



## **Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation**

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# **Report on the Assessment of Government Evaluations**

### **Schools that Work**

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**Date Evaluation was completed:** 13 October 2007

**Name of assessor:** Ray Basson

**Evaluation Number:** 1

**Date Assessment Completed:** 07 February 2013

## Evaluation Assessment Details

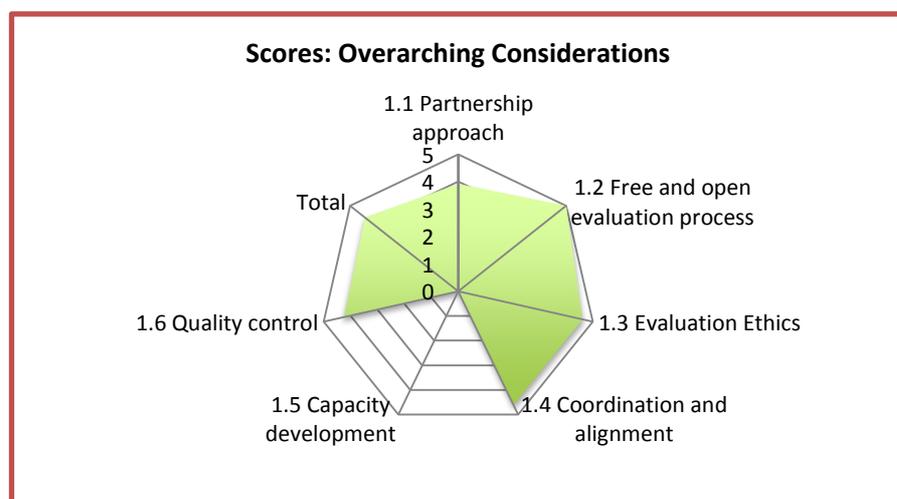
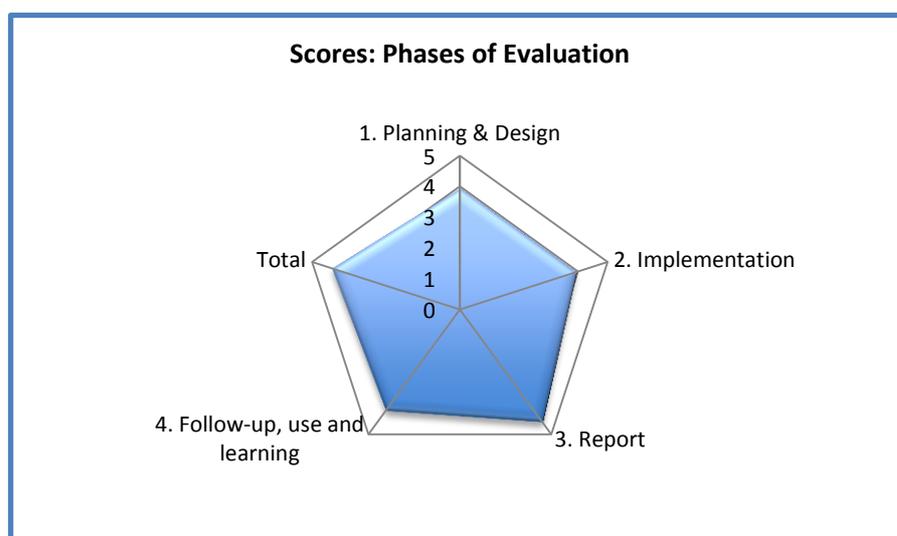
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Title of evaluation report	Schools that Work
Completion Date of Evaluation	13 October 2007
Name of Assessor	Ray Basson
Evaluation Number	01 January 1900
Completion Date of Assessment	07 February 2013
Initiated by	Department of Basic Education
Evaluation undertaken by	P Christie, D Butler, M Potterton
Evaluation area / sector	Education
	<i>Additional</i>
National Outcome	Outcome 1
	<i>Additional</i>
Type of Evaluation	Impact
	<i>Additional</i>
What is being evaluated	Institution
	<i>Additional</i>
Geographic Scope	National
Period of Evaluation	June- September 2007
Known Cost of Evaluation	Unknown

