

Quality of Basic Education
A Report to Working Group 1 of the High Level Panel on the Assessment of Key Legislation

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South African educational progress since the political transition has been disappointing in many respects. Although access to primary and secondary education has continued to improve and children remain at school longer, there are still large dropouts from the school system at around 16 years of age. For many, progress across the grades is not associated with improved cognitive skills. Moreover, though improved access to good schools has offered the possibility of improving education for many black children, the bulk of them are still in historically black schools which, despite improved learner to teacher ratios and greater resources, generally still perform poorly. Thus inequality across the school system is still very large, and the only viable way of reducing this is for the historically black part of the school system to produce much improved learning outcomes.

Section A of this draft report provides a brief perspective on the situation regarding educational performance and inequalities in educational outcomes. The focus is on current attainment differentials and inequalities in cognitive performance, before evidence is provided of recent progress in cognitive outcomes (educational quality) and inequality, albeit from a very low base. Section B deals in some detail with legislation and its relationship with school performance. Section C of this draft report responds to a number of areas that the Panel deemed important from a policy perspective. Section D contains a list of recommendations. The Appendix provides a brief overview of submissions on education received by the Panel, with short responses. Two of the submissions by Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre are mentioned that should receive attention from the Department of Basic Education.

SECTION A:

THE STATE OF BASIC EDUCATION AND INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION QUALITY

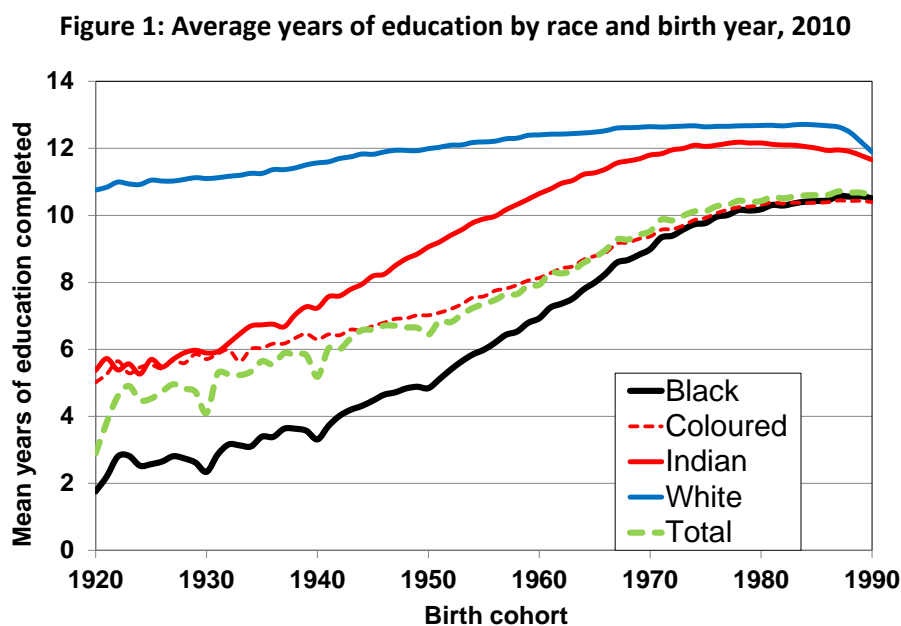
A1. Introduction

Stark inequalities in education along racial lines are one of the major legacies of apartheid. This section provides a brief overview of these inequalities. It does so by first discussing inequality in the quantity of education provided, which is influenced by both access to and progression in schools. The measure of this is what in this report will be referred to as educational attainment, i.e. years of education completed. Then the discussion turns to measures of cognitive development, most closely identified with educational quality, i.e. measuring how much children have learned at school. Finally, the last part of this Section discusses recent evidence of educational progress.

A2. Inequality in the quantity of education provided

It is one of the ironies of the apartheid period that it saw a rapid expansion of education for all race groups, with the quantity of education received by the majority black population in particular expanding at unprecedented rates in the 1960s and 1970s. Simkins has estimated that *“Between 1960 and 1996, embedded human capital in South Africa, measured in completed school years, rose from 48 million to 230 million”*¹, at a quite remarkable growth rate of 4.45% per year.

Figure 1 illustrates the progress made in educational attainment. It shows, based on census 2011 data, the average number of years of education attained by persons born in certain years. Because respondents are those who have survived until 2011, data for older cohorts may slightly over-estimate the years of education attained. Nevertheless, it provides a good reflection of the progress made by all race groups. Particularly noticeable is the progress of Indian children and how much the gaps between whites and other groups have narrowed. Whilst the average education level of black people in President Mandela’s generation (birth cohort 1920) was only about two years whilst whites of that birth cohort achieved on average more than 10 years, for the most recent birth cohorts, born in 1990, this race gap is far smaller.



Source: Calculated from 2011 census

Though school attainment or the quantity of education (number of years of school completed) has risen rapidly on average, there are still issues of some children not attending school. The constitution states every person has the right to basic education, while the South African Schools Act requires every child to attend

¹ Simkins (2002: 2)

school from the year in which they turn seven until the year they turn 15 (or until they have completed Grade 9). Using the 2007 Community Survey, Fleisch, Schindler & Perry conclude that there may be 386 000 children, or 4.3% of the compulsory age group, not attending school. Around 58 000 (less than 1% of the compulsory age group) have never attended school, but many of those are aged 7 and may still enrol soon. Thus they conclude that “almost all children have had and/or will have some exposure to schooling”.² Non-attendance is greater than expected among coloured boys, children whose mothers have died, children born outside South Africa, children who have moved in the past five years, children with disabilities, and children living in specific rural communities.

Taylor and Mabogoane (2015) regard the growth in numbers enrolled at all levels of the system as the most significant development in South African education since democracy³. As they indicate, there has also been rapid growth in school education even during the apartheid period, but the rapid expansion of Grade R and university education was a new phenomenon.

A3. Inequality in educational resources

One of the origins of racial inequality in education has been the inequality in resource allocation to schools for the different race groups during apartheid. The Ministerial Committee that investigated the need for an evaluation unit in schools (the Needu Report) noted that

“... the highly unequal character of schools persists despite comprehensive reforms since 1994 in pursuit of equal education for all. There are well-endowed schools in South Africa with impressive resources and facilities that produce superior academic results over the 12 years of schooling. There are desperately poor schools with little to show in terms of academic performance. In the past, the former category of schools tended to be white and the latter black. With the opening of school to all children, increasingly the privileged schools tend to enrol white and black middle class students while the latter schools tend to remain all black. The resilience of these inequalities underlines the long shadow of history on all our schools.”⁴

Public resources devoted to school education have been reallocated to the extent that the racial and rich-poor gaps in public spending per child have largely been eliminated⁵, although wealthier urban schools still have more highly qualified and thus better remunerated teachers, and fee-paying schools supplement public resources through their school fees. But the shifts in funds that have occurred do not eliminate “the backlogs of education infrastructure inherited from apartheid” nor did it lead to any substantial reduction in the large gaps in cognitive outcomes. A consensus has emerged that “it is one thing for a school to have resources at its disposal but quite another for it to use the resources effectively”.⁶

A4. Inequality in education quality

A large body of literature documents the weak performance of most South African learners in international and internal tests. In TIMSS 2015, South Africa for the first time took part in the Grade 5 Mathematics test, and performed second weakest (after Kuwait) of all the countries that participated (not many developing countries did). Whereas only 7% of all children performed below the low international benchmark, in South Africa this proportion was 61%. In pre-PIRLS 2011, a reading test, 58% of South African Grade 5 children could not read for meaning, and half of those (29% of all children in Grade 5) performed so weakly that they could be regarded as reading illiterate. In the 2011 SACMEQ tests of Grade 6 children in Southern and Eastern Africa, South African children performed just below the average for all the participating countries (most of which are much poorer) in both reading and mathematics. South African Grade 6 school children

² Fleisch, Schindler & Perry 2010: 7

³ Taylor and Mabogoane, 2015

⁴ Dept of Education, 2009 (Needu Report): 12

⁵ Gustafsson & Patel 2006; Inchauste, Lustig; Maboshe, Purfield & Woolard 2015; Van der Berg 2006; Van der Berg & Moses 2012; World Bank 2014

⁶ Jansen & Taylor, 2003: 20. Similar views are expressed by Taylor (2008: 4), the Ministerial Committee on a National Education Evaluation Development Unit (Dept of Education 2009 (Needu Report): 12), and Timæus, Simelane & Letsoalo (2012: 271-2).

are on average about a year's learning behind Kenya, and two years behind Tanzania. This weak functioning lead the Ministerial Committee to refer to a "...context of systemic collapse of schooling, at least in the bottom half of the education system."⁷ The low level and inequality of performance can also be gauged from Table 1, setting out the percentage of different groups that attained the low international benchmark in Mathematics or in Science:

Table 1: Percentage of Grade 9 learners in various school types that performed above the low international benchmark of 400 in TIMSS

	Public no-fee schools	Public fee-paying schools	Independent schools
Mathematics	19%	60%	81%
Science	16%	58%	81%

Source: Reddy et al. 2015: 8

Inequality in cognitive test performance is large whether one analyses performance by socio-economic status, language or population group. Typically, the richest 20% of the school system greatly outperforms other schools, amongst whom differences are quite small. In the 2006 PIRLS reading and literacy test, South African students were tested in Grade 5, English students in Grade 4. Even so, only 8% of English students could not reach the low international benchmark of 400, whilst this applied to 78% of South African students.

A5. Evidence from Matric Mathematics trends of reduced educational inequality

An earlier report by Gustafsson⁸ explains how it is possible to extract information on national trends in education quality and educational inequalities using data from Grade 12 examinations. UNESCO warns against inappropriate use of examinations data⁹, yet if carefully used such data can assist in monitoring progress. A key finding of Gustafsson is that between 2008 and 2015 there were substantial equity gains. Similar analysis of learner-level matric mathematics performance for 2002, 2009 and 2016 reveal that the number of black African learners attaining levels of mathematics performance which would allow entry into, for instance, engineering at university increased by 65% over the whole period. Improvements in mathematics are likely to be indicative of improvements across the curriculum.¹⁰ Moreover, these improvements occurred through expansion of mathematics excellence into more schools, in particular township and rural schools. Yet educational inequalities remain stark: In 2002 white youths stood 23 times as good a chance as black African youths of reaching a high level of mathematics performance (using the '20% of whites' threshold), while in 2016 whites were still 7 times as likely as black Africans to attain this level of mathematics performance, a reduction to about one third the level it had been in 2002. Importantly, these reductions in inequality occurred whilst overall quality of schooling was improving at the secondary level, according to the respected international TIMSS testing system discussed below.

Analysis confirms especially large gains in historically disadvantaged schools over the 2008 to 2016 period. Moreover, this trend had begun in the years following 2002. Mpumalanga and Limpopo account for a disproportionately large share of the gains in high-level performance in disadvantaged schools. Whilst in 2002 just over half of high-level mathematics performers in the public examination system were white, by 2016 just over two-thirds were *not* white. This makes it more realistic for employers to attain a more demographically representative workforce, as employment laws require.

There was little progress in gender-based inequalities: In both 2002 and 2016 a female Grade 12 learner were only two-thirds as likely of being a high-level mathematics performer than a male learner.

⁷ Dept of Education 2009 (Needu Report): 12.

⁸ Gustafsson, 2016. The analysis of trends in this chapter analysis draws extensively from advice and inputs of analysts and officials in the DBE, including Dr Rufus Poliah, Carol Nuga, Hilton Visagie, Willie Venter and Stephen Taylor.

⁹ UNESCO, 2014: 6.

¹⁰ Given that the examination system changed between 2007 and 2008 and that system marks are not entirely comparable across years, thresholds rather than raw marks were used in the analysis. One key threshold was the mathematics mark reached by 20% of white candidates, with candidates not taking mathematics considered to have a mark of zero. This threshold was applied across years.

To allow for a breakdown of Grade 12 mathematics trends by geographical area and school quintile, schools were as far as possible were linked across 2002, 2009 and 2016. In all, 4,615 schools could be linked across all three years. Table 2 provides statistics by category of school, with public schools broken down by the official poverty quintiles. This shows the trend of faster improvements in historically disadvantaged schools occurring already in the years following 2002. The strongest increases occurred in quintile 3. One positive trend is that a greater range of historically disadvantaged schools are producing high-level achievers. For instance, the percentage of quintile 1 schools producing such learners rose from 23% to 41% over the period, with the average high-level achievers per 'non-zero' school rising from 1.9 to 2.7. Independent schools have seen improvements in the first two panels, where quintile 5 schools saw losses. This could in part be because of migration of better performing learners from quintile 5 schools to independent schools.

