REPORT TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE:

SCHOOLS THAT WORK

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministerial Committee on Schools that Work was tasked with carrying out a pilot study on a sample of schools in middle quintiles that succeeded in achieving good Senior Certificate results, while others in similar circumstances did not. What were the dynamics of these schools that enabled their achievements? Were they replicable in other schools? To what extent were Department policies and requirements aligned with practices in these succeeding schools?

Between June and September 2007, members of the research team visited 18 schools across the provinces of South Africa to investigate these questions. Schools were selected mainly from middle quintiles, and from all former Departments.

Section 1 of the Report explores the parameters of "Schools that Work" and the advantages and disadvantages of using Senior Certificate performance as an indicator of school quality. Section 2 then provides a short review of selected literature as a context for investigating Schools that Work. This includes a selection of South African studies that throw light on systemic performance. The Report notes with concern the evidence that there are problems with quality in both primary and secondary school performance, and that South Africa lags behind the performance of other countries in international tests.

The Report suggests that there is benefit in recognizing that the majority of schools – the mainstream – are black schools in relatively poor socio-economic circumstances. The language of teaching and learning in most of these schools is English, which is not the home language of most of their teachers or learners. Schools are often under-resourced in terms of laboratories, computers, sportsfields and opportunities for extra-curricular activities. At one edge of this mainstream are schools in extremely poor communities, classified as quintiles 1 and 2. At the other edge are the

privileged schools of quintile 5, including the majority of former white schools. Schools in middle quintiles are the "norm" in South Africa.

Section 3 of the Report presents a brief analysis of the 2006 Senior Certificate results. It shows clearly that patterns of school performance are strongly and significantly influenced by socio-economic context (as indicated by quintile) and former Department. Statistical analysis indicates that the school an individual learner attends has strong predictive effects on their results.

The findings of school visits are set out in Section 4. In brief, we found highly motivated schools, with dedicated staff and busy learners, using additional time before and after school, on Saturdays and in holidays. Schools were focused on achievement in the Senior Certificate exams, and celebrated their achievements to motivate themselves further. They battled social conditions of poverty, manifesting among other things in hunger, AIDS orphans, and schoolgirl pregnancy. They had little control over their learner intake; the stability of their staffing was often precarious; and their resources – generally inadequate – were stretched to the limit. Many of them gave and received support from other schools. They took what support they could from external agencies – NGOs, Departments of Health and Welfare, the Police, and textbook publishers. Their levels of support from districts and departments were variable but generally not remarkable.

Themes explored in Section 4 are: teachers and staffing; the organization of teaching and learning; leadership and management; the importance of acknowledgement, rewards, recognition and motivation; resources; support from Districts and Departments; IQMS; OBE graduates from primary schools; social-economic conditions surrounding schools; and the evidence that success breeds success.

Section 5 analyses the descriptive themes of the previous section. In reflecting on the ways in which the Schools that Work operated in their contexts and conducted their daily practices of teaching and learning, four dynamics were evident:

- all of the schools were *focused on their central tasks* of teaching, learning, and management with a sense of responsibility, purpose and commitment;
- all of the schools carried out their tasks with *competence* and *confidence*;
- all had *organisational cultures* or *mindsets* that supported a work ethic, expected achievement, and acknowledged success;
- all had *strong internal accountability systems* in place, which enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability, particularly in terms of Senior Certificate achievement.

Are these conditions replicable? The Schools that Work exhibited strong inner capacities in terms of teaching and learning, supported by management and leadership, as well as a sense of agency. If schools do not have these capacities, then change will not be a simple matter, and interventions in the form of incentives or sanctions are unlikely to have effect. The challenge is to work with what exists in schools to build and support capacity.

To what extent were Department policies and requirements aligned with practices in Schools that Work? Section 5 looks at a selection of Departmental policies, from the perspective of school principals and teachers.

Schools that Work are mainstream – not elite – schools that exhibit inner capacity and achieve good results, with enormous effort. The Report recommends that Departments adopt a strategy of support, recognition and incentives for schools that have the inner capacity to work. **The aim in doing so would be to value and stabilise the schools that do perform, and incrementally increase their number.** This strategy of support, incentives and rewards would target schools in the middle to upper levels of performance, operating alongside strategies targeting poorly performing schools.

Schools that Work show that it is possible for schools in the mainstream of South Africa to achieve, and they stand for optimism, human agency and hope. The challenge is to support them and expand their number.

INTRODUCTION

THE BRIEF

In June 2007, the Minister of Education established a Committee to conduct a pilot study on schools in middle quintiles that perform well in the Senior Certificate exams. Called "Schools that Work", the Ministerial Committee was tasked with exploring, through qualitative study, the circumstances under which these schools achieved good results, while others in the same situation did not.

The Committee was made up of Pam Christie (Chair), Dawn Butler and Mark Potterton. It was supported by a Reference Group to guide the formulation of research questions and the interpretation of findings. The Reference Group consisted of Francine de Clercq (Wits), Tsidi Dipholo (SADTU), Aslam Fataar (UWC), Heather Jacklin (UCT), Relebohile Moltesane (UKZN), Martin Mulcahy (Ministry), Hersheela Narsee (DoE), and Sibusiso Sithole (DoE).

More specifically, the aims of the research were:

- To discover whether there were replicable lessons from these schools that could be applied to other schools.
- To investigate the alignment of department policies and requirements with the practices of these succeeding schools. What assists, and what impedes?
- To build understanding, with the Department, of conditions under which schools operate successfully.
- To provide qualitative case study snapshots of a number of individual schools, plus a quantitatively driven analysis of the sample schools.
- To provide the basis for a further, possibly continuing or longitudinal, research study on school success and failure.

Between June and September, members of the Committee (and some members of the Reference Group and other researchers) visited 18 schools in all nine provinces. They spoke to principals, teachers, SGB members (where

available) and learners, and informally observed lessons where possible. (The research approach is discussed Section 1, which also lists the schools in the sample.) The Reference Group met, as planned, at the beginning, middle and end of the research.

This report provides an account of the research and its findings. It is structured as follows:

Section 1 explores the parameters of "Schools that Work", as understood in this Report. It looks at why Senior Certificate results were used as the initial criterion for selection, and explores the advantages and disadvantages of this.

Section 2 provides a review of selected literature that addresses the theme of Schools that Work. This includes literature on school effectiveness; on schools that succeed "against the odds"; and on changing teachers' classroom practices. It also considers a selection of South African studies that throw light on systemic performance.

Section 3 presents a brief analysis of the 2006 Senior Certificate results, as a basis for grounding the themes of Section 3, and for locating the sampled schools in their performance context.

Section 4 presents an overview of what researchers found in the sample of Schools that Work, discussed thematically.

Section 5 analyses these findings more specifically, and addresses the research aims outlined above, including suggestions for further research.

Section 6 presents recommendations stemming from this study of Schools that Work.

SECTION 1

EXPLORING THE TERM "SCHOOLS THAT WORK"

1.1 Senior Certificate results as a starting point

As a starting point for this research, the decision was taken to begin with the Senior Certificate Examination results (or Matric, as it is commonly if mistakenly termed) as a basis for selecting a sample of schools to study. Matric results provide an indicator, albeit imperfect, of the functioning of the senior schooling system, its schools and individual learners. It is the major public barometer of systemic performance.

Yet the notion of Matric itself needs to be treated with caution. Historically, the Senior Certificate exam came to serve two purposes: to set the minimum statutory requirements for entry to university (Senior Certificate with Endorsement) and to signal the successful completion of 12 years of schooling. Technically, only the former (Senior Certificate with Endorsement) should be termed "Matric". This simple ambiguity signals other problems with the Senior Certificate.

- Though supposedly opening multiple pathways, the Senior Certificate does not necessarily provide an adequate route map for young people about what to do next, once the 'Matric' target has been achieved – particularly if this is achieved without Endorsement and without vocational subjects.

- Senior Certificate results continue to reflect past distortions in the education system in terms of access and success. Whereas the majority of white children have been able to stay at school until age 16, and their Senior Certificate pass rates have been over 90%, the same is not true for black children. In the last decades of apartheid,

secondary schooling expanded for black children, but quality lagged behind access. Though increasing numbers reached Senior Certificate, the pass rates for Africans in the 1980s were below 50% -- and this is still the case for schools serving African communities. Servaas van der Berg (2007:11-12) estimates that in 2003, almost 1 in 10 of the white cohort achieved a Matric A aggregate, as compared to just over 1 in 1000 of the black cohort. And of the latter, almost half attended former white or Indian schools. Thus, equal opportunities to attain a Senior Certificate, particularly Endorsement, remain elusive.

- The fact that for the majority of learners the language of learning and teaching – and of the Matric exam – is not their home language means a structural disadvantage within the system that is currently addressed by a 5% mark adjustment. This can in no way redress the cultural and linguistic advantages that some have over others, and the inequalities that slice through the education system from top to bottom. Equity, like quality, has proven to be elusive in the new educational dispensation.

- Unsurprisingly, there have been continuing debates about the quality and standards of the Senior Certificate exams. Umalusi has been willing to address these, to its credit. However, there are still questions about whether success in the Senior Certificate is an adequate indicator of quality of schooling. As Nan Yeld's work at UCT shows, it is likely that the school attended may have more predictive value for post-school educational success than individuals' capabilities and effort. Similarly, Foxcroft and Stumpf (2005) argue that results do not have the same predictive power for university achievement for all NMMU students, being more accurate for white than for black students. While assessment may indeed drive the curriculum, exam success may be achieved by repetition and rote learning rather than by critical and creative thinking. If so, success reflects primarily the diligence of learners and their teachers, rather than quality learning experiences in school.

Nonetheless, as Umalusi (2005) itself points out, the Matric is a high stakes exam, which plays "a crucial role in the South African education system". It attracts a great deal of public interest, and its credibility is important for public confidence in the education system as a whole. For all that, achievement in the Senior Certificate should not necessarily be regarded as a simple proxy for quality schooling.

Why is it important to consider these points? Because the Ministerial Committee saw evidence of all of them in looking at Schools that Work, as later sections of this report will return to. And because these are issues that may be addressed in the process of continually moving the system towards greater equity and quality.

1.2 Interpreting "Schools that Work"

"Schools that Work" is a term that is open to different interpretations. In particular, schools may work in the sense of producing reasonable results in Senior Certificate exams. But successful results may be achieved through rote learning and "drilling" of a relatively narrow set of work, as well as through critical and creative thinking in exposure to powerful knowledge. In other words, it is possible for Schools that Work to provide learning experiences of quite different quality to their learners.

What, for example, of a school that focuses on achieving 100% pass rates with no Endorsements; or one that encourages learners to study all their subjects on Standard Grade to achieve better symbols? These learners may well achieve a Senior Certificate at a School that Works, but have no clear post-school pathways opened for them.

What of the school that achieves passes in Higher Grade Science without laboratories? How may its learners' understanding of Science be compared to those achieving the same results at a school with a well-equipped Science

laboratory? How will these different learning experiences manifest in post-school contexts, such as universities?

And what of the school that counsels certain learners to leave rather than pursue an academic pathway at the end of Grade 10 (or simply fails them), thereby simultaneously working towards maintaining its record of 100% pass rate? Given the structure of the system with its competitive "high stakes" Matric exam and unequal access to alternative pathways, is it not to be expected that schools would strategise to achieve the best overall results, even if this is at the expense of student retention?

What value is to be placed on curriculum activities that lie outside the confines of the formal curriculum? Does the fact that most (black) secondary schools have no facilities for sport make a difference to the education they offer, in comparison with schools that do have sports facilities? The same applies to other extra-curricular activities, such as excursions, and resources such as the internet.

What about the phenomenon of schoolgirl pregnancies in certain poor communities (which some allege is to qualify for the Child Support Grant)? This at least indicates that pregnancy at school is not a stigma (and in some cases it may even be a fashion). But what about the fact that the debut into sexual activity for many young girls is not always voluntarily; it is often through violence, coercion and parental pressure? And what are the effects of this on the girls' achievements in schooling? We think here of the principal in one of the schools we visited who saw his chances of 100% passes put at risk by six of his potential candidates being pregnant.

In short, many Schools that Work face complex dilemmas in striving to achieve well in a competitive contest where they are unequally positioned. In the words of one of the principals, when all schools were first to undertake a common Senior Certificate examination, "It was like racing Ben Johnson against a paraplegic". Yet, by careful strategising and sustained effort, the school in question did manage to beat its "Ben Johnson", first by setting the

goal of achieving in athletics, then in choral competitions, and finally in Senior Certificate results.

In practical terms, selecting “Schools that Work” in terms of performance in Senior Certificate exams means selecting schools that perform to the norm, or better. Given that the average pass rate is currently around 70%, schools that work achieve this level or above. And given that the Endorsement rate is around 18%, then schools that achieve more than this are technically “working”. However, this is a particularly narrow interpretation of “Schools that Work”, especially considering that the best achieving schools in the system have 100% pass rates with 100% Endorsements. It also sets a fairly low benchmark for success for the country as a whole.

The schools in this study have all achieved better than the norm. Yet, given the spread of performance within the system, these schools were not chosen to represent “the best” in the system. They are not necessarily all “excellent” schools. They are schools that perform well under conditions that are typical of the mainstream of the South African education system – Schools that Work.

Initially, a selection of schools was made that met certain criteria: that they would be in middle quintiles, have over 80 Senior Certificate candidates, achieve over 80% pass rates with a good percentage of Endorsements. At the same time, provincial departments were asked to nominate three schools for us to consider. (This was done by E Cape, W Cape, N Cape, Gauteng and Mpumalanga; KZN responded that they would support our choice; North West, Free State and Limpopo did not respond.) To this mix a number of other schools were added through recommendation, and an available sample of 18 schools was finally selected, in most cases reflecting provincial recommendations. One very highly performing quintile 5 school was specifically chosen to provide a contrastive case.

As the research unfolded, and further information about the schools emerged, the sample became further blurred. Two Free State schools were selected as

quintile 1 (from a database provided by the Department of Education), when in fact they were quintiles 3 and 5. Provincial recommendations did not always include schools with the best pass rates, or with good rates of Endorsement. Information about former departments emerged only after the research had started.

The selection of schools makes no pretence at being a random sample, or statistically justifiable. This would not be possible given the small size of the sample, and the criteria it was designed to meet. It is worth noting that the sample specifically did not set out to include the top performing schools in quintile 5, almost all of which are former white or Indian schools. Instead, it provides snapshots of schools across the country, from different former departments, some with religious affiliations, and most from middle quintiles. We are satisfied that this spread of schools shows a varied picture of Schools that Work, from which much can be learnt. And as a pilot, we are confident that it provides a sound base for further study.

A brief comment on method

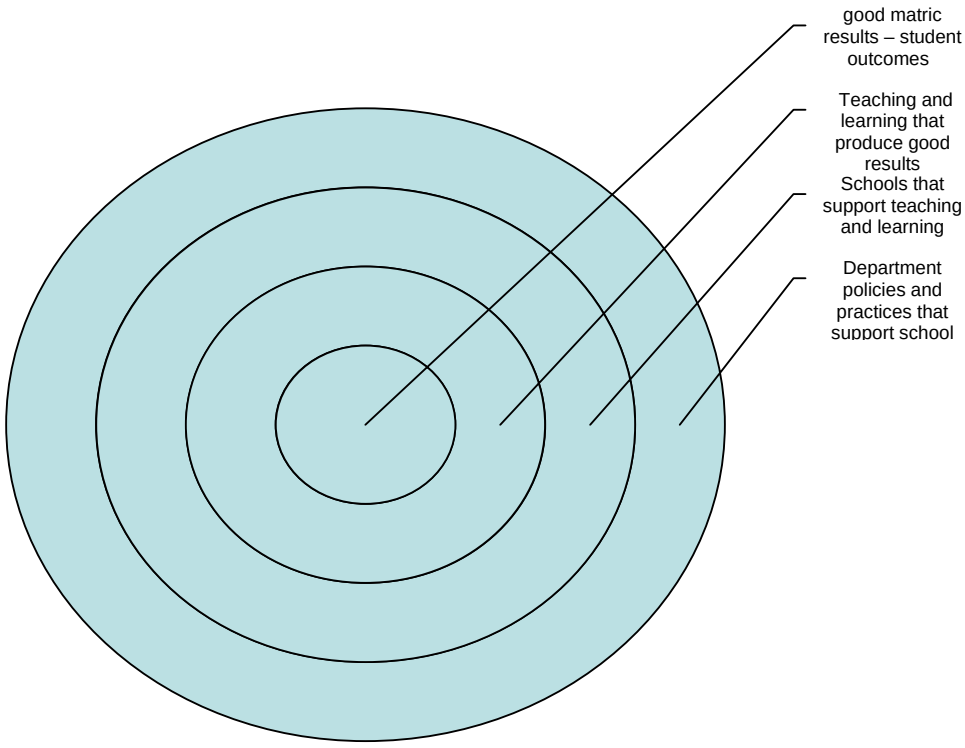
It bears mentioning that the study was undertaken in a very short time frame (June to September 2007), which straddled both the school holidays and the period of the Public Service strike, affecting all of the schools in the study. Less time was available to spend in schools than was originally planned. For a number of reasons, involvement of department officials in fieldwork was limited. As a result of these changes, the study design was adjusted towards gathering the perspectives of interviewees, supplemented by short observations. To counter this, care has been taken to “triangulate” the perspectives of participants with the findings of other research studies, and not to assume that perspectives are, themselves, “the truth”, but rather to recognise that they represent only one particular aspect of “the truth”. The results achieved by schools in the 2006 Senior Certificates provided a touchstone to ground the study in relation to both the methods used and the interpretations of findings.

A limitation of the study is that it approached schools "from the top", with greater emphasis on principals' and teachers' views, and very little student voice. This was largely due to the brief time allowed for the study, compounded by time lost during the strike and holidays, and a reluctance on our part to distract learners who were clearly focused on their classes.

Table 1 The sample of Schools that Work, 2006 results

	School name	Province	Quintile	Former department	No. of candidates	Pass SC (incl cond)	Pass Endors	% pass SC	% Endors
1	Ncuncuzo SS	E Cape	2	Transkei	95	61	33	100	35
2	Bisho High	E Cape	5	Ciskei	104	42	62	100	60
3	St James SS	E Cape	3	Transkei	103	21	78	96	76
4	Orient Islamic	KZN	-	Delegates	118	2	116	100	98
5	Mariannhill	KZN	-	DET	70	1	69	100	99
6	Silethukukhanya	KZN	3	DET	127	85	15	100	12
7	Sophungane	MPL	2	Kangwane	53	20	33	100	62
8	St Bede's	Limpopo	3	Lebowa	89	14	73	97.8	82
9	Mbilwi	Limpopo	4	Venda	86	6	79	98.8	92
10	PJ Simelane	Gauteng	4	DET	95	61	31	98.9	33
11	Mamelodi	Gauteng	3	DET	142	118	14	94.3	10
12	Iqhayiya	W Cape	3	New	55	48	3	94.4	5
13	Westerford	W Cape	5	Assembly	175	3	172	100	98
14	H/skool Concordia	N Cape	3	Representatives	69	39	27	97.1	39
15	Sol Plaatje	N West	4	?	78	32	42	94.9	54
16	Letsatsing	N West	4	Bophuthatswana	244	127	77	84.5	32
17	H/Skool Harrismith (dual medium)	Free State	5 (1)	Assembly	86	23	62	98.8	72
18	Villiers Skool (combined)	Free State	3 (1)	Assembly	12	10	5	100	42

The logic taken to approach the study of these schools was a backward mapping one. The assumption was made that good results are achieved by the teaching and learning in classrooms, and this is the smallest unit of analysis. Classrooms are part of the organisational structure of the school, which provides the next unit. Schools are supported by districts, and districts by departments. This backward mapping logic may be represented diagrammatically as follows:



It needs to be recognised that Senior Certificate results are achieved at the end-point of the system, and become less and less indicative of classroom and school practices the further one moves from this end point. These results may not adequately express what happens in the lower part of the secondary school; and though their basis is certainly laid in primary schools, this particular research was not designed to reveal anything about primary schools that work.

SECTION 2

LITERATURE ON "SCHOOLS THAT WORK"

Why do some schools work better than others? Why do some achieve good student results, when others don't? What might be done to improve school performance? Questions such as these have been extensively addressed in literature on school performance and education policy, particularly since the 1960s. What follows is a brief outline of several themes in this extensive literature, that provide useful perspectives on the Schools that Work research.

The beginning point is with the US Coleman Report, which questioned whether schools could make a difference to the life chances of socially disadvantaged students. This stimulated a large amount of research on the characteristics of effective schools, which has provided important – though in a critical sense, limited – insights into school functioning. On a different theoretical trajectory, school improvement research has focused on working with the internal dynamics of schools, again providing insights into what was once "the black box" of schools. A significant theme to emerge from these strands of research has been concern with disadvantaged schools, and those "on the edge" of the system that manage to succeed in spite of the odds. Yet another theme of importance in considering Schools that Work stems from US studies of teachers' work, the core of classroom practice, and the difficulties of addressing this as the smallest unit of multilayered and complex education systems. From the broad literature on organisational theory, the theme of institutional dynamics in addressing work tasks is touched upon. Turning to the South African literature on the working of schools since 1994, important studies highlight problems of quality within the system, and this will be addressed as a context for considering Schools that Work.

2.1 The Coleman Report

The 1966 Coleman Report to the US Congress on *Equality of Educational Opportunity* is a landmark study of schools and social inequality. Set up to investigate the poor performance of African American and minority students on school achievement tests, the Coleman study tested 570 000 students and surveyed 60 000 teachers in 4 000 schools across the USA.

It was expected that the Coleman Report would identify problems with the schools that African American students attended. Instead, it found, controversially, that students' personal and family characteristics had an over-riding influence on their performance, rather than the schools they attended. Schools did not reduce the initial inequalities between children, but rather, perpetuated, or even exacerbated, them. In the words of the Report:

> Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his [or her] background and general social context….the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school (Coleman et al., 1966:325).

This was a controversial finding, implying as it did that schooling did little to alter students' initial life chances. The Report was widely criticised at the time, and remains controversial to this day. Its methodology, the definitions and indicators it used to measure equality of opportunity, and the ways it interpreted its findings, have all been subject to criticism. Nonetheless, its major findings relating to the importance of home background and the inability of the school to compensate for social disadvantage, have held their ground and enjoyed the support of many subsequent researchers. This is not to say that schools make no difference – a point we return to later. Rather, it is to argue, in the words of Basil Bernstein (1971), that "schools cannot compensate for society".

The Coleman Report had a number of insights worth mentioning briefly for the context of this particular study of Schools that Work.

- The Report noted that achievement tests, linked to schooling, are not neutral or culture free, but related to the power relations of a society and

the skills it rewards. Schools, the Report noted, "teach certain intellectual skills such as reading, writing, calculating, and problem solving" (1966: 20). These are the skills that are measured by standard achievement tests – and they are the skills that are rewarded in the workplace. In the words of the Report:

> These tests do not measure intelligence, nor attitudes, nor qualities of character. Furthermore, they are not, nor are they intended to be, "culture free". Quite the reverse: they are culture bound. What they measure are the skills which are among the most important in our society for getting a good job and moving up to a better one, and for full participation in an increasingly technical world….

To stretch a point, the Matric exam may be seen in similar terms: It tests particular intellectual skills ("reading, writing, calculating and problem solving") that are the codified knowledge of schooling. Passing the exam is the socially designated indicator of likely success at work or in higher education. In other words, there is no sleight of hand concealing the nature of school tests and exams, their cultural bias or their social function. They are methods of sorting and selecting on the basis of specified knowledge and ways of thinking. The question then becomes, how students from different backgrounds, who do not have the cultural capital reflected in the curriculum and assessment requirements of the school, might nonetheless acquire them.

- This is particularly challenging, since the Report is quite clear that schooling *per se* does not help disadvantaged learners to catch up with others:

  > Whatever may be the combination of nonschool factors – poverty, community attitudes, low educational level of parents – which put minority children at a disadvantage in verbal and nonverbal skills when they enter the first grade, the fact is the schools have not overcome it. (Coleman et al., 1966:22)

  Instead, the Report found that initial inequalities widened as students moved through school, so that disadvantaged students tended to lag behind their more privileged counterparts, and often dropped out earlier.

- However, having established the overriding effects of non-school factors, the Report also found that *schooling did make more difference* to low

achieving students and to those who came to school least prepared in terms of what schooling demanded. Facilities, curriculum and particularly teachers had a greater effect on these students. The Report concluded, therefore, that:

> It is for the most disadvantaged children that improvements in school quality will make the most difference in achievement (1966:22).

- Crucially, the in-school factor that was found to have the most significant effect on achievement for all students was *good teachers*. Again, their effect was greatest on children whose backgrounds were most educationally disadvantaged. Again, the Report stated a clear implication:

  > A given investment in upgrading teacher quality will have the most effect on achievement in underprivileged areas (1966:317).

- Two other findings of the Coleman Report are worth mentioning briefly, since they relate to themes we return to in this Report:

  The Coleman Report found that "the extent to which an individual feels that he [or she] has some control over his [or her] own destiny" (1966:23) made more of a difference than all of the school factors put together. When disadvantaged students possessed a sense of control or agency, this worked powerfully to their advantage:

  > Minority pupils have far less conviction than whites that they can affect their own environments and their futures. When they do, however, their achievement is higher than that of whites who lack that conviction (1966:321).

  The Report found that peers had a strong influence on students' attitudes and achievements:

  > Finally, it appears that a pupil's achievement is strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of other students in the school (1966:22).

In citing the Coleman Report, it is important to recognize the contentious and even disputed nature of its findings. It is also important to recognize that its context was "Negro" and "minority" performance in 1960s America. The terminology alone dates the report, and also sets it apart from the context of post-apartheid South Africa where, it is worth noting, the performance in question is that of the "majority", not the "minority".

With all these caveats, it nonetheless remains that the major findings of the Coleman Report – that schools do not overcome unequal backgrounds, but do have greater effects on those who most need them, and that teachers make the greatest difference of all "in-school" factors – have not been substantially disproven. These points, and the major remedy suggested by the Report – the provision of high quality teachers to "underprivileged areas" – bear consideration in the South African context. In addition, findings about a sense of agency or ability to affect their futures, and about peer influence (both related, we suggest, to the culture of the school) are points which emerge in the present study as well. In other words, the Coleman Report findings offer positive messages for schooling alongside the negative, and they offer insights of relevance for other contexts.

