

A REPORT ON UNDERPERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE WESTERN CAPE

REPORT 5

School Governing Bodies at underperforming schools: How effective are they really?

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PREFACE

As part of its drive to undo the legacy of years of race-based, inequitable development in South Africa, the first democratically elected government embarked on an ambitious programme of socio-economic reconstruction and redress in its quest to establish a more fair society in South Africa. The highly unequal and racially fractured school system was one of the first sectors that were addressed. Since 1995 the South African educational landscape has undergone fundamental change to improve the provision of schooling for those that were discriminated against. This included substantial reallocation of an ever-increasing portion of the annual budget to establish new, and improve existing, resources and services.

Although near universal access in the primary school sector has been achieved, the quality of education in both primary and secondary schools has been disappointing. Results from international benchmark tests show our learners are consistently outperformed by learners from poorer countries. In the Western Cape, the location of our research, the number of underperforming secondary schools (i.e. those with a matric pass rate of less than 60%) has more than doubled since 2006. This study aimed to better understand what the important reasons were/are that make these institutions perform badly and to make suggestions as to improve the educational outcomes of learners attending secondary schools in this province.

The research project stretched over an 18-month period and included both rural and urban schools. The research design allowed us to investigate the research problem in depth and breadth. We were correct in our initial assumption that a multitude of issues and factors cause schools to perform poorly, both inside and outside of the schooling system. We decided to present our findings according to the various pertinent themes that gradually evolved from the study. The findings on underperforming secondary schools are presented in five separate reports. These are:

PAPER 1: The Impact of School Level Factors on Educational Performance

PAPER 2: The Impact of Socio-economic Factors on Educational Performance

PAPER 3: Exploring Grade Repetition at Underperforming Schools

PAPER 4: School Governing Bodies at Underperforming Schools: How Effective Are They Really?

PAPER 5: Investigating WCED Interventions at Underperforming Schools

South Africa needs to solve the current crisis engulfing our schools. In order to chisel away at the country's present modest economic growth and subsequent high unemployment rate, we need to as a matter of urgency, understand the core reasons why schools are not working and fix them. It is our moral duty to do this for the millions of children that should receive an education that is of value to them. We owe it to them.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study set out to make an assessment of the operational effectiveness of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) attached to underperforming schools included in the sample. In order to arrive at the most accurate, valid and reliable assessment, the research elicited the perspectives and opinions of different constituencies involved in the functioning of school governing bodies.

In 1996 the School Act of South Africa (SASA) was promulgated. This Act made provision for democratically elected School Governing Bodies (SGBs) at all public schools in South Africa, at both the primary and secondary school level. The conceptualisation and institutionalisation of SGBs can be described as a progressive, democratic and innovative step to reduce the orthodox and centralist approach towards managing and governing South African schools. Yet, the fact that participatory governance in South African society was generally not practiced, created problems for the successful establishment and functioning of SGBs in South African communities, particularly in former black and coloured schools. Schools have had mixed success with the effectiveness and usefulness of SGBs. This paper examines the effectiveness of SGBs at underperforming schools.

2. BACKGROUND

In 1994 South Africa embarked on a new path to democracy after decades of racial segregation. This meant that public (and some private) institutions had to adapt to a raft of legislative measures and dictates aimed at dismantling the institutionalised racism of Apartheid. As part of this drive, the education system was earmarked for fundamental change since the schooling system, with its separate schools for white and black learners not only symbolised but also gave harsh expression to the racial discrimination and inequities that prevailed in the country.

A radical departure from the educational dispensation inspired by an ideology of separatism was a priority for the ANC Government. Clase et al (2007, 244) described the changes introduced to the educational system as a new era for education. The changes were fundamental in nature and touched on all segments of the education

sector ranging from early childhood development (ECD), primary and secondary as well as the tertiary education sector. Although necessary, these changes as introduced in 1996 were also accompanied by a considerable amount of insecurity and stress for all role players involved, from national department functionaries to teachers. Some of the changes included scrapping the raft of different departments of education tasked with the delivery of schooling for the different race groups in South Africa. In addition, the new government embarked on an ambitious program of redeployment of teachers. This was ostensibly designed to ensure that a more equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers could be achieved in terms of location and race. The program had an unfortunate and unintended consequence in that many of these teachers resigned or retired.

The period from 1993 until 1996 saw the gradual phasing out of the previous model of school governance which was referred to as School Management Councils (SMCs) and being replaced by SGBs. According to the National Executive Officer of the Governing Body Foundation of South Africa there is substantial similarity between the duties and responsibilities of the now defunct SMCs and the present SGBs.¹

In line with the new democratic ethos espoused by the post-Apartheid government the new national Ministry of Education 1995 started to develop structures to give credence to these fresh operational principals of decentralisation, inclusivity and participation. Under Apartheid schools were treated as hostile institutions that belonged to the oppressive political dispensation. The new government had to strategise to bring previously disenfranchised communities and schools closer together. This was achieved by developing new entities, anchored in the community, thereby encouraging their involvement in the co-control and management of educational institutions. According to Gamage, (1994, quoted in van Wyk, 2004) this devolution of authority was intended to result in stronger and closer relationships between schools and communities. Such spreading of power to the stakeholder community would (in theory) then ultimately provide an alternative form of accountability to bureaucratic surveillance.

This new participatory and inclusive style of school governance represented, apart from the small sector of well-resourced Model C schools, a radical departure from the

¹ Telephonic interview with Roger Millson on 2 November 2011

traditional system of authoritative school management that the vast majority of schools in South Africa's broader school community was used to. Very few, except for the more affluent and well functioning township schools, had any experience in the governance and management of schools. During interviews with SGB members it was stressed that within the context of the reigning political climate at that time prior to the 1994 elections in South Africa, parents were often unwilling to become involved in the schools their children attended, arguing that it was an act of legitimising an Apartheid-inspired educational system. The vast majority of parents of school-going learners left school-related issues to either the government or the schools, notably the headmaster or principal. This meant that, at the very time that the concept of the co-governance of South African schools was introduced, very little if any experience was accumulated by parents in governing and managing some of the affairs of schools in South Africa (Heysteck & Paquette, 1999).

2.1 OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

The following section describes the constitution and main responsibilities of SGBs.

2.1.1 Who constitutes the SGB?

The SASA is clear about the membership of SGBs. The following constituencies and stakeholder groups are included:

- The school principal (ex officio)
- Elected representatives (parents, educators, other staff members, and learners in Grade 8 or above)
- Optional co-opted members who do not have the right to vote (for example, members of the community, or the owner of the school property).

The Act stipulates that parents must be in the majority at all times implying that the Schools Act tried to balance the interest of the community and that of the school. Both parties have strong representation, i.e. the principal who is an ex officio member, teacher and senior learner representation, while the community, apart from the parent representatives, can co-opt members on the SGB to fortify them in the execution of their functions. Co-opted members have no voting rights though (RSA, 1996a, Section 23

(9)). It has been pointed out that the teacher unions, who hold considerable power, were uncomfortable with the balance of power within SGBs and on its insistence the majority position of parents on the board was restricted to one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights (van Wyk, 2004). The same author states that the number of teachers on SGBs typically did not exceed three - implying that it undermined the position of teachers on SGBs when they want to confront their principals on sensitive issues.

2.1.2 Main responsibilities of SGBs

In sections 20 and 21 of the SASA (RSA, 1996) the different responsibilities of SGBs are detailed. It is wide ranging and speaks to different aspects and issues relating to the smooth functioning of the school. According to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) SGBs are tasked to decide on the following important policies and strategic decisions:²

- Admissions policy for the school
- Language policy of the school
- Religious practices to be followed at the school
- A code of conduct for learners which sets out disciplinary procedures

School governing bodies must, in addition, have the following duties:

- Develop a constitution to guide its activities
- Establish a school mission statement that will reflect the core values of the school
- Decide on the times of the school day
- Administer the school's property, buildings and grounds
- Make recommendations regarding the appointment of educators at the school

² See (www.westerncape.gov.za/eng/pubs/public_info/S/14675)

Lastly, SGBs can be asked to perform the following functions:

- Maintain and improve the school buildings and grounds
- Decide on the range of the extramural curriculum and the selection of subject options according to provincial curriculum policy
- Purchase textbooks, educational material and/or equipment for the school
- Pay for services to the school

SGBs must in all their (policy) decisions stay within the broad policy framework of the national Department of Basic Education as well as the values underpinning the Constitution of South Africa.

The type and range of duties and functions SGBs are expected to perform are demanding and requires governing bodies and governors to have a range of technical and administrative skills and capacities in order to do what they are suppose to do effectively.

Some of the duties clearly involve sensitive policy issues like deciding on the admission and language policy of the school, referred to as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). Another related and often contentious function that SGBs are called to perform is to appoint and fund additional teachers to supplement the teacher corps appointed and paid for by the government (van Wyk, 2004, SASA, 1996). SGB members, as well as stakeholders at underperforming schools, alleged that this practice happens nearly exclusively at well-resourced schools – typically situated in affluent residential areas and populated by children from more affluent households. Additional teacher resources impact positively on the effectiveness of learning and schooling. This function is thus of great importance, albeit viewed in a rather jaundiced fashion by respondents in this study. They describe it as a mechanism to entrench and perpetuate historical divisions, inequity and inequality in the educational structure of South Africa.

