

# **Outline of a Tool to Define the Characteristics of Effective Schools**

## **Purpose**

- To inform parents in government schools about characteristics of effective schools and indicators to watch out for.
- To assist parents to take an active part in school improvement.
- To provide a tool for parents to use in their own assessment and decision making about school issues.
- To provide a basis for developing information about parent choice of school.
- To promote parent participation in the learning of their children and in schools.
- To assist schools in providing information to parents and to develop strategies for improvement.

## **Target Audience**

- Parents who are or who wish to be actively involved in government schools (P&C Associations and School Boards).
- Delegates to P&C Council.
- Schools.

## **Contents**

### **PART A – Characteristics**

1. Environment conducive to learning
2. Assessment & reporting on student progress
3. Strong & professional principal
4. Strong & professional teachers

5. Strong organisational framework
6. Well-developed student welfare system
7. Clear positive philosophy
8. Broad, balanced curriculum
9. Support for community and parental participation

**PART B – Indicators**

1. School environment
2. Assessment
3. Principal
4. Teachers
5. Organisation
6. Student welfare
7. Philosophy
8. Curriculum
9. Parent participation

## **PART A: CHARACTERISTICS of an EFFECTIVE SCHOOL**

### **STRONG&PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPAL**

- provides leadership for staff and students
- works co-operatively with parents, the P&C and the School Board
- is available to talk with parents
- strives to improve the school,
- uses resources wisely

### **PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS**

- have positive attitudes and high morale
- broad range of skills and competencies
- elicit optimal student achievement
- develop students' critical thinking, problem solving and creativity
- sensitivity to individual student needs, personality and background
- maintain effective discipline

### **MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT & REPORTING**

- provides reliable information about progress
- enables quality decisions about teaching approaches
- involves assessment which supports learning and provides quality information to parents about student progress
- allows parents to observe and understand their child's progress

## **ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING**

- fosters caring and positive relationships between people
- promotes amongst students a sense of belonging and pride in the school
- has effective behaviour management policies supported by a strong student welfare system

## **STRONG ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

- provides a safe, clean, secure and welcoming physical environment
- ensures sufficient administrative and support staff to maintain effective liaison with the school's community
- institutes staff appraisal and development processes which focus on quality of services provided

## **WELL-DEVELOPED STUDENT WELFARE SYSTEM**

- supports the development of students to their full potential
- is sensitive to individual student needs and background
- addresses difficulties experienced by students effectively and efficiently
- is easily accessed by students and families
- links with community services and resources outside the school

## **CLEAR & POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY**

- recognises that each child is an individual with different needs, backgrounds and aspirations
- develops the full potential of each individual intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically
- recognises that education is a co-operative effort that involves school, teachers, parents and the community;
- provides for student participation in aspects of school organisation.

## **BROAD & BALANCED CURRICULUM**

- provides a range of learning experiences within and beyond the key learning areas
- recognises the diverse backgrounds, needs and aspirations of students

## **PARENT PARTICIPATION & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

- encourages parent/carer community to visit and participate in school life
- recognises that partnership between parents and teachers provides quality learning
- supports an active P&C association
- promotes school and teacher responsiveness to parents' views, inquiries and concerns
- seeks support from and links with the broader community including other schools, business, voluntary and government organisations

## **PART B: EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS - INDICATORS**

### **1. School environment**

- surroundings show that learning is valued (for example, on bulletin boards, classroom displays and hallways)
- clearly defined policies on issues such as discipline and bullying

### **2. Assessment**

- information about student progress is verifiable by external indicators
- approaches to teaching responsive to assessment reports
- a variety of assessment methods are in place
- parents understand how their child is progressing

### **3. Principal**

- Open disclosure of qualifications, experience and competence (including outcome of staff appraisal processes)
- Well regarded by the P&C and the School Board
- Is available to talk with parents whenever needed
- School development plan regularly updated
- Staff morale, including limits to turnover

### **4. Teachers**

- Qualifications, experience and competence are verified
- Limited teacher turnover
- Verifiable knowledge both of subject matter and how to teach children to learn
- Utilise a range of teaching approaches and materials
- Evaluate student progress and change teaching strategies if needed
- Keep students and parents informed of student progress

## **5. Strong organisational framework**

- Appropriate and well-maintained buildings and equipment
- A well stocked and well-used library
- Appropriate class sizes in line with system-wide guidelines
- Effective timetabling and arrangements for student subject choice
- Supported by an effective staff development and appraisal system, which includes time for ongoing teacher training

## **6. Student Welfare and development**

- Access to support staff (for example, counsellors and careers advisers) who understand the school and its community, including for students with special needs and students experiencing difficulties
- Demonstrable links with community support services

## **7. Philosophy**

- Formal statement in place stating that:
- all children can learn if taught
- school has high expectations for all students
- education is a co-operative effort that involves school, teachers, parents and the community
- recognising the importance of both educational and non-educational outcomes from schooling.
- Supported by clearly defined school goals and policies

- Mechanisms in place for student participation in aspects of school organisation and management

## **8. Curriculum**

- All key learning areas and system-wide guidelines are addressed
- Students with special needs, including those with learning difficulties and those requiring accelerated learning are provided for
- A range of extra-curricula activities (for example, music and debating) is provided

## **9. Parent participation**

- Parents regularly involved in student learning and school activities in a variety of ways
- Parents involved in establishing school goals and policies;
- The school works co-operatively with an active P&C association
- Effective procedures in place for communicating with parents
- Quality information given to parents about the work of the school
- Information sought about the level of parent satisfaction with the school
- Parents satisfied with what their children are learning and achieving
- Demonstrable links with other schools, government and community support services. government organisations, businesses and the community broadly
- The school is seen as a key part of the community.