



Southern Association of Independent Schools

SAIS-Only Accreditation

VISIT REPORT

for

Christ School

500 Christ School Road
Arden, North Carolina 28704-9914

Head of School Name

Paul Krieger
828-684-6232

Date of Visit

October 3-4, 2006

Dr. Edward J. Fox, Jr.
Interim Head, The Elon School

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Southern Association of Independent Schools

SAIS-Only Accreditation

SAIS member schools are part of a remarkable history of quality assurance in education.

SAIS began its organizational life in 1903 as the “Mid-South Association of Independent Schools,” providing training for teachers in private schools and some early public schools in the southeastern states. In 1953, another organization began as the Southern Association of Independent Schools, providing a forum for independent school administrators to work with public schools through SACS and to contribute to the larger interest in accreditation in the southeast. MAIS and SAIS merged in 1986 to form the present SAIS, with an emphasis on accreditation through SACS for independent schools and professional development for administrators, trustees, and teachers. Today, SAIS works to help both established and emerging schools approach these issues with creativity and innovation. Working at the state, regional, and national levels, SAIS serves and strengthens member schools through the promotion of the highest quality educational standards and ethical conduct.

SAIS is pleased to offer independent schools a process for accreditation that is specific to their needs. In today’s world of accountability in schooling, accreditation serves as a critical component of a school’s demonstrated effectiveness and ability to provide successful schooling for children. A school that is able to achieve accreditation demonstrates a commitment to a process that requires the school to meet a set of rigorous, research-based standards; to engage in a program of continuous school improvement; and to demonstrate quality assurance through self-evaluation and peer review. SAIS-only accreditation provides access to a network of services that supports every school’s ability to identify and meet its goals for improving student performance and the teaching and learning process.

An SAIS-only accredited school is part of a regional network of accredited schools which have demonstrated success in educating children. As such, SAIS-only accreditation is recognized by NAIS as a symbol of quality in education for students and teachers.

To earn accreditation, schools must meet quality standards, be evaluated by an outside group of peers, and implement a school plan focused on strategic improvement and student performance.

Accreditation is voluntary and must be renewed each year. Schools participating in the accreditation process are members of SAIS.

Roster of Team Members

Chair

Dr. Edward (Ned) J. Fox, Jr.
Interim Head
The Elon School
201 South O'Kelly Avenue
Elon, North Carolina 27244
cashiersfox@aol.com
336-584-0091, ext. 118 (school office)
828-743-9778 (home office)

Team Members

Fletcher Gregory
Chief Financial Officer
Charlotte Latin School
9502 Providence Road
Charlotte, North Carolina 28277-8695
fgregory@charlottelatin.org
704-846-7299

Dr. Richard E. Rankin, Jr.
Head of School
Gaston Day School
2001 Gaston Day Road
Gastonia, North Carolina 28056
richard.rankin@gastonday.org
rrankin@gastonday.org
704-864-7744

Dr. Margaret Grissom
Associate Head and Dean of Academics
Saint Mary's School
900 Hillsborough Street
Raleigh, North Carolina
mgrissom@saint-marys.edu
919-424-4135

The Review

A team representing SAIS conducted an on-site visit to review this school's self-study and standards compliance. The team was comprised of team members whose diverse independent school backgrounds provided an array of expertise. The visiting team sought the answers to these four critical questions within the framework of the school's self-study. The following pages contain the findings.

In conducting the on-site reviews, the visiting team was responsible for:

1. Assessing the adequacy of the self-study process;
2. Identifying strengths of the school deserving commendation;
3. Developing recommendations that may help to strengthen the programs of the school;
4. Assessing compliance with the standards of SAIS;
5. Developing a written report of the findings.

To fulfill the team's responsibilities, team members:

1. Reviewed documentation provided by the school;
2. Conducted interviews with board members, parents, school personnel, students, and community members;
3. Applied the standards for accreditation;
4. Developed a draft of commendations and recommendations;
5. Contributed to the content and focus of the written report;
6. Provided input as to the determination of accreditation.