School governing bodies need to perform a range of financial tasks. Probably the most daunting is the drafting of the annual school budget. This is a great responsibility given the vast sums of money that are involved in operating a school, as well as the increasing onus placed on schools to fund an ever wider range of operational costs (SASA,1996). The SGBs must, in addition, take responsibility for managing the monies raised through

school fees, as well as for fundraising initiatives – this is becoming increasingly important given the pressure on schools to contribute to their operational costs. These functions demand strong competencies and flair in financial planning. It is doubtful if these skills are readily available in the parent communities of the majority of schools in South Africa. The same applies in cases where members of SGBs are expected to make important choices regarding the appointment of principals, teachers and other staff.

The SASA (1996) stresses the importance of establishing a good working relationship between the SGB and other relevant stakeholders – particularly the parents, principals and teachers. There is strong emphasis on teamwork and a spirit of collaborative engagement for the benefit of schools. This is evident in instances where SGBs have to undertake their duties in partnership with either the principal and/or the teachers. In this regard the Act makes provision for the representation of teachers on SGBs as well as the ex-officio status that principals enjoy on SGBs.

2.1.3 The rationale for school governing bodies

The idea of establishing SGBs was partially inspired by a realisation of the new democratic government that, in order for a radically new and restructured educational dispensation to be accepted by all stakeholders, it would be necessary to build rapport and trust between the educational authorities and the community in order for the broad stakeholder community to feel their expertise and opinions were acknowledged by the government.

In addition the government realised that they would need to mobilise assistance from all stakeholders. Van Wyk (2004, 48) states it as follows:

“The rationale (of SGBs) is to ensure that educators, parents, learners and non-teaching staff will actively participate in the governance and management of schools with a view to providing a better teaching and learning environment. This reasoning and approach cannot be faulted – to improve the performance of schools in order to produce well educated and rounded young people that can add value to their society, both socially as well as economically at the end of the 12 year cycle should be the ultimate goal of a solid educational system”.

Adams and Wachid (2005, 26) quote Peters (in Aspin, 1995, 56) who stated, "*citizens of a democracy do not simply arrive at political maturity and stand ready, willing and able to run its institutions*".

Implicit in this statement is the need for the relevant educational authorities – be it the national or provincial departments of education or structures on district and regional level - to be sensitive to this situation and the need to assist those in need by providing focused empowerment programmes to governors of schools. Without this, the ideal of establishing effective civil participation in important matters of schooling would stay a pipe dream.

2.2 PERSPECTIVES ON SGB EFFECTIVENESS: UNDER-RESOURCED SCHOOLS VERSUS AFFLUENT SCHOOLS

It is well documented that the relative contribution of the SGB to the governance of a particular school depends, to a significant extent, on the demographics and socio-economic context the school finds itself in. Schools in more affluent areas have a greater pool of resourced parents (financial and social resources) to draw from.

Adams and Waghid (2005) found in a study conducted in Lotus River, an impoverished area of Cape Town, that parents were not interested to serve on the SGBs simply because they were too busy struggling to survive economically and socially. They did not have *enough energy* to serve on SGBs without remuneration. The authors also suggested that due to a lack of training for those who do serve on SGBs at the few schools in this area, their contributions were best described as modest and it was felt that these SGBs did not contribute to the democratic governance of schools in South Africa.

Van Wyk (2004), on the other hand, established that principals of schools situated in affluent areas, reported that they received substantial, effective and valuable support and guidance from the members of the SGB, who are often more highly qualified than the principal and teachers on the SGB. This support allows the school to function effectively and efficiently at all levels translating into effective teaching and learning, and therefore also higher levels of learner throughput.

This disparity in the relative contribution that SGBs make to the governing of schools operating in different social and economic contexts is of critical importance to this study.

The situation clearly depicts an anomalous situation, i.e. schools that are less dependent on contributions and assistance from SGBs typically have well functioning governing bodies, while those schools in dire need of inter alia institutional and financial support, are often faced with highly ineffectual SGBs.

3. METHODOLOGY

The unit of analysis defined for this study is under-performing secondary schools in the Western Cape. Under-performing secondary schools are defined as those schools that achieved lower than 60% in the final National Grade 12 examinations. The sampling frame consisted of secondary schools that achieved a lower than 60% pass rate for the 2009 final National Grade 12 examinations and consisted of 85 secondary schools for which passing data was available.

Given the explorative nature of the study it was decided to follow a purposeful sampling strategy where schools were included to ensure representation for both racial and urban/rural divide. For this study, rural schools were defined as all schools outside the Cape metropolitan area. The final sample consists of 22 schools of which 15 were from within and seven from outside the metropolitan area. Of the 15 schools within the Cape Metro, four were classified as historically Coloured schools and 11 as historically African schools. For the remaining seven schools outside the Cape metropolitan area, six were classified as historically African and one as a historically Coloured school. Access to schools was found to be somewhat difficult and after having had to add another two schools from the original sampling frame, access was only possible for 12 schools.

The research methodology consisted of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Three survey instruments (questionnaires) were developed, one for completion by the principals, one for educators and one for learners. Educators were randomly selected from staff lists provided by the school, with two educators selected for each grade offered by the school. Learners were randomly selected from class lists provided by the school with eight learners selected from each grade. The total numbers of questionnaires completed were: 12 principal questionnaires, 84 teacher questionnaires

and 436 learner questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the School Management Team of each school. These interviews were then transcribed and analysed.

The fieldwork team consisted of four senior researchers and one assistant. Both principals and teachers received their questionnaires approximately a week before the school was visited in order to allow enough time for the completion thereof. During the visit, two members of the research team were responsible for the interviews with the principal and School Management Team (SMT) whilst the other two and the assistant, were responsible for the completion of the learner and teacher questionnaires.

Due to time constraints learner interviews were facilitated in a group set-up with one researcher acting as the primary facilitator whilst the other together with the assistant, assisted individual learners as needed. In order to ensure effective management of the process, learners were split into two groups (two sessions), with group one consisting of learners in Grade 8-10 and group two consisting of Grade 11 and 12 learners.

All questionnaires were checked for correct completion by the researchers and assistant before learners left the group. Data was then captured by trained data captures in SPSS and cleaned by one of the senior researchers and assistant before data analysis.

The fieldwork was conducted in a period of eight weeks, commencing in February 2011 and concluded at the end of March 2011. All questionnaires were piloted and amended during the first school visit. Given the difficulty to negotiate access to schools, and that only minor adjustments were necessary after the pilot, it was decided to include these interviews in the final dataset.

Table 1: Sample selection

| Area distribution | Sample size (N) | Historical racial classification of majority learners | |
|----------------------|-----------------|---|----------|
| | | African | Coloured |
| Cape Metro | 15 | 11 | 4 |
| Cape Winelands | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Eden & Central Karoo | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Overberg | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| West coast | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 22 | 17 | 5 |

Table 2: Sample realisation

| Area distribution | Sample size (N) | Historical racial classification of majority learners | |
|----------------------|-----------------|---|----------|
| | | African | Coloured |
| Cape Metro | 9 | 5 | 4 |
| Cape Winelands | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Eden & Central Karoo | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Overberg | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| West coast | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 14 | 9 | 5 |

A number of closed and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaires that were administered to the teachers probing their attitudes and opinions regarding the quality and value of the SGBs functioning at their respective schools. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with principals on a wide range of issues. A semi-structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire included a number of items concerning the role and impact of these bodies on the functioning of the school, including how principals rated their relationship with the SGBs and the relative quality of support and guidance they received from their respective SGBs.

3.1 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The main methodological thrust of the study into SGBs was qualitative. Focus group sessions were conducted with members of SGBs of eight schools. A questionnaire schedule covering relevant issues was used to give substance and direction to the focus group sessions. The medium of conversation used was English and Afrikaans.

A total of 32 governors participated in the study. Significant problems were experienced in getting cooperation from and access to SGBs. Because of their pivotal role in the smooth functioning of governing bodies it was decided to ensure the inclusion and participation of the chairperson, treasurer and secretary of the respective SGBs. This was, however, not always possible. SGB members (excluding the school representatives) of underperforming schools in townships, both rural and urban, are invariably blue-collar manual workers. This made it difficult for them to either get off during working hours or for them to be available in the evening after a day of physical labour. It meant that during some focus group sessions no more than three SGB members were present. Care was taken not to have either the school principal or

teacher representatives present during these sessions in order for members to feel safe and free to share their feelings and not be intimidated by the presence of the school representatives.

In addition, during in-depth interviews conducted with school management teams at the 12 schools included in the general study, a number of issues relating to SGBs were included for discussion with SMT members.