Table 2: Mathematics achievement by school category

Mathematics high-level achievers as % of <i>all</i> Grade 12 candidates (whether mathematics students or not), as a %				Annual change (slope)	14-year change (previous column \times 14)
	2002	2009	2016		
Quintile 1	0.7	1.0	1.3	0.04	0.6
Quintile 2	1.1	1.2	1.5	0.03	0.4
Quintile 3	1.4	1.8	2.1	0.05	0.7
Quintile 4	2.5	2.7	2.8	0.03	0.4
Quintile 5	13.2	12.3	10.3	-0.21	-2.9
Independent	9.8	9.7	10.7	0.07	0.9
Number of mathematics high-level achievers					
Quintile 1	465	782	1209	53	744
Quintile 2	687	957	1 294	43	607
Quintile 3	1 403	2 115	2 670	91	1,267
Quintile 4	1 476	2 043	2 292	58	816
Quintile 5	10 107	10 325	8 978	-81	-1,129
Independent	948	1207	1 100	11	152
Percentage of schools with at least one high-level mathematics achiever					
Quintile 1	23	34	41	1.3	18
Quintile 2	28	39	48	1.4	20
Quintile 3	41	52	56	1.1	15
Quintile 4	56	63	67	0.8	11
Quintile 5	84	86	85	0.1	1
Independent	51	76	73	1.6	22

Note: A 'high-level achiever' is one who performs above the bottom of the range of the top 20% white Grade 12 learners. Roughly, this cut-off would permit a learner entry into a mathematically-oriented university programme.

Source: Own calculations

The negative overall change values for three provinces (Gauteng, Northern Cape and Western Cape) in Table 3 do not necessarily point to performance that worsened over time. What is telling is that certain provinces with high levels of poverty improved much more than others. Limpopo and Mpumalanga in fact surpassed KwaZulu-Natal over the fourteen years.

Table 3: Mathematics achievement by school category

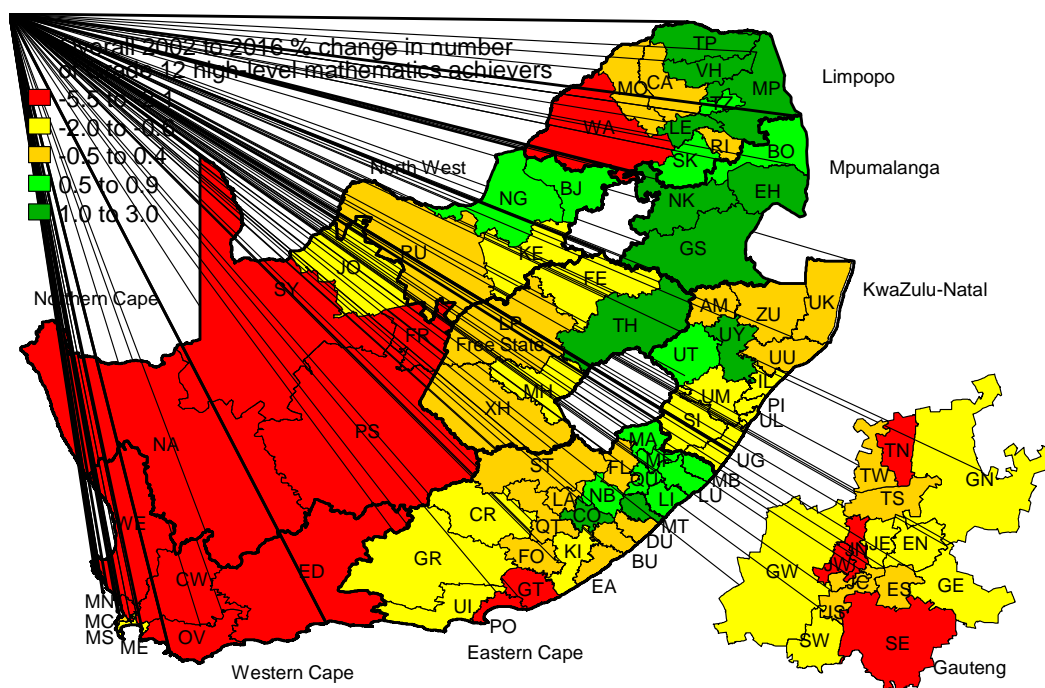
Mathematics high-level achievers as % of <i>all</i> Grade 12 candidates (whether mathematics students or not), as a %				Annual change (slope)	14-year change (previous column \times 14)
	2002	2009	2016		
EC	2.3	2.6	2.1	0.0	-0.2
FS	4.8	3.4	4.9	0.0	0.1
GP	6.9	6.2	5.9	-0.1	-1.0

KN	2.6	2.6	2.2	0.0	-0.4
LP	1.6	2.4	2.5	0.1	0.9
MP	1.0	1.6	2.4	0.1	1.4
NC	6.2	2.5	3.0	-0.2	-3.2
NW	2.0	2.9	2.4	0.0	0.4
WC	10.4	9.6	8.3	-0.2	-2.1
SA	4.0	3.8	3.6	0.0	-0.4

Source: Own calculations from Matric data

The map (Figure 2) reflects the statistics from the last column of the above table, by education district. The historically most deprived districts of Eastern Cape (those in the east of the province) saw the largest improvements, be consistent with a reduction in inequality. Districts in the northern half of KwaZulu-Natal appear to have seen more progress than districts in the south of this province.

Figure 2: 2002-2016 mathematics trends by district



Note: The smallest geographical units shown in the map are the 86 education districts. Codes are explained in Department of Basic Education (2016c: 47). D6 Equity trends in Grade 9 TIMSS performance and Grade 6 SACMEQ performance

Another source of information on system improvement is the TIMSS11 testing programme, which covers around fifty countries. South African Grade 9 mathematics and science results displayed a steady improvement across the years 2002, 2011 and 2015. In the mathematics tests, South Africa improved on average 0.07 South African standard deviations per year between 2002 and 2015, the average mathematics test scores being 285 in 2002, 352 in 2011 and 372 in 2015¹². South Africa's 0.07 standard deviations gain per year compares favourably with Brazil's PISA¹³ improvement of 0.06 standard deviations per year for over a decade, which has frequently been referred to as the most impressive of any country¹⁴. South Africa's performed well below neighbouring Botswana in 2002 and even 2011, but by 2015 South Africa had almost caught up to Botswana¹⁵. The South Africa TIMSS figures under-estimate gains, as drop-out before the end of Grade 9 has been reduced (the percentage successfully completing Grade 9 rose from 80% to 85% between

¹¹ Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

¹² Mullis, Martin and Loveless (2016: Exhibit 1.6) and Reddy et al (2012: 3). Note that South Africa wrote what is internationally referred to as the 'TIMSS 2003 tests' a year earlier, in 2002.

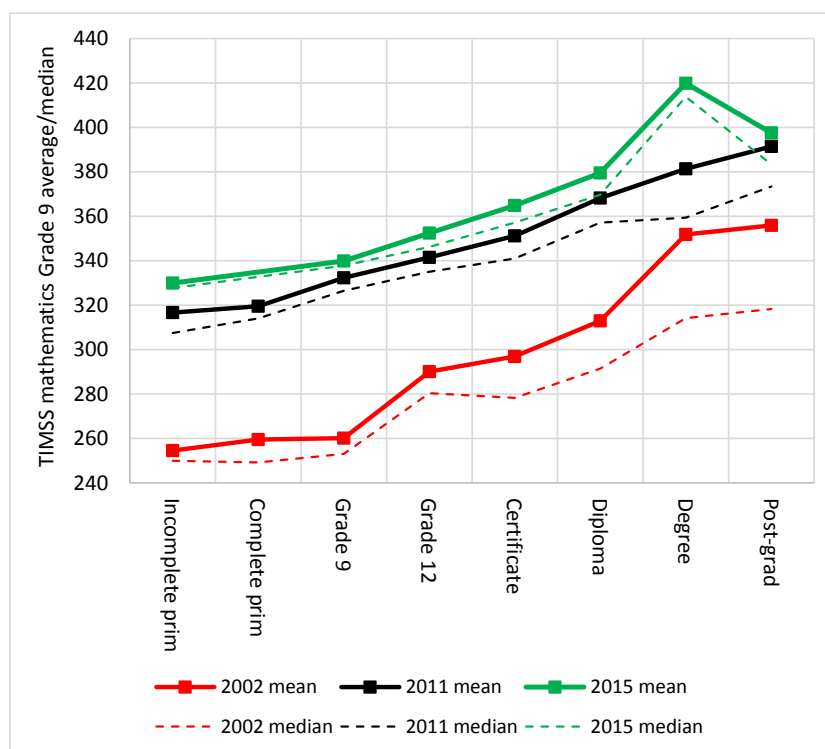
¹³ Programme for International Student Assessment.

¹⁴ Bruns, Evans & Luge, 2012.

¹⁵ Department of Basic Education, 2017a.

2003 and 2011, according to household data. Thus while educational outcomes have become less unequal, overall quality as measured by mathematics competencies showed marked improvement. Figure 3 expands on a graph published by the Department of Basic Education¹⁶ by adding the latest 2015 TIMSS Mathematics performance. The graph shows improvements for all socio-economic levels, where the latter is measured by the highest level of education of anyone in the learner's household. Households with less educated adults saw the largest gains. This again points to reduced inequality of educational performance.

Figure 3: TIMSS 2002 to 2015 trends by parent education



Source: Calculated from the raw TIMSS data downloadable at <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu>. The 'Complete prim' point is missing from the 2015 curve as this category seems to have been merged with 'Incomplete prim' in the 2015 data.

Similar conclusions about system improvement can also be found in revised preliminary results from the SACMEQ testing programme, which covers fifteen countries from Southern Africa and East Africa. Grade 6 mathematics and reading test scores improved by, respectively, 0.06 and 0.05 standard deviations per year between 2007 and 2013¹⁷, a magnitude that is in line with the improvements seen in TIMSS.

¹⁶ Department of Basic Education, 2016c: 70.

¹⁷ See Department of Basic Education 2017a.

Section B:

Legislation and basic education in South Africa

B1. Introduction

Legislators are important participants in debates on education matters and can influence the education sector by shaping legislation, including budgets, through debate and approval processes, by monitoring implementation of policies, and by engaging with annual plans and reports of government departments.

Four questions guide this Section of the report:

- How has legislation contributed to the recent improvements in the quality of schooling in South Africa or perhaps held back even larger improvements?
- **What lessons can be drawn from other countries** regarding the contribution of legislation and policy towards educational improvement and reduction of educational inequality?
- How can more citizens be drawn into policy debates?
- What could serve as **framework for prioritising** policy development in education?

Section B2 discusses what the international literature suggests is **the connection between policy and educational progress**. Section B3 provides a short summary of **South Africa's education legislation**, including key notices and regulations promulgated under the three main Acts. Section B4 discusses **reviews of South Africa's education policies**. What emerges is the emphasis on policy stability and concerns around specific aspects of policy implementation, such as teacher management, early childhood development, and the acquisition of reading skills in the early grades. Section B5 addresses **what has driven South Africa's improvements in learning outcomes**. Section B6 provides a cautious evaluation of the work of the **Portfolio Committee on Basic Education**, through some analysis of the Committee's minutes. Strengthening the work of the Committee could involve: more efficient information sharing processes so that less time is spent on this, and more time on policies; a deeper focus on what the sector is producing (including the reliability of existing monitoring approaches); a focus on annual plans and reports of education departments throughout the year, and a more development- and innovation-focused approach guided by, in particular, the National Development Plan (NDP). Section B7 draws from the previous sections in discussing critically **ten policy innovation priorities identified by the NDP**, and their implications for policy.

B2. Thinking about education policy and education progress

Over the last twenty years a growing recognition has emerged around the importance of not just enrolling children but *ensuring that they acquire basic literacy and numeracy competencies*. Much evidence now confirms that many children do not acquire such competencies and are therefore held back in almost every educational endeavour. This emphasis is clear in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁸.

