



Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

Report on the Assessment of Government Evaluations

Evaluation Title:	The State of Literacy Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase: National Report 2012
Evaluation Number:	401
Evaluation Completion Date:	02 May 2013
Period of Evaluation:	May 2012 to 2 May 2013 (1 year)
Submitted:	06 December 2013 by Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel
Approved:	06 December 2013 by Mike Leslie

Evaluation Details

Evaluation Title:	The State of Literacy Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase: National Report 2012
Evaluation Number:	401
Evaluation Completion Date:	02 May 2013
Created:	23 October 2013 by Mike Leslie
Submitted:	06 December 2013 by Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel
Approved:	06 December 2013 by Mike Leslie
Period of Evaluation:	May 2012 to 2 May 2013 (1 year)
Known Cost:	R 17,000,000.00
Known Cost Type:	Estimate
Initiated By:	Department of Education
Initiated By Internal:	Yes
Undertaken By:	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
Undertaken By Internal:	No

Assessors

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Assessment Documents

Document Name:	Document Type:	Added By:	Added On:
State of Literacy 2012 NEEDU national report_final.pdf	Evaluation report	Mike Leslie	23 October 2013
OCSBE Business Case 16Oct2013.docx	Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
HANDBOOK FOR THE EVALUATION OF SCHOOLS_FINAL.docx	The proposal selected to conduct the evaluation	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
Presentations of NEEDU National Report 2012.docx	Presentations of evaluation findings and recommendations	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
national report_final.pdf	Evaluation report	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
KZN_Impressions of School.docx	Assessment tools	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
KZN_Principal interview.docx	Assessment tools	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
KZN_School resources and systems.docx	Assessment tools	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
KZN_SGB interview.docx	Assessment tools	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
KZN_SMT Interview.docx	Assessment tools	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013
KZN_Teacher Interview.docx	Assessment tools	Wilma Wessels-Ziervogel	29 November 2013

Quality Assessment Summary

This evaluation received an overall score of 3.82. Follow up, use and learning phase received the highest score (4.29), and other phases scored between “satisfactory” and “good”. In terms of overarching considerations, Co-ordination and alignment received a score of 4.87, while capacity development and partnership approach scored lowest (2.92 and 2.94 respectively).

The lack of participation of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the evaluation process was a decision taken by the Department to encourage the autonomy of the evaluator, and ensure the credibility of evaluation findings. Despite the lack of involvement by the DBE the utilisation of evaluation findings have been a key strength of this evaluation. Some questions were however raised regarding the appropriateness of the research design, and this may have been avoided had consultation taken place.

Of all the evaluation phases, the planning and implementation phases received the lowest scores (each 3.69). This was mainly due to the lack of participation (partnership approach) and capacity development of the DBE. This needs to be understood within the context that the nature of the participation was determined by the Department as indicated above.

The reporting phase received a score of 3.76. The evaluation report was well written on the whole as the content was accessible and conclusions were well constructed. The structure of the initial sections in the report (introduction, methods, sample, etc.) could have been more logical and comprehensive. Information relating to the research design, sampling methodology, data analysis methods, limitations and ethics were omitted and this weakened the report. Using a more sophisticated software package would also have strengthened and deepened the data analysis and improved the robustness of the findings.

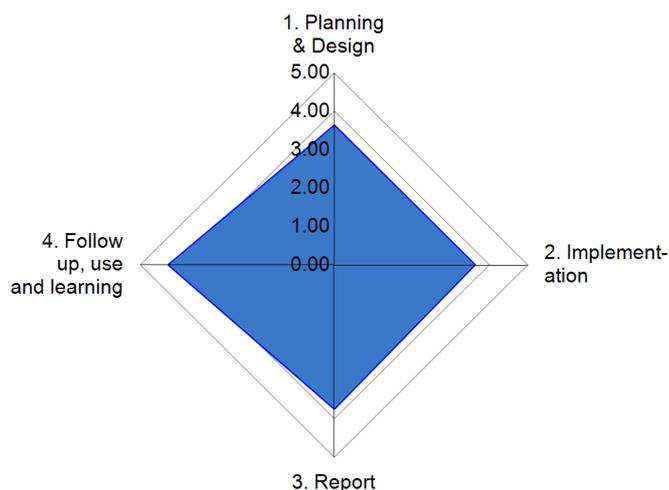
Co-ordination and alignment received a high score of 4.87 due to content and processes being well aligned to legislation, policy and literature.