### Quality Assessment Scores

Phase of Evaluation	Score
Planning & Design	3.94
Implementation	3.92
Report	4.50
Follow-up, use and learning	4.05
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.22</b>

Overarching Consideration	Score
Partnership approach	3.93
Free and open evaluation process	5.00
Evaluation Ethics	4.61
Coordination and alignment	4.60
Capacity Development	Not Applicable
Quality control	4.25



## 1. Planning & Design

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### 1.1. Clarity of Purpose and Scope in TOR

**STANDARD:** *The evaluation was guided by a TOR with at least the following sections explicit: purpose, scope and objectives; expectations regarding design and methodology; resources and time allocated; reporting requirements; expectations regarding evaluation process and products..*

#### Comment and Analysis

The evaluation was guided by a brief. Its purpose was to study schools in middle quintiles that perform well in the Senior Certificate exams, with the objective to explore the circumstances under which these schools achieved good results, while others did not. It was to be a qualitative study, to be conducted June-September 2007.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD:** *The purpose of the evaluation was clear and explicit in the TOR*

#### Comment and Analysis

As above, the evaluation purpose is clear - to study schools in middle quintiles that perform well in the Senior Certificate exams, to explore the circumstances under which these schools achieved good results, while others did not.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD:** *The evaluation questions were clearly stated in the TOR and appropriate to addressing the evaluation purpose*

#### Comment and Analysis

The evaluation questions were clearly stated: [i] Are there replicable lessons from these schools that could be applied to other schools? [ii] To what extent are Departmental policies and requirements aligned with the practices of these succeeding schools? What assists and what impedes?, [iii] What are the dynamics of Schools that Work, that enable them to achieve good results when so many schools in similar circumstances do not? [iv] What further research does a study of these schools suggest?

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: The approach and type of evaluation was suited to the purpose and scope of the evaluation TOR****Comment and Analysis**

This study is evaluative as it, in advance, places a value on the sample of schools selected for study following the implementation and impact of policies and practices in schools nationally namely, schools that work, not others. However, it is referred to in the text as research rather than evaluation. The evaluation approach originates in Stanford, is well established (Eisner, 1972; Preskill and Catsambas, 2006) and used internationally, and is well suited for the purpose and scope of this study. Framing the study in these terms would have strengthened the study and its findings.

**Rating** 4**STANDARD: Intended users and their information needs were identified in the TOR****Comment and Analysis**

The evaluation team was supported by a Reference Group which included members from the Ministry commissioning the evaluation as well as from government and others. The Reference Group met 3 times during the evaluation, and were part of the team visiting schools. The impression is given that the main user of the evaluation would be the Ministry for the purpose of replication, to find alignment with state policies, what assists and impedes schools to achieve, amongst others [see Aims i-v above].

**Rating** 4**STANDARD: Key stakeholders were involved in the scoping of the TOR and determining the purpose of the evaluation****Comment and Analysis**

Key stakeholders from the Ministry, DoE, academia, teachers' unions, and independents were involved in the evaluation. They were involved early in the study to conceptualise the design, sample selection and methods.

**Rating** 4

## 1.2. Evaluation was adequately resourced

**STANDARD: The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of time allocated**

### **Comment and Analysis**

June to September, the time allocated the evaluation, was rather short for an evaluation of this kind.

