

NEASC

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ACCREDITATION

THE TEAM VISIT

*Team Chairs and Co-Chairs are also referred
to the booklet "The Team Chair"*

*Based on the 7th Edition of
The NEASC Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation*

THE NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.

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The Team Visit booklet may be photocopied within the school in the NEASC Accreditation program.

The New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc.

FORWARD

The Team Visit booklet is one of a series designed as supplements to the 7th Edition of the *NEASC Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation*, henceforward referred to as *The Guide*. The aim of this series is to provide more detail about each stage of the accreditation process, and to offer practical advice and illustrative examples.

This particular booklet has been produced by David Styan, Gerry Percy, Dorothy Galo and Pete Woodward for use with the 7th Edition. It draws on earlier work by Peter Stokes, Gerry Percy, Marsha McDonough, Kevin Bartlett, Carol Esposito and the late Jack Monbouquette. It is intended to be of assistance to schools about to undergo a Team Visit, as well as to Chairs, Co-Chairs and members of Visiting Teams.

Chairs and Co-Chairs should also read the booklet *The Team Chair* for even more details on their role before, during and after a Team Visit.

We trust this document will prove useful to all involved in the accreditation process.

Jacob Ludes, III
Executive Director, NEASC

November 2003

THE TEAM VISIT

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CHAPTER ONE : GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE TEAM VISIT

1) BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS

Following the completion of the Self-Study, the school is visited by a Team of qualified administrators and teachers drawn from other schools.

Visits extend over a week of on-site observation and discussion, with Team members normally arriving on Saturday evening and departing mid-day on Friday. (Adjustments are made for schools whose weekends do not fall on Saturday and Sunday). The Team Chair, Co-Chair and Secretary usually remain until at least Friday afternoon to provide sufficient time for final meetings with the school's chief administrator and staff.

During the Visit the Team will spend time observing classes, examining teaching/learning materials and inspecting the facilities. Members will talk with staff, Board members, students, and other representatives of the school community in their task of pursuing information which may be helpful in gaining an understanding of the institution and the circumstances which shape it.

The Team will prepare a Visiting Team Report covering all aspects of the school's operations, and will make a recommendation with regard to accredited status to the NEASC Board.

2) FUNCTIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

The primary function of the Visiting Team is to assist the school by providing it with an outside professional assessment of the conclusions of the Self-Study. **It should be stressed that the aim of the Team is not to impose extraneous models on the school**, but to view it in terms of its own philosophy and objectives and seek ways to help it realize its potential.

The second function of the Team is to evaluate the school in light of the Standards for Accreditation and, accordingly, to make a recommendation with regard to the school's status to NEASC. Here again, it is important to stress that the Standards for Accreditation do not presuppose any specific model of excellence, but respect the freedom of schools to determine their own goals and ways of implementing them. The guiding principle of the accreditation program is that a school will be evaluated in terms of its own philosophy and objectives.

3) COMPOSITION AND SELECTION OF VISITING TEAMS

Composition

- a) NEASC maintains a list of approved evaluators, consisting chiefly of school staff members who have the ability, experience, professionalism and training to function well in this capacity. In order to keep this list current, schools are periodically requested to submit nominations of staff members, or other qualified persons known to them, who might be available for service on Teams. It is expected that accredited schools will nominate such people to serve on teams to other schools.
- b) A typical Visiting Team includes Heads or Principals, preferably with experience of an institution comparable to that being visited, along with other educators whose various competencies equip them to comment knowledgeably on all areas of the school's operation. The size of the Team varies according to the enrollment of the school as well as other pertinent circumstances, but normally there are no fewer than eight members in total. Schools should bear in mind that a Visiting Team is required to examine and report on all aspects of a school's operation in a very short space of time. The Visiting Team Report does not vary greatly according to size of school, given that all Sections must be completed.
- c) It is normal practice to include a full-time secretary on Teams in order to improve efficiency, and greatly reduce the delay in presenting the Visiting Team Report to NEASC. Schools may be able to find a local secretary to carry out this demanding task. The chosen individual must be fluent in English, competent in the word-processing package to be used, ready to work long and sometimes awkward hours, and must have no links with the school. If no such person can be found, NEASC will do its best to find someone on its data base who is able to serve.

NEASC will send Team Chairs and non-local secretaries a helpful booklet entitled *The Team Secretary*. Local secretaries will receive a copy of this booklet during their first meeting with the Team Chair on site.

Selection Procedure

- a) Well before the Team Visit, NEASC will contact the school with the names of the suggested Team Chair and Co-Chair. The school Head is asked to agree to these nomination, but may exercise a veto and ask for a second nomination when the situation warrants it.
- b) When a Chair and Co-Chair have been selected, NEASC contacts the nominees to secure their acceptance of the assignment, and the school is notified accordingly.
- c) The accrediting association draws up a list of possible Team members, which is submitted to the school. NEASC secures a commitment to serve from each of the proposed members, and then notifies both the Chair and the school of the final composition of the Team. In instances where there is disagreement about the proposed composition of the Team, it is within the authority of NEASC to make a decision, subject to appeal.
- d) Thereafter it is the responsibility of the Team Chair, acting in conjunction with NEASC, to take all further initiatives necessary in setting up, conducting and reporting on the Team Visit.

CHAPTER TWO : INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS HOSTING A TEAM VISIT

1) GENERAL

- a) All arrangements regarding transportation, times of arrival and departure, time and place of initial assembly etc., are made between the Chair and the school sufficiently in advance so that the necessary information can be given to the Team members.

It is the school's responsibility to arrange for Team members to be met at the airport/station, and to provide for accommodation in single rooms, meals and local transportation. Such arrangements must allow for optimal use of the Team's time and energies during the entire Visit. The school is expected to cover all Team members' and non-local secretary's costs relevant to the Visit, including travel. A normal courtesy is to allow each Team member to make one telephone call home at the school's expense. The school should also make it clear to all Team members which other hotel "extras" will and will not be covered by the school. Please note that honoraria, fees, gifts or any other form of material consideration to any Team member are strictly forbidden.