4. FINDINGS

This study set out to make an assessment of the operational effectiveness of the SGBs attached to underperforming schools included in the sample. In order to arrive at the most accurate, valid and reliable assessment, the research elicited the perspectives and opinions of different constituencies involved in the functioning of school governing bodies.

This section discusses the responses of (i) SGB members, (ii) principals and (iii) teachers on several questions aimed at ascertaining the operational effectiveness of SGBs.

4.1 FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH SGB MEMBERS

4.1.1 Capacity of SGBs

All School Governing Bodies interviewed were properly constituted through an election process by parents of the respective schools. An encouraging finding was that meetings were held regularly, at least once a term according to specified regulations, although two of the schools indicated that they would meet if an urgent issue, e.g. a disciplinary hearing needs to be dealt with. Three of the SGBs meet on a monthly basis. From the responses it seems meetings are well attended by members since in all instances SGBs were able to obtain a quorum.

A perception, one that has been empirically validated (Adams and Wachid, 2005) is that SGBs attached to schools situated in impoverished township communities are often not as active and effective as they should be because of a lack of capacity amongst

members due to limited formal education. It is especially true for those schools faced with a parent community with very limited or modest levels of literacy, influence and social capital. This is often the case in impoverished communities.

This was borne out by the findings of this research as well (even though the response to this question was generally poor). In general, educational levels ranged from some secondary school education to two members that had university degrees. It was disconcerting to note that in two instances, the treasurers of these SGB bodies had educational qualifications lower than Grade 12 (Grade 8 and Grade 11 respectively). It is therefore important to question the extent to which these SGB members have the necessary know-how to fulfill such a function effectively.

Although the Schools Act of 1996 is clear about the roles, functions and responsibilities of SGBs it was decided to get a first-hand impression as to how the different SGBs see their function and role. Responses to this question were diverse. Two distinct themes, however, were evident. The first group of SGBs saw their role as a general facilitating and bridging one i.e. building mechanisms between the school and the parent community in order to improve the general quality of contact between the two important stakeholders. They were not so interested in what the Act prescribed, but saw their real value in the empowerment of the parents and the school as an institution through any means available to them.

The second group of respondents saw their role and functions as being more specific. They attached great importance to two issues in particular, i.e. assisting in the maintenance of discipline and order and collecting funds for the school. It was stressed that both these issues reflected the particular context their school operated in, i.e. being situated in an area characterized by high levels of social disorganization and lack of discipline in the surrounding community, as well as confronted by a parent body that has very little if any discretionary disposable income that can be spent on assisting the school. (All schools included in this study are classified as no - fee institutions, therefore they receive no additional funds other than the subsidies from the government). Some schools, although not levying school fees formally, do appeal to parents for a once off donation at the start of the academic year; this is, however of a very modest order and makes no real impact on the financial viability of these schools.

As was mentioned previously, in terms of the Schools Act of 1996, SGBs have to perform critically important functions relating to the formulation of policies, including deciding what the school's mission and language of instruction (LOLT) criteria should be, and to a lesser extent, aspects around religion. From the responses it is evident that with the exception of one, all SGBs had indeed been involved in the formulation of these policies. In one instance there was uncertainty about the role of the SGB in the formulation of the schools language and religion policies. It is thus clear that SGBs included in this study are of the opinion that they were performing their ascribed functions and duties satisfactorily.

SGBs are further tasked to perform a cluster of financial duties, the most important being drawing up of the annual school budget. Apart from this function, governing bodies are called upon to keep control of the finances of the school and also be involved in the management and control of its property and assets. Without exception, SGBs indicated that they meet these responsibilities and obligations adequately.

4.1.2 Relationship between SGBs and stakeholders

The quality of the relationship between the SGB and important other stakeholders within the educational ecology was probed. This included parents, principals, provincial educational department and SMT.

Parents

An important function of the SGB is to periodically interact with its parent community to inform them about the state of the school and schooling, achievements and challenges. For many parents this is the most important and only opportunity to interface with the school and its staff.

These meetings happen regularly, once a term. SGB members were generally satisfied with the attendance of parents, with some describing it as *well, good enough and excellent*, especially the so-called grade meetings that are used by teachers, principals and governors to discuss learners' academic performance and progress - or lack thereof.

Apart from dealing with scholastic performance of learners, these meetings, according to the governors, are used to discuss a variety of issues and topics. This includes dealing with the financial affairs of the school, fundraising events and general issues relating to discipline. It was stressed that these meetings are used to mobilize interest in and support from the parent community who are often not closely involved in the affairs of the school.

Principals

Of particular importance and concern was the relationship between the SGB and school principal as she or he forms the vital link between the school and the SGB. All SGBs interviewed were satisfied with the relationship that existed between them and their respective principals, with most describing it as *excellent, supportive and respectful*.

Without exception the SGBs described their working relationship with the principal as mutually respectful. A clear distinction was made between management and governance, with SGB members pointing out that their respective principals honoured this distinction and showed the necessary respect for their opinions and overall autonomy. However, during discussions with SMT members it was alleged that principals tended to improperly influence their SGB. The results from this study do not support this allegation; with the exception of one governing body, SGBs reported no interference from the side of the principals. This seems to be contradicted by the fact that the SGB members responsible for the treasury function were so poorly qualified.

The issue of SGBs making recommendations on the promotion of teachers and appointment of new teachers is another important but potentially sensitive issue that SGBs have to deal with. It is possible for principals (and SMTs) to put undue pressure on SGBs to make decisions in a certain way. This issue was thus explored. One SGB responded rather despondently, pointing out that due to a decline in learner numbers, no teachers could be appointed in the two years prior. Spokespeople of one SGB declared unambiguously that the SGB was effectively sidelined, its influence nullified by the school management and that they therefore did not play any role in the process. The remaining SGBs reported no conflict or tension between them and the principal and SMT regarding this issue.

One SGB expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of communication that existed between them and the principal. The other SGBs however were satisfied, mentioning that the principal was available and approachable. This seems to suggest that, according to spokespeople for the majority of SGBs, a healthy and productive relationship exists between these parties. This is encouraging, giving the strategic position the principal occupies on the SGB.

National and Provincial Department of Education

SGBs were generally not satisfied about the quality of their relationship with the Department of Basic Education (DOE) and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), describing it as weak or non-existent. The biggest concern is the lack of contact and long intervals between visits. Three SGBs stated contact only happens during workshops and other training occasions. Some members of SGBs alleged to never to have met an official from the provincial department's head office or district office.

One SGB lamented the fact that the SGB had initiated the establishment of a new grade at their school in 2010 but had received no substantial support from the WCED. SGBs pointed out that new official policy initiatives and directives are sent directly to the school (principal), completely ignoring the SGB. This led to dissatisfaction amongst SGB members. Governors said this approach devalued their standing and significance within the school.

A general sentiment expressed by all SGBs was that the WCED maintains good, regular contact with the office of the school principal but neglects to acknowledge the existence of the SGB. Dissatisfaction with the dissemination and availability of strategic documents, announcements and circulars emanating from the WCED was expressed by all SGBs, stressing that they were left in the dark about new initiatives and thinking.

SMTs

SGBs had mixed opinions regarding their relationship with the SMT of their respective school. Two governing bodies described the contact and cooperation with the SMT as *very good* while the rest were less favourable in their assessment, describing it as *tense, broken, nonexistent and irregular*. Given the strategic importance of the relationship

between the different tiers of leadership and management at the school (the SGB, principal and SMT - conceptualised as a leadership triangle) it was disconcerting to note the lack of interaction between SGBs and SMTs.

Quality of Support for SGBs

The research was keen to establish what issues, if any, were inhibiting and hindered the smooth and effective functioning of SGBs. A wide range of factors were mentioned.

On a practical level, SGBs were unanimous in their opinion that they did receive the necessary practical support, in terms of availability of venues and equipment to perform their task well. Two SGBs remarked that, whenever there was a problem, the parent community would assist them to solve it. It was stressed that this type of commitment motivates governors to carry on doing what, in the interviews, was often described as a thankless voluntary task.

Six SGBs mentioned a lack of consistent and broad-based parent support as their main obstacle to realising their full potential to govern, adding that it was usually the same parent corps that attends meetings. One governor mentioned that SGBs in their present form lack mass appeal, stressing it *“is too complex in its format and procedures”*, thereby alienating parents.

In addition, the lack of enthusiasm amongst SMTs and teachers for the school governing bodies and their contribution to the school, as evident by their erratic presence at governing board meetings, was lamented by nearly all SGBs. Governors stated that this was a serious problem. It showed that many teachers *“do not take them serious”* and that this undermines the legitimacy of SGBs.

A number of school governors referred to the extent and severity of the economic challenges and social pathologies present in the communities surrounding their schools as their greatest challenge. This included an increasingly high rate of unemployment amongst the parent corps and in the broader community, as well as a high prevalence of crime, alcohol abuse, HIV/Aids, domestic violence and general social disorganisation in the local community. It was stressed that schools cannot be isolated from these realities and that what happens in the surrounding community reflects in the school consciousness. When learners socialised under (some) of these conditions walk through

the school gate in the morning they are often highly traumatized and not susceptible to learning. SGB members thought it was their duty to be proactive and act back at these negative influences and forces but were at a loss as to how to address them.

