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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

THE PRELIMINARY PREPARATORY VISIT

“Journey to Excellence
in
International Education”

Based on the 8th Edition of the Main Guide; Published March 2011
NEASC
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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of a series designed as supplements to “Journey to Excellence,” the 8th Edition of the *NEASC Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation*, henceforward referred to as *The Guide*. The series of supplements provides more detail about each stage of the accreditation process and offers practical advice (with illustrative examples) to schools in different phases of the accreditation process and to assigned Visitors to schools.

This particular booklet is designed for the benefit of Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors and for faculty and leadership in schools about to undergo such visits. The current version was produced by Margaret Alvarez and Gerry Percy of the CIS Accreditation Service, and Dorothy Galo and Pete Woodward of NEASC/CAISA.

We trust that Visitors and schools will find this document to be a useful supplement to *The Guide*, and we wish you good luck in the drive for school improvement.

Cameron C. Staples
President and Chief Executive Officer
New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc.

July 2011

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRELIMINARY/PREPARATORY VISIT (INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS AND VISITORS)

The Preliminary Visit is the term used for the initial stage in the process of accrediting a school for the first time. The Preparatory Visit is the initial stage in the process of re-accrediting a school which currently holds accreditation.

The Preliminary/Preparatory Visit is of extreme importance to the whole Accreditation process, and for this reason is normally carried out by one or two experienced evaluators.

The main purposes of the Preliminary/Preparatory Visit are:

- To gain sufficient knowledge of the school to assess its understanding of the standards and its readiness to undertake the accreditation process.
- To focus the school's attention on its own Guiding Statements (vision, mission, objectives, etc.), the ways in which they impact student learning and well being, and the extent to which these Guiding Statements drive planning and decision making.
- To focus the school's attention on the meaning of the standards and indicators, including an initial self-appraisal by the school of its ability to provide evidence of the degree of its alignment with the standards.
- To provide information and training that will help to prepare the school for the Self-Study aspect of the accreditation process and to discuss initial planning for the subsequent Team Visit.
- To agree upon a time frame and details for the Self-Study and subsequent Team Visit that will be recommended by the Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors to the respective agencies.

After the Visit, the Visitors submit a report to the respective agencies. The agencies will decide whether to award candidate status to new applicants or, in the case of accredited schools, to proceed with the next stage of the accreditation cycle. The agencies will communicate their decisions to the school and forward a copy of the Visitors' Report.

CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS (INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS AND VISITORS)

(Please refer to the 'Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation, 8th Edition,' 'The Self Study' and 'The Team Visit' booklets for additional information)

A. Introduction

The accreditation process has long been recognized in international school circles as a highly effective means of initiating and maintaining school improvement and demonstrating adherence to a set of publicly stated standards. The information contained in this Overview is intended to clarify the various aspects of the accreditation process, its declared purpose, the procedures involved in the self-study and team visit components of the process, and the benefits that accreditation offers to a school.

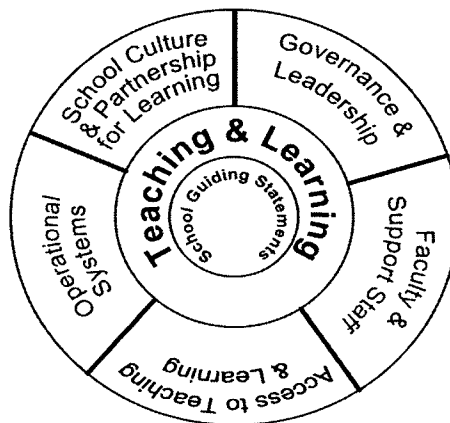
On request CIS or NEASC may undertake an evaluation alone, in collaboration with each other, or in collaboration with another accrediting association. When two agencies are involved, the school produces one Self-Study and hosts one Team Visit. The Chair and Co-Chair, representing the two associations, convey the recommendations of the Team to their respective organizations. Each association makes its own independent decision with regard to the possible accreditation of the school.

B. Purpose of the Accreditation Program

There are a number of benefits associated with the award of accreditation to a school, but the **main aim** of this evaluation program is **to provide an opportunity to improve the quality of the education offered at the school** through a rigorous process of self-examination followed by an objective external appraisal by a team of peers, focusing on student learning and well being. The resulting Visiting Team Report and the independent actions of the accrediting association(s) attest to the quality of education at the evaluated school.