It's worth noting alongside the Coleman Report the significant work on schools and social inequality that elaborates on the issues in different contexts and through different theoretical frameworks, reaching the same conclusions. Schools play a key part in the formation and perpetuation of social patterns, including patterns of inequality, and this needs to be recognized by all who hope to use schooling as a means for social equity. The French theorist Bourdieu captures this well in saying:

> In fact, to penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria for when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its *de facto* sanction to initial cultural inequalities (1976:113).

Bourdieu's message is not entirely pessimistic, in that he sees the possibilities of

> …a rational and really universal pedagogy which would take nothing for granted initially, would not count as acquired what some, and only some, of the pupils in question had inherited … and would be organized with the explicit aim of providing all with the means of *acquiring* that which, although apparently a natural gift, is only *given* to the children of the educated classes… (1976:113).

What is important to recognize is that the knowledge codes and forms of thinking on which schooling is based automatically privilege some at the

expense of others. This is no simple matter to adjust – but ignoring it is likely to mean the perpetuation of initial inequalities. And, as Bourdieu suggests, it need not be ignored, but may be worked with constructively.

This is the challenge that South Africa has been striving to address in setting access, quality and equity as key goals for the education system. The message from decades of research is the historical legacies within the system may diminish, but are *unlikely to disappear of their own accord* as time passes, unless there are targeted interventions to address them. And even here, research suggests there are no easy solutions.

The fact that patterns of Senior Certificate and Endorsement are still strongly linked to quintile (reflecting socio-economic position) and to former department (as will be illustrated in Section 3) bear witness to the depth and enduring nature of inequalities.

This Report supports the position that the power of existing inequalities be recognized, rather than ignored. Strategic pressure points for classroom change such as curriculum, language of instruction, and teacher professional development need to be aligned and worked with, alongside resource allocations, if all schools are to provide opportunities for students to achieve.

It is against this background that Schools that Work need to be considered – for they are schools that achieve results that run counter to expectations. They are schools that, for a range of reasons, are able to illustrate that social patterns are not simply deterministic, but are shaped by human agency. They show what is possible – and also some of the costs of achievement.

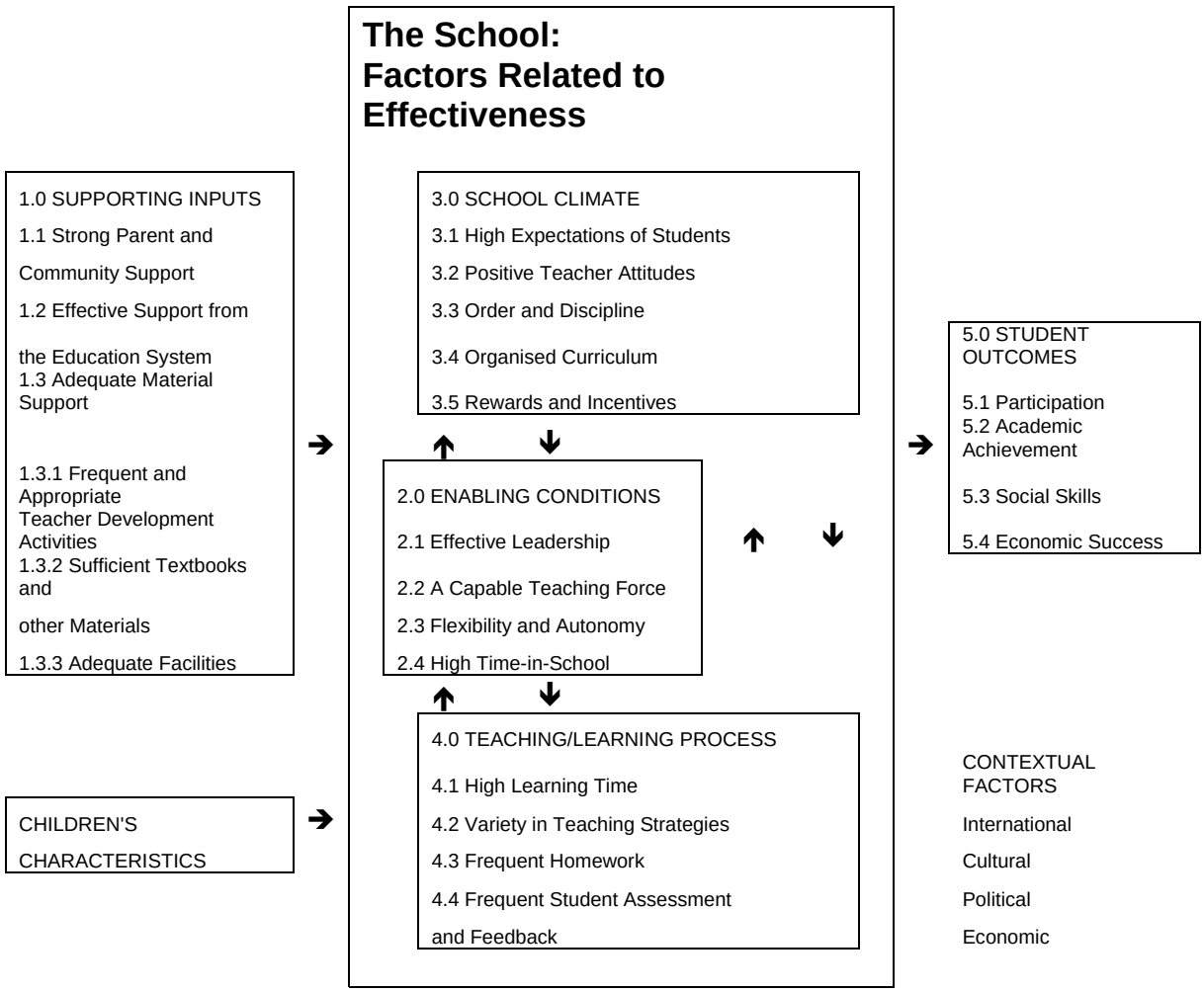
2.2 Effective Schools Research

In the wake of the Coleman Report, a significant research tradition has built up in an effort to show that schools *do* make a difference, and, beyond this, to establish what the features of effective schools are. Much quantitative research has been carried out over many decades to establish what makes a difference to school functioning and student performance (this is evident in the volumes of the journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* in collections such as *The International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (2000), and in the work of individuals such as Sammons (1995), Mortimore (1993), Rutter (1979), Townsend (2001), Scheerens (2000), and others). A number of features of effective schools have been established and tested. A meta-analysis of these provides the following list of characteristics:

Professional leadership
Shared vision and goals
A learning environment
Concentration on teaching and learning (time on task)
High expectations
Positive reinforcement
Monitoring progress
Pupil rights and responsibilities
Purposeful teaching
A learning organization
Home-school partnership (Sammons *et al*, 1995)

In the context of developing countries, the work of Heneveld and Craig (1996) established that schools have a greater effect than in developed countries, and Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) added the importance of "will" to the list of features, arguing that in developing countries, parental push for schooling makes a difference to school effectiveness. (See also Dembele, 2005.)

Heneveld and Craig provide their conceptual framework diagrammatically and this is useful in specifying the dimensions of schools and their interrelatedness.



Heneveld & Craig (1996)

Effective Schools Research has been important in producing information about Schools that Work, and in particular the relative importance of different dimensions of schooling. Complex multilevel statistical modelling has established, for example, that schools do have an effect that can be measured, in the range of 5 to 15% (that is, there is a 5-15% variance between more and less effective schools) (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). According to Townsend (2001), classrooms account for 35% to 55% of the variance. Individual teachers have a powerful effect. And according to Hallinger and Heck (1998), the variance attributable directly to principals is mediated rather than direct; but it is nonetheless generally accepted that leadership is a key feature of effective schools.

Effective schools research has met with strong political criticism for its apparent neglect of the major Coleman finding, namely the over-riding influence of social context. In focusing on school qualities, it often does not adequately acknowledge that these do not make the decisive difference to students' life chances. The largest "effect" remains outside of schools, in students' home backgrounds and social conditions. Thus, to measure the qualities of effective schools is to address only one part of the effectiveness story – and the lesser part at that. Strong debate continues between those who support effectiveness research and those who do not, with little evidence of either side shifting much.

A weakness in effectiveness studies is that they throw little light on how schools come to be effective, or how effectiveness may be replicated in other schools. They also say very little about students and their learning. The elements of effective schools are in some ways unsurprising (though the research information about the effects of each may be illuminating), and the problem remains of how ineffective schools may be made more effective. However, this is not to dismiss the importance of the research tradition, and what it has contributed to understanding of schools.

John MacBeath and Peter Mortimore, both powerful scholars in the effectiveness tradition, usefully sum up the state of the field at the turn of the millennium in a passage worth quoting at some length:

> We have learned:
>
> - That school education cannot compensate for society and that in making high demands of teachers and raising our expectations of schools we must have scrupulous respect for the evidence on socio-economic inequality and the changing nature of family and community life;
>
> - That schools can make a difference and that being in an effective as against a less effective school is a crucial determinant of life chances for many individual young people;
>
> - That "effects" are complex and multilayered and that while schools of themselves can make a difference there are even more significant effects at the level of department and classroom;

- That children experience schools differently; that achievement is not a simple linear progression but subject to ebbs and flows over time and in response to the influence of peer group and pupils' own expectations on the basis of gender, race and social class;

- That the context of national culture is a powerful determinant of parent, student and teacher motivation and that school improvement requires more than simplistic borrowing of remedies from other countries;

- That we are learning, and still have a lot to learn, about how schools improve and what kind of support and challenge from external sources is most conducive to their effective development;

- That a salient dimension of school improvement is helping schools to be more confident in the use of their own and other data, more self-critical and more skilled in the use of research and evaluation tools;

- That we will only make dramatic advances in educational improvement, in and beyond schooling, when we develop a deeper understanding of how people learn and how we can help them to learn more effectively (2001:2).

2.3 School improvement studies

In contrast to the large-scale, quantitative approaches of school effectiveness, school improvement research has tended to focus on the internal dynamics of schools, and of school change. Influential theorists such as Michael Fullan (2007), Andy Hargreaves (1994), David Hopkins (2001) and Louise Stoll and Dean Fink (1996) have mainly analysed school-based approaches to change, and later work has included links to system change as well. This work offers many insights into schooling, particularly in the UK and Canada. A strength of this work is that it reflects the authors' experience in day-to-day school practices and how to work with them.

What emerges strongly is that school change is a complex if not contradictory process, and that it takes time. (Fullan (2000), for example, estimates that it takes three years to change a primary school, and five to change a secondary school, depending on size and complexity.) Change involves structures, but more importantly, it involves school culture, and this is much harder to work with and change. Powerful teaching and learning depend on a range of internal relationships in schools that need to be engaged with, and successful change cannot simply be mandated. Leadership is important. Teachers'

capacity to carry out desired changes is a factor to consider, but so, too, is their professional judgement that the change will be better than what exists. Cultures of teaching tend to be highly individualised, in that teachers are used to working behind closed doors in egg-crate isolation. Building collaborative practices – where teachers risk sharing their practices and professional knowledge – may be a difficult but rewarding approach to change. (This would, of course, depend upon the shared practice being professionally sound, a point we return to later.)

David Hopkins and colleagues, in their study of *Improving Schools* (Gray *et al*., 1999) convincingly demonstrate that schools at different stages of development and effectiveness require different school improvement strategies. Hopkins and colleagues provide a useful framework for addressing this.

An important contribution of this work is that it illustrates the complexities of working with schools as social institutions, and shows that there are few short-cuts and easy techniques in bringing about, and sustaining, school change. It provides insights on the importance of school culture in influencing school performance (another point we return to in a later section of this Report).

2.4 Disadvantaged schools, and schools in difficult circumstances

In addressing school performance and change, a significant literature has emerged on the particular case of schools operating under difficult conditions, or in disadvantaged communities. These schools struggle "against the odds" and some manage to survive or even thrive where others fail. Schools such as these have been the subject of research and interventions. For example, the UK National College for School Leadership provides web-based materials on working with and leading schools in "challenging circumstances". There is a strong tradition of research and intervention on "disadvantaged schools" in Australia. And there are numerous programs and interventions in the USA addressing students "at risk". This work goes across effectiveness and improvement traditions, as well as a range of political positions. And

potentially, it offers many insights for working to improve schools in South Africa.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the CCOLT Study (1994) on dysfunctional schools in Gauteng, and the companion study by Christie, Potterton and others (1998) on resilient schools, which could be seen as part of this tradition. Key features of resilient schools were found to be:

- Sense of responsibility and agency
- Leadership
- Centrality of teaching and learning
- Safety and organization
- Authority and discipline
- Culture of concern

Three anticipated sources of resilience that were not strongly present were:

- Governance and community relationships
- Parental involvement
- Relationships with education departments

A significant study of South African 'disadvantaged schools' that succeed in maths and science is that carried out by Cliff Malcolm and colleagues (2000). Features listed in this study of classroom success are:

- Competent use of traditional methods
- A firm belief that disadvantage can be overcome
- Recognising the school as a vital modern institution in a depressed and deprived environment
- Subject knowledge of teachers is the key to teaching and learning
- Promoting hard work and discipline are important
- Motivation on the part of the principal, head of department, teachers and learners play a positive role
- Positive ethos is critical – even more than physical resources

Literature on disadvantaged or "at risk" schools provides important insights. However, in applying the international literature in South Africa, a note of caution is necessary.

Introducing their study entitled *Schools on the Edge: Responding to Challenging Circumstances* (2007), MacBeath and colleagues set the scene as follows:

> This is a book about schools on the edge. It is, in part, a story of eight English schools living on the precarious edge between success and failure, but it is, in larger part, a narrative of schools and communities edging towards a common purpose and understanding of what is educationally important and achievable. The history of school education, wherever and whenever it has been written, provides accounts of schools in the centre of the social mainstream as against schools perpetually on the periphery. What brings them together is a common policy framework but their social and economic circumstances are worlds apart. Schools on the edge face a constant struggle to forge a closer alignment between home and school, parents and teachers, and between the formal world of school and the informal world of neighbourhood and peer group (2007:1).

They go on to refer to these as schools that "serve families and communities that have been cut adrift" (2007:1). Their message about schools such as these holds some hope, at least:

> Yet, however bleak the picture, there are schools in all countries which succeed in defying the odds, sometimes by statistical sleight of hand, sometimes by a concentrated and strategic focus on those students most likely to reach the bar and, in some instances, by inspirational commitment to deep learning across boundaries of language and culture. These schools are, in every sense, exceptional (2007:2).

As mentioned earlier, there is much that South Africa can learn from these studies, many of which are excellent (including MacBeath *et al*'s, and James et al, 2006). Yet it would be problematic if studies of schools "on the edge", "disadvantaged schools" and "schools in challenging circumstances" in other countries were seen to reflect the conditions in the *majority* of South African schools, without this being recognised. These are schools on the peripheries of their own systems, where the bulk of schools are at the centre of the social mainstream. If the majority of schools in South Africa have the features of being at the periphery of the social mainstream, leaving a minority at the centre, the problem becomes one of a different order.

Yet this may be the case, and if it is, it signals a problem requiring urgent and concerted attention.

At the same time, there is benefit in looking more closely at what the landscape of schooling in South Africa is, to locate its own mainstream and peripheries. Schools in the mainstream of South Africa – the majority of the schools – are black schools in relatively poor socio-economic circumstances. Almost all of the teachers in these schools teach in English, which is not their home language. Most schools are not resourced with laboratories or sportsfields, and while they have running water and electricity, most have pit latrines and no internet facilities for learners. At one edge of this mainstream are schools in communities so poor that fees and associated costs of schooling are simply not affordable. At the other edge are the majority of former white schools, with a legacy of physical resources and a majority of teachers trained in former white or open colleges and universities, teaching in their mother tongue. In South Africa, the popular conception (or "hegemonic norm") of schooling is set by this privileged sector of schools. Images of these schools provide "commonsense" notions of what normal South African schooling is (or should be). However, this hegemonic norm is not the numeric norm. Most schools are not like this. These are not typical of schools in the mainstream. Instead, in a perverse reading, they are "schools on the edge", in that they reflect a privileged position in relation to the mainstream.

Suffice it to say that the selection criteria for Schools that Work took into consideration the historical and continuing legacies of inequality in South African schooling. The intention was to select schools from the "mainstream" of the system, rather than the edges of extreme privilege or extreme deprivation.

This is important in considering Schools that Work, in that it challenges us to valorise the schools in the mainstream for what they are, and what they can do and be. It challenges us to re-examine how certain notions of the school have become dominant, and to recognise that this hegemonic norm represents privilege that is currently not available to all. Repositioning the mainstream, and revaluing it, is important in finding strategies to achieve equity and quality for all.

2.5 Classroom practice as "the core" of schooling

A number of US scholars, such as Cuban (1984), McLaughlin (1987) and Elmore (2004), have grappled with the seemingly unchanging nature of the schooling system and its apparent resistance to reform. Cuban, for example, has usefully distinguished between "first order" changes to the system, which he sees as "quality control" measures, and "second order" or "design" changes. Whereas first order changes (which may be applied to any part of the system, from curriculum to staffing to governance) attempt to improve what already exists, second order changes (again, to any part of the system) attempt to redesign the system, or change its power relations. Cuban's (1984) study of the past hundred years of US schooling shows that second order changes have met with limited if no success, whereas first order changes have flourished – many of them important adjustments to the quality of the system. Cuban's warning is that changing an education system in fundamental ways requires major political, social and economic shifts outside of education. And as the South African case shows, even then, fundamental shifts have been hard to put in place successfully. (For example, opening access to the existing schooling system has proven easier than fundamental redesign, such as the integration of education and training.)

Elmore's extensive work offers many different insights on education policy and change. One of these is his insight that it is "the core" of education practice that is the hardest part to change (Elmore, 1996). This he defines as teachers' views of knowledge, their assumptions about how students learn, and their assumptions about how these should come together in classroom practice. He points out that politicians often favour high profile changes such as governance, but these have little effect on the core of classroom practice. Elmore notes that reform attempts have often lacked a clear theory of change, with the result that they have not reached the core of education, or if they have (like the Progressive Movement in the USA), they have not been sustainable. Elmore suggests that incentive structures be changed to encourage teachers to deprivatise and change their practice. He also

suggests that exemplars of good practice be made available for teachers to learn from.

McLaughlin (1987) has famously noted that change to the smallest unit of the system – teachers and learners in classrooms – is hard to reach from the top, given the multiple layers of education systems. Change at the level of this smallest unit requires a strategic balance of pressure and support. Pressure alone seldom changes people's beliefs (though it may be used to bring behavioural change). Support alone allows other priorities to take precedence. Change involves both people's capacity and their will, and while the former may be changed relatively easily (e.g. through good training or "capacity building"), the latter (involving beliefs and motivation) is far harder to shift. It would be a mistake to interpret McLaughlin's point as behaviourist; what she is advocating, rather, is that change be viewed as a process of negotiation rather than imposition. In changing school practices, it is necessary to work with both the macro-logic of systemic level concerns, and the micro-logic of schools, teachers and classrooms.

Talbert and McLaughlin's (2001) study of teacher professional communities in a sample of US schools illustrates the importance of the cultural and institutional forms of teachers' work. Analysing what they term "the three legs of the classroom triangle" – subject matter, beliefs about learners in the class, and notions of effective pedagogy – Talbert and McLaughlin were able to show that the different ways in which teachers worked with colleagues affected what and how they taught in classrooms, how they understood their work with learners, and what they expected of each other and of learners. Where there were strong professional communities, these played an important role in establishing "norms for teaching" as well as expectations for student performance. Where these norms included a strong service ethic, they could be powerful in shaping cultures that supported student achievement. In contrast, weak communities tended to operate as collections of individual teachers who did not share ideas about their teaching practices or have a strong shared sense of responsibility for student learning. This led them to suggest that building strong professional communities with high

expectations of themselves and their learners might be “a primary unit for improving education quality” (2001:12). However, that would depend on the culture, values and norms of teaching espoused by the community. Also, as they themselves pointed out, communities depend on the experience of shared goals and common work, and without this, teachers might interpret pressures to build communities as a form of what Hargreaves (1994) has termed “contrived collegiality”.

A South African insight on communities of practice is provided by Marneweck’s (2002) study of the implementation of Curriculum 2005 in a cluster of rural schools. Marneweck found all the signs of strong teacher professional communities – shared norms and values, deprivatised practice and reflective dialogue around improving learners’ learning – but what was shared was limited in terms of subject content and pedagogical knowledge, with the result being poor classroom practice. Ironically, their strong sense of professional community served to mask this from the teachers, who did not question the quality of their work.

Consideration of this body of literature is useful for Schools that Work, in that it relates systemic to institutional issues, showing that changes to the latter are not always within easy reach of policy-makers. It is also important in providing perspectives on teacher practices, and possible ways of working with the hard-to-reach core of classroom activities.

From the broad range of work on organizations, and on schools as organizations, the following section looks at selected issues of institutional dynamics that affect performance of the primary work task.

2.6 Schools as institutions

Schools as institutions operate on highly standardised formats, but in contexts that are highly diverse. There is a spatial fixedness to schools-as-places which brings a rigidity to their practices. The very architecture of schools emphasises sameness, including their standard timetables, age-graded

classes, and expectations of teachers. National policies and institutional practices expect learners to conform to an ideal norm that often bears little relation to the different conditions under which they may live and work. The very "sameness" of schools masks an almost infinite variety of differences in culture and "feel", making each school a distinctive place of its own. And this distinctiveness plays through the different patterns of performance and effectiveness of schools, to belie the standardisation promised by their exterior forms. The particularity of schools as institutions also mediates government policies, so that the messages "from above" are often translated along the way as they are implemented in individual schools and classrooms. Appealing though it may be to think that schools may be treated as the same, and may be changed in desirable ways by policy mandates, experience shows that this is not the case.

Schools (and bureaucracies like Education Departments and their District Offices) are complex organizations, in spite of their sameness of form. Whereas rational theories of organization and simple systems models once predominated in organisational literature, there is now greater recognition of non-rational and unconscious forces, of micro-politics, of emotions in workplaces, of power relations, and of the importance of organisational culture in setting norms and expectations as well as patterns of behaviour. All of these provide insights on the complexity involved in bringing human beings together to accomplish a common task.

Drawing on the Tavistock tradition, Rice (1963) provides a useful definition of the primary task: it is the task an organization must perform to survive. Market-based organizations face bankruptcy if they do not succeed at their primary tasks, and voluntary organizations may simply fold. Neither happens to state institutions like schools or bureaucracies – which means that these institutions must find different ways of dealing with "failure" if they cannot achieve their primary tasks. These include denial, task avoidance, demotivation, lowering expectations of self and others, projection of blame, a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency. Without experiences of success, staying focused on the primary task may be particularly difficult. The option of

taking active responsibility for changing the situation is always a possibility – but may require a change of personnel, or external assistance. The challenge for these schools is to move from the dynamics of mediocrity or failure to the dynamics of achievement.

Elaborating on the notion of a primary task, Lawrence (1977) proposes three types: the *normative primary task* (the publicly stated goals); the *existential primary task* (the task people believe they are undertaking and what they experience); and the *phenomenal primary task* (the task that can be inferred from what people actually do and how they behave, which is often not conscious). Ideally these should be aligned if the organization is to be effective. Publicly stated goals should reflect what people believe they are doing, and both should be evident in what people are actually doing. Yet very often, slippages occur. Teachers may believe that they are working towards the primary task of the school, yet behave in ways that undermine this. Or they may have different interpretations of the primary task from those who formulate the goals publicly, and different interpretations to each other. Different values and views and levels of competence infuse people's actions and beliefs even when they think they are doing the same task. People may believe – consciously or unconsciously – that the publicly stated goals (*the normative primary task*) cannot be achieved under the conditions in which they find themselves. People may be unsure of how to achieve the normative primary task under their circumstances; they may be unsure of what they should be doing, or how to do it. All of this illustrates that simply mandating what the normative primary task is, does not ensure that it prevails.

Individuals in organizations operate in formal and informal groups to do their work. Thus, as Rice (1963:10) points out, organizations have an interpersonal as well as an inter-group life. Cross-cutting social relations and contested power relations are ever present, always needing to be managed in the process of fulfilling the basic work task. The organisational theorist Zaleznik (1989) usefully highlights the tension between the demands of social relations and the demands of the work task, which he terms the tension between "psychopolitics" and "real work". Too much energy may be spent on

greasing the wheels of psychopolitics, he suggests, at the expense of real work. Yet energy channelled into real work "is the one sure route to a sense of mastery, to the pleasure that comes from using one's talent to accomplish things" (1989: 61). Where institutions cannot provide the conditions for real work to prevail over psychopolitics, people easily lose direction and a sense of purpose.

There is value in recognising that organizational dynamics such as these are one reason why systemic change in schooling is hard to achieve, particularly through policies that are developed at a distance from individual schools and their specific conditions. Frustrating though this may seem to policy makers seeking solutions that may be 'taken to scale', there is no proven way of changing the dynamics of individual schools and its effects on their performance of their primary task, other than working closely with them.

So far, a select sample of international literature has been addressed, on which this analysis of Schools that Work will later draw. The next section looks at a small sample of South African literature, related specifically to system performance.

2.7 Schools that Work in South Africa?

There is a considerable and increasing amount of published and unpublished work on various aspects of the post-apartheid education system. The focus here is on a small part of this literature: studies reflecting on the performance of the system.

First, as context, there is the general overview provided by StatsSA (2005), comparing 1996 with 2001:

- enrolment rates increased between 1996 and 2001
- the majority of students aged 7 to 15 were in school in 2001
- primary school enrolments were almost complete
- secondary school enrolments had increased, but enrolments were dropping off in later years

However, StatsSA points to persistent inequalities remaining within the system:

> In general, the quality of teaching in schools in different areas of the country requires further examination. As would be expected, children are moving through the education system at differing rates, which vary noticeably by population group. In particular, some black African children in the more rural provinces are moving through the system rather slowly. Some coloured children are also moving rather slowly through the system. The quality of education in schools, especially those in the former homelands, requires further research (2005:62).

Issues of quality are well demonstrated by South Africa's performance on national and comparative international tests. These are by now well known but worth restating because of their importance:

- In the 2003 TIMSS test on maths and science proficiency at Grade 8 level, South Africa came last of the fifty participating countries (see Reddy, 2006, 2005). Top performers were Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, in the TIMSS test, the best South African performances were only equal to average Singaporean performances. In the 1999 TIMSS test, South Africa came last of 39 countries. Less than 0.5% of South Africa's students reached the top 10% international benchmark (Howie, 2001).