Two SGBs attached to rural schools mentioned a particular challenge that constrained their operational efficiency. These schools service a high number of children from farm worker families. Some of these farms are situated far away from the schools. This makes it almost impossible for parents, who usually work long hours and that have no easy access to transport, to attend SGB meetings or any other school events. This is an unfortunate situation. Farm workers are typically less schooled than their urban counterparts and it can be argued that regular contact and involvement with school activities and functions could impact positively on their perception of the value of education. This, in turn, could influence their level of involvement in and commitment to the schooling of their children.

4.1.3 Value of interventions

It was important to establish to what extent members of school governing bodies are in touch with academic developments at their respective schools. In order to get an indication of this, SGBs were probed to establish how well informed they were as well as to ascertain their opinions regarding the (current) different intervention initiatives and strategies aimed at improving the academic performance of learners at underperforming schools in the Western Cape.

With the exception of one, all SGBs were well informed about the interventions and mentioned a range of initiatives, with telematics the most frequently mentioned, followed by tutoring, autumn and winter schools and extra classes over weekends. The remaining SGB members could only mention one, i.e. telematics. Other interventions mentioned were courses in conflict management, a school safety project and a school feeding scheme.

From the responses it became clear that no distinction is made between initiatives driven from the national Department of Basic Education and those forthcoming from WCED. Intervention programmes were seen as coming from *government*.

Asked about the effectiveness of these programmes initiated by the WCED, the majority of governors were satisfied with the impact pointing to increases in the matric pass rate at their respective schools. Although the majority of SGBs thought the interventions were well targeted, two SGBs were highly critical alleging the interventions were actually empowering and assisting the teachers instead of the learners (they could not specify the type(s) though).

These results are encouraging; it clearly shows that SGBs operating at underperforming schools are generally well informed about academic intervention programmes introduced at their respective schools - although they were not able to clearly define whether the national or provincial departments were responsible for these initiatives. However, what is infinitely more important is the positive evaluation SGBs bestow on these interventions. They attributed an increase in the matric pass rate (in the case of schools where it was applicable) compared to previous year(s) to the fact that these initiatives were relevant, well conceptualized and targeted. They were also satisfied with the way initiatives were introduced and communicated to all parties concerned; in an accessible and clear way, via internet, postal service and departmental representatives.

In a follow-up question SGB members were asked to suggest interventions and programmes that need to be instituted at their respective schools. The responses were meaningful, suggesting governors feel that not only do learners need interventions and support but also their teachers. For the learners regularly-held holiday camps were proposed as well as offering more of the same interventions. For teachers courses in motivation were proposed. A strong plea by all SGBs interviewed was that teachers should become more professional, take their work more seriously, be more involved in the affairs of their respective schools, be less absent and get more support from the principals and WCED in effective class room management and in the execution and upholding of strict codes of discipline.

Other interventions needed by underperforming schools, as mentioned by the different SGBs, were the training of teachers in effective librarianship, career guidance and physical training - services identified to be severely lacking or underutilised at these academically weak schools. Two governors at one school, both with post-matric qualifications, argued that these interventions will work on two levels, i.e. that of the

school and the individual learner. Firstly it assists schools to expand their educational impact resulting in more rounded and generically educated learners that will translate into higher throughput rates. In the case of the learners, it was expected that these initiatives would make them more informed and healthy, as well as more motivated and future-orientated by showing them the benefits of education in securing better paid employment opportunities.

4.1.4 Challenges facing underperforming schools

The governors were also asked about their main concerns regarding the schools they are responsible for that have an impact on the weak matric pass rate in 2010. The dominant issues were:

- The endemic lack of parental (or guardian) involvement in matters relating to their children's schooling i.e. in assisting their children with homework and the lack of concern with the academic progress of their children
- Parents living far from the schools pose a particular challenge. Their attendance of SGB meetings as well as other parent-school contact occasions was described as *weak and erratic*, simply because of the logistical challenges. This is not a desirable situation, as children of farm workers often need extra attention and monitoring because of their impoverished domestic and insular social environment
- Gangster-related activities on the school property and rampant teenage pregnancy were two serious obstacles faced by underperforming schools, according to the overwhelming majority of SGB members.
- One SGB was particularly unhappy with the overall physical condition and appearance of the school buildings and grounds; the lack of proper maintenance was indicative of a lack of good school management and school pride amongst staff.
- A chronic lack of adequate funds, necessary for the smooth day-to-day running of the school, as well as for the purchase of additional educational and sport-related equipment to add value to the educational experience of learners from impoverished communities

It is disconcerting to note that only one SGB took any steps to address the problems identified. Police intervention was sought to address issues relating to crime and

violence in the school as well as the introduction of a sex education programme, i.e. *Love Life* to fight the high prevalence of unwanted and unplanned pregnancies amongst the female learners.

Educational challenges facing schools

Governors were probed about what they perceived to be the main educational challenges facing their respective schools. Different themes emerged: i.e. a widespread lack of requisite levels of numeracy and literacy (mathematics and English) amongst learners. This challenge was repeatedly mentioned by all SGBs. The other problem mentioned, (specifically by governors attached to schools serving predominantly isiXhosa-speaking learners), was the present policy regarding the language of teaching and learning (LOLT). Governors were adamant that this policy is inappropriate and is the reason why many of their learners fail. Other school-related factors included a serious lack of basic equipment - especially tables, desks and chairs – as well as dysfunctional and/or underutilised science and computer laboratories and libraries.

SGBs attached to rural schools mentioned a factor unique to their context, i.e. the long distances that many children have to travel to attend school. They said this was a major contributor to the higher levels of absenteeism amongst learners. This was the case even at the school where 80% of learners were transported daily by an efficient bus service subsidised by the WCED. The vast distances complicate the attendance of farm-based learners of extramural programmes, including sport activities and more importantly, academic intervention programmes offered. This problem was confirmed by the principals and members of the SMT who said it was specifically learners in the senior grades who were affected, as they were not able to attend additional academic programmes often offered in the evenings.

From the contributions of the governors it is clear that they were concerned about the attitude, behaviour and commitment of learners and teachers and the impact this has on the underperformance at their respective schools. The persistent high levels of teacher absenteeism were identified by all SGBs as having a debilitating impact on the teaching and learning protocol at schools.

Related to the above, was the lack of discipline amongst teachers and learners. This was evidenced in the widespread late coming amongst especially learners - although it was alleged by some SGB members that non-adherence to school hours was also evident amongst a small percentage of teachers. It is illuminating that the lack of commitment amongst (some) teachers and learners to their respective roles and responsibilities, and related to this, a pervasive lack of discipline amongst the same parties, were identified as the core problems rendering these schools dysfunctional.

One governor serving a rural school declared that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between learners and teachers when it came to unacceptable and non-professional behaviour as evidenced from the following quote

“They swear, they both drink at the shebeen... the problem is nobody wants to take action... many teachers are not setting a good example for the children at this school... the problem is many (learners) have no example to look up too... not at this school and not in their home or in this community... life teaches them to look down, all they see are their stukkende (worn) skoene (shoes).”

An SGB member stated that one of the biggest challenges facing the school was the negative state of mind of the teachers, describing them as demoralised and unmotivated. This was attributed to teachers not receiving the recognition and appreciation they deserve. The governors described this attitude as a cancerous growth spreading throughout the school community, eventually impacting on the commitment of learners towards schooling.

4.1.5 Strategies for improvement

SGB members were asked what initiatives, if any, they propose to turn around the current dysfunctional state of their schools and improve the throughput of learners and overall performance in a sustainable fashion. Two dominant themes were evident from their responses; firstly invest energy, time and money in improving teachers and teaching. Their view was that this could be done by firstly acknowledging the reality of what teachers have to face on a daily basis. This should be followed by investing in improving the subject knowledge of teachers, their motivation and passion for their work.

Secondly, and related to this, SGBs thought school leadership should be (made) stronger, making sure that the teacher corps at underperforming schools adhere to professional standards such as being on time and acting in accordance with their status in the community. Principals and SMTs should, in addition, develop more accurate monitoring tools to keep track of the performance of teachers and to identify problem areas earlier on.

The second dominant strong theme emanating from the interviews concerned the role of parent communities. Governors repeatedly compared the quality and extent of support enjoyed by Model C schools (i.e. those schools mostly located in previously white residential areas). They compared the support that schools and SGBs at these schools enjoyed in comparison with those in impoverished previously black areas, describing it as worlds apart. Governors argued that without sustained and comprehensive parental support neither underperforming schools nor their SGBs could function adequately.

A number of governors suggested that the WCED, through their District offices, should become more actively involved in awareness programmes amongst those parent communities that are typically not closely involved in the school affairs of their children. This will help to mobilisation parents to become more involved in both the academic progress and problems of their children as well as in school-related activities, like fund raising drives.

