

Report of the Visiting Committee Pine Point School, Stonington, Connecticut April, 2002

MISSION STATEMENT

Pine Point School is a dynamic partnership of students, faculty and parents of diverse experiences committed to academic excellence. Children are actively engaged in their own learning in a caring and supportive environment. The school stresses the importance of individual accomplishment and the power of collaborative effort.

Our mission is to develop in each student:

- * an inquisitive, creative, and disciplined mind
- * a firm foundation of core academic skills
- * a strong sense of responsibility for community and self
- * an appreciation for both the arts and athletics
- * a passion for learning

INTRODUCTION

Spring had come early to the coastline of southeastern Connecticut and temperatures were warm as the Visiting Committee began to set about its work. The Borough of Stonington is a charming mix of historic homes, summer residences, and art and antique related shops. The town is lively and retains its maritime flavor and still supports commercial fishing activities. Just outside the center of town is the Pine Point School.

Pine Point, founded in 1948, is a pre-school through ninth grade day school of 260 students. The school is fortunate to have dedicated teachers and administrators who clearly understand the mission of the school and who work to fulfill its goals. At various points in its publications the school will describe itself as small. It was very clear to this group of visitors that the school, while small in size, has a big heart and a large vision. It was exciting to be amongst the teachers and staff of Pine Point as they all work together to build the school.

The visiting committee found the self-study well prepared and the supplemental materials complete and thorough. Every person whom the committee wished to meet made the effort to be available and was extremely generous with their time. It was obvious that the

Committee's visit was the culmination of a well-organized effort throughout the school to make the most of the reaccreditation process.

The visiting committee was made to feel most welcome in every way. The School did an excellent job of arranging for meals and lodging. The staff of the school took great care to make sure that the committee members were comfortable and able to focus on their work.

Among those who care for Pine Point School is a gentleman, 89 years old, who tends to plantings. He, at this point, makes his own schedule. The committee was fortunate to observe the tender care he gave the grounds during its visit. This caring, attentive gardener is a fitting image for this school.

Small elementary schools will often go through cycles. By the nature of their size and due to the population they serve, it is not uncommon for schools to experience periodic economic downturns. While that has been a part of the recent history of the school, it is abundantly clear that there are many able people presently tending to the school. The school community is excited about the direction it has set for itself and the Visiting Committee is confident that the future holds much success for Pine Point and all members of its community.

I. PROCEDURAL

In all the many discussions that the visiting committee had with teachers and staff, it was extremely clear that much time and thought had been given to the self-study process. The process was inclusive and brought together groups of teachers, administrators, trustees and parents. Each of the groups had a clear and powerful sense of the mission of the school and was well versed in the details of the standards of accreditation. The conversations we had were candid, thorough and wide-ranging. The people at Pine Point are proud of their school and are eager to share the good news.

In many forums with different constituencies the visiting committee inquired about the procedures that are in place to follow up on the report and recommendations. The people in the school see the final report as the basis for the initiation of a new strategic planning process. The last strategic plan was completed in 1996 and it is the overwhelming feeling of the school staff and trustees that a new plan should be put in place. The administration and the board are clear that the visiting committee's report will serve as the jumping off point for this process.

II. MISSION

The mission of Pine Point School is clearly stated in its publications, it comes across loud and clear in discussions with staff, and a large printed version greets all visitors as they walk through the front door. On the first day of its visit the Committee was fortunate to be able to attend the weekly all school meeting. Through this assembly we were able to observe the warm relations that exist between teachers and students. There is no question that, as the mission states, children are

actively engaged in their own learning in a caring and supportive environment. We witnessed a number of announcements and reports that indicate the kind of dynamic partnership that Pine Point strives for in its program.

The major part of the Assembly was given over to a ninth grader who addressed the entire school on "his world". This speech is something of a rite of passage for all ninth graders. For support, fellow classmates introduce the speaker, and the entire class sits surrounding the presenter. The ease in which this demanding task was performed is a testament to the warm and nurturing environment.

In reviewing the recent history of how classes are organized in the school, there have been many changes. In the early 1970's the school used an Open Classroom approach in organizing the grades. The use of multi-age groupings has diminished over the years, and now only Kindergarten and grade 1 are together.

The organizational issue that is receiving attention at this time is the role of the Middle School. This year the school hired a new director and he will be assuming a larger role in the running of the division. Faculty and staff are presently engaged in examining the set-up of team teaching in grades 6 and 7 and the more departmentalized program in grades 8 and 9. Some questions being asked are: Does our 8th and 9th grade program adequately prepare students for easy transition to secondary school? Is our Middle School too small and therefore causing students to decide to leave? If we significantly grow the Middle School, will the school lose its intimacy? The dialogue that is occurring is healthy, positive and productive.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the school for the clarity of its mission and for the enthusiastic support it receives from all constituencies.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the informal addition to the mission statement, "developing strong minds and caring hearts" be reviewed and formalized.

The visiting committee recommends that as the Middle School evolves and becomes more of an entity, attention needs to be paid to the size of the division and its attendant impact on social dynamics, attrition and academic rigor.

III. STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Students

Pine Point School has a careful and considerate process for admissions. The school recently moved an experienced administrator into the role of full time admissions director. A part-time administrative assistant supports the admissions director and other administrators will help with visits, tours and evaluations.

The school is giving the area of admissions a great deal of attention, and recently produced a very attractive and informative view book. A renewed effort is being put forth in many directions. The school is a very active presence in the community and is visible in print publications, local guides and the media. The school benefits from very positive "word of mouth" on the part of parents and has leveraged this to good advantage. These recent efforts are paying off with increased enrollment and manageable attrition.

The school takes great care through the admissions process to make sure that Pine Point is a good fit for the applicant. In conversations with staff and parents we heard of several stories where the school had carefully assessed a student's appropriateness and handled the transition to the school extremely well.

In pursuing all pertinent information regarding applicants, the school handles material in a sensitive manner to assure confidentiality. Files are carefully maintained and only relevant material is retained.

