

ANNEXURE-H

GUIDELINES FOR AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS

1. Introduction

Schools in Bhutan by and large enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy till the nineties and principals being at the helm of affairs had a lot of control over how schools were managed, including the control over finance and the staff. Secondary schools were provided with Letter of Limited Credit (LLC) over which schools had the control on its use. Similarly, principals could pick and choose teachers and transfer too, which in a way helped to build faculty of their choice.

Except the occasional monitoring visit from the school inspectorate stationed at the head office in Thimphu, schools functioned fairly independently. However, the autonomy and independence accorded was not a deliberate and conscious reform initiative undertaken but rather compelled by circumstances. Schools were isolated and located in far flung places with no road and telecommunication connectivity which automatically led to function independently, though there were no formalized structures and parameters established to operate as autonomous schools.

However, with the socio-economic development and the concurrent political reforms, there had been a significant change in governance too with the responsibilities and powers being decentralized to the grassroots. Accordingly, with decentralization, secondary schools were handed over to the Dzongkhags and the LLC withdrawn and the budget for primary schools clubbed with the Dzongkhags. Although decentralization is associated with autonomy and independence, schools came under direct purview of the Dzongkhags and as a result had to compete with Dzongkhag's priorities for budget as well as deployment of teachers.

To give further impetus to the policy of decentralization and in keeping with the government's pledge to devolve greater power to the grassroots, from 2014 academic session, certain selected schools would be granted autonomy. These will be public funded self-managing schools, freed from some of the rules, regulations and statutes that apply to other public schools in exchange for some agreed delivery and performance outcomes. Such a move is expected to provide schools, certain discretionary powers and flexibilities, within defined parameters, not only for the management and governance of schools but also curriculum implementation. The move will also allow schools opportunities to foster partnership between parents, teachers and students to create an environment in which parents can be more involved, teachers are given the freedom to innovate and students are provided the structures they need to learn.

While autonomous schools enjoy certain flexibilities, they are obliged to meet a number of mandated responsibilities and compliance to government acts and policies pertaining to public schools. With flexibilities to maneuver within the defined parameters, autonomous schools will have tremendous opportunities in shaping their own destiny and carving a unique and idiosyncratic niche for themselves.

2. **Objectives:** The primary purpose of granting autonomy to schools are:

- i. To empower schools to set their own strategic directions, determine priorities and exercise control over their resources.
- ii. To enhance efficiency and delivery of services by reducing bureaucracy.
- iii. To improve the quality of educational practices and student learning outcomes through empowerment, greater autonomy and flexibility.

3. **SCOPE**

Autonomous schools have the flexibility and responsibility to make decisions across a range of school operations. The key areas of autonomy are staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment practices, schedule and governance. While each autonomous school can choose to exercise the *flexibilities* outlined below, they are also obliged to meet a number of mandated *responsibilities*.

3.1 **Human Resource: Staffing**

Responsibility: Autonomous schools will have the responsibility to:

- i. maintain minimum teacher-student ratio based on existing teacher deployment tool, government approved staffing pattern and pay scale
- ii. put in place clear processes and procedures for HR management including the promotion and redeployment of staff in conformity to BCSR.

Flexibility: Autonomous schools will have the flexibilities to:

- i. determine their staffing profile (administrative, teaching and school support staff) within the allocated budget.
- ii. select their own team of staff who best fit the needs of the school.
- iii. surrender non-performing staff, having exhausted the due processes.
- iv. approve leave, including EOL inconformity to the provisions of BCSR.
- v. access professional development opportunities both within and outside the school.
- vi. decide on the areas of professional development needs of the school.

3.2 **Budget**

3.2.1 **Recurrent:** Autonomous schools will receive a block grant of lump sum amount calculated based on per pupil cost based on the formula prescribed by MoF and guidelines issued by MoE (*annexure-4*) to meet the recurring expenditure on which they have the following responsibilities and flexibilities:

Responsibility: In order to maintain transparency and accountability in use of school budget, autonomous schools will have the responsibility to:

- i. observe financial norms for procurement and incurring other expenditure.
- ii. maintain and operate the school's budget through LC Account. (CD Account)
- iii. comply with accounting and financial procedures and practices.
- iv. maintain proper records of financial transactions for auditing purposes

Flexibility: In utilizing the budget, autonomous schools will have the flexibility to:

- i. decide on their spending as per the priority needs with approval of the SMB.
- ii. manage utilities (electricity, water, gas and waste management) and retain all savings.
- iii. manage faults (breakdowns and repairs) and engage contractors using funds from the budget allocated.
- iv. allocate funds for professional development programmes from their budget.
- v. determine expenditure for special needs services.
- vi. supplement budget through fund raising activities such as school fete, concerts, alumni contribution, corporate contribution and geog fund, however not through parental contribution and increase of fees.

