

ST MARY'S SCHOOL

STATEMENT ON THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF ST MARY'S

Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

We, the people of South Africa,

*Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country;
and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to—

*Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.*

May God protect our people.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.

God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa.

Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.

Position statement

It would be difficult to deny that a Nation's most important buildings are not Palaces or even Parliaments but Houses and Schools, for therein are formed, for good or ill, the characters of her citizens, and character, as we all know, is the key to the future as it is to the present.

The Countess of Clarendon¹

Fundamentally our aim in education is the same as it was in our early days: to teach striving after perfection rather than satisfaction with mediocrity: to educate for the future, for social responsibility, and total commitment to ideals.

Dodo Pitt, Headmistress (1974 to 1988)²

Church schools are as concerned as any other school to equip pupils for lives marked by rapid change, global competition and insecurity. But Church schools know in their viscera that this is not just about acquiring skills and good examination results. It is

¹ On the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the school buildings on 25 September 1934, quoted by Dodo Pitt in her foreword to the St Mary's history written by Mary MacPhail and published in 1981.

² In her foreword to the St Mary's history written by Mary MacPhail and published in 1981

about forming people who have the moral strength and spiritual depth to hold to a course and weather ups and downs. It is about forming people who know:

that economic competition is not more important than family life and love of neighbour,

and that technical innovation is not more important than reverence for the beauty of creation.

It is about forming people who, however academically and technically skilful, are not reduced to inarticulate embarrassment by the great questions of life and death, meaning and truth. Church schools themselves embody the truth that a context of firm principles suffused by faith and love is the best and right basis for learning and growing.'

Rowan Williams as the Archbishop of Canterbury³

1. St Mary's is an independent, Anglican School for girls, located in, and connected to, its home city, Johannesburg. It seeks to offer a world class education, relevant to South Africa and to the wider world.
2. The Educational Philosophy of St Mary's is at all times informed by the principles, values and ethos described in the Statement on the Christian Identity and Ethos of St Mary's adopted by the Board of Directors on 4 February 2014.
3. We acknowledge that
 - 3.1 as an institution we were founded in a context which afforded privilege to individuals and communities on the basis of their race
 - 3.2 apartheid, as a crime against humanity was and is legally, morally and theologically indefensible; and
 - 3.3 the systemic impact of our colonial and apartheid past has hurt and marginalized individuals within the St Mary's community.

Consequently, we seek to continue to transform our communal and individual lives in order to heal the hurt and divisions of our past, and in order to embrace a future for South Africa shaped by all who live in it, especially the students within our care.

4. As a South African school, we acknowledge and subscribe to the values expressed in section 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:

The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values:

- (a) *Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.*
- (b) *Non-racialism and non-sexism.*
- (c) *Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law.*

³ Quoted by Rev Jacques Pretorius: Sermon at Staff Eucharist, St Mary's School, 13 January 2015

- (d) *Universal adult suffrage, a national common voters roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness*
5. We further acknowledge the rights and duties conferred by section 29(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:
- Everyone has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, independent educational institutions that -*
- (a) *do not discriminate on the basis of race*
- (b) *are registered with the state; and*
- (c) *maintain standards that are not inferior to standards at comparable public educational institutions.*
6. We acknowledge and will always be mindful of the following:
- 6.1 We have a duty to respect and nurture each child and to acknowledge that a child's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child⁴, while always being mindful of the fact that the interests of one child may not coincide with the interest of other children.
- 6.2 We affirm our desire to be a South African school that seeks to reflect the diversity of our country, that seeks to provide an education that is enhanced through a curriculum and institutional culture which reflects our country, and that demonstrates our belief in non-racialism, non-sexism and diversity. We will not tolerate racism or bigotry.
- 6.3 We will inculcate a spirit of kindness, compassion and respect for diversity.
- 6.4 St Mary's does not have unlimited resources, financial or otherwise. Its sole source of income is the fees and development levy which parents pay. We are therefore conscious of the sacrifices which many parents make to send their daughters to this school and we welcome that fact.
- 6.5 Our duty, as good citizens, to ensure access to girls from previously disadvantaged backgrounds whose circumstances are such that they would not be able to enter St Mary's without financial and other assistance, recognizing also the educational value of diversity for girls, teachers and parents
- 6.6 Our duty to share our facilities and resources with disadvantaged schools and their pupils so that they too may grow into contributing members of our society able to take responsibility in the world of possibilities and opportunities that will open to them;⁵
- 6.7 Our responsibility for the continued professional development of teachers to ensure a dynamic learning environment