The primary focus of the self-study process is to demonstrate the capacity of a school to meet the requirements for accreditation. A typical self-study consists of:

- Analysis and response to accreditation standards;
- Identification and demonstration of a continuous process of improvement;
- Implementation of methods that provide for quality assurance.

The study addresses four critical questions:

1. **PROFILE: *Where is the school today?*** The PROFILE should include clear, comprehensive information reflecting current student performance data, stakeholder perspectives, community characteristics, and analysis of strengths and limitations in the areas of student learning and school performance.
2. **VISION: *Where does the school want to go?*** The VISION is a clear, compelling purpose communicated through the school's vision and mission statements, beliefs, and core values.
3. **PLAN: *What is the plan to get there?*** The PLAN should be based on an analysis of pertinent data, research of best practices, and alignment with generally-accepted expectations for student learning at schools with similar missions.
4. **RESULTS: *How will the school know when it has accomplished its plan?*** The RESULTS are documented evidence demonstrating successful implementation of strategies that resulted in accomplishment of the school's mission and student achievement gains related to the school's mission.

The Self-Study

What to include in this section:

- Brief history of school

Christ School was founded in 1900 by the Reverend Thomas C. Wetmore to provide “an institution of learning in which the children of the Appalachian region could be given a thorough education and trained into good citizenship under the influence and the direction of the Church.” During its early years it was supported by funds raised by Father Wetmore and by funds from the National Council of the Episcopal Church. Both boys and girls attended, the majority as day students, until 1928 when the State opened a public school and provided transportation for the children of the neighborhood. After this there was no longer the need for a “missionary” type of school in this area, and Christ School devoted itself to the preparation of boys for college. The school is still related to the Episcopal Church, although it is self-supporting. There have always been a resident Chaplain and regular Chapel services.

- Current school statistics and leadership structure

Current statistics are available at the School for anyone to look at. They were also provided to the PRT. Suffice it to say that since the date of initial SAIS-only accreditation, 2002, retention has increased by 5%; Annual Loyalty Fund gifts have increased by 10%; new student applications and visits have increased significantly; new student enrollment has increased by 37% since 2002; all college graduates from a five-year period have been surveyed and some curricular changes have been made; faculty retention has increased; attrition from discipline issues is down by 38%. A \$15 million capital campaign is running well ahead of schedule, now nearing \$17 million.

There have been many building improvements, including a beautiful new chapel. Publications have taken a giant leap forward since our last visit.

A current organizational chart is available at the school; one was provided for each member of the PRT.

In January, 2003, Paul Krieger was appointed Headmaster. He had been phased in under Russ Ingersoll over a two-year period. The transition was relatively seamless and well-communicated.

- How the school selected and approached the self-study

Christ School chose to integrate two methods of self-study: School Renewal, which they used for initial SAIS-only accreditation in 2002, and the Self-Study method. The two are blended so well that this could well be a model for other schools to follow. It is a seamless report. Each year, since the initial SAIS-only accreditation, there has been an annual update, which is also included in the self-study report.

There has been immense buy-in from all stakeholders, such as the members of the PRT had not seen before in any other school.

PROFILE

PROFILE: *Where is the school today?*

Christ School has thoroughly documented test scores, has made the decision in the last five years not to take problem children, has been accepting achieving children who are interested in a college preparatory education, and has thereby increased its retention, reduced its attrition, attracted new students, increased its enrollment, halted its faculty attrition.

In addition, Christ School has surveyed its graduates of the last five years to see primarily how they have fared in college, and has made changes in its curriculum, most notably in mathematics and in foreign languages to strengthen those areas.

160 stakeholders have participated in its last strategic plan, and a new committee under a Board member has begun to work on a new strategic plan.

A Learning Resources Center and an expansion of staff has been of aid to those college-bound students with learning differences.

All information was available to the members of the PRT in notebooks in our work room, and some in mailings before we came.

VISION

VISION: *Where does the school want to go?*

The key decision in 2002-2003 to accept a different type of student, *i.e.*, to concentrate on the college-bound student who had had no previous history of discipline problems has greatly changed the face of the school, and has increased the enrollment.