One governor articulated a strong requirement to increase the focus on the learner at underperforming school. He specifically mentioned that learners needed to be assisted to “*rediscover the magic of books and leaning*”. His suggestion was that parents and their children should be seen and approached as a unit or team in this endeavor. The sentiment was that without sustained parental involvement and support, efforts to enthuse the learner would fail. The same applies to efforts to increase the level of interest of parents in the schooling of their children and working towards the good of the school - without the motivation of their children; parents would not be reached emotionally.

4.1.6 Reasons for serving on a SGB

Governors were asked why parents would want to become involved and serve on a governing board of a school. This question is even more valid when it comes to parents working long hours, living far away from the school and having no access to private transport. It must also be borne in mind that serving on a SGB is voluntary; governors receive no remuneration for their input and time.

School governors were clear about what motivated them to serve the school, pointing to their love for, and commitment to, the development of their children and their passion for the community and its welfare.

Other reasons offered included an opportunity to be empowered, to gain respect from both the community and the school staff. A desire to help the school improve its overall performance was also mentioned. A small number of governors thought school governing bodies would become more effective if members are paid for their service. They thought this would make members more committed and involved. The majority of members, however, rejected this, stating that not receiving financial rewards had no impact on their dedication to the SGB. What all governors, however, suggested was that they be compensated for the transport costs of getting to meetings and other SGB-related activities.

A source of frustration mentioned by three SGBs was the lack of support and guidance forthcoming within a reasonable amount of time from the WCED in times of crisis. This leads to operational paralysis and makes them incapable of performing their tasks. This specifically concerned serious disciplinary and expulsion issues. In such instances SGBs were portrayed as toothless and weak because no action was taken. They further claimed that this indecision on the part of the SGB leads to widespread insecurity and discontent amongst both learners and teachers.

4.2 PERSPECTIVES ON SGBs FROM TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

The second part of this report focuses on the findings that were generated through responses to a number of questions around the theme of school governing bodies that were included in the questionnaires administered to principals and teachers.

Principals are, in terms of the School Act of 1996, ex officio members of the SGB. They perform a critical function on the SGB, articulating the needs and challenges of their respective schools as well as share the achievements of the learners and teachers of their schools with the members of the SGB. They should bring continuity in the relationship between the school and the SGB. Principals, in addition, should be the conduit whereby decisions taken and sentiments expressed by SGBs are fed back to the school community, i.e. the SMT, teachers, learners and administrative staff of the school. Principals are thus expected to play an active role and have a keen interest in the well being of SGBs.

Legal Status of SGBs

In getting a sense of their perspective on the level of functioning and effectiveness of the SGB, questions were asked of both principals and teachers. SGBs were described as functional with 82% of principals indicating this to be the case. An unexpected finding was that two principals indicated that the SGB at their school was not legally constituted. Another principal could not state with any certainty whether this was the case at his school. As mentioned above, the Schools Act is very clear on the responsibility of schools in South Africa to have a legally constituted and functioning SGB.

Value of SGB to school functioning

When questioned about the extent to which the governing body contributed to the functioning of underperforming schools, nearly two thirds (62%) of teachers agreed that SGBs do add value to the school. In the case of the principals, respondents were much more split in their opinion, with nearly half (46%) taking a dim view of their contribution to effective functioning of the school. Nearly 20% of principals were very positive about

their SGBs contribution, while slightly more than a third described the contribution as moderate. The findings are reflected in the tables below:

Table 3: Extent to which SGB contributes to effective functioning of school (teachers)

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Don't know | 1 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Yes | 52 | 61.9 | 63.1 |
| No | 31 | 36.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 84 | 100.0 | |

Table 4: Extent to which SGB contributes to effective functioning of school (principals)

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Large extent | 2 | 18.2 | 18.2 |
| Moderate extent | 4 | 36.4 | 54.5 |
| Small extent | 5 | 45.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | |

The finding suggests that SGBs attached to underperforming schools are not meeting the expectations of school principals in any meaningful way. This is disappointing as it can be argued that the more in need for (additional and external) assistance and support a school is, the more strategically important the facilitative and empowerment role of SGBs become. Principals, by virtue of their position in the school and on the SGB, have infinitely more contact with SGBs and are thus in a better position to assess the SGB's contribution and value than teachers.

Relationship between SGB, principal and teachers

Teachers said their dissatisfaction with SGB structures at their respective school primarily lies with poor management within the SGB, as well as due to the fact their members seemingly do not understand their function and do not take their duties seriously. Other aspects mentioned was a lack of feedback to teachers from SGBs on schools matters that concern them directly.

Teachers were deeply unhappy with what they perceived as poor support from SGBs specifically regarding issues related to teaching in the classroom. In this regard specific reference was made to disciplinary issues reported to the SGB. Another aspect was the

conflict that existed between the different stakeholders, i.e. SGBs, principals and/or teachers. It was mentioned that this conflict often results in the formation of different camps, leaving parties paralyzed and unable to perform their core functions.

Relationship between SGB and other Stakeholders

The majority of principals (73%; N=8) indicated that they usually involve the SGB in decision-making pertaining to management aspects of the school.

Table 5: Extent of involvement of principals in SGB decision making

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Sometimes | 3 | 27.3 | 27.3 |
| Most of the time | 5 | 45.5 | 72.7 |
| Always | 3 | 27.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | |

The quality of the relationship, as perceived by the principals, between the teaching staff and the SGBs was also explored. Although teachers have representation on these boards, the relationship between these two parties is sometimes tense and characterised by mistrust and conflict (Brown and Duku, 2008). This was also evident from this research.

Table 6: Good working relationship between SGB and teachers (assessment of principals)

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| No answer | 1 | 9.1 | 9.1 |
| Yes, always | 2 | 18.2 | 27.3 |
| Yes, sometimes | 6 | 54.5 | 81.8 |
| No, never | 2 | 18.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100 | |

Slightly less than 20% of principals described the relationship between school governors and teachers to always be good, while just over 50% was of the opinion that this relationship is sometimes good. Nearly 20% thought the relationship to be broken and thus dysfunctional. These results are to be expected especially in the case of schools where the parent community and teacher corps often have different educational levels and represent vastly different social and economic classes. This finding is consistent with another one established in this study, i.e. that a large percentage of governors are

highly critical of the general behaviour and commitment of the teacher corps at underperforming schools in the Western Cape.

Support

In a related question principals had to indicate to what measure SGBs support them in the execution of their tasks and duties. In this instance their responses were more positive as is illustrated below:

Table 7: Extent to which SGB supports principal in the execution of tasks

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Large extent | 4 | 36.4 | 36.4 |
| Moderate extent | 4 | 36.4 | 72.7 |
| Small extent | 3 | 27.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | |

Thirty six percent indicated that they were very satisfied, with the same percentage giving a qualified positive response. A relatively high percentage, i.e. 27%, of principals was clearly not happy with the support received from their schools' SGB.

In a following question principals were asked to state in what areas they expected SGBs to support them in. The following four areas were mentioned in this regard:

- Financial management including the drawing up and management of the budget
- Appointment of teachers
- Assisting in disciplinary actions with regard to both school staff and learners
- Managing the school infrastructure (that is physical buildings)

The results showed that there was a serious disjuncture between what was expected from SGBs and what was actually realised. This was clear from the two thirds of principals who said they received poor support from the SGB when drawing up the annual budget for their respective schools. In this regard it is interesting to note that 91% of principals mentioned that they would welcome additional support in the specific area

of budgeting. This is indicative of the lack of support received from SGBs tasked with this function.

A crucial function of SGBs is to assist their school in developing policies, some dealing with sensitive and controversial issues like school admission criteria, recommendations regarding the appointment of teachers, the LOLT of the school as well as the disciplinary code or regime to be applied to learners and teachers. The research probed principals on two issues; firstly if the SGB is capable of participating in the process of policy formulation and secondly whether they participate in this process in any meaningful way.

Table 8: SGB capable of assisting in policy formulation

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| No answer | 1 | 9.1 | 9.1 |
| Yes, always | 1 | 9.1 | 18.2 |
| Yes, sometimes | 7 | 63.6 | 81.8 |
| No, never | 2 | 18.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | |

Only one principal (10%) thought SGBs were capable of generally contributing to policy formulation, 64% thought it is only possible at times, while 20% indicated the SGB was not at all capable of doing this.

Table 9: SGB involved in policy formulation

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Yes, always | 4 | 36.4 | 36.4 |
| Yes, sometimes | 6 | 54.5 | 90.9 |
| No, never | 1 | 9.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | |

Slightly more than a third of principals indicated that SGBs were always involved when issues of policies were dealt with whilst the other 55% stated that this involvement happens at times. Only in the case of one school did the SGB never involve itself in policy issues.

One principal reacted in a cynical fashion to this question: *“I can list an impressive number of things they are involved with, but actually they do nothing, they have no capacity to do anything worthwhile”*.

An interesting anomaly that became evident from the findings is that, although less than 50% of principals thought SGBs added any real value in terms of what could be described as advanced capacity (i.e. technical or financial contributions to their respective schools), more principals were positive about the general support they received from SGB (72%; N=8).