The Underpinning Concepts

The accreditation process helps a school use its mission, vision and objectives to guide its development and to ensure that school systems and services have student learning and well being as their primary focus.



C. Criteria for Evaluation

Each school is evaluated against two basic 'benchmarks', these being:

1. The School's Own Guiding Statements

Each school is required to have clear statements of vision, mission, and educational goals. Such guiding documents/statements may have different names depending upon the individual school, but in each school they must align with the standards under Section A. Most importantly, each school's programs and services will be assessed in terms of how successful they are in meeting its own stated vision, mission, or educational goals.

2. The Standards for Accreditation

Each school is required to align its operations with a set of written standards that cover every aspect of a school's operation. These common standards, grouped in seven sections (A-G) have been developed, reviewed, and endorsed by educational peers representing the accrediting organization(s). The focus of the standards in every section is on student learning and well being.

The Standards for Accreditation are designed to reflect the characteristics of a high quality educational experience. However, they do not pre-suppose any specific model of excellence nor do they suggest comparing the characteristics of one school with those of another. The guiding principles of the accreditation process are that a school will be evaluated against prescribed standards (but in relation to its own guiding statements) and that the school's program and services are appropriate for its unique demography.

D. Outline of the Accreditation Process

The process involves these five essential stages which are repeated on a routine ten-year cycle:

1. The Preliminary/Preparatory Visit

A school seeking accreditation for the first time hosts a *Preliminary Visit*, usually lasting three days and normally involving one or two visitors. This booklet provides specific information about this visit.

2. The Self-Study

The self-study, lasting one to two years, is the most important part of the entire evaluation and accreditation process, both in the commitment of time and effort involved and in the value to be derived. The self-study begins with the Part One Committee creating a School Profile which is a central repository of data and information that can be used by other self-study committees and by the Visiting Team and which includes information on a broad range of student achievements. The Part One Committee also collects and analyzes data from opinion surveys reflecting the views of all constituent groups in the school community.

In Part Two, the school conducts a searching and reflective review of its own operations with each self-study committee using the results of the recently completed profile, the opinion survey data and the school's own guiding statements as the starting point for its work.

Part Two of the self-study is divided into seven Sections, listed below. Each Section covers a major area of the school's operation, for which there are Standards for Accreditation against which the school will rate the degree of alignment. Indicators for each Standard will guide the school in understanding the meaning of the standards and also in assessing the degree of its own alignment with the stated Standards.

A	Guiding Statements
B	Teaching and Learning
C	Governance and Leadership
D	Faculty and Support Staff
E	Access to Teaching and Learning
F	School Culture and Partnerships for Learning
G	Operational Systems

The report for Part Three of the self-study will consist of a synthesis of the major conclusions of each of the self-study committees and a discussion, with recommendations to the school's leadership, of how plans for improvement could be incorporated as part of the school's long term planning or existing strategic planning initiatives.

Please refer to 'The Guide' and 'The Self Study' booklet for more information.

3. The Team Visit

Following the successful completion of the self-study, the Team Visit will be conducted by a team of trained and suitably qualified administrators and teachers, drawn from other NEASC member schools.

The primary function of the Visiting Team is to assist the school by providing an objective assessment of the conclusions of the self-study and by articulating specific recommendations for school improvement. The Team visits the school for approximately one week to see it in action. Team members visit classrooms and other work places and campus facilities, examine documentation compiled by the school, and speak with students, parents, members of the administration, faculty and support staff, and the Governing Body. They examine all aspects of the school in the light of the self-study findings, the school's own Guiding Statements and unique demography, and the Standards for Accreditation focusing on student learning and well being.

The Visiting Team will write a detailed report which will address each of the three parts of the self-study. The Visiting Team will also make an overall recommendation with regard to possible accreditation of the school directly to the respective agencies.

Please refer to 'The Team Visit' booklet for more detailed information.

