

St Conrad's College – The best investment you can make

Why you made the correct decision to send your child to St Conrad's College

Independent Schooling

At the end of every year we wait in anticipation for the matric results to be announced. Once the results are made public, successful candidates are overjoyed knowing that a part of their dreams has been realised and it's a simple move on to the next chapter in their lives, and often this includes studying at a university. Most schools use these results to boast using the local media as a voice piece to emphasize how many distinctions their respective candidates had achieved. This is undeniably an attempt to reflect on the probable perceived academic quality and excellence practised at these schools. Mary Williams, executive head of Roedean, an independent school in Johannesburg says: "Do these students have the critical and creative thinking skills and capacity and courage to have a voice and to play a meaningful role in society and above all, to challenge the status quo?"

Is it the results, or rather the final product (actual quality of the learner), i.e. a well adjusted and successful, graduated adult who is contributing positively to the country's economy, which determine how schools should be measured? Are schools results - driven or are they preparing children and young adults for life, especially their next chapter in life, i.e. post secondary schooling? For this reason parents who choose independent schools are looking for added value. They want more, better and different. Jane Hofmeyer, the National Executive Director of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa, says that parents are searching for values-based education for their children. "Learners from independent schools excel, particularly in areas of leadership and involvement in volunteer and philanthropic programmes among many others. Their contribution is beyond academic results. Parents choose independent schools for the ethos, values and discipline," she says.

Four characteristics, prized by parents, lie at the heart of independent schooling: independence, accountability, a strong value-base and a commitment to quality.

Independence: As their name suggests, independent schools have the freedom to follow their own distinctive missions, such as a particular ethos, faith or philosophy, and choose their curricula and examinations. They can determine how they will be governed, financed, and staffed, decide on their learner admission and promotion policies, and manage their operations in ways that suit them best. This means that they have more scope and flexibility than their state counterparts to introduce

innovative approaches to teaching and learning, develop and test new educational concepts, and respond to the changing needs of learners.

Accountability: While independent schools cherish their freedom, they have to demonstrate accountability to their constituency and the wider society. Independent schools have to meet government requirements for registration and accreditation, and must be able to demonstrate that they maintain standards that are not inferior to those at comparable public schools.

Strong value-base: Parents choose schools that are rich in values, providing sound discipline in a structured learning environment, where learners learn the importance of hard work, personal responsibility, shared norms and good citizenship.

Quality: Above all else, when parents are paying for their child's schooling they want quality education. Across all geographical locations and socio-economic categories, Independent Schools, especially ISASA (Independent Schools Association of S.A) member independent schools provide:

- Quality educators who are committed and experienced, professional and motivate and inspire learners to succeed.
- *High academic standards.* Research by the Human Sciences Research Council in 2004 showed that, across all fee levels, independent schools produce a higher percentage of Senior Certificate passes and University exemptions than at public schools.
- *Smooth transition to the next level of studies.* Learners from Independent Schools are well-prepared for the demands of the next level of education, especially higher education, i.e. universities.
- Structured, safe, nurturing learning environments with good disciplinary structures, positive values and pastoral care.
- Smaller classes and more individualised attention for individual learners.
- Development of the whole child through a range of curricular options and extra-curricular activities, and opportunities for community service.
- *Quality Assurance* – This assurance is achieved through a very stringent process of accreditation with Umalusi (national regulatory body for standards), which involves site visits; portfolios of evidence and ongoing school monitoring reports which is mandatory to independent schools only. Therefore no state school has to undergo this intensive scrutiny to serve as confirmation of its quality. If the independent school is a member of ISASA, then its quality must also be confirmed through IQAA (Independent Quality Assurance Association). Exceptionally tough benchmarking and standards have to be met and maintained to achieve approval and accreditation to practise as an independent school in South Africa. St Conrad's has been through both of these accreditation processes and, in the process, we have received glowing reports. We are proud that the exceptional quality of our policies and

administration, as well as our teaching and learning are accredited as being exemplary.

More children are being sent to Independent /Private Schools?

There is no denying that private education is quickly gaining traction in South Africa.

‘Parents are losing faith in the public school sector’ and more are opting to send their children to private institutions. A study by the South African Institute of Race Relations revealed that the number of children attending independent schools increased by 50% between 2000 and 2009. There has only been a 1.6% increase in learners attending state schools over the same period. The institute study also revealed that between 2000 and 2009, the North West Province reported the biggest decline in state school enrolment – 15% (Marius Roodt – Institute Researcher).

Simon Lee, the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa’s communication’s manager, says that more parents choose to send their children to independent schools because of the discipline and structure, and because religion is not taught at government schools. He said that parents want the best for their children and that the growth in the independent school environment is a clear indication that parents are “losing faith in the public school sector”.

What is the IEB?

IEB is an acronym for the ‘Independent Examination Board’. The vision of the IEB is to advance quality teaching and learning in South Africa through an assessment process of integrity, innovation and international comparability. The IEB believes in the transformational power of assessment. An often cited criticism of external assessment is that it encourages rote learning on the part of the learners, which leads to a regurgitation of material developed by someone else, often without learners themselves having a deep understanding of its meaning or significance. This is where the IEB’s assessment practices are different. They develop assessment instruments that require a critical response from learners, which demands a critical engagement on the part of learners with learning material.

In other words, the IEB:

- encourages educators to teach learners how to think, not what to think;
- encourages the understanding of questions, not only what the answers are;
- encourages how to critically engage, not what to say;

- encourages learners to consider issues for themselves, to be analytical, reflective and proactive in order to provide unrehearsed, substantiated responses that they, the learners, themselves have developed.