- b) The school should make no plans involving time commitments for Team members during the Visit without consulting the Team Chair in advance. It should also consult the Team Chair on exactly who is and is not to be included in any meetings between Team members and representatives of the school.
- c) The school should arrange to introduce the Team to all members of the school staff and representatives of the wider community at some form of reception arranged shortly after the Team's arrival and before the intensive work of the Visit has begun. The Sunday afternoon or evening is usually the best time for such an event. It must be remembered, however, that a Team Visit is a time of intense work and that, other than this initial reception, social occasions involving Team members should be avoided.
- d) The normal school schedule and activities should be maintained during the Team Visit, but no examinations should be given.

2) DURATION OF TEAM VISIT

Experience shows that the most practical day for the Team to arrive is Saturday, thereby making some time on that day and the whole of Sunday available for team activities. Team members will thus have time to get to know each other, to plan strategies for the Visit, to be orientated to the locale of the school, to inspect the complete set of Self-Study materials and to tour the facilities before observing any classes.

Such an arrangement frequently results in considerable financial savings to the school, as air fares are often much reduced when a stay over a Saturday night is involved.

Most Team members will leave on the following Friday lunchtime, but the Team Chair, Co-Chair and Team Secretary normally stay until Friday afternoon to check the Team Report for factual accuracy with the Head of School and to correct any inaccuracies they find. The Chair should also address school staff on the Friday to give them brief and general feedback on the Team's visit and its findings.

* **Note:** Special arrangements are made for schools which operate on a different weekly schedule.

3) DISTRIBUTION OF THE SELF-STUDY

As soon as the list of Team members is known, the school should contact each individual to check in which format they may wish to receive the Self-Study Report. Each Team member has the right to receive a copy on paper of his/her sections if he/she wishes. However, it may be easier (and cheaper) for all concerned if some or all of the Self-Study Report is distributed on diskette or CD-ROM. This must be agreed on a case by case basis.

NEASC, the Team Chair and Co-Chair should receive from the school the complete Self-Study at least six weeks before the start of the Visit. (In the case of the NEASC Office, the preference is for as much as possible of the Self-Study Report to be submitted on diskette or CD-ROM.)

All Team members should receive at minimum those Sections of the Self-Study assigned to them by the Chair, plus Part One (the Surveys) and Part Two Sections A, C and D (Philosophy and Objectives, Governance and Management, and Staff), at least four weeks before the start of the Visit. The Team Chair has the responsibility of informing the school about individual Team member assignments.

4) ORGANIZATION OF THE VISIT

The Team Chair, in conjunction with NEASC, is responsible for much of the organization before, during and after the visit. Chapter Three of this booklet summarizes the Chair's role and a separate booklet, *The Team Chair*, provides much more detail.

Schools and Team members are requested to co-operate fully with Chairs as they carry out their organizational tasks. Replies to all messages and queries should be sent promptly.

5) FACILITIES AND MATERIALS

- a) In addition to single room accommodation for Team members, and for the secretary if not local, the Team will require a Team Room at the place of accommodation. This room should be sufficiently large for the whole Team to work in comfort during the lengthy meetings necessary each evening, and there should be facilities for locking it when not in use.
- b) At the school itself a Team Room must be provided which is large enough for the whole Team to meet, and secure enough to ensure the confidentiality of discussions and documents. The secretary should be provided with a separate room nearby in which to work.

The following items should be available in the Team Room at the school:

the entire Self-Study Report including any item which was too bulky to be sent to Team members beforehand e.g., inventories, site plans, policy manuals, curriculum documents, student publications.

- a plan of the school buildings showing all the facilities, with all classrooms clearly marked.
- a master schedule showing the current program of studies in action. It is essential that Team members be able to locate classes easily at any stage of the school day.
- A complete list of the school's teaching and administrative staff with some form of cross-referencing to the building plan and/or master schedule so that staff members can be easily located. Space should be provided for Team members to indicate with a signature when they have visited staff members.
- adequate supplies of basic stationery.
- word-processing equipment.
- A projector (beamer) to display documents from a computer
- a paper shredder if possible
- simple refreshments

6) A NEASC VISITING TEAM IS COMING!

(It is strongly recommended that the following two pages be duplicated for the school staff)

The following statements briefly define the role of the Visiting Team, and are intended for dissemination to all who are involved in the Self-Study and Team Visit processes - school staff, students, and others in the school community.

The Visiting Team must:

Make an overall judgement as to how well the school is doing in terms of:

- its own Philosophy and Objectives (i.e. what it claims to be doing)
- the NEASC Standards for Accreditation

Write the Visiting Team Report, each Section of which will contain these four components:

- The Standards (but not the Indicators) complete with the E, M or D ratings agreed upon by the full Visiting Team. Any E or D ratings will be followed by comments and references to specific commendations or recommendations in the body of the report. Comments on M ratings are optional.
- The Team's *Observations* of the area with respect to the Standards for Accreditation and the school's Philosophy and Objectives
- A set of *Commendations* which will highlight for the school and NEASC any principal strengths that significantly enhance the school's operations
- A set of *Recommendations* which will highlight for the school and NEASC any principal factors in need of strengthening

In addition the Team will make an overall recommendation to NEASC with regard to the initial accreditation or continued accreditation of the school. This recommendation will be sent directly to NEASC (not to the school) with the Visiting Team Report. It will NOT to be shared with the school.

The Visiting Team will:

- Become thoroughly acquainted with the school's Self-Study, and assure itself that there has been widespread participation in the production of that document.
- Visit classrooms, review student's work, inspect the facilities, examine materials and talk to students, parents, board members and staff - including chairpersons responsible for Sections of the Self-Study.
- Spend time together comparing notes, discussing and reaching consensus with regard to the Visiting Team Report.

The Visiting Team should:

- Be helpful to the school by its constructive evaluation.
- Commend and encourage efforts, initiatives and sound innovation.
- Visit each teacher in the school, at least once, while class is in session.
- Answer any question which the school may have about accreditation.

The Visiting Team will not:

- Evaluate individual teacher performance. Individuals will not be singled out for criticism or named in the Visiting Team Report.
- Be over-prescriptive. The Team Report should not recommend precise, specific steps to be taken to solve problems (except if there are health or safety issues to resolve).
- Give disproportionate attention to personal specialities of Team members, let the biases of individual Team members effect the Report, or promote 'pet' educational theories or programs.
- Volunteer information on 'how we do it in my school'.
- Give undue time and attention to impromptu pressure groups, or individuals.

