

The Selection and Appointment of a School Principal
A Guide to Assist School Management Committees, Incorporated
Management Committees and Selection Boards

What Is this Booklet about?

Under the guidance of the School Sponsoring Body, School Management Committees have the authority to select the school's principal. While the Education Ordinance requires the final appointment to be made by the Permanent Secretary for Education, it is the School Management Committee and its School Sponsoring Body that recommend the appointment.

This booklet brings together the requirements that apply to Hong Kong schools in the Aided Sector. It is prepared for the reference of the School Management Committees and chairpersons of selection boards.

Apart from complying with the requirements stipulated in section 57A of the Education Ordinance on selection of a principal, Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) schools should, as far as possible, adopt the suggested composition of the Selection Board in this booklet in their IMC constitutions on the part of the principal selection. Schools which have not yet set up an IMC, should consider incorporating the suggested composition of the Selection Board in this booklet into relevant sections when drawing up their constitutions.

If you have queries concerning the appointment of principals, please contact the respective Education Bureau's Regional Education Office of your school. For enquiries concerning the Certification for Principalship, the School Leadership and Professional Development Section (Phone number: 3509 7585) can be contacted for assistance.

This booklet is available in Chinese and English.

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Leadership - the Principal's Special Responsibility in Your School

Every school has a principal - someone appointed to take charge of the education of the students. However, not many principals are able to achieve this by teaching the students in person. In every other case, the principal's educational responsibility is achieved at second hand - through the knowledge, skills and dedication of professional teachers.

This dependency on colleagues is not new, of course, for the structure of schools has not changed much over the past fifty years. What is new, however, is the complexity of the educational task and the higher expectation of parents, education authorities and the Government. It is now no longer possible for a good school simply to be 'competently managed' by the principal. Quality schooling is increasingly dependent on leadership - particularly the quality of the educational leadership of the principal.

If you want the best for your students' education, you will want a principal whose values, attributes, educational knowledge and expertise to be coupled with leadership skills of the highest order.

Good educational leaders can be hard to find. Use this booklet to help you find the best person available for appointment to your school.

So, Your School Management Committee and School Sponsoring Body are Looking for a Principal ...

Selecting a principal is one of the most important responsibilities of the School Management Committee. The selection of the right principal will enhance the education of your students more than any other single act of your School Management Committee.

The opportunity to appoint a principal does not come very often. So when it does, take every care to make the best possible choice. A bad choice cannot be reversed without great embarrassment to everyone involved.

Appointing an Ethical Principal ...

No person will have every quality you desire in a school principal. Even so, there is one quality that absolutely matters for the well-being of the children in your school and the reputation of the school in your community - *personal integrity and moral uprightness*.

As you read this booklet, continually bear in mind this fundamental quality of educational leadership. Above all, make sure that, in whatever selection processes that are finally used, the selection board has the opportunity to understand the moral and ethical convictions of any persons being seriously considered for the job of school leader. Before a selection board can recommend a candidate to the School Management Committee, it must have a clear understanding of the nominee's personal values and be confident that these will translate into ethical work practices. It is too late to discover ethical deficiencies in the school's new principal after appointment!

... using an Ethically Sound Selection Process

The integrity and moral uprightness of selection boards is as important as the integrity and moral uprightness of principals. No valid selection can be made without regard to *due process* - the moral obligation to act with unquestionable integrity. Processes which are honourable and true will lead to outcomes which are morally justified and legally defensible. As you read through the booklet, give careful thoughts to how this can be achieved.

How Might You Approach this Task?

Because the selection of a principal happens infrequently, the School Management Committee is wise to start the process from the beginning each time. Simply to 'repeat what we did last time' may not be the best approach. That is one reason for the preparation of this booklet.

There are some procedures which are legal requirements of the Education Bureau and other government authorities. Most are covered in this booklet, but chairpersons of selection boards should

- read through the relevant sections in the Code of Aid (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/regulations/codes-of-aid/index.html>); and
- check the latest requirements of the Equal Opportunities Commission (<http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/GraphicsFolder/default.aspx>) and other related laws.

Appointment of a Principal

- 1 *A selection is made by a selection board appointed by the School Management Committee;*
- 2 *The School Management Committee recommends an appointment to the Permanent Secretary for Education;*
- 3 *The Permanent Secretary for Education approves the appointment and*
- 4 *The School Management Committee appoints the Principal to the school.*

Without exceptions, these requirements are designed to ensure that the best possible choice is made in a manner appropriate to the commitment of public funds. Therefore, selection processes need to be

- open;
- fair; and
- transparent.