The clarity of mission is expressed in various publications, notably in the Student Handbook at the beginning, followed by a strong section on the Honor Code. Further, it is fleshed out in a great publication entitled *Discover You*, which talks about what a boy goes through and learns from his experience at Christ School.

There is an unusual feature in the Student Handbook, the adaptation of the Athenian Oath for Christ School students into The Christ School Oath, which serves as a guide for the students.

PLAN

PLAN: *What is the plan to get there?*

The school has in place a very effective strategic plan, which has been coupled with its School Renewal topics. There are various benchmarks in the plan and various timelines.

Annually, the strategic plan is brought up to date, and a checklist of all plans accomplished.

In short, Christ School is guided by the accreditation process to a degree seldom seen by this Chair. (This Chair has now served on or has chaired some 60-70 accreditation visits, 1964-2002.)

School Wide Goals are already in print for the years 2006-2011 and are included in the materials of the self-study. Five of the nine goals have built-in benchmarks. The new strategic planning committee will flesh these out and perhaps add more goals.

RESULTS

RESULTS: *How will the school know when it has accomplished its plan?*

Christ School clearly knows when it has reached its goals and sub-goals. There are timelines and benchmarks. They are clearly documented on an annual basis.

The school absolutely has a clear statement of evaluation and a clear record of their evaluation of the results achieved.

Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

The peer review team commends the school for:

1. A splendid self-study that melds two methods seamlessly: School Renewal and the Strategic Plan, a model arrangement.
2. All faculty members being expected to use the new technology in lesson planning and in creating interactive presentations to enhance learning. Advances in academic technology with acquisition of new forms of technology, such as the use of SmartBoards and the faculty laptop program.
3. The renewed and public emphasis on the Honor Code and the public signing of both the Honor Oath and the Christ School Oath.
4. The dramatic growth in dollars and in participation in the Annual Loyalty Fund (ALF), a tribute to the positive nature of the school these years.
5. Publishing realistic School Wide Goals for 2006-2011, and for establishing a new Strategic Planning Committee.
6. Having inspired the boys to sing in chapel!
7. Admissions decisions based on the match between the personal and academic profiles of prospective students and the school's expectations of students as scholars and as model citizens, a process that is very much board supported. The clarification of mission and establishing clearly what kind of students are to be there has been a great aid to the school.
8. A significant increase in support for faculty development through funding, personnel, and programs. The faculty are encouraged to innovate with instructional methods.
9. Reworking the faculty evaluation system to include the various roles of the faculty.
10. Sustaining a deep sense of community that is valued by the students. Having a campus that is friendly and welcoming for all that are there or for all who come. Faculty and students are at home.
11. Making academic changes in the curriculum to make it more relevant to the 21st Century.
12. Giving department chairs responsibility for departmental curriculum.
13. Instituting an intervention team (C2A) to respond immediately and putting strategies in place for students in academic, social, or personal difficulty. Designating the Chaplain as the leader of this residential curriculum program.

14. The strong fiscal position: no deficit, no debt.
15. The strategic use and redesign of all publications and the website.
16. The administration's clear vision of the marketing and communications needs of the school, all supported financially.
17. Instituting a redefined demerit system and implementing a merit system.

Recommendations:

The peer review team recommends that the school consider:

1. Funding the Headmaster Scholars Program through endowment and not through the operating budget.
2. Evaluating opportunities for faculty recreation and leisure within the context of the demands of a boarding school. The school need not finance these, only explore ways to tell faculty how really to be away from campus, figuratively or literally, when they are off duty. The boarding school listserv may be a place where suggestions could be elicited.
3. Continuing to advance the department chairs' administrative responsibilities.
4. Ensuring ongoing support for technology to remain current and competent and engaging in budget planning to that end.
5. Taking further steps in revising the faculty evaluation system, including clear lines of responsibility.
6. Evaluating the success of changes in the curriculum and looking at curriculum more broadly for relevance, for integration vertically and horizontally, and for critical thinking.
7. Holding to the current, well-conceived admissions standards.
8. Continuing to market the school's message both internally and externally, that this is a school for serious well-behaved students. Consciously maintaining the feeling of joy at the school.
9. Considering the role of public relations and how it might enhance the Communications Office.
10. Evaluating the financial feasibility of endowing the maintenance in the planned new facilities.
11. Considering an intentional program to recruit minority faculty members.