The School recently began a process of permanently storing student records on computer discs. The School has completed the process for its first fifty years and as students graduate, their records will be added to the database. A copy of the computer disc is in the school office and another copy is kept off-site in a safe deposit box.

Parents

The school values the close connection it has with its parent body. Visiting committee members consistently heard about the ease and quality of communication between school and home.

The school produces several pieces that do a good job of informing the parents of events at school. There is a thorough School Handbook and Directory, a monthly calendar and a weekly newsletter.

In all of its material the school outlines the procedures for dealing with concerns. Parents reported a willingness on the part of the school to address all concerns and described meetings with school personnel who have an open mind on matters being raised.

With the goal of being an inclusive school, Pine Point has valued feedback from parents. In the 2001 parent survey, strong praise was given to the academic program, class size, faculty and the nurturing environment. Parents expressed a desire for the School to examine social patterns in the school, the role of the Parents Association, and some safety issues surrounding transportation to and from the school.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the school on its hard work to make sure that the parents are a real part of the school. The school's publications are of high quality and work to advance the goals of the school.

Community

Its mission drives the school's role in the community. Pine Point describes itself as a dynamic partnership. The school hopes to develop in students a strong sense of responsibility for community. In studying the program and witnessing the school in action it is clear that this goal of developing a sense of community is genuine and being met. The list of activities and projects is impressive: sixth graders work at a homeless shelter, seventh graders work with senior citizens, ninth graders do field work for environmental agencies, and younger students raise funds for an animal shelter. These projects are valid learning activities for students and also relate to coursework at different levels.

The school has taken an active stance in encouraging students to adopt a global view on world affairs. Members of the staff have made visits to schools in other countries and have reported back on their trips. Email links have been established between Pine Point and students in other parts of the world, giving them direct knowledge of events occurring in varied and different sections of the globe.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the school for its well thought out plan of service learning. The program builds through the years and is an integral part for the school in meeting the goals of its mission.

The visiting committee commends the school for its efforts in making the facilities of the school available to outside groups in the community and for inviting area schools to its special events. It is clear that Pine Point School is intent on being a genuine resource for the Stonington area.

IV. PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Faculty and Administrative Personnel

The school has a clear process for identifying instructional and administrative needs and a set of defined strategies to attract, orient and retain faculty. In December, the Head asks teachers to share tentative plans regarding employment for the following year. Administrative and departmental input regarding projected instructional needs is also solicited at this time. This information informs the recruitment process that utilizes local and national search agencies to identify potential teaching candidates. The head and assistant head conduct initial interviews and the search process includes school visits and the solicitation of input from Pine Point faculty and department heads.

New faculty members are given an orientation program at the beginning of the year and can find general information about responsibilities and expectations in the Employment Handbook and Faculty Handbook. All new teachers receive ongoing support from assigned mentors. Division heads meet on an as needed basis with new teachers, as well.

Decisions regarding teaching responsibilities, salary and benefits are determined on an individual basis by the head of school after gathering pertinent information from division heads and department chairs.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the school on its success in recruiting and retaining a committed group of talented and experienced teachers.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the school continue to explore what constitutes a "full" or "fractional" teaching load.

The visiting committee recommends that the school continue to strive for equity in salary distribution as starting salaries necessarily escalate to attract new teachers.

The visiting committee recommends that the school examine projected staffing needs in foreign language and technology as these programs expand.

Professional Development

The school is active in supporting faculty professional development and has a substantial and growing budget for this purpose. The faculty, by and large, take advantage of these opportunities and are appreciative of them. While a great deal of the professional development at the school is self directed - teachers self-identify a professional need and a workshop to further a subject area or pedagogical area of interest - the administration is also active in bringing nationally known presenters to campus to work with the faculty on selected topics. The procedure for securing a professional development offering is clear and known by the faculty. Teachers submit proposals for professional development to their division head and the head of school grants final approval.

Commendation:

The Visiting Committee commends the school for making ongoing professional development for its faculty a priority and for putting time, attention and resources, financial and otherwise, at the service of the teachers.

Faculty Evaluation

The process, timing and criteria for faculty evaluation are clearly stated and involve pre-observation meetings, classroom observation, self-evaluation, discussion opportunities and written feedback. The evaluation process is differentiated based upon years of service to the school, with new teachers receiving evaluation opportunities during their first, second, and fourth school year. After five years, teachers are evaluated every third year with senior teachers undergoing the evaluation process every fifth year. There is also a teacher portfolio and peer evaluation component to this process.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the school for formulating an evaluation system that includes observation, discussion and written feedback components.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that attention be given to evaluating the consistency and application of the evaluation process.

The visiting committee recommends that the school explore some of the other options (sabbaticals, graduate study) for professional development that were suggested in the self-study.

The visiting committee recommends that the school assess the role that the teacher portfolio and peer evaluation are playing in the evaluation process. The school might ask if these pieces are necessary, and if so, how should they be tracked.

V. PROGRAM

The academic program at Pine Point is broad and encourages children to develop "strong minds" and "caring hearts." The goal of achieving a balance between creating a nurturing environment which recognizes ability and developmental differences, and creating skill and content competency within a rigorous academic program, continues to be pursued by teachers in all grade levels.

Attention is paid to the periodic updating and revision of departmental scope and sequence to guarantee coverage of academic material and skill sequences within disciplines. This process constitutes a significant school-wide commitment of resources, time and energy. Grade-level skill and content goals are updated consistently with attention to current national standards as appropriate.

The curriculum is balanced. Children at all grade levels experience a program which includes core academic subjects - language arts, math, social studies, foreign language and science - and a range of arts and athletic activities. A wide range of field trips, on-campus speakers and presentations, and service learning opportunities are integral aspects of the Pine Point experience.

Lower School children are age grouped (with the exception of the K-1 mixed classroom) and have a homeroom teacher who oversees a child's social, emotional and academic development. Children are flexibly grouped by ability in mathematics. The teachers may draw upon the knowledge of an on-site learning specialist, psychologist and speech and language pathologist in creating individualized instructional interventions. The home-base teacher manages communication between home and school.