The findings suggest that there is a capacity problem in a number of SGBs. It is significant that responses were slightly more negative in relation to questions around the ability of SGBs, than to those relating to their actual involvement. This could be interpreted as a veiled motion of no confidence in their ability. Also, if this assessment is accurate, it points to an unhealthy situation where governors are involved in formulating crucial policy formulation without the inert ability to participate in this process. This can, and probably does, result in inappropriate and/or ineffectual policies that impact negatively on the functioning and performance of schools.

The negative perspective of a significant number of principals regarding the ability of their governors to engage on a policy level raises the issue of the training of SGB members and the results of this study point to a need for this. Principals were asked to indicate whether members of their SGB had received training.

The majority of principals (92%; N=9) indicated that their SGB members had been for training since the body was constituted. It would thus seem that the effectiveness of as well as the format and content of this training might need to be reviewed.

Table 10: SGB members received training since it was constituted

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Yes | 9 | 81.8 | 81.8 |
| No | 2 | 18.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 11 | 100.0 | |

All eight principals that had a SGB functioning at their school declared that their governors had received some training.

4.3 SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM DISCUSSION WITH SMTs AND SGBs

4.3.1 Chronic conflict and tense relationships between SGBs and school staff

Tense relations exist between the SGB members. This often rendered the body ineffectual, as it was unable to reach consensus and could therefore, not take firm action or make crucial decisions on issues of strategic importance to the school. Examples of these internal conflicts are issues over discipline regarding disruptive and/or dangerous learners, the appointment of teachers and issues relating to the school budget and general finances. Another area of tension is the relationship between the SGB and the principal. This is in stark contrast to SGB members describing the relationship between the principal and themselves as being mostly good or excellent.

Conflict between the SGB and the teachers was also mentioned as a serious obstacle. Teachers at two schools alleged that the staff was at loggerheads with the SGB over a range of issues for virtually the entire year resulting in a complete breakdown of communication and working relationship between the school and the SGB.

However, a more general sentiment expressed by teachers was that SGB members do not show the required support and that they are not seen to be open and approachable. They also referred to them being disinterested in the teacher corps, showing a lack of compassion for the position of teachers at underperforming schools and are not interested in discussing problems facing teachers in the classroom.

Teachers were particularly critical about the negative view that SGB members tended to have of educators teaching at underperforming schools. It was alleged that the only meaningful contact with governors was when they are disciplined, threatened or criticised by them.

4.3.2 Ineffectual SGB

A disturbing sentiment was that SGBs at underperforming schools add no value. One teacher stated: *“although they are present they are not visible”*. Another respondent described the SGB as *“worth nothing, the SGB is absent - they are there, in theory, but do nothing, they do not contribute to this school”*. A number of teachers pointed out that regular meetings did take place, but that this did not cause anything to change at the

school and teachers were therefore of the view that SGBs had no impact. At one of the biggest townships schools visited on the Cape Flats, teachers alleged that governors shine in their persistent absence. One teacher said: *"I can't even identify one member of the SGB"*.

4.3.3 Management issues

A strong sentiment amongst teachers was that the core of the problem of ineffectual SGBs was located in bad leadership and management. SGB chairmen and their management were described as *"weak, erratic or autocratic"*. SGBs were accused of either making no real decisions, or not implementing them, and often not carefully considering the implications of those they did manage to implement. Often important information was not fed back to the teachers or SMTs. Teachers alleged their active participation on the SGB was not encouraged by the governors, with chairmen often threatened by their presence.

A further allegation made by a number of teachers was that some lacked the urgency to become involved in the affairs and challenges of the schools.

They attributed this to the domineering role that some principals are allowed to play. It was alleged that, in some instances, they virtually control the SGB which they blamed on weak or near-absent leadership in the SGB. According to some teacher, SGBs tend to create chasms between them and the school they suppose to support, serve and govern.

4.3.4 Lack of capacity in SGBs

According to many teachers a core shortcoming of SGBs relates to the general lack of capacity amongst the governors, including some chairmen. This, in their view, was mainly due to a lack of formal education. The situation prevents SGBs to fully understand and come to grips with some of the policies of the WCED, what they intend to achieve and how they should be implemented and monitored. It was pointed out that this fundamental shortcoming renders SGBs ineffectual with serious consequences for the schools served by them.

Although the hard work of some governors were acknowledged and appreciated by teachers many thought the problems at underperforming schools were exacerbated by the lack of capacity of the SGBs. A teacher articulated it this way:

“They are not well educated to know the government policy in education. SGB members are not qualified to help, though they (SGBs) are trying but one must acknowledge that we don't have the strongest in terms of educational background and knowledge when it comes to the members of the SGB”.

4.3.5 Negative impact on teaching

Teachers made reference to a number of implications that these shortcomings and non-performance of the SGBs had on their teaching. Two central issues were identified; firstly, teachers have spend excessive amounts of time and resources on fund raising at their schools because governors were not doing what was expected of them; secondly, teachers (and learners) often had to endure disruption and conflict as result of violent and aggressive behaviour in the classroom caused by learners who were not adequately sanctioned or disciplined by SGBs. Teachers also mentioned the demoralising and non-appreciative working environment at their schools caused by governors not willing to act, address the cause(s) or deal with disruptive behaviour. They claimed that the unsupportive attitude and lack of appreciation and respect of SGBs for their difficult position at township schools, as well as for their efforts and labour as educators, added to their lack of motivation.

5. CONCLUSION

The set of responsibilities and menu of functions to be performed by a properly constituted SGB is wide ranging and demanding. Members of SGBs need to have a well-resourced and well-constituted SGB body to perform these functions effectively. In addition to this SGB members need to work well with the principal and SMT to play a meaningful role in the running the school.

The evidence points to a disjuncture between the expectations of the different constituencies of schools on the one hand and the SGB on the other. This credibility gap between how positive SGBs rate themselves and how differently principals, school

management members and teachers perceive them might be indicative of an unrealistic and inaccurate assessment amongst certain SGBs about their own competencies and the relative value of their contribution towards the functioning of the schools they govern.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the system in its current form is not working optimally for underperforming schools. The present model of school governance yields no real benefits to schools in dire need of assistance and empowerment in critical areas like drawing up annual budgets and fundraising. This might point to the fact that the SGB model in its current form might be fundamentally flawed within the context of underperforming schools.

6. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations listed below were derived from the broader study on underperforming schools.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS AIMED AT SCHOOL LEVEL FACTORS

Recommendation 1: Cast a solid foundation³

It is recommended that high quality educare programmes be instituted to reach the two- to four-year-olds residing in vulnerable and marginalised areas before they reach their reception year to primary school.

Our findings point to substantial failure rates in the first two years of schooling. This sends a clear signal that high percentages of children in townships and rural areas are not ready to participate in formal schooling at the beginning of their school careers.

The aggressive extension of Grade R, the reception year, by the Department of Basic Education, would undoubtedly contribute to the improvement in the level of school readiness of the most vulnerable cohort of the youngest learners. However, many children in South Africa, ironically particularly those from impoverished and working class urban and rural households are not yet catered for.

³ This recommendation is based on findings emanating from failure rates as found in this study as discussed in the paper “*Exploring grade repetition at under performing schools*”, by the same authors as part of this study.

Recommendation 2: Take a new look at primary schools

It is recommended that primary schools feeding under-performing schools be improved in order to advance the quality of education at these schools. What exactly is wrong with the education process at primary schools was not part of this study.

What is eminently clear from our research is that the schooling at many primary schools is not of a level that enables Grade 7 learners to advance successfully to Grade 8 and beyond. The large percentage of learners at underperforming schools required to repeat this grade is proof of this.

It is recommended that the National Department of Basic Education institute a compulsory national Grade 7 assessment or examination. This would ensure that learners are assessed in a standardised fashion and that only those learners with the requisite skills are allowed to advance to secondary school. This gate keeping would inevitably increase learner numbers at primary level and measures to assist schools in handling this development should be instituted simultaneously so as not to disrupt the educational programme. These measures will include more schools more teachers and thus more teacher training

Recommendation 3: Rethink grade promotion policy

It is recommended that existing policies governing the promotion of learners per learning phase be reconsidered as a matter of urgency.

The authors are of the opinion that the current policy whereby learners are allowed to fail only a set number of grades during a 12-year cycle, is fundamentally flawed and has implications for both the learner and school.

Many learners, who have already repeated the quota of grades allowed in the intermediate phase while attending primary school, find themselves promoted to Grade 9, although they have not remotely reached the required level for Grade 8.

This leads to high levels of frustration and disillusionment with the educational system amongst both learners and teachers at underperforming schools. Learners feel lost and disengaged and their behaviour becomes disruptive. Teachers, in turn, feel demoralised and experience a sense of failure when large numbers of their learners continually fail Grade 9. This pattern seems to repeat itself in Grades 10 and 11. Our findings suggest that the high dropout rate in Grade 10 at underperforming schools is, to a significant extent, a consequence of this policy. To address this, schools should be allowed to fail

learners who do not achieve the required standard in examinations. No learner should be promoted without meeting the requisite standard.