Remember, good procedures can always be explained in a straightforward manner and even defended if that becomes necessary.

What is the First Thing to Do?

The School Management Committee needs to make two early decisions:

- to choose an official spokesperson for the School Management Committee in all matters related to the selection of the principal (The chairperson of the School Management Committee is always the best person to act as spokesperson.); and
- to appoint a selection board to make the actual choice.

Who Should be on the Selection Board?

A board of five or six persons is best, although eight or ten is a manageable number with a decisive chairperson. More than ten is usually too many for effective and timely decision making.

It is not important that the board represents all the parties with an interest in its work. It is important, though, that the board has the collective skill to do its job on behalf of everyone else.

A good board will include

- representatives of the school sponsoring body;
- a person skilled in the selection of professional employees;
- someone who has previous experience in the selection of successful school principals;
- a representative of the alumni (if available) or parents of students at the school;
- a person nominated by the Education Bureau;
- an educator not directly involved in the operation of the school sponsoring body or its schools; and
- both men and women.

First Responsibility of the School Management Committee

- 1 *Nominate a person as the sole spokesperson to speak publicly about selecting a principal.*
- 2 *Nominate a selection board with the responsibility of recommending an appointee for the consideration of the School Management Committee.*

Obviously, some individuals will bring to the board more than one of these attributes.

Remember, your School Management Committee does not select a principal very often and is not expected to be an expert in this task. That is why the list above includes people from outside the school community who

- know what is happening in school education and the direction it will move in the next five years; and
- have been recently involved in the selection of a principal in another school which you hold in high regard.

There are two other important considerations when planning the membership of the selection board:

- don't include people who will not be able to attend all the selection events - interviews, presentations, consultant reporting sessions, etc. If there is doubt about worthy people having sufficient time, it is better for them and the selection board if they are asked to assist as consultants or advisors rather than join the board itself; and
- don't include people who have, or are very likely to have, conflict of interest. For example, people who have members of a family interested in applying for the position are not qualified to be members of a selection board.

10 Tasks in Selecting a Principal

The tasks below may not apply in all cases. School Management Committees should add or delete tasks as required.

Task 1 Describing the Job and the Leadership Qualities Required

The first task is to write down exactly what you require. What sort of person do you wish to appoint? You have two aims here:

- you want to attract applications from all who can do the job well; and
- you want to discourage applications from those who will not be able to do the job well.

So, an accurate description of your requirements is the first essential task.

However, there is no need to include every quality you desire. Over-detailed job descriptions can result in too few applicants. But, be careful to include all the essential qualities you seek. Put your emphasis on essential requirements not on preferred characteristics.

Task 2 Determining the Selection Criteria

In addition to the job descriptions, applicants will also want to know the criteria you will use when choosing the appointee. Rank the selection criteria in order of importance. This will be really helpful when deciding who to interview.

In order to assist you, on Pages 17 and 18 of the booklet there is a section on leadership skills and cherished values for school principals. These will help you write appropriate selection criteria about leadership.

Apart from the job descriptions, it may be necessary to refer to other documents. There should be no surprises during the selection process. It is particularly important to let the candidates know

- if the board will be using an external consultant for advice in deciding who will be recommended for the job;
- if applicants will be required to undergo any form of personality assessment; and
- if the board will seek the opinion of referees (including referees not nominated by the applicant).

Suggested Selection Board Tasks

- 1 *Describing the job and the leadership qualities required*
- 2 *Determining the selection criteria*
- 3 *Advertising the position widely and appropriately*
- 4 *Assessing the applications*
- 5 *Interviewing*
- 6 *Contacting referees*
- 7 *Organising presentations*
- 8 *Arranging personality profile assessment*
- 9 *Choosing a person for the job*
- 10 *Making a recommendation to the School Management Committee*

Candidates will also want to know what the terms of employment will be. Make sure that the School Sponsoring Body's conditions of contract for the employment of principals are distributed along with the job descriptions and the selection criteria.

Wise selection boards are very particular about defining selection assessment criteria in advance.

Task 3 Advertise the Position Widely and Appropriately

The Education Bureau encourages the school to advertise its vacant position in the daily press. This is a good start, but not enough if you want to attract a sufficient number of quality candidates.

You will want to be certain that all good applicants know you seek a person of quality. Make every effort to contact people you believe are suitable for the job. Word of mouth is very effective. Ensure the job vacancy is broadcast as widely as possible.

