

School Principal interview checklist

Principal selection usually involves a screening by the trust or management, a detailed interview with the board or chairperson, sometimes a presentation on a school development plan, and a final meeting on terms.

10 QUESTIONS TO PRACTISE OUT LOUD

1. What would you do in your first ninety days as principal here?

What it checks: Whether you have a structured plan to learn the school before making changes, and can build trust with staff, parents and management.

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a crisis at school.

What it checks: Whether you stay calm, communicate clearly and act decisively when safety or reputation is at risk.

3. What salary and benefits do you expect for this role?

What it checks: Whether your expectations fit the school's size, fees and location, and whether you can discuss package components maturely.

4. How have you improved board or academic results in a school you led?

What it checks: Whether you can show a real improvement with data and explain the specific actions that caused it.

5. Describe a time you had to take a tough decision about a staff member.

What it checks: Whether you handle underperformance or misconduct fairly, with documentation and due process, while protecting students.

6. How much independence do you expect from the management or trust?

What it checks: Whether you can work within the trust's governance while being clear about the authority a principal needs to lead.

7. How do you evaluate and develop teachers?

What it checks: Whether you have a fair appraisal system based on observation and evidence, combined with real professional development.

8. Tell me about a change you introduced that staff initially resisted.

What it checks: Whether you can lead change by explaining the reason, involving staff and adjusting the plan rather than forcing it.

9. Why do you want to lead our school?

What it checks: Whether you know this school's situation, strengths and challenges, and have a genuine reason to commit for several years.

10. How do you ensure child safety and protection in school?

What it checks: Whether you know child-protection responsibilities, such as POCSO reporting duties, staff verification and safety audits, and treat them as non-negotiable.

TIPS FOR THIS INTERVIEW

- Prepare a short one-page school development plan with three priorities, actions and measures, since many panels ask for a first-year plan.

- Collect before-and-after data from your past roles on results, admissions, attendance and staff retention, and practise explaining what you changed.
- Revise the affiliation norms of the school's board and the main child-protection duties, including POCSO reporting and staff verification.
- Study the school's website, published results and mandatory disclosures, and note two strengths and two challenges to discuss with the panel.

THE DAY BEFORE

- ☐ Confirm the time, venue or video link and the interviewer's name
- ☐ Plan your route and leave time for traffic, or test your camera, microphone and internet
- ☐ Keep copies of your resume, ID proof, certificates and photographs in a folder
- ☐ Iron your clothes and charge your phone and laptop
- ☐ Do one final run-through of your introduction, then stop and rest

ON THE DAY

- ☐ Arrive 15 minutes early, or log in 5–10 minutes early for a video call
- ☐ Greet everyone politely, including the receptionist or coordinator
- ☐ Listen to the full question, pause, then answer in a clear structure
- ☐ Take brief notes of names and key points
- ☐ Ask your prepared questions and confirm the next steps before you leave