Education researchers have increasingly been turning to scientific methods to determine what brings about improvements in the competencies children acquire. These methods basically involve testing one intervention, such as new teaching tools, and seeing whether 'treated' children end up performing better than children in a 'control group' which did not receive the intervention. In contrast, gauging what has brought about system-wide change in specific countries or regions of the world must be answered through a number of techniques: lessons learnt from the experimental research, careful analysis of political and social factors, and examination of data pointing to which segments of society have progressed most. A useful point of departure here is **Unesco's 2013/14 Global Monitoring Report**, titled *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality education for all*.¹⁹ Key points of emphasis include the following:

¹⁸ United Nations: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015

¹⁹ UNESCO 2014.

- Much is said about the **role of teachers** and the systems that train them, distribute them, support them, and hold them accountable.
- There should also be a special focus on ensuring that youths entering teacher training for the first time are **sufficiently representative of the regions and linguistic groups** of the country.
- Initial training of teachers has been found to be weak in terms especially of **subject knowledge**, and of equipping future primary teachers to **teach children to read**.
- More attention is needed to ensuring that those who train teachers have the necessary skills.
- A special policy focus is needed on ensuring that marginalised segments of society gain access to **a fair share of the country's better qualified teachers**.
- **In-service training** can improve educational outcomes, yet results of existing programmes are **often disappointing, thus** special care must be taken in the design of these programmes.
- **Financial and non-financial incentives** for teachers must focus on retaining good teachers as long as possible. The most effective incentives tend to be **well-designed career pathways** into senior positions.
- Countries should pay special attention to maintaining good **system-wide data on teachers**, including their qualifications and their training backgrounds.
- **Quality pre-school education** is important, as the beneficial impacts of certain kinds of brain stimulation are far greater when a child is at the pre-school stage.
- Basic competencies need to be established in **a language the child understands well**. Transitioning to another language requires incremental introduction of the second language and several years of **sustained bilingualism**.
- Access to **textbooks** matters.
- Good tools for **classroom assessment** should be available to teachers, in part so that they can identify which learners require what kind of remedial support.
- Interventions using **information and communication technologies** should be embarked upon cautiously, as not all such interventions impact positively on educational outcomes.
- **Strong school leadership** is necessary to instill the necessary work ethic in a school, and to reduce problems such as teacher absenteeism.
- A stronger focus on **national assessment systems** to gauge progress in achievement of basic competencies is needed. UNESCO warns against inappropriate use of examination systems for this purpose.²⁰

Learning from experiences of specific developing countries should occur cautiously, as what works in one national context may not work in another. Brazil has justifiably been considered interesting for South Africa due to its remarkable improvements in educational quality since around 2000. Analysts have attributed Brazil's progress to equity-focused funding reforms, paying households to send children to school and large-scale in-service teacher training. However, much of the credit is attributed to the **introduction of an assessment and accountability system** considered *"superior to current practice in the United States and in many other OECD countries in the quantity, relevance, and quality of the student and school performance information it provides"*²¹. Brazil's reforms reflect a political leadership which has paid close attention to what pupils learn.

The impact of new assessment systems on education quality is a hotly debated topic. In countries such as the United States teachers have argued that too much testing has unduly limited the time available to teach. If there is no strategy to feed assessment results into decision-making processes from national down to classroom level, assessment can become little more than an expensive data gathering exercise. Poorly designed assessment systems can clearly have detrimental effects, but as the case of Brazil seems to demonstrate, if they are well designed they can have large beneficial effects, if teachers see value in the system and if it sends the right signals to schools and parents around the importance of learning²².

²⁰ UNESCO 2014: 6.

²¹ Bruns, Evans and Luque, 2012: 7.

²² A landmark study in this regard is that of Hanushek and Raymond (2005), who find that the timing of the introduction of universal standardised testing in the states of the United States coincided with state-level improvements in educational quality.

There is **no simple relationship between laws and policies and what actually happens in schools**. Some policies are aspirational in that they express what society expects government to do. At the same time, much of what happens in schools, even good practices, are not defined by any policy, but are rather the result of tradition. Good governance of a schooling system to some degree implies allowing people at various levels of the system to find locally suitable solutions in their workplaces.

South African lawmakers need to consider that **activist organisations will use the courts to bring about policy compliance with legislation**. Much emphasis has been on compliance with physical infrastructure policies²³. If policies on what children should have learnt by particular grades or ages were as explicit as infrastructure policies, more of this activism may have been directed explicitly at educational quality.

B3. A short audit of South Africa's education legislation

Three key Acts of Parliament that constitute the cornerstones of the legislation governing basic education and regulations falling under them are discussed below. The focus is on aspects of the legislation which may require change or special emphasis in the light of current policy priorities, for instance expressed in the NDP.

National Education Policy Act of 1996 (NEPA)

This Act elaborates on the **responsibilities at national and provincial levels**, in line with the Constitution. Section 8 of the Act points to monitoring the sector as a whole, which has not been adequately realized:

The Minister shall direct that the standards of education provision, delivery and performance throughout the Republic be monitored and evaluated by the Department annually or at other specified intervals, with the object of assessing progress in complying with the provisions of the Constitution and with national education policy...

The Department shall undertake the monitoring and evaluation contemplated ... by analysis of data gathered by means of education management information systems...

The Department shall fulfill its responsibilities ... with a view to enhancing professional capacities in monitoring and evaluation throughout the national education system.

The original NEPA of 1996 has been amended through Amendment Acts in 1997, 1999, 2007 and 2011. The parts of Section 8 quoted above have remained unchanged. The following are promulgated in terms of NEPA:

- Notice 2432 of 1998: Admission policy for ordinary public schools.
- Regulation 1718 of 1998: Assessment policy in General Education and Training, grades R to 9 and ABET.
- Notice 710 of 2002: National policy regarding General Education and Training programmes: Approval of the Revised National Curriculum Statement grades R-9 (schools).
- Notice 306 of 2008: Foundations for Learning campaign: 2008-2011²⁴.
- Notice 722 of 2011: Approval of National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 as national education policy.
- Notice 1115 of 2012: Draft amendment policy pertaining to the national curriculum statement grade R-12 as set out in the policy document, *National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement grades R-12*.
- Notice 323 of 2016: Policy on the South African standard for principals.

South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA)

This Act establishes the responsibilities and rights of schools, in particular the school governing body and the school principal. It also describes the duty of parents to send children to school from the year the child turns seven to the year the child turns fifteen, the duty of the provincial Member of the Executive Council (MEC) to

²³ Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, 2015: 19.

²⁴ This Notice is, unusually, not explicitly issued in terms of any Act, though it seems linked to NEPA.

provide schools for communities, and the duty of the national Minister to promulgate equitable school funding norms. Rights of the school and parents with respect to charging school fees, and rules relating to the management of the 'school fund' are described. The Act strongly emphasises that post-apartheid schooling should be free from discrimination and corporal punishment.

The original SASA of 1996 has been amended through Amendment Acts in 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007 and 2011. The 2007 additions to the Act are particularly significant in terms of improving learning outcomes in schools. Principals are required to produce an 'annual report', which must include information on academic performance relative to nationally promulgated minimum standards. They should also produce an annual 'academic performance improvement plan', which the provincial education department can approve or return to the school with recommended changes. Whilst the intentions of all this are good, there are practical difficulties, discussed in Section B0. The 2007 amendment moreover implies that if a school principal is caught between conflicting instructions or requests of the school governing body versus the education department, then the latter is supreme.

The following are promulgated in terms of SASA:

- Notice 869 of 2006: Amended national norms and standards for school funding.
- Notice 723 of 2011: Determination of minimum outcomes and standards and a national process and procedures for assessment of learner achievement as stipulated in the National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12.
- Notice 1116 of 2012: Determination of minimum outcomes and standards and a national process and procedures for the assessment of learner achievement as stipulated in the national curriculum statement Grades R-12.
- Notice 1495 of 2016: Approval of amendment to the regulations pertaining to the National Curriculum Statement grades R-12.

Employment of Educators Act of 1998 (EEA)

This Act establishes the national Minister's right and duty to determine national salary scales and the provincial MEC's duty to declare a set of educator posts, or a 'post establishment', per school, and to allow for posts to be filled with suitably qualified teachers. The provincial education department is the employer of publicly paid educators, though school governing bodies should make recommendations regarding who to appoint. Where teacher posts move between schools due to growth or shrinkage of schools, school governing bodies may be forced to select new appointees from a list that includes only 'excess' teachers from other schools. The original EEA of 1998 has been amended through Amendment Acts in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2011. A 2014 draft bill focusing on reducing the powers of the school governing body and strengthening those of the employer (the provincial department) in the appointment of school principals, deputy principals and schools-based heads of department is discussed in a report of the Department of Basic Education²⁵. This is aimed at introducing more professional criteria into appointment processes for school managers. In terms of the EEA, Notice 1451 of 2002 amended regulations for the distribution of educator posts to schools in a provincial department of education.

There are important policies relating to the employment of educators which are not directly linked to the EEA, particularly the resolutions of the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) that deal with, for instance, the rights of teachers, school governing bodies and the employer regarding moving of teachers across schools.

Other Acts

The basic education sector is governed by a few other Acts, though the three referred to above deal with most sector-specific matters prioritised in, for instance, the NDP. Other Acts include the Children's Act of 2005, which includes responsibilities of schools to protect children. The National Qualifications Framework

²⁵ Department of Basic Education, 2016d.

Act of 2008 establishes the basic framework within which the school curriculum operates. The Electronic Communications Act of 2005 establishes the 'e-rate', a cheaper internet rate that schools should enjoy.

B4. Past education policy reviews in South Africa

Three reviews which discuss South Africa's basic education policies in a holistic sense receive attention here.

The OECD review of 2008. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), of which South Africa is one of five 'enhanced engagement' partner countries, is a major producer of policy research focussing particularly on full members but also partner countries. The 2008 review of South Africa's education system²⁶ was produced through collaboration between a large range of non-South African researchers and South African researchers and policymakers. The review identified as a key challenge improving the quality of basic competencies amongst learners, given that two international testing systems had pointed to surprisingly weak learning outcomes in South Africa relative to other developing countries. The review considered the years of post-1994 policy change and experimentation as necessary and mostly successful, but recommended a period of consolidation and policy stability for the foreseeable future. Essentially the focus had to fall on **improving implementation, rather than on further policy change**. This was echoed in the Department of Basic Education's 2011 sector plan²⁷, in which recommendations regarding strengthening of policy implementation and better collaboration between national and provincial levels featured prominently. Communicating and integrating existing policies was also emphasised, particularly in the area of teacher management²⁸.

The NDP of 2012 (and 2011). Though the National Development Plan (NDP) published in 2012 (and its earlier draft of 2011) are plans, they also include considerable reviewing of South Africa's education policies since 1994²⁹. The final plan was the product of extensive reviewing of the available literature and consultations with stakeholders and experts. The plan is clear that success needs to be gauged in terms of what learners learn, in part using international standardised tests, and in terms of grade attainment, in particular attainment of Grade 12. Essentially, the NDP supports policy stability coupled with improved implementation, though some key policy changes are recommended (see Section B0 for details). One major policy change that is envisaged is making **a year of schooling in the year preceding Grade R** available for all children.

The 2016 'binding constraints' review³⁰. This 2016 report, titled *Identifying binding constraints in education*, was produced for the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and funded by the European Union. Much of the focus in this review is on what to prioritise in policy implementation in order to improve learner competencies. Top priorities proposed include strengthening provincial level governance and administration, and curbing undue teacher union influence. With respect to policy innovation, it argues that much better guidance within the curriculum documentation is needed with respect to the **acquisition of reading skills in the foundation phase of schooling**. Amongst the background reports informing the review is a detailed proposal relating to the development and form of this guidance³¹.

The following paragraphs refer to a few prominent and particularly useful reviews from the last five years of specific aspects of the schooling system. A drawback of such narrower reviews is that they may overly prioritise solutions in a specific policy area, and ignore the importance of spending time and effort on other 'policy levers' which could yield similar result, but these narrower reviews are better able to delve into details in ways not possible in sector-wide reviews. Unfortunately, not all reviews mentioned are easily available.

²⁶ OECD, 2008.

²⁷ Department of Basic Education, 2010.

²⁸ OECD, 2008: 367-375.

²⁹ National Planning Commission, 2011 and 2012.

³⁰ Van der Berg et al, 2016.