CHAPTER THREE : INFORMATION FOR THE TEAM CHAIR

One of the key factors for a successful visit is the organization of the Visit and the Team by the Chair. Each Chair has his/her own organizational style, and each Team and school have their own characteristics. However, all Visits have a number of factors in common and, in the interests of fairness, all schools are entitled to a certain uniformity of approach. An additional booklet, *The Team Chair*, is therefore provided to guide Chairs in their tasks.

In summary, *The Team Chair* booklet give very detailed guidelines for each of the following stages:

- At least eight weeks prior to Visit
 - e.g. contacting the Co-Chair to clarify his/her roles
 - e.g. drawing up the Roster of Team Assignments (avoiding overload for the Chair who must reserve time for general leadership activities)
 - e.g. communicating team member assignments to the school
 - e.g. making any other initial contacts with the school
 - e.g. initial instructions to Team members

- At least six weeks prior to the Visit
 - e.g. reading the Self-Study
 - e.g. further instructions to Team members
 - e.g. more contacts with the school

- At least three weeks before the Visit
 - e.g. decisions on working methods within the Team
 - e.g. drawing up the time-table for drafting and finalizing the Team Report

- On the Saturday of the Visit
 - e.g. checking facilities for the Team
 - e.g. confirmation of logistics of the Visit
 - e.g. initial gathering of the Team
 - e.g. initial meeting of the team (usually over a meal as an “ice-breaker”)

- On the Sunday of the Visit
 - e.g. formal Team Meeting to clarify organizational issues and set the “tone” of the visit
 - e.g. discussions with the Team Secretary
 - e.g. campus visit and reception with teachers and other members of the school community

- On the Monday to Thursday (morning) of the Visit
 - e.g. classroom visits
 - e.g. writing of draft reports and their first-reading to the Full Team or sub-groups thereof
 - e.g. writing the Preamble to the Report, and the Concluding Statement
 - e.g. observing the school evacuation procedure in action

- On the Thursday afternoon and Friday morning of the Visit
 - e.g. the vital Final Team Meeting when the Team must:
 - i. complete the Report
 - ii. decide on Major Commendations and Recommendations (and --briefly comment on their relationship to Part Three of the Self-Study Report)
 - iii. address the Standards and rate the school
 - iv. agree on an overall recommendation with regard to accreditation

- On the Friday of the Visit, probably in the afternoon
 - e.g. finish compiling the Report
 - e.g. rate Team members
 - e.g. brief and general feedback to the Head of School (and other senior management and/or governance members if invited by the Head)
 - e.g. brief and general feedback to the school staff

- During the week after the Visit
 - e.g. vital “post-production” to ensure the report is of high quality
 - e.g. forward the Team Report to NEASC
 - e.g. write the letter to NEASC to accompany the Report

CHAPTER FOUR: INFORMATION FOR TEAM MEMBERS

Over-riding Comment: All activities of Team members should contribute to the gathering of information on, and the formulating of professional opinions about, the quality of student learning and student well-being.

1. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Thank you for agreeing to join an NEASC Visiting Team. You have been selected because your school considers you to be someone who can be relied upon to make rational, perceptive comments verbally and in writing on certain aspects of another school's operations, to function well as a Team member, and to conduct yourself in a thoroughly professional manner.

In view of the public responsibility assumed by NEASC in undertaking the accreditation of schools, a great deal of trust has to be placed in the Visiting Team to conduct and report its investigations thoroughly. Thus, as a Team member you have the obligation to:

- become very familiar with this booklet *The Team Visit*, and with the school's Self-Study Report. In particular, from the Self-Study, you need to become very familiar with the implications of the Part One Survey results, Part Two Sections A, C and D, and all those Sections for which you have been assigned specific responsibility on the roster drawn up by the Team Chair before the Visit. As a result of this vital prior reading, you should prepare questions and ideas (you may even wish to make an initial rough draft of some "observations" in writing) so that valuable on-site observation and discussion time can be used to its maximum efficiency.
- treat the Visit as a time for intensive work. (Please do not bring spouses or other companions; the demands on your time and energy will simply be too great. If you wish to arrive earlier and/or stay later for personal reasons you, not the school being visited, should pay any additional costs.)
- contribute to a Report that will be sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to be a reliable basis for the accreditation decision, and to be a useful working document for the future development of the school.

Clearly, the professional and ethical responsibilities of Team members are considerable. The process of the Visit itself may seem somewhat daunting, and may be confusing at first. However, it will all fall into place! You will find the advice from the Team Chair and Co-Chair useful in this respect.

Practical reminders: check passport, visa, and vaccinations. Keep all expense receipts related to travel for presentation to the Team Secretary, who will organise reimbursement during the Visit week.

2. GUIDELINES FOR VISITING TEAM MEMBERS

- a) You will receive Part One (the surveys), Sections A, C and D of Part Two, and all other Sections of the school's Self-Study assigned to you by the Team Chair, four weeks before the Visit. Familiarise yourself with all of these. Make preliminary notes and formulate questions on particular points which catch your attention.

- b) Remember that the school is to be evaluated in the light of:
 - how successfully it follows its own Philosophy and meets its own Objectives. You must therefore familiarise yourself with these
 - the NEASC Standards for Accreditation. You must therefore read these and their associated Indicators very carefully

- c) Remain objective. Do not compare with other schools, and particularly resist the desire to tell "how we do it in my school". Avoid personal bias or advocating your own pet educational theories or programs. Avoid giving undue attention and time to impromptu pressure groups or individuals. If they ask to be heard, treat them courteously but remind them that your prime consideration and time must be devoted to the normal duties of a Team member. Keep the Team Chair informed of developments and/or "delicate issues" in such cases.

- d) Remember that individual teachers are not evaluated in this process. However, classroom observations are vital so as to gain an overall impression of what is actually happening in the school. In order to make optimum use of classroom visits, you should focus on the standard of student work and learning. Watch the students more than the teacher, and be sure to observe a good cross-section of student work – written or otherwise.