Quality Assessment Scores

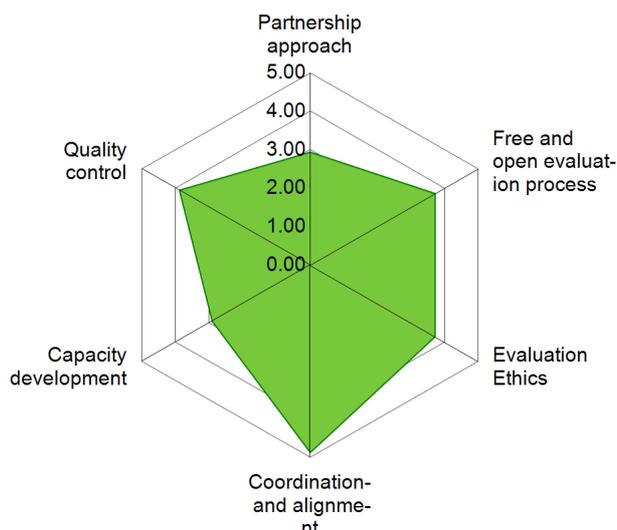
Phase of Evaluation	Score
1. Planning & Design	3.64
2. Implementation	3.64
3. Report	3.76
4. Follow-up, use and learning	4.29
Total	3.82

Overarching Consideration	Score
Partnership approach	2.94
Free and open evaluation process	3.74
Evaluation Ethics	3.72
Coordination and alignment	4.87
Capacity development	2.92
Quality control	3.89
Total	3.82

Scores: Phases of Evaluation



Scores: Overarching Considerations



Phase of Evaluation	Area of Evaluation	Score
1. Planning & Design	1.1. Quality of the TOR	3.63
1. Planning & Design	1.2. Adequacy of resourcing	3.09
1. Planning & Design	1.3. Alignment to policy context and background literature	5.00
1. Planning & Design	1.4. Appropriateness of the evaluation design and methodology	3.39
1. Planning & Design	1.5. Project management (Planning phase)	5.00
2. Implementation	2.1. Evaluation ethics and independence	4.27
2. Implementation	2.2. Participation and M&E skills development	2.30
2. Implementation	2.3. Methodological integrity	3.88
2. Implementation	2.4. Project management (Implementation phase)	4.00
3. Report	3.1. Completeness of reporting structure	3.63
3. Report	3.2. Accessibility of content	3.73
3. Report	3.3. Robustness of findings	3.64
3. Report	3.4. Strength of conclusions	4.07
3. Report	3.5. Suitability of recommendations	3.62
3. Report	3.6. Consideration of reporting risks and ethical implications	3.85
3. Report	3.7. Project management (Reporting phase)	5.00
4. Follow-up, use and learning	4.1. Resource utilisation	4.00
4. Follow-up, use and learning	4.2. Evaluation use	4.37
Total	Total	3.82

1. Planning & Design

1.1. Quality of the TOR

Standard: 1.1.1. The evaluation was guided by a well-structured and complete TOR or a well-structured and complete internal evaluation proposal

Comment and Analysis: The evaluation was based on a "Business Case and Business Plan for the establishment of the Office of Standards and Compliance for Basic Education" (currently known as NEEDU, i.e. the Service Provider) which guides all of NEEDU's work. This generic document acted as the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. The ToR was not prescriptive in the methodology section as data collection, sampling and analysis methods to be used were not detailed (the ToR indicated that approach and methods used should be "evidence based"). A "Hand book for the evaluation of schools" acted as the NEEDU "proposal" guiding the evaluation process and this provided more detail on sampling, data collection and analysis processes to be undertaken.

Rating: 4

Standard: 1.1.2. The purpose of the evaluation stated in the TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) was clear and explicit

Comment and Analysis: The purpose of all evaluations conducted by NEEDU was stipulated in the ToR and was felt by the service provider to be clear .

Rating: 4

Standard: 1.1.3. The evaluation questions in the TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) were clearly stated and appropriate for addressing the evaluation purpose

Comment and Analysis: Evaluation questions were not detailed in the ToR. The objectives of the evaluation were rather stated under two sections titled "functions" which spoke to what was to be evaluated by NEEDU at a higher level.

Rating: 2

Standard: 1.1.4. The approach and type of evaluation was suited to the purpose and scope of the evaluation TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal)

Comment and Analysis: The approach and type of evaluation was well suited for the purpose of the evaluation.

Rating: 4

Standard: 1.1.5. The TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) identified the intended users of the evaluation and their information needs

Comment and Analysis: It was made explicit in the ToR that the key user of the report is the Minister of Basic Education who would table recommendations in parliament.