Middle School children begin a gradual process of assuming greater responsibility over their academic progress as the program becomes progressively departmentalized. This process culminates in the 8th and 9th grade program. For the first time children receive cumulative grades and homework increases appreciably. Each child has an advisor who looks after the child's development and participates in managing communication between home and school. Classes are heterogeneous, with the exception of mathematics, which continues to group children by ability and is increasingly differentiated in its curriculum.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the school for living its mission statement through its academic program. The program takes developmental readiness into account in its structure and execution, and is broad and well balanced.

The visiting committee commends the faculty for their energy, commitment, professionalism, and subject area expertise.

The visiting committee commends the faculty for collegial spirit and open communication. These foster an environment in which ideas are shared and children's needs are identified and addressed.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that continued focus be placed on the articulation of curriculum between divisions and across grade levels. This includes the completion of a curriculum-mapping project that is in its early stages of execution.

The visiting committee recommends that technology be harnessed as an instructional tool, and that technology be integrated into the curriculum at all grade levels.

The visiting committee recommends that the school continue to articulate the Middle School philosophy for grades 6-9.

Language Arts

The Language Arts Department demonstrates a clear understanding of the school's mission statement, creating a caring and supportive environment of academic excellence. The faculty is a creative, hard-working and dedicated group of teachers who believe that students should seek the best in themselves as readers, writers, speakers and listeners. The faculty employs a variety of methods to keep students actively engaged and to help students cultivate disciplined minds.

Students evidence the ability to read critically, speak confidently and write for multiple purposes and audiences. Students are motivated to value language and think creatively about the power of language. They are assessed by many means: teacher observation, performance assessment, student portfolios, standardized tests administered in grades two through five, and through interesting long term projects. Teachers assign formal grades starting in gradesix, and cumulative examinations in growing numbers are given in grades seven, eight and nine. In grades five and eight, students are required to do extended performance assessment projects so teachers can estimate how well students can apply skills they have learned in an integrated fashion.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the Language Arts department for dedication, hard work and intellectual integrity.

The visiting committee commends the Lower Level for embracing a new program with energy and commitment, and providing programs that help struggling readers and enrich the reading of those who are advanced readers.

The visiting committee commends the language arts department for creating performance assessments in grades five and eight which help the faculty evaluate both student achievement and the major goals of the Language Arts program.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the Middle School Language Arts Department articulate goals and practices that will create continuity in the writing and reading program in grades 6 through 9.

The visiting committee recommends that the Language Arts faculty consider exploring the application of common revision processes and assessment rubrics.

The visiting committee recommends the exploration of greater numbers of sophisticated and in-depth readings as students move from grade six through grade nine.

The visiting committee recommends that the Language Arts Department visit peer schools to compare reading and writing requirements in ninth grade programs.

Mathematics

Pine Point strives to develop young mathematicians who are skilled problem solvers, able to apply content knowledge to real world experiences. Instructional techniques intentionally draw heavily on cooperative group work, manipulatives, real world problem solving and multiple means to solve similar problems. Teachers in the Lower School draw upon a variety of resources to cover the designated scope and sequence. Upper School Teachers, particularly 8th and 9th grade teachers, follow a more proscribed lesson sequence with text support.

Children are grouped homogeneously in mathematics beginning in second grade, and each student is assessed to determine the most efficacious learning environment on an ongoing basis. In the lower grades, grade level mathematics groupings pursue similar scope and sequence goals with the groups receiving different extension activities and materials and moving at an different paces. In the upper grades, the mathematics curriculum is differentiated into two tracks. Ninth graders complete either Algebra or Honors Geometry.

The math program scope and sequence is clearly defined, with skill and content goals carefully delineated at all grade levels. The program was revised to relate to NCTM standards in 1996.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the use of manipulatives, cooperative group learning and real world problem solving.

The visiting committee commends the math department on the clarity of its articulation of grade skill and content goals.

The visiting committee commends the school for striving to meet developmental needs and ability differences through flexible homogeneous grouping in the early grades and curriculum differentiation in the upper grades.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends the math department revisit the scope and sequence created in 1996. The question of the "costs and benefits" of selecting a common, cross-grade text series could then be weighed. (This issue may be particularly important in the lower grades.)

The visiting committee recommends that the department continue the discussion of the appropriate balance between "real world problem solving" and skill mastery.

The visiting committee recommends that the school investigate the issue of articulation between the Pine Point curriculum and curricula at receiving schools.

Science

The science program at Pine Point begins in the preschool and culminates in the signature Oceanology program for ninth graders. By design, children learn science by "doing science." Even at the earliest ages asking questions, making hypotheses and gathering data are common practice. Rather than focusing on textbook learning, the program builds understanding in the - sometimes figuratively, sometimes literally - messy way that scientists in the real world seek knowledge about the world around us. Whether it is the study of butterflies in third grade, dissecting frogs in seventh or collecting data about local waterways in the oceanology program, children learn by doing.

The scope and sequence is the product of careful study by the department ensuring that a balance exists between the physical and biological sciences with the hope that teachers can pursue areas of particular personal interest within a framework that ensures that children receive a broad exposure to important scientific topics. The scope and sequence has recently been benchmarked to the National Association of Teachers of Science recommendations.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the science department for encouraging children of all ages to learn science by doing experiments in a "hands-on" environment.

The visiting committee commends the Oceanology program in particular. Children learn about oceanology not just by reading about ecosystems, but by participating in longitudinal studies in which data collected are contributed to local and national scientific databases.

Social Studies

The social studies department demonstrates a clear understanding of the school's mission and objectives. The department's goal is to develop in its students an awareness of self in relation to family, classmates, school, town, country, and the world. The committee observed that the faculty

is dedicated, passionate, and creative in their instruction. They strive for and achieve a balance between factual instruction and issues of ethics, compassion, and productive citizenship. They fulfill the school's mission by using multiple methods to instruct students in and out of the classroom. Students develop group and individual skills in critical reading, researching, and writing projects from daily homework to larger term projects.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the social studies department faculty on their dedication, creativity, and effectiveness in teaching their students according to their stated departmental goals.