**Rating** 3

**STANDARD: The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of original budget**

### **Comment and Analysis**

The evaluation was allocated a small budget which covered basic costs. With the approval of Minister Pandor, left over funds were used to bring all participating school principals to Cape Town, to attend the presentation of the study, establish a support network, and the like. They were also treated to a tour of Parliament.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of staffing and skills sets**

### **Comment and Analysis**

The evaluation had both an evaluation committee [a team of 3] supported by a Reference Group [about 10]. These were adequately skilled for the task, the preponderance being drawn from academia and independent contractors as well as from the Ministry, DoE, and teacher unions.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: Where appropriate, the evaluation planned to incorporate an element of capacity building of partners/staff responsible for the evaluand**

**Comment and Analysis**

There is no evidence of a plan to incorporate an element of capacity building for partners/staff of the evaluand. This would be unusual for an evaluation of this kind.

**Rating** N/A

### 1.3. Alignment to Policy Context and Background Literature

**STANDARD: There was evidence that a review of the relevant policy and programme environments had been conducted and used in the planning of the evaluation by the evaluators**

**Comment and Analysis**

Reviews of policies affecting schools that work does not seem to have been used in planning the evaluation.

**Rating** N/A

**STANDARD: There was evidence of a review of appropriate literature having been conducted and used in the planning of the evaluation by the evaluators**

**Comment and Analysis**

There is evidence that the extensive review of literature on school improvement in the evaluation report [Coleman Report through schools that work in South Africa], influenced planning of the evaluation. Issues affecting performance in schools in disadvantaged circumstances structure the plan and give it a sense of context.

**Rating** 5

**1.4. The evaluation methods planned were appropriate to the project**

**STANDARD: There was explicit reference to the intervention logic or the theory of change of the evaluand in the planning of the evaluation**

**Comment and Analysis**

The logic taken to approach the study of these schools was a backward mapping one. The smallest unit of analysis for schools to attain good results was teaching and learning in the classroom, the next unit being the organizational structure of the school, supported by districts as the next unit, followed by departments. This seems an appropriate intervention logic for the evaluation. The study, however, points out that Senior Certificate results are achieved at the end point of the system, and become less and less indicative of classroom practice the further one moves from this point.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: Key stakeholders were consulted on the design and methodology of the evaluation**

**Comment and Analysis**

As mentioned above, the impression is given that key stakeholders were consulted in the design and methodology of the evaluation.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: The planned methodology was appropriate to the questions being asked**

**Comment and Analysis**

With the exception of sample selection [an 'available' sample], planned methods received very little discussion. Interviews were planned to gather the perspectives of interviewees, supplemented by short observations, and findings were triangulated with studies from the literature. The evaluators acknowledge limitations [holidays, a Public Service strike] meant less time was spent in schools than planned. The impression created is that the methodology would have been strengthened with reference to a research or evaluation framework, in this case such as Eisner 1979; Preskill 2006.

**Rating** 3

***STANDARD: Planned sampling was appropriate and adequate given the focus and purpose of evaluation******Comment and Analysis***

The 'available' sample of 18 schools that worked all achieved better than the norm. These are schools that perform well under conditions that are typical of the mainstream of the South African education system. Two schools selected, as the study progressed, turned out to be quintile 3 and 5, and 1 was selected as a contrastive case from quintile 5. The sample intentionally was not of the best schools, nor was it a randomized sample. Appropriately, the sample of schools studied provide a snapshot of schools which worked, to show the the varied picture of their achievements.

**Rating** 4

***STANDARD: There was a planned process for using the findings of the evaluation prior to undertaking the evaluation******Comment and Analysis***

No prior, planned process for using the data of the evaluation seems in place in the evaluation. This may be a surprise, as replication is an aim of the study to increase the number of schools that work in the school system. But it should also be noted that use is also not an explicit requirement of evaluation in general and more specifically of the Eisner-Preskill evaluation approach referred to above. Thus, this omission may not come as a surprise.

**Rating** N/A

**1.5. Inception phase*****STANDARD: The inception phase was used to develop a common agreement on how the evaluation would be implemented******Comment and Analysis***

With the very short time allocation for the evaluation, the impression is given that agreements were reached on some aspects of the evaluation [eg. involvement of district officials in fieldwork] which did not happen.