- On SACMEQ tests administered in 2005, South Africa scored ninth out of fourteen countries in the region (see Taylor, 2006). Top performers were Seychelles, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. South Africa's results were worse than Swaziland, Botswana and Mozambique, but better than Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia and Malawi. Many of the countries that performed better than South Africa spent less on their education systems.

- In the UNESCO Monitoring Learner Assessment (MLA) tests for Grade 4 in 1999, South Africa's numeracy score was 30%, a lower score than Mauritius, Senegal and Malawi (Reddy, 2005).

- The Grade 3 Systemic Evaluation (2001) found low achievements across all provinces in literacy and numeracy (Kanjee, 2007). The Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation (2004) also pointed to low levels of performance across Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), maths and science. It found a big difference in performance between urban and rural learners, and between those whose LOLT was the same as their home language, and those for whom the LOLT was different.

  Moreover, test results show a bimodal pattern, with the best results achieved by historically privileged schools (quintile 5), and a significant gap between these and historically disadvantaged schools. This suggests that while South Africa has improved access to schooling, it has not provided access to quality schooling for the majority of the population. It suggests that "quality schooling" is provided for a minority of the population that is now racially mixed – and even here, the quality of achievements does not measure well against international benchmarks.

It has now become clear, particularly with international tests and comparisons such as TIMSS, that South African schooling is not particularly effective in terms of the student results it achieves. Nor is it particularly efficient, considering that South Africa performs less well than most of its neighbours, who spend less on their education systems.

Based on statistical analysis of 1993 survey data, the researchers Servaas van der Berg, Louise Wood and Neil le Roux (2002) noted that inequalities in black education remained profound. In their words:

> The problem does not lie in the performance of black learners from better socio-economic backgrounds, which was still not particularly good compared with children of other race groups. Rather, it lies in the abysmal performance of the largest part of the former black school system and its failure to improve educational outcomes rapidly among the poor so as to overcome the legacies of the past. *Policy makers appear to be insufficiently aware of this* (2002:305, emphasis added).

The issue of quality is one of the most pressing concerns to be addressed in South Africa's education policy framework. The evidence is overwhelming

that teaching and learning within the system as a whole are in crisis; what is less clear are the steps that are being taken to address this. While it is useful and constructive for the national Department of Education to intervene through projects such as Dinaledi, the Quality Learning Project and QIDS-UP, it is important to recognise these are specific interventions. They do not target the quality of teaching and learning in the bulk of mainstream schools – and performance data shows this is necessary. IQMS is intended as a national intervention, but the question is whether it is focused enough on teaching and learning. As Elmore points out, changes to governance do not necessarily bring needed changes to the core of educational practices. And to this we would add that leadership training may also miss the mark in improving classroom practices, unless it is directed towards leading *learning* (See Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie, 2003).

Problems in systemic performance may be politically difficult to acknowledge, and also difficult to change, but their consequences will be felt in the economy and society for years to come if they are not addressed. For example, it will simply not be possible to meet the targets of JIPSA and ASGISA on the basis of the education performance reflected in these test results.

In the aftermath of apartheid, poor performance of the system could be interpreted as a historical problem of effectiveness following the racial ranking of schools, with white schools being most effective, and African schools the least. As the South African system changed, a number of studies investigated questions of effectiveness and efficiency. These are reviewed by Taylor, Muller & Vinjevold (2003) in their book, *Getting Schools Working*.

Of greatest concern are poor performance in mathematics and science. Reviewing mathematics results in 2006, Nick Taylor judged that at most 20% of South Africa's schools were functioning adequately. The other 80% of schools – schools serving poor African communities – were, in Taylor's view, "essentially dysfunctional". This led him to conclude that South Africa faced a serious problem: "the inability of most schools to provide young people with the attitudes and intellectual skills required to build a modern state" (2006:2).

It is worth noting that Taylor's views of the poor performance of the system are shared by other scholars, albeit in different ways. The works of Vijay Reddy (2006), Sarah Howie (2001), Servaas van der Berg (2005), Angus Case and Ann Deaton (1999) and Brahm Fleisch (2007) provide evidence of performance problems that deserve to be acted upon.

Negative though these views are, research by Taylor and his project team does suggest five major factors that might optimize learning, and could be used to improve school results if applied more broadly:

- *Home level factors, including language*. When schools teach in the language of the home, especially in early years, learning is improved. Learning is also improved when children read at home and do homework.

- *Time management.* Many teaching hours are lost through absenteeism, lack of punctuality, and the scheduling of activities such as choir and sports competitions. Increasing teaching hours would bring notable improvements.

- *Curriculum leadership*. This entails the principal or heads of departments ensuring that the curriculum is covered, monitoring student assessment and undertaking quality assurance measures, and managing books and stationery. Sound curriculum leadership would improve school functioning.

- *The teaching of reading* was also highlighted by Taylor's project. In many cases, confusion over curriculum requirements meant that teachers were not actually teaching basic reading and writing.

- *Teacher knowledge.* Taylor's project suggests that teachers need stronger content knowledge, and also knowledge of how to teach particular subjects.

As with effectiveness studies elsewhere, it needs to be borne in mind that social contexts are more significant than school effects in influencing student outcomes. Nonetheless, schools do have effects, and MacBeath and Mortimore's wry point certainly has traction: it is certainly better to attend an effective than an ineffective school.

Why does a report on Schools that Work highlight weaknesses in the existing system instead of focusing on its "good news"? Because the problems faced by other schools in the system are faced by these schools as well. It may be that these schools find exceptional, non-replicable ways to deal with their problems, rather than generalisable "solutions". Even if this is the case, they highlight some of the systemic issues that need to be addressed, and possible points of strategic engagement, if quality improvement is to be tackled in mainstream schools in South Africa.

To sum up the points made in this section, there is an established literature that may guide South African educators on what to expect in studying Schools that Work. This literature relates school performance to social context. It highlights features that set effective schools apart from their ineffective counterparts. It provides insights into the exceptional schools that perform under difficult circumstances. It shows that good classroom practice depends upon teachers and their knowledge and assumptions, and that the core of educational practice is difficult to change. It also depends upon school organizational capacity, including leadership. This level of change cannot be mandated, since it depends on both capacity and will, particularly on the part of teachers and school leadership. Deprivatisation of practice through the formation of teacher professional communities may be an important lever of change – but it may also have the opposite effect of consolidating poor practice. School culture plays an important part in setting norms for practice, but this, too, is not simple to change. Though the primary task of schooling may be clear, it is not necessarily simple to achieve, particularly when 'psychopolitics' takes over. Yet there are also examples of schools that do meet their mandates to deliver quality teaching and learning, and the challenge is how to have more of these.

In the case of South Africa, there is evidence that both primary and secondary school performance lags behind the performance of other countries. The degree to which this is so, and the fact that only the most privileged part of the system performs adequately (but not spectacularly) in international terms, is an issue that needs to be addressed. Finding possible strategic points for

improvement is important, and this has been considered in the Schools that Work research.

On the basis of the literature reviewed so far, we now look more closely at the patterns evident in the 2006 Senior Certificate results. These may be seen to reflect a number of the themes raised in the literature review, and also provide a context for looking at the performance of the schools selected for this study.

SECTION 3

SENIOR CERTIFICATE RESULTS, 2006

This section of the Report provides a brief overview of Senior Certificate results for 2006, as they relate to the themes of this report. The National Department of Education has provided a Technical Report on these results, and it is not the intention here to duplicate the Department's report. Rather, the intention is to relate these results to some of the earlier themes discussed, most notably socio-economic factors and the historical legacies of former departments. These need to be acknowledged if they are to be constructively addressed.[1]

3.1 Distribution of schools writing Senior Certificate

The first two tables show the **type, number and province** of schools writing the Senior Certificate exams:

Table 1: Type of School writing Senior Certificate, 2006

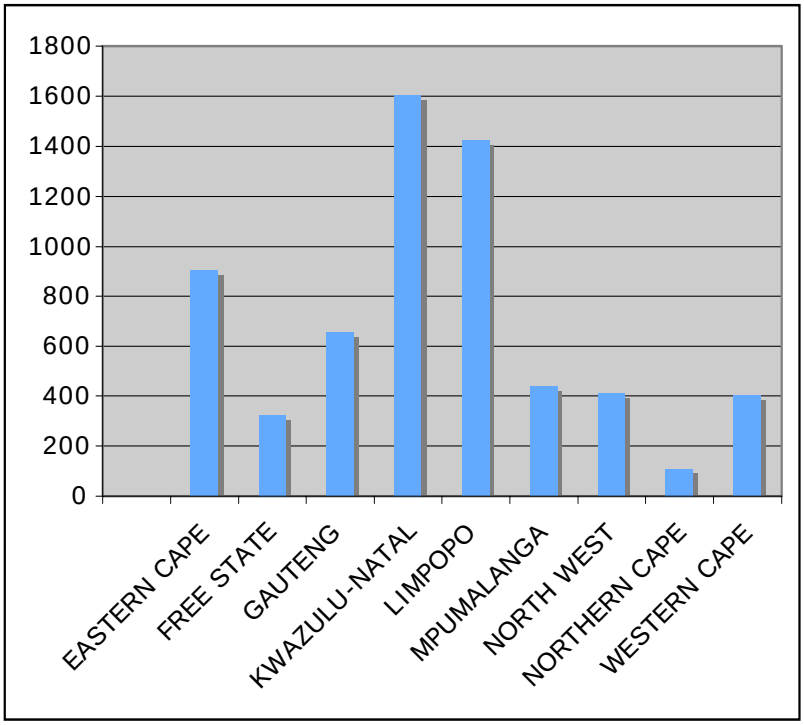
Sector	Number	Percent
Unknown schools	31	0.49
Independent	379	6.05
Public	5,857	93.46
Total	**6,267**	**100**

Table 2: Schools writing Senior Certificate by Province, 2006

Province	Number	Percent
Eastern Cape	902	14.39
Free State	325	5.19
Gauteng	656	10.47
KwaZulu-Natal	1,604	25.59
Limpopo	1,423	22.71
Mpumalanga	437	6.97
North West	410	6.54
Northern Cape	108	1.72
Western Cape	402	6.41
Total	**6,267**	**100**

[1] The statistical analysis and discussion provided in this section were carried out by Carlene van der Westhuizen of UCT's Development Policy Research Unit, whose contribution is hereby acknowledged.

Figure 1 Schools writing Senior Certificate by Province



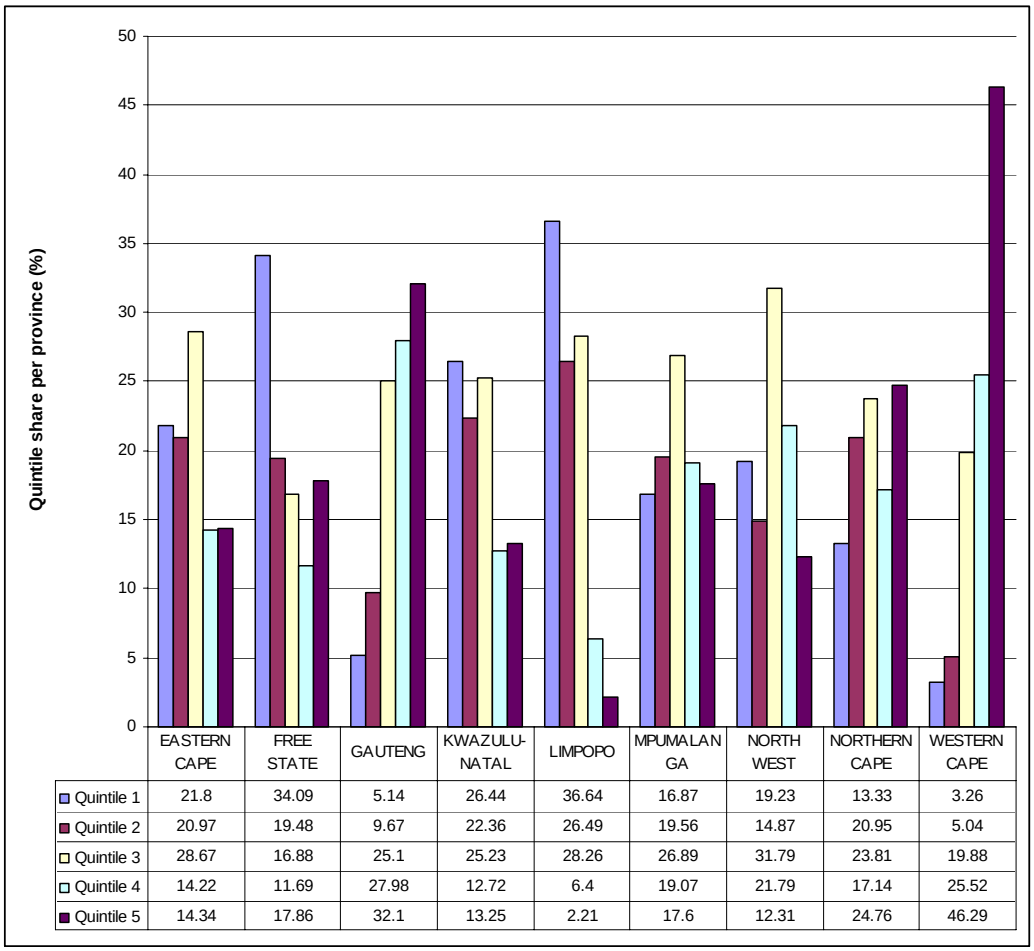
3.2 Socio-economic profile of schools and their results

To explore the relative **socio-economic** position of provinces and their schools, the Department's information on quintiles is useful. As part of its redistributive funding orientation, the National Department has divided schools into five quintiles (replacing the earlier provincial quintiles) based on various socio-economic indicators. Quintile 5 schools are least poor; quintile 1 are poorest. The distribution of schools by provinces and quintiles is shown in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Table 3: Share (%) of Schools by Province and Quintile

	Quintile					
Province	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
Eastern Cape	21.8	20.97	28.67	14.22	14.34	100
Free State	34.09	19.48	16.88	11.69	17.86	100
Gauteng	5.14	9.67	25.1	27.98	32.1	100
KwaZulu-Natal	26.44	22.36	25.23	12.72	13.25	100
Limpopo	36.64	26.49	28.26	6.4	2.21	100
Mpumalanga	16.87	19.56	26.89	19.07	17.6	100
North West	19.23	14.87	31.79	21.79	12.31	100
Northern Cape	13.33	20.95	23.81	17.14	24.76	100
Western Cape	3.26	5.04	19.88	25.52	46.29	100
Total	**24.01**	**20.15**	**26.22**	**14.58**	**15.04**	**100**

Figure 2 Distribution of Quintiles by Province



The tables and figures above indicate the spread of schools across provinces, as well as the distribution of less poor and more poor. The tables show that:

- In the Western Cape, nearly half (46%) of the schools fall in quintile 5, with a very small share falling in quintiles 1 and 2.
- In Gauteng, the majority of schools (60%) fall in quintiles 4 and 5.
- Free State, KZN & Limpopo have relatively large shares of schools in quintiles 1 and 2.

The following table shows **pass rates** in relation to quintile across all provinces.

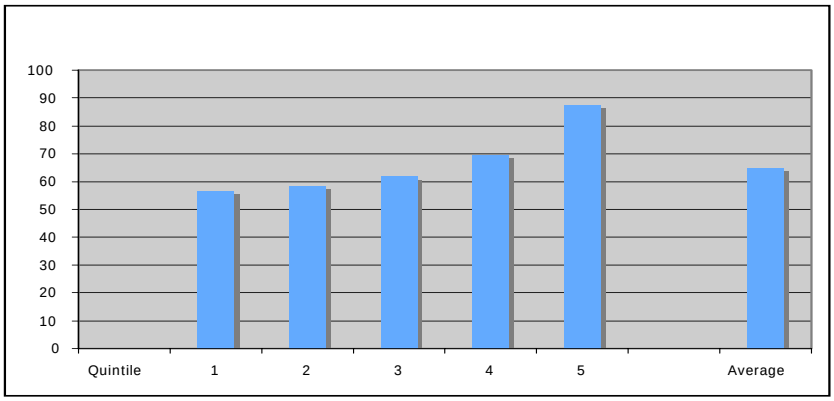
Table 4 Breakdown of pass rates by quintile*

Quintile	Mean (%)	Median	Min	Max	N
1	56.57028	56.3	0	100	1376
2	58.49853	58.8	0	100	1155
3	61.82628	61.4	0	100	1503
4	69.72297	71.65	0	100	836
5	87.68318	95.95	4.2	100	862
Total	**64.93418**	**65.1**	**0**	**100**	***5732**

***** Public schools only. Information about quintiles was not available for all public schools.

- The table above compares the pass rates for each quintile, and also gives the pass rate at the median in each quintile, as well as the minimum and maximum pass rates in each quintile.
- It can be seen that in each quintile there were schools with a 100% pass rate, while in all but quintile 5 there were schools with a zero pass rate. Median results are particularly striking in showing differences between quintiles.

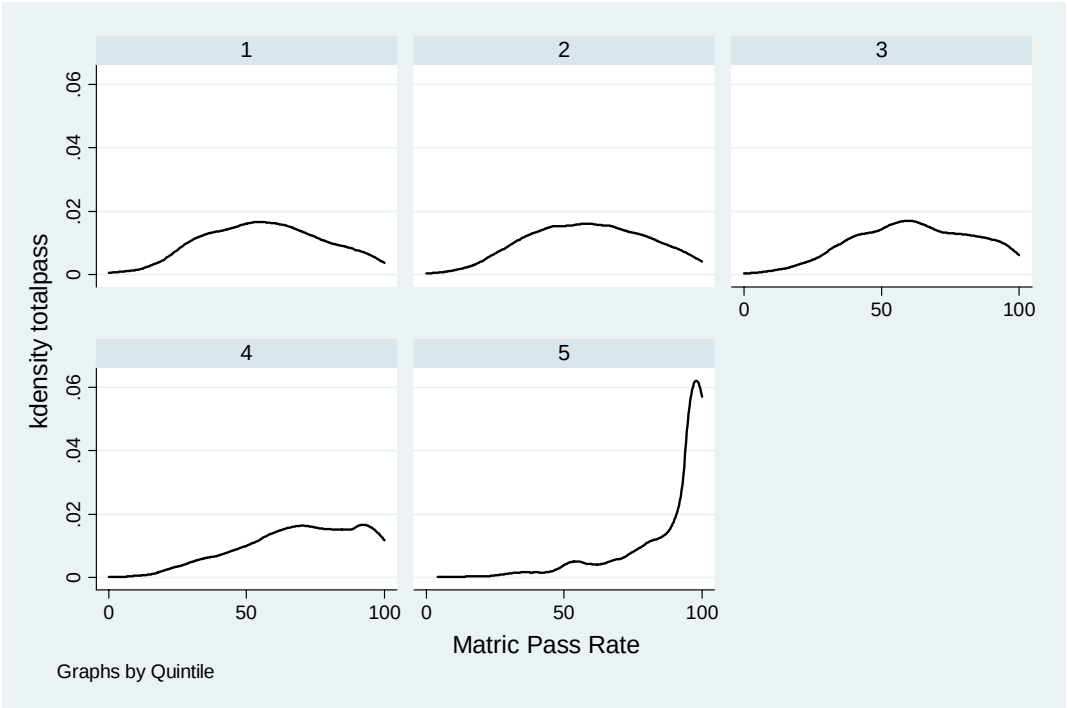
Figure 3 Mean % pass by quintile



- The t-tests for the mean values show that the difference between the mean pass rates in quintile 1 and quintile 2 is not statistically significant. The differences between quintiles 2 and 3, quintiles 3 and 4, and quintiles 4 and 5 are all statistically significant at the 95% level.

Graphically, these are further illustrated in the following figures, which show Kernel Density Distributions:

Figure 4 Kernel Density Distributions by Quintile

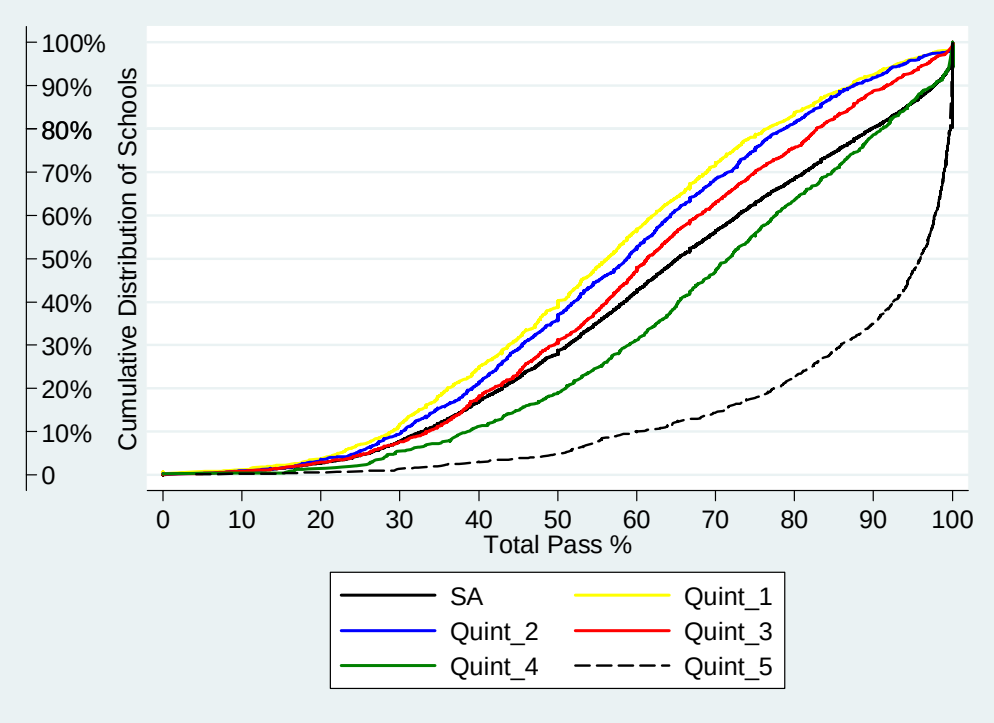


- The above graphs show the distribution of pass rates for each quintile. For the bottom 3 quintiles, the distributions are relatively normal, with some concentration in the middle at around the 50% pass rate.

- The Kernel density function for quintile 4 shows that more schools are concentrated at pass rates above 50%, while the Kernel density function for quintile 5 schools shows very clearly a large concentration of schools around the 90%-100% pass rate.

The cumulative distribution of pass rates by quintile is shown graphically in Figure 5 below. The cumulative proportion of schools is on the vertical axis, while the pass rate is on the horizontal axis.

Figure 5 Cumulative Distributions Functions of Pass Rates



- The black line for South Africa shows that about 10% of all schools in the country had a pass rate of 30% or less. Similarly, about 50% of South African schools had a pass rate of around 65% or less.

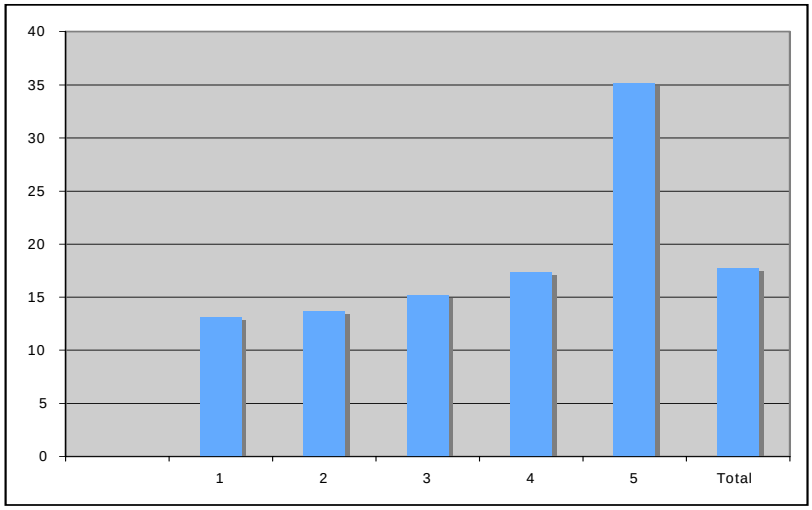
- The yellow line shows the cumulative distribution of schools in quintile 1 and it is clear that these schools performed worse relative to the other quintiles. The graph shows that 50% of the schools in quintile 1 had a pass rate of about 55% or lower.

- Schools in quintile 4 (green line) and quintile 5 (dotted black) performed better than the national average at most points – this is illustrated by the fact that the cumulative distribution functions for these two quintiles lie below the national cumulative distribution function.

- The dotted black line shows that in quintile 5, only 20% of schools had a pass rate of 80% or lower.

Turning to Endorsements, the figure that follows shows the average percentage of Pass with Endorsement in each quintile.

Figure 6 Average % Pass with Endorsement per quintile



- The difference in the mean between quintile 1 and quintile 2 is not statistically significant at the 5% level (or 1%).

- The difference in the mean between quintile 2 and 3 is statistically significant at the 5% level, but not at the 1% level.

- The difference in the mean between quintile 3 and 4 is statistically significant at the 5% level, but not at the 1% level.

- The difference in the mean between quintile 4 and 5 is significant at both the 5% and 1% level.

- The overwhelming difference between quintile 5 schools and the others in terms of Pass with Endorsement is noteworthy.

3.3 Former Education Department and Senior Certificate results

The following tables show the former Education Department of schools in relation to the 2006 Senior Certificate data set:

Table 5 Breakdown of Public Schools by Former Department

Former Department	Number	Share (%)
Unknown	285	4.87
DET	1,153	19.69
TBVC States	800	13.66
Self-governing Homelands	2,114	36.09
Coloured (HOR)	276	4.71
Indian (HOD)	150	2.56
White (HOA)	633	10.81
NEW	446	7.61
Total	*5,857	100

***** Excludes Independent schools; public schools only

- The "New Education Department Schools" are schools created after 1994. More than 95% of these schools have more than 80% African learners. About 82% of these schools have 100% African learners.

- The former Independent Homelands of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda & Ciskei are referred to as TBVC Schools.

- Former Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu and Lebowa are referred to as Self-governing Homeland schools.