4. Decisions on Accreditation

NEASC (through the CAISA Commission) will review carefully the Visiting Team Report and consider the recommendation of the Visiting Team relative to possible accreditation of the school. Those processes will result in recommendations upon which the NEASC Board of Trustees may act:

The CAISA Commission decision may be to:

- a. award Accreditation or Re-Accreditation.
- b. award Accreditation or Re-Accreditation with specific qualifications.
- c. postpone Accreditation or Re-Accreditation for some specified reason(s).
- d. not award Accreditation or Re-Accreditation.

Any adverse decision is subject to appeal by the school. Adverse accreditation decisions are defined as denial of accreditation, placement on probation, postponement of accreditation, or termination of accreditation.

5. Subsequent Procedures

A number of follow-up procedures have been established, including:

- a) The Two Year Report is prepared by the school at a date to be specified by NEASC/CAISA (approximately 24 months from the Team Visit). This shall contain a summary of the recommendation responses already completed by the school and Action Plans for addressing the other recommendations of the Visiting Team. An on-site visit may be required at the option of NEASC.
- b) A Five-Year Report that shows how the school has addressed the Visiting Team's recommendations following its own action planning. NEASC will expect also to see evidence of planning for the future included in this report. Schools must indicate whether they are still well aligned with Standards and demonstrate that systems are still in place to ensure on-going alignment. Receipt of the school's Five-Year Report will be followed by an on-site visit by at least two persons representing the accrediting agencies; these visitors will themselves write a comprehensive report for review and response by the respective agencies. The school's plans may well need to be reviewed according to the Five Year Visitors' comments.
- c) Special Reports and/or Special Visits may be required at any stage of the accreditation cycle if considered necessary by the agencies.

Please refer to 'The Subsequent Procedures' booklet for more detailed information.

E. Benefits of the Accreditation Process

The award of accreditation itself.

The school's own claim to excellence, however well justified, will always be open to question in the absence of an objective verification of quality. The school's earning of accredited status from a respected agency can be very reassuring to parents and faculty. It is an indication to the school community and to other individuals and establishments (including universities) that the school offers a quality education.

The opportunity for self-assessment.

To some extent continuous improvement is already a goal of schools, but not at the level to which self-evaluation is taken during the writing of the self-study when the school is working to meet clearly stated external standards and demanding deadlines. Schools earning accredited status tend to agree that introspection has been the most valuable aspect of the entire process. Also of significant benefit is the opportunity for school staff to meet collaboratively, often across disciplines and divisions of the school, to discuss issues, to identify concerns, and to propose improvements.

The opportunity for improved intra-school contact and understanding.

In some schools it is quite possible to go from year to year feeling that staff members in other areas are vague acquaintances at best and that the concerns of other sections are of little interest to them. It is the common experience of schools undergoing evaluation that the accreditation process is a unifying force in a school.

The opportunity to receive an external assessment.

The Team Visit involves a detailed, objective evaluation which reflects the perspectives of fellow professionals who have been trained in the evaluation process and who are familiar with both the Standards for Accreditation and the unique nature and concerns of International schools.

A plan for the future.

The Self-Study document, the Visiting Team Report, and the Two Year and the Five Year Reports serve as guides to planning for the school as they identify both strengths upon which to build and developing areas for attention. This information will help to move the school forward with a goal of ongoing improvement.

Maintaining the right points of focus

The accreditation process will help the school to ensure that it is focusing on certain vital aspects of its existence – most notably: the quality of student learning aided by the best possible teaching, student well-being, the promotion of internationalism/inter-culturalism, and the planning and actions necessary to support these features.

Affirmation of the school's needs.

It may be that Governing Body members, faculty and support staff, leadership, students or parents have felt the existence of certain needs for some time. The Visiting Team Report will serve to validate concerns and to guide staff, Governing Body and administration in establishing priorities and developing action plans. Schools are encouraged to integrate the recommendations from the various and NEASC reports into its own strategic planning processes to the extent possible.