3.2.2 Capital

Responsibility: The minimum standard facilities as per the level of the school will be provided by the Dzongkhag/Ministry and therefore, autonomous schools will have the responsibility to

- i. submit the proposals for capital works to the Dzongkhag
- ii. ensure quality of capital works undertaken in the school.

Flexibility: Autonomous schools have the flexibility to:

- i. mobilize and seek support from corporations and agencies for supplementing resources, facilities and other developmental works.

3.2.3 Curriculum and Assessment:

Responsibility: To ensure that schools meet the required quality and standard of learning, autonomous schools will have the responsibility to:

- i. follow and implement the national curriculum
- ii. follow national board and terminal examinations for grades 10 and 12.
- iii. ensure the achievement of minimum standard of learning outcomes as stipulated in the curriculum framework.

Flexibility: While autonomous schools are required to follow national curriculum, they also have the flexibility to:\

- i. be innovative and creative in implementing the curriculum and assessment practices including the use of ICT, dramatics, etc. in teaching and learning
- ii. adopt any other alternative assessment practices that best maximize student learning outcomes.
- iii. adopt a range of optional curricula that would enhance creativity, skills and attitude of students (art, painting, music, agriculture, vocational skills etc.)
- i. To achieve the set learning standards schools could use either the prescribed text books or other learning materials but ensuring that the learning outcomes are met.

3.2.4 Schedule:

Responsibility: To ensure proper implementation of academic and non-academic programmes, autonomous schools will have the responsibility to:

- ii. ensure adequate instructional time for teaching and learning; and
- iii. maintain minimum required instructional days of 180.

Flexibility: Autonomous schools have the flexibility to:

- i. set school timing and calendar years in ways that maximize student learning.
- ii. decide on the planning and professional development time and frequency for faculty.
- iii. prioritize and schedule co-curricular activities as deemed fit

3.2.5 Governance:

Responsibility: The principal is responsible for the educational leadership, operation and management of the school and accordingly has the responsibility to:

- i. ensure that the school has an effective School Management Board (SMB).
- ii. institute School Management Committee for shared leadership and collaborative decision making.
- iii. ensure that the School Board participates in the performance review of the school.

Flexibility: Autonomous schools have the flexibility to:

- i. set their own strategic direction and authority for day to day decisions.
- ii. create a more vibrant and democratic governance system.
- iii. create unique school culture and practices.
- iv. create an excellent learning ambience and build a strong learning community.

4. OBLIGATIONS

Autonomous schools will operate within the parameters detailed below:

4.1 Compliance

Although autonomous schools have more flexibility to set their own strategic direction and authority for day to day decisions, they remain part of the public school system and will have compliance to:

- i. All Government legislations including, but not limited to, The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Civil Service Act of Bhutan 2010, BCSR 2012, Penal code of Bhutan, Local Government Act etc.
- ii. Government policies and initiatives that apply to all public schools, including and not limited to National Education Policy, Teacher HR Policy, admission policy, boarding policy, dependent policy, financial norms etc.
- iii. Enrollment procedures- (*autonomous schools will continue to provide education to students in their local intake area. Parents and guardians will still have the right to enroll their children in their local/feeder school*).
- iv. All agreements between the Ministry of Education and the School.
- v. Provision of relevant data to enable the Ministry to meet nation-wide reporting obligations
- vi. The Ministry's School audit program/Performance Management System/ Independent Review
- vii. Government approved fee- the structure for contribution, fees and charges remains the same as all public schools as stipulated in "*Nurturing Green Schools for Green Bhutan- A Guide to School Management*".
- viii. to the approval of School Management Board/MoE for any additional collection/ contribution.

4.2 Delivery and Performance Agreement (*Annexure-1*)

Each Autonomous School will have a Delivery and Performance Agreement which:

- i. is signed by the principal, MoE and the Dzongkhag;
- ii. identifies resources the school will receive, support that will be provided, programs contracted to be delivered, and performance and accountability of the school during the contract period.

4.3 Public Accountability

- i. Each Autonomous School will undergo an independent review in the final year of its Delivery and Performance Agreement, with the report made public.
- ii. Produce an annual school report, providing parents and community members with transparent information about school and student performance signed by the chair of the school board.
- iii. Information about the school priorities, programs, reports, student numbers, staff information student attendance, and achievement is available and the displayed on their own websites.
- iv. Undertake ongoing school self assessment which is reported to the school board.

