Jeffrey – in his first year as College Headmaster – receives an approval rating of 93% from the parents and 97% from the staff.

Our management teams are a credit to our schools with an average rating of 95% from parents and staff. The Preparatory, Junior Preparatory and Grade R Staff unanimously approve of the work being done by their respective management teams. 100% of the Grade R staff believe that the school has *“good policies”*.

In the order of 20% of the Preparatory and College parents express a degree of uncertainty regarding the role played by the School’s Board of Governors. Similar sentiments are expressed by the College staff.

4.3. **Academics**

Opinion survey results reflect a resounding endorsement of the academic standards at St Benedict’s. This is true for all stakeholders in all three sections of the school: 100% of the Junior Preparatory parents and staff, 99% of Preparatory parents and 97% of Preparatory staff and boys. At College level, 100% of the staff concur that the *“schools academic standards are good”*. The same statement enjoys high support from both the College boys (99%) as well as the College parents (98%).

Nine out of ten parents feel that the school keeps them well-informed of their son’s progress and 97% of parents were of the opinion that their sons were making *“good progress”*. Boys seconded this sentiment: 97% of Preparatory boys and 96% of College boys were satisfied with their progress.

100% of Grade R parents felt that their son is *“progressing well”* and that there are *“regular educational meetings with parents”*, that *“teachers are quick to let parents know if there are any problems”* and that reports issued regarding their son’s progress are *“clear”*.

At College level, 78% of boys find their school work *“interesting”*. Although national norms are at 77% for the same statement, this is an area of concern. It is unfortunate that a heavily loaded curriculum, particular at Grade 10 – 12 levels, greatly hampers teachers’ creativity.

At Junior Preparatory level, 100% of the Grade R staff stated that *“Communication between the pre-school and the foundation phases is good”*. 23% of the Junior Preparatory staff believes that there is a need to look at improved processes to facilitate smoother transition between grades, particularly the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4.

97% of Preparatory boys and 93% of College boys feel that staff encourage them to work hard. Unfortunately, 28% of Preparatory boys and 16% of College boys state that teachers *“often complain”* about their work. This exceeds the national norms at Primary (22%) and High Schools (14%).

The survey results certainly underline the good work that is being done at Grade R level. 100% of parents stated that the educational programmes provided cover all disciplines and that activities at this level are *“age appropriate”*, that *“children’s work is well displayed”*. Grade R teachers concurred that the curriculum is age-appropriate and 100% stated that they have *“realistic expectations of Grade R children”*.

4.4. Homework

At Junior Preparatory level, 98% of parents describe homework as “worthwhile” and 100% of staff consider it “meaningful”. Although 100% of Preparatory staff considers homework to be “meaningful”, only 87% of parents agree. 92% of College staff and parents approve of the homework issued to boys.

83% of Preparatory boys and 71% of College boys are “satisfied” with the homework that they are expected to do. At both levels, these percentages are below the national norms of 90% and 75% respectively and the Academic staff is called upon to interrogate the nature, purpose and value of the homework that is being issued.

4.5 Extramurals

As with Academics, the extramural life of the school is active and flourishing as evidenced by the very high rates of pupil involvement in sport and cultural activities.

At Junior Preparatory level:

- 98% of parents indicated that their sons were involved in extramural activities;
- 91% of parents stated that the school satisfied their son’s sporting needs;
- 92% of parents agreed that the school has high cultural standards;
- 100% of staff are involved in the school’s extramural programme and believe that the school’s sporting programme satisfied the needs of the boys’
- 95% of staff approved of the school’s cultural standards;

At Preparatory School level:

- 96% of parents indicated that their sons are involved in activities outside of the classroom;
- 98% of boys agreed and 90% felt that the school satisfied their sporting needs;
- 86% of parents felt that the school satisfies their son’s sporting needs;
- 100% of staff are involved in the school’s extramural programme and all believe that the school’s sporting programme satisfied the needs of the boys;
- The statement “The school has high standards culturally” received strong levels of approval: 95% of parents, 97% of staff and 92% of boys agreed.