CHAPTER 3: THE STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION (INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS AND VISITORS)

The standards for accreditation (8th Edition) can be downloaded from the NEASC website www.neasc.org

The Standards are fundamental to the accreditation process given that:

- a) a school should use a self-appraisal of the Standards in making its own preliminary determination as to whether it is ready to seek accreditation. The Indicators for each Standard are intended to clarify the meaning of the Standard and also to serve as a source of evidence of the school's alignment.
- b) the Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors will use the Standards in assessing a school's readiness to undertake the evaluation and accreditation process. Schools are encouraged to suggest other or additional indicators of their alignment with the standard.
- c) the Standards are vital points of reference during the school's Self-Study process. Schools will rate themselves against both the Indicators and the Standards.
- d) the Visiting Team will use the Standards in evaluating a school and in deciding whether or not to recommend Accreditation (and what qualifications, if any, to put upon its recommendation). The Visiting Team will rate the school's alignment with the standards, but will not give a written rating against the Indicators.
- e) the accreditation agencies will consider as one of the factors the extent to which a school aligns with the Standards when making the final decision on granting or withholding accreditation. Also important factors are the commitment and capacity of the school to improve.

While the Standards for Accreditation are to be understood in one sense as minimum requirements, they are at the same time solid benchmarks. Any school with a high degree of alignment with the standards will be a school of genuine quality, clearly meriting a seal of approval from the educational community.

Accreditation decisions will reflect an analysis of the degree of the school's alignment with the Standards and a consideration of the school's plans for improvement in areas of concern. A school will be judged in terms of the total pattern it presents, and a lesser degree of alignment with certain of the Standards may be compensated for by a school's overall quality. However, a school will be expected to explain the reasons for less than full alignment and to provide evidence that the basic intent of the Standards is being observed. One source of that evidence is the related Indicators; but schools may offer other evidence.

A guiding principle of the NEASC Evaluation and Accreditation program is respect for the freedom of schools to determine their own goals and ways of implementing them. Hence the Standards are not intended to impose any specific philosophy but simply to state the generally accepted wisdom of the educational community as to what constitutes sound quality in any school, regardless of its particular philosophy. It is the intention that no school offering a broad general program of education of genuine quality should fail to come within the framework of these Standards.

N.B. It is the responsibility of the Head and other members of the school community to examine the Standards thoroughly prior to the Preliminary/Preparatory Visit and to draw the attention of the Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors to strengths and areas in need of strengthening, especially cases in which the school itself feels it may have difficulty in aligning with the Standards.

CHAPTER 4: EFFECTIVE PLANNING FOR THE PRELIMINARY/ PREPARATORY VISIT. (INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS AND VISITORS)

The success of the Preliminary/Preparatory Visit requires careful prior organization.

1. Well in advance of the Visit, the school will receive a request to submit a Prior Information and Reflection Form to NEASC/CAISA and directly to the Visitors themselves. It is important the Visitors receive this well in advance of the visit so that they can effectively prepare for meetings.
2. The Visitors will contact the Head of School well beforehand to agree on a schedule for the Visit, which normally requires at least three full working days on site, and a whole day workshop for those members of the school community who will lead the self-study process.
3. When creating the schedule for the Visit the school should carefully follow the guidelines sent by the Visitor(s). These guidelines indicate which sections of the report each Visitor will be responsible for – important information when creating the schedule – and the various types of meetings and the equipment that will be necessary for the visit.

The Prior Information and Reflection Form

This form provides important information about the school and its development needs, and helps the Visitors more effectively focus the visit.

The form has four components:

Component One: Background information about the School.

Component Two: Reflective Statements from the Head, the Governing Body and the Faculty about the strengths, improvements made and development needs of the school

Component Three: A list of documentation the school is asked to provide prior to the visit

Component Four: Succinct reflective statements indicating the extent to which the school believes it is currently aligned with each standard.

E.g. **STANDARD A1**

The school shall be guided by clear and broadly accepted Guiding Statements of vision, mission, and educational objectives (or the equivalent using the school's chosen nomenclature and format) for students.

School response:

The school currently has a statement of mission and objectives, last revised in 2009 by faculty, students, parents, and the governing body, which are somewhat known and have varying degrees of acceptance amongst the school community. This is due to the large number of new students joining the school this academic year that are unfamiliar with our type of school. The school currently has no vision statement but plans to create one during the school's upcoming strategic planning exercise.

The school may wish to start addressing development areas which are highlighted in the Prior Information and Reflection Form even before the Preliminary/ Preparatory Visit.

