

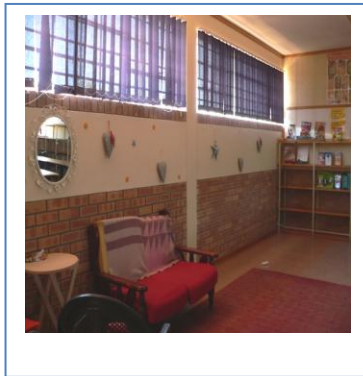
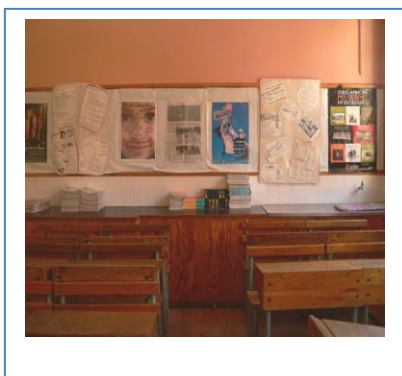
A REPORT ON UNDERPERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE WESTERN CAPE

REPORT 4

Investigating WCED Interventions at Underperforming Schools

November 2011

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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 out-performed 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The number of underperforming schools, according to information released by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), in the Western Cape has more than doubled in the last few years despite the plethora of national and provincial interventions aimed at turning the situation around. In 2006 there were 36 underperforming schools in the Western Cape. By 2009 this number increased to 85, accounting for almost 20% of all secondary schools within the province. Despite the introduction of a number of interventions by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), with this project specifically focusing on those introduced during 2010, the number of underperforming schools still stood at 78 at the end of the 2010 school calendar. Most underperforming schools are located in the townships. These schools manifest many social dysfunctionalities emanating from the social environment in which they are rooted.

This paper examines the interventions implemented by the WCED with a specific focus on those introduced in the past two years. The aim was to determine the effectiveness of these interventions in having the desired effect of improving performance at the targeted schools from the perspective of key stakeholders at school level. It also endeavours to ascertain the appropriateness of these interventions and in what ways their impact can be improved.

In testing the effectiveness and possible areas for improvement of the interventions, interviews were conducted with principals, educators, the members of School Management Teams (SMTs) and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) of the 12 selected underperforming schools in the Western Cape¹.

The paper starts by giving a brief overview of the key findings on underperforming schools. This is followed by a brief description of the strategic framework that was developed in 2009/2010 by the WCED to address the problem of underperforming schools. This is followed by the findings of the survey that discusses (i) the knowledge that educators, principals, SMTs and SGBs have of WCED's interventions, (ii) their perceived impact of the strategic interventions and (iii) the appropriateness of the interventions. The paper concludes with some suggestions on how interventions aimed at improving underperforming schools can be improved.

¹ The paper should be read in conjunction with Paper One and Two of this series which discusses both school level and out-of-school factors that give rise to underperformance.

2. 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 exams. 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 rate 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

3. FINDINGS

The research found underperforming schools to be a heterogeneous group, that although faced by similar general challenges, are faced with very specific manifestations of these challenges unique to their environment, their broader community, and learner profiles. The research distinguished three different typologies of such schools. Typology 1 schools were institutionally strong (i.e. they had good systems, efficient administrative processes, strong leaders and dedicated staff members) but had to confront a range of problems emanating from the socioeconomic environment from which their learners came. Typology 2 schools were characterised as those “merely getting by” and Typology 3 schools were described as “barely functional” or “dysfunctional”.

3.1 WCED INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

The Provincial Turnaround Strategy of the WCED for underperforming schools (for the period 2009 – 2010) was aimed at systematically addressing school underperformance and the low levels of learner attainment.

The strategy focused on long-term change measures as well as emergency measures to attack the downward spiral of those schools already under administration of the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) in the province (WCED, 2009:1).

In spite of the implementation of the NSLA the number of underperforming schools continued to increase from 36 in 2007 to 74 in 2009. This was coupled with a further decline in learner achievement, with one school reporting a pass rate of below 20% (WCED, 2009: 3).