³¹ Pretorius et al, 2016.

The 2012 public expenditure review³². This review, produced for the DBE and funded by Unicef, consists of a variety of reports and was unfortunately not made public³³. It supports the argument that the key problems in the sector were not weak policies or under-funding, but implementation and management. The report pays particular attention to the role of the DBE in strengthening monitoring of performance and expenditure trends, including the impact of salary agreements, to encourage more informed 'value for money' debate.

The 2013 post provisioning report³⁴. This review, produced by Deloitte for the DBE, focuses on the data that inform the allocation of teachers to schools. It concludes that a lack of clarity with regard to what national policy applies in this area has allowed undesirable across-province differences in the way teachers are allocated. In this respect, the report provides an interesting indication of broader problems around how policies are approved, gazetted and communicated. Unfortunately, the report does not deal with wider 'post provisioning problems', e.g. weaknesses and ambiguities in policies relating to the rights of school governing bodies in appointment of teachers, or the rights of teachers when it comes to redeployment across schools.

The 2013 'Dell report' on the use of information by districts³⁵. This report, funded by the Dell Foundation and produced in collaboration with the DBE, provides rare insights into the management culture in education district offices, and what needs to change for the services of these offices to improve. Though the review uses the lens of data collection and use, its relevance goes beyond just data. It recommends a more educational- and service-oriented culture and argues that current emphasis on basic bureaucratic compliance is misplaced.

The 2012 World Bank review of the Annual National Assessments³⁶. This review, produced for the DBE by a prominent Canadian assessment expert, Fernando Cartwright, provides valuable insights into South Africa's recently introduced national assessment programme. There is a very strong emphasis on the need to strengthen policies explaining the purposes of this kind of programme. In the absence of these policies, these programmes easily become a source of confusion and tension between teachers and the authorities (as occurred in South Africa when the programme was 'paused' in 2015).

The 2014 Ministerial Committee report on Grade 12 standards and access³⁷. This is a comprehensive and important review produced by a committee that included many university-based academics. Importantly, it concludes that despite popular calls for fundamental change in the Grade 12 examination, the basic structure and processes around this examination should remain largely unchanged, though improvements in the rigour of marking are recommended. The most far-reaching recommendation is that mark thresholds for students wanting to pursue university studies be raised from 40% to 50%.

The 2017 review of data use in the education sector³⁸. This recent report, along the lines of the Dell report, uses the lens of data to explore wider issues relating to, for instance, organisational culture. It was produced for National Treasury and uses Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal as case studies. One key area of focus is how DPME and National Treasury policies and rules that govern reporting on progress and expenditure in the education departments should change on the basis of lessons learnt over the years.

³² Van der Berg, Kruger, Gustafsson and Rawle, 2012.

³³ In the case of these reports, and many other reports like them, the reason for not publishing the materials appears to be more a knowledge management problem, than a report quality problem. Misleading reports should arguably not be made public. However, this is often not the problem. The tendency, not just in the education sector, is for reviews not to be made public because it is assumed that they are only of interest to internal users. Obviously there is a large range of stakeholders who may find these reports interesting, including legislators, academics, journalists and people working in civil society organisations. Not promoting access to information and knowledge amongst these stakeholders raises the risk of poorly informed policy debates. Often important reports get lost after some years even within government as a result of poor archiving, or poor 'knowledge management'.

³⁴ Department of Basic Education, 2013f.

³⁵ Dell Foundation, 2013.

³⁶ World Bank, 2013.

³⁷ Department of Basic Education, 2014.

³⁸ National Treasury, 2017b.

The above lists are evidence that substantial reviewing of the basic education sector and policies has occurred. However, it is worrying that some critical areas appear not to have been sufficiently analysed, such as teachers, including teacher supply and conditions of service and accountability, and school governance.

B5. Likely contributors to South Africa's test score improvements

As shown in Section A, there is now growing evidence that the competencies of learners have improved substantially over the last decade or so, and that these improvements occurred mainly in socio-economically disadvantaged segments of the schooling system. The result has thus been less educational inequality. What factors have contributed towards these improvements in the quality of learning outcomes? System-wide improvements can virtually never be explained to a high level of certainty, as the dynamics are highly complex and no single research method would be adequate. Factors other than government action and policy success may also play an important role. To illustrate, in 2003 only 41% of learners in schools enjoyed the presence of at least one household member with at least a Grade 12 qualification. By 2015, this figure had risen to 56%³⁹. Thus better support in the household is likely to have contributed towards test score improvements. The DBE, in its *Action Plan to 2019*, attributes the quality improvements mainly to **three changes in the way schooling is conducted**, changes which were brought about by policy change.

Firstly, **better access amongst learners to textbooks** is said to have contributed to the improvements. This would have been brought about both by a stronger emphasis on textbook use in the curriculum and increased spending on books. TIMSS data point to the very dramatic changes that occurred: in 2002 only 30% of Grade 9 teachers reported using a textbook as their main classroom resource for teaching mathematics. By 2011, this figure had increased to 70%⁴⁰. In support of this theory of change is the finding from a randomised control trial conducted by the DBE that delivering study guides to schools helped improve Grade 12 examination results substantially⁴¹. Clearly the availability of books does impact on learning outcomes.

Secondly, more standardised testing, and in particular **the introduction of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) programme**, seemed to have sent strong and influential signals through the system that it was important to focus on acquisition of basic mathematical and language skills⁴². This would be in line with conclusions drawn in other countries. Given the amount of criticism directed at the design of ANA by teachers and even education researchers, it may appear strange to attribute educational gains to this programme. However, it seems that even a flawed testing system is better than having no standardised testing at all.

Thirdly, **more suitable curriculum documents** and training associated with this seem to have contributed to better classroom practices. To illustrate, the curriculum document covering grades R to 3 English home language which became applicable in 2004 was relatively short, just 45 pages. In contrast, the corresponding Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document introduced in 2012 had 128 pages, and more details on how to teach, as opposed to just descriptions of the learning outcomes which had to be attained⁴³. The same could be said for the curriculum documents for other languages. Some of the improvements preceded the CAPS documents, e.g. a national reading strategy document released in 2008⁴⁴.

Insofar as the above interventions have contributed to improvements, they should be protected and prioritised. In particular, the implication is that ANA, or something like it, needs to be re-introduced following the 2015 suspension of the programme.

³⁹ Own analysis of Stats SA General Household Survey microdata, available at <https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za>.

⁴⁰ Department of Basic Education, 2015a: 12.

⁴¹ Taylor and Watson, 2015.

⁴² Standardised testing started becoming widespread even before the launch of ANA in 2011. Some of this occurred as part of the Foundations for Learning campaign, introduced through Government Notice 306 of 2008.

⁴³ Notice 710 of 2002, and Notices 722 and 723 of 2011.

⁴⁴ Department of Education, 2008.

B6. Focus areas of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education

The minutes of Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, available online⁴⁵, were scrutinised to obtain a sense of the current areas of focus of legislators dealing with basic education. Using as point of departure the ideals of the National Development Plan (NDP), the following stand out in the minutes:

Wide range of areas covered, relatively penetrating questions. Most of the policy areas outlined in Section B0 are covered at some point. The general meeting format of presentations, generally by the Department of Basic Education, followed by questions and discussions, seems logical. It is clear that members of the Committee engage with the presentations and ask relevant questions. These are all strengths within the current system.

A large portion of time spent on sharing and clarifying basic information. Much time seems to be devoted to presentations, and simply clarifying the thinking, facts and numbers behind the presentations. Sharing and clarifying information often leave little time for deeper discussions, a problem common in large organisations and systems.

Too little focus on learning outcomes (that learners learn in line with stated aims and targets) **and grade attainment** (that learners should progress up the grades as far as possible). There is some discussion of how many learners reach Grade 12, but grade attainment below this level receives too little attention. The Committee should pay more attention to what learners learn and how effective the system is at monitoring this vital aspect.

Discussions on implementation not sufficiently focused on annual reports and plans. One way of bringing about a more holistic approach to long-run service delivery is to pay careful attention to plans and reports mandated by legislation and linked to budgets. Here the annual performance plans and annual reports of the DBE and provincial education departments are key. The Committee could pay more attention to these documents, e.g. to what extent are actions focused on what was prioritised in the annual plan, or how is the DBE ensuring that provincial plans are logical and aligned to national priorities. In general, the stakes around annual plans and reports should probably be raised significantly.

Policy discussions not specific enough. Discussion in the committee meetings are too often too general, and not sufficiently focused on the specifics of policies.

National Development Plan barely mentioned. Annual plans should of course be guided by long-term plans, in particular the NDP and the DBE's own *Action Plan to 2019*. These long-term plans are barely mentioned in the minutes of the Committee's meetings.

B7. Recommended policy work going forward

The following list of six priorities draws from ten policy innovation priorities mentioned in the NDP. Their order reflects what could be considered their level of urgency for the work of legislators. They are strongly guided by the NDP, which help to bring unity amongst players in the education arena.

More reliable national assessments of learning. Standardised testing, in the form of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) programme, was halted in 2015 due to disputes between government and teacher unions over the programme's design and purpose. Whilst ANA was problematic in many respects, it appears to have sent vital signals to actors in the system about the importance of mastering basic language and mathematics skills, and constituted a unique tool at the primary level to gauge which schools were coping least, and which could be considered role models, in particular amongst township and rural schools. Since 2015, it appears as if better policies for standardised testing have been developed. In this regard, a 2016 proposal by the DBE is important. The largest hindrance to progress seems political. In South Africa, as elsewhere, standardised testing is generally regarded with suspicion by teacher unions, and testing easily becomes a 'bargaining chip' in the larger politics of teacher pay.

⁴⁵ See <https://pmg.org.za/committee/28>. Around fifteen minutes, covering fifteen meetings, from 2016 and 2017 were analysed.

New ways of teaching basic reading skills. Evidence from around the world points to a particularly powerful obstacle to educational progress: poor teaching methods in the earliest grades, in particular as far as reading acquisition is concerned. Guidance in this area has improved, largely through better curriculum documents, yet government's own reports point to gaps, such as a lack of attention to norms around how much writing learners should produce, or what the word count per minute should be for reading out aloud in specific languages. Legislators should push for the introduction of additional tools to strengthen early grade teaching and insist that these tools be properly quality assured, preferably through engaging with international experts. But the exceptionally large classes in the lowest grades in parts of the school system warrant special attention, as large classes limit the extent to which innovative teaching practices can be explored.

Broader access to better pre-school services. There has been remarkable progress in enrolment in some type of pre-schooling. However, apart from one rigorous impact evaluation focusing on the quality of Grade R being introduced in schools during the years 2005 to 2011, there has been little monitoring of the quality of pre-Grade 1 services, and specifically whether these services improve children's readiness for school. The NDP focusses strongly on a universal year of schooling (not necessarily in a formal school) below Grade R. Currently at that age around three-quarters of children are attending some institution, but only around a quarter receive public funding. Yet the existing system whereby early childhood centres are funded provides funding to half a million children who are below the age of the children the NDP is focused on. There is thus a fundamental funding contradiction between the existing system and what the NDP envisages. With regard to service quality, it may be best to focus initially on strengthening existing systems, making public funding dependent on upholding basic minimum standards around hygiene, etc.. Such systems require inspections and reports. Currently such reports receive little mention in annual reports of government departments.

Tightening up school management and governance. Across the world, a key lever for improving schooling systems is seen to be 'decentralisation' or 'school autonomy', linked to adequate central funding and strong accountability of the school to the state. In South Africa, there are often simultaneous moves to take powers to the centre, whilst also devolving powers to schools. For instance, widespread concerns around corruption in appointment of school principals often lead to the assumption that principals are weak and should be 'micro-managed'. The culture of provincial and national departments is often centralist, which can lead to the notion that it is primarily the duty of the province to monitor whether teachers engage in professional development activities or arrive in time at school, and so on. At the same time, the NDP and SA Schools Act clearly see the ideal as being relatively empowered school principals who act as powerful agents of change in the schooling system. The NDP in fact advocates shifting more powers to principals. The contradictions can result in situations where effective principals are micro-managed and ineffective principals are left alone, instead of being assisted or removed. Legislators can assist in bringing about a more coherent environment for school principals by insisting that the basic provisions of the school funding norms are followed. Legislators should also critique the checks and balances that provincial departments have in place to prevent corrupt appointments. Realizing the NDP's vision of school principals as important agents of change is linked to the presence of standardised testing, but also tools to communicate school-level results to parents so that learning can feature more prominently in conversations between parents and the school's staff. This may require the use of 'school report cards' for schools and parents.