Remember – Good applicants like to be invited to apply to work in good schools.

Task 4 Assessing the Applications

What to do when advertising is unsuccessful: A selection board has the responsibility to choose the best available person. If the list of applicants does not include one or two people of quality, it is better to stop the process and start again, rather than hope that one of the applicants will turn out to be better than expected.

Starting again gives you the opportunity to

- rewrite the job descriptions to appeal to a greater number of applicants; and
- reach a wider group of educators by extending the advertising.

Never proceed with interviews if you believe none of the applicants can do the job.

What to do when advertising is successful: You will want to interview all worthy applicants for the position. And, you will not want to interview those who cannot do the job. How can you tell them apart?

Use the selection criteria to rank the applications into three groups:

- 1 those who can;***
- 2 those who might; and***
- 3 those who cannot.***

Rank the applications into three categories, using the selection criteria:

- those who satisfy all or most of the selection criteria and appear competent to do the job;
- those about whom you are less certain, but who might be able to do what is required; and
- those who clearly are not yet able to fulfill the position's requirements.

This is where you will benefit from ranked selection criteria and properly prepared job descriptions, listing all the essential requirements of the position and the educational and leadership qualities necessary to do the job well.

Task 5 Interviewing

Plan to interview all who are qualified to fill the position and all whom you believe may be able to do the job. It is sensible to conduct interviews in a hierarchical series. Your aim is to get a shortlist of candidates for more intensive scrutiny. And you want to do this as efficiently as possible. So with each round, eliminate as many unsuccessful candidates as you can. This can usually be achieved in two rounds of interviews - sometimes in only one.

How Much is Enough?
Not all the Tasks 5, 6, 7 and 8 will be required every time. The aim is simple:
to collect sufficient information for the selection board to make an informed and proper decision.

Interviewing job applicants is a slow process. Be as efficient as you can. People on selection boards make significant sacrifices of time.

When preparing the initial list of people to be interviewed, make a deliberate effort to include all possible appointees. If you are unsure whether or not to interview a marginal applicant, it is better to err on the side of inclusion. It is

hard to justify omissions after the event - especially if no likely appointee emerges in the first round of interviews.

*When preparing interview lists, the Golden Rule is **if in doubt – include the names on the lists.***

When the shortlist has been determined, more intensive selection processes can then commence. These may require applicants

- to attend a further and very thorough interview;
- to make presentations to the selection board (as if to a public meeting) of their educational philosophies and world views;
- to nominate referees who are able to advise the selection board on their skills and abilities; and
- to undergo personality profile assessment to measure their capacity to lead the school well and manage its affairs and personnel with skills and sensitivity.

Can interviewing alone be a sufficient selection process? Not usually. While interviewing is usually necessary in the selection of a principal, it is rarely enough.

Getting to know a likely appointee in settings other than the interview room is obvious commonsense. Many good applicants do not naturally interview well. Providing opportunities to meet applicants in other environments is important in the discovery of the best candidate.

A selection board must use every available means to ensure that it is choosing a good principal and not just a good interviewee.

Task 6 Contacting Referees

You will probably ask applicants to nominate two or three persons that you can refer to when assessing applications. For reasons of privacy, it is usual to wait until there is a shortlist before seeking information from referees.

Assessing the usefulness of referees' information is quite difficult. An applicant usually chooses referees who have a positive view of their abilities. The selection board, however, would wish to know the shortcomings of the applicants. Referees should be contacted and 'quizzed' in a way that enables the selection board to assess the real value of the references supplied.

Contacting persons not named as referees by an applicant can often provide information of more use than the information you get from nominated referees. However, before contacting others, a selection board must be absolutely certain that they can be fair about this and make similar inquiries about all applicants. It is courteous to advise candidates that the selection board intends to seek the opinion of informed outsiders. Most candidates will have no objection.

For these reasons, it is very important to wait until the shortlist is established before seeking information from sources who were not referred to in candidates' applications.

Task 7 Organising Presentations

The principal you choose will be the main promoter of your school for many years ahead. So it is important that all candidates on the shortlist demonstrate their public speaking skills. You are interested in what they say and how they say it.

Presentations of this nature provide opportunities for applicants to explain their educational philosophies, their world views and their vision for the school. More importantly, they can demonstrate their capacity to engage people's interest in important things about education.