At College level,

- 96% of College parents stated that their sons are involved in the school’s sporting programme;
- 93% of the boys supported this statement;
- 92% of the College staff involved in the activities outside of the classroom;
- 92% of staff and 90% of parents felt that the school satisfied learners’ sporting needs;
- 84% of the boys concurred

National norms for “parent satisfaction” regarding schools’ sport programmes peak at 86% for Primary schools and 78% for high schools. “Learner satisfaction” norms in this regard are 89% for Primary schools and 70% for high schools.

Comparisons with the survey results of the 2007 Evaluation reflect the great strides that have been made in developing a rich and vibrant Cultural life at the College over the last five years. Responses to the statement “The school has high standards culturally” have increased from 77% to 95% amongst parents; from 68% to 97% amongst staff and from 73% to 88% amongst boys.

4.6 **Discipline**

Staff throughout the school consider disciplinary processes to be “fair” (Junior Prep and Preparatory – 100%; College – 97%). This sentiment is shared by parents whose responses average at 94%. Preparatory and College boys’ responses to the statement “*Discipline of the school is good*” reflect 91% and 90% approval ratings respectively.

At Grade R level, 100% of both the staff and parent communities agreed that children know and understand “*what is expected of them*”.

4.7 **Relationships**

4.7.1 **“Care and Happiness”**

A high percentage of parents confirmed that their sons are “*well cared for*” within the St Benedict’s environment. This was highest at the Junior Preparatory level where 100% of Grade R and 99% of the remaining Junior Preparatory parents supported the statement. The percentages for the Preparatory school and College were 97% and 95% respectively.

Grade R, Junior Preparatory, Preparatory and College staff unanimously agree that “*Learners are happy at school*”. This judgement is firmly supported by parents in all three sections: 100% of Grade R parents and 99% of Junior Preparatory parents stated that their son was happy at school; and 97% of Preparatory and College parents agreed. 97% of the Preparatory school boys declared that they were “happy” in comparison with 92% of College boys. All Grade R parents agreed that their sons are “*comfortable in a steady routine*” and are “*encouraged to make friendships*”. All Grade R staff concurred that the boys were “*comfortable in a steady routine*”.

97% of Preparatory and 90% of College boys stated that they were “proud” to be part of our school.

4.7.2 **Approachability**

Staff throughout the school see themselves as being easily approachable and open to discussions: 97% agreed that they are easily approached by parents and 96% agreed that they are easily approached by learners. The daily contact that occurs between Junior Preparatory staff and parents means that 99% of parents find the staff approachable. At Grade R level, 100% of parents agreed that the staff were “approachable”. This drops to 89% in the Preparatory School and 92% in the College.

A number of boys experience a degree of difficulty in discussing problems with staff – 34% in the Preparatory school and 29% in the College. Although this follows trends in national norms – 37% at Primary School level and 38% at High School level – it still warrants attention and discussion. Also of concern in this regard is the fact that 31% of College staff believe that “*Teachers do not always treat learners fairly*”.

4.7.3 Respect

On average, 98% of parents in all three sections responded that their *“child’s attitude towards the teachers is good”* and 96% believe that *“My child’s teachers treat my child fairly.”* 100% of Preparatory and 96% of College boys stated that they respect their teachers. College and Preparatory staff strongly agreed with these sentiments. It is of concern that 35% of Junior Preparatory staff feel that boys *“do not have respect for teachers”*.

100% of Preparatory and 98% of College staff felt that teachers show respect for the learners. 95% of Preparatory boys shared that their teachers *“respect and care”* for them. 88% of College boys responded positively to the same statement.

100% of Grade R parents stated that they respect the teachers. At Grade R level, there was 100% approval from parents for the following two statements: *“Children are encouraged to be considerate of others”* and *“Children are encouraged to consider the needs of others in the wider community”*.