The visiting committee commends the school for fulfilling a recommendation of a previous committee for the school to commit more funds for field trips in social studies as well as other disciplines.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends that the school take steps to remedy the weakness mentioned in its self-study to provide more computers and hardware for Internet connection and other instructional activities.

Foreign Language

The comprehensive foreign language program is in its third year and is still expanding into the lower school. Students are enrolled by parents in either French or Spanish in grade K-1 and continue until grade 6, at which time all students take Latin for a year. After that the student selects French or Spanish to study in grades 7 through 9. The department fulfills its objectives in exposing students to languages and related cultures by using a wide range of resources and activities. The committee observed enthusiastic teachers who engaged the students, spoke the language in class and stimulated student listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

It was observed by the committee that while the program is vibrant and still evolving, it has some issues to confront. Each teacher expressed an interest in having more time in the schedule for language classes and a need for the hiring additional staff. The placement of a single year of Latin in grade 6 also presents challenges.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the foreign language department instructors on their dedication, passion, and creative approaches to teaching language in a manner consistent with the school's mission statement.

The visiting committee commends the foreign language department for responding to the recommendation of the last visiting committee by its introduction of Spanish into the curriculum and the expansion of French and Spanish into grades K-1 through 6.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the school investigate the role of the study of Latin and its placement in the middle school program as a one-year course.

The visiting committee recommends that the school review staffing needs in the language area.

Service Learning Program

The service-learning program is reflective of the Pine Point mission to develop students with "caring hearts" and a strong sense of responsibility for community service. Service learning projects are integrated into the curriculum, and are not unrelated to class activities. The visiting committee was impressed by the range of service projects that students have an opportunity to experience, and by the seamless integration of service into the academic curriculum.

A variety of service projects have been developed for students throughout all grades at Pine Point, ranging from visits to elderly clients at nursing homes to several oceanography projects. These service projects are designed to reinforce academic skills in the areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies, while helping students to become more aware of the interrelationships and interdependencies that are a part of modern society. Major service learning projects are conducted in the seventh and eighth grades and result in comprehensive projects. Students expressed excitement and pride about the projects completed through the service-learning department. Teachers are encouraged to consult with the service learning program chair to explore methods in which service projects can be integrated into their intended units of study. They are also encouraged to add to the existing portfolio of service projects.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the service learning program chair for his enthusiasm and commitment to the integration of service and academic curricular development.

The visiting committee commends the school for the eighth grade assessment, developed by the chair of the service-learning program. It is comprehensive in scope and provides students with an intellectually challenging, yet age-appropriate, project.

Music

This program at Pine Point School provides students with the opportunity to develop knowledge of and appreciation for music. The curriculum is designed to enable students to read and write music, identify and categorize types of instruments, and to understand music from historic, stylistic, and cultural aspects.

Instruction is provided to all of the students at the school, including the pre-school children. Students are encouraged to explore music in a variety of forums. They research types of music, discuss forms of musical composition, and work in groups to create and perform musical compositions. All seventh grade students learn how to play the guitar. The eighth and ninth

grade students are involved in a collaborative arts program in which dance and music curricula are integrated. In addition to music classes, there is also a lower and middle school chorus and instrumental ensembles. Enthusiasm for music class was evident during class observations.

Commendations:

The visiting committee was impressed that Pine Point School has made a commitment to the performing arts by ensuring that all of their students receive music class instruction on a weekly basis.

The visiting committee commends the music teachers for creating an environment in which students are comfortable taking the risks to compose, perform, and discuss student compositions. Their enthusiasm for music is contagious.

Recommendation:

The classroom space devoted to the fine arts department is limited. The music room is also used for division assemblies and meetings, creating a need for music classes to be moved to another location. As plans are developed for the growth of Pine Point, exploration of more effective and dedicated space for the fine arts department is recommended.

Health

The health department chair is responsible for conducting workshops for classroom teachers who assume the major responsibility for direct health education at Pine Point School. The department chair is also responsible for organizing guest lectures including Freedom from Chemical Dependency, human sexuality instruction, and anti-bullying workshops for students and parents. Although the department headship has changed three times in the past six years this does not seem to have affected the quality of instruction.

The goal of health education at Pine Point is to provide students with information about a variety of health issues and to motivate them to be aware of their physical well-being and to make healthy life choices. The curriculum includes instruction in areas such as social development, substance abuse, mental and emotional health, and human sexuality. Instruction is age appropriate. Teachers are encouraged to seek assistance from the school psychologist when they view interactions or behaviors that are even of slight concern. The psychologist works closely with teachers, students, and parents to address their concerns.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the faculty of Pine Point School for their ability to integrate aspects of health education into their program and for following the recommendation of the last visiting committee to provide meetings for teachers involved in health instruction.

Dance

Students in the dance classes are enthusiastic and obviously enjoy their time in the class. All students, including those in the pre-school program, receive movement and dance instruction. The

instruction is developmentally appropriate, ranging from explorations of rhythm and movement to more abstract representation of music and concepts. Instruction in dance class is tied to the academic curriculum; for example, fifth grade students study colonial times, visit Old Sturbridge Village, and learn about country-dances. Students in the eighth and ninth grades are enrolled in CAP (collaborative arts program) in which instruction in music and dance is integrated. The head of the dance department is also the Fine Arts Department Chair.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the head of the Fine Arts Department Chair for creating an environment in which peer collaboration between the music, art, and dance teachers is valued and facilitated.

Art

The curriculum of the art department is designed to provide students with an opportunity to explore a variety of two and three-dimensional visual arts. Appreciation for art, professionally as well as student generated, is also an objective of this department.