Better use of modern technologies in education. This is an area where the risk of fruitless expenditure is high throughout the developing world. There is a need for an effective national policy framework for ICT in schools to guide spending and actions and the collaboration between public and private actors. Crucially, South Africa does not have such a policy currently, yet government does acknowledge this is a serious gap. There are also more on-the-ground issues that can be addressed. For instance, computer subjects have existed in the grades 10 to 12 curriculum for many years, yet participation in these subjects has been mostly stagnant, and the participation of black and female learners has been low.

A smoother transition from school to post-school life. The NDP emphasises the importance of career guidance for grades 7 to 9 (the senior phase) as part of a broader emphasis on ensuring that youths make the right decisions with regard to their grades 10 to 12 subjects, moving on to a TVET college, or leaving full-time education altogether.

Section C:

Responses to some issues raised by the Terms of Reference (ToR) and feedback received from Working Group 1

C1. The ratio of Grade 1 enrolments to Grade 12 entrants and passes by province

A crude measure of flows through the school system is the number of Grade 12 learners as a percentage of the number of learners in Grade 1 eleven years earlier. The highlighted figures in Table 4 shows such a 'pseudo cohort'. In 2002, 1 287 582 learners were in Grade 1, and eleven years later 597 196 were in Grade 12

Table 4: Enrolment by grade and year in public schools, 2002 to 2013

Year	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
2002	1 287 582	1 006 967	943 244	1 070 766	1 138 418	1 034 229	955 199	932 962	1 085 368	873 453	673 442	485 134	11 486 764
2003	1 292 131	1 124 265	1 004 312	954 874	1 036 996	1 102 465	988 589	977 668	903 043	1 100 890	737 418	475 974	11 698 625
2004	1 294 975	1 103 131	1 030 323	979 200	911 263	990 434	1 041 922	1 002 898	907 172	1 049 239	820 802	500 490	11 631 849
2005	1 233 581	1 118 690	1 078 001	1 061 770	951 372	898 493	972 542	1 052 499	930 797	1 069 494	839 009	538 909	11 745 157
2006	1 186 011	1 082 501	1 100 150	1 073 604	1 026 779	920 187	872 693	1 021 377	971 493	1 093 750	890 902	568 930	11 808 377
2007	1 171 153	1 049 991	1 066 668	1 090 652	1 035 377	1 001 632	896 123	930 019	957 450	1 115 961	920 102	625 809	11 860 937
2008	1 122 048	1 031 794	1 017 630	1 050 819	1 042 985	1 001 836	964 331	926 603	902 656	1 076 527	902 752	595 216	11 635 197
2009	1 106 786	1 004 268	1 004 560	1 019 850	1 009 330	1 012 592	970 885	991 083	926 531	1 017 341	881 661	602 278	11 547 165
2010	1 116 899	994 410	972 668	1 002 645	978 983	978 016	980 747	1 001 180	1 009 327	1 039 762	841 815	579 384	11 495 836
2011	1 177 089	1 003 353	957 209	974 860	957 203	946 427	941 291	1 008 110	1 049 904	1 094 189	847 738	534 498	11 491 871
2012	1 208 973	1 074 788	967 373	966 349	939 025	935 446	912 528	971 509	1 096 113	1 103 495	874 331	551 837	11 601 767
2013	1 222 851	1 116 427	1 025 185	964 630	923 562	909 095	902 099	942 345	1 073 060	1 146 285	834 611	597 196	11 657 346

This is a 'pseudo-cohort' in the sense that many of those in Grade 12 in 2013 were not in Grade 1 eleven years earlier, because of repetition: Some of the 2013 matrics may have started one, two or even more years earlier than 2002 in Grade 1. Nevertheless, as patterns of progression, drop-out and repetition tend to change relatively little in the short term, thus the ratio between these two magnitudes is a useful indicator: It was 46% for the country as a whole for these years (See fifth last column in Table 5). Perhaps more pertinently, matric passes in 2013 were only 34% of the enrolment in Grade 1 eleven years earlier. However, before Grade R become common, many children were sent to school early and spent two or more years in Grade 1, thus the number of Grade 1 learners exceeded the cohort size. Analysts have thus often used the Grade 2 number as one that more closely resembles actual cohort size. Grade 12 matriculants in 2013 were only 53% of the Grade 2 enrolment in 2003 (fourth last column).

Table 5: "Progression" using Pseudo-cohorts by province, 2002-2013

	Grade 1 in 2002	Grade 2 in 2003	Gr 8 in 2009	Gr12 in 2013	Matric passes 2013	Gr12/ Gr1	Gr12/ Gr2	Gr12/ Gr8	Pass/ Gr1	Pass/ Gr8
Eastern Cape	274 512	210 781	152 735	77 939	46 840	28%	37%	51%	17%	31%
Free State	62 882	55 663	50 824	27 774	23 689	44%	50%	55%	38%	47%
Gauteng	152 845	147 881	157 587	105 035	85 122	69%	71%	67%	56%	54%
Kwazulu Natal	349 180	287 844	249 034	157 300	112 403	45%	55%	63%	32%	45%
Limpopo	153 501	148 429	134 763	86 650	59 184	56%	58%	64%	39%	44%
Mpumala nga	93 373	83 407	85 450	52 321	38 836	56%	63%	61%	42%	45%

North West	95 349	87 844	62 685	29 979	25 414	31%	34%	48%	27%	41%
Northern Cape	18 106	17 613	21 485	10 654	7 749	59%	60%	50%	43%	36%
Western Cape	87 669	84 637	76 520	49 544	40 542	57%	59%	65%	46%	53%
South Africa	1 287 417	1 124 099	991 083	597 196	439 779	46%	53%	60%	34%	44%

C2. Profiles of performance in the Annual National Assessments, 2014

Tables 6 and 7 show the performance in the 2014 Annual National Assessments (ANAs) for all the participating grade in Mathematics and Language. Though comparisons of average performance levels cannot validly be made across grades due to possible differences in difficulty levels, some important differentials can be observed. The large racial differentials at higher grades are symptomatic of large inequalities and also low quality of education in schools serving largely the black population.

Table 6: Mathematics Performance in Annual National Assessment by province, gender and race, 2014

	Gr1	Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr9
Province:							
EC	56.2	53.8	50.8	33.3	29.4	33.4	17.9
FS	59.2	60.2	56.3	37.8	35.1	41.1	17.5
GP	65.0	64.6	59.2	43.9	41.1	45.2	16.3
KN	61.8	60.7	56.0	39.1	35.0	41.2	15.9
LP	55.2	54.4	46.2	30.2	26.7	33.2	9.3
MP	55.9	55.0	48.2	33.4	29.8	33.2	14.6
NC	55.4	55.6	51.0	33.7	31.3	37.6	14.8
NW	54.4	53.5	49.8	31.1	29.3	37.9	14.5
WC	61.4	62.7	58.6	42.7	40.1	45.8	18.6
Gender:							
Female	62.3	61.2	55.3	38.7	35.0	40.8	14.9
Male	58.0	57.7	51.7	35.6	32.4	38.0	13.2
Race:							
Black	59.0	58.0	51.7	35.0	31.4	37.3	12.4
Coloured	60.9	62.1	57.0	39.5	36.5	41.8	14.3
Indian	74.1	75.6	72.3	59.5	56.8	60.2	31.5
White	76.5	79.6	77.3	65.2	62.8	66.1	40.6

Table 7: Performance in each grade in Language in Annual National Assessment (ANA) by province, gender and race, 2014

	Gr1	Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr9
Province:							
EC	55.8	53.4	47.9	41.2	35.8	44.5	35.6
FS	61.9	56.9	54.6	43.2	40.7	51.1	37.8
GP	65.8	60.5	55.3	51.7	50.8	59.3	43.2
KN	61.9	59.0	55.5	44.6	41.2	51.0	34.7
LP	58.3	53.2	47.3	36.9	32.3	44.3	30.2
MP	58.7	55.7	47.9	40.3	38.0	46.7	37.8
NC	57.1	53.0	46.4	40.2	39.9	48.2	40.5
NW	56.9	51.5	47.0	38.5	36.8	49.1	38.6
WC	64.5	62.0	49.9	51.4	52.2	59.9	45.5
Gender:							
Female	64.4	60.7	55.2	48.5	45.9	55.1	40.7

Male	57.8	53.6	47.5	40.5	37.8	47.4	34.1
Race:							
Black	59.1	55.1	50.2	41.8	38.5	48.5	34.8
Coloured	65.1	61.4	50.4	49.7	50.9	58.5	45.0
Indian	83.8	78.6	67.9	68.4	69.1	76.3	58.9
White	84.4	81.4	69.7	71.9	73.9	77.9	65.3

C3. The relationship between the level of education and employment

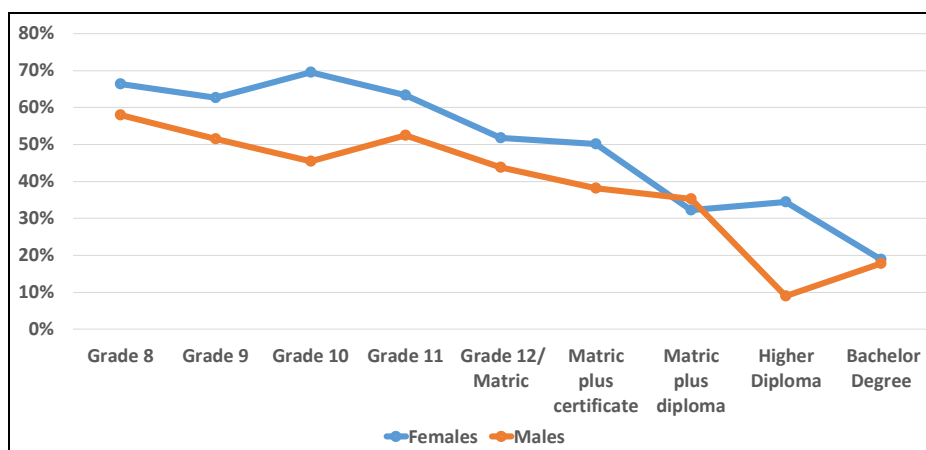
Table 8 below shows how, for each age and gender group, the level of broad unemployment tends to decline at higher levels of education. As there are small numbers of individuals in the survey in some specific age, gender and education categories, some of the figures appear volatile. However, the underlying relationship has been well studied, and once one controls for other factors such as gender, race and the urban-rural divided, there is a clear convex relationship. This implies that higher levels of education across most grades is not associated with much improvement in the employment probability until matric is reached, whereafter the prospects for jobs increase strongly, as Figure 4 also illustrates. This is related to the higher productivity that employers associate with matric and higher levels of education, whereas the relatively easy transition between lower grades means that employers do not consider this a good productivity signal.

Table 8: Broad unemployment rate by age group and education, 2015

	Age group				
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	All (15-64)
None or Grade R only	45.3	43.2	34.0		39.3
Grade 1	40.2	42.6	61.2	35.1	24.7
Grade 2	32.1	35.6	33.5	28.5	21.1
Grade 3	35.3	59.2	49.1	31.8	33.0
Grade 4	51.3	45.9	31.0	22.2	34.8
Grade 5	60.8	44.4	34.6	23.2	38.7
Grade 6	57.8	40.3	27.7	22.7	36.6
Grade 7	49.6	41.6	33.9	24.1	38.3
Grade 8	60.9	37.2	32.5	19.3	39.6
Grade 9	55.6	41.8	31.4	20.3	43.8
Grade 10	55.5	39.4	29.0	26.9	40.3
Grade 11	43.8	57.8	37.2	31.4	19.4
Grade 12	47.7	27.7	18.9	10.1	33.0
Matric plus certificate	44.8	21.5	23.3	15.6	29.9
Matric plus diploma	33.5	16.9	7.3	9.0	16.8
Higher Diploma	26.1	8.3	8.9	4.6	10.7
Bachelor Degree	18.4	6.4	4.4	8.9	9.1
Bachelor Degree with Post-graduate diploma	24.3	7.8	2.5	1.9	7.7
Honours Degree	12.4	4.9	1.3	4.1	5.2
Higher Degree (Master's/ PhD)	25.5	5.8	0.0	3.9	5.9
Total	50.1	31.4	23.3	16.9	34.3

Source: Own calculations from Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Q1 of 2016

Figure 4: Broad unemployment rates for young adults (20-24 years) by education and gender, March 2015



Source: Own calculations from Quarterly Labour Force Survey, March 2015

Section C12 investigates this issue further.

