

Selecting the Principal of Your School

A Leaflet Prepared for Members of Selection Boards

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 Director of Education, it is the School Management Committee and its School Sponsoring Body that recommend the appointment.

This pamphlet briefly describes the steps usually followed in the selection process. It also outlines the major responsibilities of members of selection boards.

It is not possible to include every requirement in a pamphlet of this size. Below are the references to other publications which may assist you in this important task.

So, you have been asked to join in the search for a new principal for your school

Congratulations! As a member of your School Management Committee's selection board you have the special task of finding the best person to lead your school in the challenging and exciting future of Hong Kong's tomorrow.

Leadership is important. The selection of a good principal will enhance the education of your students more than any other single activity you can participate in.

The chance to appoint a new principal does not come very often. So now that it has, take the opportunity to make the very best possible choice!

The Task

While some procedures are legal requirements of the Education Department and other government authorities, most are just commonsense.

Without exception, they are all designed to ensure that the best possible selection of a new principal is made in a manner that is

- open;
- fair;
- transparent and
- appropriate to the commitment of public funds.

Ten Tasks for Finding the Right Principal

There are ten activities usually necessary in the selection and appointment process. Not all are necessarily the responsibility of the selection board; some may be done by others. Find out which apply to your selection board.

1 Describing the Job the Principal will Be Employed to Do

The first task is to write down exactly what you require. What sort of person do you wish to appoint to your school? 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.

Make sure that the job description includes all the essential qualities you seek.

2 Work out the Selection Criteria to Be Used by the Selection Board

In addition to a job description, 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 whom to interview.

3 Advertise Your Requirements as Widely as Possible

The Education Department encourages a vacant position of principal to be advertised in the daily press. This is a good start, but not enough if you want to attract a sufficient number of quality candidates.

Make every effort to contact people you believe ought to apply for the job. Word of mouth is very effective.

4 Assess the Applications

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 fulfil the position's requirements.

5 Interviewing

Interview all who are qualified to fill the position and all whom you believe may be able to do the job. Through a first round of interviews you are

establishing a short list of candidates for more intensive scrutiny.

When the short list has been determined, more intensive selection processes can then commence. These will include additional interviews and usually will include the processes listed as 6, 7 and 8 below.

6 Contacting Referees

You will probably ask applicants to nominate two or three persons that you can refer to when assessing applications.

Assessing the usefulness of referees' information is quite difficult. Applicants usually choose referees who have a positive view of their abilities. The selection board, however, will be equally interested in the negatives. 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 also provide useful information.

7 Arranging Educational 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 short list demonstrate their public speaking skills. You are interested in what they say and how they say it.

Presentations of this nature provide opportunity for applicants to explain their educational philosophy, their world view and their vision for the school.

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 able to assess applicants for leadership skills. personality profile assessments are widely used in business and have proved to be equally good indicators of leadership capability amongst school principals.

9 Choose a Person for the Job

The selection board's task 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.

Remember, this process is an art form, not a calculation made from 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.

You are in pursuit of the candidate who has the qualities that will best advance your students' education. Remember to assess potential as well as achievement.

10 The Final Appointment

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 Director of Education for appointment as principal of the school.

Also Available for Your Assistance

Two other publications are available:

The Selection and Appointment of a School Principal:

A 20-page booklet outlining the procedures recommended by the Education Department for the selection of a school principal. Especially relevant to those chairing selection boards. Available in Chinese and English; and

Consolidated Information for School Management Committees on Selecting a Principal: a CD-Rom containing Chinese and English texts of this pamphlet, the booklet referred to above, relevant Education Department administrative circulars and directions for accessing the ordinances and statutory requirements of other SAR Government authorities.

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