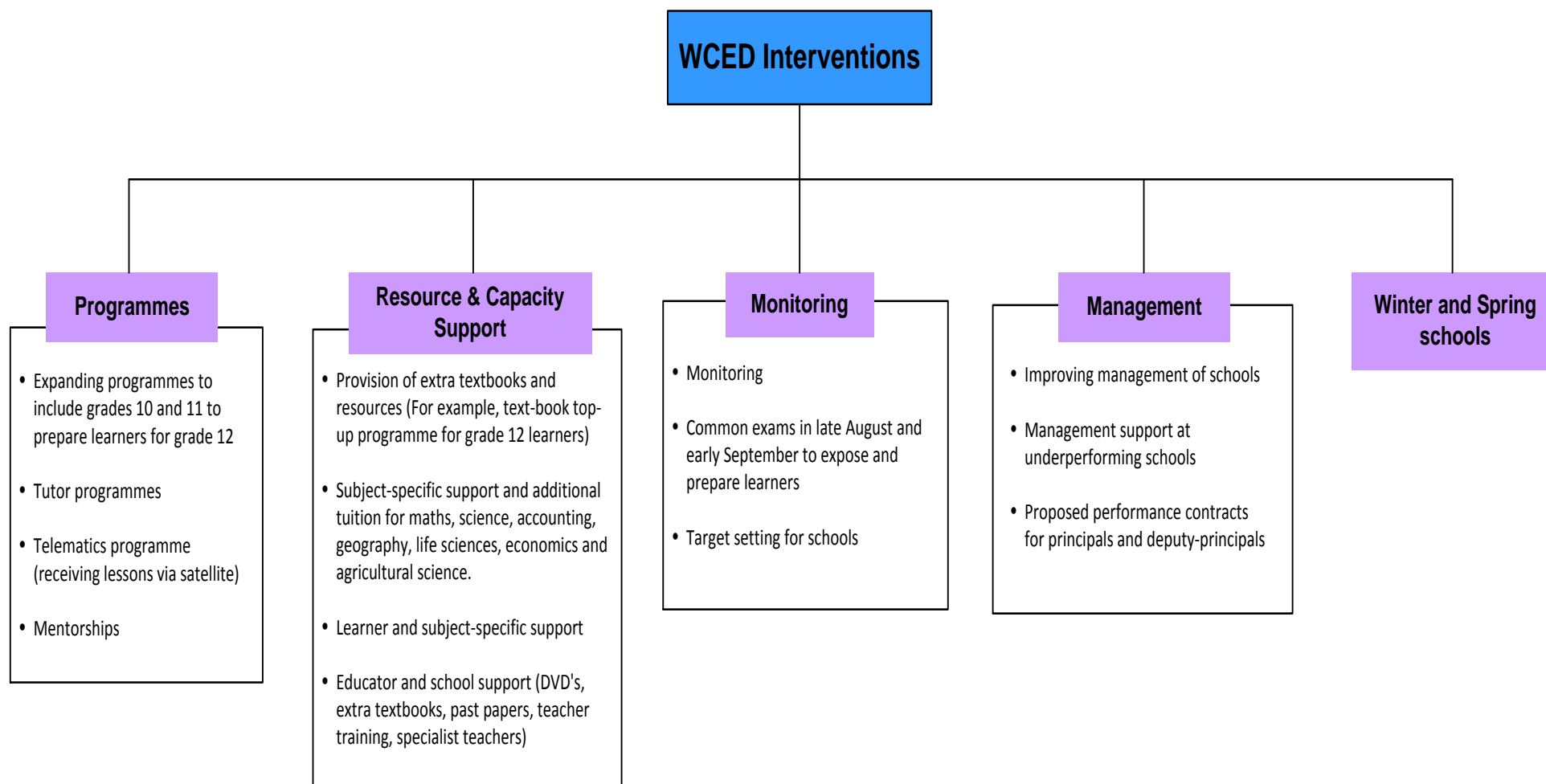
The turnaround strategy recognises a particular sequence of interventions needed when addressing underperformance. In the case of dysfunctional schools, organisational development is proposed, where as the focus at underperforming schools is placed at professional development and support specifically with regards to the School Improvement Plan (SIP) together with relevant curriculum support, for well-performing schools support to maintain and further improve standards is proposed.

The interventions of the Western Cape Education Department can be grouped into the following broad types:

1. Programmes directed at providing academic support to learners
2. Resources and capacity support
3. Monitoring
4. Management
5. Winter and spring schools

These interventions are illustrated and described in the diagramme below:

Figure 1: WCED Interventions



Source: WCED 2010

3.2 KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF INTERVENTIONS

To test the impact of WCED's strategic interventions questions testing awareness, as well as more detailed knowledge and perceptions on the implemented interventions at the individual schools, were included in both the principal and teacher questionnaires.