4.8 Bullying and Discrimination

In terms of “bullying” and “discrimination”, the following trends emerged from the opinions surveys:

Statement	Junior Prep	Preparatory	College
Parents: <i>“My child is bullied at school”</i>	20%	13%	10%
National Norms	16%	16%	9%
Staff: <i>“Learners are bullied at school”</i>	29%	22%	29%
National Norms	21%	21%	28%
Learners: <i>“I am bullied at school”</i>		17%	8%
National Norms		23%	9%
Parents: <i>“The school does not discriminate unfairly”</i>	97%	93%	87%
National Norms	92%	92%	92%
Staff: <i>“There is no unfair discrimination at school”</i>	82% (Gr R: 80%)	94%	82%
National Norms	87%	87%	85%
Learners: <i>“I am taught to make friends regardless of skin colour, gender or disabilities”</i>		94%	92%
National Norms		94%	90%

100% of Grade R parents described the school as being *“racially inclusive”*.

88% of College boys responded positively to the statement that they are *“encouraged to consider different points of view in discussions at school”*.

Although these trends compare favourably with national norms, there can be no place for bullying or discrimination in our school.

The Junior Preparatory report states that *“Focus group discussions suggest that there is a disjuncture between the definition of bullying and normal rough-and-tumble play, suggesting that a parent education and partnership approach would be beneficial. The boys interviewed spoke positively about their playground interaction, and commented on some obstructive and over-boisterous behaviour rather than what would be described as bullying.”* This sentiment is strongly supported by the high approval ratings regarding “happiness” and “consideration”.

In focus groups it emerged that the issues regarding “unfair discrimination” were linked to the management of staff as opposed to interactions between boys or staff and boys.

4.9 Parent involvement and Support

99% of Junior Preparatory parents, 96% of Preparatory parents and 95% of College parents stated that they felt “welcome” in the school. Parents also asserted that they “support school events” (100% at Grade R level, 100% at Junior Prep level and 97% and 94% at Preparatory and College levels respectively). All Gr R staff agreed that “Parents appreciate teachers’ efforts”.

Perceptions of parent support amongst the learners and staff is slightly lower: 85% of Preparatory Boys and 77% of College boys stated that their parents support school events. 6% of Junior Preparatory Staff, 15% of Preparatory Staff and 19% of College staff responded that parents “do not show enough support for the school”.

A quarter of the parents admitted to being “critical” of the school (Preparatory – 25%; College – 28%). Although these figures compare favourably with the current national norms (Primary School – 33%; High Schools – 36%), parent support is an area which requires attention.

All Grade R parents agreed that “Communication with parents is good”.

4.10 Facilities

Across the board, all our stakeholders believe that the “school’s facilities are good”. With one exception, scores throughout the schools and their constituencies were in excess of 98%. At 87%, the support was slightly less amongst the College boys. This reflects their desire for specialist facilities for Basketball, Squash, Music and Drama.

96% of boys in the Preparatory and the College agreed that they have “internet facilities” at school.

Grade R parents stated that the classrooms are attractive (100%) and that there is an “efficient” aftercare (92%).

There was very strong approval for the Grade R playground equipment. Parents consistently exhibited 100% approval ratings in this regard: “The buildings and playground are well planned and safe” (100%); “The playground has a good selection of apparatus” (100%) and “The apparatus is safe” (100%). These scores were strongly supported by the Grade R staff. Both parents and staff agreed that boys experience “creative play at school”.

4.11 Safety and Security

100% of Grade R parents and staff expressed satisfaction regarding the security of the Junior Preparatory School. 95% of Grade R parents stated that “children are safe” and 10% of parents admitted that they do not “always call for [their] child before the official closing time”.

98% of Preparatory and College and 97% of Junior Preparatory parents stated that their “child feels safe at school”. 100% of Junior Preparatory and Preparatory and 97% of College staff seconded this sentiment. On average, 94% of Preparatory and College boys responded positively to the statement “I feel safe and secure at school”.