Art instruction is provided to students in grades one through nine. When possible, art projects are used to enhance the academic curriculum. For example, in fourth grade students study marine animals in science class; then in art class they make ceramic representations of these marine animals. Art instruction in grades one through five, and in grade seven, focuses on mixed media, while instruction in grade six, eight, and nine focuses on all aspects of drawing. Organized in this manner, the art curriculum provides students with a solid foundation in many aspects of visual arts.

Student artwork is displayed throughout the school and during class observations it was clear that students were engaged and enthusiastic about art instruction and the projects on which they were working.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the communication and collaboration between the two art teachers. This open dialogue allowed for the development of a comprehensive curriculum.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends that as plans are developed for the growth of Pine Point, exploration of more effective space for the fine arts department be undertaken.

Library

The School enjoys benefits from having an active, up-beat, adequately funded library/media center. The School has developed a comprehensive curriculum for grades K-6 that is developmentally appropriate and supports the goals of the Library - to provide materials in assorted media, to provide formal instruction in the use of information resources, and to encourage a love of reading. Grades 7-9 have no regular library class time but when starting a research project the class will come to the library for guidance. The library staff enthusiastically accomplishes a tremendous amount of work with rather limited resources of both space and time. The School's recently

completed Campus Master Plan includes the construction of a new library and technology center at the center of the campus.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the school for a library that provides materials (both print and non-print) and services which support and supplement classroom curricula and seeks to meet the individual needs of each student.

The visiting committee commends the initiative of the library staff in their outreach and identification of sources and programs that expand their capabilities to access resources for students, faculty, and families far greater than their physical space would allow: e.g. the State of Connecticut's iconn program and making access available through the school's website.

Recommendations:

The Committee recommends that the school continue to seek ways to provide adequate funds in order that the new library and technology center can be constructed.

Technology

The most recent technology plan was released in 1995. It was worked on actively for the first few years and less thereafter. In most recent years there has been very little commitment to the use of technology at the school. Of the approximately 95 computers in use at the school, many are outdated and therefore have limited application. With a new Head of School a renewed interest in technology has occurred, and in the last year commitment to provide networked, high-speed Internet access was made. This required financial resources to be provided for the cost of wiring and infrastructure. In addition, 20 IMAC laptops were leased for use by the faculty.

Keyboarding skills have been taught to students starting in the fourth grade and a required level of competence has been established by sixth grade, and is being assessed.

There are some individual teachers who incorporate technology to support their teaching. A limited amount of training has been provided to faculty on opportunities for integration of the use of various software packages into the curriculum. However, it is apparent that there is a lack of a clear vision of technology appropriate to the total curriculum. Historically the budget for this area has been very limited, and staffing has been part-time. This year some computer support services have been contracted for with an independent provider, who works at the school once a week. The most recent technology coordinator was overburdened in the position and has asked for a change in work assignment for next year. A new technology coordinator has been identified, but in addition to learning a new position, he will carry responsibilities for a part-time teaching load and a department chair. Given this level of staffing, the School will continue to be hard-pressed to accomplish significant technology integration.

This year, outside help was obtained from representatives of CAIS's Commission on Technology to evaluate the current situation and make recommendations for upgrading existing hardware and software. In addition, with the help of a parent, the website has recently been revamped.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the school for its work in the revamping of the website and its use in support of the school's mission.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the school establish a technology committee and develop a written plan that articulates a clear vision of technology that is appropriate to its total curriculum.

The visiting committee recommends that the school develop procedures in which teachers, with appropriate support, are responsible for taking the lead for the genuine, purposeful integration of technology into the curriculum.

The visiting committee recommends that the school develop an acceptable use policy for technology, and inform students, families, faculty, and staff of the policy.

The visiting committee recommends that the school commit the resources to provide staffing, hardware, software, and training to begin execution of the plan.

Physical Education

Pine Point provides a well-defined and broad program of physical education offerings that are developmentally appropriate for the instructional ages of the children. In the Lower School, the program consists of a variety of games and activities intended to develop a child's sense of movement in space and control over one's body while encouraging interpersonal sensitivity, successful group interaction and self-esteem. Basic skill development for a variety of future activities is thoughtfully integrated into this supportive and playful early physical education environment.

In the Middle School, the children participate in a minimum of two seasons of team or individual sports with some children choosing to participate in three. All children attend a weekly physical education class in addition to the four-day-a-week team practices. The physical education classes are of mixed gender and continue, at an age appropriate level, a program of activities and skill sequences established in the younger grades.

Middle School children have a choice between the sports offered in a particular season. Sports, depending upon popularity, have "A" and "B" teams allowing each child the opportunity to participate at a level commensurate with his/her skill level, experience and commitment. All children participate in games and practices during a given season.

Staffing for the Lower School physical education program is drawn from the physical education staff, and coaches for the Middle School program are chosen from among faculty in the Lower and Middle School. A variety of team and individual sport offerings are made available to the children each season.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the physical education staff and coaches for their efforts to create a supportive environment for young children to develop a positive sense of the capabilities of their bodies. The emphasis on community, sensitivity, respect and skill development at all levels is refreshing. The emphasis on participation in the Lower and Middle School is consistent with developing an "appreciation" for athletic endeavor as stated in the school Mission.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the school examine the time allocated to Physical Education in the Lower School. One or two meeting times per week may not afford the children the full benefit of program offerings.

The visiting committee recommends that the costs and benefits of extending the Middle School sports commitment from two seasons to three seasons be examined. A single physical education class per week for those children who are not doing a sports season may not be sufficient to build healthy bodies during a formative age.

VI. GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the governance of the School. The Board consists of between 12 and 21 people, most of whom are current parents. The Board has final decision-making power with respect to issues of School policy. This power is not shared with any other governing body. A board sub-committee periodically reviews the Pine Point School by-laws; the by-laws were most recently amended in May 2000 by a vote of the entire corporation.

The Board periodically reviews the mission statement. It was last significantly revised during the long range planning process in 1995 and 1996, and the Board is responsible for assuring that it is the motivating force behind the actions at the school.