Recommendation 4: Recognise that underperforming schools are a heterogeneous group

Move away from a one size fits all approach to underperforming schools as they are not a uniform group.

The research showed that underperforming schools are a heterogeneous group and can be broadly categorised into three typologies. The authors are of the view that interventions should be tailor-made to the needs of each school and that the Department moves away from a one size fits all approach. Widespread unhappiness was expressed, particularly at the better functioning schools, by teachers and SMTs about the indiscriminate application of intervention strategies.

Recommendation 5: A renewed focus on Grade 8

It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education significantly increase the number of classrooms and teachers in the lower grades of secondary school. In addition to this it is also recommended that top teachers be redeployed to teach Grade 8 learners as this is where the most urgent interventions are sought.

Our research established that class sizes of the lower grades, Grades 8-10 of underperforming schools are bigger than the norm prescribed (a result in part of the existing policies on the promotion/failure of learners).

The majority of classrooms visited during the fieldwork were so overcrowded that teachers could not move between desks. Learners in underperforming schools are facing a double challenge: they are not adequately prepared for the demands of a secondary school curriculum and class sizes make individual tuition and regular support from teachers impossible.

The authors recommend that the Department of Basic Education significantly increase the human resource capacity of secondary schools in order to bring down the teacher-to-pupil ratio (ideally 1:25) to enable teachers to identify learning deficiencies and afford remedial intervention and individual assistance to learners.

Results emanating from this research unambiguously pointed to the urgent need for systemic change and curriculum intervention initiatives at the lower grades of underperforming schools, Grades 8-10. Stakeholders at all schools emphasised the need to change the present focus of additional tuitions and intervention programmes from the higher grades to include the lower grades and especially Grade 8. If this is done effectively it will have a knock-on effect and impact positively on the academic performance and outcomes of senior learners.

Recommendation 6: Make the language policy work for learners

It is recommended that the DoE attend to the present LOLT policy.

The present official language policy practiced at South African schools profoundly debilitates and constrains both the learning and teaching process at underperforming secondary schools catering for Xhosa-speaking learners. Learners with a weak primary school educational foundation are being expected to learn and write in a second language. This has in most instances disastrous educational outcomes.

All concerned stressed that the present policy of teaching and learning was not working and was creating serious impediments to teaching and learning. The de facto situation in this regard at most of the abovementioned schools is that official policy was being circumvented by different means and practices by principals, SMT members and teachers.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen leadership and management

It is recommended that principals sign performance contracts, SMTs be upskilled and SGBs differently constituted.

Serious shortcomings with the management and governance of underperforming schools were established. Principal accountability is a key issue. It is recommended that, in conjunction with a performance contract, a mentoring system be instituted to develop leadership skills in principals. SMTs are perceived by a significant percentage of teachers not to assist educators to become better teachers. Their contribution could be enhanced if they were up-skilled in their respective subjects and given more free time for management by the appointment of additional teachers.

Improve the relationship between the Principal, SMT and SGB

The authors noted that the leadership, management and governance provided at school level can be conceptualised and presented as a 'leadership triangle', representing the relationship between the three most important leadership components at the level of the school itself, that is, the Principal, the SMT and the SGB. This constitutes the apex of leadership at the school.

Recommendation 8: Revisit the current policy of a standard model of school governance at South African schools

It is recommended that the present approach and model of school governance in South Africa be revisited.

School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in its current form appears to be fundamentally flawed and not working in the context of underperforming schools. Both principals and educators indicated that SGBs contributed only marginally to the functioning of these schools because parents typically lack organisational, managerial and technical capacity, which prevents them from supporting school management and the teacher corps in critical areas like drafting of the annual school budget, fundraising and the effective implementation of disciplinary procedures.

A possible route to strengthen the capacity of SGBs is through the targeted nominations of highly skilled individuals from civil society, private sector companies and academia.

Recommendation 9: Improve the Capacity of School Governing Boards

It is recommended that the present training programmes for members of School Governing Boards be assessed and evaluated in terms of its outcomes.

The existing package of training programmes for SGBs at underperforming schools is clearly not showing the desired outcomes. The WCED should critically interrogate both the relevance and quality of the content as well as the accessibility of it given the low level of formal education of many governors.

Recommendation 10: Improve teaching at underperforming schools

It is recommended that urgent attention be given to improving the quality of teaching at underperforming schools.

Our findings clearly show that the better educational outcomes at underperforming schools are associated with highly qualified and more experienced teachers, supporting existing evidence in this regard. We therefore recommend that underperforming schools recruit qualified teachers who have the necessary subject knowledge to teach their subjects effectively.

In addition, teachers must show they are competent in the subjects they teach by passing a test or by completing an academic major, graduate degree or comparable coursework. This will go a long way in ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge to teach the subjects they are teaching.

Recommendation 11: Improve facilities at underperforming schools

It is recommended that a concerted effort is made to improve the infrastructure, facilities (especially toilets) and amenities at underperforming school.

Presently underperforming schools do not have all the basic facilities, amenities and infrastructure to function effectively. It is recommended that schools should be equipped with basic facilities and infrastructure to function effectively.

Recommendation 12: Improve the current system of dissemination, monitoring and evaluation of the full implementation of the curriculum

It is recommended that the district office take the necessary steps to ensure that there is a functioning system in place for the dissemination of curriculum information at underperforming schools, and that the resources required for the implementation of the curriculum are available and utilised.

Recommendation 13: Assist learners with special needs

It is recommended that policies and services are developed specifically for underperforming schools to deal with learners with special needs.

The research showed that learners with special needs are not well managed at underperforming schools. This includes both improving access to specialized services, i.e. psychological and remedial teaching services as well as up-skilling of the teacher corps in this regard to improve their identification of learners requiring such services.

Recommendation 14: Improve the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of teachers

It is recommended that teacher performance be closely monitored and evaluated.

Evaluation of the level of academic progress that takes place in classrooms should be a non-negotiable. The fact that nearly a quarter of the teachers interviewed declared that monitoring was, at best a rare occurrence or, at worst never happened, clearly suggests that consistent monitoring of performance of teachers at underperforming schools presents a serious challenge. It also points to bad management at these schools.

It is recommended that skipping classes, absenteeism and late-coming be strictly monitored and recorded.

There are many instances where teachers are either absent, skipping classes or arriving late at school. The leadership and management of the school must ensure that all these instances are monitored and strictly recorded.

Recommendation 15: Improve school safety, particularly in the classroom itself

A suite of interventions is necessary in dealing with this issue ranging from behaviour modification programmes, the development of conflict resolution skills, disciplinary codes, etc. These interventions should target both learners and teachers.

Recommendation 16: Improve morale and attitudes of learners and teachers alike

It is recommended that development programmes be offered for both teachers and learners at underperforming schools.

Principals and teaching staff at underperforming schools often have to confront a range of issues that are beyond the scope of teaching; issues that emanate from the social environment from which learners come. The research highlighted that even if quality education is provided (like in the case of Typology 1 schools) this is likely to have

minimal impact on the lives of learners if factors emanating from their socioeconomic environment are not addressed since many learners live in communities that are dysfunctional which perpetuates cycles of violence, abuse, and poverty.

It is for this reason that we recommend that a comprehensive personal development programme be developed for learners which is to be run during the entire duration of a learner's high school career. This programme needs to promote strategies that build the self image and self esteem of young people and should reinforce good behaviour and promote attitudinal changes and values that emphasizes the excellence of personal growth and development.

Recommendation 17: Improve parental involvement

"Your school is only as good as your parent body" (School principal during interview, 2011)

Parental involvement at underperforming schools should be facilitated and enabled on a number of levels.

6.2 SOCIO ECONOMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 18: More social workers, health workers and psychological services for learners at underperforming schools

It is recommended that the number of professionals in the caring disciplines be significantly increased.

At each school included in this study a strong demand for such services was expressed. There was general dissatisfaction with the existing level of services, particularly its availability and especially amongst principals of rural schools. The study found that close to 15% of migrant learners are heads of households. This is a disturbing finding. These learners need special attention, support and intervention when necessary.

Recommendation 19: Building of more school hostels

It is recommended that serious consideration be given to the possibility of building more school hostels to accommodate learners from vulnerable or dysfunctional domestic environments.

A number of rural based schools expressed the need for more school hostels. It was the opinion of the respondents that such a step would ensure that learners are housed in structured and stable environments conducive to discipline and learning. A sentiment expressed in this regard was that the school system cannot counter the negative environmental influences that many learners live under and that the only strategy was to physically take these learners away from such influences and expose them to a new environment that instills in them an alternative set of values.

Recommendation 20: Countering the impact of over-crowded living conditions of learners

It is recommended that underperforming schools make the appropriate allowance for the fact that the overwhelming majority of their learners have to cope daily with the consequences of overcrowded households. This again asks of schools to consider their existing model of “homework” and begs the question whether this concept is appropriate in impoverished areas.