Rating: 5

Standard:	1.1.6. Key stakeholders were involved in the scoping of the TOR and choosing the purpose of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	Key stakeholders, including the Minister of Basic Education, were involved in scoping the role of NEEDU, and in so doing also indirectly the purpose of the evaluation. However, there was little further involvement of the DBE in scoping of this specific evaluation, which was intentionally done to ensure objectivity. This was however mentioned as a limitation by one interviewee.
Rating:	3

1.2. Adequacy of resourcing

Standard: 1.2.1. The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of time allocated

Comment and Analysis: The evaluation team had allocated one year to conducting the evaluation. This was seen as being mostly sufficient, although due to a small team contracted for this large-scale evaluation, team members were somewhat pressurized.

Rating: 4

Standard: 1.2.2. The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of original budget

Comment and Analysis: The evaluation was considered adequately financed. Where additional resources were required, the DBE was flexible enough to accommodate this.

Rating: 3

Standard: 1.2.3. The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of staffing and skills sets

Comment and Analysis: Since the unit was not properly established, HR and finance staff from the Department of Basic Education supported the evaluation. The evaluation required a bigger team to share the travelling responsibility. Staff, who were mostly school principals and district officials, were also not adequately skilled for conducting evaluation research, and did not have the necessary writing skills. As a result, 6 free-lance researchers were contracted to assist with writing and editing of documents. Having staff who had experience in the education sector was however also an advantage for this evaluation.

Rating: 3

Standard: 1.2.4. Where appropriate, the evaluation planned to incorporate an element of capacity building of partners/staff responsible for the evaluand

Comment and Analysis: No capacity development was planned.

Rating: 1

1.3. Alignment to policy context and background literature

Standard: 1.3.1. There was evidence that a review of the relevant policy and programme environments had been conducted and used in planning the research

Comment and Analysis: The research was closely linked to the evaluator's/NEEDUs legislative mandate and this was articulated in the report as well as supporting documents. The timing of the evaluation was also strategic in that it followed the implementation of the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The complexity of the education system across different environments was considered in the scoping of the research and deciding what should be the focus this and future evaluations.

Rating: 5

Standard: 1.3.2. There was evidence of a review of appropriate literature having been conducted and used in planning the research

Comment and Analysis: Appropriate literature was used to define particularly what was to be evaluated and how it was to be evaluated. Themes explored in the evaluation were clearly informed by literature reviewed (for example, theory on instructional leadership was defined and there was a clear link between this concept and the evaluation questions). The evaluation also borrowed its methodology from a previous national study ("Creating Effective Schools: A Report of South Africa's National School Effectiveness Study") where the method was tried and tested.

Rating: 5

1.4. Appropriateness of the evaluation design and methodology

Standard: 1.4.1. There was explicit reference to the intervention logic or the theory of change of the evaluand in the planning of the evaluation

Comment and Analysis: The intervention logic is somewhat clear in the ToR which articulates the vision for the DBE as per the National Development Plan: Vision for 2013. Here the characteristics of a quality schooling system are noted, but these have not been linked to expected impact for children, or to the specific activities executed by the DBE to influence the expected results.

Rating: 3

Standard: 1.4.2. Key stakeholders were consulted on the design and methodology of the evaluation

Comment and Analysis: Key stakeholders were not consulted on the evaluation design and methodology as this was considered a more technical issue. The department preferred that the NEEDU have full autonomy in the evaluation design and process.

Rating: 1

Standard: 1.4.3. The planned methodology was appropriate to the questions being asked

Comment and Analysis: The methodology combined observation, assessment of workbooks, analysis of secondary data (ANA tests) and documents, and semi-structured interviews. Observations were made of elements related instructional leadership, school culture and performance of learners (e.g. reading). Learners books were examined to assess the quality of writing. Secondary data and documents were analysed to provide input on instructional leadership (e.g. attendance registers), assessment of teacher knowledge (SAQMEC III) and utilisation of monitoring mechanisms (e.g. ANA Tests) put in place. Lastly semi-structured interviews were conducted at all levels of the school ecological system and across almost all indicators assessed. This allowed for triangulation of methods and data sources, and was appropriate for answering the evaluation questions.

Rating: 5

Standard: 1.4.4. Sampling was appropriate and adequate given focus and purpose of evaluation

Comment and Analysis: Sample was comprehensive and included key role players on national, provincial, district and school levels. The evaluator felt that the exclusion of a key teachers union (SACTU) was an omission, although there were attempts to include them. Interviewees mention that the lack of a representative sample was a limitation, and this was also acknowledged in the report. The sampling methodology was furthermore appropriate.

