



ISASA

Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa

Guidelines for Establishing a New Independent School

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GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A NEW INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

I. INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to draw up a set of prescriptive steps for the setting up of a new school as these steps depend to a large extent on the type of school that is being set up. Consequently, it was decided to rather draw up a set of questions that any person contemplating setting up a new school should consider.

It is strongly advised that the services are sought of a highly experienced person who has already been involved in setting up a new school.

2. QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

Begin with the end in mind. You are not building a school to meet present needs only. You are building a school that will last over 100 years. Think about the big picture. What do you envisage the school looking like when it is completely developed?

2.1. Phases

What phases do you intend to cater for, how big do you want the school to grow to and how quickly do you want it to grow?

- Pre-primary Phase: Grades 0000 - R
- Foundation Phase: Grades 1-3
- Intermediate Phase – Grades 4-6
- General Secondary Phase: Grades 7-9
- Further Education Phase: Grades 10-12
- Post Matric phase: Grade 13

2.1.1. What will the medium of instruction be?

2.1.2. What will the maximum class size be for each phase?

2.1.3. How many classes per grade will the school have ultimately?

2.1.4. What will the pupil : teacher ratio ideally be?

2.1.5. Will the school be monastic or co-educational?

2.1.6. What community will the school serve?

2.1.7. Will the target market deliver enough students to enable the school to reach its maximum number of students?

2.1.8. Can your target market afford the fees you envisage?

2.1.9. What other communities could be targeted to recruit more students?

2.1.10. Will the school provide boarding?

2.1.11. What other schools will the school be competing with for students?

2.2. Curriculum

- 2.2.1. What sort of curriculum is planned: academic, cultural, physical, spiritual/moral, social educational activities?
- 2.2.2. What Unique Selling Point (USP) will the school have in order to be attractive to parents and students?
- 2.2.3. What staffing will you require in order to deliver this curriculum?

2.3. Facilities

- 2.3.1. What facilities will you need for this curriculum?
- 2.3.2. How many classrooms will you need?
- 2.3.3. How many specialist rooms will you need – art, music, drama, science, technology?
- 2.3.4. What other facilities will you provide – fields, courts, pool, ablution, hall, canteen/tuckshop, storage, locker rooms, offices (for admin and for teachers), maintenance yard, and parking?
- 2.3.5. What about infrastructure – electricity, water, sewerage, roads?

2.4. Legal Status

- 2.4.1. What sort of organisation are you proposing to set up?
- 2.4.2. Will it be for-profit or non-profit?

2.5. Governance

- 2.5.1. What governance structure are you intending to have? Who will be appointed? How?
- 2.5.2. How democratic will the Board be? What will be the role of parents?
- 2.5.3. What are the responsibilities of the Board and of the Chair of the Board?

2.6. Staffing

- 2.6.1. How do you propose to remunerate your teachers?
- 2.6.2. What will the benchmark for conditions of service be?
- 2.6.3. What conditions of service will you offer – pension, medical aid, housing, 13th cheque, assistance with children's education, leave?

2.7. Management

- 2.7.1. What sort of Head will you be looking for to start up your school?
 - An experienced person who has an established track record?
 - A new Head who costs a lot less and who can grow with the school?
 - A person who has experience of developing a campus?
 - A person with marketing and business skills?

- 2.7.2. What level of salary package are you envisaging for your Head?
- 2.7.3. What will the Head's responsibilities be – has a job description been drawn up?

2.8. Fees

- 2.8.1. How will you benchmark your fee structure?
- 2.8.2. What will be included in the fees – tuition, remedial assistance, books, transport, aftercare, outings, examination fees?
- 2.8.3. How will your fees be payable? Annually, termly, monthly, discounts for early payment, penalties for late payment?
- 2.8.4. What policy will you have on bursaries/scholarships?
- 2.8.5. What policy do you have regarding debtors?

2.9. Capital Costs

- 2.9.1. How will you fund the capital development costs of setting up the school? Desk fee, refundable deposit, debenture scheme, special levy?
- 2.9.2. Where will you go for development finance? What security will be required?
- 2.9.3. What provision have you made for start-up costs?
- 2.9.4. What provision have you made for furniture, equipment and IT hardware?

2.10. Marketing

- 2.10.1. How will you market the new school? Who will do this?

3. SOME BASIC FINANCIAL RULES

3.1. Income

- 3.1.1. Operating income must be met by fee income. One cannot balance the books through fundraising.
- 3.1.2. Teachers and parents will only put up with poor or inadequate teaching facilities, low salaries and a thin programme for a short while. The honeymoon period is only about two years.

3.2. Operating Expenses

- 3.2.1. As a rough guide, the breakdown of operating expenses could look like this:

• Teachers' salaries (including the Head)	70%
• Educational expenses (books, materials, departmental expenses)	10%
• Administration expenses	10%
• Grounds and maintenance expenses	7%
• Surplus	3%
• TOTAL	100%

- 3.2.2. By working out the number of teachers and determining the salary bill, one can arrive at a figure that represents 70% of the total amount that will be needed. This will inform the setting of fees.
- 3.2.3. Setting fees too low, leaving out key aspects of compensation (such as pension, medical aid, and 13th cheque) creates mountains to climb later on.

4. GETTING STARTED

4.1. Useful Points to Bear in Mind

- 4.1.1. Schools starting out tend to be too democratic when it comes to allowing parents to have their say or their way. This often comes back to haunt them when the school grows.
- 4.1.2. New schools should decide on how many students will make the establishment of a new grade viable. They should only agree to open a new grade if this critical number has been reached.
- 4.1.3. Schools demand space. An area of between 6 ha and 12 ha is desirable. Building on too small a site creates enormous pressures later on when the school grows.
- 4.1.4. Think big!

4.2. Things to Do Next

- 4.2.1. Set up a steering committee, preferably with someone on board who has travelled the road previously.
- 4.2.2. Do a feasibility study. What numbers can we expect, will the community support the school, what other schools exist in the area, what facilities are available for the school to use at present?
- 4.2.3. Draw up a provisional mission statement, preferably in conjunction with the founding Head.
- 4.2.4. Register the school with the Provincial Education Department.
- 4.2.5. Set up the legal structures – register the company/trust, apply for NPO and PBO status where applicable.
- 4.2.6. Apply for membership of the school with ISASA (optional but recommended).
- 4.2.7. Draw up a constitution for the above legal entities as well as for the Governing Body.
- 4.2.8. Draw up a financial model which demonstrates clearly the anticipated cash flow over the first five years and the anticipated budget for the same period.
- 4.2.9. Draw up legal documents relating to the capital payment requirement that has been selected.
- 4.2.10. Investigate via ISASA possibility of application for subsidy.
- 4.2.11. Investigate current remuneration levels paid by ISASA and Provincial Education Departments and establish a salary structure.
- 4.2.12. Make application to set up pension and medical aid schemes, if applicable.



- 4.2.13. Draw up financial management guidelines and checklists.
- 4.2.14. Plan to advertise and recruit the right Head. Probably the key decision to be made. The Head ideally should be appointed as soon as the feasibility study has been completed as s/he should be involved in the planning of facilities, drawing up of policies, appointment of staff, etc.
- 4.2.15. Ensure that the incoming Head is aware of the following:
 - Provincial Education Department guidelines for independent schools.
 - ISASA policies on rights and responsibilities of independent schools.
 - ISASA conditions for membership, including requirements for membership and the code of ethical practice.
 - SACE regulations about requirements for teacher registration (www.sace.org.za).
 - Examination centre registration details.
 - Umalusi requirements (www.umalusi.org.za).