⁴ Section 28(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

⁵ Archbishop Thabo Makgoba: Homily for the Induction of the Revd Roger Cameron as CEO of ABESA, St Mary's School, 24 March 2015

- 6.8 The school serves a parent constituency, the expectations and requirements of most of whom are that while their daughters will gain entry primarily to South African tertiary educational institutions, they will also be well prepared towards entry into international tertiary institutions
- 6.9 Most of the girls leaving St Mary's will seek employment or follow their chosen occupations and live their lives in South Africa, and their education must prepare them for this but they must also be prepared to be global citizens.
- 6.10 Accordingly, we should align our curriculum to the National Curriculum Statement Grades R - 12 but depart from it whenever we consider it necessary to better achieve our philosophy.

Reason for being

- 7. Our reason for being is that when girls leave St Mary's, -
 - 7.1 They will seek opportunities to fulfil their God-given potential
 - 7.2 They will be imbued with spiritual and moral values and will have the courage, discernment and determination to live according to those values in all that they say or do
 - 7.3 They will respect and believe in themselves as women, and, informed by their moral and spiritual values, will define 'success' in accordance with those moral and spiritual values
 - 7.4 They will be open-minded, conscientious, self-driven and flexible
 - 7.5 They will be motivated by freedom, challenge and purpose more than by external reward
 - 7.6 They will have the knowledge and skills necessary to follow their chosen path in life and, if so desired, to enter into the universities and tertiary institutions of their choice
 - 7.7 They will acknowledge and appreciate their privilege and will generously embrace and discharge the responsibilities that go with that privilege, and be committed to engaged citizenship
 - 7.8 They will acknowledge the times of immense change in which we live, and be equipped for constant change and a future world that is very different from the one they were born into
 - 7.9 They will seek to be healthy in body, mind and soul
 - 7.10 They will respect others and respect and celebrate their differences
 - 7.11 They will live purposeful and significant adult lives and be valuable citizens of South Africa and of the world; and
 - 7.12 They will know, and be able to find, peace and contentment in their inner selves.

Educational philosophy

8. The St Mary's educational philosophy is premised on a relationship between parents, girls and the school. Ours is a learning community which values its girls, their parents, their teachers and all who work in the school.
9. Our relationship with parents requires full co-operation and mutual support and an acknowledgement that there are aspects of the child's education which are the responsibility of parents and family and are not the business of the school.
10. Girls will be required to recognise and embrace their responsibility to develop their full potential by participating actively in the education process at St Mary's.
11. The school will provide a stimulating experience where each girl will be guided and supported in the process of questioning, understanding, thinking, creating, collaboration and building self-esteem. We will actively search out and develop new and innovative ways to facilitate deep learning.
12. Teaching and learning at St Mary's will be directed to:
 - 12.1 The acquisition of knowledge and skills. The girls will learn and be taught to understand, analyse and discern the meaning and value of that knowledge and the use of multiple approaches to acquiring knowledge and skills.
 - 12.2 The development of confidence and ability to construct and communicate argument, which is accurate, valid, fair and persuasive, and to present and express themselves, orally and in writing, in an informed, reasoned, ethical and accurate way.
 - 12.3 The identification of a problem and the application of knowledge, creativity, technology and learnt processes to solve the problem.
 - 12.4 Participation in physical and cultural activities for the purpose of enjoyment and learning to work in a team or group for a common goal, whether winning or losing, and about the satisfaction of participation, performance and physical fitness.
 - 12.5 An understanding and awareness of justice, diversity, inequality, racism and the individual's place in the world in relation to others.
 - 12.6 Self-belief and courage to take well-informed and calculated risks while remaining true to their values, and about having the resilience, persistence and determination to pick themselves up after failure.
 - 12.7 Instilling self-discipline, self-sufficiency and conscientiousness.
13. For these purposes, we will attract and retain staff who are committed to this philosophy of the school and are able, through their contribution in the classroom and beyond, to achieve its objects. We will provide opportunities and will support development, self-improvement and continuing learning.