Table 6 Breakdown of Former Department by Funding Quintile

	Funding Quintile					
Former Dept	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
Unknown	21.46	19.31	29.61	20.6	9.01	100
DET	17.81	18.16	32.11	23.68	8.25	100
TBVC States	22.96	26.73	37.64	9.54	3.14	100
Self-governing Homelands	36.65	26.6	27.17	7.86	1.72	100
Coloured (HOR)	4.36	6.55	15.27	41.45	32.36	100
Indian (HOD)	0	0.68	3.38	23.65	72.3	100
White (HOA)	1.47	2.13	6.55	13.91	75.94	100
NEW	34.88	23.26	25.81	10	6.05	100
Total	24.01	20.15	26.22	14.58	15.04	100

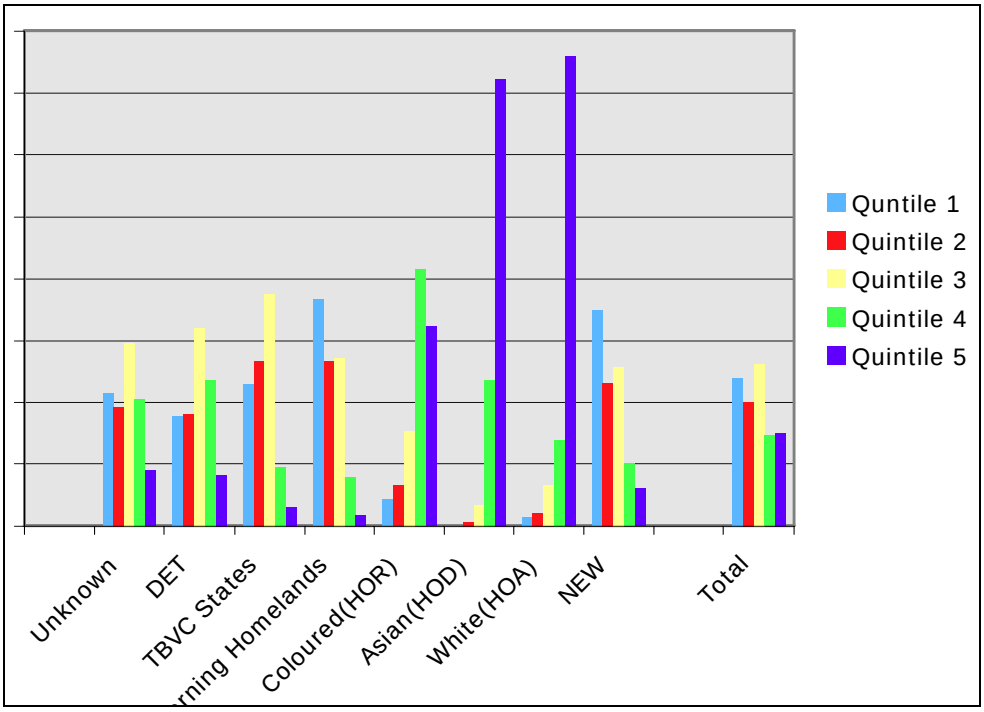
The table above shows the breakdown of schools in each former department by funding quintile, expressed graphically in the figure below. The table shows that:

- Nearly three-quarters of the former White schools are in the 5th quintile, with former Indian schools similarly positioned. A very small share of these schools can be found in the bottom three quintiles.

- Former Coloured schools are also mostly located in quintiles 4 and 5.

- The majority of the DET, TBVC and Self-governing Homeland schools are found in quintiles 1 to 3. New schools are also mostly in the bottom 3 quintiles.

Figure 7 Funding quintiles by former Department



Turning now to Senior Certificate pass rates, the following table shows a breakdown by former department.

Table 7 Mean Pass Rates of Public Schools by Former Department*

Former Department	Pass Rate (mean)	Median	Min	max	N
White (HOA)	94.46398	98.7	0	100	633
Asian (HOD)	87.136	90.1	35.9	100	150
Coloured (HOR)	74.62681	77.05	17.4	100	276
DET	64.85915	65.8	0	100	1153
Unknown	64.26281	65.6	0	100	285
NEW	60.13969	59.45	0	100	446
Self-governing H	58.09584	57.4	0	100	2114
TBVC States	55.83525	55.95	0	100	800
Total	65.02744	65.2	0	100	*5857

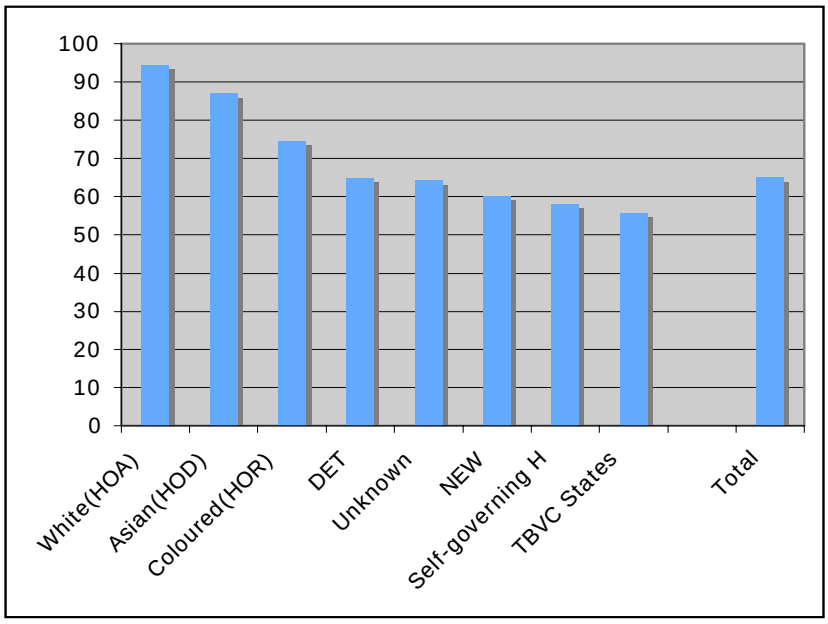
* Excludes Independent schools

- It is very clear that the former White schools have the highest mean pass rate, followed by former Asian and Coloured schools.

- The former TBVC and homeland schools have the lowest mean pass rates.

Figure 8 shows these scores graphically, as a basis for pointing out where the significant differences lie.

Figure 8 Mean Pass Rates by Former Department



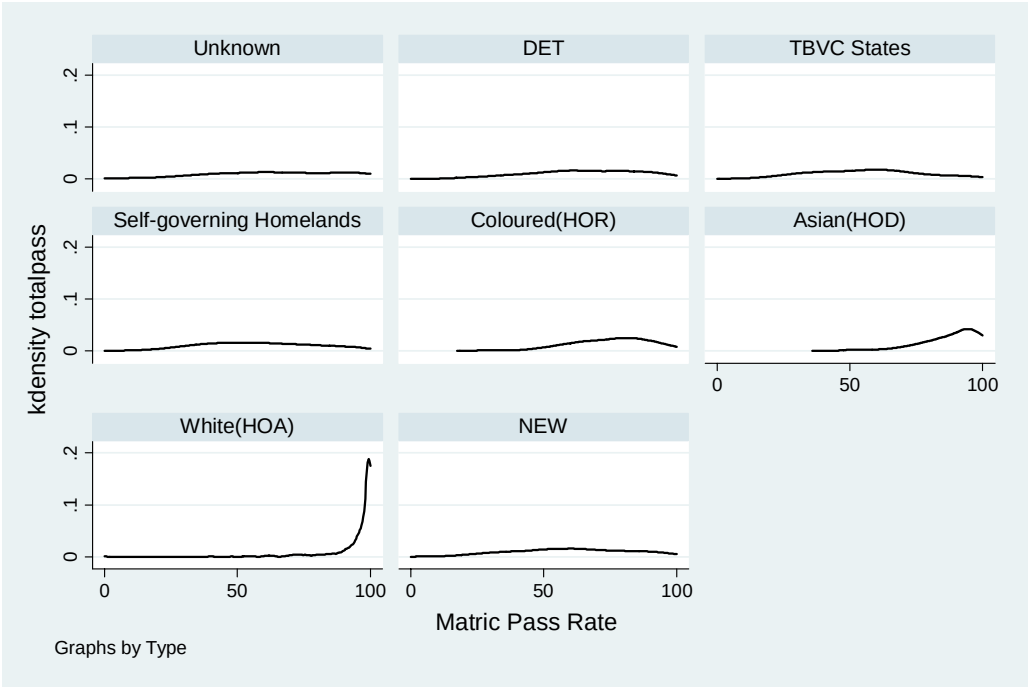
- When schools are ranked by mean pass rate, there are no significant differences between the mean pass rates of:
    - Former DET, Unknown and NEW schools;
    - Former TBVC and Self-governing Homeland schools.

- The difference in the mean pass rates of the NEW and the Self-governing Homeland schools is statistically significant.

- And the differences in the pass rates for the former White, Indian and Coloured schools are all statistically significant.

Graphically, these performances are further illustrated in the Kernel Density Distributions in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9 Kernel Density Distributions of Pass Rates by Former Department

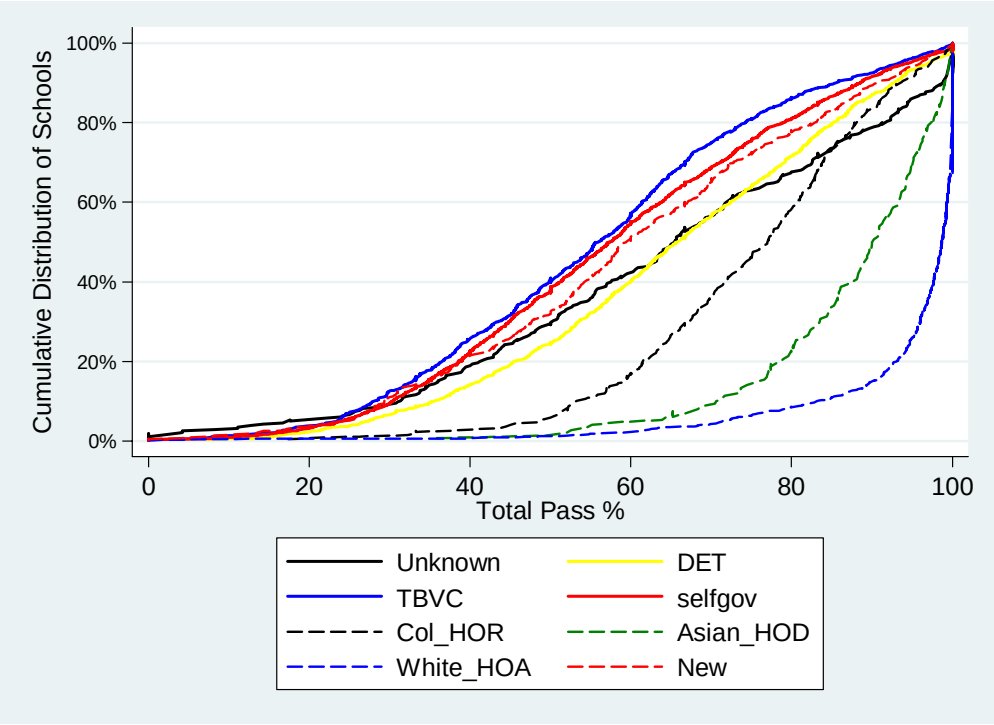


- The graphs above show the distribution of pass rates for each former department

- The kernel density graph for former White schools very clearly shows the concentration of pass rates close to and including 100%. There is also a small spike of former Indian schools at the relatively higher pass rates, and an even smaller 'hump' for the former Coloured schools. For the other schools the pass rates are relatively evenly distributed.

The next figure shows the cumulative pass rates by former Department.

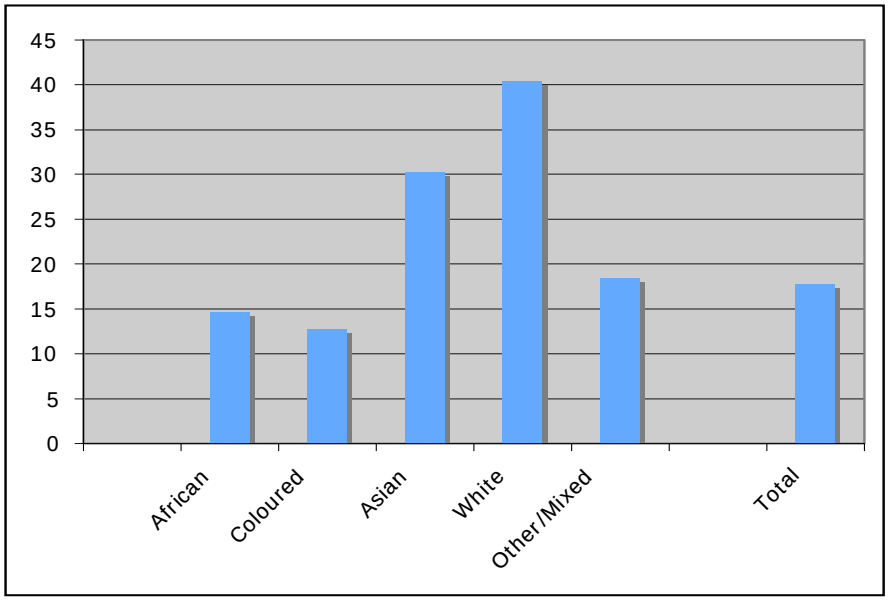
Figure 10 Cumulative Distribution of Pass Rates by Former Department



- It can very clearly be seen that the CDF for former White schools lies below the other CDFs. Only about 10% of former white schools had a pass rate of less than 80%.
- The CDF for former Indian schools shows that only about 20% of these schools had a pass rate of less than 80%.
- The former Coloured and "other" schools also performed relatively well.
- The former homelands schools performed the worst, with about 60% of those schools having a pass rate of 60% or less.

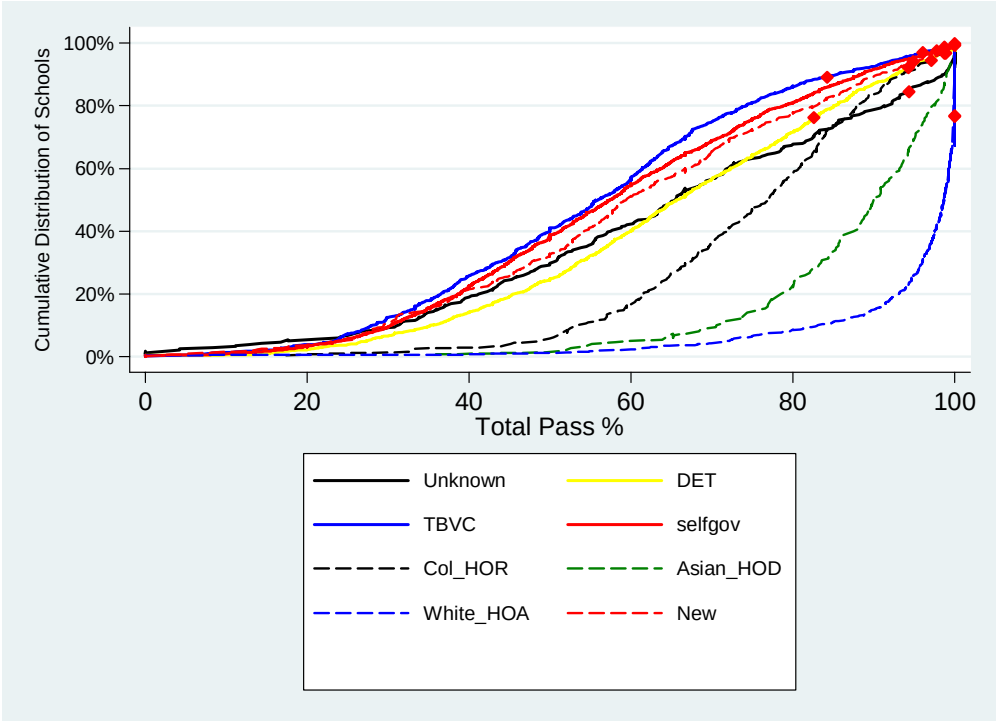
Finally, endorsements also followed the pattern of former Departments, as the following figure of average percentage of endorsements shows. In this figure, former departments are grouped by racial predominance.

Figure 11 Average % of endorsement by former departments classified racially



To conclude, the schools visited in this research are marked on the graph below.

Figure 12 Schools visited in this research



3.4 Summary analysis

The data presented above shows strong evidence for unequal performances of schools in terms of their socio-economic position and their former Department.

Socio-economic background clearly has an over-riding effect on results, as does former Department. In other words, the school that an individual learner attends has strong predictive effects on their results, both in terms of social position and in terms of school effectiveness.

The issue of former Department is interesting, in that it suggests not only differential levels of historical resourcing, but also possibly the endurance of organisational patterns and cultures at Departmental and school levels. It may be that these schools continue to run as they did under their former Departments – with former white and Indian schools having an organisational culture that supports achievement, and schools in other former departments not having this. It may well be that daily life in schools in terms of organisational practices and the culture of expectations of teachers and learners has not changed much. This is a hypothetical suggestion that would require further research to substantiate. However, this research into Schools that Work does show that in succeeding schools, organisational cultures do support achievement, illustrating that patterns may be changed through human effort and agency – though the ease of this should not be underestimated.

Language of teaching and learning (LOLT) also deserves comment. While former White, Indian and Coloured schools may have become racially mixed, it remains the case that most teachers in these schools are first language English or Afrikaans speaking. And the White, Indian and Coloured learners in these schools are likely to be learning in their home languages. African learners in these schools are likely to have adults at home with high

aspirations for their children, and the resources to pay higher fees. And increasingly, many of them would have started Grade 1 in these schools. These are issues that warrant further research.

The following Section of this Report presents the findings of site visits to the selected Schools that Work.

SECTION 4

FINDINGS: DESCRIPTIVE THEMES

In the course of the research on Schools that Work, the team visited 18 schools across the provinces of South Africa. Seven of these were rural schools; six were in regional centres; four were in city townships; and one was city suburban. What did we find?

In a nutshell, we found a set of highly motivated schools, with dedicated teachers, and busy learners, doing all they could to focus on achievement in the Senior Certificate exams, and celebrating their achievements to motivate themselves further. They battle social conditions of poverty, manifesting among other things in hunger, AIDS orphans, and pregnancy linked to the child support grant.

These schools are remarkable in their vitality and social cohesion, their goal orientation and focus, their hard work and their achievements, where others fail. They are mostly led by principals and/or SMTs who strive to 'play the game' and achieve success for their schools with cards that are not in their favour. By their energy and effort, they succeed and use this success as motivation in yet another round of the game of results.

They take what support they can from external agencies – donors, NGOs, Departments of Health and Welfare, the Police, and textbook publishers. Their levels of support from districts and departments are variable but generally not remarkable.

They have little control over their learner intake; the stability of their staffing is often precarious; their resources – generally inadequate – are stretched to the limit. They receive little if any special treatment from their districts, but many of them do give and receive support from other schools.

What is the cost of these remarkable efforts on the part of staff and principals? Are these conditions sustainable? Are they replicable by similar schools? Are their Grade 12 achievements at the expense of teaching in lower grades, or do they build on foundational teaching in lower grades? To what extent is success in the exam an indicator of good education or of extensive exam 'drilling'? Do they open pathways for their learners? What are their sources of vitality and resilience? These questions do not yield single, clear answers, across all of the schools, much as we would like them to.

A number of people we interviewed stressed that they were doing nothing out of the ordinary. They were simply doing what they should do: principals being principals, teachers teaching, and learners in class learning. We know, however, that this is an understatement, in that achieving the rhythms and practices of 'ordinary schooling' is an extraordinary feat for these schools. We know this from comparison with other schools in similar circumstances, and from their place in the general performance of the system as a whole.

A number of themes stand out from visits to these schools. These are presented in the following sections, and further analysis is provided in the next section of the Report.

Theme 1 The importance of teachers and staffing

There can be no doubt that the good results of these schools are produced by the commitment of principals and teachers. This emerged as one of the most powerful themes in our study of Schools that Work.

In ***every*** school, the importance of teacher 'dedication', 'commitment', and work ethic was stressed. The achievement of good results was a task above the ordinary. It required extra time for teaching and assessment (a theme we return to), a strength of purpose and a clarity of focus on the task of teaching.

In some cases, this was manifested in a sense of ownership of the school and its community. The sense of custodial and reciprocal responsibility among teachers, principal and the community is evident in the following statement from a rural school:

> SMT: Actually we own the school. This school does not belong to the principal alone. Both parents and teachers are owning the school … We have support from the community. The community understands the vision and the culture of the school. If we have parents' meetings, they come in big numbers. (School J)

Ownership in this school translates into a sense of belonging and commitment amongst its learners:

> At this school, you are here not just to learn. You feel at home. Teachers work hand in hand with learners. They advise you with problems. And educationally, try to identify your problems and help. That is why this school gets 100% pass rate. Learners are committed. (School J)

The commitment of principals, teachers and learners was evident in every school visited – as one principal put it: "This school is my whole life." (School N) A sense of shared responsibility by teachers and learners in working towards the common purpose of achieving good results was evident in all schools. A few of the comments made:

- One of the main reasons for the school's success is the dedication and commitment of the teachers at the school. Most of the teachers are very experienced, and have a strong commitment to the vision of the school. (School A)

- I have "puik personeel", an excellent team. The team explains the success of the school. I can do nothing without this team. (School F)

- The critical factor in making the school succeed is educators. Without enthusiastic, motivated educators, you've got absolutely no chance. Our educators do a whole lot more than just 8 am to 3 pm, which is our academic school day. There's always something on the go. (School B)

- The science teacher is good because she shows passion for her subject and enthuses learners with the same passion. To be a good teacher you need passion as well as content knowledge. (School H)

For some individuals, the sense of commitment extended beyond simply being teachers to the larger goal of contributing to the country's future. For example:

> I made the decision that as long as I am a principal or a teacher, particularly because of the history of the country, let me dedicate myself to do my part. It's my contribution. I'm influenced by a number of things – by my

> background of being active in the struggle environment. If we are to talk about nation-building, it must start in schools. If we don't invest in our education it becomes a futile exercise. (School A)

This township principal (also a SADTU office bearer) did not pull back from articulating a political dimension to his vision, framing his commitment in a discourse of nation building. Discussions with staff members at this school suggested that they felt respected, valued, consulted and acknowledged.

Having the freedom (and the influence) to select staff (especially HoDs and SMT members) was considered crucial in creating a positive school establishment:

> The critical thing is selection. I was fortunate that when I came in, the parents had confidence in me. When we conduct interviews, it is very important to know who you are recommending – although the appointment is going to be made by the Department of Education. I was fortunate in that I had an opportunity to go and check on all of the HoDs. It's people who are passionate about education. It makes a big difference when parents in the SGB have confidence in you. That's where it starts. (School A)

Not all principals found their SGBs helpful in the selection of staff:

> There's nepotism in terms of the governing council appointing people who aren't appropriate. It's killing the community. (School N)

For all of these schools, attracting and retaining suitable staff was seen as increasingly difficult. Most schools referred to the difficulty of recruiting good quality teachers, and rural schools, especially, mentioned the difficulty of recruiting quality Maths and Science teachers.

- To keep track of quality teachers is becoming more and more difficult. (School B)

- Eish! Keeping teachers is a great problem. Most of the educators move to greener pastures. So each and every year, we need to recruit new teachers. In that recruitment, we make sure that we recruit the relevant educators. It's not simple to get Maths and Science educators. (School J)

A number of principals had strategies for securing and retaining staff – but there was no sense that they were assisted by the staffing policies and practices of education departments. In fact, two of the schools spoke of the detrimental effects of the temporary employment policies of their departments, which were putting at risk their capacity to maintain their good results. For example:

> Come the 31st, I'm going to lose 13 educators, very good educators. They are going to be replaced by somebody whom I can't interview, who does not have a work ethic … Last year they made the mistake of not giving us the correct school establishment. Our school has 1200 learners, but we are allowed 24 educators. Can you believe it? So we find ourselves employing some temporary educators from the school budget. (School P)

Several schools have refined their selection processes to ensure that they recruit the best possible teachers:

- The selection process is strict. The school chooses a lesson and judges the candidate on his/her classroom presentation. The school remained with a vacant post for the whole year because all applicants failed to satisfy standards. (School O)

- Not easy to get good Maths and Science teachers. We advertise the posts, then we do short-listing and interviews. We usually write down our pick. We give them test papers. That's how we get good educators. (School C)

- We're finding it more and more difficult to get quality. Even with our Board posts. In the past we would have had 20-25 applicants of quality, but now we're getting the same number but we probably could only look at about 4 or 5 of them, realistically. (School B)

When recruiting staff, one principal said she had more confidence in older teachers than new graduates, as the latter display what she calls an "IDC" (I Don't Care) attitude. Further, the younger group "is inclined to union militancy rather than treating the profession as a 'calling' – where the interests of learners supersede those of teachers". (School O)

Several schools complained that their best teachers are poached by the District Office. For example:

> Staffing provision at the school is another problem. Our school was nice and stable – everyone was permanent. But the Department comes and takes our "best" teachers. (School F)

An interesting inversion of such poaching was the principal of a semi-rural school, who had been a subject advisor in the District before taken up this position. Her experience in the Department placed her in a good position to engage with the District. She was able to access the necessary support when necessary, as well is keep officials at bay when she needed to. Her previous work experience certainly gave her better insight. (School Q)

Another principal who faced the situation of losing good staff to the District Office and other positions, said with some resignation that she went so far as to "remove some of the good teachers from the spotlight of Grade 12 to lower grades. These teachers could then mentor the new ones" – and were less likely to be poached by Districts or other schools. (School O)

The principals we spoke to tried by all means to have suitably qualified staff teaching in all subjects, and they shuffled and strategised to achieve this (e.g. careful thought would go into the subject area for an HoD or deputy position to be advertised).

Schools did not always have full staffing complements, or principals who were appointed at appropriate levels. Several of the schools had acting principals (at least two of them women). One of these principals was in fact a Foundation Phase teacher, and was running a highly successful combined school.

Improved staffing policies from provincial departments would make a difference in many of these schools that already perform well. It may be that their efforts to strategize in this complex area is something that sets them apart from less successful schools – certainly, our sense is that they received no special treatment from their departments. There was little sense that the departments nurtured their well performing schools, particularly in staffing terms.

In rural schools in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga, SGBs and their Chairpersons took an active interest in staff and learner performance as part of their responsibility – but this was less the case in the township schools we visited.

