

Conclusions

The School Support project deliberately set out to explore how to enable disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing High Schools to fulfil one of their core functions – to successfully implement the curriculum.

To do this, it focussed on what schools needed to do differently in order to move from under-performance to steady achievement in as short a time as possible, and how best to enable them to do this. Put another way, the School Support Project has experimented with how District Officials can better enable schools to do what they are expected to do.

We are delighted that the success stories in this report offer considerable encouragement to Provincial Education Departments, District Directors, Circuit Managers and Curriculum Advisors on at least three counts:

- First they provide inspiring evidence of how much even the most disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools are capable of achieving; within two or three years; within existing systems and budgets; if they receive the right kinds of support.
- Second, they confirm that the kind of support provided by the School Support Model does make a difference in disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools.
- Third, they imply that if Provincial Education Departments can enable and support District Officials to provide the right kinds of support, there is every chance of turning many more under-performing schools into steadily achieving schools within a relatively short space of time.

As suggested in the case studies, once the basic functionality of schools is restored and maintained, the chances of improved learner results are significantly improved.

Recommendations

Evidence from the School Support Project strongly suggests that just four strategic shifts in emphasis could enable Provincial Education Departments and their Districts to facilitate the same sorts of achievements more widely in schools.

Recommendation 1:

Ensure that every teacher, and every learner, in every subject, in every grade, has the teaching and learning support materials they need to fulfil curriculum requirements – at the beginning of each school year.

Recommendation 2:

Shift the overall emphasis from **monitoring administrative curriculum compliance**, to **enabling practical curriculum implementation**.

Recommendation 3:

Enable and expect District and Circuit Officials to balance their monitoring functions with practical support functions, with the emphasis on support until schools are consistently fulfilling implementation requirements.

Recommendation 4:

Ensure that school support activities are school-based.

Implications

Implications - Recommendation 1:

Given the Department of Basic Education's 'funding model that supports the provision of school books, teacher support materials, equipment and school meals in poor schools' (National Planning Commission, p.12, June 2011), the provision of the necessary materials is an accepted Departmental responsibility.

There should therefore not be any budgetary implications for providing approved teacher's guides, textbooks and workbooks as recommended. The challenges lie in ensuring more efficient:

- Stock taking and requisitioning by schools; and
- Ordering from book suppliers and distribution and delivery by Departments.

Implications - Recommendation 2:

Providing support to enable the development of teachers, school management teams and school leaders is consistent with the core principles embodied in the guideline documents for Whole School Evaluation, the IQMS, the NCS and CAPS; and is also an accepted Departmental responsibility.

The challenge here is that the 'mindset' that emphasizes compliance monitoring practices in the broader education system, needs to be shifted in order to come into alignment with and to reflect the values, attitudes, beliefs and practices embodied in, and required by the school curriculum and IQMS expectations.

To ensure that District Officials can enable school leaders and classroom teachers to develop the required values, attitudes, beliefs and practices in their schools and classrooms; the officials themselves need to model them in the way that they work with schools. To achieve this, many officials will need support to shift their emphasis from:

- One-off 'policing' inspections that monitor compliance without enabling it; to
- First enabling compliance, and only then monitoring it.

This requires the ability to balance 'providing support' with 'holding accountable' through ongoing cycles of school visits over time, more or less as follows:

- Provide supportive training, facilitation, mediation and coaching as required.
- Set agreed upon goals with agreed upon deadlines.
- Follow up as agreed, with monitoring, reflection, feedback and further necessary support.

These kinds of shifts will ensure that official's school visits 'model' what school leaders are expected to do with their teachers, and what teachers are expected to do in their classrooms: **Enable development and learning before assessing it.**

Put another way, this will ensure that Whole School Evaluation, IQMS and curriculum requirements are aligned through the whole District system, so that at each level, the monitors and evaluators are themselves able to model the practices they are monitoring and evaluating in others.

To effect these kinds of shifts, see the additional implications for Recommendations 2 - 4 below.

Implications - Recommendations 3 and 4:

To implement and support these recommendations, District Officials will need to provide regular, supportive, practical school-based monitoring, reflection, training, mentoring and coaching visits to schools.

As outlined in the introduction to this report, the content and focus of school-based support visits should be:

- 1) To support school leaders and school management teams to:
 - Understand and acknowledge their curriculum leadership and management roles and responsibilities
 - Know how to improve and align their systems, procedures and practices with them
 - Have guided experiences of how to implement them practically
- 2) To support teachers to:
 - Understand curriculum policy requirements
 - Understand how teacher's guides and textbooks embody curriculum requirements; provide teaching guidelines to compensate for inadequate training; and provide content, learning and assessment activities designed and to fulfil curriculum requirements
 - Know how to align classroom planning, preparation, textbook use and teaching methods with curriculum requirements
 - Have guided experiences of how to implement these practically
- 3) To support school administrators and general workers to:
 - Understand how to support their leaders, managers and teachers to implement the above
 - Have guided experiences of how to implement this support practically.

Additional implications - Recommendations 3 - 4

District Officials (Circuit Managers, Curriculum Advisors and others) will need to experience the kind of 'on-the-job' support they will be required to model in their school support visits.

To facilitate this, they will need:

- 1) Initial 're-orientation and training' to ensure that they:
 - Understand and acknowledge their roles and responsibilities.
 - Understand what is required of schools in their respective area/s of responsibility.

- Understand what they need to do to support schools to achieve what is required of them
- 2) Regular, practical support with planning and actually visiting schools to monitor, reflect, mentor and coach school leaders/teachers, to ensure that they:
- Know how to practically support and enable schools to achieve what is required of them.
 - Have guided, practical experiences of how to support and enable schools to achieve what is expected of them.

The School Support Project is committed to offering this support to the District Offices whose schools it is has been working in since 2008. It is also in the process of cooperating with Pearson Education Achievement Solutions to develop a programme that will offer the same support to other Provinces or Districts.

References:

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