Rating: 4

Standard: 1.4.5. There was a planned process for using the findings of the evaluation

Comment and Analysis: The utilisation of the evaluation findings is facilitated through the NEEDU Bill which states that the Minister of DBE is obligated to consider the reports and recommendations made by NEEDU. This was planned to be tabled at the Council of Education Ministers, and so there was a plan for utilising the findings at a very strategic level. There was no further plan for the utilisation of findings.

Rating: 4

1.5. Project management (Planning phase)

Standard: 1.5.1. The inception phase was used to develop a common agreement on how the evaluation would be implemented

Comment and Analysis: The DBE and the Service Provider agreed that the evaluation process should be conducted as independently by the Service Provider as possible.

Rating: 5

2. Implementation

2.1. Evaluation ethics and independence

Standard: 2.1.1. Where data was gathered in contexts where ethical sensitivity is high, appropriate clearance was achieved through an ethics review board; e.g. in evaluation involving minors, institutions where access usually requires ethical or bureaucratic clearance, and situations where assurances of confidentiality was offered to participants

Comment and Analysis: The necessary ethics were adhered to, particularly around consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical clearance was not obtained, and may have been necessary since children were being observed.

Rating: 3

Standard: 2.1.2. Where external, the evaluation team was able to work freely without significant interference

Comment and Analysis: Evaluation team worked very independently and were encouraged by the evaluand to do so, despite attempts to consult and get input from DBE.

Rating: 5

Standard: 2.1.3. The evaluation team was impartial and there was no evidence of conflict of interest

Comment and Analysis: The evaluation team was impartial, and conflict of interest was not evident.

Rating: 5

2.2. Participation and M&E skills development

Standard: 2.2.1. Key stakeholders were consulted through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement

Comment and Analysis: No formal structure was set up to guide the evaluation process. The Department encouraged total autonomy of the evaluator and did not want to be consulted. Some input was however provided on instruments by the M&E unit. The draft report was reportedly sent to provinces for comment, although none of the interviewees at national level received report for comment.

Rating: 2

Standard: 2.2.2. Where appropriate, an element of capacity building of partners responsible for the evaluand was incorporated into the evaluation process

Comment and Analysis: No capacity building was conducted, except informally through presentations conducted and explanations provided on the methodology and sampling.

Rating: 1

Standard:	2.2.3. Where appropriate, the evaluation team incorporated an element of skills development amongst the evaluators (e.g. students, interns, recent graduates, etc)
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation team has periodic training sessions (biannually during schools holidays when fieldwork cannot be conducted). Training sessions are conducted over 4-5 days and are linked to performance appraisals of staff members and the evaluation focus for the next period. The purpose of this is to develop the skills gaps for staff (as identified in performance appraisal) and also develop their capacity to conduct the evaluation over the next period.
Rating:	5

Standard:	2.2.4. Peer review of the agreed evaluation design and methodology occurred prior to undertaking data collection
Comment and Analysis:	Although the evaluation methodology built on a previous national research study conducted, and a peer review of the evaluation design and methodology is currently underway, this was not undertaken prior to data collection.
Rating:	2

2.3. Methodological integrity

Standard:	2.3.1. The methods employed in the process of the evaluation were consistent with those planned
Comment and Analysis:	Methods were implemented as planned, although the DBE was flexible in allowing methods to be determined by the evaluator.
Rating:	4

Standard:	2.3.2. A pilot of data collection instrumentation occurred prior to undertaking data collection
Comment and Analysis:	Instruments had previously been used (and thus tested) in the National Schools Effectiveness Study (Taylor and Taylor). However instruments were also refined and piloted in 10 urban schools for this evaluation.
Rating:	4

Standard:	2.3.3. Data collection was not compromised by fieldwork-level problems or unplanned diversions from original intentions
Comment and Analysis:	Fieldwork problems were only encountered in one school where the union denied access to the schools. Furthermore fieldwork level problems were not encountered. This was attributed to the fact that the National, Provincial and District DBE and schools were all supportive of the evaluation process.
Rating:	5

Standard: 2.3.4. Forms of data gathering were appropriate given the scope of evaluation

Comment and Analysis: Data gathering was quite comprehensive as it covered National, Provincial, District and School Levels, thus allowing for good triangulation. Observations, semi-structured interviews (collecting both qualitative and quantitative data), documents and secondary data were used for data collection which is deemed appropriate for the more qualitative nature of this evaluation.