Living in overcrowded conditions can potentially undermine the child’s needs and rights. For example being able to do school work and study when other household members want to sleep, visit, make conversation or watch television is very difficult. Schools could make available aftercare facilities for learners to do their homework at school.

Recommendation 21: Counter the impact of a threatening environment

It is recommended that the WCED seeks collaboration with relevant structures, organisations to assist learners, especially but not exclusively urban and female learners, to deal with the impact of a threatening environment.

Recommendation 22: Sustain and extend the School Feeding Scheme

It is recommended that the School Feeding Scheme programme be sustained and where necessary extended with a special focus on schools accommodating predominantly Xhosa speaking learners.

Recommendation 23: Building a bridge – acting back on the challenges

It is recommended that a bridging mechanism be developed to address both school-level and non-school issues.

Our findings have established a raft of school level and non school level variables influence the ability and/or attitude of learners to engage productively and optimally in educational programmes.

It is also true that educational authorities have limited capacity and influence and are not able to act back at broad societal realities and challenges impacting on learners. It is important that society recognises and acts on this.

Acknowledging that education for these schools have to take place within a context of poor social economic realities, it is imperative that educational authorities which include school management, develop creative strategies with the primary aim of addressing the effects these realities has on learners and the educational environment within each school.

We therefore recommend a bridging mechanism to pull together programmes and interventions by all stakeholders in society. Given the multi-faceted nature of factors giving rise to under-performance, an integrated response requires the involvement of government, civil society, business and the community. This is in line with the statement made by the Deputy Minister of Basic Education provide below:

“The starting point for change in the education sector is with the poorest of the poor, and the key question is how do we get the public and our partners in the private sector to respond to this?”

(Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Mr. E Surty, 2011.)

An example: Madrasati/My School Initiative

As part of international benchmarking, this study identified, visited and reviewed the *Madrasati/My School Initiative* of Jordan as a model that could be adapted for the South African context.

The *Madrasati/My School Initiative* is a grassroots initiative that tackles problems of under-performance at schools through social compacts.

The *Initiative* is an autonomous, Not-for-Profit (NPO) entity with an independent board and an influential and powerful patron (in this case, Queen Rania). The *Initiative*

operates at national or provincial levels, interacts directly with under-performing schools, and coordinates education and external interventions via social compacts in the form of a School Councils.

The approach adopted by the *Madrasati Initiative* 'brings together public, private and non-profit sectors in a comprehensive education initiative that aims to improve the overall learning environment in the selected public schools.' (Madrasati 2011).

The *Initiative* is informed by the following principles: student-centeredness, partnership, cost-sharing, community ownership, volunteerism and transparency. Key benefits (as espoused in the initiative overview) are:

- It mobilises a renewed level of interest and engagement in addressing an issue that has long been a public concern (underperforming schools) without viable and sustainable solutions
- It enhances the idea of education as a social responsibility and not the sole responsibility of the government
- It encourages schools to become the focal points for community activities, volunteerism, civic engagement and a source of community strength
- It fosters ownership amongst parents, students and stakeholders
- It becomes an effective mechanism for partners from public, private and civil society to work collaboratively
- It is a door-opener for the private sector to get actively involved in adopted schools
- It enhances participation between schools and local communities through joint activities and programmes

The model espoused by the *Madrasati Initiative* can be amended for the South African context.

The following is proposed:

Each province establishes a provincial Madrasati equivalent which could take the form of a Provincial Education Body. This provincial body will be an autonomous NPO with an

independent Board and a strong patron and be self-sustaining by raising funds from government, private sector, donors, etc.

It will:

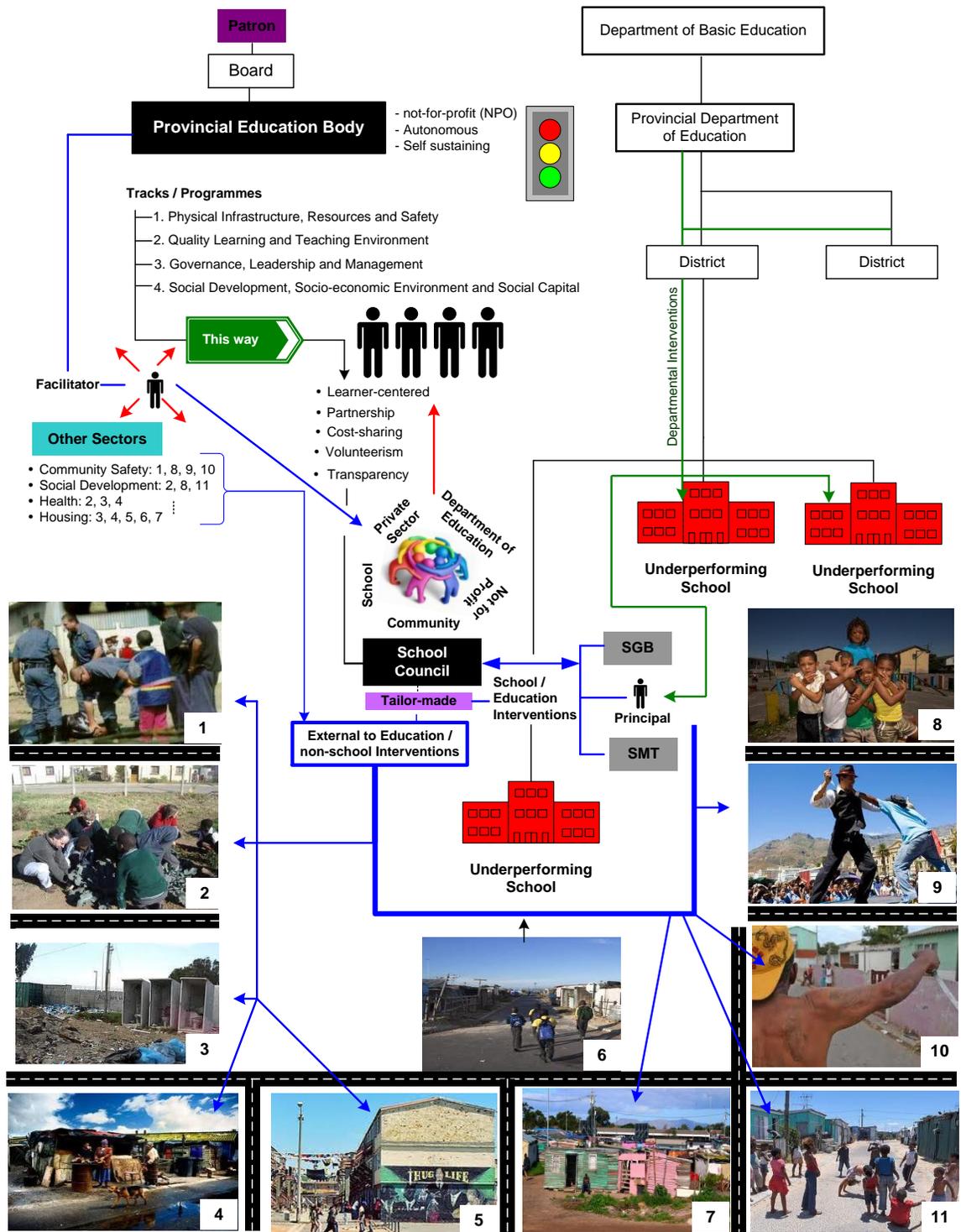
- Collaborate with the Provincial Department of Education at strategic and operational levels involving action planning, programmatic interventions and resource mobilisation.
- Facilitate the setting up of social compacts in the form of School Councils at identified underperforming schools.
- Develop a tailor-made programmatic set of interventions per school to attack underperformance in conjunction with other stakeholders.
- Interact with schools, districts, provincial and national Departments of Education and other education and non-education stakeholders.
- Coordinate province-wide cross-sectoral initiatives that involve education and non-educational interventions and stakeholders.
- Do money-scouting and resource mobilisation at provincial, national and international levels.
- Coordinate volunteerism and volunteer-tourism (international volunteers donating educational expertise) for educational purposes.
- Coordinate, at a provincial level, programmes and support involving government, private and non-profit sectors that deals with the following four tracks of interventions
 1. Track One: Deal with physical infrastructure, resources and safety at the schools.
 2. Track Two: Create a quality learning and teaching environment with the requisite tools – all based on a needs assessment. This takes the form of involving NGOs and is augmented with a suite of relevant interventions by the education department.
 3. Track Three: Strengthen Governance, Leadership and Management.

4. Track Four: Social Development, Socio-economic Environment and Social Capital that includes programmes dealing with health, nutrition and social welfare.

School Councils

At a school level the School Council constitutes the social compact consisting of learners, youth, teachers, parents, community members, district and departmental officials, NGOs, private sector, etc. The School Council works with the School Governing Body (SGB), the principal and the SMT, and collectively explores solutions to multi-faceted problems facing these underperforming schools, and implements tailor-made programmes based on the four tracks of interventions by working with various partners. The School Council with the Provincial Educational Body will seek a sponsor for the school in order for the school to gain access to additional financial support and the benefit of corporate experience and access to additional networks.

This can be graphically illustrated as follows:



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