- e) Therefore; remember:
 - if possible each staff member should be visited at least once - if feasible twice, preferably by different Team members.
 - before visiting a teacher, read the relevant Staff Data Form (see Appendix to Part One of the Self-Study). Do not remove this form from the Team Room.
 - plan your visits to be of a reasonable length so you may observe all the various teaching/learning techniques which may be used across a lesson.
 - do not take notes during the classroom visit, but do so afterwards.

- be as inconspicuous as possible, and take care over your body language.
 - if another member of the Team is already observing that class, just leave as quietly as possible.
 - after the classroom visit remember to place your initials against that teacher's name on the staff list posted for this purpose in the Team Room in the school. In this way the Team Chair will be able to check that all teachers have been visited.
 - at the first possible opportunity, give the teacher a chance to talk to you about the lesson you observed and to discuss student learning outcomes. Promote conversation through open ended questions. Operate mainly in “listening mode”.
- f) You will serve on some Team committees and maybe chair others, as determined by the Team Chair when he sets up the corresponding roster. When chairing a committee, please remember:
- ensure that your committee members have considered the Self-Study for your Section.
 - organise times during the Visit week when the members of the committee may get together and comment on the relevant section of the Self-Study, share the impressions they have gained at the school, and help draft the committee report. The times for committee meetings should have been incorporated into the overall Team schedule, but are not limited to those times if there is a need for more meetings. The Chair will give you a deadline for having your first-draft report ready .
 - with your committee members, note any significant changes you would make to the school's own ratings on the Standards list, but do not spend an undue amount of time debating details of the ratings.
 - be considerate to other Team members by adhering to the schedule and attending on time other meetings established by committee chairpersons.
 - ensure that you, or one of your committee, meet(s) the chairperson of the School's committee that wrote the Self-Study Section with which you are dealing.

g) You will be responsible for writing the reports for the Sections you chair. Some useful tips are:

- Always write with the Standards for Accreditation as your essential and overriding guide. Constantly ask yourself “which Standard am I addressing here?”. Do not be afraid to quote or directly refer to the Standards. Use the Indicators for further guidance as you write.
- In general, it will also be helpful to keep questions of the following type in mind:

Do the facts as observed agree with the information provided in the Self-Study? Are there differences between the program as it is drawn up on paper and as it is actually practised?.... Do policies and procedures really work?.... Are the various special features of the program real or window dressing?.... Are they meaningful?.... What is the effect on student learning and/or well-being

- please adhere precisely to the agreed format and style for the Visiting Team Report (see Chapter Five of this booklet). Failure to do so can waste enormous amounts of time.
- try to use the school's Descriptive Profile (Step Two in the self-study) as one of the bases for the “*Observations*” component of your report if you agree that that profile is accurate.
- try to identify the important problems and issues in the “*Observations*” component. Avoid making statements which might seem petty or trivial.
- Incorporate examples and/or explain consequences as you write the *observations*.

Example: Do not simply write with respect to Standard C3 “The Head is not the responsible leader of the school”. Instead write “Board members regularly deal directly with teachers and parents, and this undermines the Head's role as responsible leader of the school”.

- do not pad the report with insignificant *Commendations* and *Recommendations*. The value of the Visiting Team Report will be judged by the insights it brings to factors affecting the quality of the school, not by its length or the sheer number of recommendations and commendations.
- avoid sweeping generalizations. Be concise and precise, saying exactly what you mean. Try to identify who is responsible for taking action on a particular recommendation. Avoid phrasing that implies some action should be taken but fails to specify what area is under consideration.

- do not be over-prescriptive. It is not your role to tell the school specifically how to solve the problems that have been identified. Help the school identify the problem, perhaps suggest possible alternatives, but leave the solution to the school. Exceptions to this general rule might include safety or financial provisions which you may feel obliged to insist upon.
- unless you are seeking to lay heavy emphasis on a particular point, avoid repeating commendations or recommendations from other Sections of the report.
- make separate commendations or recommendations; do not combine them into “multi-commendations” or “multi-recommendations”.
- commend progress where it has clearly been made, and praise the school where praise is due. However, avoid singling out individuals and always avoid using proper names - refer to the position if necessary rather than the person.
- never single out named staff members for criticism.
- there is little likelihood of progress being made in areas where needs are not recognised and eventually accepted by the school. A successful report will assist the school in analysing its own problems by crystallising school and Team thinking in writing.
- in writing *commendations* attempt to identify special features in which the school itself takes pride.
- your report should reflect the consensus of your committee.
- your first-draft report will be discussed, often vigorously debated, with other Team members in open session. Accept this as a positive part of the process, and avoid taking constructive criticism personally! Remember you will never be expected to carry sole responsibility for the contents of the Team Report – the whole Team carries responsibility for the whole Report – so this open discussion process is essential.

- h) During much of the Visit you will be engaged in gathering information from members of the school community. Remember:
- prepare for meetings thoroughly by researching the relevant material and planning questions in advance to clarify the situation. Avoid asking for factual information which is already provided in the Self-Study Report unless you require specific confirmation for some good reason.
 - frame questions so as to elicit information without reflecting a value judgement. Avoid asking questions with implied answers, such as those that begin with: "Don't you think you should?", "Isn't it better to ...?", "Why don't you ...?". Use open-ended questions, and strive to listen more than talk.
 - do not allow pressure groups or individuals to distract you from the main task. Avoid taking sides in any school issues.
 - keep an open mind and do not jump to conclusions. Do not immediately take as fact an opinion or value judgement expressed by a member of the school's staff or wider community. Always seek other verification ("triangulation").
- i) At all times act as an invited guest and colleague, avoiding any behaviour that will cast you in an adversarial role,. You are a peer, not an "inspector ". Remember schools are not "obliged" to seek accreditation, but do so in the interest of their own improvement.
- j) The Visiting Team should attempt to leave the school itself in good spirits. The Team should convey a feeling to school personnel that, through their efforts, they have contributed to school improvement. It is important to impart a sense that the recommendations in the Team Report's will not be negative criticisms but will be intended to help the school reach its goal of continuing to deliver the best possible education to its students.
- k) At all times members must respect confidentiality. All information arising from the Self-Study and the Team Visit, and/or that contained in the Team Report, is strictly the business of the school and NEASC. No Visiting Team member should reveal any information relating to accreditation work.
- l) Throughout the Visit, Team members should feel free to call on the Team Chair or Co-Chair for advice or assistance. The Team Chair should be advised immediately of any potentially sensitive or problematic areas.