For both principals and teachers the majority (76% teachers and 91% of principals) indicated that they were aware of strategic interventions introduced by the WCED [Table 1]. On the question of how they found out about the interventions the majority of principals (60%; N=6) indicated being informed by the District Official, with another 30% indicating (N=3) the Circuit Manager and one informed directly by a Director of the Department of Education. The majority (80%) of teachers indicated they had been informed by their principal about the strategic intervention, with another 20% indicating to have received information from the Circuit Manager and 10% from the District Official² [Table 2].

On the question if their school was part of any of the strategic interventions nearly all principals (91%; N=10) and the majority of teachers (63%) indicated yes. The fact that a rather larger number of teachers were not aware of the interventions is of concern, given that all the schools in the study had matric pass rates of lower than 60% for 2009 and were therefore all classified as NSLA schools in 2010. It would have been expected that that all teachers and principals would respond in the affirmative when asked this question.

A possible explanation for the response rate of the teachers might be that the sample included teachers of all grades and not just those responsible for Grade 12 learners. If this is the case, it raises another important question relating to the manner in which intervention programmes are designed and implemented at these underperforming schools. Is the programme developed and implemented from a "damage control" perspective with the matric pass rate as the only consideration, or is there a more holistic approach aimed at developing learners with strong academic ability? From the response of stakeholders the former seems to be the perception.

² Note that teachers were asked to indicate all their sources from where information was received, multiple responses were thus allowed and thus the percentages do not count to a total of 100%.

Table 3: Awareness of strategic interventions by WCED in 2009 - 2010

	Aware of strategic interventions introduced by WCED in 2009-2010			
	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Principals	10	90.9	1	9.1
Teachers	64	76.2	20	23.8

Table 4: How did you find out about the strategic intervention? (Multiple responses)

	How did you find out about the strategic intervention?			
	Principals		Teachers	
	N	%	N	%
District Official	6	60	14	16.7
Circuit Manager	3	30	17	20.6
Director of Department of Educations	1	10	6	9.8
Principal	N/A	N/A	49	80.3

Table 5: School part of strategic intervention by WCED in 2010?

	School part of strategic intervention by WCED in 2010				Total
	Yes		No		
	N	%	N	%	
Principals	10	90.9	1	9.1	100%
Teachers	45	63.4	26	36.6	100%

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTIONS IMPLEMENTED AT INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS BY BOTH PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

In testing the knowledge, experience and perceptions of teachers and principals with regard to the impact of interventions implemented at the individual schools, respondents were asked a number of questions. Firstly they were asked to name the intervention implemented at their school, then to name the agency responsible for the implementation, the year it was implemented, to outline the support received in implementing it and finally, to provide their views on the appropriateness of that specific intervention. All these responses are summarised for both principals and teachers in Tables 4 and 5.

In the principal responses five interventions were specified as implemented in the participating schools. These were tutorials (N=11), telematics (N=8), holiday school (N=6), additional classes (N=5) and the distribution of support material (N=2)³. For almost all the interventions the agency responsible was the WCED, except in the case of additional classes where, in all five cases, the specific school was responsible for the implementation. Other support agencies specified included the Stellenbosch University (tutorials) at two schools, district office for the presentation of a holiday school at one of the schools, and the NSLA. The interventions were spread over a period of two years (2009 to 2010) with the majority implemented in 2010 and one intervention in 2011. When asked about support for the implementation of the respective interventions, most indicated that they received assistance from the district offices and the WCED. With regards to the type of support received, the distribution of support material was the primary form of support, followed by workshops and training courses.

In response to what kind of interventions had been implemented at their schools, there was a slight discrepancy with teachers identifying eight and principals only five. The intervention programmes specified by the teachers included capacity building workshops for educators (N=9), circular advisory support (N=2), training courses for educators (N=3), additional classes or work for learners (N=4), tutoring programme (N=2), telematics (N=3), learning area support (N=1) and NSLA (N=1)⁴. It must be noted that very few teachers were able to specifically mention the intervention programmes at their school.

³ The specified frequency for each intervention equals the number of schools participating in the study where a specific intervention was implemented.