Rating: 5

Standard: 2.3.5. The data analysis approach and methods were appropriate and sufficient given the purposes of the evaluation

Comment and Analysis: The variables analysed were appropriate for the purpose of the evaluation. Xcel was used as a tool for data analysis, which was not sufficient to allow for more meaningful statistical analysis of the data.

Rating: 3

Standard: 2.3.6. Key stakeholders were significantly engaged as part of the methodology

Comment and Analysis: Data gathering was quite comprehensive as it covered officials at National, Provincial, District and School Levels. Semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted at all these levels. Furthermore different levels of stakeholders were engaged at each of the levels of the school ecology: at provincial level interviews were conducted with the Head of Department, Chief Directors and Directors for Curriculum and District Management; at district level interviews were conducted at similar levels as for the provincial department; at school level the school management team (e.g. Principal, Deputy Principal, HoD for Foundation and Intermediate Phases, SGB chairperson) and teachers were interviewed.

Rating: 5

Standard: 2.3.7. The methodology included engaging beneficiaries appropriately as a key source of data and information

Comment and Analysis: Beneficiaries (i.e. children) were passively engaged through observation and assessment of learning materials. Adopting a child rights-based approach (with a focus on the right to participation in research) and including reflections of children, in an age appropriate way, about their learning experience (e.g. the effect of language barriers, reading culture, time management, etc.) would have enriched the data.

Rating: 2

2.4. Project management (Implementation phase)

Standard: 2.4.1. The evaluation was conducted without significant shifts to scheduled project milestones and timeframes

Comment and Analysis: The evaluation was completed with no significant shifts in timeframes/milestones. Specified time frames for the evaluation were no imposed by the DBE through, and so there was flexibility in this regard.

Rating: 4

3. Report

3.1. Completeness of reporting structure

Standard: 3.1.1. Executive summary captures key components of the report appropriately

Comment and Analysis: No executive summary was included.

Rating: 1

Standard: 3.1.2. The context of the development intervention is explicit and presented as relevant to the evaluation

Comment and Analysis: The development intervention (i.e. education) is explicit and the evaluation was presented against the backdrop of the challenges faced in the education sector. Each chapter in the findings section started by outlining the problem faced or underlying theory of change relevant to that specific chapter which gave the reader good sense of the context before exploring the findings.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.1.3. There is a clear rationale for the evaluation questions

Comment and Analysis: The rationale for evaluation questions were clearly linked to the overall question of quality of education. The evaluation addressed a wide scope of questions addressing the issues of quality of education in a systemic way; this was done through looking at the effectiveness of governance structures/processes (at school, district, provincial and national levels) in supporting quality education, quality of curriculum delivery and learning outcomes.

Rating: 4

Standard: 3.1.4. The scope or focus of the evaluation is apparent in the report

Comment and Analysis: The scope of the evaluation, in terms of key issues to be included and excluded in the evaluation as well as type of schools and geographical coverage of the study were clearly articulated and justified.

Rating: 4

Standard: 3.1.5. A detailed methodology is outlined in the relevant section of the report to the point that a reader can understand the data collection, analysis and interpretation approaches used

Comment and Analysis: The methodology for data collection was quite detailed, however key issues related to the evaluation design, specifically whether a qualitative, quantitative or mixed method design was used, as well as sampling methodology used, was omitted (even though these could somewhat be devised from reading the report and instruments). Also the methods used for data analysis and interpretation were not covered in the report.

Rating: 2

Standard: 3.1.6. Acknowledgement of limitations of all aspects of the methodology and findings are clearly and succinctly articulated

Comment and Analysis: The only limitation acknowledged was related to the generalisability of the data. No other limitations, such as the limitations of using announced visits and the effects this may have had on participant bias, were included.

Rating: 3

Standard: 3.1.7. Key findings are presented in a clear way; they are made distinct from uncertain or speculative findings; and unused data is not presented in the body of the report

Comment and Analysis: The key findings were clear in the report. Clearly defining concepts, contextualising the theory of change and providing benchmarks (where available and necessary) in the introduction to the chapter provided a good background against which to understand and assess the findings that followed in the report. Under subsections, key findings were succinctly reported upfront and usually focussed more quantitative data initially and then qualitative data. This was then followed by interpretation of the data and unpacking of the complexity of the issue being discussed (e.g. taking into consideration variances within the data, and contextual issues) and considering how the issue impacts on the quality of education. Where necessary uncertain/speculative findings were acknowledged and provided with caution. Limitations were often reiterated at various points in the report to ensure that the reader interprets findings with caution. Where assessment instruments were used (e.g. EGRA test) the limitations of these were provided upfront in the relevant section.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.1.8. Conclusions and recommendations are clear and succinctly articulated

Comment and Analysis: Conclusions were clear and recommendations pointed and contextualised within the findings.

