



# ISASA

Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa

## Why Choose an Independent School?

**P**arents have a fundamental right to educate their children according to their own values and beliefs. In our multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-faith world, this means there will be a constant demand for educational choice.

Southern Africa has a huge variety of independent schools from which parents can choose. They differ widely in the types of education they offer and the communities they serve.

### What is ISASA?

ISASA, the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa, representing some 600 independent schools, is the oldest and largest independent school association in the region. Its members provide quality education to 125 000 pupils and employ more than 10 000 teachers.

One of its greatest strengths as an association is the rich diversity of its member schools. They serve a very broad range of socio-economic and cultural communities, religious affiliations and educational levels from pre-primary to post-matric across Southern Africa.

The ISASA brand stands for high standards of educational and ethical practice: all ISASA member schools are quality assured for membership, and commit themselves to a code of ethics.

Some independent schools are based on religious faiths: these include Christian denominations, as well as the Jewish, Hindu and Muslim faiths.

Others follow particular philosophies, approaches and practices, such as those of Montessori and Rudolf Steiner. Schools can be single-sex or co-educational, large or small, boarding or day.

The socio-economic spread of ISASA member schools in South Africa ranges from well-established, well-resourced schools that have become household names (such as St John's, Roedean, St Stithians, Hilton, Inanda Seminary, St Cyprian's, Bishops, St Andrew's and the King David schools), to more recently established schools serving poorer communities such as C21, Christian High School, Zenzeleni, Get Ahead and Cornerstone College. The same range of schools can be found amongst our members in neighbouring countries.

While most ISASA member schools write examinations based on the core curriculum of either the Independent Examinations Board or the state, some do offer international examinations. For example, the Deutsche Schule in Johannesburg caters for those wishing to write German school-leaving examinations.

### Why parents choose independent education

Independent or private education is expanding all over the world in response to parent demand. The growth of private schooling has been most dramatic in developing countries like India, China, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Chile. However, even in a developed country such as England, enrolments in independent schools have increased by more than 10 per cent since 1985.

In South Africa, the independent school sector has grown rapidly since the 1990s. While there were only about 500 independent schools registered in 1990, by

Quality Values Diversity

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2001 the number had increased to almost 2 000 schools serving some 400 000 learners. The majority of these new independent schools serve black communities and charge fees below R8 500 per annum. With the coming of democracy and the opening up of opportunities and choice to black South Africans, the entire face of independent schooling has changed: in 1990 it catered for a majority of white learners in high-fee traditional schools, whereas now 70 per cent of the learners are black (58 per cent African) in low-fee schools.

Why are so many parents all over the world choosing to send their children to independent schools?

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

### **Independence**

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

This means that they have more scope and flexibility than their state counterparts to introduce innovative approaches to teaching and learning, develop and test new educational concepts, and respond to the changing needs of pupils, employers and society in general.

### **Accountability**

While independent schools cherish their freedom, they have to demonstrate accountability to their constituency and the wider society. Independent schools have to meet government requirements for registration and accreditation, and must be able to demonstrate that they maintain standards that are not inferior to those at comparable public schools. ISASA maintains that its schools must be responsible to their stakeholders and society at large and act ethically, within the relevant constitutional and legal frameworks. In fact, it can be argued that independent schools are among the most accountable schools in a society – they will go out of business if they don't deliver to their clients.

### **Strong value-base**

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

### **Quality**

Above all else, when parents are paying for their child's schooling they want quality education. Across all geographical locations and socio-economic categories, ISASA member schools provide:

- ❖ **High-quality teachers** who are committed and experienced professionals and motivate learners to succeed.
- ❖ **High academic standards.** Research by the Human Sciences Research Council in 2004 showed that, across all fee levels, independent schools produced a higher percentage of senior certificate passes and university exemptions than public schools.
- ❖ **Effective mathematics and science departments.** Independent schools produce a greater proportion of higher grade passes in mathematics and science than public schools.
- ❖ **Access to good learning resources and facilities** such as media centres, books, computers and laboratories.
- ❖ **Smooth transition to the next level of studies.** Learners from independent schools are well prepared for the demands of the next level of education, and especially higher education.
- ❖ **Structured, safe, nurturing learning environments** with good discipline, positive values and pastoral care.
- ❖ **Smaller classes** and more individualised attention for individual pupils.
- ❖ **Development of the whole child** through a range of curricular options and extracurricular activities, and opportunities for community service.
- ❖ **Affordable schooling.** Contrary to popular perception, in some areas of Southern Africa independent school fees are lower than those in public schools.
- ❖ **International links.** Most ISASA schools in Southern Africa have links with independent schools in other parts of the world, which helps to keep them in touch with international trends in education. They participate in events and exchanges with schools from all over the world. Because they offer such good value at very competitive fee levels, Southern African independent schools are attracting more and more students from other countries.

Being able to choose is the essence of democracy. Independent education in Southern Africa offers parents the opportunity to choose what they believe is best for their children, as well as what they can afford. Parents of every socio-economic group can find schools that meet their needs. They are encouraged to participate in their child's education and, in a partnership between the school and home, help their children achieve their full potential.