Many principals and teachers mentioned that the teaching profession is in crisis. Not a principal failed to mention concerns about attracting good people into teaching, and many referred to the fact that teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to stay in the profession. Conditions of teaching work are

simply not good enough, in many people's view. The profession is not attractive or well esteemed by young people at this stage. Poor status and salaries are problems for existing staff, particularly in comparison with other professions ("One of the things that has to improve are their salaries – they can hardly buy houses."). (School A)

Some explicitly commented that they would not under current conditions advise good learners to go into teaching. In spite of being valued personally by their own school community, there was a pervasive sense that teachers in general are not sufficiently valued and acknowledged for work that is increasingly difficult. Consequently, many teachers – even principals – are leaving the profession:

- Every teacher is looking for opportunities to get a job somewhere else. Jobs outside of teaching. One of the most vibrant and dedicated teachers is going to join Social Services. You know their hearts are no more here. We are seeing an exodus. There is an exodus of managers in our schools, particularly in the townships. It's quite bad. (School A)

- Last year seven teachers left. We have plenty of teachers leaving the profession – unfortunately mainly white males. Last year we had two very talented teachers who wanted to get married, but they can't make it on a teacher's salary. They're working in commerce now. (School B)

One principal commented that principals themselves were under great pressure to produce good matric results, and this pressure exacerbated their inclination to leave the profession:

> The working environment is unstable … The pressure of having to produce quality results in an environment that is challenging becomes another issue, particularly for high school principals. It might be different in primary schools because there is not the pressure to compete generally with the other schools. That's why you find this exodus that is happening with principals. (School A)

One principal acknowledged that good teachers were attracted to the school when vacancies arose because the school was recognized as being successful, and conversely, having taught at such a successful school probably meant that teachers stood a good chance of moving to a promotional position. (School J)

Inevitably, given the timing that this research coincided with national industrial action, all schools referred to the impact of the stay-away. For some schools, the strike was an unhappy experience, though for others, issues were openly discussed and consensus reached on how to deal with the challenges of the strike. In the aftermath, though, unhappiness lingers in some schools:

> Previously highly motivated teachers are now demotivated and angry. Morale is not good at the moment because all teachers have had their pay docked (even if they didn't stay away for all the days). Low morale will impact on the school. (School F)

Some schools felt supported by their local communities, while others did not. In the view of one former white school:

> Respect. Parents do not have respect for teachers anymore and the strike did not help. There may be more respect at schools such as XX but we live with a lot of criticism. The status of teachers has to be addressed … (School R)

In some cases, learners were clearly supportive of striking teachers, and had taken study matters into their own hands:

> But we are back. It's our culture. Grade 12s were supportive of the teachers. They had their own strategy to keep working because we don't want to disappoint us. They had their own evening classes. They kept registers themselves. They marked for each other. They are motivated. In the strike, our kids knew what to do. (School C)

Most township schools felt they had no option but to close during the strike, but others, while supporting the strike, were able to make arrangements for their matric learners.

Generally, teachers took responsibility for the task of teaching, and were motivated to achieve. This is well illustrated by the case of one of the township schools, where the staff felt that leadership was lacking. It was their own sense of responsibility for the task that kept them on track "as footsoldiers" (in the words of a teacher), not motivational leadership. Staff tended to remain at this school for many years (some were past pupils) and their commitment to the school, its learners and the township were a factor in the cohesive way in which it organized its teaching and achieved its results. (School N)

Two schools commented on the problem of dealing with teachers who were under-performing. These people were a source of great concern to principals, who felt unable to move them on:

- There's one educator, he's just sitting there, he does nothing. Those kids need to be taught. No homework. Nothing! No corrections – the learners correct themselves. He has not been to school for about 3 weeks. He came only yesterday. I must constantly go and monitor him. When we schedule a meeting, he does not come ... We are trying to follow all the steps … When I talk to him, I have to get some of the SMTs – but they're busy with classes. When you think of how much time we have spent on him, can we afford to let it go on? (School P)

- There is a problem with an incompetent staff member. How to deal with this situation? Once a person has been appointed and they don't deliver … We're supposed to empower this person, but how can we if we don't teach the same subject as this person? (School N)

There was also the impact of superfluous teachers in a number of provinces. A nightmare scenario for a principal of a school with high aspirations would be to have incompetent teachers from other schools transferred to their schools by their departments:

> [If a school is not performing well] learners run away. All of a sudden you have a large quantity of educators who are just sitting there – no learners. Those educators are the ones who replace the temporary educators at your school. There's a problem … you never interview those educators. Every school, including myself, would be getting rid of all their useless educators. They come here, and they are your problem. (School P)

Principals and teachers also mentioned that conditions of teaching are harder. Where schools have large classes – and almost all did have at least some classes over 60 – they take more effort to control, to monitor individual performance, to mark work, to move around in the classroom, and generally to teach. Today's young people are perceived as being harder to deal with. Some principals and teachers referred to more complex family circumstances; others spoke of a culture of rights under the new dispensation.

> I think most of them love teaching, because to be able to survive these days, you must love teaching, you must love learners. [The Department must] improve the class sizes. When you go to those Grade 8s, who are so energetic, and go to that class – even if you are a principal – you don't understand how those teachers survive, because they are dealing with crowd control. They have to deal with discipline. Some of those learners, they need immediate psychological attention because they have never been brought up by both parents. (School A)

The culture of rights was perceived as relevant to learners – but at the expense of teachers' rights.

> It's the rights of teachers vs. rights of learners. Learners need to focus more on responsibilities and teachers need their rights to be respected by learners, parents, community and education department … Learners are becoming arrogant and aggressive. (School F)

The perception of continual changes in policy – including curriculum policy – added to the burden for some teachers.

Theme 2 Organising teaching and learning

Time

Time on task, and careful use of time was an essential – and very visible – feature of these schools in producing good results. Every school in the study used extra teaching time, at least for Grade 12s, to produce good exam results. Though the June 2007 strike put additional pressure on most schools in terms of syllabus coverage, these schools used extra time under normal circumstances anyway to achieve good results.

Some of the schools said they ordinarily completed the Grade 12 syllabus by May or June, so time lost (this year) was revision and exam preparation time – rather than time for new work. However, even those schools said they were "crying for that time". (School C) Schools have a range of schedules: early classes, afternoon classes, evening classes, Saturday classes, Winter Schools, September Schools, and teaching through holidays.

> Staff are dedicated. Time is well managed. Start at 8 am to 4 pm. There are Saturday classes. The District Office uses the school as a venue for the District. We agreed on condition that our learners could attend – they must not be left out. Five or six teachers from our staff teach the Saturday classes. This goes on till 15 September. Then there's a Spring School. We also have afternoon classes for Grade 12 till 3.45 pm. We give personal assistance to those who need help. (School D)

One school began "a week earlier than other schools" (School G), and at least two schools did not close during holidays; they held extra classes for Grades 10, 11, 12.

- They [learners] come early in the mornings. Saturday classes and afternoon classes. Don't close in holidays. Some learners come in during the holidays – we let them come in, and give them what they want. (School C)

- Teachers and learners of Grades 11 and 2 voluntarily decided to start school earlier (6.30 am) and stay later for another one or two periods. (School L)

Of course, use of time raises considerations about quality as well as quantity. In theory, extra time may be used in different ways and for different reasons: to drill for exams; to make up for time lost in the day/year; to provide an enriched curriculum; to allow for extra curricular activities; and so on. In practice, given the timing of our visit, a lot of the classwork we observed was drilling for exams.

In all schools, time was precious:

> If you count the number of days, they are very very few, especially for Grade 12. So I want all educators to finish their syllabi when we do the June exams … From August, they are writing trial exams … So where is this second semester we are talking about? There is no such a semester. So we have told the educators "Finish the syllabi by June". (School P)

It was certainly the case that much extra time was used for exam preparation. In several cases, schools had finished the syllabus and held tests before the 2007 strike; extra time was used for revision and "drilling".

> We have already worked through 22 exam papers. We drill repetition. We have 4 exams per year and I don't care if it is not policy. Children learn when they know they will be tested. We do a lot of exam preparation and repetition. (School S)

Using extra time did not necessarily mean that available time was used tightly – in some cases it did not prevent "milling around" between classes. And not all teaching could be regarded as enrichment of the ordinary curriculum. One researcher was told by learners that "afternoon and Saturday classes simply repeated the same material by the same teacher". (School G)

But certainly, a sense of using time for hard study was viewed as an ingredient for success by these schools. And the commitment of teachers extended to every free period:

> The teachers here work hard because most have a full time-table, sometimes only one free period per week. They use the frees they have for extra help. (School S)

In contrast to the majority of other principals in the study, one principal commented: "If the curriculum is managed well within the allocated time, there is no need for a frenzy of providing extra classes." (School H)

Organisation and management of the curriculum

Internal organization of the curriculum and monitoring of progress is something that differed from school to school, though systems for managing this were evident in all. Leadership of the curriculum was differently assumed in different schools – for some it was the principal, for others it was HODs, and in a few cases, active teachers. (We did not have the opportunity to explore the operation of these in any depth.)

At one extreme, a school timetabled weekly subject meetings during school time. Minutes of all meetings were provided to the SMT for perusal and discussion. (School B) Another school described their system of continuous monitoring of quarterly assessment results to identify which teachers were in need of support with the NCS: "Because of the positive values and attitudes of teachers, there is no cheating or cooking of results." (School L)

At the other extreme, there were schools where all academic responsibilities were left to HoDs, who usually reported to a deputy. There was no single approach to this – partly reflecting, no doubt, that there is no single consistent staffing structure or resourcing across schools and their provinces.

In some schools, frequent meetings and sharing of information between teachers in the same learning areas took place, even if these meetings were short and informal:

> Sometimes we meet informally. In the mornings we gather before we start teaching. I can request my Language educators to meet for five minutes. That's why it is informal. If I go for moderation, I come back and share what I learned at moderation. But if it's a formal meeting, we meet once a month. In another month, it's for the Circuit, where as a cluster we discuss. It's the

> same for Science. Most of the times we have these informal meetings. About teaching and learning, team work is very important. (School J)

While teachers in all schools did meet in subject department structures, in some cases this happened only once a quarter, and the focus of these meetings (according to one teacher) was mainly to meet Department requirements such as producing portfolios. Portfolios, however, were regarded as onerous for both teachers and learners:

> The portfolio system - for teachers, it is a nightmare ... for the kids too. We have extra subjects in Grade 8 and 9. They do 11 subjects, and in every single one of those subjects they are being asked to do orals and group presentations and worksheets. Sometimes they say "Do we have do to another poster!" And they're being asked to do it because of portfolio requirements – not because of sound educational needs. Too much duplication! (School B)

We saw a range of strategies for organizing the curriculum, but in all cases, there was evidence of strong teachers at the chalkface. One principal told about her strategy for content mastery: in Maths, for example, one teacher taught only Paper 1, while another taught a different section. When questioned whether such a strategy could be good or bad for the teachers in terms of their own content knowledge, the principal insisted that increased specialization resulted in a greater impact on learners' understanding of the learning area. Apparently district officials had tried to dissuade the principal against this practice, but she had managed to maintain it. In her view, the strategy ensured that the year's programs were completed on time. (School O)

Another curriculum HoD outlined her strategy to strengthen the competence of teachers in her section of the school. While acknowledging that she was a "strict leader", this HoD encouraged teachers (but didn't coerce them) to teach afternoon classes, and to go to workshops and winter classes to sharpen their content-knowledge. Teachers were also encouraged to use *The Star* newspaper supplements as a resource. Some Learning Area senior staff (Maths, Zulu, and Accounting) were cluster leaders, and acted as models for teachers in other schools in the area. Learners in the school were also encouraged to be committed, to participate in debates, to go on excursions and any curriculum expositions on offer. They were encouraged to be

independent scholars, and to make use of libraries and other resource centres to find information for themselves, including engaging with current affairs and the news. (School O)

In many of the classes we observed, we saw "conventional" teaching, with much "chalk and talk". And, given the high motivation and compliance of the learners, this methodology was accepted by them. Not many lessons were remarkable, and in a few cases, there was evidence of little written work being done.

That said, during class visits and in discussions with teachers, we frequently saw evidence of confidence, competence and subject knowledge. A researcher described the competence of the Biology teacher at one school: "Mr X has been at School P since 1988. His knowledge of biology is vast, and his enthusiasm for his subject is demonstrated in a discussion on the biology examination paper. He has been an exam marker for years, and understands the kinds of problems learners have with different sections of the paper. His intimate knowledge of the exam enables him to coach learners on how to pace themselves properly and to tackle the easier questions first." (School P)

In several cases, it seemed that most of the teaching emphasis was placed on Grades 11 and 12, and this would pay dividends in terms of Grade 12 results at the end of this year. However, to some extent this focus on the higher classes had been at the cost of attention to teachers and learners in Grades 8, 9 and 10.

Other schools, in contrast, mentioned the need to give specific attention to lower grades as well. And indeed, these schools did achieve their goals in terms of Grade 12 results.

> Take care of the lower classes, just like any other. Grade 12 is not the most important class. It's not. Grade 8 up to Grade 11. If you look after them, you won't have any problems in Grade 12. (School P)

Departmental policy encourages strategies for moving learners through the system. It prohibits schools from failing learners more than once per phase

up to Grade 9 (unless reports on the difficulties experienced by learners are compiled), so failure rates were relatively low regardless of actual learner achievement. Potentially this masks the effects of inadequate teaching and learning practices in the lower grades. While principals reported high failure rates at Grade 10 level, numbers to support this were not available to the research team. The relatively small proportion of Grade 12 learners in relation to the total enrolment suggested that there was a substantial dropout at lower levels. Data on numbers of learners in four schools during 2007 (taken at random) clearly indicate drop out rates:

	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
School O	542	261	148
School C	459	234	116
School P	323	220	142
School L	270	189	139

In all these schools, Grade 12 numbers were significantly lower than Grade 10. Thus failure and drop out do occur at the end of Grades 10 and 11, likely to be in part, at least, as a consequence of the GET curriculum and assessment practices. This project cannot confirm the data (beyond the impression created by these schools numbers), but we are aware that another Ministerial Committee will establish the broader pattern. How this might be interpreted is discussed in Section 5 below.

A question which cropped up in some schools was whether they were able to select learners in lower grades who were likely to pass Grade 12 exams – most schools strongly denied that such selection occurred. One principal had been told by her District official that she was not allowed to interview learners on entry at Grade 10 because it would look like she was “sifting the weak ones out”. (School D)

Another school took the view that learners did not “drop out” of school when they reached Grade 10. When appropriate, the school advised the parents to send their children to an alternative school:

> Some of them, not many, when they reach Grade 10, we check their performance, and involve the parents to think about moving to technical schools. They are not dropping out, they just go to the technical school. (School J)

The practice of condoned passes

An issue not raised by principals in the comparatively formal interviews, but which emerged in more casual conversation, was the practice of classifying learners who were unlikely to pass Year 12 exams as "private" candidates. For example, one of the schools – with District support – had four groups of Year 12 learners, each with about 40 learners, but the fourth group (with 41 learners) was known as the "private group". The school had two exam centre numbers, but the results of the private group were not included in the pass rate of the school. Another school mentioned an arrangement with the District Office that they could de-register non-performing learners. These non-performing learners generally did not have up-to-date or adequate portfolio activities. However, this school stressed that it resorted to such reclassification only after serious interventions had been attempted. As "private candidates", portfolio activities are not a requirement for a matric pass. Clearly such a practice enables the school to avoid more negative results, and to maintain high pass rates.

A number of schools mentioned that they struggled with condoned passes in earlier grades, which impacted on their Year 12 results:

> We are told that they must proceed with their cohort. You must look at the question of age. You cannot fail a learner, so there is encouragement that they must proceed. That's where the stagnation is.
>
> So it is not justified to compare results. Other principals, they are doing all these things. If you look in most schools in townships, the numbers in Grade 11 are very big, but then you go to Grade 12, you will find that you have 40 learners. They are blocking these Grade 12 learners to progress from Grade 11 because people are worried about their results. It can never be a good barometer to judge the school on the performance of Grade 12. (School A)

The pressure on schools to condone failures in Grades 10 and 11 was seen as "political interference" which created its own problems. (School P) Schools then found ways to discourage learners from staying until the end of Grade 12.

One reason for pressuring schools to condone Grade 11 failures at the beginning of 2007 was the predicament of the present cohort of Year 12

learners, whose subjects and syllabi are the last of the curriculum being phased out; if they repeated Grade 11, in 2008 they would face different subjects and new curricula of the new FET. Several principals expressed concern for the 2007 group of Grade 12s who might fail – "though they will be able to do supplementary exams and repeat Grade 12 until 2011, but who is going to keep teaching those subjects to those learners?" (School F)

Concern for the future of learners

All schools visited showed real concern for the future and welfare of their learners when outside or after school: "Our area is a disadvantaged area. So I have to make sure that these learners pass with exemption so that they can get bursaries … Unless they get good results, and get scholarships and bursaries, they just pass matric and then they wander around." (School J). One township school made a considerable effort to support learners who had won the opportunity to travel abroad – a source of great pride for them. (School P). And motivational speakers are regularly brought in to the schools to talk about careers and generally to motivate the learners.

Several schools in this study offered subjects only at Higher Grade, so that learners would pass Grade 12 with sufficient Endorsements/exemptions for admission to tertiary institutions. These principals were critical of others who achieved 100% passes at Standard Grade: "What can those learners do? They just they wander around. There are no jobs here". One principal described the indirect pressure he put on his teachers:

> I brainwash the learners to demand Higher Grade so that they can study further. The learners then put pressure on the teachers to do Higher Grade. (School F)

Professional co-operation

In a number of cases, participation in cross-school clusters offered welcome professional support for teachers. One school regularly hosts other schools (principals, teachers and learners) to show them that "we do nothing extraordinary"; the school also ran Winter Schools and Saturday classes that

were open to others. (School P) Another (township) school was active in district clusters, with no fewer than four of its staff being cluster leaders. Schools offered support to other schools in their areas of strength – support which those schools readily acknowledged to us.

> Because this is a school that is doing very well, the educators are not selfish. Our educators go out and help other educators from other schools. We also have educators from outside to come and assist us. We cluster with neighbouring schools. (School J)

The broad commitment to education expressed by one principal manifested in collaborative projects with other schools, one of which (tutoring) was later taken up by the provincial MEC for education for the whole township. The principal also organised an education forum which gave principals opportunities to engage with the MEC to lobby, for example, for more facilities in the area or for a satellite district (EMDC) office. The principals' group also lobbied funders.

The openness of these schools to working with other schools is significant in at least two respects. First, where teaching is not treated as the privatised work of individuals behind closed doors, this may be regarded as strong evidence of teacher professional communities working within and across the schools. As mentioned in the literature review, the sharing of professional expertise among educators may be regarded as a powerful form of teacher development. Second, it suggests an attitude to teaching as being for the common good of the community of schools, not simply for the individual achievement of the single school. This sense of common purpose beyond their own interests is a remarkable indicator of the strength of these schools and the broader commitment of their staff.

It may be that the common external challenge of performing well in high stakes tests brought the schools together to share resources. Whatever the reason, it is certainly a strength to be recognised and supported.

It is striking that in the schools in this study, the principal could walk into any classroom – and so could we as researchers. We encountered no

defensiveness on this score (though in one school a couple of teachers declined to be interviewed). In some schools, HoDs and other senior teachers encouraged inexperienced teachers to sit in on their lessons, and expressed a real keenness to mentor and help.

Theme 3 Leadership and management

There was evidence in most of the schools of effective leadership, albeit of differing kinds. Some schools had strong leaders as principals; others had dispersed leadership in SMTs and HODs. Not every school in the study relied on a powerful principal for its achievements, which suggests the need for a more sophisticated understanding of leadership than that offered by the stereotype of the "heroic" principal leader being necessary to achieve excellence. That said, leadership in the broadest sense was certainly evident in all schools, and all schools were well managed. Three schools had acting principals. In such cases, it was not possible to attribute the mechanisms of excellence to current principal leadership, though these schools were running well and being ably headed. (Schools C and J)

In a number of schools there was evidence of shared leadership – though this, too could take different forms. In one case, the principal worked from the centre of her SMT, and the metaphor of "a chain" was used to describe how people in the school worked together, both in terms of passing learners from grade to grade, and in terms of co-operation among staff and the leadership team. (School J) In another case, there was evidence of strong leadership in the form of a dynamic principal who empowered and released leadership potential in others, with the effect that he had created strong teams which strategised together. (School L) This principal spoke of striving to be a role model who inspired, showed care and interest in others, looked at the positive aspects of challenges and personally wanted to learn and grow (and staff we spoke to agreed that this was so). These qualities had spread to produce leadership in the SMT, teachers and learners; all those interviewed in the school reported that they had adopted similar role functions and attitudes of

caring and working hard to meet challenges and grow. A comment from one member of staff:

> We accept criticism because we know it is done positively and will be followed up by support and assistance. (School L)

In contrast to charismatic leadership, other schools displayed a more distributive style of leadership. Interestingly, three of the schools headed by women were notably team-oriented (though not all women led in teams):

- There is nothing we are doing differently. As a school we are committed a lot. When others join us, we make sure that they share our vision, the mission of the school. We are working as a team. We try by all means to work as a team. If you are a team, you are assisting each other.

- As the SMT, we motivate teachers and learners. Discipline of teachers and learners in this school is good. There is a lot of commitment and dedication; we all make sacrifices. We work as a team – there's co-operation, common vision, open communication, mutual trust.

The staff in almost all the schools expressed confidence in and support of the leaders in their schools:

- The secret of success at this school is leadership. Our principal really is the key at this school … Our principal is a real leader; we are fortunate to have someone like him at the helm". (School K)

- The school's success is due to the principal. She has a presence in the school and delivers on her promises. She is non-populist in that she reminds teachers to be in class at all times. She helps with learning material when she can, and she is the first to arrive and the last to leave the school premises. (School O)

Leadership is a complex dynamic, handled by leaders and subordinates in many ways:

> I manage but I do not control. I'm not good at control. I trust my staff – I don't peep over their shoulders. I do a few class visits but I prefer it when they come to me with a problem rather than me going to them with a problem. I manage from a position of trust, but I want the Department to trust me too. Some School Managers and Governance developers do not. (School R)

A feature of all the schools in the study were the high expectations of teachers, and even moreso of the learners:

> This school has high expectations of learners. We have a history to defend here. In 2006 a group of 104 learners wrote matric; 62 obtained exemptions and 42 a pass. The learners know they have to keep the flag flying. (School E)

In another school, success was at least in part due to a stable corps of good teachers ("footsoldiers") with less reliance on the person of the leader. One particularly successful school relied heavily on its well organized planning systems for every aspect of the school's activities, as indicated by the following three comments from the same school:

> Good planning, and having systems in place so that people know what they have to do. Every teacher, when you come at the beginning of the year, you know that this is what is required of you, these are your deadlines, these are the dates for the term, this is what you're accountable for. So they can plan ahead. If they don't know how to do it, help them. If possible, set in place systems with regular subject meetings, regular meetings with your Grade group, the head of the Grade will meet with the class teachers and discuss problems.

> It's a school that never sleeps ...Besides the academic side, we have 35 cultural clubs and societies. Sport is compulsory for our children. Every single staff member is involved in sport in some way. So the commitment is there.

> I've never come across a school that is so immaculately clean. Everything is spic and span. As a teacher, when you walk in in the morning, when you walk down the corridor, it's shining. You walk into your classroom, and it's neat and tidy and clean. And you walk through the grounds … As a teacher, it makes a difference. (School B)

In most of the schools, there were good relationships between principals, management and teachers. On the whole, schools had been successful in creating a culture of caring for teachers and learners. However, clearly there were instances of some ambivalence:

> The school culture is such that I feel valued. The school is moderately safe and caring. There is a culture of trust and collaboration with management, but it's limited. There are high – perhaps too high – expectations of learners and teachers … Our HoD is supportive, and teaching and learning are regarded as central activities. (School N)

Several of the principals had opted out of classroom teaching, mainly because of the need for them to be constantly available to handle crises:

> As the head of the school, I focus, I attend parents meetings, SGB meetings, I deal with curriculum issues, I represent the school. I'm almost doing everything. I have requested now not to teach Biology because I'm not doing a proper service to those learners. Last year when I was teaching Grade 12, I was not always there in the classroom – there'll be a meeting called by the Department, parents calling saying that their son has been detained, and all those things. I have my own timetable. So I am running around. (School A)

Regarding the academic and administrative running of this school, responsibilities were well divided amongst the two deputy principals:

> I have a deputy principal who focuses on curriculum, he's very strong on curriculum issues – the policies, the changes, what's happening in FET. Then I have another deputy principal, who focuses on administration; he's very good in administration – the registers, when teachers come in the morning, they sign the register. Both deputies are teaching. The people who are most over-loaded are HoDs … So that's how we distribute our responsibilities. Generally we are working as a collective.

Quality leadership – of different sorts – is clearly a key dimension of success. Principals in all cases demonstrated an understanding of the history and identity of the school and deep commitment to the community in which the school was located ("The school is a beacon of light for the community"). They showed the ability to work with staff interpersonally (in different ways), and to effectively deploy the strengths and talents of teachers. They showed commitment to the lives of young people and to understanding their needs; and to a person saw themselves as roles models promoting values such as respect and honesty.

Theme 4 Acknowledgement, rewards, recognition and motivation

A striking feature in almost every school in the study was that the principal, and sometimes the SGB, went to great lengths to acknowledge, praise and motivate staff and learners in public ways for good performance. Most often, this took the form of celebratory functions and certificates of acknowledgement. End of term gatherings, outings to a restaurant, or a special meal, were markers of appreciation. Non-monetary but formal rewards held great significance in schools. For example:

- One principal called her HODs together saying 'I have a gift for you'. The gift was a copy for each of the letter of congratulations sent by the DG. (School O)

- A rural school described its annual event – arranged on occasion by the local Chief, and at other times by the SGB – where Certificates of Appreciation, and trophies are given to teachers. "Those certificates, I put it in my memory box, or my CV. That is why the teachers are motivated." (School J)

- Several schools take their teachers on end-of-year outings. This year we are not going to focus only on learners; we are going to focus on teachers. We have a program whereby each and every term we take the teachers away, just for a debriefing session. And at the end of September, we are going to Robben Island, to say "Look we appreciate the hard work that you are doing" ... We have a nice chat, and come back refreshed. (School A)

- Another township school provides food and petrol money for teachers who teach extra time as a token of appreciation. (School N)

- One principal motivates staff by writing letters thanking them for their hard work and acknowledging when they have gone the extra mile. (School G)

- An urban school mentioned that it provides a light lunch for its staff every day to bring them together in a caring way. (School B)

- "There isn't anybody who doesn't like to be congratulated" (said by a principal who is remarkably task-oriented, rather than interpersonally oriented!). (School P)

In almost every school foyer or principal's office there were proud displays of numerous trophies and certificates awarded to the schools. In some cases – especially where there were no sports facilities – schools competed in choral and debating competitions, expos in technology or science, and other competitions between local schools, and expected to do well in these. Sometimes, competitions between classes were used to create momentum and motivation. As one principal put it, "learners must compete for position one, but they can't always expect to get position one" (School Q). In this school, competition was seen as a way of stretching students' capabilities, within and beyond the school, and helping them to deal with winning as well as losing.