The Head of School is an active member of the Board of Trustees and is a member of all Board committees. There is frequent contact between the Head and members of the Board. Expectations are set in a formal process annually, with the Board's Executive Committee and the Head of School discussing and identifying priorities for the upcoming year. Concerns are addressed formally at each Board meeting in the executive session and at weekly meetings between the Head and the President of the Board. The Head and the President of the Board hold primary responsibility for open communications, but all members of the governance structure hold responsibility for open communications.

The Board of Trustees assumes full responsibility for hiring, supporting the growth of, evaluating, and removing the Head of School. There is an annual evaluation of the Head. Evaluation forms are distributed and completed by the Trustees and the administrative team.

The last Long Range Plan was adopted in October of 1996. The process is expected to begin again following the re-accreditation visit.

The Board holds financial responsibility for the School. The Board approves a budget that is prepared by the administration and the finance committee. The Director of Development and the chair of the Board development committee are responsible for oversight of the development program. The Board of Trustees sets tuition levels as part of the annual budget process.

The nominating committee seeks recommendations for the board from all constituencies. There is an orientation process in place that members feel does a good job of introducing new trustees to their responsibilities.

The Board of Pine Point is setting very high standards for themselves. They are actively addressing financial, building and program issues. They continually ask themselves, "What can we be doing better?"

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the Board on its energy and commitment to the school. The group is focused on raising the quality of the school in many substantive areas.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends the Board consider adding additional members to the board who have relevant non-profit experience. An individual with experience in independent school finance and fund raising could be a useful addition.

VII. ADMINISTRATION AND FACULTY

The administrative team is led by the Head of School who oversees all operations at the School. The Head is supported in his academic administrative duties by an Assistant Head who is also the Director of the Lower School and two other Division Directors (Middle School and Preschool). One administrative assistant supports these offices. The Admissions Office consists of one director and one assistant who is also the publications coordinator. The Development and Business offices each consist of one director and one assistant. Department Chairs are an integral part in establishing program changes. Led by the Chair, departments discuss possible changes and ways to improve presentation. One director heads the Buildings and Grounds Department. His staff consists of two full-time employees and two part-time employees.

The mission of the school is obvious throughout all areas of the school. Administrators and faculty alike stress the importance of individual accomplishment and collaboration. The administrative team is effective in carrying out the program of the school and has a fine rapport with the governing board. Faculty members feel that they can broach any issue with administrators and be given a respectful and fair hearing. Communication is often informal as is decision-making. Faculty members are asked for their input regarding programmatic changes and often initiate the need for change.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends Pine Point on its extraordinarily committed and qualified administration and faculty who understand their school's mission and attempt to bring it to life.

The visiting committee commends the Head of School who is energetic, creative, and is dynamic in his approach to leadership and planning.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends that the administration and faculty determine if teacher portfolios and peer evaluation are essential to the on-going evaluation process. If they are deemed so, their use by all should be formalized.

VIII. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Financial Management

The financial affairs of Pine Point are receiving increased attention. The school has a newly hired experienced business manager, and an active and talented Finance Committee of the Board. Given concern about recent economic difficulties, it is understandable that the school is spending a good deal of time on issues like tuition, fees, fundraising and endowment.

An independent and certified public accounting firm visits the School each summer to conduct an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2001 such an audit was performed and it was found that the financial statements fairly represent the financial position of the School.

The School is reliant not only on tuition income, but also on its Annual Fund, special events, and restricted gifts income to budget for a break-even annual operation. Thus 11.3% of the current operating budget comes from other than direct tuition charges. These sources of funds, while adequate for the annual needs of the school, allow little to no cushion should any unanticipated expenses occur.

In addition, there is limited budgeting for capital replacement expenses. Although a process is in place for identifying needs, these are often funded after a surplus occurs in the operating budget rather than as a necessary component of expenses needed to be included in the budget setting process.

In November of 2001 the School decided to retire all of its outstanding long-term debt. This was partially in response to the low rate of return being earned on the School's short-term funds, in combination with a desire to bring closure to an earlier capital expansion program that had resulted in the assumption of unplanned debt. While psychologically beneficial for the community, this reduction in long-term liabilities may limit short-term liquidity, should the need arise.

In the late fall the School involves the appropriate members of the faculty and administration in developing a preliminary operating and plant budget based on the program needs. The Finance

Committee reviews and directs the modification of the budget based on in depth discussions focused on the balance of tuition increases, enrollment, and the desire to increase compensation of faculty. The revised budget is presented to the board for approval in January.

The School has hired an experienced professional Business Manager who will be able to provide capable administrative financial planning and analysis for the school. The financial management staff clearly understands the four funds that are in place: unrestricted operating, plant, temporarily restricted, and permanently restricted.

Commendation:

The Committee commends the Finance Committee and the Development Committee for developing and instituting a policy for Gift Acceptance Standards and Policy at Pine Point School in January of 2002.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that the School embark on a financial strategic planning process to analyze the level of financial resources required to meet the needs of the school for both the operating and plant budgets. Given the level of endowment funds available to the school, particular attention should be focused on determining goals that will reduce the percentage of the current operating budget that is derived from other than direct tuition charges.

The visiting committee recommends that in order for the School to achieve the stated goal of increasing teachers' salaries, a financial plan for achieving these increases should be developed. Although the salary for a starting teacher has improved significantly relative to peer schools in recent years, and the median salary appears to be midway in the same group, further analysis may show that with an aging faculty, not as much improvement has occurred as may have been hoped for.

Tuition and Financial Aid

The visiting committee reviewed the Supplementary Material Inventory and saw that information regarding the financial responsibilities clearly meets this requirement. As tuition assistance is offered, the visiting committee confirmed that the Financial Aid Policy listed in the self-study is accurate and reviewed the Supplementary Material Inventory and found documentation that meets this requirement. The School offers a Tuition Refund Plan to all students as part of the annual enrollment contract process. Families communicate their desire to purchase the tuition refund plan or not by checking a box on the enrollment contract.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the school for its prompt, consistent, follow-up on accounts receivable.