**Rating** 3

## 2. Implementation

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### 2.1. Ethical Review and Considerations

**STANDARD:** *Where data was gathered in contexts where ethical sensitivity is high, appropriate clearance was obtained through an ethics review board; e.g. in evaluation involving minors, institutions where access usually requires ethical or bureaucratic clearance, and situations where assurances of confidentiality was offered to participants*

#### **Comment and Analysis**

Ethical clearance was given for the study by the DoE and provincial departments. In the evaluation report, names of schools were used and individual identities of persons protected.

**Rating** 4

### 2.2. Evaluator independence

**STANDARD:** *Where external, evaluation team was able to work freely without significant interference*

#### **Comment and Analysis**

Being an external evaluation, the evaluation team was able to work freely without interference from state departments, teachers' unions, and others.

**Rating** 5

***STANDARD: The evaluation team was impartial and there was no evidence of conflict of interest******Comment and Analysis***

The Reference Group with representatives from many sectors served both to advise as well as to check on the impartiality of the evaluation team. In addition, when writing up the findings, the evaluation team drew on concepts and findings discussed in the literature review thereby declaring its position and serving to check its impartiality as a team. No conflict of interest is apparent either.

**Rating** 5**2.3. Key stakeholder involvement*****STANDARD: Key stakeholders were consulted through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement during the evaluation******Comment and Analysis***

Formal meetings were held during the evaluation bringing key stakeholders together from the Ministry, provinces, schools, for consultation with the evaluation team. These were arranged during the planning stage, and during the evaluation to interrogate data for themes, check fieldwork notes written up in reports on schools visited for their comment and inputs.

**Rating** 4***STANDARD: Where appropriate, an element of capacity building of partners responsible for the evaluand was incorporated into the evaluation******Comment and Analysis***

No capacity building for the evaluand was provided in the report, which is appropriate to this evaluation approach.

**Rating** N/A

## 2.4. Methodology

**STANDARD: The methods employed in the process of the evaluation were consistent with those planned**

### **Comment and Analysis**

Methods used in the fieldwork were consistent with those planned.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: Data collection was not compromised by fieldwork-level problems or unplanned diversions from original intentions**

### **Comment and Analysis**

Originally, District Officials were to be included in the fieldwork, which did not work out. The fieldwork was also somewhat curtailed through vacations as well as a strike by Public Service employees. Both affected the fieldwork phase, and limited visits to schools to one-and-a-half days in each school. This is a limitation of this study, and seems to have reduced the amount of data collected.

**Rating** 3

**STANDARD: Forms of data gathering were appropriate given the scope of evaluation**

### **Comment and Analysis**

Instruments were appropriate for the evaluation. They arguably could have been strengthened with reference to an evaluation framework [eg: Eisner/Preskill], as well as checks on data had there been time.

**Rating** 3

**STANDARD: The data analysis approach and methods were appropriate and sufficient given the purposes of the evaluation**

**Comment and Analysis**

Data analysis was based on notes written up into in fieldwork reports on each school. All 18 were studied by the evaluation team, who looked for themes, and the like, in preference to using a coding system. Checks were made internally by team members and supported by evidence, and the final report on schools sent to schools for checking. These were both appropriate and sufficient for the evaluation.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: Key stakeholders were significantly engaged as part of the methodology**

**Comment and Analysis**

The evaluation team and members of the Reference Groups were engaged in the methodology of the evaluation. And where appropriate it included others [eg: principals checking reports written from field notes on their schools].

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: The methodology included engaging beneficiaries appropriately as a key source of data and information**

**Comment and Analysis**

Beneficiaries, such as school staff and principals, were key sources of data, as is appropriate in such evaluations.