The Schedule for the Visit

Specific details are provided in the Guidelines sent by the Visitors. As a general guide the following meetings/events take place:

1. **A Tour of the School Facilities:** preferably with the Head of School at the beginning of the visit.
2. **Orientation to the School's Mission and Values for the Visitors.**

This one-hour meeting, organized and presented by the school's leadership team, is held at the beginning of day one of the Preliminary Visit. Its purpose is for the school to help the Visitors further their understanding of:

- the school's guiding statements and the values that underpin them
- the ways in which the guiding statements impact student learning and well being
- the extent to which the guiding statements are embedded in the school's programs, services and operations

The meeting also affords the school an opportunity to demonstrate the level of knowledge and acceptance of its guiding statements and its ability to critically analyse its effectiveness in putting the guiding statements into action. The school may choose to do this by means of:

- a pre- prepared presentation. This should not be a promotional type presentation but a reflective piece which highlights effective as well as less effective practices
- school community member testimonies
- portfolio presentations
- a combination of any of the above

The school may wish to refer to the concept chart (page 6) for further ideas on areas to include. After the initial school input the visitors will seek additional information using follow up questions.

3. Separate meetings are held with:

- the Governing Body or its representatives (at least 2 hours). During this meeting the Governing Body presents a critical reflection on the work of this body. This presentation might include:
 - How the Governing Body supports the school's Guiding Statements.
 - How the Governing Body's actions and decisions impact the learning environment.
 - The Governing Body's recent achievements.
 - Challenges facing the Governing Body.
 - How this Body's governance role is relates to the Leadership/Management role of the Head of School and his/her senior colleagues (i.e. the Administration).
 - The Governing Body's plans for future school development
- the Self-Study Steering Committee Chair and members (if already appointed)
- the entire teaching staff
- the support staff or their representatives
- parent representatives
- student representatives
- Each member of the Senior Administration Team
- "Specialists" who could give the Visitors a particular insight into the various areas of the school which will be treated under Sections A to G of the accreditation protocol.

The meeting with the teaching staff, at which the most detailed explanation of the accreditation process will be given, is best scheduled during or at the end of the first day of the Visit.

An example of a schedule for Day One of the Visit

FULL DAY ONE - Date		
Time	Visitor: Mrs. X	Visitor: Mr. Y
07.45 – 09.15	School Tour with Mrs Brown (School Director) & Mr Smith (Facilities Manager)	
09.15 – 10.15	Orientation Meeting for both Visitors facilitated by the school leadership team.	
10.15 – 10.30	Coffee/tea/snack in Staff Room	
10.30 - 11.30	Initial perusal of documentation by both Visitors	
11.30 - 12.15	Mrs Dremer & Mrs Scott in Room 31 (Section B, Teaching & Learning, Maths and Sciences)	Mrs. Hill & Mr. Green in Room 21 (Section E, Access to Teaching and Learning, Special Needs support)
12.15 – 13.00	Mrs. Kline & Mrs Drew in Room 31 (Section B, Teaching and Learning, Social Sciences)	Ms. Robinson in Room 121 (Section E, Access to Teaching and Learning, Specialised Language Support)
13.00 – 13.30	Lunch with Senior Management Team in Small Dining Room	
13.30 – 14.15	Mr Liner and Ms Barnes in Room 20 (Section B, Teaching & Learning, English and Mod Langs.)	Mrs. Gourmet, Mr. Spic and Mrs Span in Main Kitchen (Section G, Food and Cleaning)
14.15 – 15.30	Classroom Observations	Classroom Observations
15.30 – 16.15	Mr Jones & Mrs Foly in Room 32 (Section E, Counselling)	Mr. Garcia in Room 14 (Section G, Safety and Building Maintenance)
16.15 – 17.30	All Academic Staff in School Theatre - Overview of the Accreditation Process. (<i>Those involved in the Workshop need not necessarily attend.</i>)	
17.30 – 19.00	Free time and/or reading of documentation and/or report drafting and/or discussion with School Director on items arising from today's interviews	
19.00 - 20.15	School Board in Meeting Room 2. Overview of Accreditation Process and Section C, Governance and Management.	

And so on for the other days.

4. The Self Study Workshop

This interactive workshop guides participants through the self study process and provides materials and information which assist the school in gaining as much as possible from the process.