Rating: 5

3.2. Accessibility of content

Standard: 3.2.1. The final evaluation report is user-friendly, written in accessible language and its content follows a clear logic

Comment and Analysis: The report was very detailed, generally well written and reader-friendly. The report could however have benefited from a more logical flow and clearer headings particularly in the sections covering the background and evaluation methodology. For example, Evaluation Objectives, Key Evaluation Questions and Indicators for Assessment, should have been presented together and given a separate header - these issues were very dispersed in the introduction to the report. The chapter on Theoretical considerations could have been covered more upfront or as part of a section on "Evaluation Objectives, Questions and Indicators Section" as it contextualises what is to be evaluated, as opposed to after the scoping of the evaluation (contained in the section on "Coverage" and "Focus"). Also the sample of individuals included in the study should not have been contained under the header "Instruments Developed". Some important headings such as "Sample" and "Limitations" were omitted, and in other instances less ambiguous headings would have made reading easier, e.g. not "Focus", but rather "Focus of the evaluation or NEEDU".

Rating: 3

Standard: 3.2.2. Quality of writing and presentation is adequate for publication including: adequate layout and consistent formatting; complete sentences and no widespread grammatical or typographical errors; consistency of style and writing conventions (e.g. tense, perspective (first person, third person); levels of formality; references complete and consistent with cited references in reference list and vice versa; etc.

Comment and Analysis: The report was detailed, well written and edited. The report contained detailed text, diagrammes and graphs to illustrate findings. A list of references were included at the end.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.2.3. Appropriate conventions are used in presentation of data (e.g. use of appropriate statistical language; reporting of p-values where appropriate; not reporting statistically insignificant findings as significant; clarifying disaggregation categories in constructing percentages; not using quantitative language in reporting qualitative data, etc.)

Comment and Analysis: Generally the report used appropriate conventions to present the data and how findings/data was calculated was made explicit. In one part of the report (Time management under section 3.1), however, analysis was not clear. The author "estimates that the timetable is followed 90% of the time in about 70% of schools...time management is a significant problem in about 30% of schools...". How these percentages are calculated is not clear from the report and the meaning of the word "significant" was not clear (i.e. whether it meant statistically significant or just generally).

Rating: 3

Standard: 3.2.4. The use of figures and tables is such that it supports communication and comprehension of results; and data reported in figures and tables are readily discernible and useful to a reader familiar with data presentation conventions

Comment and Analysis: Figures, diagrams, tables and illustrations were used in the report, and made reading interesting. Clearer labels, displaying percentages from high to low, in some instances would have made figures/tables easier to read.

Rating: 4

3.3. Robustness of findings

Standard: 3.3.1. Data analysis appears to have been well executed

Comment and Analysis: Thematic areas of analysis were clear. Not much detail was provided in the report for data analysis procedures for qualitative and quantitative methods although interviews indicated that Xcel was used. It is therefore difficult to make an assessment about whether it was well executed.

Rating: 2

Standard: 3.3.2. Findings are supported by available evidence

Comment and Analysis: Findings were well supported by evidence. Each section first described data collected (primary or secondary) and then concluded with key findings.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.3.3. The evidence gathered is sufficiently and appropriately analysed to support the argument

Comment and Analysis: The argument was made clear and was based on evidence gathered from primary and secondary data sources. The lack of information on data analysis however hinders the strength of the argument provided.

Rating: 4

Standard: 3.3.4. There is appropriate recognition of the possibility of alternative interpretations

Comment and Analysis: Alternative interpretations and speculative findings were made explicit. Approaching this evaluation in a systemic way allowed for challenges/successes uncovered to be tackled from various perspectives, thus giving light to alternative/other variables contributing to challenges/successes.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.3.5. The report appears free of significant methodological and analytic flaws

Comment and Analysis: The methodology was well designed and on the whole data analysis seemed adequately executed despite the lack of information on how exactly data was analysed.

Rating: 3

Standard: 3.3.6. Relevant limitations of the evaluation are noted

Comment and Analysis: The only limitation acknowledged upfront was related to the generalisability of the data. Other limitations were included in the body of the findings, but these were not exhaustive.

