



Scottish Council of Independent Schools

Guidelines for Membership

The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) acts as a consultative and advisory body for the independent schools in Scotland. Founded in 1978, it became a charitable company limited by guarantee in 1990. It represents 96% of the independent sector in Scotland and operates through a Board comprising Governors, Heads and Bursars elected by the member schools.

The Director and staff are responsible to the Board for carrying out the key functions of SCIS, which are to:

- communicate and negotiate with the Scottish Government, MSPs, public and private bodies on behalf of the independent sector
- advise member schools and their governing bodies on educational developments and on legislation affecting independent schools (e.g. education, charity law, welfare)
- advance education through curriculum development and continuing professional development for teachers and support staff
- provide information for parents, the general public, the media and other interested parties bodies

Membership of SCIS

All schools in membership of SCIS must be fully registered with the Scottish Government Schools' Directorate and subject to inspection by HM Inspectorate of Education and, where appropriate, by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care.

Membership Criteria

To help schools applying for membership, SCIS has drawn up a set of guidelines which member schools are expected to meet. It is the responsibility of the Head and a school's governing body to provide children with sound educational experience, to protect their safety and to safeguard their well-being. Standards and quality of education are externally monitored by HM Inspectorate of Education. Care standards in boarding schools, pre-school education and after school care clubs are monitored the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care.

Governance

Independent schools exist for the advancement of education and most independent schools in Scotland are registered as charities. It is helpful if the status of the school is clearly described in the prospectus and handbook, so that parents and others can understand that, in the case of charities, any financial surplus will be used for the purposes of the school. All schools should have accounts externally audited annually.

Each independent school has its own governing board, or equivalent, appoints its own staff and develops its own ethos. Schools should have a written constitution, a memorandum and articles of association or equivalent setting out their purpose and structure of governance. If there is no board of governors, an advisory body or equivalent should be in place.

It is good practice for existing and new governors to be advised of their corporate responsibilities and to be given guidance and training on their role as governors during their term of office.

Management

The Head, who is responsible for the education and welfare of pupils, should be a qualified and experienced member of the teaching profession, appropriately trained and registered, or eligible to be registered, with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. In some schools, such as those offering specialist provision, the Head may have alternative, appropriately recognised qualifications. The Head is usually supported by a team of senior management staff who will be similarly qualified.

Staff

Teaching staff should have appropriate academic qualifications and, where possible, should be registered, or pursuing registration, with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Heads, teachers and all staff working with children should be subject to appropriate checks. Proper contractual procedures should be in place and there should be a framework for continuing professional development and review of all staff.

Curriculum

Pupils are expected to receive a broad and balanced curriculum, appropriate to their age, stage and individual needs.

Information on the curriculum and on assessments should be available to parents, so that they are aware of the school's procedures for reporting on their children's progress and on other matters.

Parents

Heads and staff in independent schools work in close collaboration with parents, who may need advise on their child's education, on pastoral and other matters such as support for special needs, co-curricular activities or meeting the cost of school fees. Many schools have parent associations or parent groups who support school activities and who liaise with the staff.

Premises

School premises and playing fields need to meet appropriate building regulations, health and safety requirements, fire regulations, and other applicable legislation. Accommodation provided on the school premises should be fit for purpose and suitable for the number, age and sex of the pupils.

Welfare

Schools are expected to have policies and procedures in place for child protection, anti-bullying, disability, equal opportunities and other matters to promote and safeguard the welfare of the children. Schools can also encourage parents, pupils and staff to understand their responsibilities to each other and to the school community as a whole.

Inspection and Self-Evaluation

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education considers the quality of learning and teaching in schools in relation to, for example, the curriculum, support for learning, resources, ethos and management. Where schools have been inspected, the published inspection reports should be readily available. In the follow-up to inspections, schools are expected to demonstrate that they have been responsive to the key points for action in the reports.

Schools are expected to have business and development plans in place, setting out their priorities for improvement in the context of their overall aims. Plans often cover a three of five year cycle and should be regularly monitored and reviewed.

Values

Independent schools strive to offer a high quality of education within a framework where the focus is on the development and care of the individual child. Pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential, to participate in a wide range of activities within the school and to contribute to service in the wider community. It is helpful for school prospectuses and handbooks to describe the learning environment in the school and the style of education offered in the context of the values and aims of the school.

Complaints

SCIS strongly recommends that all schools have a complaints procedure which is readily available to parents and pupils. Most complaints can usually be resolved within the school. If serious, complaints are referred to the Registrar of Independent Schools and they may be investigated. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended by the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, sets out the nature of issues for which the Registrar is able to issue a Notice of Complaint against the school which may lead to the School being removed from the Register of Independent Schools.

Subscriptions

Member schools are required to pay their annual subscription and other charges invoiced by SCIS timeously.

Review of Guidelines

The above guidance, produced by the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, is reviewed at regular intervals.

For further information, advice and guidance please contact

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