Guidelines:

- i) The workshop should be attended by key people who will be in leadership positions in the school's drive for (re)accreditation. At minimum, these should include all members of the Provisional Self-Study Steering Committee. Some selected members of the Management Team and/or Board and/or teaching body may also wish be chosen by the school to participate.
- ii) NEASC does not require all members of staff to attend the workshop. There is no upper limit to the number of people who could attend. A school might therefore decide that a large proportion of staff should participate, but if it makes this choice it should be aware that the normal teaching timetable may need to be altered unless a weekend day is used.
- iii) The day and timings for the workshop should be agreed between the school and the Visitor as part of the overall Preliminary/Preparatory Visit schedule.
- iv) Workshop materials will be sent to the school by the NEASC Visitor well in advance. These will need to be printed, copied and distributed electronically and on paper to all workshop participants in plenty of time for them to do the vital pre-reading.
- v) To facilitate the workshop, the NEASC Visitor will require a computer, data projector (beamer), cables and a suitable projection surface. There should be room to bring workshop participants together for the "lecture" parts of the workshop, and space for participants to work in separate groups for the interactive parts. Each working group should be provided with a computer and memory stick.
- vi) The school should organize meals/refreshments as necessary during the workshop.

Further details will be provided by the Visitors

Organizational Matters

Travel arrangements

- Flight (or other transport):

Flights (or other transport) are booked by the Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors using the most economical means available. Business class tickets will not be reimbursed by the school, unless the Visitor can demonstrate that this is the most economical route available.

- Travel Insurance:

Travel insurance is arranged for all visits.

- Visa/vaccinations:

The school will advise the Visitor(s) whether visas/vaccinations are necessary to enter the host school country, and what steps should be taken to obtain them.

- Transport during the visit:

Transport between airport and hotel, and between hotel and school, will be arranged by the school. The school will give the Visitor(s) information regarding the airport pick-up and contact numbers to use in case of emergency.

Accommodation

Single room, standard accommodation, with internet access, will be booked and paid for by the school. The school will, prior to the visit, advise the Visitor(s) of the name, location and contact details of the hotel.

Responsibility for Expenses Incurred

Costs covered by the school:

NEASC Visitors require reimbursement on site for out of pocket expenses for the following travel expenses.

- Economy air/train travel
- Transport between home and airport/station, between airport/hotel, and between hotel/school.
- Car mileage (if used instead of plane/train) and parking at hotel
- Travel insurance
- Visa/vaccination costs
- All meals while traveling and during the visit (*Note: The school should advise the Visitor(s) beforehand on the limits it wishes to impose on cost of meals, payment for alcohol, etc.*)

The school is also responsible for paying the hotel bill directly for four hotel nights in a single, standard room accommodation with internet access. An additional night may be required, should this need arise due to flight availability.

Costs to be covered by the Visitor:

- Upgraded travel costs: should the Visitor choose to travel Business Class, he/she should submit proof of the cost of an economy class flight, and will be reimbursed for this amount only.
- Upgraded accommodation
- Additional nights at the hotel before or after the visit
- Any personal costs incurred at the hotel such as: telephone calls, laundry, bar, minibar, pay-per-view television, spa treatments.
- Excess baggage charge

CHAPTER 5: THE PRELIMINARY/PREPARATORY VISIT ASSESSING THE READINESS OF THE SCHOOL (INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISITORS)

In order to accomplish the first main objective of the Visit, the Visitors will wish to determine the extent to which:

- the school has clearly formulated guiding documents such as an educational mission or philosophy and a set of objectives that reflect the vision of the school community and the school's unique demography **and that effectively drive school decision-making processes.**
- student learning and well being are at the heart of school decision making
- the school is committed to developing international mindedness
- there is evidence that the school is actively striving for excellence and is committed to ongoing improvement with a clear focus on student learning and well being
- the school demonstrates the capacity to undertake a school improvement process through for example, a track record of successful planning and implementing plans for improvement, previous engagement in accreditation, authorization or inspection processes.
- the school has sound organizational procedures, and basic documentation in place to support the school's program and operations to include:
 - a Board policy manual
 - documented role description for the Governing Body and the Head of School
 - school organizational chart
 - job descriptions
 - school development plans
 - curriculum documentation (including assessment documentation) which reflects what is taught
 - an admissions policy
 - staff, student and parent handbooks
 - staff contracts
 - well-designed, rehearsed and effective plans of action in cases of fire, accident, medical or other emergencies
 - basic financial documents- audited accounts, budget, cash flow forecasts

- the school demonstrates good alignment with most of the standards for accreditation; in particular those standards which relate to the areas highlighted on pages 22-23
- the school can demonstrate in areas where the school is not yet well aligned with the standards that it can make significant progress in the coming months.
- the school community has developed sufficient understanding of the accreditation process and its expectations to embark on the self study.
- There appear to be no significant factors internal, (such as an impending campus move) or external (such as a change in local legislation) which might affect the school's ability to undertake the self study or address its development needs.