C4. Increasing access to schooling and quality

Access to schools in the sense of children attending school is no longer a major problem in the school system. The Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention already showed in 2007 that most children between the ages of seven and 15 attend school. This committee defined **retention** as “the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system until the completion of the compulsory schooling phase. Learner retention is the complement of dropout. ...”⁴⁶ According to StatsSA (2017: 3), participation among 7 to 15 year olds has remained above 97% since 2002, while those out of school fell from 7% in 2002 to 5% in 2015.⁴⁷ It thus appears as if access to schooling of some sort is no longer a major issue, but that access to quality education is more difficult, as indicated throughout this report.

Table 9 Proportion of learners of different age groups who have reached certain thresholds

	2002	2015
16-18 year olds who have completed Grade 7	85%	94%
19-21 year olds who have completed Grade 9	83%	87%

Source: StatsSA 2017: 3

C5. Interventions that can add to the basket of “No Fee Schools”

The DBE’s revised strategic plan includes providing “full funding assistance covering tuition, books, x

C6. Investments in physical infrastructure of schools

The DBE has committed itself to “eradicate inappropriate school structures, construct new structures and provide infrastructure facilities; Provide schools with infrastructure and facilities in line with agreed norms and standards; Provide learners with access to information via broadband” (DBE Strategic Framework). It admits, however, that there are still considerable backlogs and that progress in eliminating unsatisfactory conditions such as lack of water, electricity and proper sanitation in schools is still occurring too slowly:

“While funding has been made available to deal with school infrastructure backlogs, PEDs have not been able to drive school infrastructure projects with the anticipated momentum. Capacity, market and provider constraints have been cited as the main challenges in the provisioning of infrastructure. The Presidential Infrastructure Co-ordinating Commission, announced by the President in his 2012 State of the Nation Address, as well as the appointment of implementing agencies in different provinces, will improve delivery and provision of school infrastructure. The

⁴⁶ Department of Education, 2007: 3.

⁴⁷ StatsSA, 2017: 3

Department will continue to eradicate mud and unsafe school structures through the ASIDI project to bring about dignity in education. Recruitment of qualified personnel with Built-environment expertise in the provinces is expected to add impetus to the planning and delivery of infrastructure.”⁴⁸

International evidence indicates that physical infrastructure does not necessarily contribute greatly to improved learning. In South Africa, though, the lack of basic infrastructure in some schools is an issue not necessarily because of the impact that it may have on access or learning, but because it is a manifestation of inequity and that clean water and proper sanitation should be regarded as a human right.

C7. Enabling productive teaching and learning through timely delivery of textbooks, etc.

As outlined in the Department of Basic Education’s Revised Five-Year Strategic Plan⁴⁹, one way of improving overall learner performance is through increased access to high quality learning and teaching materials. Therefore the Department has committed itself to ensuring that every learner has access to the minimum set of required workbooks. This objective has been reached: according to the DBE, all provinces received all required workbooks in 2016. In addition to textbooks and workbooks, the DBE will also use digital content to aid teaching and learning. This content is to be made available through an educational portal, which is currently in advanced stages of development. A content repository consisting of free interactive educational resources including interactive workbooks, video lessons, worksheets and state-owned e-textbooks has already been set up. These efforts exemplify the Department’s commitment to increasing access to quality teaching and learning materials as a means of improving overall learner performance.

According to StatsSA⁵⁰, over 91% of learners in all grades and provinces have access to language workbooks and over 91% to Mathematics workbooks. The workbooks are aligned to the new curriculum statement, CAPS, and is available in all 11 languages for Language up to Grade 9, and for Mathematics in all 11 languages up to grade 3 and in English and Afrikaans up to Grade 9..

In Grades 10 to 12, the focus falls on textbooks rather than workbooks. Statistics South Africa’s General Household Survey of 2015 again provides useful information in this regard. The proportion of learners in these grades who reported that they had no textbooks has dropped from around 20% in 2002 to 4% in 2015⁵¹. As shown in Table 10, 78.7% of learners in these two grades included in the StatsSA sample indicated that they had textbook in all their subjects, and another 15.7% that they have such textbooks in most of their subjects. In Free State, more than 90% of children report they have textbooks in all subjects. The only province where fewer than 90% reported that they had textbooks in all or most of their subjects is Northwest; in Kwazulu-Natal more than one-quarter say that they do not have textbooks in all their subjects but do have textbooks in most subjects.

Table 10: Percentage of learners in Grades 10-12 who report having textbooks in all or most subjects, 2015

	All subjects	Most subjects
EC	79.8	15.9
FS	90.3	7.1
GP	87.8	7.9
KZN	64.1	26.0
LP	84.9	13.4
MP	75.8	17.5
NW	71.6	17.9
NC	88.7	8.0

⁴⁸ Department of Basic Education, 2016a: 28

⁴⁹ Department of Basic Education, 2016a: 42

⁵⁰ StatsSA, 2017: 3.

⁵¹ StatsSA, 2017.

WC	85.7	10.2
SA	78.7	15.7

Source: StatsSA 2017.

C8. Improved governance and management of schools

Research efforts to establish links between school leadership and management (SLM) and learning through quantitative methods are relatively rare and have generally found only weak to moderate effects, despite the fact that SLM is universally regarded as key to good education. In part this failure to establish clear links is related to the difficulty of quantitatively capturing SLM, and in part perhaps also because it is not clear what aspects of SLM are most important for having a positive impact on learning. Robinson (2008) observes that the impact of different leadership dimensions are better investigated by looking at specific leadership practices and behaviours rather than adopting broad theories as the unit of analysis.

In large-scale quantitative research, existing measures of SLM capture effective or ineffective SLM practices in superficial and fragmented ways. In education production functions there remains a large residual or unexplained component despite controlling for school resources and various student home-background factors⁵². This is especially the case in rural or poor communities where this disconnect between resources and results seems largest⁵³.

C9. Continuous training of teachers and academic support for learners

The National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) reports that during the 2015/2016 financial year, 79 449 educators were supported or trained in various content areas, including Accounting, English First Additional Language, Mathematical Literacy, Numeracy and Literacy⁵⁴. In addition to curriculum-specific training, the Department has also increased opportunities for educators to participate in professional development programmes. There are currently 800 such programmes which teachers can choose from to address their professional development needs. Reports show that 33 160 educators participated in these programmes during the 2015/2015 financial year.

Despite this, the DBE recognizes that more needs to be done to expand training opportunities for teachers. The group identified too small budgets allocated to educator training as one of the main reasons for the lack of adequate teacher training.

C10. Relevance and responsiveness of the curriculum content

A number of studies have found that reading skills in South African primary schools are severely lacking. One study finds, for example, that many Grade 5 learners read so slowly that they cannot read for meaning⁵⁵. This despite the fact that reading for meaning is a curriculum outcome of Grades 1-3. Such findings point to the importance of ensuring effective implementation of the curriculum as a core outcome of the Department. Specifically, improving reading skills has been identified as a priority for the Programme: Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring⁵⁶. Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) for Grades R-9 has been introduced as a means of monitoring reading performance across the basic education sector.

In response to the National Development Plan's (NDP) emphasis on improved performance in Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) subjects, as well as Languages, the DBE has also adopted this goal⁵⁷. The development and supply of Mathematics workbooks for Grades 1-9 has been a major initiative in support of this goal. Studies have revealed that given the close compliance of these workbooks with curriculum outcomes, they are in fact a useful tool for effective curriculum implementation⁵⁸.

⁵² Crouch & Mabogoane, 1998.

⁵³ Van der Berg et al, 2011.

⁵⁴ Department of Basic Education, 2016a: 87.

⁵⁵ Draper & Spaull, 2015.

⁵⁶ Department of Basic Education, 2016b: 43.

⁵⁷ Department of Basic Education, 2016b: 43.

⁵⁸ See for example Hoadley & Galant, 2016.

DBE mandate derived from NDP and incorporated into their Strategic Plan: “Keeping curriculum changes to a minimum will enable teachers to develop the core skills”.

C11. Exploring a possibility of shared resources, equipment and educational material between private and public schools

Various models have been proposed or experimented with where more affluent schools (public or private) partner with less affluent schools to share resources. Formally establishing or demanding such links at a policy level does not seem to have been successful, and most such attempts have been abandoned. Informal arrangements seem to have worked better, though these too have often not continued for long. Some of the reasons for this is that such arrangements are time intensive, and work best where both parties are able to interact on a regular basis, i.e. where distances are short. That means that such arrangements cannot often work outside of large metropolitan areas. Moreover, the number of affluent schools (Quintile 5 and private schools) is relatively small compared to poor schools (Quintiles 1 to 3).

Other models of cooperation are also possible, however. Short periods of teacher exchange can be considered as a way in which strong bonds can be built, and teachers from poor schools can get a better understanding of how good schools operate. Another possibility is sharing assessments, whereby common assessments are set, shared (perhaps electronically, and whereby there then develops a better understanding of the level of cognitive demand that should apply to meet the demands of the curriculum.

C12. The extent of returns on our investments in education

Van Broekhuizen finds that employment returns to education in South Africa are negligible prior to completion of Matric⁵⁹. That is, only the completion of Matric seems to bear any noticeable returns to investments in education in terms of labour market earnings and the probability of employment. Obtaining a Matric certificate raises the probability of being employed by 8 percentage points, and after controlling for a number of factors, individuals with Matric earn on average 39% more than those who have not obtained a Matric certificate. Furthermore, as individuals attain tertiary education, their employment prospects increase substantially.

These findings suggest that investments in basic education bear measurable returns only in as far as they enable individuals to complete Matric and attain tertiary qualifications. Unfortunately, due to high dropout rates, less than half of the children who enter Grade 1 will, on average, make it to Matric⁶⁰. Considering that about 20% of those will not pass Matric, this further reduces the proportion of learners who eventually will complete Matric and thus enjoy high returns to their education in the labour market.

C13. Determining an acceptable level of school pass mark

In a study for Umalusi that also looked at international school systems, Wedekind states that

“...pass marks between 30% and 40% are by no means unusual and there are very few school systems that set pass marks at 50% for subjects. There are however a number of systems that require achievement at that level for most subjects in some aggregated form in order to be awarded the qualification.” (Wedekind 2013: 25)

In an article in Mail & Guardian, Stephen Taylor first debunks two “myths” that he claims are widespread:

“Myth 1: ‘The pass requirements were higher in the past.’ This is simply not true: the pass mark for a subject was never 50%. Not during apartheid. Not in recent years. Never. Myth 2: ‘The pass mark is 30%.’ In fact, the NSC requires six subjects to be passed, three with at least 40% and the remaining three with at least 30%.”

Wedekind tried to estimate, based on matriculation data for the years then available, how many learners would have passed if the requirements were either that the average matric mark exceeded 50%, or that 50% had to be achieved in all subjects. The results are presented in Table 11 below. Taylor, referring to 2013 NSC

⁵⁹ Van Broekhuizen, 2011: 95.

⁶⁰ Van Wyk, 2015: 8

data, estimates that a somewhat higher number would have passed if the requirement was 50% for all subjects, namely 120 000. Even this is only a fraction of the 440 000 who did in fact pass.