Every school relied heavily on internal tokens of recognition and appreciation as a primary source of motivation:

> Recognition builds tradition. The prize-giving ceremony builds tradition. We try and give credit to everyone and to find something good in everyone. Some only achieve outside school but we give them credit, even if it is for fishing. I take all the photos myself. This week I took photos of two girls who achieved excellent results in the Iscor Shield for debating and public speaking. (School R)

Learners who did well were acknowledged in assemblies and prize-givings or in weekly newsletters that were sent out to parents. (One school even gave "a discount on school fees to learners who do well". School H)

External rewards did exist, though they were not plentiful.

- Some provinces have systems of annual awards which are given to highly-performing schools. One small town school had "received R150,000 from the provincial education department for being one of the

best schools. We are going to use it to paint and clean the whole school. We are very grateful." (School R)

- In another province, the MEC had persuaded a large commercial bank to donate R250 000 to a rural school: "We are going to use the money to promote Maths and Science." (School F)

- Several other schools have also received awards and donations from the local chief, the commercial sector or from embassies (Japanese, British, Irish, US), including school buildings.

Several principals had mastered the art of strategic networking. They had raised international and national donations/funds, organized expert assistance, and resources needed by their schools – extra classrooms, laboratories, libraries. One principal commented that this sense of agency excited him, "especially when I realize that there are a lot of opportunities out there, and we don't need to wait for help from the Department". (School L)

All these instances of recognition were described with great pride: "We celebrate success" (School C), and "Dit is lekker om te sê ons het dit bereik", and "Dis 'n skool agter die berg maar nie agter die bos". (School F)

Theme 5 Resources

There is no doubt that the schools in the middle quintiles, most of which are ex-DET or homeland schools, are resource-strapped. Many teach science and biology without proper laboratories. Though some Dinaledi schools do have laboratories, and all received calculators, some equipment, and some textbooks, not one school reported satisfaction that it had adequate resources to meet all teaching needs.

For whatever reason, teachers appeared not to use textbooks systematically. In some cases, there were complaints about under-provisioning of textbooks, or that different material was delivered to what was ordered:

> For the NCS we don't have textbooks. There are a lot of textbooks, but no specific prescribed textbooks for each grade. In History, there are a lot of authors! You order from the Department, but when they are delivered they are not the exact books that we ordered. It's a problem. So maybe if you can advise the Department to inform schools which prescribed books they must use, because the examiners prefer certain books. (School J)

In the absence of sufficient textbooks, photocopied notes were ubiquitous in classrooms. And the practice of the teacher writing notes on the chalkboard for learners to copy down was certainly in evidence.

Not only were textbooks in short (or wrong) supply, but in many cases classrooms were in poor condition (e.g. broken ceilings and windows) and there was little, if any, visual coding, such as posters, on the walls (whether relevant or not). One principal reported that the school was used by ABET classes in the evenings, and "things disappear". (School G) Many classrooms were physically too small to accommodate senior learners – more than 60 learners, sitting four at a desk, crowded into rooms in a way that the teacher could not circulate. (School J) Similarly, another school had a crowded staffroom – a source of real dissatisfaction in terms of conditions of work for teachers. (School C)

Several schools had laboratories for Biology and Science, but some of these were "white elephants" in that they were hardly used because materials were scarce. In one school, we observed a Science experiment on acids and bases being conducted – with student involvement – on the teacher's desk, with no safety precautions in evidence.

Some schools complained of difficulties in other teaching areas, such as Technology, because there was no appropriate space or practical equipment, and therefore it was impossible for learners to learn from experiments or observation:

> We need a centre for technology. We need to do practicals in food processing. One year I brought my stove here so that we could do cooking practicals. We need a warehouse with engines, so that learners can see how they work? But we do just the theory, rather than the practicals. Learners like technology. It we had a technology centre, it would be wonderful. Out of that, we could get engineers! (School J)

Many schools made a real effort to improve their physical appearance by keeping gardens or vegetable patches, but in some cases there was no running water, and playgrounds at times the scene of dust storms. One or two schools had boreholes or received tank water from their local municipality, but

others had to pay for the water ("R200, which lasts a day or two") – and therefore they did without.

Former DET and homeland schools do not have sports fields. Several principals considered that sporting activities would help to channel the energies of their learners, and keep them busy in constructive ways at school. Sport and other extra-curricular activities were very restricted, though these were certainly considered beneficial:

> Kids who are involved in extramurals show better behaviour. We want a swimming pool. We have a borehole but no playgrounds for keeping kids occupied. Sport welds kids. We have land but not sports grounds. Cricket coaching is offered at primary school but not at secondary school. Sport keeps kids at school … This is an old school. The toilets are *always* broken ... Thieves and vandals steal our water. (School N)

One principal (of a rural Coloured school – one of the top five schools in the province) complained bitterly about not having a school hall:

> Our school has poor resources. We don't have a hall. If you don't have a hall, it is difficult for discipline. The learners can't come together day by day as a school. You are forced to be a faceless principal. Sometimes we can't have assembly for a week because it's raining and freezing cold. (School F)

This school had struggled against better-resourced schools:

> Some schools have all wonderful facilities. It's like racing against Ben Johnson when you're a paraplegic. It's difficult. They come and poach the best children in our school for the Model C schools, which have all the facilities. (School F)

However, the principal had strategised for success, and competition had spurred the school community to great heights – to the point that they had achieved in all important spheres:

> It was hard to compete with them. So we achieved equality in sports first – a hungry child can run faster than a child with a full tummy. We don't have an athletics track, but the children can run up the mountain. You have to understand that we had to motivate our learners in other ways … Once we beat them in athletics, we took on cultural activities and beat them in choirs and debating … Now we even beat them in the academic sphere. (School F)

Apparently these competing schools had exchanged exam papers:

> We swapped exam papers with X school, but they complained about the difficulty of our papers. (School F)

In contrast, one school in another province was very proud to report that they had managed to acquire significant resources:

> Over the past five years we have built the school's resources to include more classrooms, two computer rooms, admin block, science lab, technical drawing room, library, tuck-shop, hall, and carport. (School H)

Another school in the study had made similar effort. Our researcher saw "an impressive new library building which has been erected at the far end of the school. It's not yet completed, but will contain the library and a number of seminar rooms. The library was built by a member of the community, and symbolizes the school's (and the patron's) commitment to learning." (School K)

Communities varied in the nature and level of their support to schools. As one principal put it:

> The community is not necessarily impressed with academic results. Sport impresses them but we do not have our own fields. We use the grounds of the municipality but they are not in a good condition. But some teams win sometimes. The farmers (parents) take turns to work on a piece of land, rented by the school; the seeds are bought by the school but labour is free, and the school gets the profits. (School S)

As one principal wryly mentioned, 'Resources don't teach'. (School P) However, the capacity of these schools to offer the formal curriculum is cramped, and extra-curricular activities do not feature. Schools do make use of debates and choirs as extra-curricula activities but there is not much available for enrichment for these learners, particularly in rural areas.

Under these circumstances, schools tended to focus their time and efforts on achieving good exam results. Achieving the all-round education offered by well-resourced schools would be beyond the reach of most of them.

Theme 6 Support from Districts and Departments

It seems that these well-performing schools are known to their districts. If districts have a shortage of capacity, it probably manifests more in the case of poorly performing schools. It would appear that well-performing schools do not necessarily draw support from districts. And one of the principals remarked that District Officials who visited the school said they learnt from what they saw. (School L)

In many schools, the lack of subject advisory support was mentioned as a problem. In one township school, it was mentioned with some resentment that subject advisors found the place unsafe – as did the staff and learners – and so didn't visit the schools enough.

> At a District level, they only observe what is happening in the schools, they don't come into this community. They are frightened of the crime … It annoys me to find that you are going an extra mile in terms of all the issues we deal with as a principal. We are not getting assistance that we need in the curriculum. [District officials] tell you that they are over-stressed and under-resourced. But they expect good results from us.
>
> We have problems with learners who need a psychologist, but when you call a psychologist, they say "Mr X, I have 54 schools that I must go to". That's a problem, because we are dealing with learners who have [serious problems] in these communities. (School A)

It may be the case that Districts are "over-stressed and under-resourced". However, it would appear that at times they resort to recruiting their own staff of high-quality educators from amongst the schools they serve. Several schools complained that they had lost their best staff – including previous principals – to the District Office. And as one principal mentioned, staff often moved on from District Offices out of education altogether.

In many schools, principals and management staff expected expertise to be provided by the District Office. But often the training provided on the curriculum (especially NCS) was felt to be too little and of poor quality.

> There hasn't been much inservice training or professional development ... The NCS was done in passing. People are doing it on their own, just struggling. The implementation of NCS emphasises learning outcomes but not content, and we ask for content. There aren't enough learning materials. Teachers should be given fully fledged information. (School N)

However, one school had the opposite complaint:

> It is often frustrating to endure yet again some training which has been done countless times. We need to think out of the box about how to raise education levels throughout the country without dumbing down. (School B)

However, in the absence of such training by the Districts, it seems that it is being provided by book publishers:

> We are worried about coping with FET/NCS. Sometimes we get help from the booksellers … The book sellers gave us training in lesson planning for all

> subjects. We then buy the books from them. The Department also does some training. (School C)

However, the Department and some Districts seem to be meeting the needs of some schools:

> Our staff went to meetings and workshops at district level … We do feel supported by the Department … Recently we were visited by NW Minister of Education, who help us to get our computers to be fixed. (School G)

While principals and SMTs bemoaned the paucity of curriculum support from the department (at district level), they constantly worked to draw in more support and to take advantage of what was available. There was use of NGO support, some of it substantial.

Without a thorough and ongoing relationship with the District Office, which would include training, advice, and inspections, an important part of the systemic accountability and improvement system is missing. This point was mentioned by a number of schools.

Theme 7 IQMS

IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) is a major project initiated by the national Department of Education to improve the quality of education throughout the country (through appraisal, performance measurement, and whole school evaluation). We found that this system was patchily regarded. Several principals referred to IQMS positively by saying that they saw the potential benefits of the system – especially in relation to development appraisal – but they had reservations about some aspects of its wider implementation.

Some of the comments were:

- IQMS is a struggle. We don't know how to do it. The District Office called all the schools and told us to revive it. Development Appraisal helps teachers, but we are all not quite clear how to fill in all those forms … Last year we had a visit from Queenstown – I think it was Whole School Evaluation – but we've had no feedback. We've had no help from the District. But when we ask for help, they do help us. The Department is short of subject advisers. (School D)

- IQMS is a good thing. Work should always be monitored. We must check that a person is doing their job. Regular visits keep you on your toes. BUT I

> am opposed to IQMS because it is attached to money. It's window-dressing for one day – for the rest of the year a teacher can get away with doing nothing. (School F)

Broadly, the appraisal was regarded as being important, but the overall system was regarded with mixed feelings:

- The IQMS is a good initiative because it addresses three things – it addresses the development of a teacher, it addresses the issue of Whole School Evaluation, and it addresses the issue of remuneration of teachers. So in principle, it's a correct thing, but I think the problem is in terms of the practicalities … the Minister has been complaining that most of the teachers are having the highest scores, but their performance is the opposite. Generally, people see this as a form of accelerating their income because they want to supplement what they are getting. (School A)

On balance, more negative than positive responses to IQMS were expressed:

- IQMS has not yet been helpful. Perhaps it is because teachers have not yet grasped the pros and cons of this policy. (School O)

- IQMS is not a true reflection of the teachers and hinders the work of his school. The scoring is not good. (School G)

- I don't think IQMS is fine. Peers will write anything about you. The Department is the one who is supposed to evaluate you. (School N)

- I do not like certain aspects of IQMS as recognition. I like the whole school inspection but not "die papiertjies". There is too much paperwork. So many papers then so many points. The courses offered by the Department are often not up to standard. (School R)

Perhaps the most positive response was from one school that had both CS educators and SGB-paid educators:

> IQMS is sound. It's a vast improvement on what it has been. Obviously it has its problems, but we use it. We use the same system for our Board-paid teachers. So we treat everyone in the same way. It's a good policy, it's a sound policy. (School B)

In contrast, one of the principals regarded IQMS as a source of tension in a school in a small community:

> IQMS – We do not want to rate staff for the 1% increase. We have to live with these people and look them in the eye daily and think: I am the reason for your financial struggle. It cannot be done in a small community such as this. (School S)

Theme 8 OBE graduates

In almost every school, the *primary* school curriculum was regarded as problematic. Many interviewees mentioned that learners from primary schools arrived at high school not being able to read and write properly; that they lacked systematic knowledge; and that they found the transition to senior grades difficult. The result was seen to be an added burden for teachers in Grades 10 to 12, plus a failure and drop-out pattern at the end of Grade 10.

- They have never been taught. We have kids in Grade 8 that can hardly read or write, and their maths is horrible. (School P)

- Being a high school and starting in Grade 8 we have a problem with the quality of the child we're getting from primary schools … The level of literacy and numeracy skills is definitely declining. So in Grade 8 we're having to do a lot of picking up. We accept children from 30 or 40 different primary schools, and the vast difference in the quality of the child we're getting from the various schools is actually frightening. (School B)

Many teachers had strong views on the inadequacies of learners' earlier education:

- We are teaching kids who can't read or write**.** The implementation of OBE has been a problem. Primary schools have a lot of problems. Kids are noisy and want to talk. Their retentive memory is very poor. They want to guess. Too much group work means they don't develop as individual learners … Kids can express themselves in language, orally, but they cannot write. (School N)

- The level of English in the school is a worry. Many learners need simple questions to be repeated two or three times before they respond. (School G)

The problem of poor preparation in earlier grades was definitely not evident in the combined primary and secondary schools we visited. While referring to the need for commitment and teamwork, the (acting) principal in one school – who was a Foundation Phase teacher, but leading a highly successful combined school – stressed the need to build on solid foundations:

> This is a Combined school – it starts from Grade 1 up to Grade 12. Our teachers are working as a chain. The Grade 3 teacher knows exactly what happened in Grade 2. So that's why I say we are working as a chain … We have standards throughout the curriculum.
>
> We don't take it as a challenge to be a combined school. We take advantage of the fact that we know them from when they are small. We know their parents, so it is easier for us to identify problems and to assist when necessary. So we are building them in the strong foundation phase. (School J)

The term “cut and paste OBE” was used in a number of schools. While not all secondary teachers were nervous about their ability to cope with the FET curriculum, they considered that the primary curriculum was not working adequately, and that the home backgrounds of the children were not conducive to academic achievement:

> Even teachers themselves are not properly capacitated to deal with this transformation in the curriculum. So if the teacher himself is not fully confident of the curriculum of the subject matter, what do you expect from the learners?
>
> What compounds the situation is that the only place of structure for most of these learners is the school. After school, the likelihood that the learners will come across books is very minimal, because there’s no support base at home to say “Study your books”. It’s very few parents who are able to do that. (School A)

The comment was made several times that that teachers in primary schools were not accountable for learner performance, so senior secondary schools had to shoulder the load. In some cases, schools conducted frequent tests in Grades 8 and 9 so that the transition to the final years’ exams would be more palatable for learners.

> Learners are not at all well prepared. There’s a big big gap there. The educators usually cry, saying that they need to do a lot. They can’t spell even a Xhosa word. And then in English, they can’t construct, not a single sentence. We should bring back an external exam in Grade 9. (School C)

Only one school admitted to selecting the best applicants at the entry points of Grade 8 or Grade 10. They interviewed learners, and used their own criteria for selection (“previous records of Maths and English … mainly all-roundedness … children that are sporting, involved in cultural activities or music”). (School B) This school did not rely on primary school reports, which were not assumed to be a true reflection of the children’s achievements or potential. Several principals said they visited primary schools to promote their schools, though active selection was discouraged by Departmental policy: “We are not selecting. We take them on a first-come-first-served basis” (School P). It is worth noting that this school specialized in Maths and Science, yet parents wanted their children at the school regardless of their abilities or interest in these areas.

Theme 9 Socio-economic conditions surrounding schools

Poverty

There was general understanding in the schools we visited that young people today – especially those living in urban townships – faced overwhelming family crises and critical social difficulties, which often manifested in behavioural problems. Learners in some of the township schools may live in shacks, in unstable homes, often with relatives ("not two parents"), in real poverty:

> Many learners are literally dumped by their parents in this community and have to live at the back of a family's house to attend this school … Many learners travel to school by taxi, paying up to R220 per month. (School L)

Most cases of failure were understood in terms of conditions at home and lack of parental support and care. One township principal said:

> I think we have not yet grasped what are the critical issues that are facing our young people, to be able to help them. That's why the drop-out rate is so high, particularly in township schools. It's bad! … The rate of substance abuse, particularly dagga, is a problem, it's a big challenge. (School A)

Rural schools, on the other hand, had different difficulties:

- The community is very rural and poor. People live in abject poverty. They grow mealies, and do sheep and cattle farming on a small scale. The community is keen and interested in education.

  If we were in a township, maybe the strategies we use here wouldn't work. I don't think there's an educator here who would want to leave this school and go to a township. The life there is different to this one. Here, you have rural respect for authority. The kids here obey their elders. In the township, they don't respect in the same way. (School C)

- We have all the problems. The social life in the community is difficult – poverty, drink, drugs, child neglect, pregnancies, assault. If anyone is murdered, a small community feels is more than a large community. We also have deaths in families, "possibly" the result of AIDS. (School F)

In every school visited, teachers were prepared to give extra time before and after school, at weekends, during holidays. However, in some cases this time was limited by crime and threats to their safety:

> An issue that is crippling us is crime around this area. As much as I am passionate about my job, when it's 4.30, I must begin to pack my things because there are no guarantees that I am safe. The criminals here see teachers as a source of income.

> We are scared of having afternoon classes because you know that learners are going to report that "We have been robbed of this and this". You are scared. You take your car and you look around for these boys, but it's very risky. I say "Hey man, I am exposing myself to danger". So you are faced with those challenges. (School A)

While several of the schools were "no fee" schools, most of them did collect minimal fees from parents who would pay: R500 per annum, R400, R350, R300. Several of the schools struggled to collect the school fees: "It's difficult to collect school fees because many parents are unemployed." At this school, a local business paid school fees "for deserving learners". (School G)

Parental support (or lack thereof)

It would appear that rural schools enjoy a greater degree of parental/community support than township schools do. Two township responses:

> You call a parent meeting – I have 1147 learners – if the parents are 150, that's a lot … The last thing that is crippling us is the parents. I will never understand that when a learner does not come to school for two or three weeks, the parents are silent. When you call a parents meeting on a Sunday, you come here and you find that there are only a few parents. (School A)

Rural schools, though, did have parents or community members who supported the schools:

- Partnership between teachers, learners and parents is one of the keys to success. This partnership is expressed through regular parent consultation and communication. Parents raise money for the school and support functions ... they are very involved with senior learners in helping them to make their subject choices. (School K)

- We have support from the community. The community understands the vision and the culture of the school. If we have parents' meetings, they come in big numbers. (School J)

We were told that parents came to meetings in large numbers under two circumstances: first, if the meeting was to discuss and decide on school fees, and second, if there were to be elections for the School Governing Body. (School F)

The issue of safety is a challenge for all schools, especially when offering after-hours classes. However, one rural school commented on the strength of parent support in this regard:

> And now we are busy with evening classes. Parents come here to check the progress – and also see to security. We have not had safety problems since we "Adopted a Cop" from SAPS. We have Community Police Forms, they are helping us. The parents come to collect their children in the evenings. (School J)

Discipline

The issue of discipline is challenging for many schools, and several schools struggled to maintain Departmental policy on the matter. One principal put it as "the rights of teachers vs. rights of learners … Learners need to focus more on responsibilities and teachers need their rights to be respected by learners, parents, community and education department". (School F)

Township schools reported a range of discipline problems, and mentioned that there was little parental support on the issue:

> You call a parent "Your child is problematic", "Your child has slapped or kicked another learner". There's a problem of anger, particularly amongst the boys. You call the parents, but the parents won't come. It's few parents who come. (School A)

All schools mentioned that discipline was becoming harder to maintain. This trend was seen as symptomatic of a breakdown of family control, as well as the result of changed Departmental policies:

> Discipline is becoming harder and harder for teachers. We have staff meetings trying to analyse why it is so difficult, and I think clearly it's because the homes are not as structured as they used to be. We're getting more and more parents not being at home with their children – mothers having to work. So the support structure at home is not as strong as it used to be. It's really tough for teachers to have to cope with that. We find our counsellors are working a lot harder than they used to. (School B)

The school, then, has to be a "superparent", or, in the words of another principal, "the child is the baby of the school". As parents struggle to control their teenage children, they may expect the school to be the major disciplining presence in the life of the learner. In one rural school, parents occasionally asked the principal to give the learner a hiding (and he admitted to sometimes obliging in the case of boys). He did not believe hidings would work on girls and usually referred discipline problems with girls to a senior woman educator to deal with. He also encouraged teachers to deal with discipline problems at the classroom level, or they would lose authority.

The need for appropriate (and less time consuming) strategies for disciplining learners was raised by a number of schools, who felt that the Department could do more in this regard.

- The new ways of disciplining children under the new dispensation take up too much time when you should be teaching children … The Department must give us practical ways of punishing learners. New ways of disciplining children take up too much time when you should be teaching children. (School N)

- But the Department drops us when we request that serious offences be removed, so we don't ask anymore. For example one learner who broke 78 windows and 2 girls who baked and sold daggakoekies at school. (School R)

Corporal punishment has not died away – one or two schools let this be known to us. One or two principals admitted that they occasionally used "light lashes", and some learners mentioned that they were called to the principal's office "for a board meeting". Several principals said that they still believed in the value of corporal punishment: "Corporal punishment should be re-instated, to be administered by the principal only." This principal believed that the "middle-class parents" in the community were not supportive at times when discipline needed to be reinforced:

> They're mainly middle class. There is little care and support from parents because they are too busy pursuing their careers to care for their children. (School H)

Another principal (a woman) who considered that corporal punishment should be reinstated said:

> The policy on corporal punishment should be reviewed. It is a quick responsive form of discipline that is less time consuming than other present forms of discipline … Teachers have more authority with corporal punishment. (School E)

National policies on discipline are not always supported or understood at school level. At one interview, the chairperson of a rural SGB commented that national policies did not fit with local community practices:

> We have problems with some of the policies – take suspension. If there's a serious problem, we have to wait for the Department to come. It should take five days, but it can be two weeks … There was a learner involved in stock theft. That's very bad – it has a bad impact on the school and this village. We don't agree with the Department policy. (School C)

Similarly, another principal wanted to be able to expel a learner in dire circumstances:

> Die vrot appels moet verwyder word, e.g. drugs. The Department says they'll put them on a programme – but they can't be rehabilitated here in the school. Some of the kids are peddling drugs for outsiders – they are paid, or given drugs. If a child stabs another, he's a danger for the other kids. (School F)

On policies which allow learners to come to school not in uniform:

> We don't agree with the policy on uniforms. For us, uniforms are a source of pride, and we insist that learners wear them … Uniforms are cheaper – they close the gap between rich and poor. Otherwise learners want to have a lot of clothes. With uniforms, we cannot identify the poor ones from the well-to-do – what matters is their academic performance. (School C)

On policies in general:

> The biggest problem with these policies is that it's difficult to know the policies in detail – there are too many of them. It's as if we need a legal department here. (School N)

We specifically asked principals whether they had problems with absenteeism and punctuality. Most of them said that problems were minor:

> Some learners do come late – not very late, maybe 5 minutes. When the bell rings, we lock the gate. But when the period starts, everybody is in classes. (School J)

But several principals – especially those in township schools – referred to the problem of substance abuse:

- The rate of substance abuse, particularly dagga, is a problem. It's a big challenge. Those boys travel to school [from shack areas], they buy the dagga in one of those areas, and smoke it along the way. When you come to class, you can smell that there's dagga. It's a serious challenge. Here, I have Fridays when I inform the police – a particular Captain that I phone, on Fridays, even once a month. (School A)

- You live in a location, so it's easy to identify drugs. If you are with kids, you spot behavioural changes. We turn to the police for help. (School N)

Many schools mentioned that they had cultivated good relationships with the police, and they used them frequently – "Adopt a cop" – and referred cases to be dealt with in police station Trauma Rooms. (School B)

Schoolgirl pregnancies

This was a very big issue for schools, with none of the principals being supportive of schoolgirl pregnancies.

> Don't like this pregnancy business that the Department allows. They [the learners] are hiding it from us, but we don't hunt them down. Even in the church [across the road] girls are getting pregnant at 15 or 16 – or even in Grade 8. They are loose at an early age. It's may partly be the grant, but it's not only poor families where the girls become pregnant; well-to-do girls are also doing it. It's not rape. (School D)

While many interviewees linked early pregnancies directly to the Child Support Grant, and its importance to family income in conditions of poverty, others pointed to peer support and pressures, and in one community, lobola was mentioned as a possible reason for early pregnancy.

Interestingly, the link to financial incentives runs counter to the findings of several studies on teenage pregnancy, which claim that it is not linked to Child Support Grants (see Goldblatt, 2003; Sogaula, van Niekerk, Noble, Green, Sigala, Samson, Saunders & Jackson, 2002; CASE, 2000). Similarly, the dismissal of "rape", and the absence of discussion on sexual violence seems noteworthy, given the strong, established evidence of sexual violence at schools, as well as in South Africa more broadly.

Principals and teachers appeared to be more in tune with the impact pregnancy might have on the functioning of the school, its discipline and its performance. Having pregnant learners at school raised fears of childbirth on the premises, as well as girls distracted by health issues. "Coming to school pregnant is a problem – it encourages others." (School D) One HoD considered the Department's policy on pregnancy to be retrogressive. In her view, "it sends wrong messages to girls, and it legitimises absenteeism". "Teachers are not mid-wives", they cannot be expected to consider a pregnant learner's needs, especially as "the days of labour are approaching". (School O)

Another principal was not happy with the policy that allowed pregnant girls to remain at school. She felt that policy made teenage pregnancy more acceptable, and expressed some concern about the taboos around having a pregnant girl in a classroom situation. (School E)

Some schools expected pregnant matric learners to give birth and write exams; others waited anxiously to see if their matric pass records would be spoilt by absence due to childbirths.