**Rating** 4

## 2.5. Project management

**STANDARD: The evaluation was conducted without shifts to scheduled project milestones and timeframes**

### **Comment and Analysis**

While the 4 month timeframe was adhered to, as mentioned above, within the evaluation there were interruptions [vacations, strike] and fieldwork didn't take place as planned [District Officials as fieldworkers didnt happen]. These appear to have reduced time in schools and hence the quantity of data collected, and seem to have been beyond the control of the evaluation team.

**Rating** 4

## 3. Report

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**3.1. Report was well-structured and presentation was clear and complete in each of these areas**

**STANDARD: Executive summary captured key components of the report appropriately**

### **Comment and Analysis**

The Executive Summary captures appropriately key components of the evaluation. It is clearly structured, focussed and reports its essential findings.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: The context of the development intervention was explicit and presented as relevant to the evaluation**

### **Comment and Analysis**

The context of schools that worked was presented persuasively: it clarified Senior Certificate passes, pass rates in the present and former educational administrations, performance in relation to disadvantage internationally, and others. This is a strength of the evaluation.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: There was a clear rationale for the evaluation questions****Comment and Analysis**

The evaluation questions flowed from the purposes of the study, the rationale for them being: to understand Schools that Work, if factors contributing to their success are replicable, what assists and what impedes these schools achieving, and others.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: The scope or focus of the evaluation was apparent in the report****Comment and Analysis**

The scope of the evaluation was apparent from the report.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: A detailed methodology was outlined in the relevant section of a report (full report or 1/3/25) to the point that a reader could understand the data collection, analysis and interpretation****Comment and Analysis**

Data collection methods were outlined very briefly, but sufficient to understand data collection in the field. And, an excellent review of school performance in local and international literature provided details accounting for performance in circumstances of disadvantage, and guided analysis and interpretation as these relate to the questions.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: Key findings were presented in a clear way; they were made distinct from uncertain or speculative findings; and unused data was not presented in the body of the report****Comment and Analysis**

Key findings were presented in response to the evaluation questions, and were clear and concise. Being grounded in data, these findings were distinguished from speculative findings, and help understand performance in these schools and the difficulties of replication in schools elsewhere. Unused data relating to the questions asked remained in individual school reports, and were not included in the evaluation in final form.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: *Conclusions and recommendations were clear and succinctly articulated***

#### **Comment and Analysis**

Conclusions and Recommendations are clear and succinctly presented. Recommendations were valuably alluded to ahead of being made and thus prepared a reader for the recommendations finally made.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: *Acknowledgement of limitations of all aspects of the methodology and findings were clearly and succinctly articulated***

#### **Comment and Analysis**

There is little acknowledgement of limitations in the evaluation. One that arguably should have been made is the short period of time actually spent in Schools that Work [about one-and-a-half days] which, it seems to me, limited insights into these.

**Rating** 4

### 3.2. Writing and presentation

**STANDARD:** *Quality of writing and presentation was adequate for publication including: adequate layout and consistent formatting; complete sentences and no widespread grammatical or typographical errors; consistency of style and writing conventions (e.g. tense, perspective (first person, third person); levels of formality; references complete and consistent with cited references in reference list and vice versa; etc)*

#### Comment and Analysis

The evaluation is excellently written and is well suited for publication, from layout through writing and stylistic conventions.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD:** *Appropriate conventions were used in presentation of data (e.g. use of appropriate statistical language; reporting of p-values where appropriate; not reporting statistically insignificant findings as significant; clarifying disaggregation categories in constructing percentages; not using quantitative language in reporting qualitative data, etc.)*

#### Comment and Analysis

Appropriate conventions were used throughout the evaluation.

**Rating** 5

### 3.3. Presentation of findings

**STANDARD:** *The use of figures and tables was such that it supported communication and comprehension of results; and data reported in figures and tables was readily discernible and useful to a reader familiar with data presentation conventions*

**Comment and Analysis**

The use of figures and tables supported communication of results to a reader familiar with data presentation conventions.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: Data analysis appeared to have been well executed**

**Comment and Analysis**

Data analysis appears well executed.