Table 11: Estimated number if matric passes if alternative pass criteria would have applied

	Passes if requirement was 50% average		Passes if requirement was 50% for all subjects	
	Number	% of all candidates	Number	% of all candidates
2008	178 977	34.96%	49 665	9.70%
2009	186 161	36.20%	42 556	8.82%
2010	213 570	42.16%	53 274	10.52%
2011	206 200	44.27%	49 972	10.73%

Source: Based on Wedekind, 2013: 27

Applying these stricter criteria could have major consequences. Wedekind and Taylor come to very similar conclusions in this regard, that greatly increased failure rates would be politically and socially unacceptable. This is likely to be disruptive to the labour market and create confusion among employers, *“because matric would mean very different things, depending on when people went to school”*.⁶¹

It is more likely that either the standard of the papers would drop to allow more people to pass, or the marks would be adjusted upwards. Both these authors point to consequences of such steps for universities; if the difficulty level is lowered in order to make the pass mark 50%, there would be less ability to differentiate at the high end, thus making it harder for universities to identify top candidates. This would make it even more difficult to have differentiation at the top end for university access, a

Subject requirements between the matriculation examination that applied until 2007 and the new NSC requirements of 2008 onwards are difficult to compare exactly, especially as there used to be a standard and a higher grade for many of the more demanding subjects. The best attempt to deal with this was a series of studies by Charles Simkins for the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE). He concludes, based on a 30% pass level, that *“...it would not be appropriate for more than about 40% of National Senior Certificate candidates to attempt mathematics. The rest should enter for mathematical literacy.”*⁶²

C14. Exploring possible multiple exit points

The possibility of implementing an exit examination after Grade 9 has long been considered in South Africa. The South African Schools Act requires children to attend school until the last school day of the year in which they turn 15, or the end of Grade 9, whichever comes first. For a period, a compulsory universal examination, known as the CTA (Common Tasks for Assessment) was instituted, with 25% of the marks attained through a universal examination moderated by Umalusi, and 75% through tasks administered in the classroom. However, the CTA seems to have had a limited positive effect. It was poorly received by teachers, many of whom found that preparing for this examination detracted from their time for covering the curriculum.⁶³ At the same time, the exceedingly low levels of assessment meant that employers did not consider it a useful indication of what a potential worker is able to do that would assist them in selecting amongst jobseekers. Moreover, in part the CTA was intended also as an examination before learners split into an academic, school based stream, and those who would move into Further Education and Training Colleges. However, the flow to FET Colleges from Grade 9 was extremely low, and the CTAs were abolished as it became clear that most children continued in school as long as they thought they could continue with some chance of success. Clearly, there was no indication that the FET Colleges offered better opportunities in the labour market, even for those who did not perform well in academic studies, and the preference for schools rather than the FET Colleges remained. Thus Wedekind, in a document written for Umalusi, remarked that *“From the historical review and the analysis of the current context it is clear that the current qualification was initially intended as a channel that largely fed students into higher education programmes.*

⁶¹ Taylor, 2014.

⁶² Simkins, 2010: 7.

⁶³ See Sithole, 2009.

Yet it is clear that this vision did not materialize, with the vast majority of Grade 9 learners opting to follow the NSC route.”⁶⁴

In 2015 the Minister of Basic Education announced that the department was intending to introduce an exit examination and certificate for Grade 9 “to address the skills shortages and unemployment in the country”. Again, the intended intervention was aimed at creating a second skills and vocational pathway specifically for learners who struggle to attain the academic requirements of the National Senior Certificate (matric) examination.⁶⁵ In this regard, the cautionary comment of an OECD team is relevant, “...that great care should be taken before introducing an external exam that may turn into a ‘selection’ exam for grade 10 and an insurmountable barrier for the very youngsters who most need help” (OECD 2008: 201).

However, most learners who drop out of the formal school system do so in response to having repeated rather than being motivated by possibilities offered by other paths into the labour market. An exit examination in grade 9 is unlikely to have much effect on the preference of most learners to remain in the academic school system as long as they see any potential chance of completing matric and benefiting from the rewards that that brings in the labour market.

There may be other reasons why a grade 9 examination could be desired, however. The Advisory Committee for Mathematics (ACM) recommended that the Department of Basic Education introduce a National Examination for grade 9 Mathematics as a means of addressing the poor quality of mathematics teaching and learning, including one of the consequence of such poor learning, the large flow of learners switching to Mathematical Literacy rather than Mathematics after completing Grade 9. “This means that the pool of learners leaving grade 12 with Mathematics is diminishing and this impacts on the number of learners available to study important fields such as Science and Engineering at South African universities.”⁶⁶

A report by UK NARIC for the Independent Examinations Board found that “the features of the NSC indicate a qualification with an underlying level that is both robust and fit for the purposes of examining secondary school levels”, and it concludes that the NSC is broadly comparable to the GCE AS level.⁶⁷ On the other hand, they bemoan the absence of a recognition of educational achievement on a fundamental level, and argues that high dropout after grade 10 makes this even more necessary. Therefore they propose that there should be an examination at the end of Grade 10 that is broadly comparable to the GCSE in the UK.

C15. Comparison to other countries in respect of educational profile

South Africa compares well internationally in terms of a number of measures of educational performance. Mean educational attainment in South Africa was 10.2 years in 2014, which is much higher than that of comparable developing countries such as Brazil, who had a mean attainment rates of 7.4 years in 2014 (<http://data.uis.unesco.org>). South Africa fares well in terms of attainment even in comparison to developed countries, achieving the same mean years of attainment as Italy in 2014 (<http://data.uis.unesco.org>). South Africa’s enrolment ratios are also good by international standards.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, years of attainment and enrolment ratios do not necessarily translate into measurable learning outcomes. High rates of attainment must be accompanied by quality education in order for this to be the case. South Africa continues to perform notoriously poorly on international assessment tests, even by regional comparison, revealing that high enrolment rates do not translate into measureable learning outcomes for the majority of South African learners (Spaull 2012).

C16. How should the performance gap between fee-charging schools and no fee schools be tackled?

The differences in learning outcomes across these two types of schools is in part a reflection of the differences in home background, specifically socio-economic status. Poorer (quintiles 1 to 3) schools were declared no fee schools. One intriguing question is whether the absence of fees is in itself a factor leading to

⁶⁴ Wedekind, 2013: 27.

⁶⁵ My Broadband, 2015.

⁶⁶ Govender, 2014.

⁶⁷ UK Naric, 2019: 4

⁶⁸ Gustafsson, 2012.

worse performance. Some would postulate that having even low fees enhances parent involvement in the school, and a sense of accountability to parents. Even if this were true, it is perhaps not politically possible to roll back the no fee schools policy.

C17. How does one build a better institutional culture in schools?

Much of the debate around improving schools does indeed pay attention to the culture of schools. What is implicit in much of Section B0 above and in the NDP is that culture is something that policy shapes indirectly by putting in place the right incentives. If learners do not learn in schools, this should soon become apparent. Principals, who should be the best people for the job, should face consequences if they do not do something about under-performance. The provincial departments should ensure that standard disciplinary procedures are followed, so that the principal enjoys an environment that is conducive to good management and a good work ethic. Sufficient attention should be given to positive and negative incentives which puts behaviour 'right'. The right school principal, with the right incentives (monetary and non-monetary) to perform well, should be able to line up school resources in the right manner, and create the right cultural environment.

C18. Should government promote independent schooling for the less advantaged to a greater degree?

In the South African context, there should probably be greater use, by government, of independent schools to test approaches which may be difficult to test in the more rigid public system, for instance innovative ways of conducting multi-grade teaching. Bringing about a massive 'privatisation' of public schools is probably not something that is either doable from a political angle or desirable in terms of stability. On a very specific and immediate level, it seems justified for legislators to delve into reported problem whereby provincial departments appears to place bureaucratic hurdles in the way of independent schools. This has been fairly well documented by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (2016).

C19. How could international collaboration help to solve the country's teacher development challenges?

It appears that the country has been relatively successful at bringing about better teacher training programmes. This is strongly suggested by both the 2007 and 2013 SACMEQ data, which indicate that younger teachers emerging from the more recent university-based training system are more knowledgeable and produce better learner results than their older peers, by a large margin⁶⁹. An area where international collaboration should probably be stronger is in the *design* of teacher development programmes, particularly in more innovative areas such as new approaches for acquiring reading and the use of ICTs in the classroom.

⁶⁹ Armstrong, 2014 and Gustafsson, 2016b.

Section D:

Recommendations

D1. Before instituting large changes in the education system that could be destabilising or costly, first test their efficacy through small pilot studies, for instance in the form of randomised control trials (RCTs)

- This can for instance be done regarding ECD programmes, teacher training, use of technology, etc.
- A key area where a balance must be sought between the need to pilot and demands for rapid rolling out on scale is standardised annual national assessments. This is perhaps the sector's most critical area of innovation in the coming years. There is a need to implement these assessments as soon as possible across all schools annually as a basis for better school-level accountability. However, test design, methods of marking and the use of results for accountability (but also to some extent development) need to be shaped by careful experimentation. On the policy side, 2007 amendments to the South African Schools Act (SASA), plus related notices and regulations falling under the National Education Policy Act (NEPA), will need to be revisited to ensure that a solid framework exists for the national assessment system.

D2. Expand support to Early Childhood Development, with strong emphasis on the quality of such provision in the sense of cognitive, social and emotional development of children

- Consider placing ECD under the DBE, at least as far as cognitive development is concerned
- Stabilise ECD by increasing funding and developing appropriate training for ECD practitioners (use RCTs to measure the impact of interventions before scaling them up)
- Formulating coherent funding norms for services below Grade R will be critical for the success of these services. In particular, existing contradictions whereby two- and three-year-old children are funded, whilst poor four-year-olds who should be funded are not, will need to be resolved. Lessons can be learnt from both the design and the somewhat irregular implementation of the 2008 Grade R funding norms (Notice 26 of 2008).

D3. More reliable national assessments of learning should be introduced in line with best practices around the world.

- Despite the discontinuation of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) since 2015, largely due to teacher union pressure, the NDP's insistence that better information is needed on what learners learn at the primary level still holds.
- A new national assessment should be instituted that contains both (a) a system of universal testing that makes it possible to gauge how well individual schools perform, particularly at primary school level, and (b) a sample-based testing system with highly secure tests with 'anchor items' or test questions that are repeated from year to year. The latter can be used to gauge system performance and to track it over time. The DBE has committed to such a system and it appears that unions are also broadly willing to accept this, if the purpose of the different assessments is spelt out clearly.
- Given the sensitivity of standardised assessments, it is vital to have not just a formal policy in this regard, but also simplified versions aimed at ordinary citizens. Australia's policy guide is worth consulting.
- Linked to improved national assessments is the NDP's emphasis on the systematic provision of information to parents about the academic performance of individual learners as well as the performance of the school as a whole, what the international literature refers to as 'school reports cards'. Performance of schools should always be evaluated with cognisance of the socio-economic background of the children they serve.
- A logical extension of this would be school report cards distributed to parents based on data from the Grade 12 examinations system.

D4. Place the emphasis in primary schools system on ensuring that all children can read fluently and with comprehension by age 10

- Teacher pedagogy – teach teachers to teach reading, particularly in African languages
- Current proposals that universal standardised testing (the 'universal summative test') focus on Grade 6 would provide an excellent basis for monitoring progress in strengthening reading, even if Grade 6

learners are a few years older than ten. In particular, by Grade 6, children who transition from one of the nine indigenous African languages to English should be able to read fluently in English. This should be a central focus of the new assessments.

D5. Provide greater support to the development of African languages for teaching, reading and writing

- Improve availability and quality of African language books and other reading material
- Support research on African languages, e.g. by instituting NRF chairs in early reading acquisition in African languages. Balfour states that *“research in international applied language studies on how bilingualism influences the development of proficiency in reading is in need of further development. South Africa needs to contribute to this scholarly work, given our unique position enshrined in legislation, in terms of indigenous language development. The opportunity exists here for work in which language pedagogy development for the purposes of bilingual (or multilingual) language acquisition, can be undertaken.”*⁷⁰

D6. Improve and expand the teaching of English in the Foundation Phase in schools where the Language of Learning and Teaching changes to English at (about) Grade 4.

- Study English language acquisition
- The success of the 2012 introduction of First Additional Language as a subject in grades 1 to 3 should be monitored closely to determine whether it has contributed to easing the language transition that most children are faced with in Grade 4.

D7. Improve accountability of teachers and principals

- Utilise DBE Workbooks as measure of curriculum coverage through monitoring by curriculum advisers
- Re-institute a form of national assessment and use this as a measure of learning outcomes in primary schools. All assessment results should be seen within the context of the socio-economic background of learners. Without this innovation, existing problems whereby the performance of schools is inaccurately gauged, or where school evaluations become a matter of dispute, will continue. This will perpetuate a situation in which it is difficult to hold principals accountable, or to point to the right principals as role models for their colleagues. Moreover, at the secondary level school evaluations based on Grade 12 results should focus on a wider range of indicators and move away from an overly simplistic focus on basic ‘pass rates’. The National Development Plan’s vision of school principals as key agents of change in the system must be pursued. Whilst the 2016 standards for school principals (Notice 323 of 2016) are a step in the right direction, more policy work is needed in this area, in particular to outline how the emerging assessment system should be used (and also how it should *not* be used) in holding schools accountable.