CHAPTER FIVE : THE VISITING TEAM REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Visiting Team Report represents the culmination of an intensive period of work for both the school and the Visiting Team. It forms the basis for the next stages of the accreditation process because the school must eventually respond to the Team's recommendations at the One Year and Five Year stages at minimum. Therefore the Report must be well organised, factually accurate and informative in its descriptions, and clear and concise in its observations, commendations and recommendations. In particular it should not be overloaded with superfluous commendations and recommendations.

2. GENERAL ORGANIZATION OF THE TEAM REPORT

Note: NEASC will supply a diskette containing the basic Visiting Team Report format which should prove very useful to the Chair, the Team, and the Secretary.

- a) The Team Report should be page-numbered, and begin with a *Contents* sheet. There then follows an *Introduction* (the text is already included on the diskette provided) which describes NEASC and the accreditation process. The Chair and Co-Chair should then add a *Preamble* which should describe the main features of the school (please see the list in the box immediately below) and summarise significant aspects of the Team Visit. The *Preamble* may also be used to convey a few general impressions about the school, although any sweeping generalizations of an evaluative nature should be avoided. It is useful if the *Preamble* gives an idea as to the seriousness of purpose with which the Self-Study Report had been prepared, and the level of organization and hospitality shown by the school during the Team Visit. Also it is customary to thank the school for its efforts, and to make a general comment on the professionalism of Team members.

Minimum List of Facts to be included in the Preamble for the convenience of readers not familiar with the school:

School's foundation date.
School's legal status.
Summary of governance and management structure.
Range of Grades/Year-Groups at the school.
Student numbers and nationalities.
Staff numbers and nationalities.
Administrative divisions of the school.
Summary of type(s) of curriculum offered.
Languages of Instruction.
Summary of location and buildings.
Summary of accreditation history of the school.

- b) The Visiting Team will then comment on Part One of the self-study, the issues which are identified therein, and the steps being taken to respond to them.
- c) There then follows the main body of the Team Report, which should be organised under the same Section headings, A to G, as those used in the school's Self-Study Report. Each Section should include these four components:
- *The Standards (but not the Indicators) complete with the E, M or D ratings agreed upon by the full Visiting Team. Any E or D ratings must be followed by comments and references to specific commendations or recommendations in the body of the report. Comments on M ratings are optional.*
 - *Observations which will include just enough description, judgements, examples and consequences to make the subsequent commendations and recommendations clear. All commendations and recommendations which follow must be supported by statements in the observations*
 - *List of Commendations*
 - *List of Recommendations.*

- c) The Report should then show the *List of Major Commendations and Recommendations* chosen by the whole Visiting Team at its final full meeting. The points chosen for inclusion here should be taken verbatim (both text and reference number) from various Sections of the Report, and nothing “new” should be introduced at this stage. The number of “*Majors*” chosen from a given Section A to G may be none, one, or more than one. There should not be an excessive number of Major Commendations and Recommendations, and probably between ten and twenty of each will suffice. At the end of this list the Team should comment on any important discrepancies between its major findings and those identified by the school itself in Part Three of the Self-Study Report

- d) A short *Concluding Statement* should then be added by the Team Chair and Co-Chair. This should contain little more than thanks to the school and the Visiting Team. No hint as to the Team’s overall recommendation with regard to accreditation should be included here, or anywhere else in the Team Report. [The overall recommendation with respect to accreditation should be submitted to NEASC as a separate document, not as part of the Team Report itself. The school should not be informed of this overall recommendation.]

- e) Throughout the report, the team should take every opportunity to relate what it observes to the quality of the learning which is going on or to student well-being. Student learning outcomes and student well-being are at the center of all that the school intends, and the team will wish to use all the means at its disposal to ascertain how effectively the school achieves improvement for each student.

- e) The Team Report should then close with the list of Team members and their professional positions (though not their individual assignments during the Visit).

3 FORMAT AND STYLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL COMMITTEE REPORTS.

- a) The first component part of each committee's report is the rating of the *Standards*, with any comments necessary
- b) The next component is the committee's *Observations*. These should be frank, whether it is a matter of praising something excellent or identifying a factor in need of strengthening. It should be remembered that constructive criticism can be helpful to a school by awakening people to a need, and thus initiating remedial action. Also, the *Observations* must adhere to the following principles:
 - they should take as their general context the Standards for Accreditation (as explained by the Indicators) although perceptions which are relevant to, but not addressed specifically in, the Standards may also be included.
 - value judgements should be written in plain, non-emotive language avoiding sweeping generalizations which cannot be reasonably supported and verified (particularly if these are of a negative nature).
 - Statements in the *Observations* component should be supported by examples and/or the visible consequences should be explained.

Example: Do not simply write with respect to Standard C3 "The Head is not the responsible leader of the school". Instead write "Board members regularly deal directly with teachers and parents, and this undermines the Head's role as responsible leader of the school".

- *Observations* should provide the context for the *Commendations* and *Recommendations* which come later. Indeed any observation of a particularly positive nature must be followed later by a commendation, while any observation of a particularly negative nature must be followed by a recommendation.
- c) The next component part of the committee report is the list of *Commendations*. These highlight aspects of the school's operation which significantly enhance the program it offers. They must derive from topics already raised in the *Observations*, and should be specifically addressed to groups or individuals as illustrated here:

“The Visiting Team commends -

1. The Board for its decision to allocate funds for the recent modernisation of the school's Computer Laboratories
2. The staff of the Information Technology Department for writing and implementing a highly imaginative I.T. teaching program at Secondary level
3. The I.T. support staff for their efficient systems for maintenance of hardware and cataloguing of software.”