There was a 95% approval rating from Junior Preparatory parents and staff for the safety of possessions at school. This continues to be a cause for concern at both Preparatory and College level with approval ratings of no higher than 79%:

Statement	Preparatory	College
Parents: <i>My child’s possession are safe at school</i>	79%	73%
Staff: <i>Possessions are safe at school</i>	73%	75%
Learners: <i>My possessions are safe school</i>	73%	70%

4.12 **Staff Matters**

Staff, throughout the school, expressed concern regarding class sizes. 53% of Junior Preparatory staff, 15% of Preparatory staff and 20% of College staff stated that “*Class sizes are too big*”. Preparatory boys concurred at 17%. Only 12% of College boys believe there are “*too many learners in my class*”.

Staff stated that they “*got on well with one another*” (Junior Prep – 100%, Prep – 97% and College- 94%) and that they are “*proud to be at this school*” (Junior Prep – 100%, Prep – 97% and College – 95%). They felt that there were “*opportunities for professional development*” (Grade R – 94%, Junior Prep – 94%, Prep – 100% and College – 88%) and that the teacher appraisal system is effective (Junior Prep – 63%, Prep – 93% and College – 72%).

Staff felt that they had an “*appropriate say in the way the school is run*” (Junior Prep – 71%, Prep – 97% and College – 81%) and that they had opportunities for promotion (Prep – 97% and College – 78%). The response to the latter statement was 47% for the Junior Preparatory which is understandable when one takes into consideration the small staff contingent. All Grade R staff stated that “*Teachers are consulted in the drawing up of policies*”. 60% of Grade R staff stated that there is a “*high level of teacher job satisfaction*”. In focus group discussions with Grade R staff, this was attributed to perceived differences in the treatment and conditions of service of staff elsewhere in the school.

4.13 **College Specific**

College boys responded that there are extra Maths lessons (98%); that the school provides career guidance opportunities (92%) and that the school counsellor is easily accessible (88%).

5. **MENTORS’ IMPRESSIONS**

The IQAA appointed mentors report as follows on their “*impressions*” of each of the sections of our school:

Junior Preparatory – Cathy Ablett

“The school is housed in buildings built with the specific age and gender of the children attending it in mind. The facilities in Grade R – both indoor and outdoor – are excellent, offering each child the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. Classrooms are interactive and vibrant, full of examples of the children’s artistic endeavours. These are delightfully appropriate and appeal to the sense of all who visit the classes. Facilities are well utilised and the focus is clearly on the overall development of each and every child. The children are well settled into their routines and it is clearly evident that they have a very productive and worthwhile day at school. The Grade R programme is detailed and well researched, covering all areas of development necessary for the solid foundation that quality pre-primary education offers.”

All classes in the Junior Preparatory School were visited by the Mentor during the validation day visit....Educators take great pride with their classroom environment and the classes were both interactive and welcoming. The garden section outside each downstairs class adds to the overall positive learning experience for the children. Lessons observed were educationally sound with good educator/learner dialogue. Although not too much group work and differentiation was observed on the validation day, there is evidence to suggest that it does indeed form part of the educational experience of the children.

The educators are aware of the children’s needs and respond in a friendly and nurturing manner. The children were well mannered and polite with the Catholic Ethos of the school clearly evident in the

outreach programme that the school is involved with. The Religious Education lesson observed was incredibly moving and very age and religiously appropriate. So too the music lesson – a highly enjoyable and enriching experience.”

Preparatory School

Cheryl Kindon, the Preparatory School mentor, chose to highlight the following impressions:

- ✓ *The pupils were happy, involved and very polite*
- ✓ *The care and concern displayed by the Principal and members of staff for their pupils was most striking;*
- ✓ *The comprehensive programmes available to all pupils and the professional approach of the staff to their charges are impressive;*
- ✓ *The gardens are most attractive and immaculate;*
- ✓ *All the grounds and buildings are well maintained;*
- ✓ *The classrooms are very well equipped;*
- ✓ *A wide range of sporting and cultural activities are offered to boys*

She adds that she was *“so impressed by the teaching that is happening in the school. In each of the classrooms I visited I observed well planned lessons in neat and appealing surroundings”*.