Any applicant who finds this difficult or embarrassing is unlikely to have the educational leadership qualities necessary to lead the school into the future.

Task 8 Arranging Personality Profile Assessment

Assessing applicants' leadership skills is particularly difficult in an interview. Leadership skills are best assessed 'on the job', but this is usually impossible and beyond the expertise of most selection board members.

Fortunately, there are a number of experienced consultants in Hong Kong that are able to assess applicants on leadership skills. These assessments always include a pen and paper test and sometimes an interview with a trained assessor. They are widely used in business and have proved to be equally good indicators of leadership capability amongst school principals. It goes without saying that all candidates should undergo personality profile assessment with the same consultant.

Psychological testing is expensive, so only the short-listed applicants are usually asked to undertake this sort of analysis of leadership skill and potential.

Written test reports from a consultant should always be presented in person to the selection board. This is very important when the consultant has interviewed the applicants as part of the assessment procedure.

Task 9 Choosing a Person for the Job

There comes a time when all the available information is before the selection board and a decision has to be made. If it is clear that no applicant is suitable for the task, the matter needs to be referred back to the School Management Committee. There is really not much more a selection board can do without further instruction from the School Management Committee.

This is an unusual outcome. More often, most selection boards find it difficult to choose between two or more acceptable candidates. The board's job is simply to choose the best applicant and to do it according to the selection criteria that were established before the position was first advertised.

Personality Profile

The Education Bureau has prepared a programme for the training of aspiring principals. It includes a leadership needs analysis containing a personality profile.

It is expected that most candidates will be ready to make this profile available to selection boards.

Remember, this process is an art, not a calculation made using collected mathematical data. Resist the temptation of drawing up a spreadsheet of selection criteria, giving each one a weighting and then scoring points for each candidate. Selecting a principal is not like judging the diving at a swimming carnival. It is far more complex.

You are in pursuit of the candidate who has the qualities that will best advance your students' education. Remember how applicants responded as well as what they said. At the same time, bear in mind that most people appointed to the principalship have never done the job before. Your new principal will need room to grow in the job. So, assess potential as well as achievement.

Task 10 Making a recommendation for the School Management Committee

Once the selection board has recommended a candidate to the School Management Committee, its work is finished.

It is the job of the School Management Committee to deal with the recommendation and, together with the School Sponsoring Body, to determine whether or not the selected person will be nominated to the Permanent Secretary for Education for appointment as principal of the school.

Before doing so, the School Management Committee should finally check that all the processes outlined in Education Bureau circulars have been completed. The latest editions of these circulars are available at the EDB website www.edb.gov.hk.

When making the nomination to the Permanent Secretary for Education, the School Management Committee should also submit a recruitment report. The

Making a Decision

The process is an art. Leave some room for intuition and share such thoughts within the selection board.

report should give an account of the recruitment process, number of applications received, applicants short-listed and interviewed and an interview report with reasons to support the final recommendation.

What Happens after Your Principal is Appointed?

Continuing Professional Development

The School Management Committee has ongoing responsibilities towards the principal. The Committee's interest in quality leadership does not stop with the selection of a school head.

It is very important that the principal receives as much continuing education as the job requires. This is a commitment required from both the principal and the School Management Committee.

It is also a commitment of the Education Bureau, which has established programmes for three distinct groups of school leaders:

- vice-principals and senior teachers aspiring to principalship;
- newly appointed principals; and
- serving principals.

Newly appointed principals: Principals are considered 'newly appointed' for the first two years of their principalship. Newly appointed principals of public sector schools in the first 3 years of their principalship are required to undergo a designated programme so that they can enhance their educational and leadership skills as quickly as possible. This designated programme includes:

- an induction programme (in the first year of principalship) focusing on school administration and development;
- a structured support programme (in the second year of principalship) providing mentoring support and assistance in establishing a principal network;
- a leadership enhancement programme (within the first 3 years of principalship) focusing on broadening their horizons through mainland study visits.

Serving principals: Similar assistance is given to serving principals - those who have completed two years of principalship. This includes

- the establishment of a plan for principals' personal continuing professional

development (The continuing professional development plan is based on the six *Core Areas of Leadership* and takes into account the needs of both principals and their schools.);

- access to needs assessment programmes to guide the refinement of continuing professional development plans; and
- the provision of professional development programmes to meet the diverse needs of the profession.

The Education Bureau requires serving principals to maintain their professional development commitment at about 50 hours each year.