CHAPTER 6: THE PRELIMINARY/PREPARATORY VISIT: PREPARING THE SCHOOL FOR THE SELF-STUDY AND THE TEAM VISIT (INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISITORS)

In order to achieve the second major objective of the Visit and to ensure that everyone concerned is fully aware of what is expected, the Visitors will review with the school Head and such individuals or groups as may be appropriate, each of the following:

- the Accreditation process - its purpose and procedures. This is reviewed with the faculty, support staff, students, parents and the governing body.
- the NEASC supplementary materials involved.
- the Self-Study process. Please refer in particular to the Self Study Workshop.
- the basic purposes and procedures of the Team Visit.

To assist with the above tasks, Visitors will discuss the following resources that are available to the school:

- two booklets entitled *The Self Study* and *The Team Visit* which will be sent to the School to assist with the further stages of the Accreditation process
- a set of guidelines and a PowerPoint Presentation for the informative meetings and Self Study Workshop to be held with various members of the school community

In preparing the school, the remaining essential tasks of the Visitors are as follows:

1. to establish a proposed schedule of dates (to be recommended to the agencies) for accomplishing the subsequent steps in the process, including the Team Visit.
2. to agree on a recommendation to the agencies about the size and general composition of the Visiting Team, including the fields of expertise that should be represented.
3. to inform the school of any particular areas of its operations and/or facilities which, in the Visitors' opinions, are seriously deficient (and that might prevent the agencies from giving approval for the school to move forward at this time) and to suggest improvements which might be undertaken prior to the Team Visit.

This information must be provided to the school verbally during the Visit Exit Meeting and in writing, following the Visit, in the Visitors' Report. If a school is poorly aligned with Standards and seems likely to remain so for some time, immediate entry into the self-study process may not be recommended by the Visitors. NEASC will then respond to the school with recommended next steps which may lead to a further report and visit before candidacy status can be granted.

CHAPTER 7: CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAMPLE PRELIMINARY VISITORS' REPORT

A template for Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors' Reports is available from NEASC. Nevertheless, given that the Visitors are typically experienced individuals, variations in format and style are acceptable. However, all reports should include the following sections.

INTRODUCTION (in template format)

This should contain brief descriptions of such features as:

- the school's history
- its current legal status and governance
- the span of grades and age-groups in the school
- nationalities and other important characteristics of the staff and students
- type(s) of curriculum offered
- school location and physical facilities
- the school's position in the accreditation process
- the conduct of the current Visit

PART ONE: ASSESSING THE READINESS OF THE SCHOOL

This part of the report refers to the current position of the school with regard to the Standards for Accreditation. It should be structured so as to refer to each of the Seven Sections A to G (Guiding Statements, Teaching and Learning, Governance and Leadership, etc.) and it should contain "Observations" and "Suggested Actions" for each Section. It is suggested that Visitors use a tool such as the Standards *Aide Memoire* provided by NEASC to assist with this part of the report, as well as to give structure to formal discussions with those with whom the Visitors meet at the school.

Visitors write their observations and suggested areas for attention on a template after each standard. The observations for each Section should reflect a focus on the school's effectiveness/impact on student learning and well being, consideration of the school's own guiding statements, the essential aspects of the Standards in each Section and the evidence leading to the Visitor(s)' perceptions.

The following list of essential aspects for each Section may guide the Visitors in writing their observations and in identifying areas for attention, if any. The list may be helpful also to the school in synthesizing and understanding the important aspects of the various sections.

Section A – Guiding Statements

- Clarity of, and the real impact/commitment to, the School's Vision, Mission and Objectives (VMO).
- International/inter-cultural commitment.
- Admissions policy and procedures to ensure student-to-school match.