- d) The final component of the individual committee report is the list of *Recommendations*. These highlight aspects of the school's operation which are in need of strengthening and warrant attention and improvement. They should arise from topics already considered under *Observations* and should follow the general pattern now shown:

“The Visiting Team recommends that -

1. The Secondary I.T. Department collaborate with colleagues in the Primary School to create a coherent policy and program for students which spans the range Kindergarten to Year 13,.
2. The Director and the I.T. Department find ways of providing students with supervised access to the Computer Laboratories outside normal lesson times
3. The school find a way, perhaps with the help of the Student Council, to re-cycle the large quantity of paper used in the Computer Laboratories”

4. SUMMARY OF REPORT STRUCTURE

In summary, the Visiting Team Report is made up of the following eight parts:

- Contents
- Introduction (concerns NEASC and the nature of the process)
- Preamble (concerns the school, it's Self-Study, and the Team Visit)
- Visiting team comments on Part One
- Individual Committee Reports for Sections A to G, each with four components: *standards*, *observations*, *commendations* and *recommendations*
- List of Major Commendations and Recommendations (and comments on any important discrepancies between this list and the contents of Part Three of the Self-Study Report)
- Concluding Statement
- List of team members

5. COMPLETING THE REPORT

- a) The Team Chair carries prime responsibility for ensuring that the Team Report in its final shape is a unified and cohesive document in a single literary style. Although the Report should essentially be completed with the help of the Co-Chair before the Chair travels home, some post-editing in the week or so after the visit will almost certainly be needed to ensure the highest quality of cohesion and presentation. (The spelling in the Team Report should either be consistent with UK English or USA English throughout, but not a mixture of the two.)
- b) The Chair is responsible for writing a letter to NEASC containing the Team's overall recommendation with regard to Accreditation. This should be sent directly to NEASC, not to the school, along with the Team Report within a week of the conclusion of the Team Visit.
- c) The Team Chair is also responsible for sending the completed *Team Member Ratings Form* to NEASC at the same time as the Team Report itself.
- d) NEASC sends a copy of the Visiting Team Report to the Head of the school for his/her information. The Head is advised that further comments and a decision with respect to accredited status will be forthcoming once NEASC has taken the required time (generally one to two months) necessary to consider the Team Report and its overall recommendation in depth. Please note that the Visiting Team's overall recommendation with regard to accreditation is not sent to the school, but stays within the accrediting agency.

- e) The NEASC Board takes the decision with regard to the school's accreditation status, having first considered the Team Report and the recommendations made by the Visiting Team and the NEASC Accreditation Advisors.
- f) The Self-Study, Visiting Team Report and recommendations are to be treated as confidential documents, and are made available to no one except as specified (the school will be encouraged to share the contents of the Report in its entirety with the school community after it has been reviewed by NEASC).

CHAPTER SIX: SAMPLE VISITING TEAM REPORT

There now follows an illustrative sample of a Team Report. Please note that only a representative selection of the various Sections has been included for brevity.

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| Preamble | 3 |
| Section A : Philosophy and Objectives | 5 |
| Section B : Curriculum | 8 |
| etc. | etc. |

INTRODUCTION

(Chairs will normally insert here the text directly from the diskette supplied by NEASC. It contains a description of NEASC itself, and the process of school evaluation and accreditation.)

PREAMBLE

The International School of Bangomo (ISB) was founded in 1980 by a group of English-speaking parents with informal backing from a number of embassies. ISB is legally registered in the host country as a not-for-profit private limited company, and it has enjoyed official recognition from the local Ministry of Education as a "Specially Registered Educational Establishment" since 1982.

All parents automatically become members of the School Association when their children are admitted. The school is governed by a Board of nine parents elected by association members. This Board appoints a Director to lead and manage the school. The incumbent who has been in the post for seven years has appointed Primary and Secondary School Principals as well as a Business Manager to be his immediate colleagues in the Management Team.

ISB enrolls just over 1000 students in Kindergarten to Grade 12. The Primary School (K to 6) with its 540 students is slightly larger than the Secondary School (Grades 7 to 12). Students of some 45 nationalities attend ISB, the largest groups being British, American, Japanese and Korean in that order of statistical importance. A substantial minority (11%) of ISB students are local citizens.

The 103 members of the ISB academic staff come from 10 different countries, with the largest groups being British, American and Indian. Of the 22 members of the support staff, 20 are citizens of the host country

ISB offers its own school-designed curriculum to students in Kindergarten to Grade 10. This program draws upon English National Curriculum in part, but certainly not exclusively. Courses in Grades 11 and 12 prepare students for the IB Diploma for which ISB has been an authorised school since 1989. All teaching in ISB is through the medium of English.

ISB is housed in two recently constructed and linked buildings located on a pleasant nine hectare campus in the southern suburbs of the town of Bangomo which is the country's administrative and commercial capital.

ISB was first accredited by ENEASC following a Tem Visit ten years ago, and is now a candidate for re-accreditation. The present NEASC Visiting Team consisted of a Chair, Co-Chair, Team Secretary and fourteen other professional educators. A list of Team Members is shown at the end of this Report.

The school ensured that the Visit was extremely well organised before our arrival and throughout our stay. The staff of the Director's Office deserve our special thanks for their consistent concern for our welfare.

The Team arrived on the Saturday, and it was possible to arrange a brief introductory session that evening, followed by dinner as a group and a social evening spent getting to know each other. Sunday morning and afternoon were spent in extensive full team briefings, initial committee meetings, an address from the Head of School, a visit to the school campus, and a reception to meet the school community.

Committee work on Philosophy and Objectives and School Facilities Sections began on Sunday evening. Monday to Thursday mid-day inclusive were spent observing the school in action and generating the Team Report. Thursday afternoon/evening and Friday morning were used to finalise the Report, to select the major commendations and recommendations, to give ratings to the Standards and to decide on an overall recommendation with respect to accreditation. These last few exercises were probably the most stimulating and important event of the entire Visit because they crystallised the perceptions of the whole Team.

There were certain general impressions common to each member of the Team, and in this preamble we wish to emphasise two of them.