> Within my Grade 12 learners, 86 learners, I am supposed to watch that group very closely. The teachers tell me that six of those Grade 12s are pregnant. One thing that comes to mind as a head of school is "My God, this has the potential to challenge that 100%". (School A)

This principal – despite being a generally caring leader – thought of learners significantly in terms of "producing good results". He saw pregnant learners in terms of the threat they posed to 100% passes, rather than being concerned for the implications of early child-rearing in the lives of those learners.

HIV/AIDS

We encountered enormous resistance to naming HIV/AIDS, though people were prepared to talk of "the sickness" and were certainly prepared to say that people in their communities were "dying like flies". Schools were hesitant to pry into the personal or family circumstances of learners or teachers in their homes: "Privacy prevents you raising this."

Virtually every school had AIDS orphans, who were cared for in different ways by the schools.

> At school we have these orphans. Some learners are child-headed families. Those learners can be helped. Eish, it's difficult! I can say to you around this area, Nkomazi area, we are no. 1 infected and affected. Here in school, there are more than 200 orphans -- some of the learners come to school without a uniform, they misbehave. (School J)

In primary (and combined) schools, where the Nutrition Program is operating, orphan children rely heavily on the meals from school, sometimes sharing them with elder siblings in the same (combined) school, or taking their plates home at break.

- The feeding scheme is helping a lot, because they come here with an empty stomach. For Grade 8 to Grade 12, there is a problem – there can be 4 learners from the same family, 2 are in primary, and 2 in the secondary. I've seen some of these learners, during break, they take their plates to share with the older children. (School J)

- We are fortunate that the Department of Education is running a national nutrition program, whereby we are allowed to feed about 200 to 250 learners. We give them bread every morning. (School A)

All schools are required to develop HIV/AIDS policies, and some schools conduct awareness-raising programs and assist orphans to get social support grants:

> We do have programs organized by the Department, by the Circuit, even school-based. About 30 of our learners are orphans. We help them to fill in forms for grants – the forms indicate the needs of the children. Some live by themselves, some have guardians. There is no government feeding scheme [because it's a high school]. If they don't say anything, you cannot go and ask. People don't want to discuss their problems with other people – not this problem, anyway. Every weekend there are funerals. We don't really get the true story about the cause of death. The person was sick, and then it ends there. (School C)

In high schools, where there are generally no feeding schemes, the teachers contribute money to buy food and clothes. In these schools, the teachers 'pop money' to provide for those who are prepared to acknowledge they need help, in spite of teenage pride: "At high school some learners don't want to appear poor." (School N)

It would seem that AIDS manifests more in primary schools, where some children, we were told, attended school simply for the sake of the food. By secondary school, without this incentive, children presumably found other ways of keeping themselves alive. We heard touching stories of teachers providing outfits for the matric dance, adopting children, providing extra clothes and uniforms.

An additional health problem to be dealt with by schools is the newer problem of drug-resistant TB:

> The other challenge that is facing us now is the outbreak of this TB, because most of the learners are staying in the squatter area. We have two cases here where the learners ran away from medication … The Care Givers came here, and reported that "Meneer, this thing is very dangerous". In actual fact, we encourage learners, together with the teachers, to go and test. One of the teachers here was away from school for almost four months because of TB. And she's teaching Grade 12. She told me "Meneer, it's TB". (School A)

Conclusion Success breeds success

There's no doubt that these schools were setting their own goals and targets of excellence, and motivating themselves to achieve these – sometimes

competing against themselves. Their work towards continuous improvement was both a motivator and an attractor of learners and staff.

An essential ingredient of success was commitment from the learners, and an appreciation of what was being done for them. One learner wanted to "repay" the school some time in the future:

> I love this school. When I leave if I make a lot of money I want to be a proud sponsor of this school. We are safe and secure. There's no gangs and no bullying. I feel as if I'm on the right track. (School N)

For those schools that are part of the Dinaledi programme, their involvement was an enormous motivator. This could in part be simply the "Hawthorne effect" of receiving attention; but being selected for success and being given extra support was enormously motivating. Even more could be made of this to ring-fence the success of the schools, and protect them with Departmental resources and assistance. We would like to see these schools being given more profile in a "rewards-based" school improvement strategy (a point we return to later). And all of the graduates of these schools being given incentives and opportunities for post-school placements in work or study.

The learners we spoke to were confident and ambitious for themselves. They knew about personal goals and achievement (though whether they could channel this into an appropriate post-school pathway was not always certain). In all the schools, teachers were intensely interested in the long-term prospects of their learners, and extremely proud of their achievements after school. One final comment:

> One of last year's Grade 12s has gone to PenTech. They phoned to tell us that he had achieved 11 "A"s in his June exams, and that he shows great promise. So you can come from a poor community, but no-one should have an excuse. You don't need to live in a double-storey house, your father doesn't have to be a doctor or your mother a professor. You can come from the poorest, humblest house, and still be the best child in the province. This makes a person feel good. (School F)

SECTION 5

ANALYSING SCHOOLS THAT WORK

The Schools that Work Committee had the privilege of visiting schools that were the "success stories" of the mainstream system, in terms of the Senior Certificate results of 2006. These schools, mostly in middle quintiles, succeeded in meeting the demands of Senior Certificate exams at levels that most others, including many privileged schools, did not. Through the focus, sense of responsibility and strength of commitment of all concerned, through hard work beyond the demands of conventional timetables, and through a belief that they could succeed, these schools met their goal of producing good, and sometimes outstanding, Senior Certificate results.

> *For this, they, and others like them, should be given full acknowledgement and every encouragement to continue. They should also be given us much support as possible by the Department to maintain their exceptional achievement.*

Building on the findings set out in Section 4, and the literature reviewed in Section 3, the task of this Section is to answer the central questions on which this research was based:

- What are the dynamics of Schools that Work, that enable them to achieve good results when so many schools in similar circumstances do not?
- Are there replicable lessons that might be applied to other schools?
- To what extent are Departmental policies and requirements aligned with the practices of these succeeding schools? What assists, and what impedes?
- What further research does a study of these schools suggest?

These questions will be addressed through the rest of this Section and the one that follows. *In the text of this Section, italicised paragraphs, such as the*

one above, move towards recommendations by drawing out the implications of what has been said. Fuller recommendations follow in Section 6.

To frame the analysis, it is useful to acknowledge again the influence of context on school performance, which was evident in this study of Schools that Work.

5. 1 Influence of context on school performance

The findings of this study confirm the research on social inequality since the Coleman Report. This cumulative research leaves no doubt about the influence of social background on learners' learning outcomes, an influence so powerful that school effects seldom override the pattern, except on an individual basis. Although schools do make a greater difference for disadvantaged learners, and in developing countries, their performance is strongly influenced by context. However, the Report makes an observation that is worth serious consideration in the South African context: "*A given investment in upgrading teacher quality will have the most effect on achievement in underprivileged areas*" (Coleman et al, 1966:317, emphasis added).

In South Africa, the common patterns of class, race and gender inequalities are heightened by a historical legacy that has proven hard to shed – though these patterns are changing with new race/class configurations and a widening gap between rich and poor in post-apartheid South Africa. However, these inequalities are also interlaced with the complex issue of language, in that the majority of learners do not learn in their mother tongue.

> *Given that most schools face language issues, **LOLT** needs to be given full consideration in all educational policies and practices in South Africa. Not doing so would give an automatic and unacknowledged advantage to those who are privileged enough to learn and teach in their home languages.*

It is worth restating the extent to which performance in Senior Certificate exams in 2006 follows *socio-economic patterns*, as well as *former education*

department. The schools most likely to achieve excellent pass and endorsement rates are the schools on the privileged end of the spectrum, and these rates reduce with quintile. The mean pass rate in quintile 5 schools is 88% (see Section 3, Table 4), and there are significant differences in results between quintiles 5 and 4 (70% mean), quintiles 4 and 3 (62% mean) and quintile 3 and the bottom two quintiles. There are no significant differences in performance between schools in the poorer communities of quintiles 2 and 1 (whose mean pass rates are 59% and 57%). This shows significant patterns of descending performance by socio-economic status. There are also significant differences in performance between former departments, with the best performing schools being largely former white, Indian and coloured schools, and the worst performing being former homeland schools.

> *The effects of class and race on learner achievement are evident in the performance patterns of their schools. There can be no doubt that the school that learners attend has a significant influence on their chances of achievement. Recognition of this helps to understand – and possibly change – patterns of performance.*

As argued earlier in this Report, there is benefit in re-looking at the institutional map of schooling in South Africa, to give appropriate recognition and value to the schools that constitute the numeric mainstream. To restate: the majority of schools in South Africa – the mainstream – are black schools in relatively poor socio-economic circumstances. At one edge of this mainstream are schools in extremely poor communities. At the other edge are privileged schools, mainly former white schools, which, as the statistics above show, are the best performing schools in the system. They provide a hegemonic norm, but they are not the numeric norm.

> *This challenges us to reformulate popular notions of "the normal school" so that mainstream schools may be valorised for what they are, and what they can do and be. It challenges us to recognise that privileged schools are at the edge, not the centre of the system, and that the conditions they offer are not likely to be available to all. Repositioning the mainstream, and valuing it, is important in finding strategies to achieve equity and quality for all.*

Where communities are poor, have few material resources, and do not speak the language of instruction in their homes, they have few options to supplement the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. Unlike the privileged schools on the margins of the system, even schools in the mainstream that are not necessarily extremely poor, are not in a financial position to employ additional teachers to reduce class sizes or to provide specialised instruction where needed. Even in Schools that Work, classes often do not have full sets of learning materials, or adequate libraries or laboratories, or computers with internet connections. Many remarked on the inadequate psychological and social support services provided for their learners by the Department.

> *Recognising budgetary constraints, it is nonetheless necessary to work steadily for the improvement of the material conditions of the majority of schools, in particular in relation to teaching resources and the provision of special services for learners who need them.*

Many of South Africa's schools – particularly township schools – face particularly difficult circumstances. Many schools deal with violence, gangs and substance abuse on their premises as well as outside. They deal with the effects of HIV/AIDS, which they and their communities find hard to acknowledge. They deal with the effects of poverty and unemployment on their communities. Schools cannot solve these problems themselves. The schools we visited relied on relationships with the police to assist them, as well as local services such as the Departments of Health and Welfare where these existed. They also drew on whatever external support was available, for example through NGOs, donors and businesses. In rural areas, we saw active involvement of SGBs in discipline and protection of learners, but this was not the case in township schools (though our sample does not allow generalisation on this). This is a matter of social capital – the networks of available support and resources. And clearly, the social capital available to different schools to access and to build upon is different.

> *It is important that schools be encouraged in their initiatives to draw support from whatever sources are available, and to build on networks of social capital wherever they can. The sense of*

> *inner agency, and mustering resources to solve problems, should be viewed as a strength in schools.*
>
> *Alongside this, further links between the Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Health and SAPS might be developed to extend support to schools.*

Even so, it is important to acknowledge that schools under very difficult circumstances do not have the adequate resources to meet the challenges of their contexts. Schools need support with the health and nutrition of their learners, in dealing with mourning and grief in communities where people are dying, and in dealing the effects of instability, violence and abuse. Whereas better resourced communities may be able to provide additional supports to their schools, this cannot be taken for granted. In conditions of poverty, school feeding is crucial, to say nothing of the need to care for orphans and vulnerable children. Currently, Department feeding schemes end in primary schools (with a few exceptions), and it is teachers who voluntarily carry this responsibility in secondary schools. The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS means that the schools we visited were able only to guess how many learners or teachers were infected or affected. Under these conditions, in spite of having policies in place, schools could do little more than informally support orphans and children who were obviously vulnerable with food and clothing.

> *From what we saw, we would recommend that school feeding be extended to all school children in poor communities (including those in senior schools). Fuller consideration needs to be given to the care and support of orphans and vulnerable children when schools are not in session.*

To sum up: it is worth remembering that schools in the mainstream – between privilege and extreme poverty – operate in challenging socio-economic conditions. Unless schools in these communities have internal and external resources that they are able to mobilize to engage with the challenges they face (a point we return to later on), they may easily feel like “paraplegics in the Ben Johnson race”, with little expectation of achieving much at all.

> *Under these circumstances, it is **exceptional schools** that are able to perform well – to “simply do the work of ordinary schools”, with principals, teachers and learners focused on a task which they feel competent to achieve.*

What may be done about this overall situation? Pro-poor funding policies, including "no fees" schools, have improved the situation in poorer schools. They have reduced – but not eliminated – unequal state spending on schooling. The equalization of teachers' salaries has been an important equity measure. Much has been achieved in terms of capital refurbishment, though much remains to be done. For the rest (except for the funding formula), the policy dispensation tends to treat all schools as being "the same". The same outcomes are expected from schools in very different circumstances, and this is simply not realistic. Schools are not the same, particularly in terms of social, economic and linguistic conditions. Nor do they appear to be moving towards homogeneity. Under these circumstances, Bourdieu's challenge needs to be faced: that equal treatment of learners from unequal backgrounds is likely to perpetuate inequality, while at the same time giving the appearance of meritocracy. Equal treatment cannot, under such circumstances, bring equal opportunities, let alone equal outcomes.

> *We suggest that under these circumstances, the Department should recognise that if a "one size fits all" approach to policy implementation is applied, the majority of schools will have little chance of moving towards, let alone reaching, the quality of the privileged schools that are the hegemonic but not the numeric norm. Differentiated strategies for policy implementation that recognise the depth of inequality and the extent of poverty and social suffering in school communities need to be devised and put in place. Differentiated policies are also needed to assist different schools to achieve their central goals of teaching and learning. (These are points we return to later.)*

Schools that Work show that *context* does not over-determine how effective schools are, strong though its influence may be. *Human agency* is able to shape social circumstances and change history, and Schools that Work bear witness to this. However, it would be wrong to infer from this that social patterns are easily changed, and that schools should bear responsibility for succeeding against the odds. The weight of history shows otherwise. It shows the exceptional imagination, courage and commitment that human beings bring to bear under the most intolerable of circumstances, and it shows the injustice of blaming them if they cannot.

Having considered how social context may affect schools' ability to achieve their central goals, we turn now to look, we now turn to look in more detail at the dynamics and strategies of Schools that Work.

5.2 Dynamics and strategies of schools that work

In reflecting on the ways in which the schools in this research conducted themselves, four dynamics stand out:

- all of the schools were *focused on their central tasks* of teaching, learning, and management with a sense of purpose, responsibility and commitment; they had strong organisational capacity, including leadership (in various forms) and management; and professionalism was valued;
- all of the schools carried out their tasks with *competence* and *confidence*;
- all had *organisational cultures* or *mindsets* that supported hard work, expected achievement, and acknowledged success;
- all had *strong internal accountability systems* in place, which enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability, particularly in terms of Senior Certificate achievement.

Each of these will be briefly addressed.

5.2.1 A focus on central tasks with purpose, responsibility and commitment

It is interesting to note that many of the schools in this study stressed that they were doing nothing exceptional: they were simply doing their work as principals, teachers and learners. Yet, clearly, if the task were as transparently simple as this, all schools would function well – and the evidence is that they do not. In particular, as South Africa's results on national and international tests show painfully clearly, the teaching and learning in most primary and secondary schools – their central task – is not of sufficient quality to produce good student achievement.

Clearly, the central tasks of teaching and learning in schools, evidenced in good student performance, are not simple to achieve. They depend, as the

effective schools literature shows, on a number of inter-related factors, both inside and outside of schools.

What is striking about Schools that Work is the degree to which the schools cohered around their central task. They defined this task in terms of hard work and achievement, and they structured their time and curriculum coverage to meet this. A focus on their "real work" gave a sense of purpose and motivation that operated in self-sustaining ways (and kept at bay the "psychopolitics" that are always lurking in organisations).

In terms of organisational capacity, all of the schools functioned to support their primary task. Leadership was evident, sometimes in the person of the principal, and sometimes dispersed in SMTs, HODs, or teachers themselves. Moreover, schools operated, often informally, as professional learning communities (see Section 2) in a number of ways:

- Teachers' practice was deprivatised in that their classroom doors were open to the school management, to us as outsiders, and in many cases to other teachers.
- Teachers shared professional expertise within the school, and across schools, where they both gave and took professional assistance.
- Teachers worked collaboratively, though in different ways in each school, to set curriculum goals and monitor student achievement.
- Systems of induction and mentoring were present in many of the schools.
- Teachers took responsibility for their role in student performance.
- In many cases, they extended their care for learners to the provision of food and clothes for orphans and vulnerable children, or those in poverty.

The extra time that teachers spent – unpaid – to ensure that learners were adequately prepared to succeed in the Senior Certificate was evidence of remarkable focus, commitment and sense of responsibility for achieving their purpose. Beyond any call of duty, these teachers took professional pride in the achievements of their learners, their school, and themselves.

The sense of purpose was also palpable among senior learners we spoke to. Certainly, learners were prepared to do extra work, took responsibility for studying, and expected to achieve good results.

The schools' focus on achievement extended to whatever opportunities were available in the external environment – choir competitions, maths and science Olympiads, and sometimes, though rarely, sporting events. These were used to broaden learners' experience and give them a sense of extending themselves against others.

The extraordinary commitment and achievement of these schools cannot be doubted and needs to be commended.

However, there is a lingering question about whether or not the learning experience of these learners was "thinned down" in comparison to their counterparts in privileged schools – a question highlighted for us by the contrast provided by the "outlier" privileged school in the study. Many of the learners we observed were learning from photocopied pages because they did not have textbooks; many learnt science without proper laboratories; they studied languages and humanities without libraries; and they had few extra-mural opportunities to broaden their experiences.

Their achievement is to their immense credit, and should in no way be diminished. The question posed, rather, is whether all learners are, in fact, studying the same curriculum and being prepared equally, through their success in the Senior Certificate exams, for future study. Does passing the Senior Certificate examinations, even with Endorsement, have the same educational value across the system, for well-resourced and poorly-resourced schools?

> *These Schools that Work illustrate the importance of holding a steady focus on the primary task of teaching and learning, and bear witness to what can be achieved through commitment and a sense of responsibility.*

It is important that this commitment and hard work on the part of schools be reciprocated by the Department in the educational experiences it enables these schools to provide. At very least, they should be provided with adequate resources and stable staffing.

5.2.2 Competence and confidence

Another striking feature of these schools was the sense of competence and confidence conveyed by teachers and Grade 12 learners. What is entailed in this?

Certainly, schools need to be competently led and managed. Without clear and consistent organisational patterns, the rhythms of teaching and learning are hard to sustain. Building school organisational capacity is thus an important part of school development. All the schools we visited ran well, though with different forms of leadership and structures of management. Organisational competence gave stability and confidence to members of the school community.

Yet student achievement does not stem primarily from management, governance and leadership, crucial as these are. It stems from the smallest unit of the system, from the hard-to-reach core practices of classroom activities, from the quality of learning in interactions between teachers, learners and materials. And in this, teacher competence plays a crucial role.

The pedagogic relationship is one of authority. Its quality depends crucially on teachers' knowledge of what they are teaching, their assumptions about how learners learn, and their repertoire of pedagogical and assessment practices. Not only must capacity be present; so too must will or motivation. And it goes without saying that student capacity and will also need to be present if they are to participate in this particular relationship of authority.

Not all the learning experiences we saw stood out as out of the ordinary. Nonetheless, teachers were almost all regarded as competent by themselves

and others, and they were certainly able to achieve the external demands of the system as evidenced in the Senior Certificate results of their learners.

> *This research on Schools that Work shows the importance of having competent teachers, and how mentoring and induction and professional communities may be used to build teachers' capacity. The confidence that these schools had in the possibilities of achievement was, we suggest, grounded in teacher competence, albeit supported by school organisational capacity (including leadership) and drive.*
>
> *At every school, teacher quality was raised as a central factor in what made the school work as well as it did.*
>
> *This suggests the importance of teacher pre-service and in-service development as one of the essential conditions for schools to work well and learners to be able to achieve their potential.*

5.2.3 Organisational cultures of achievement

The importance of organisational culture and mindset has been discussed at length earlier, and will be mentioned here in brief.

Suffice it to say that these schools had cultures that supported hard work on the part of learners and teachers. They linked hard work to achievement, and thus were able to take responsibility for their achievements and had a sense of control over their lives. (The presence of this sense of agency – or "locus of control" – was mentioned by the Coleman Report as having a significant influence on disadvantaged students' achievement.)

Continuing, active motivation was viewed as important by principals, who went to great lengths to acknowledge all successes, and even created opportunities for success to be experienced and acknowledged. Success was celebrated as part of the culture of these schools, who expected to achieve. Success was a culture that was kept alive, nurtured, and celebrated. (This may well have been a negative experience for learners who were not achieving, but that possibility lies beyond the scope of this research.)

Success breeds success is one of the powerful messages from Schools that Work.

5.2.4 Strong internal and external accountability

A consistent feature of the schools in this report was that there were strong internal accountability systems in place. The importance of this should not be underestimated. In exploring what this means, the work of Elmore (2004) is useful. Elmore uses a simple definition of performance-based accountability as "systems that hold learners, schools or districts responsible for academic performance …" (2004:90).

As mentioned earlier, a sense of responsibility was evident in the strength of purpose and focus in all of the schools. There were clear expectations that were consistently (albeit differently) monitored in these schools. There was a sense of shared task and of capability to perform the task. These schools knew what constituted the work necessary to achieve good results, and they had systems in place to do the work and monitor it. (And we suspect they had systems to deal with learners who did not perform.) And on the basis of this clear internal accountability, these schools were able to develop strategies to succeed in meeting the external demands of the Senior Certificate.

It is not surprising that for these schools, the monitoring element of IQMS was supported in principle – though they might have found the system cumbersome and time-consuming.

Schools that Work had strong internal accountability systems, which were aligned with the demands of external accountability. And herein, lay the strength of these schools.

It is interesting to note that South Africa's first White Paper on Education and Training recognized the importance of accountability, in stating:

> The restoration of the culture of teaching, learning and management involves the creation of a culture of *accountability*. This means the development of a common purpose or mission among students, teachers, principals and governing bodies, with clear, mutually agreed and understood responsibilities, and lines of cooperation and accountability. (White Paper 1, 1995:22)

How may internal and external accountability be built in schools that do not perform as well as the schools in this study? This question does not have a simple answer.

Elmore's work provides an approach that might be useful in thinking about this issue. Writing in the context of growing external performance-based accountability demands on schools in the US (including high stakes tests), Elmore distinguishes as follows between schools with strong and weak accountability structures:

> Schools with weak internal accountability structures assign causality for their success or failure to forces outside their control: the learners, their families, the community, the "system". Schools with strong internal accountability assign causality for their success or failure to themselves: to the knowledge and skill they bring to their work, to the power of shared values, and to the capacities of their organizations. *The historic absence of clear guidance for schools around issues of performance and accountability has spawned an extensive and resilient culture of passivity, while the practice of improvement requires a culture of coherence and responsibility.* (2004:127, emphasis added)

Elmore argues strongly that "*Internal accountability precedes external accountability and is a precondition for any process of improvement*" (2004:114, original emphasis). He says that:

> Schools do not "succeed" in responding to external cues or pressures unless they have their own internal system for reaching agreement on good practice and for making that agreement evident in organization and pedagogy ….
>
> No externally administered incentive, *whether it be reward or sanction*, will automatically result in the creation of an effective improvement process inside schools and school systems. Nor will any incentive necessarily have a predictable effect across all schools. The effect of incentives is contingent on the capacity of the individual school or school district to receive the message the incentive carries, to translate it into a concrete course of action, and to execute that action ….
>
> Schools with weak internal accountability systems are likely to respond to external incentives in fragmented, incoherent and ineffective ways. Schools with relatively strong internal accountability systems are likely to respond in more effective and coherent ways (2006:114, emphasis added).

To stress the point, rewards and sanctions that are externally administered are not likely to produce results in schools that do not already have internal accountability systems. But this leaves the vexing question of how internal accountability systems come to exist in schools in difficult circumstances.

Elmore helps in this regard by drawing attention to the importance of internal capacity, which he defines "by the degree of successful interaction of learners and teachers around content" (2004:118).

> Accountability systems and incentive structures, no matter how well designed, are only as effective as the capacity of the organization to respond. The purpose of an accountability system is to focus the resources and capacities of an organization towards a particular end. *Accountability systems can't mobilize resources that schools don't have*…. The capacity to improve precedes and shapes schools' responses to the external demands of accountability systems (2004:117, emphasis added).

Again, to stress the point, schools cannot be pressured through internal or external accountability measures to produce results if they do not have the internal capacity to do so. What, then, counts as internal capacity?

Expanding on the notion of *capacity*, Elmore draws on a definition from Cohen, Raudenbush and Ball (2002) who regard capacity as "the knowledge, skill and material resources that are brought to bear on the interaction among learners, teachers and content" (2004:118-9). With these authors, he asserts that the three components of instructional capacity – knowledge, skill and material resources – cannot be treated in isolation from each other. Solutions to the capacity problems of individual schools need to begin with their existing teaching practices and organisational arrangements, to understand how they support or impede what the school is trying to achieve, and to work for change accordingly.

If schools are to be improved, raising capacity is crucial. This means raising the school's ability to engage successfully with its primary task of teaching and learning, and this has to be supported organisationally through leadership and management structures and processes. Following Elmore's logic, change needs to begin with whatever capacity already exists at school level in terms of teaching practices and organisational arrangements. On this basis, capacity may be built through a reciprocal process of responsibility, or, in Elmore's formulation:

> For every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation. Likewise, for every investment you make in my skill and knowledge, I have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate some new increment in performance (2004: 93).

To what extent may "leadership" be viewed as the ingredient that builds internal capacity or as the catalyst in mobilising capacity for school change? This was a point of discussion, with points of agreement and disagreement among members of the Reference Group. The agreement was that some "leadership" existed in all of the schools, even if it was exercised at different levels and in different ways. The concept of "leadership" is much debated and open to many meanings. In this study, leadership was understood as the exercise of influence over others to achieve certain goals (as distinct from management, which has to do with the structures and processes for carrying out key tasks). It is not to be conflated with people who hold formal positional power. And leadership needs always to be understood in terms of the requirements of the context; what is valuable in one context may actually be an impediment in another.