**Rating** 3

**STANDARD: Findings were supported by available evidence**

**Comment and Analysis**

And, the presentation of findings is persuasive and well supported from the available evidence.

**Rating** 5

***STANDARD: The evidence gathered was sufficiently and appropriately analysed to support the argument***

**Comment and Analysis**

Not much is said about analysis of data. It seems inductively treated for themes, which is appropriate for the evaluation.

**Rating** 3

***STANDARD: There was appropriate recognition of the possibility of alternative interpretations***

**Comment and Analysis**

The writers guard against the belief that data gathered is the truth, and demonstrate through the different lenses used to interpret the data that there are many factors contributing to schools that work and that no one can be privileged.

**Rating** 5

***STANDARD: The report appeared free of significant methodological and analytic flaws***

**Comment and Analysis**

Notable about the report is how thoroughly and carefully it has been carried out. It can be considered substantially free of significant methodological and analytical errors.

**Rating** 5

### 3.4. Conclusions

**STANDARD: Conclusions were derived from evidence**

**Comment and Analysis**

Conclusions are derived from evidence.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: Conclusions took into account relevant empirical and/or analytic work from related research studies and evaluations**

**Comment and Analysis**

This is a strength of the evaluation. Many insights and observations from the literature relating to schools that worked, both local and international, were used to enrich its conclusions.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: Conclusions addressed the original evaluation purpose and questions**

**Comment and Analysis**

Writers of the evaluation report structured write-up around questions, and addressed each specifically.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: Conclusions were drawn with explicit reference to the intervention logic or theory of change**

**Comment and Analysis**

No explicit reference was made in conclusions to the intervention logic. Having said this, the evaluation was not intended to address a specific intervention but rather a more general question why selected disadvantaged schools in the third quintile which succeed against the odds, did so when other schools in similar circumstances did not. The question is not applicable to this evaluation.

**Rating** N/A

### 3.5. Recommendations

**STANDARD: Recommendations were made in consultation with appropriate sectoral partners or experts**

**Comment and Analysis**

Its seems recommendations were made in consultation with members of the evaluation team, and are likely to have been discussed with the Reference Group.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: Recommendations were shaped following input or review by relevant government officials and other relevant stakeholders**

**Comment and Analysis**

Its unclear if recommendations were reviewed.

**Rating** N/A

**STANDARD: Recommendations were relevant to the policy context****Comment and Analysis**

An interviewee stated that recommendations had been incorporated into the Department of Basic Education's Plan of Action. She made the point that at a policy level support for schools that work [Recommendation 1] had not materialized, nor had assistance with discipline [Recommendation 9]. Nor had a network of principals in schools that work been constituted [Recommendation 11] as recommended in the report.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: Recommendations were targetted to a specific audience sufficiently - were specific, feasible, affordable and acceptable****Comment and Analysis**

Recommendations targetted schools that work to sustain them and strengthen similar schools to perform despite the conditions they find themselves in. Specific recommendations were made which seem feasible and affordable in the main.

**Rating** 5

**3.6. Relevant limitations of the evaluation have been noted****STANDARD: Relevant limitations of the evaluation were noted****Comment and Analysis**

Limitations of time and resources were noted. The limited time spent in the field was noted too suggesting that more fieldwork and data had been planned.

**Rating** 3

### 3.7 Protection of participants and risk considerations

**STANDARD: The full report documented procedures intended to ensure confidentiality and to secure informed consent where this was needed (in some cases this is not needed - e.g. evaluation synthesis - in which case N/A should be recorded)**

#### Comment and Analysis

The evaluation approach had the benefit of encouraging participation as evaluatees knew that they were being studied as examples of the good, that is, schools that worked. Consent was obtained, schools named, and individuals remained unnamed in the full report.