Special Issues (identified during the Chair's preliminary visit) that the visiting team was asked to address:

1. Tag line identity:

"A National Leader in Educating Boys" -- We like the concept, but suggest that the school consider dropping the word "National" and changing the tag line to "A Leader in Educating Boys," or "A School Leader in Educating Boys."

2. Retention and enrollment (as was mentioned in 2002):

The reforms that Christ Church has put in since 21002 seems to be working well, judging by their success in increasing the size of the student body. But having redefined what kind of student they would take has helped immensely.

3. Financial: building endowment; new academic building; faculty housing:

All seem to be on target, thanks largely to the current Capital Campaign having been so successful.

To build endowment takes time: one would wonder what the endowment goals are, however. Typical need theses days include financial aid, staff development funds, and maintenance of buildings.

4. Technology: how to stay current and competent:

As most acknowledge, technology can be a bottomless money pit. One must decide first what a school wants to do with the technology, in two areas: administrative and teaching. We applaud the school for expecting all faculty to use the new technology in lesson planning and in creating interactive presentations to enhance learning,

We have no suggestions, but feel the school is on the right track to have projected usage precede purchase.

5. Curriculum: how to stay current and relevant for the beginning of the 21st Century:

We heard of some teachers who are into a curriculum review of their own courses. We assumed that this was department or school-directed.

We looked at the Christ School Curriculum Guide and found it to be up to date. There seems a caveat, however, in that there are a great many courses for the size of the student body. One might ask the question: if one adds a course, what course should be excised?

In the normal cycle of the School Renewal, this is the year of Curriculum and Instruction, and the impetus for curriculum review seems to have come from that.

SUMMARY

- What type of community did you find at the school?

The PRT found a gracious, warm, caring community. We were hospitably received from the beginning. The new improvements to the campus since 2002 are visible, as well as built in to the school's fabric:

The Chapel expansion was well blended with the old; the new signs and entrance are stunning; the new Student Center is functional and used.

A parent of boys, as well as the boys themselves, would find all of this appealing.

- Describe the collaboration between stakeholders.

Every faculty member and administrator with which we spoke all felt involved in the process of the accreditation – this year all were involved in the curriculum and instruction segment. All felt a part of it.

The best part of their self-study and accreditation, however, is that the entire process is built into the ongoing fabric of the school.

- Were expectations set and on target?

The PRT's expectations were more than met. The school's expectations set throughout the 2002-2006 school years have also been more than met.

CONCLUSION

The PRT very much appreciates what Christ School has accomplished since our last visit here, in 2002. Three of the four members of this PRT were on the initial accreditation committee. We had never seen a school improve so much in a relatively short time. It was a good school before; it is a much better school today.

We thank Erich Cluxton for his having chaired the self-study and for his part in taking care of us while on campus.

We thank Mrs. Beth Krieger for taking care of our food needs – she is as warm and gracious as the school that she represents.

Further, we recognize the fine job that Paul Krieger, the Headmaster, has done since he has taken office. He has taken a good school and made it even better.

Finally, we thank all of the men and women and boys t\with whom we met and who were so very cordial and forthright with the members of the PRT.

It was our great privilege to have been asked to come.

The peer review team finds:

1. That the school is in compliance with all standards of the SAIS-Only accreditation process.
2. That the self-study conducted by the school meets the standard of quality and thoroughness required by the accreditation process and answers the four critical questions as outlined in the Sourcebook.
3. That Christ School is unanimously recommended for SAIS-Only accreditation.

Edward (Ned) J. Fox, Jr.
Chair, Peer Review Team

For the PRT

October 4, 2006