School Management Committees can assist serving principals by

- encouraging principals to take part in professional development consistent with their personal growth and the needs of the school;
- ensuring that they have enough time and freedom to attend professional development activities; and
- providing the finance necessary for participation in quality continuing professional development activities.

How to Monitor Your Principal's Professional Development

One of the School Management Committee's most important tasks is to monitor the continuing professional development of all the teaching staff. This includes the principal who should set a good example for others in the establishment of a strong learning community.

In order to monitor the professional development of all staff members (including the principal), continuing professional development must be on the agenda of School Management Committee meetings. This ensures that

- participation in professional development is co-ordinated across the school to meet the needs of the school as a whole as well as the career needs of individual professional staff;
- recently completed professional development is assessed against its relevance to school goals;
- proposed activities are consistent with the school's strategic planning requirements;
- the staff are up-to-date with all the changes that are introduced into the school curriculum (especially changes proposed by the government); and

- the school community's expectations for educational excellence are reflected in the planning and content of the staff's continuing professional development commitment.

What about Succession Planning?

What Is Being Done

Hong Kong has over 1,000 schools. In any year, up to 100 appointments are made to principalship. It is important, therefore, that sufficient qualified people are available when required.

Succession planning is, therefore, an important part of the responsibilities of the Education Bureau, school sponsoring bodies and School Management Committees.

The Role of the Education Bureau

To prepare for succession, the Education Bureau includes aspiring principals in its continuing professional development commitment. The programme for aspiring principals forms part of the Certification for Principalship process which will ensure that sufficient accredited school leaders are available for selection boards looking for principals. The training caters for the needs of aspiring principals and includes

- access to an appropriate needs assessment programme;
- designated training courses;
- additional training in educational policy, leadership and school management; and
- advice on the development of a professional portfolio.

The Role of School Management Committees

As this booklet shows, the appointment of a principal is not simply a matter of promoting a teacher from within the school. It is the search across Hong Kong for the best available candidate. It is therefore not possible for a School Management Committee to train up its next principal in the way that a family business might train its next managing director. Rather, School Management Committees have the responsibility of encouraging their teaching staff to develop their leadership

skills and to participate in the Education Bureau's programme for aspiring principals.

What are the Leadership Criteria that Describe a Principal of Quality?

Finding the right person for school principal is the search for a competent and professional education leader with values that are fundamental to school education. It is not just the search for a chief executive for the school.

Personal values to look for in a school principal:

- *belief that all students can learn*
- *love and care for students*
- *respect for diversity*
- *collaboration, sharing and team spirit*
- *commitment and dedication to education*
- *passion for continuous learning and excellence*

No set of values can be prescriptive or exhaustive. The selection board can exercise its discretion in focusing on values that best reflect their school mission and goals.

Quality school leadership can be listed under six headings called Core Areas of Leadership. They provide a framework which enables a School Management Committee to prepare both the job descriptions and the selection criteria to be used in the assessment of applications.

Core Areas of Leadership

- *Strategic direction and policy environment*, where principals plan for the future and ensure school community involvement in the process. They strategically integrate relevant aspects of policy from the social, educational and political environments into their planning for school and student improvement;
- *Learning, teaching and curriculum*, where principals coordinate school programmes to achieve coherence across the curriculum, learning and teaching. Together with their school communities, they ensure that all

students experience a broad, relevant and balanced curriculum through formal, informal and non-formal activities;

- *Teacher professional growth and development*, where principals promote and enable continuing professional and career development for teachers and themselves. They foster the sharing of up-to-date professional knowledge and informed practice aimed at accommodating change as well as the diverse needs of students within a general commitment to student and school improvement;
- *Staff and resources management*, where principals create a collaborative team management ethos focused on empowering human resources as well as deploying physical and financial resources effectively and efficiently towards the goals of school improvement and student achievement;
- *Quality assurance and accountability*, where principals in concert with their school communities build quality assurance and accountability systems that provide feedback to students, teachers and others with a view to securing school improvement. These systems also meet the information requirements of external agencies regarding school performance; and
- *External communication and connection to the outside world*, where principals build connections between the school and the local, national and global communities. By doing so, they enable their school communities to contribute to the wider society and its development.

***Things that Matter –
Six Core Areas of Leadership***

- 1 Strategic direction and policy environment***
- 2 Learning, teaching and curriculum***
- 3 Teacher professional growth and development***
- 4 Staff and resources management***
- 5 Quality assurance and accountability***
- 6 External communication and connection to the outside world***