

Dear Headmasters and principals of Christian schools

One of the goals I have set myself for this season in my life is to write a series of “one pagers”, every now and again, to try and clarify some of the vision issues that Christian school leaders have to grapple with. It is an attempt to “grab the slippery soap in the shower” and in doing so it hopefully will build something into the foundations of every Christian school. In this first letter I want to write about the foundations of a school. Foundations are critical to any building; they determine the length, breadth and height of every building; they are largely unseen as they lie below the ground; they determine what goes on within the four walls of the school and, if not carefully laid, they can contain the seeds which may limit the effectiveness of school [Matt 7:24ff].

Put another way, the foundations are the non-negotiable values of the school. Whilst the management of the school may compromise on some issues, these core values are not up for discussion. These values form the bedrock of why the school exists in the first place! Most, but not necessarily all, of these values would be unique to Christian schools and would probably not be overtly found in state schools such as encouraging learners to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The challenge lies in defining these values on paper. This is not an easy exercise and could well take the best part of a term of discussion with staff. For me personally this is the exciting part as one determines the red, centre part of an archery target. What is in the very core [bull's eye] of your school? Coming up with ten or more non-negotiable values is indeed an excellent staff building exercise. Even spending one professional development session on reviewing what is already well-documented as part of the core of the school, is time well spent. In an ideal situation one should go through this exercise every year with the staff, especially after adding new members to the school's teaching profession. In other words, we are clarifying “what business we are in”? [Thereafter one can ask the question “how is business”?]

Recently, I was privileged to hear what a well-known advocate [legal expert] had to say in the area of defining a school's values. The advocate strongly recommended that the Parents' Information Manual / Prospectus / new learner application form / something similar, all contain these explicitly written values of the school. In this way the enrolling parents could not claim that he/she was ignorant of what the school really stood for. If the school had to find its way into a court of law [an option which cannot be discounted in this day and age], then the advocate said that the school's legal team had good evidence upon which to build a case to defend the school.

In summary:

- Define clearly what the school's core values are.
- Make sure that parents and staff are aware of the non-negotiable core values:
 1. By means of a staff professional development session.
 2. By means of explicitly including the values in the Parents' Information Manual / Prospectus / new learner application form / something similar.
 3. By means of a Parent Evening meeting.

If I can be of assistance in helping you to compile a list of your core values, please just let me know and I will happily be part of this process. Another option is for you to send me a copy of your core values and I will comment from an outsider's position.

Kind regards

Erith Budge