Disagreement centred on whether or not leadership was the main ingredient in mobilizing and sustaining capacity, or whether it was a necessary but not sufficient catalyst for schools to work. Those who supported the former position defined leadership further, as the ability to mobilize people and their capacity for the benefit of the organization and its vision, and to do this by fostering team work and professional learning communities, as well as by developing networks to build the capacity, resources and performance of the organisation and its people. Those who supported the latter position suggested that leaders – like parents – need to be "good enough" (to borrow a term from Winnicott) rather than exceptional, and that leadership is a necessary but not sufficient condition for school change.

Debates on leadership range widely. Jacklin (2007) provides a useful perspective in arguing that long term good leadership develops its own momentum, partly by being built into the system, while bad leadership eventually corrodes the culture of a school. Not reading the external signals

correctly, and thus prioritising tasks that are not externally validated, is one example of where leadership may go wrong. And Christie (2005) is adamant that leadership has its "dark side" and does not always warrant a positive connotation. In fact it is quite possible to lead people astray.

Looking at the research information gleaned about this particular set of Schools that Work, what is evident is a mixed picture on leadership from the position of the principal. In some cases, dynamic individuals saw themselves as role models, motivating others and building teams, and strategically scanning the environment for opportunities. In other cases, principals worked strongly in teams, at times downplaying their own presence to foreground the team. In many cases, we saw a partnership between principals and deputies forming the leadership of the school. In these cases, principals usually assumed the external relations and boundary work of the school, while deputies, in a less visible role, were crucial in the day to day running of the school. Two schools stand out as appearing to have notably weak or undynamic principal leadership; in the one case, "footsoldiers" – strong professional teachers – saw themselves as working quite ably without principal leadership. In the other case, the institutional framing of the school lent it strength. And in both cases, the history of the school was a source of identity that gave it strength.

These schools were also replete with professional teachers who felt competent; responsibility for achievement was assumed by learners as well as staff and management; school cultures supported and rewarded achievement and hard work; school structures and organization worked smoothly; and principals and some of the teachers spoke of being role models. In other words, leadership from the position of the principal is only one component of the capacity dynamic. But leadership in its broadest definition – as dispersed across the organization – is certainly a key dimension in organisational success.

There is clearly no "one-size-fits-all" way to improve school capacity. Differential strategies are necessary, which build on the existing strategies

and organisational practices of schools. Here, it is worth recalling the *Improving Schools* research undertaken by David Hopkins and colleagues (referred to in Section 2), which provides a framework for differential approaches to thinking about school improvement.

> *This research on Schools that Work supports the view that capacity is an essential part of school performance, and that it is a component of the internal accountability that enables the schools to meet the demands of external accountability, manifested in good learner performance.*
>
> *Building the capacity of teachers (their knowledge, skill and use of resources) is a crucial dimension of enabling schools to address their central tasks of teaching and learning. School improvement cannot be achieved unless schools have teacher capacity.*
>
> *Leadership – in different forms and at different levels within schools – is an important dimension of school organisational capacity.*

5.3 Addressing the research questions

5.3.1 How do Schools that Work achieve their results?

The central aim of this research was to explore the circumstances under which Schools that Work were able to achieve good Senior Certificate results, while others in the same situation did not. The research has provided an account of these schools, and an analysis of their dynamics of success. The analysis may be summed up as follows: these schools were focussed on their primary task of teaching and learning with a sense of purpose, responsibility and commitment. They carried out their tasks (teaching and learning, supported effectively by management and leadership) with competence and confidence. Their organisational cultures supported hard work, achievement and success. And their internal accountability structures enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability, evidenced most particularly in Senior Certificate results.

How did these schools come to be as they are? The research was not designed to investigate this, though it provides leads to follow up with further investigation. In particular, in-depth study of Schools that Work in their contexts would be required, and it is likely that this would not be captured simply in a single story.

5.3.2 Are there replicable lessons for other schools?

Here, the answer is equally complex. The Schools that Work, described in this study, would have us believe that they are doing what ordinary schools do – which suggests that others may learn from them and replicate their successes. But if our analysis is correct, these Schools that Work are more exceptional than ordinary. Their focus, commitment in terms of time and effort, and their achievements, *are* exceptional. They are schools that do as much as it takes to meet their goals, as is illustrated in the descriptive accounts of Section 4. And in fact this raises questions about what would be needed to sustain their exceptional efforts.

The Schools that Work exhibit strong inner capacities in terms of teaching and learning, supported by management and leadership, as well as a sense of agency. If schools do not have these capacities, then change will not be a simple matter. As Elmore (2004) suggests, neither external pressure nor incentives can induce schools to mobilise resources if they don't have them. If a critical mass of capacity *is* present, or close to present, then what may be required is a catalyst of some sort to promote agency and set a change process in motion. Change will require working on a school-by-school basis with what capacities do exist in these schools. The task is not simple, but it is not impossible. To paraphrase the words of Raymond Williams (1983), if there are no easy answers, the hard answers are still available, and it is these that we must learn as we challenge seeming inevitabilities and seek practical alternatives in hopeful ways.

Schools that Work show that it is possible for schools in the mainstream of South Africa to achieve, and they stand for optimism, human agency and hope.

And from this basis, it may be possible to take a different angle on "lessons to be learnt" from these schools. Starting from the premise that these are mainstream – not elite – schools that are performing well, with enormous effort, a different set of questions may be: How might Education Departments support these schools so that their good performance is sustainable? How might the example of what these schools achieve be used to stimulate better performance in other schools? Are there possibilities for stimulating a renewed sense of agency, ownership and self-esteem in leadership, teachers, learners, and communities through learning from these schools? And for building (or re-building) capacity?

Given the centrality of recognition and reward in the motivational practices of these schools, and drawing on Elmore's notion of reciprocal responsibility, a targeted improvement strategy might be based on support, incentives and rewards for performance in schools like these.

All of the schools in this study stretched themselves almost beyond their limits in their commitment to achieve success. To assist them to sustain their performance and to take some of the pressure off them, Departments might consider ways of providing them with the specific resources or support they need, in recognition of their efforts. Where schools are performing slightly less well but do have some capacity, a strategy might be to work with them and motivate them with recognition and incentives to encourage them to stretch into better performance. **The aim in doing so would be to value and stabilise the schools that do perform, and incrementally increase their number.** As argued earlier, incentives are unlikely to have much impact on schools that do not have inner capacity and accountability. But for those schools that do have capacity and are performing well – and those in the next tier of performance, that could be assisted to stretch towards better

achievement – incentives and rewards may well work as a way to sustain performance and develop potential further. This would be a strategy targeting schools in the middle to upper levels of performance, operating alongside strategies targeting poorly performing schools.

Though this study was not tasked to consider strategies for poorly performing schools, a couple of points may be made on the basis of the analysis provided here. First, we have argued that capacity is key to improvement, and that inducements and sanctions are unlikely to have much effect on schools that do not have inner capacity. What is not clear is how to build capacity, except by engaging school-by-school to identify and work with what exists. In cases where there is nothing to build upon, severe measures may need to be adopted by Departments. With this in mind, we would suggest a serious and concerted review/evaluation of previous Departmental strategies to see what they have achieved and what can be learnt from them. Further, in-depth investigation of schools that have managed to turn around might yield insights into how to identify and build the capacity, focus, and commitment of management, teachers and learners in other schools.

5.3.3 Policies, from the perspective of schools

One of the aims of the research was to investigate the alignment of Department policies with schools' needs and practices. When asked about Department policies, the range of responses from schools was mixed.

Curriculum and assessment policies

Every school – except the combined schools – expressed deep concerns with the quality of primary school graduates. This was sometimes attributed to primary teachers' implementation of OBE, and also to the progression policies of GET, where learners, it was alleged, were often promoted without being able to demonstrate basic reading, writing and arithmetical skills.

> *So consistent was this message across the schools – and so consistent is it with the results of South Africa's systemic evaluations and its performance on international tests – that we*

> *recommend it be acknowledged by the Department, and that the Department give attention to primary school performance.*

Successful secondary schools made up for what they regarded as a deficit in primary school performance – which they felt impeded their own work. This raises questions about how less successful secondary schools handle the problem.

The onerous nature of portfolios was mentioned as a negative factor. A positive counterpart is the cross-school moderation processes.

Questions were raised about the effects of progression policies in the FET. There are genuine concerns about learners who fail as the new curriculum is being introduced, and about whether there is capacity to deal with their needs.

Though many of the teachers in this study expressed confidence about the new FET curriculum, they also stressed that inservice support for the new curriculum was inadequate. Teachers were concerned about practicalities, such as models of assessment, depth and coverage.

> *Again, the fact that competent teachers were concerned about the levels of inservice support raises questions about the position of the bulk of teachers – and we recommend that the Department act on this.*

Staffing and the teaching profession

All principals mentioned the importance of being able to select and retain good staff. Where teachers are appointed on a temporary basis, this has potentially destabilizing effects on schools. We saw this from the perspective of ambitious principals and SMTs, who were particularly stressed by the possibility that this might bring unsuitable staff into their schools. The effects on less successful schools would presumably be no easier to deal with.

The movement of good staff from schools to District Offices is understandable from the promotional perspective of staff, and the needs of District Offices, but

from the perspective of schools, this may well seem like “poaching” which has detrimental effects on their performance.

Concern about the status of the profession, about the conditions of work of teachers, about comparative levels of remuneration, about attracting good young people into teaching, and about the difficulties of attracting and retaining good staff were voiced in almost every school.

> *Again, the consistency and seriousness of these messages on staffing from highly performing schools means that they are worthy of consideration by the Department.*

Resources

It goes without saying that none of the schools felt they had all the resources they needed from the Department – though the one privileged school in the study did not complain about this.

Resources have been mentioned in early parts of this Section, and will not be repeated at length here. Suffice it to say that in all cases, schools felt that the particular resources they mentioned were important for the quality of learning and administration in the schools. Laboratories and libraries (appropriately staffed) may be more obvious resource needs, given that they speak to the formal curriculum. But it is worth noting that the principal who had no school hall felt that this impeded his ability to convey his presence across the school in a way he felt was essential. The principal who mentioned sporting facilities linked this to the difficulties of channeling adolescent energy positively in township contexts. And the staff who were cramped into a small shared space believed that their joint work was impeded by having no proper staffroom. Where 68 Grade 11 learners sit in desk arrangements of four to fit into a standard classroom, and there is literally no space for the teacher – or anyone else – to move around, it takes enormous concentration on the part of all to stay on task.

> *We suggest that problems of resources be addressed as a matter of priority.*

Support from Districts and Departments

While these schools had good relationships with their District Offices, this does not mean that they felt there was adequate support provided. Most notably, schools felt the inadequacy of subject advice support, and also of psychological services for learners.

That said, they enjoyed being part of clustering activities organized by districts.

(We make no comment about the "Recovery Programme" since we were not able to talk to all schools about this.)

Discipline and authority

This is an area where school experiences are most at variance with departmental policies. A number of the schools were prepared to mention (off the record) that they still used corporal punishment, some because they believed in it, and others because they saw it as the best option available.

In particular, Departmental procedures were viewed as too long and complex to address problems perceived to be immediate, critical, or serious.

Linked to this, was a sense by some of the staff interviewed that learners are very aware of their rights and that teachers seem to be rendered rightless in the face of this. Teachers were concerned about a situation of learner rights without an accompanying sense of responsibility.

> *We suggest that these issues speak to larger problems of authority in schools and communities, and should not be simply brushed aside.*
>
> *If the Department seriously wishes to uphold a practice (as opposed to paper policy) of no corporal punishment, it might be worth working out with schools a set of more practical*

disciplinary measures that they could use, in particular to solve serious problems more speedily.

IQMS

Most of the schools in this study were in favour of monitoring – with some individuals saying they would support an inspectorate. They were not opposed to IQMS, but not strongly supportive either. Those who were not strongly supportive regarded it as time-consuming, its peer-review as not necessarily the most valuable form of staff development, and its link to salary as problematic. However, they agreed with its spirit of accountability.

In overall terms, the schools' responses to policies were mixed, and a number of clear problems were highlighted. What this suggests to us as researchers is the complexity of cultural contexts in which uniform policies from Departments are implemented. Policies, it seems, were not always experienced as they were envisaged, and may have had unintended consequences.

5.3.4 Suggestions for further research

This research has been conducted as a pilot study in a short span of time, and part of its brief was to make suggestions for further research. There are many possibilities, including:

- A fuller account of schooling from the perspective of learners.

- A closer, more in-depth examination of the teaching/learning practices of these schools, as well as their leadership and management strategies and structures, than was possible in this pilot study.

- A similar investigation of other schools along the spectrum of performance, with a view to developing differentiated strategies for raising school capacity.

- An investigation of primary schooling, along similar lines.

SECTION 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

Framing the recommendations

Schools that Work show that it is possible for schools in the mainstream of South Africa's education system to perform at outstanding levels, through extraordinary commitment, competence and accountability.

However, these are exceptional schools in a system that is not characterized by equity and quality. Understanding the nature of the system and its structural – and hence enduring – patterns of performance is a prerequisite for developing strategies for changing these. It is on this basis that the recommendations developed from this study should be read.

Systemic problems of equity and quality

In terms of **equity**, the various sections of this Report have shown the effects of class and race on learner achievement. Certainly, they are evident in patterns of school performance in Senior Certificate exams. There can be no doubt that the school that learners attend has a significant influence on their chances of achievement. Recognising this helps to understand patterns of performance, which are unlikely to change in the long term unless their systemic basis is acknowledged and addressed.

At all levels of the schooling system, there are serious doubts about **quality**, which surfaced in the course of this study as well. The seriousness of this needs to be recognised by all concerned – teachers, trade unions and professional bodies, SGBs as well as department officials at all levels. Unless responsibility for quality improvement is dispersed across stakeholders throughout the system, quality improvement will be difficult to achieve.

One way to approach this might be for national and provincial Departments to work through data on test performances with all who are involved - teachers, trade unions and professional bodies, and SGBs – so that the urgency of the situation is recognized and strategies for change may be developed and implemented.

The "normal, mainstream school" in South Africa

This study starts from the premise that the majority of South African schools – the mainstream – are black schools in relatively poor socio-economic circumstances. The language of teaching and learning in most of these schools is English, which is not the home language of most of their teachers or learners. Schools are often under-resourced in terms of laboratories, computers, sportsfields and opportunities for extra-curricular activities. These mainstream schools need to be valued for what they are, and what they can do and be. It is these schools, not privileged schools "on the edge", that are "the normal school" for most South African learners.

It is mainstream schools whose potential must be developed if South Africa is to meet its goals of equity and quality for all, achieve its human resource development targets, build the next generation of citizens, and do justice to its young people.

Schools that Work are mainstream schools that perform exceptionally well, while operating in the normal, average conditions of schooling in South Africa. Though there are no simple ways to replicate their performance in other schools, these schools show that it is possible to achieve more with mainstream schools. They also suggest that it might be possible to build the numbers of schools that perform well through strategies of support, encouragement and incentives. The basis of this would be "reciprocal responsibility", based on recognition of effort and achievement.

It is on this basis that the following recommendations flowing from this study of Schools that Work are set out.

6.1 Recommendations relating to the Schools that Work

Recommendation 1:

Support, reward and stabilise schools that perform well to assist their sustainability, and incrementally increase their number in a renewed drive for school quality.

- Provincial departments should analyse performance results to identify schools that achieve highly, and those on the verge of high achievement. This should provide the basis for developing different strategies to support these schools.

- The study of Schools that Work shows the importance of recognition and rewards in these schools' motivational practices. This suggests that Departments and Districts should acknowledge and recognise good performance in schools, wherever appropriate. Rewards and incentives should be used to encourage these and other schools whose internal accountability processes indicate that they have the capacity to use them.

Highly performing schools

- Departments and Districts should "ring fence" highly performing schools, and make every effort to sustain them and celebrate their performance. Understanding more about these schools and the conditions under which they achieve is likely to be valuable for Districts in their work with other schools.

- Provincial Departments should work towards providing these schools with resources that are necessary to support their performance (eg laboratories, libraries, staffrooms etc). Provinces and Districts should

attempt to stabilise the staffing of these schools. This should not be seen as simple preferential treatment. Rather, it should be seen as the basis for a relationship of reciprocity and accountability – that schools be appreciated and rewarded for what they have worked to achieve.

- These schools should also be targeted by national Department strategies that support schools, such as Dinaledi.

- None of these strategies should be seen as being in competition with strategies for resourcing and supporting poor schools, or poorly performing schools. Instead, they should be viewed as complementary strategies to work across the range of different schools.

Schools on the verge of high performance

- Departments and Districts should identify and work with schools on the verge of high performance, with the goal of improving their performance.

- Incentives for improvement should be offered to these schools in terms of resources, to build reciprocal accountability. Reward and recognition should be provided for each step achieved towards improvement.

- Departments and Districts should work incrementally towards the goal of quality improvement with all schools that have sufficient capacity to engage with a strategy of rewards and incentives.

- This strategy for school improvement should operate alongside other strategies targeting school improvement. It should be seen as recognition for hard work and achievement, as a form of reciprocity, not as a form of favouritism. And recognition and acknowledgement should be given to *all* schools that improve.

6.2 Recommendations on teaching, the teaching profession and teacher recruitment and retention

Background comments

This research on Schools that Work shows that an essential part of school performance is capacity, defined in terms of competence in teaching and learning, supported by competent organisational structures, including management and leadership. Capacity, and its mobilisation, are part of the internal accountability that enables the schools to meet the demands of external accountability, manifested in good learner performance.

All schools spoke of the importance of good teachers in school performance. This suggests the importance of good pre-service and in-service teacher development to build teacher capacity. School improvement cannot be achieved unless schools have this form of capacity.

Recruitment and retention of quality teachers – particularly in the current difficulties facing the profession – was a concern for the leadership of *all* of the schools in the study.

Participants in this study pointed to a crisis in the teaching profession in South Africa, which they related to low salaries and status, and increasingly difficult classroom conditions. All schools highlighted the difficulties of attracting good new entrants to the profession and retaining good young teachers.

Again, the consistency and seriousness of these messages on staffing – the importance of stability, of selection, the status of the profession, and attracting and retaining good staff and good young people into teaching – coming from highly performing schools, means that they are worthy of consideration by the National and Provincial Departments of Education.

The very fact that some of these matters are being addressed by the Department of Education, and that there are National initiatives have been taken, suggests the need for them to be communicated more directly to

teachers. For example, the proposed Occupational Specific Dispensation for teachers may go a long way to relieving some of the concerns of teachers, but it is not well communicated to teachers, who often receive incomplete information via the media or through Union structures.

Recommendation 2:

Building the capacity of teachers, both through pre-service preparation and in-service development, should be recognised as essential for quality schooling.

National and provincial departments, together with Higher Education Institutions, should commit themselves to taking active steps to ensure the provision of high quality pre- and in-service teacher education. All measures possible should be taken to enhance the status of the profession and attract good new entrants.

Teacher supply and deployment

- The National Department should investigate the effects of the closure of colleges of education and their incorporation into higher education on teacher supply. In particular, the supply of mother tongue foundation phase teachers needs to be investigated.

- The employment of *new* un- and under-qualified teachers by provinces raises questions about whether qualification structures (such as the NPDE) are appropriate for new recruits into the profession and this should be investigated by the National Department. It is possible that a new qualification structure might need to be considered.

- The structural location of teacher education within the National Department should be given further consideration, given that teacher education is now provided by HEIs. Teacher education should be given the strongest possible support within the Department and placed where it has the greatest potential for leverage to enhance teacher education and the teaching profession.

- Given the initial positive reception of Fundza Lushaka, the National Department should monitor the placement of new graduates into good rural schools (such as Schools that Work), so that they are given good mentoring. The bursary system should be extended further in order to attract more good candidates into teaching.

- As a start, we recommend that successful learners from Schools that Work should be actively recruited with bursaries from Fundza Lushaka to study teaching (even if this is not their first choice of profession). These learners would have the experience of a well-functioning school to draw on.

- Provincial Departments should ensure the permanent appointment of teachers, to bring stability to schools and teachers, and to ensure that teachers receive proper benefits and remuneration.

Teacher education programmes

- Teacher education programmes need to be focused on the actual conditions in mainstream schools, including Language of Learning and Teaching. Content knowledge, knowledge of how students learn, and knowledge of a range of teaching practices needs to be included in curricula of preservice and inservice education. Skills in second language teaching need to be built for all subject teachers, including mathematics and sciences. The National Department and its quality assurance and accreditation structures need to play an active role in ensuring that *all* teacher education programmes are well delivered and of high quality.

Inservice support

- Good inservice support should be provided on curriculum, and particularly new FET curriculum. Given that the quality of inservice support depends on providers, they should be monitored and evaluated. International research on inservice provision shows that it is most effective where it is

directed towards teacher practice. On this basis, we recommend that inservice support on the NCS should be in the form of exemplars of good practice, address teacher concerns about coverage and depth and provide practical examples of assessment strategies and model exams. This form of practice-based inservice is likely to be more valuable that discussions *about* the curriculum.

The status of the teaching profession

- Moves to improve the salaries and benefits of teachers are to be welcomed. The remuneration of teachers should be monitored as part of a continuing commitment to ensuring equitable conditions in the profession. Unions as well as the Departments need to ensure that initiatives to improve conditions are communicated to teachers.

- No opportunity should be lost by Education Departments to give recognition to the importance of the profession and to improve its conditions.

- As much positive information about the profession as possible should be made available through publicity campaigns.

6.3 Recommendations addressing the curriculum and assessment

Background comments

A consistent message from Schools that Work was their concern about the quality of primary school graduates. This message is consistent with the results of South Africa's systemic evaluations and its performance on international tests. It would appear that the wide and shallow approach of current primary education is not achieving the basic skills for learning. We recommend that Education Departments address the situation in primary schools – particularly their ability to produce learners who can read and write and are numerate – and should be seen to be addressing this.

Recommendation 3:

Urgent attention needs to be given by all Departments to the functioning of primary schools. The teaching of Reading, Writing and Numeracy should be seen as the essential task of primary schooling. Achieving competence in these areas should be included as part of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria of all other subjects. The importance of Language of Learning and Teaching needs to be given serious consideration in all matters of curriculum and assessment.

- We recommend that consideration be given to providing an approved set of text books for all schools in the compulsory subjects initially, and that this be progressively expanded to all subjects and phases of the system.

- Alongside textbooks, we recommend that schools be provided with (or assisted to develop) additional Learning and Teaching Support Materials. This might include, for example, a file with compiled tests, work charts, questionnaires and multiple choice questions for each subject at each grade.

6.4 Recommendations on streamlining administrative requirements

Background comments

The message from the Department to maximise the use of available time for teaching and learning is sometimes undermined by administrative requirements imposed by the Department. In this study, examples emerged where schools and teachers were supportive of accountability requirements in principle, but perceived particular policies and their implementation as unnecessarily time-consuming and administratively burdensome (eg IQMS and portfolio assessment). Policy-makers would do well to address this seriously, so that implementation strategies are developed which do not undermine the policy intent.

Recommendation 4:
The Department should engage with District officials and with Schools that Work to establish how practices for meeting reporting and external accountability requirements can be made more effective.

6.5 Recommendations addressing the conditions of poverty that schools operate in

The majority of mainstream schools in South Africa operate under conditions of poverty (although to varying extents). Many operate in communities of high unemployment, and they deal with the effects of violence, substance abuse, and HIV/AIDS. Under these conditions, schools need whatever support is possible so that they are able to carry out their primary tasks of learning and teaching and achieve good performance.

Resources

Background comment

While "resources do not teach", and there is much evidence of under-used resources in South African schools, it is important to recognize that for schools that are focused and achieving well in teaching and learning, resource constraints may seriously hamper performance.

While basic resources, such as textbooks and toilets, are the right of every school, we recommend that the Department consider ways of targeting resources towards highly performing schools, for example through a reward-for-achievement system, or partnerships with the private sector. This may also act as an incentive for other schools to perform better.

Recommendation 5:

Resources for schools should be addressed as a matter of priority, and Provincial Departments should spend more of their allocated funding on improving the infrastructure of schools.

Recommendation 6:

The provision of additional psychological and social welfare support should be a high priority for schools in difficult circumstances – most notably, township schools. Provinces should increase specialist support services, and ensure that they are available in all districts.

Social capital

Background comment

Schools in the mainstream handle difficult circumstances, and cannot solve their problems alone. All Schools that Work spoke of the support they drew from outside – be it chiefs and governing bodies, NGOs, or the Police. It is important that schools be encouraged in their initiatives to build networks of support and to draw support from whatever sources are available.

The sense of inner agency, and mustering resources to solve problems, should be viewed as a strength in schools, and should be encouraged.

At the same time, structural networks should be established with other Departments and agencies to support schools.

Recommendation 7:

Schools should be encouraged to build their own networks of support, as part of their capacity to address the problems they face. Alongside this, further links between the Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Health and SAPS should be developed to extend support to schools. "Full service schools" could be a positive part of community development.

Orphans and vulnerable children

Background comment

Schools that Work, particularly in townships and rural areas, assisted learners with food and clothing, often on an informal basis, and many spoke of the

importance of school feeding in the lives of these children. Clearly, these are problems faced by all schools in similar communities.

For orphans and vulnerable children in particular, schools often serve as informal nodes of care in the absence of other social services. This role needs to be recognized and attended to, particularly in conjunction with other departments.

Recommendation 8:

Schools need to be supported as nodes of care for orphans and vulnerable children. Fuller consideration needs to be given to the care and support of these children, as well as *all* children in poverty. School feeding should be extended to cover secondary schools as well, and provision should be made for feeding when schools are not in session.

Discipline and authority

Background comment

Many Schools that Work spoke of difficulties with discipline, and a culture of rights among students which undermined teachers and was not accompanied by a culture of responsibility. Some also spoke of difficulties stemming from the breakdown of authority in families and communities.

We suggest that “discipline issues” speak to larger problems of authority in schools and communities, and should not be simply brushed aside.

Recommendation 9:

Schools need assistance in dealing with discipline, and disciplinary procedures within Departments need to be handled with greater speed and efficacy.

Pathways for learners

Background comment

Learners in poor communities may achieve well in Senior Certificate exams, but be unsure what to do next, or unable to find resources to study further.

Recommendation 10:

Departments should give attention to ways of developing pathways for learners who pass the Senior Certificate in schools in poor communities, including rural and remote communities, so that talent is not lost to the system because of inadequate networks of communication.

6.5 Launching a network of Schools that Work

Recommendation 11

Principals who participated in this research on Schools that Work should be brought together to discuss their hopes and achievements with the Minister of Education. We recommend that they be networked to each other to constitute an informal professional community – the first of many communities of Schools that Work.

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