Rating: 3

3.4. Strength of conclusions

Standard: 3.4.1. Conclusions are derived from evidence

Comment and Analysis: Conclusions were based on evidence. Each chapter ended with a conclusion which helped digest some of the key findings.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.4.2. Conclusions take into account relevant empirical and/or analytic work from related research studies and evaluations

Comment and Analysis: This evaluation relied on other research studies to inform key evaluation findings, and so conclusions were also based on these. An example is that teachers subject knowledge was reported using SAQMEC language test previously administered (Taylor and Taylor) and the conclusion that "teachers exhibit generally poor subject knowledge in language skills" is directly linked to the SAQMEC data.

Rating: 5

Standard: 3.4.3. Conclusions address the original evaluation purpose and questions
Comment and Analysis: Conclusions were written after each chapter and were tied to the overall purpose of the research and questions. An overall summarised conclusion may however have helped to briefly summarise key findings related to the purpose ; this would have helped integrate the findings from different chapters.
Rating: 4

Standard: 3.4.4. Conclusions are drawn with explicit reference to the intervention logic or theory of change
Comment and Analysis: The theory of change was not made explicit upfront, which made drawing conclusions against these a challenge. An overall summary of the intervention logic linked to conclusions would also have been beneficial at the end of the report, as this would have tied different chapters together to provide an overall picture of the state of education and learning.
Rating: 2

3.5. Suitability of recommendations

Standard: 3.5.1. Recommendations are made in consultation with appropriate sectoral partners or experts
Comment and Analysis: Direct consultation with experts in the sector is not evident. Sectoral experts' recommendations were considered through the literature used in this research. For example a benchmark for reading is suggested using the norm for another country. Recommendations also reinforced some of the positive policies in place, which can be assumed to have been informed by experts.
Rating: 2

Standard: 3.5.2. Recommendations are shaped following discussions with relevant government officials and other relevant stakeholders
Comment and Analysis: Recommendations were mostly based on the evaluators' analysis of the data. Questionnaires did not probe directly into recommendations. Stakeholders interviewed at DBE level indicated not having input into recommendations.
Rating: 2

Standard: 3.5.3. Recommendations are relevant to the current policy context
Comment and Analysis: Recommendations were definitely in line with policy and particularly to the National DBE strategic plan (Action Plan 2014 Towards Schooling 2025) and National Development Plan.
Rating: 5

Standard:	3.5.4. Recommendations are targetted at a specific audience sufficiently - are specific, feasible, affordable and acceptable
Comment and Analysis:	Recommendations were very detailed in the report and were regarded by interviewees as "realistic, relevant and appropriate". These were positively received by the DBE. Each recommendation was clear about who was targeted at the different levels of the school system (e.g. School Management Committee, District, Provincial, National DBE, etc.). Practical suggestions for improvement (or benchmarks) have been provided as part of recommendations. These characteristics make recommendations actionable.
Rating:	5

3.6. Consideration of reporting risks and ethical implications

Standard:	3.6.1. Peer review of the draft evaluation report occurred prior to finalisation of the evaluation report
Comment and Analysis:	The draft report was reviewed by a Professor (who is an education expert) at the University of Cape Town, before finalisation. The final report is undergoing a further review of the research design and methodology to ensure robustness of future evaluation designs.
Rating:	5

Standard:	3.6.2. The full report documents procedures intended to ensure confidentiality and to secure informed consent where necessary (in some cases this is not needed - e.g. evaluation synthesis - in which case N/A should be recorded)
Comment and Analysis:	Ethical considerations made in the evaluation were not documented in the report.
Rating:	1

Standard:	3.6.3. There are no risks to participants in disseminating the original report on a public website
Comment and Analysis:	There is no risk to participants in making this report publically accessible.
Rating:	5

Standard:	3.6.4. There are no unfair risks to institutions in disseminating the original report on a public website
Comment and Analysis:	There is no risk to institutions in making this report publically accessible. Schools performing successfully or poorly are not identified in the report, however individual reports/feedback was provided to the relevant schools to ensure that improvements could be made on this level.
Rating:	4

3.7. Project management (Reporting phase)

Standard:	3.7.1. A project closure meeting that reflected on the challenges and strengths of the evaluation process occurred
Comment and Analysis:	Continuous meetings were conducted by the evaluators during implementation to learn from implementation and fine tune the evaluation process. Key lessons learnt were used for the next Basic Education evaluation focussing on rural schools which is now being conducted by NEEDU.
Rating:	5

4. Follow-up, use and learning

4.1. Resource utilisation

Standard:	4.1.1. The evaluation was completed within the planned timeframes
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation timeframes were considered tight but the evaluation was completed in time. The evaluation period was however decided by the evaluator and so were somewhat flexible.
Rating:	4

Standard:	4.1.2. The evaluation was completed within the agreed budget
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was completed within budget of R 17 million (of which R 11.7 million was for personal, R 4.2 million for travel and accommodation, and R 1.2 million on goods and services).
Rating:	4