College

Kevin Tait, the College Mentor, writes as follows regarding his general impressions of the College:

“The dedication of the staff to the well-being of the pupils is obvious. The boys are all well-mannered, articulate and friendly. School discipline is clearly excellent.

The long standing hundred percent matric pass rate does not happen without extensive preparation and support for weaker boys. At least half of the pupils at the College come from the Prep school on an automatic entry basis so teachers have to work with the boys they have. Despite this, the school has an enviable reputation for academic excellence.

St Benedict’s is a well-run school with experienced and capable staff in key positions. As policies and planning are finely tuned it is understandable that newer or younger staff may feel that there are not enough opportunities for them to contribute to policy or to progress through the ranks.

St Benedict’s offers outstanding value for money as its tuition fees are approximately 25% lower than some of the other competitive independent Boys’ Schools in Gauteng.”

He adds *“the sporting facilities easily rank with the best of those of other Boys’ schools in Gauteng. All the classrooms I saw are attractively presented and well equipped with modern teaching media”*.

6. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations for continued school improvement are listed in the respective reports:

Junior Preparatory

The Junior Preparatory Report contained the following recommendations:

- Greater emphasis on collaborative and differentiated learning activities;
- Improved structures to manage the transition between grades;
- Continued improvement of the teacher appraisal system;

- Continued education regarding “bullying” and the need for an awareness programme that highlights the difference between “bullying” and “conflict”;
- Mechanisms to allow for staff into the functioning of the school;

Preparatory School

The Preparatory Report recommends the installation of lockers for improved security.

College Report

The College Report recommends the installation of lockers and continued revision and improvements to campus security.

From an academic point of view, the streamlining of assessment at Grade 8 and 9 levels is recommended.

In terms of capital developments, the report calls for the construction of additional classrooms, a music centre, an indoor basketball centre and squash courts.

The report also notes the need to enlist the services of a Human Resources Manager at the school.

7. **ENDORSEMENTS**

Cathy Ablett, the Junior Preparatory mentor states that the evaluation process in the Junior Preparatory school was *“openly, honestly and efficiently carried out, with appropriate rigour, neither too easy-going nor too harsh.”* Cheryl Kindon expresses similar sentiments and adds that she believes the report *“is a fair and honest reflection of the activities and administration of the school”*. Kevin Tait adds that the College process was *“openly, honestly, painstakingly and efficiently carried out with appropriate vigour. The process has also assisted in re-enforcing the already existing climate of continuous self-evaluation among the staff.”*

8. **CONCLUSION**

The 2013 core Evaluation has been a very constructive and positive experience. It is remarkable how much progress has been made since the 2007. It is also very encouraging to see the strong support and confidence that the St Benedict’s parent and pupil body express in what the school is doing.

The three reports reveal areas which warrant attention and these will certainly enjoy the attention of the school’s management team. The recommendations laid out in the reports will be incorporated and addressed in the school development plan.

We are indebted to all those who have been involved in the process, in particular our boys, parents and staff. Your input into the initial surveys and the subsequent focus groups is greatly appreciated. As always, your opinion is greatly valued.

We must also thank the School Evaluation Teams in each of the schools whose responsibility it was to conduct and conclude the evaluation and quality assurance process. In particular, I must thank the team leaders who guided the teams through their work: Mr T Craig (College); Dr D Oerson (Preparatory) and Mrs M Mackinnon (Junior Preparatory). We express our gratitude to the external mentors who were appointed by IQAA: Kevin Tait (College); Cheryl Kindon (Preparatory School) and Cathy Ablett (Junior Prep School). The mentors have acted as “critical friends” and have guided, advised and monitored the schools’ evaluation teams in planning and carrying out the process and in the reporting on it at the end. The mentors’ contribution to the process has been invaluable and it has been an absolute pleasure working with them.