4.4 Governance

- i. The principal ensures the school has an effective School Management Board (SMB) with members comprising of cross sectional representations as outlined in *“Nurturing Green Schools for Green Bhutan- A Guide to School Management”*.
- iv. The annual budget and plan for the school are endorsed by SMB.
- v. Under the guidance of the SMB, the principal is responsible for the educational leadership, operation and management of the school.
- vi. The principal provides biannual report to the school board on the school’s performance.
- vii. Management decisions including HR should be done in a fair and transparent manner through the School Management Committee.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS AND PROCESSES

To ensure accountability for the quality of their learning environment and the standards of their students’ learning, autonomous schools will follow the following set of accountability instruments and processes:

5.1 Governance

Autonomous school will institute democratic governance system for fair, transparent and collaborative decision making through the establishment of School Management Board and School Management Committee as outlined in *“Nurturing Green Schools for Green Bhutan- A Guide to School Management”*.

5.2 Delivery and Performance Agreement

A five-year Delivery and Performance Agreement will be signed between the school, Dzongkhag and the Ministry of Education outlining the performance and accountability expectations of the school; and the resources and support that will be provided; programs it will be contracted to deliver; student achievement and how it will be monitored; and the performance and accountability of the school over the life of the agreement.

5.3 Strategic Plan

Following the Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA), autonomous school will prepare a five-year strategic plan for their school, aligning with the DPA outlining the overall school performance improvement targets. (*Details in annexure-3*)

5.4 School Self Assessment

Autonomous schools will undertake school self assessment to monitor the school's performance, students' achievement improvement targets, and milestones outlined in the Strategic Plan using the SSA tools.

5.5 Annual School Report

Autonomous schools will be required to publish an Annual School Report endorsed by the SMB with the finalized report submitted to the Dzongkhag and MoE and shared with the parents during the parent-teachers' meeting.

5.6 External Review

Each autonomous school will have an independent review in the final year of their Delivery and Performance Agreement with the report made public.

6. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The key performance indicators that will be used to assess the performance of the autonomous schools are:

- i. **Delivery and Performance Agreement:** The extent of achievement and progress made on the deliverables outlined in the DPA will indicate the school performance.
- ii. **Strategic Plan:** The extent of progress made on the improvement targets specified in the strategic plan will be accounted for to gauge the performance.

- iii. **Performance Management System (PMS) scorecards:** The performance of the school derived from the PMS Scorecards will determine its performance at the Dzongkhag and National level, based on which schools need to identify areas of improvement and the degree of improvement to be made. The PMS scorecards will be the baseline against which school's performance will be measured in the following year to gauge the progress made both at the Dzongkhag and National level.
- iv. **Learning outcomes:** Students' achievement of learning outcomes, as outlined in the curriculum framework, in the core subjects (English, Dzongkha, Math and Science) against the targets for improvement outlined in the strategic plan, will be the basis for measuring the achievement of learning outcomes.
- v. **Characteristics of Good school** The extent to which characteristics of good school embedded in the GNH wheel, comprising of the key operational areas manifest and form part of the school culture.

7. INDEPENDENT REVIEW

The independent review will take place in the final year of the school's Delivery and Performance Agreement or at a time before that specified by the Ministry of Education. The independent review will verify the school's self-review of its performance against its Delivery and Performance Agreement and Strategic Plan commitments. The focus of the review is on the standards of student learning, the quality of the learning environment and sustainability.

Based on the process of verification, the independent review will confirm the school's judgments on its areas of strength; affirm areas for development as identified by the school in its planning and review processes; and, where applicable, recommend further areas for improvement.

Independent reviewers, consisting of experienced educators appointed by the Ministry of Education will examine the school's self-review, analysis and planning information related to the Delivery and Performance Agreement and the Strategic Plan.

7.1 Process of Independent Review

The independent review will occur in three stages after intimating the schools, approximately three months before the review visit to confirm dates.

7.1.1 Stage 1: Presentation of school self-review analysis

Reviewers will meet the Principal and Board Chair, about half a day to develop their awareness of the school's context and self-review. The Principal and Board Chair will provide an overview of the school's self-review, analysis and planning information and discuss key achievements, school improvement and future directions. At the end of the visit, the reviewers will take a copy of the school's self-review and planning information for consideration.

7.1.2 Stage 2: Review visit

Approximately two weeks after Stage 1, reviewers will visit the school to verify the information provided in the school's analysis. During the review visit apart from the meeting with the Principal and Board Chair, they will also meet other members of the school community. The review visit will conclude with an exit meeting with the Principal and Board Chair to discuss the preliminary observations and seek clarification of issues before writing the independent review findings.

7.1.3 Stage 3: Findings

The findings of each school's independent review will be forwarded to the principal and board chair for confirmation of the accuracy of the information, before being finalized and sent to the Director, Department of School Education. Findings will **confirm** the school's judgments on its areas of strength; **affirm** directions the school has identified and where appropriate, **recommend** areas for further improvement.