The IEB approach demands of learners to understand how and why knowledge is applied to obtain desired outcomes rather than simply reproducing repetitive lists of information and facts, without any real understanding of their origins, implications and applications in real-life contexts. In essence the IEB assessment addresses the 'how' and 'why' aspects of learning in addition to the 'what'.

The result is a more rounded learner with the ability to apply acquired knowledge in different scenarios and through the process of analysis and deduction, arrive at an answer that follows a coherent thought process that is understood by the learner every step of the way.

What does the IEB offer?

It offers quality-based assessment products and services for educational institutions. Its assessment processes are innovative and internationally comparable, providing credible results, which accurately reflect a learner's level of competence. They are designed to meet legislative requirements where appropriate and are underpinned by efficient and effective administrative systems, up to date developments in the field of assessment and sound organisational values of integrity and quality.

IEB Assessments in Schools:

The IEB provides the following assessments for learners which are used or practised at St Conrad's:

- *The National Senior Certificate (Grade 12)*
The IEB assesses the South African National Curriculum, detailed in the National Curriculum Statements. The IEB examination papers are externally moderated by UMALUSI, the quality assurance body that also oversees the conduct of the examination, marking and finally approves the IEB results. IEB students are among the top performers in the country with an average of 97-98% of Grade 12 learners qualifying for entry to tertiary education at one of three levels of study i.e. degree, diploma or higher certificate. 97.7% of our St Conrad's learners qualified for tertiary studies in 2010.
- *Grade 6 and 9: Core Skills Tests*
This is a non-curriculum based assessment which focuses on the application of skills and knowledge that a Grade 6 or 9 learner should have developed over their period of time at a school. The key focus of the test is on the skills required for effective operation in life and society outside of the formal learning environment. The rationale is that exposing children to a range of thinking skills and complexity from an early age encourages the development

of a disposition that questions beyond the obvious and an inquisitive mind – the key characteristics of an independent thinker and learner.

- *ACER International Benchmarking Tests*

The IEB is in partnership with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to offer the International Benchmarking Tests. These tests can be used by schools to gauge the English, Mathematics and Science achievements of their students in relation to local, national and international standards.

The IEB has established working links with the Australian Council for Educational Research and is in constant contact with international bodies of assessment through its membership of the International Association for Educational Assessment.

Research studies performed at a prominent South African university showed that the success rate of achievement for the graduation of students through their university from students who wrote the Independent Examinations Board examinations (IEB) in matric is exceptionally high. According to one study at the University of Cape Town (UCT), the IEB candidates made up a quarter of all UCT graduates in December 2007. This is a phenomenal feat if you take into account the far smaller number of learners writing the IEB examination, ie approximately 1, 5% of all matriculants, compared to the state examination. The drop-out rate of IEB matrics was 2% compared to an estimated 35% to 50% at SA Universities on the whole.

The comparatively small number of candidates writing the IEB compared to the state matric examinations, also makes the management body of the IEB more accessible and they are able to deal with emergency concessions quickly and efficiently which is an advantage to learners in need.

“The IEB and its schools already contribute significantly to the development and assessment of the state curriculum. The IEB examines all the non-official foreign languages for the department and at its request has partnered it to develop several new assessment initiatives. Independent school teachers and IEB specialists act as critical readers for subject curricula and serve on departmental curriculum reference groups and panels. Using its schools as “test beds” for assessment development, the IEB has also piloted several innovative approaches that have been adopted by the state system” – Anne Oberhozer (IEB Chief Executive)

St Conrad's College – Deus Caritas Est

When I look around at our St Conrad's learners I am delighted that so many have been given the opportunity to benefit from the quality of education we provide. We not only prepare them for secondary schooling, but we also strive to give them the very best start in their young lives. Diversity among our learner population is truly reflective of South African society, giving our children the opportunity to familiarise

themselves, and interact with, children from different cultures, and this exposure and development takes place at a very young age, providing them with a definite advantage once they move onto Higher Learning Institutions and the workplace.

St Conrad's College has a distinctive Catholic ethos grounded in the motto of the Brothers of Charity (Deus Caritas Est – God is Love). Commitment to selfless and loving service of God and the community plays an integral role in our approach to educate our youth. We endeavour to educate our young people to grow up not only to serve, but to also transform their communities in unique and visionary ways. Ultimately backed by our hugely successful track record, our learners progress and develop to make a significant contribution to societal and community development, endorsed and motivated by their values - based grounding, qualifications, expertise and standing in modern day South African society.

The strength of a school lies in the ability to challenge the learners academically and to ensure that each day is a learning experience for them. Ultimately, the greatest advert for a school in the long- term, is not what learners achieve in terms of results, but what they become. Even as we strive for excellence and promote the potential of each individual learner, we are also educating young South Africans to transform our country into a truly peaceful and productive nation. This is evident in the many successes and achievements of past learners who've been exposed to our schooling system. These successes include many top national and international businessman/women, specialist medical practitioners, pathologists, architects, chartered accountants, actuaries, advocates etc.

At St Conrad's College, we cannot claim perfection, nor can we afford not to identify areas in our operation that can be improved upon. We can, however, lay claim to a vibrancy and sense of purpose which places us well on track for achieving the quality education for which we strive. It is said that where there is faith, hope and love with a touch of patience and perseverance much can be achieved despite all the odds. This is true for institutions and groups of people faced with often seemingly insurmountable odds. St Conrad's will always strive to provide the best education for our learners. In an age of change, uncertainty, failing standards and materialism, we will never lose sight of the real meaning of the purpose of education.

Your child is in good hands and the everyday sacrifices you as parents make to keep your child at our school is an immeasurable investment that will ultimately result in an informative, holistic and comprehensive educational grounding which can unfold into immense opportunity in years to come.

Mr Anthony Edwards

Executive Head