The visiting committee commends the school for developing the "Financing a Pine Point Education" brochure that clearly explains the process and appropriate deadlines, frequently asked questions, and information requirements.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends that the Finance Committee compare the school's tuition to other elementary schools. The analysis might best be done not just on the basis of location, but in comparison to schools that offer a similar range of services (the "Stats On-Line" database would be a good resource for this purpose.) It is clear that Pine Point is a "good buy" – and while this stature does have its benefits, it may not enable the school to meet all goals its Board wants to achieve.

Development

The development program at Pine Point focuses on six key areas: planning, research, annual solicitation, capital solicitation, publications and public outreach. The overriding objective is to strengthen the School's relationship with its various constituents. The development office has three full-time staff: a Director of Development, an Assistant Director of Development, and an Assistant Director of Development of Alumni Affairs.

The Development Office attempts to pay equal attention to the key six areas listed above. The finance committee, with the approval of the Board of Trustees, produces a budget for the upcoming year. Financial goals are met through the annual fund and a mix of special events.

At its June 2001 meeting the Board of Trustees committed to raising capital funds sufficient to accomplish the goals of Phase I of the Campus Master Plan and at the same time raise dollars to grow the endowment.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends Pine Point on the efforts of its professionally administered Development Office.

The visiting committee commends the school on the planning it has done for the upcoming capital campaign and for its resolve to include endowment funds in the goal.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends analyzing the current breakdown of administrative duties in the office. Reorganizing tasks with other departments in the school may bring about cost savings and improve efficiency.

Physical Plant

Pine Point School's campus is located on several acres of beautiful property, including two athletic fields. In the fall of 1999 The Mount Vernon Group Inc. began the process of developing a Campus Master Plan. They met with faculty, administration, Director of Facilities, and Board Members to identify the physical facilities necessary to support the program of the school. The plan was completed and presented to the Board. Phase I, which includes the addition of a Library and Technology Center and the addition and renovation of space to create an Early Childhood Learning Center, has been designed and the initial stages of a capital campaign have begun. The desired start date of Phase I is February 2003 but this will be contingent on funding being available.

The current campus is well maintained. Clearly the Facilities Director takes personal pride in the school. There is a regular schedule of housekeeping performed by the custodial staff that varies from the daily tasks to annual projects. Routine preventative maintenance schedules are established for various systems, including heating and mechanical/lighting, emergency and fire equipment. The maintenance department operates an effective work order system, through which most facility issues are handled in a timely manner. Any issues that need attention are identified by individual employees, routine visits from the Fire Department, and a proactive Safety Committee. The combination workshop, Facilities Office, garage storage space is utilized to its outside capacity. There is some discussion of the need for additional staff to bring some out-sourced services in-house. Clearly the facilities staff are flexible, conscientious, "can do" people.

Long term maintenance and renovation needs have recently been receiving a secondary focus in the budgeting process. The school's plan is to handle these issues as the Campus Master Plan is executed.

Commendation:

The Committee commends the school in the execution of its recycling program that exceeds levels of 55% of their waste. This program is in direct support of the mission in its strong sense of responsibility for community and self.

Recommendation:

The Committee recognizes the steps taken in developing a more comprehensive PPRSM plan and budget, and encourages further analysis and planning in these areas.

Health and Safety

The administrative team discusses general facilities and safety issues at their weekly meetings. In addition, a newly configured safety committee reviews safety and accidents on a quarterly basis. Regular review is done of various processes, rules, and regulations for safety in the use of carpool and bus transportation, school boat, school vans, and arrival and dismissal. The arrival and dismissal process is an orderly, efficient one. Speed bumps have been placed in the parking lot to further promote a safe speed in the driveway and parking areas. Appropriate supervision is provided during recess and lunch.

The school has a comprehensive written crisis response plan that identifies various types of crisis that may occur and the appropriate responses. All members of the school community have reviewed the plan and practiced various responses. These drills are held regularly to avoid panic and ensure safety within the community.

There is a separate office designated as the Nurse's office, centrally located in the school, and outfitted in accordance with the Town of Stonington Special Services Department. The school nurse is a part-time employee scheduled for 15 hours a week. The school secretary and other adults at the school cover other hours. A medical doctor is on call during the school day and the School is a member of the Stonington Ambulance Corporation.

All athletic teachers and coaches are trained in prevention and care of athletic injuries and students are taught proper stretching and conditioning exercises in their physical education classes. Given the number of students and adults trained in First Aid and CPR, there is usually someone immediately available to provide care.

There is an established process for notification of safety concerns, and accident reports are filled in and returned to the Nurse when appropriate. Annual training is provided for allergy, bee sting, and diabetic emergency, American Red Cross CPR and First Aid, and OSHA issues. Hazardous materials handling and MSDS documentation is maintained and followed.

Commendation:

The visiting committee commends the School on its mission supportive program of annual certification of all 8th graders, faculty and staff in Red Cross First Aid training.

Recommendation:

The visiting committee recommends that the school consider increasing the hours of the school nurse.

Personnel

The Head of School maintains files for currently employed professional staff members in his office. Files include resumes and professional development material. Access is limited to his use.

The Business Office maintains payroll information and documentation required by the federal government for payroll purposes. In addition the Business Office maintains all files for former employees. The Business Manager keeps these files in a locked, fireproof cabinet. The accountant processes payroll information.

Support staff are interviewed and hired by the administrator who supervises their work. Applicants complete employment applications, provide references, and give authorization for a pre-employment screening to determine acceptable background information.

Commendation:

The Visiting committee commends the school for updating its Employee Handbook and encourages its completion and use.

Legal and Regulatory Compliance

In reviewing the School's practices with several school administrators, reading the Supplemental Materials provided to the Committee, and inspecting actual documentation maintained on site, it was found that the school is in compliance.

IX. CULTURE AND CLIMATE OF THE SCHOOL

The faculty, administration, and students of Pine Point School transmit a sense of warmth and caring that is conducive to both learning and human dynamics. The school clearly attempts to balance the development of a strong mind with a caring heart. The self-study and discussions with students, parents and faculty evidence an abundance of field experiences, a sense of community involvement and true regard for the dignity of each individual.