The first is that ISB seems to be “on the crest of a wave”. The school has recently moved onto a new K-12 campus after many years of coping with inadequate facilities and separate sites for the Primary and Secondary Schools. The new plant is most impressive in so many respects. Staff and students appear to have settled well into their new surroundings, and the overall impression was one of high morale. The current roll of just over 1000 students is the biggest in the school’s history, and local opinion is that it may well grow still further over the next few years.

The second impression is that the level of support offered to the school by the parent body, both through the level of commitment of the Board of Governors and through a wide range of other activities, is very high. This is one of ISB’s “trump cards”.

Both the students and instructional staff treated the Visiting Team with friendliness, understanding, and total co-operation. They and the administration, clerical and ancillary staff did everything to facilitate our task. The fact that the Self-Study had been undertaken with seriousness of purpose and attention to detail enabled the Visiting Team to develop rapid insights into a complex educational institution. The entire Team wishes to congratulate the whole school community on its achievement.

As Chair, I was privileged to work with a group of colleagues who were intelligent, co-operative, highly professional and incredibly hard working. Without their total involvement and dedication to the task, and their cohesion as a group, this Team Report would not have been possible. I wish to thank them all, and Jill Brown the Co-Chair in particular, for their support and encouragement. I trust the report we have produced will be helpful to the school in its drive for improvement.

Bertram Williamson

16th Nov. 2003

COMMITTEE REPORTS SECTION BY SECTION

The Section Reports A to G must now follow in alphabetical order. An example is given here covering the first few Standards in Section C (Governance and Management).

Section C : Governance and Management,

Observations

The International School of Bangomo is a non-profit making limited company of which all fee-paying parents are full members. It is governed by a nine-member Board of Governors elected on a staggered basis for two-year renewable terms by the parent body at their Annual General Meeting.

Board policies are contained in a recently up-dated comprehensive policy manual which, among other things, defines the limits of Board responsibility vis-à-vis those of the Director. Newly elected Board members receive this document, but there is no other system for their orientation or training. An organised induction course for new Board members is lacking, and such a system should be introduced to ensure that the Board does not lose the well balanced approach to its role which it has displayed over the last five years or so.

The Board of Governors is active, supportive and rigorous in pursuit of its goal of continuing the development of the school along the lines published in the philosophy and objectives. It appears to have a clear sense of the respective roles of the Board on the one hand and the Director and his School Management Team on the other. So, for example, there are documented cases of individual Board members taking the correct decision to channel comments they have received from individual parents back through the School Director for resolution.

The Board and Director agree yearly targets and these, along with the relevant job description, are the yard-sticks against which the Director's performance is formally assessed. This assessment is reported to the Director in writing. The system by which the Board annually assesses the Director's work is accepted as very positive by all those involved. As one example, as the result of an agreed objective some three years ago the Director has become more actively and routinely involved in the construction of the school's annual budget than he was previously.

The Board has no formal system for appraising its own performance. The absence of any process by which the Board can systematically analyse its own work needs to be remedied.

The School is sub-divided into two basic sections, the Primary School, comprising Grades K-5, and the Secondary School comprising Grades 6-12. The School Management Team is made up of the Principals of these two schools together with the Business Manager and the Director. This school management team (SMT) has enjoyed considerable continuity in that the shortest serving member is the Business Manager who joined the school four years ago. The Director suitably delegates responsibility to members of this management team, hence contributing to the generally efficient and harmonious operation of the school.

Members of the management team all contribute to the compilation of comprehensive Staff and Parent-Student Handbooks which are published in up-dated form every 1st September. These well constructed documents are very useful for the orientation of new members of the school community, and generally they provide clarity for day-to-day operations (with the exception cited below). This clarity is further enhanced by the laudable practice whereby the job descriptions of all senior and middle managers are updated by mutual consent every two years. Indeed ISB tends to operate like a “well oiled machine” while retaining a very pleasant and “human” working atmosphere. There are no “vacuums” in ISB which might lead to attempted “empire building”, and this is a very positive feature of the school.

Unfortunately there is the one exception to the general rule of clear operating procedures at ISB, and that is in the area of admissions. Procedures for dealing with prospective client families, for obtaining student records from past schools, and for placement testing are surprisingly confused. Clear lines of responsibility need to be established between those currently involved in admissions. Alternatively, given the management team’s heavy work load and the likelihood of increased enrollment, the school might be well advised to appoint an Admissions/Recruitment Officer.

Editor’s Note: More observations would follow here related to the remaining Standards in Section C which deal with financial matters.

Commendations

The Visiting Team commends:

1. The Board of Governors for its commitment to the school's philosophy.
2. The Board of Governors for actively supporting the management team while avoiding involvement in the day-to-day operations of the school.
3. The management team for developing clear administrative structures in most areas of its operations.
4. The management team for effectively communicating policies and procedures through well produced handbooks in most areas of operations.

Editor’s Note: More commendations might now follow related to the remaining Standards in Section C which deal with financial matters

Recommendations

The Visiting Team recommends that:

1. The Board, after careful consultation with outside advisors if thought necessary, institute proper procedures for the induction of new members
2. The Board similarly install a system for organised evaluation of its own performance
3. The management team improve procedures in the whole area of admissions, by a reorganization and clarification of roles, and/or by persuading the Board to create a new post of Admissions and Recruitment Officer.

Editor's Note: More recommendations might now follow related to the remaining Standards in Section C which deal with financial matters

LIST OF MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Each of the Visiting Team committees was comprised of one chairperson and three other members. However, all reports were read in plenary sessions at two stages in their drafting so that all members of the Visiting Team were able to provide insights and corrections for every Section or Sub-Section.

During its final meeting, the Visiting Team chose from various committee reports a number of major commendations and recommendations which it felt were the most important to draw to the school's attention. To avoid creating any possible confusion with regard to interpretation, these have been extracted verbatim from the various Section Reports.

These commendations and recommendations are arranged according to the alphabetical order of Sections, and are therefore not in any order of priority.

Major Commendations

The Visiting Team commends:

Section A: Philosophy and Objectives

A4. The school for its genuine commitment to its philosophy and to meeting its major objectives.

Section B: Primary Curriculum Program

B1. The Early Childhood Staff for the warm, caring atmosphere that is so evident in this part of the school

B2. The Primary Curriculum Council for its excellent work in producing clear, comprehensive and helpful curriculum documentation covering the whole primary program.