4.2. Evaluation use

Standard:	4.2.1. Results of the evaluation have been presented to all relevant stakeholders
Comment and Analysis:	Relevant results were presented at school, district, provincial and national levels. A number of different stakeholders participated in (and requested) presentations including academia (Universities: UCT, UJ, Stellenbosch), Research institutions (HSRC, Stats SA), NGOs and Trade Unions. About 20 presentations have been conducted thus far.
Rating:	5

Standard:	4.2.2. A reflective process has been undertaken by the steering committee (if no steering committee exists then by the evaluation management team or the involved department officials) to reflect on what could be done to strengthen future evaluations
Comment and Analysis:	No reflection was evident at the level of the DBE.
Rating:	1

Standard:	4.2.3. The evaluation study is seen by interviewed stakeholders as having added significant symbolic value to the policy or programme (e.g. raised its profile)
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was highly regarded by participants, especially as it directly spoke to the DBE policy and programme as a whole. The evaluation and its recommendations strengthened accountability within the DBE and helped prioritise issues to be addressed over the next period.
Rating:	5

Standard:	4.2.4. The evaluation study is of conceptual value in understanding what has happened and possibly in shaping policy and practice
Comment and Analysis:	Although many of the findings were not new to interviewees, having evidence provided to support conclusions added value in informing evidence based policy. One specific area which added conceptual value was the problematic levels of the content knowledge of teachers which points to a challenge in the teacher education system.
Rating:	4
Standard:	4.2.5. Development of a draft improvement plan has been started, but not completed, based on the findings and recommendations set out in the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	Some provinces have already drafted their improvement plan based on the recommendations made in the evaluation. It was not clear how far provinces are in implementing the improvement plan. It is furthermore not clear whether the national department has drafted an improvement plan, although recommendations have already been implemented.
Rating:	4
Standard:	4.2.6. The report is publicly available (website or otherwise published document), except where there were legitimate security concerns *Note: only apply if sufficient time has elapsed since completion of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The report is available on the DBE website.
Rating:	5
Standard:	4.2.7. There is clear evidence of instrumental use - that the recommendations of the evaluation were implemented to a significant extent *Note: only apply if sufficient time has elapsed since completion of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation has definitely informed policy and practice in the following ways: A reading (and possibly mathematics) sub-directorate is being established to strengthen reading across the grades; reading norms and assessments are being developed, and in some cases the norms proposed in the evaluation report are being used as a benchmark; a language framework called the Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) policy is being developed to improve the quality of the use of African Languages for teaching and learning; a DBE reading plan is being developed for Grade R to 12; ANA is being administered by an external provider to ensure reliability and validity; DBE workbooks are being aligned with CAPS; Provincial reading programme are being monitored through quarterly reading reports.
Rating:	5
Standard:	4.2.8. There is clear evidence that the evaluation has had a positive influence on the evaluand, its stakeholders and beneficiaries over the medium to long term *Note: only apply if sufficient time has elapsed since completion of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	Even though only 6 months has lapsed since the report was publicised, significant positive changes are evident.
Rating:	N/A

References

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2012. Instruments: Interview with school teacher; Interview with Foundation Phase SMT members other than principal; Interview with SGB Chair/Senior SGB member; NEEDU School Resources Systems; Principal interview; Learner book analysis - language; Summary of impressions following completion of school visit.

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2013. Presentations of NEEDU National Report 2012.

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2012. Summary Report.

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2012. National Report 2012: The State of Literacy, Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase.

National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). 2013. Handbook for the Evaluation of Schools: Procedures and tools for conducting school evaluations in South Africa.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). Business Case and Business Plan for the Establishment of the Office of Standards and Compliance for Basic Education.

List of Interviewees

Carol Deliwe, Strategic Planning Research and Co-ordination: Department of Basic Education. Telephonic interview. 19 November 2013. Contact: 012 357 3339, Email: Nuga.C@dbe.gov.za

Dr Jennifer Joshua, Director: Curriculum, Implementation & Quality Improvement (GET): Department of Basic Education. Email interview. 27 November 2013. Contact: Joshua.J@dbe.gov.za

Dr Nick Taylor, Lead Evaluator: NEEDU. Telephonic interview. 14 November 2013. Contact: 0824918821, Email: taylor.n@dbe.gov.za

Justice Libago, M&E: Department of Basic Education. Telephonic interview. 25 November 2013. Contact: 012 357 3661, Email: Libago.J@dbe.gov.za.