Pine Point reaches out to both parents and the community at large to further its goal of a dynamic partnership. Examples of this include its academic relationship with the American School for the Deaf, Old Sturbridge Village, Mystic Seaport and the Pfizer Corporation. Additionally, the service learning programs that the school offers take students out to help others in the surrounding towns in a variety of settings. Within the school community the partnership continues with events such as Grandparents Day, monthly luncheons with the Head of School, K-1 Family Nights and the ongoing tradition of the full-school Monday morning meeting.

It was clear to the committee that the faculty supports each other and that there is genuine regard and closeness between instructors. The administration supports these relationships and in that way the adults in the community model the levels of caring and respect they wish the students to learn and demonstrate. All of the visiting committee members remarked how the culture and climate of the school are consistent with the mission statement and values promoted by Pine Point.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the entire Pine Point School community for their efforts in creating a close, caring environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of all of its students.

The visiting committee commends the school for its active involvement with parents in the spirit of a dynamic partnership.

Recommendations:

The visiting committee recommends that at this time in the school's history, when so much is happening- capital campaign, expanding facilities, increased enrollment- the school take care to create structures and situations that foster ongoing communication among the faculty, administration, and board members.

The visiting committee recommends that the school pursue the goal mentioned in its self-study and remain vigilant to dispel the perception that biases and favoritism occur in the school community as a result of the intimacy and familiarity between students, parents, administration and faculty.

X. SUPPLEMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

Pre-School Program

Developing confident, enthusiastic, curious learners is obviously a major objective of the Pine Point pre-school program and clearly reflects the school's mission. The preschool program is carefully designed to provide a nurturing, developmentally appropriate program for three and four year olds. Major emphasis is placed on the development of the 'school skills' that a young child should possess as a foundation for successful school learning. The development of social and basic life skills, as well as academic readiness skills, is provided throughout the program.

The pre school program is divided into three and four year old divisions. There are fourteen students in the three-year-old group and sixteen in the four-year-old group. Two full time teachers and instructional aides as needed staff each division. The pre school curriculum delineates goals in the areas of social skills, receptive and expressive language, math, social studies, science, health, and motor skills. Experiential, hands-on learning, guided play, and class discussion is used to introduce children to new concepts. Development of social skills and oral language skills is a major objective of both classes. Children are encouraged to move from parallel to cooperative play and to build their ability to use language to interact with peers and adults. Teacher guidance, modeling, and praise are instrumental in helping Pine Point pre schoolers to achieve these goals.

A thorough screening process is employed prior to a child's enrollment in the Pine Point pre-school. Prospective parents receive information about the program and all students are required to attend a "Play Day" at which the children are evaluated by a team of teachers and school specialists. Often the school psychologist, learning specialist, and speech and language therapist attend the screening. Ability to separate from parents and engage in discussion with peers and adults seem to be the basic skills that a child must possess prior to admission to the pre-school.

The pre-school teachers are tremendously committed to fostering strong communication between school and home. Once a child is admitted, classroom teachers make home visits prior to the beginning of the school year. The pre-school staff encourages daily communication, as appropriate. They are motivated to forge a positive, supportive relationship with parents as their young children begin a school experience. Aside from Parent Conferencing, opportunities are provided throughout the school year for parents to be involved in the pre-school program.

The Pine Point pre-school currently enjoys full enrollment and a robust waiting list. Community interest in the pre-school is apparent.

Commendations:

The visiting committee commends the faculty of the pre-school for their dedication and enthusiasm. They possess a clear vision for their program and provide children with a safe, nurturing, and rich learning environment.

The visiting committee commends the faculty for their commitment to parent communication and support.

Recommendation:

Space in the pre-school wing is used efficiently, but is limited. As part of the long-range plan, the visiting committee recommends that an expansion of pre-school space be considered so that it may be possible to take advantage of the strong community interest in Pine Point's pre-school.

MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Major Commendations:

1. The visiting committee commends the teachers of Pine Point. The school is exceptionally well served by this group of committed and talented instructors. The school is fortunate to have retained a large number of gifted teachers for long periods of service and has also been successful in recruiting newer members of the profession to its staff.
2. The visiting committee commends the leadership of the school. The head has demonstrated commitment to advance the school in several major areas. The assistant head of school provides support to staff and has an outstanding working knowledge of students and their needs. The directors of the Pre School and the Middle School are deeply knowledgeable about the group of children they work with and are strong advocates for them. The balance of the administrative team, in development, business, admissions, and facilities, is bringing a high level of professionalism to all activities. The administrative staff, in conjunction with the board, is dedicated to bringing Pine Point to new levels of excellence.
3. The visiting committee commends the school for its service learning program. At Pine Point, teachers view service as an integral part of instruction. The work done in the program actively supports the school's mission of creating a sense of responsibility for self and community.
4. The visiting committee commends the school for the development and adoption of the Campus Master Plan. The changes included in the plan will have a decidedly positive impact on the program and the future growth of the school.

Major Recommendations:

1. The visiting committee recommends that a plan for increased, purposeful utilization of technology in the academic program be made a high priority. In the self-study, the school takes notes of its own shortcomings in this area and frustrations encountered in building the program. The committee encourages the school to study a multi-pronged effort: increased teacher training, additional staffing, and significant allocation of resources for hardware and software.
2. The visiting committee recommends that the school give attention to its long-range financial plan. Given the financial pressures that often exist at small elementary schools, as has been the case recently at Pine Point, it is suggested that tuition levels, salaries and capital projects be studied by the school through assessing its needs and comparing itself with similar schools.

3. The visiting committee recommends that future growth of the Middle School be studied as part of a larger process. Further attention to defining what makes Pine Point's Middle School program unique and how the academic program articulates with receiving schools may be beneficial.

4. The visiting committee recommends that the teacher evaluation process be more clearly defined. As it presently exists, faculty members are unsure of the role of the peer evaluation and the portfolio.