D8. Ensure that classes in the Foundation phase are not too large

- Very high grade repetition in the foundation phase, particularly in Grade 1, contributes to large classes. Existing rules around grade repetition (mostly Notice 2432 of 1998) focus only on the individual child, not on overall grade- and school-level ceilings for repetition. Such ceilings could reduce class sizes and make it more feasible to introduce alternative teaching methods.

D9. Improve the calibre of school principals by better selection, support and development

- Institute independent competency assessments and performance management contracts for principals. According to the NDP, competency assessments should ensure that individuals not displaying the requisite skills would not become principals. Two provinces have already instituted such competency assessments when appointing new principals. Ultimately, performance contracts for principals should become linked to national school assessment results, which should be viewed relative to the socio-economic backgrounds of learners. A DBE policy on ‘standards for school principals’ was produced in 2016.
- Ensure meritocratic appointment and promotion processes. The NDP and the Mangaung Resolutions of the African National Congress have been remarkably frank in arguing that the process of appointing

⁷⁰ Balfour, 2012: 204-5

school principals is plagued by undue union influence. The 2014 amendment to the Employment of Educators Act aims to remove undue influences from principal appointment processes by allowing a provincial department to nominate a few candidates and then force the school governing body to select from these.

- Assist principals with advice on how to be instructional leaders, i.e. to focus on learning. For this to occur, synergies between national standardised assessments and schools-based assessments need to become very clear in the relevant notices and regulations falling under the National Education Policy Act (NEPA).
- The IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) has been implemented with varying degrees of success in different parts of the country. There is evidence that KwaZulu-Natal has been relatively successful in producing IQMS scores for principals which correlate well with learning outcomes. This is an indication that IQMS, if properly implemented, can assist in improving school-level accountability.
- Offer training for school principals. Training programmes for school management are relatively well-developed, and are offered by a variety of universities, under the Advanced Certificate in Education banner. These programmes should be monitored by the DBE, as there currently are problems with the frequency and nature of reporting on university participation in specific programmes.

D10. Improve the relationship between government and teacher unions

- Incorporate the unions in decision making regarding quality of education, e.g. through involvement in Umalusi and other bodies and processes in education

D11. Improve teacher training, including further training of teachers already in the system

- Unesco's 2013/14 Global Monitoring Report for education, titled *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality education for all* (Unesco 2014), states that initial training of teachers in developing countries is often weak in terms of subject knowledge and equipping future primary teachers to teach children to read. (Ghana addressed subject knowledge deficits by focusing strongly on revising subject knowledge during the first year of teacher training.)
- University training should place more emphasis on pedagogy, especially with regard to teaching reading in the Foundation Phase. UNESCO's report indicates that more attention should go towards ensuring that those who train teachers have the necessary skills.
- Re-training of teachers needs to be expanded, inter alia through experimentation in the use of ICT. UNESCO warns that the results of such programmes are often disappointing. Special care must be taken in the design of these programmes to avoid wastage of resources.
- More teachers in weak schools should be exposed to examples of good quality teaching. Here some experimentation with alternative models can be considered, including long periods spent at good schools in South Africa and even perhaps abroad. In this case too trials are a good way of determining which interventions bear fruit in terms of learner outcomes.
- In shifting some of the emphasis in teacher development to locally-based professional learning communities, the DBE's 2011 *Integrated strategic planning framework for teacher education and development in South Africa* has followed an important worldwide trend. However, clear policy, guidelines and tools need to be developed to support the optimal functioning of such professional learning communities in the South African context. This policy area would lend itself well to a randomised control trial focused on testing different incentives and tools.

D12. Use technology better to improve teaching, but before doing this on scale, use RCTs to determine the cost effectiveness and gains in terms of learner outcomes

- The 2004 White Paper on e-Education (Notice 1922 of 2004) is widely regarded as dated and not specific enough to serve as a framework for guiding new technologies in schools. A new policy framework must be provided to bring together the various actors and issues.
- Participation and success rates in the grades 10 to 12 computer subjects is a matter that should receive more attention, in part as these subjects can serve as an impetus for better technology absorption in schools, and in part because they respond to critical needs in the labour market. Current participation rates are strongly biased against black learners and female learners. This matter must be resolved

Recommendations regarding two submissions from Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre:

Though the Working Group is not convinced that the recommendations made by these entities would clearly lead to an improvement in education quality or would reduce inequalities in the quality of education, two of their submissions do require the attention of the Department of Basic Education and other authorities. These are the following:

D13. Fully implement the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure

- Despite an undertaking to do so in 2013, the education authorities have not yet managed to comply with the basic infrastructure standards set out in the Regulations regarding the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure, covering issues such as water, sanitation and electricity provision. This failure. Such infrastructure should be regarded as basic rights of all school children, irrespective of the possible effect on education quality. The Department of Basic Education, the National Treasury, the Financial and Fiscal Commission and the provincial education departments are urged to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated for this purpose to eliminate this backlog expeditiously.

D14. Investigate and clear up uncertainty regarding legislation regarding sexual violence in schools

- Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre submitted that no clear guidance is given to schools on consulting sexual offences registers before appointing a teacher, and that there is conflicting guidance on the employment of and disciplinary procedures for sexual offenders. These and the other related matters they raise should be investigated by the Department of Basic Education and cleared up if required.

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APPENDIX

Submissions to the Committee

The Commission has received a number of written submissions and a few oral submissions. Oral submissions have largely raised issues of rural neglect and some transport issues. The written submissions are briefly discussed below. **As some of the issues raised in the submissions of Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre require attention**, though they may not all be related to education quality and inequalities in such quality, the issues that this Working Group have looked at, **their submissions should also be referred to the Department of Basic Education for evaluation and follow up.**⁷¹

Submission by the Free Market Foundation:

The Free Market Foundation makes three points:

- (i) It argues against discretionary powers that have been given to the Minister, members of Executive Council and Heads of Departments by sections of the South Africans Schools Act of 1996 as amended. It argues that such discretionary powers “create uncertainty and in many cases are unnecessary”. However, it does not expand on this statement and show why such discretionary powers create uncertainty, nor why they are undesirable.
- (ii) The second point the Foundation makes relates to standardised curricula. It argues that schools should be free to set or choose their own curricula and that this would lead to competition to obtain the best product for learners. They do not indicate how competition would lead to the “best” curricula rather than to the “easiest” curricula – surely some teachers may prefer the latter, in the absence of central criteria that they have to meet?
- (iii) The third issue the Foundation highlights is the private provision of schooling offered by entrepreneurs rather than the government. “Government could purchase top quality schooling for the poor from competing private providers with taxpayers’ money rather than having it squandered on non-functional government schools.” Again the assumption is there that there are informed consumers who would compete for the best product that these privatised schools could provide, rather than a situation where few parents have enough background and understanding to recognise good teaching, and to choose amongst schools given these preferences. Nor does the argument deal with the situation in many rural communities, where most poor children are located, and where distance and cost preclude real competition amongst schools.

Finally, the Foundation attaches, without any motivation, comments that it had submitted in response to Education Laws Amendment Bill and the Higher Education Amendment Bill in 2002, and to the NDP in 2012. The gist of the comments is the same, its belief that competition in education can be implemented instead of government control, and that this would lead to a more efficient education system.

Submissions by Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre:

Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre made seven submissions in a single document. Some of these submissions deserve attention and should be considered by the Department of Basic Education. However, the committee is not convinced that their recommendations would clearly lead to an improvement in education quality or would reduce inequalities in quality of education.

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre on the equitable share and school funding:

The two entities argue that the current system whereby provinces are funded is not redistributive enough, and that the equitable share formula should be revised accordingly. As in much of their arguments, though, it appears that they concentrate more on where fiscal resources should flow to without questioning how much that would contribute to equity in outcomes in terms of education quality. Further, there is a currently a review of the Equitable Share formula underway.

⁷¹ The seven submissions they made are all contained in a single document.

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre on the quintile system of school funding:

The two entities argue that the funding system for the Norms and Standards allocation of funds to schools is not redistributive enough and that classification of schools into quintiles is not always accurate in terms of identifying schools with substantial numbers of poor learners. They therefore ask for a complete overhaul of the funding model towards what they refer to as a needs-based model “that responds better to issues such as rural-urban migration and the impact of the apartheid legacy on schools”. This issue is receiving constant attention from the Financial and Fiscal Commission.

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre on regulations for the creation of educator posts and the distribution of such posts:

They state that the policy to distribute teachers equally between schools is a major step forward, but argue that it does not differentiate between rich and poor schools or well qualified and poorly qualified teachers, do not promote diverse curricula in poor schools, and leaves special needs schools vulnerable. Again, the argument is directed at redirecting fiscal and in this case also teacher resources, but again without considering whether such resources shifts would benefit learners in such schools if other matters are not dealt with to ensure efficiency in the application of resources in weakly performing schools. However, the situation of post provisioning for special needs schools that they also refer to does require separate attention.

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre on regulations relating to minimum uniform norms and standards for school infrastructure:

Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre again raise their concerns about the failure of the education authorities to achieve compliance with the basic infrastructure standards set out in the Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure, covering issues such as water, sanitation and electricity provision. This failure, which the Department of Basic Education ascribes to insufficient funds allocated to infrastructure by provincial departments, clearly needs attention. **Such infrastructure should be regarded as basic rights of all school children, irrespective of the possible effect on education quality. The Department of Basic Education, the National Treasury, the Financial and Fiscal Commission and the provincial education departments are urged to give this important matter sufficient attention.**

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre on powers of school governing bodies and the state:

The two entities ask that the South African Schools Act be reviewed with a focus on ensuring that learners’ interests are protected where SGBs and government attempt to resolve a dispute, and that not too much power should be concentrated in the hands of SGBs or the State. However, it is not clear from the submission why they consider the present situation unbalanced.

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre Submission on Section 58b of SASA relating to underperforming schools:

The two entities suggest that the responsibility for developing a School Improvement Plan should be shifted onto the education districts working in cooperation with the School Management Team.

Submission by Equal Education/Equal Education Law Centre on legislation regarding sexual violence in schools:

It is submitted that no clear guidance is given to schools on consulting sexual offences registers before appointing a teacher, and that there is conflicting guidance on the employment of and disciplinary procedures for sexual offenders. **These and the other related matters they raise are clearly a cause for concern and should be investigated by the Department of Basic Education.**

Submission by the Ihlumelo Foundation:

The *Ihlumelo* Foundation, a non-profit organisation, explains what important work they do in poor communities and schools, and expresses the wish that the outcomes from the High Level Panel's work will also contribute to a situation where they would obtain funding for the work they do and wish to do more readily.

Submission by Ms. Marcelle Pillay:

Ms Pillay submits that the current situation is that white and Indian applicants to study for a degree in medicine require far higher matric average marks than applicants from other race groups to be admitted to such courses. She regards that as ludicrous and dangerous. She also has some further views on health provision which are not of relevance to this report.

Submission by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR):

The SAIRR did not make a specific input to the committee, but simply sent a copy of its policy bulletin @Liberty (no 12 of 2014, dated September 2014). This policy bulletin sets out an argument for a voucher system, whereby all children would receive a voucher to the value of R12 000 (roughly the current cost to the state per student). Students should then be free to attend the school of their choice, by applying and submitting this voucher. Better schools would then attract more children and weaker schools would decline in numbers. This would, according to this view, lead to the expansion of better schools and the contraction of weaker ones, thereby also encouraging the latter to improve their performance. Arguments for such a system have raged over a long time, and some have interpreted the experience of charter schools in the USA as application of such a system and as having been very successful, but others strongly doubt their real success. Competition has also been tried in slightly different ways in Chile, but it has been less successful in rural areas, where South Africa's weaker schools are concentrated.

Submission by an anonymous person:

This person asks that the South African Schools Act should be amended to improve the status and role of School Governing Bodies (SGBs). In particular the person pleads that there should be stronger criteria applied as to who can be a member of the SGB, including educational criteria such as having completed matric, that stipends should be paid to SGB members to ease the cost on them of attending meetings and travelling for that purpose, and that SGB members should be involved to a greater extent in educational bodies (e.g. Umalusi) and in decision making.