**Rating** 4

**STANDARD: There were no risks to participants in disseminating the original report on a public website**

#### Comment and Analysis

The writers take the view that there is no risk in disseminating the full report on a public website.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: There were no unfair risks to institutions in disseminating the original report on a public website**

#### Comment and Analysis

As far as can be seen, there were no unfair risks to institutions in disseminating the full report on a public website. Indeed, as it was a study of good practice there may be advantages to schools to have the report disseminated in this way [eg: a participating school becoming publically recognised as a school that works].

**Rating** 5

## 4. Follow-up, use and learning

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### 4.1. Presentation to stakeholders

**STANDARD: Results were presented to all relevant stakeholders**

#### Comment and Analysis

The results of the evaluation have been widely disseminated, amongst others, to the Ministry of Education, provincial departments of education, and many other fora [such as to the Council of Education, Witwatersrand where it was presented as the main address at its AGM].

**Rating** 4

### 4.2. Resource utilisation

**STANDARD: The evaluation was completed within the planned timeframes**

#### Comment and Analysis

The evaluation was completed in the prescribed 4 month period allocated it by the Ministerial Committee.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: The evaluation was completed within the agreed budget**

#### Comment and Analysis

It was also completed within budget. As mentioned above, Minister Pandor agreed to the small surplus it generated being used to encourage and sustain these schools and their performance[eg: it paid for participating principals to visit Cape Town to attend the formal presentation of the report, to develop a support network for principals of Schools that Work, amongst others].

**Rating** 5

### 4.3. Transparency

**STANDARD: The report was publicly available (website or otherwise published document), except where there were legitimate security concerns**

#### Comment and Analysis

The report is publically available.

**Rating** 5

### 4.4. Lessons learnt

**STANDARD: After completion of the evaluation, a reflective process was undertaken by staff responsible for the evaluand to reflect on what could be done to strengthen future evaluations**

#### Comment and Analysis

Not applicable.

**Rating** 4

### 4.5. Symbolic and conceptual value

**STANDARD: The evaluation study was seen by interviewed stakeholders as having added significant symbolic value to the policy or programme (eg raised its profile)**

#### Comment and Analysis

In general, the report was seen by interviewees to have added significant symbolic value to schools producing good Senior Certificate results under difficult conditions.

**Rating** 5

**STANDARD: The evaluation study was of conceptual value in understanding what has happened and possibly in shaping policy and practice**

#### **Comment and Analysis**

A strength of the evaluation was its conceptual value for understanding Schools that Work within the social context they found themselves in. One interviewee was confident that it contributed to shaping the DOE's Plan of Action for schools.

**Rating** 5

#### **4.6. Utilisation of findings and recommendations**

**STANDARD: There was clear evidence of instrumental use - that the recommendations of the evaluation were implemented to a significant extent**

#### **Comment and Analysis**

The writers are sceptical about the evaluation report having instrumental use. They also are unaware of recommendations being implemented to sustain these schools and to encourage other schools to rise to the high level of performance of Schools that Work. An interviewee was sure that most of the recommendations had been included in the DBE's Plan of Action.

**Rating** 2

**STANDARD: There was clear evidence that the evaluation has had a positive influence on the evaluand, its stakeholders and beneficiaries over the medium to long term**

#### **Comment and Analysis**

The evaluation seems to have had a positive effect on participating schools: they were identified for the study as Schools that Work, and were affirmed during visits by fieldworkers and by the invitation to travel to Cape Town to attend the formal presentation of the report.

**Rating** 4

## **References**

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- Eisner, E. (1979). *The Educational Imagination* [second edition]. New York: MacMillian.
- Preskill, H and Catsambas, T.T. (2006). *Reframing Evaluation through Appreciative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Christie, P, Butler, D and Potterton, M (2007). *Schools that Work*, [Ministry of Education]

## **List of Interviewees**

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- H Narsee, Management Committee, DOE; Telephonic Interview, 22/1/2013.
- M Potterton, Evaluator, CIE; Face-to-face Interview, 17/1/2013.