The findings from the independent review will include the following sections:

- a. ***About the independent review:*** A section informing readers of the purpose of the independent review.
- b. ***Executive summary:*** This provides a summary of the independent review visit, findings of the school's performance against the Delivery and Performance Agreement and Strategic Plan, and any commendations, affirmations and recommendations.
- c. ***Confirmation:*** After the review visit, prior to being finalized, independent review findings will be forwarded to the Principal and Board Chair to verify on the factual accuracy of the information. The Ministry of Education, Principal and Board Chair will then receive the independent review findings.

- d. **Response to the independent review:** It will be for the Principal, Board Chair and Ministry of Education to determine what action occurs as a consequence of the independent review findings. The Ministry of Education may at any time bring forward independent review in response to key indicators from its monitoring mechanisms.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

8.1 School Management Board

The role of School Management Board (SMB) is setting the long-term future for the school and maintaining oversight of the implementation of the school's Strategic Plan and providing additional expertise to help the school achieve the best outcomes for students. In addition to the range of responsibilities outlined in "*Nurturing Green Schools for Green Bhutan- A Guide to School Management*", the responsibilities of SMB of autonomous schools are to:

- i. work within the Ministry of Education's relevant legislation and regulations;
- ii. contribute to the school's Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA).
- iii. monitor the progress of the school's Strategic Plan;
- iv. endorse and review the annual budget
- v. participate in the review of the performance of the school;
- vi. create interest, within and across the community, about the school;
- vii. approve fees, charges, contributions
- viii. liaise with other committees within the school
- ix. participate in meeting each year to report to the school community; and
- x. provide advice and guidance to the principal

8.2 Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education will ensure:

- i. professional support in such areas as curriculum, student services and employee performance.
- ii. access to academic and non-academic achievement data through the Performance Management System, ASSL, BCSE, BHSEC and NEA.
- iii. an internal review or bring forward the independent review in the event that the school's performance is of concern.
- iv. to secure the required fund to enable schools to focus on student performance and the targets and priorities detailed in their Strategic Plan
- v. student support services including attendance, participation, student exclusions and managing student behaviour;
- vi. support for the management of critical incidents;

- vii. curriculum support, including access to professional learning for system initiatives and programs;
- viii. information and communication technology programs and support for system approved programs and software;
- ix. access to relevant Department and whole of government legislation, policies and guidelines;
- x. access to professional development opportunities;

8.3 Principal:

The Principal will ensure:

- i. that the school has an effective School Management Board (SMB) as per the provisions outlined in “*Nurturing Green Schools for Green Bhutan- A Guide to School Management*”;
- ii. that the school has a system of shared and participatory management practices
- iii. to inspire staff and students through the creation of shared vision
- iv. effective management of resources;
- v. that the Strategic Plan is put in place;
- vi. the budget and Strategic plan are endorsed by the school board;
- vii. half-yearly report is provided to the school board on the school’s performance;
- viii. the delivery of programmes and performances as outlined in the Delivery and Performance Agreement and Strategic Plan;
- ix. over all school performance is improved progressively, both at the Dzongkhag as well as National level;
- x. students’ performances in the core subjects is lifted, including those students who require teaching and learning adjustments;
- xi. school performance and student improvement targets, as detailed in the school’s Strategic Plan, are assessed and reviewed annually;
- xii. the school participates in the independent review process with the Ministry of Education in the final year of the Delivery and Performance Agreement with the report being made public;
- xiii. financial and human resources are used to deliver educational programmes that provide students with opportunities to achieve high levels of proficiency;
- xiv. education programs are designed and delivered to meet the needs of students and are in accordance with the provisions of the National Education Policy;
- xv. students with special needs, allocation is used to provide teaching and learning adjustments for eligible students;
- xvi. ensure the safety and welfare of students on school premises, and away from school premises while on school activities;

- xvii. compliance to all mandated responsibilities, government legislations, policies and initiatives that apply to all public schools as stipulated in the DPA; and
- xviii. progress against the school's Strategic Plan is reported regularly to the School Board.

8.4 Dzongkhag/Thromdey:

In order to facilitate smooth implementation of the plans and programmes of autonomous schools, Dzongkhag/Thromdey will:

- i. facilitate and provide necessary administrative support when required;
- ii. facilitate and provide coordination and liaising services;
- iii. facilitate securing the release of selected staff;
- iv. provide access to Dzongkhag level professional development and other educational programmes;
- v. facilitate and provide access to Teachers Resource Centers; and
- vi. Continue with the monitoring responsibility as is the practice in place.