Section B – Teaching & Learning (T/L)

- Teaching/Learning program coherence with VMO, including internationalism aspects.
- Alignment between the written and taught curriculum
- T/L provision for all students with varied learning styles and learning needs.
- Curriculum documentation comprehensiveness and vertical/horizontal coherence.

- Resources for learning- library, ICT, facilities, space, human resources, classroom materials.
- Use of the locality and community diversity to enrich learning.
- Professional development to support T/L
- Use of a range of teaching practices to support diverse learner needs
- Varied assessment of student learning and developing use of resulting data for modification of T/L.
- Development of systems for analysing student achievement based on data about school and individual performance
- Effectiveness of reporting of school and student achievement.
- Curriculum review procedures

Section C – Governance & Leadership

- Effective and interdependent governance and management structures.
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities, especially of Head and Governing Body, expressed in Policy Manual and procedures.
- Qualified and experienced school leadership
- Ethical treatment.
- Financial stability.
- School planning.

Section D – Faculty & Support Staff

- Staff (Faculty, Support, and leadership) in sufficient numbers and suitable for the job.
- Effectiveness of contractual arrangements.
- Robust recruitment and personnel practices leading to stability in staffing
- Appraisal process linked to professional development.

Section E – Access to Teaching & Learning

- Effectiveness of special needs support
- Effectiveness of ESL/Other Teaching Language support.
- Effectiveness of guidance/counselling.
- Provisions for health care on site and off site.
- Documentation- policies and procedures- supporting services in this area

Section F – School Culture & Partnerships for Learning

- Positive school climate.
- Communications within and beyond school.
- Home-school communications and partnerships in support of learning.
- Co-curricular programs and access.
- Quality of boarding services (if applicable).

Section G – Operational Systems

- Effectiveness of financial management.
- Buildings, grounds, equipment as they support learning.
- Provisions for health and safety including well-designed, rehearsed and effective plans of action in cases of fire, accident, medical or other emergencies
- Effectiveness of auxiliary services and their staffing (food, security, transport, maintenance).

PART TWO: PREPARING THE SCHOOL FOR THE SELF-STUDY AND THE TEAM VISIT

This part of the report refers to the steps taken by the Visitors to ensure that the school is properly prepared for the subsequent steps in the process. It should include comments on:

- the members of the school administration, staff, and community who were contacted, and the topics of discussion
- a description of Visit activities
- the school's commitment/enthusiasm to undertake the Accreditation Process and to align with Standards.
- the school's capacity/resources to achieve alignment with the Standards in a reasonable period of time
- The school's real focus on student learning and well-being
- the proposed schedule of the timeline and dates for the Self-Study and Team Visit
- suggestions as to the size and general composition of the Visiting Team

N.B. NEASC normally requires a minimum team size of six-eight members, although the size and/or unique characteristics of the school will be considered in making the final decision. Although an attempt is made to invite team members from areas close to the geographic location of the school, it should be noted that representatives from other member schools and from the USA (for NEASC) will often be included.

PART THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General concluding remarks and a recommendation with regard to candidate status (Preliminary Visit), or the readiness of the school to pursue re-accreditation (Preparatory Visit), are contained in this part of the report.

It is clearly not possible for the Visitors to evaluate a school as thoroughly as the Visiting Team or as the school itself through its Self-Study. The Visitors will attempt to serve the school as well as possible, within the limits of the Visit, by highlighting major areas for attention as well as the school's strengths.

The school is again reminded of its duty to draw the Visitors' attention to any areas in which there is possible doubt as to whether the intent of the Standards for Accreditation can be met by the time of the Team Visit.

In the event that there are serious deficiencies that cannot be remedied immediately; or there is limited evidence that the school can improve its alignment with the standards within a reasonable period of time; or there is doubt that the school has the capacity or commitment to move forward with a comprehensive self-study, the Visitors may recommend the deferral or postponement of that next step to the respective agencies.

N.B. The Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors' Report is *not* to be left with the school. It is written for the information of NEASC/CAISA and the Chair of the future Visiting Team. After it has been reviewed by NEASC/CAISA it will be sent with a letter which informs the school whether or not it may proceed with the next step in the process.