Section B: Mathematics throughout the School

B4. The Head of Secondary Mathematics and the Primary Mathematics Coordinator for their close collaboration in actively promoting the use of information technology in the delivery of the mathematics program throughout the school.

Section C: Governance and Management

C2. The Board of Governors for actively supporting the management team while avoiding involvement in the day-to-day operations of the school.

C3. The management team for developing clear administrative structures in most areas of its operations.

.... and so on (*between ten and twenty in total typically*).

Major Recommendations

The Visiting Team recommends that:

Section B: Primary Curriculum Program

B1. The issue of curriculum articulation between the Primary and Secondary Schools be given a higher priority.

Section B: Sciences throughout the School

B3. The issue of access to laboratory facilities be resolved so that the expressed wish to increase “hands-on” experiences for upper primary students may become reality.

Section C: Governance and Management

C3. The management team improve procedures in the whole area of admissions, either by a reorganization and clarification of roles, and/or by persuading the Board to create a new post of Admissions and Recruitment Officer.

Section D: Staff

D2. The school formulate agreed procedures for professional appraisal, and a related program of staff development.

.... and so on (*between ten and twenty in total typically*).

Comments on any important discrepancies between this list and the contents of Part Three of the Self-Study Report:

The Visiting Team noted that all the Major Commendations in this report are essentially similar to the positive features highlighted in Part Three of the Self-Study Report. However, while most to the Team’s Major Recommendations are also reflected in Part Three of the school’s Self-Study, there is a notable exception: namely Team Recommendation D2. The school’s own report did not express particular concern in the area of staff appraisal and its link to professional development but, as Section D of this report shows in detail, the Visiting Team does not feel that Standards D6 and D7 are currently being fully met at ISB.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The Board, Administration and Staff at the International School of Bangomo feel the accreditation process has already brought benefits during the Self-Study stage, and as Chair of the Team I confirm that much progress has been made. Indeed, it was a pleasure to visit a school that has entered the accreditation process with such enthusiasm.

The school is expecting still more benefits to arise from this Team Report. If the recommendations it contains are carefully interpreted and converted into an action plan with a manageable time-line which avoids instant “knee-jerk” reactions, the results should be very positive.

Once again I would like to thank the school for the excellent way in which the Visiting Team was received. To the Team itself go my congratulations on their hard work and constant good spirit. In particular I would like to thank my Co-Chair Jill Jones for her constant support and good humour throughout the Visit week.

I wish ISB every success in its drive for school improvement.

Bertram Williamson
Team Chair

LIST OF TEAM MEMBERS

The Chair should insert here the list of Visiting Team members, normally as supplied by NEASC. The list should show each member’s name, the name and address of their school (or similar), and the position they hold. However it should not show the assignments carried out on this particular Visit, given that the whole Visiting Team takes collective responsibility for the entire Report.

CHAPTER SEVEN : OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO ACCREDITED STATUS

1. Introduction

At its final full meeting, usually on the Thursday afternoon/evening and Friday morning, the Visiting Team will need to reach a consensus on the overall recommendation it will make with regard to the school's accreditation status. As debate takes place, the Team is advised to avoid becoming over-legalistic. It should keep in mind fundamental questions such as "Is this a good school which is striving for excellence?" "Does the school have a positive effect on its students learning and well-being?" "What overall recommendation would best assist the school in its drive for improvement?"

The Team Chair must send the overall team recommendation, along with the Team Report, directly to NEASC. No indication as to the Team's overall recommendation must be given to anyone at the school.

2. Recommendation to NEASC

For NEASC, the recommendation must be made in one of four forms:

- (a) for award of Accreditation or Re-Accreditation
- (b) for award of Accreditation or Re-Accreditation with specific qualifications.

[In cases where the school generally meets the Standards, but the Team feels that certain specified recommendations must be met immediately or within a relatively short period of time. A follow-up Special Report and a Special Visit by one or two NEASC representatives may be recommended under such circumstances.]

- (c) for postponement of Accreditation or Re-Accreditation for some specified reason(s)

[In cases when the school may meet many of the Standards but falls seriously short in certain specific areas which the Team feels could only be satisfactorily addressed within a longer specified time. A follow-up Special Report and Special Visit would normally take place in such a case.]

- (d) for denial of Accreditation or Re-Accreditation

[In cases when the school falls significantly short of meeting a substantial number of Standards, and has shortcomings of a relatively serious nature which appear to have no medium-term solutions.]

The Chair of the Visiting Team should consult with NEASC if any question arises as to the appropriate recommendation.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the NEASC Board of Trustees to make a decision on the status of the school once it has carefully considered the recommendations from the Visiting Team and the NEASC Accreditation Advisors who analyse the Visiting Team Report.

CHAPTER EIGHT: FOLLOW-UP ACTION BY THE SCHOOL

1. Introduction

If the evaluation process is regarded as a passing chapter in the life of the school - something undertaken at the time accreditation is sought and then set aside until the next time - its value will be greatly reduced. A school meriting accreditation is one which is continually working for self-improvement. Thus a series of steps, explained in the NEASC booklet *The Award of Accreditation and Subsequent Procedures*, have to be taken following the Team Visit. The most immediate are:

2. Studying the Visiting Team Report

The school will wish to give close study to the Visiting Team Report, as well as to any recommendations made in letters from NEASC as the accrediting agency.

3. Planning for the Future

The school will need to address all Visiting Team recommendations (as well as those in its own Self-Study Report), develop plans for improvement, and initiate concrete steps towards their realisation. School proposals to deal with the recommendations, as well as the progress that has been achieved in relation to urgent matters, forms the basis for the First Progress Report to be submitted about one year after receipt of the accreditation decision. The school will again be required to report on progress and submit future plans at the Five Year stage, after which it will host a Five Year Visit by one or two NEASC representatives.

Although schools may wish to allow a certain period for rest and reflection before embarking on further activity, interest and momentum should not be allowed to dissipate.

It may prove advantageous to re-activate some or all of the initial Self-Study Committees for follow-up work. In certain instances these committees may evolve into permanent working parties, entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out improvements in the very areas they themselves helped to identify.