⁴ The specified frequency for each interventions shows the number of teachers that specified that specific interventions as implemented in their school.

Other agencies specified were Dinaledi (workshops), NSLA (circular advisory support and additional classes) and the University of Stellenbosch (telematics). The majority of interventions were implemented in the course of 2009 and 2010 with three interventions specified for 2011. The primary support agents for the interventions were indicated to be the WCED and the district offices, with one reference to Dinaledi and another to the Cape Teaching and Learning Institute (CTLI). The primary form of support was workshops aimed at building teachers' capacity. Other types mentioned included the distribution of support material and specific training courses to teachers.

3.4 APPROPRIATENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERVENTIONS

With regard to the appropriateness of the interventions described above, the majority of teachers and principals responded in saying that the implemented interventions were appropriate for their specific school and its learners.

Concern was however raised regarding the level of impact of these interventions and both teachers and principals had suggestions on how its impact could be improved. Suggested recommendations included the following:

- Continuous evaluation of intervention programmes to ensure validity and impact.
- Smaller classes to allow more personalised attention to learners.
- Improved communication between the department and schools towards both principals and teachers.
- More frequent and more systematic intervention programmes.
- Interventions need to be integrated with existing processes not as add-ons.
- The introduction of interventions to focused on the improvement of learner attitude to education.
- The introduction of interventions to increase parental involvement.
- A greater sensitivity, in the design of programmes on the impact of interventions on actual teaching time.
- Interventions aimed at earlier grades - even as early as primary school level. It was mentioned that such an approach will result in the genuine building of students' skills and capacity, instead of focusing interventions on Gr.12 learners leaving a strong sense of damage control and in effect resulting in 'too little too late'.

A strong sentiment, specifically amongst teachers, was that the 'department' (a collective for WCED and district offices) forces intervention programmes on schools without considering the impact thereof on teachers and/or learners. Some teachers experienced the department as disregarding their professional expertise. They felt they should be included in the design of interventions instead of simply having to implement programmes that did not take them as teachers nor the context of the school or learners into account. One principal put it this way: *"Consult the schools more on what the needs of the school would be instead of deciding at district level what to provide to schools"*.

It would seem that a partnership approach, rather than a *dictating approach*, is necessary when planning and implementing interventions. This would not only ensure support of the programmes, but also the viability and impact thereof. The context of the school and learners must be taken into account when deciding on the type of interventions needed as well as the logistics around implementation.

Currently the department has a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach when designing and implementing interventions with very little, if any consideration, for the local context of individual underperforming schools. Given the very different social contexts of schools, such a generalised approach runs the risk of compromising both the applicability and impact of interventions.

In order to ensure that interventions have the desired impact, consultation with principals and teachers of underperforming schools is essential. Such consultations should focus on both understanding the context of underperformance at that specific school, as well as considering the practical aspects of implementation. According to teachers the following aspects need to be considered. Issues to consider, according to teachers, include:

- Assessing the primary reasons for underperformance in a specific school, that is - is the reason for underperformance related to the school's socio-economic context, the academic ability of the learners or is it a result of poor human resource management within the school?
- In what way does the manner in which interventions are offered prevent or improve attendance by learners? Important aspects to consider would include the availability and costs of transport and safety aspects such as the time and venue of an intervention.

Such an approach does indeed suggest a more individualised approach to the designing and implementation of interventions for individual schools, with tailored interventions becoming part of a broader programme by the Department aimed at underperformance at secondary schools.

The following tables give a summary account of principal's and teacher's responses to specific interventions with regards to the agency responsible for each intervention, the year it was implemented, support structure available, type of support received and perceived appropriateness of each intervention.

Table 6: Summary of interventions implemented at sampled schools (principals)

Name of intervention	Agency responsible for the intervention	Year intervention was applied	Support structure	Type of support received	Appropriateness of implemented intervention
Telematics (N=8)	WCED: 8	2009: 1 2010: 7	WCED: 3 District Office: 4 US: 1	Support Material: 5 Workshops: 2 Training course: 1	Yes: 7 No: 1
Tutorials (N=11)	WCED: 5 US: 2	2009: 3 2010: 8	WCED: 4 District Office: 5 US: 2	Support Material: 7 Workshops: 6 Training course: 1	Yes: 9 No: 0
Holiday school (N=6)	WCED: 4 District Office: 1 School: 1	2009: 1 2010: 3 2011: 1	WCED: 2 District Office: 3 School: 1	Support Material: 1 Training course: 1	Yes: 5 No: 0
Additional classes (N=5)	School: 5	2010: 5	WCED: 1 No support: 4	Training course: 1	Yes: 4 No: 0 No response: 1
Support material (N=2)	WCED: 1 NSLA: 1	2010: 2	District Office: 2	Support Material: 1	Yes: 2 No:

Table 7: Summary of interventions implemented at sampled schools (teachers)

Name of intervention	Agency responsible for the intervention	Year intervention was applied	Support structure	Type of support received	Appropriateness of implemented intervention
Capacity building workshops for educators (N=9)	WCED: 8 Dinaledi: 1	2007:1 2009: 1 2010: 3 2011: 3	WCED: 3 District Office: 5 Dinaledi: 1	Support Material: 1 Workshops: 9 Training course: 1	Yes: 8 No: 1
Circular Advisor Support (N=2)	WCED: 1 NSLA: 1	2009: 1 2010: 1	District Office: 2	Support Material: 2 Workshops: 1	Yes: 2 No: 0
Training courses for educators (N=3)	WCED: 2 Other: 1	2008: 1 2009: 1 2010: 1	WCED: 2 District Office: 1	Support Material: 1 Workshops: 2 Training course: 1	Yes: 1 No: 1 Don't know: 1
Additional classes/work for learners (N=4)	NSLA: 2 WCED: 2	2010: 2	WCED: 1 District office: 2 CTLI: 1	Training course: 3 Workshops: 1	Yes: 3 No: 0
Tutoring programme (N=2)	WCED: 2 NSLA:	2010: 2	WCED: 2	Support Material: 1 Workshops: 1	Yes: 2 No: 0
Telematics (N=3)	WCED: 2 US: 1	2008: 1 2009: 1 2010: 1	WCED: 2	Support Material: 2 Workshops: 2	Yes: 3 No: 0
Learning Area Support (N=1)	WCED: 1	2006: 1	WCED: 1	Support Material: 1	Yes: 2 No: 0
NSLA (N=1)	NSLA: 1	'Long ago'	WCED: 1	Support Material: 1	Don't know: 1

3.5 SUGGESTIONS TO STRENGTHEN INTERVENTION PROGRAMME

A number of pertinent suggestions were made regarding the support required to strengthen the intervention programme at schools:

Socio-economic environment:

Underperforming schools face numerous challenges emanating from the socio-economic environment in which they are located and where learners come from. Interventions at school level must be supported by programmes that directly address the socio-economic factors that impact on learners such as issues of safety, security, transport, health and poverty. Problems emanating from the socio-economic realities, manifest in the classroom environment and divert teachers from their core focus of teaching and learners from learning.

Role-modelling best practice:

Educators in particular indicated that use should be made of curriculum advisors capable of role modelling best practice in the classroom. In addition, educators indicated that the number of schools allocated to district officials should be manageable to enable them to visit schools more often and give regular, constructive support to assist in professional development. In addition to this, SMTs indicated that educators needed to be mentored with best practices by a lead educator.

Staff shortages:

Educators outlined that many teachers do not complete the syllabus for their subjects primarily due to them not being equipped to teach the subjects they are assigned. They indicated that it was therefore imperative to address issues such as staff shortages - as well as gaps in experience and knowledge - as these factors all impact directly on the ability of staff to implement and support the intervention programme.

More parental involvement:

SMTs, principals and educators indicated the lack of parental involvement as a great problem. Any intervention programme must be supported at home and manners in which parental involvement can be improved is therefore a key element to address.

After-care support:

Because of the socio-economic and marginalised status of most learners, it was recommended that interventions should be supported through aftercare programmes for learners and opportunities for learners to engage in their homework at school.

A partnership approach to designing and implementing intervention programmes:

One of the key observations from members of the SMTs, principals and SGBs was that there was not enough consultation in the development of intervention programme so as to address the specific needs of a school. There was a call for a partnership approach to change and intervention programs instead of the current approach which is perceived to be “pushed” from the Department.

Better coordination of intervention programmes:

Various stakeholders indicated that the interventions implemented by the WCED were ‘uncoordinated’. Whilst some of the interventions were needed, there was a sense that the strategy behind it was ill-informed and not completely targeted to the needs of the schools. The interventions followed a “one-size-fits-all” approach premised on the belief that underperformance emanated from a set of issues and characteristics true for all underperforming schools.

4. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS AIMED AT SCHOOL LEVEL FACTORS

Recommendation 1: Cast a solid foundation⁵

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.

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

⁵ 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.

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.

4.2 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:

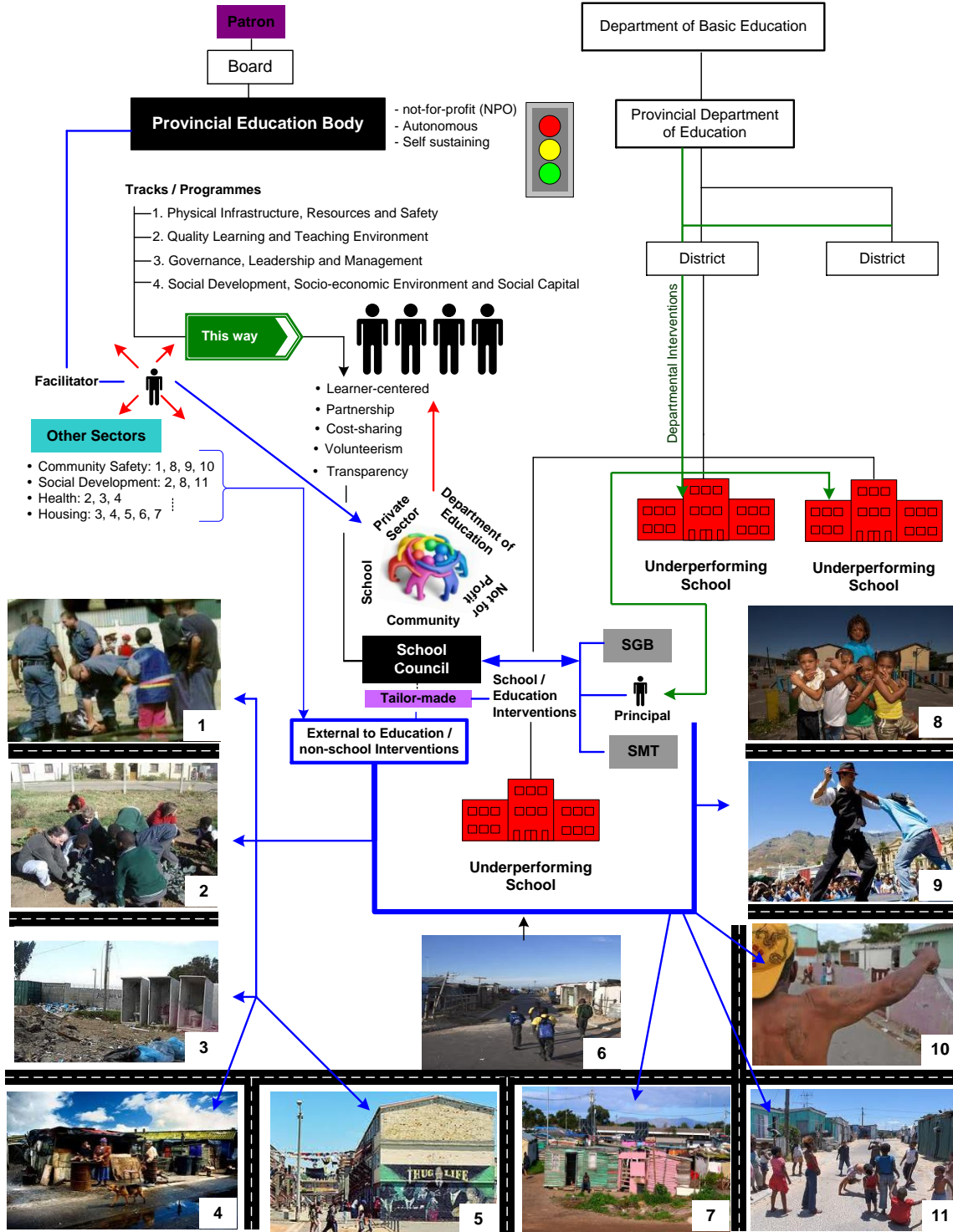
- Collaborate with the Provincial Department of Education at strategic and operational levels involving action planning, programmatic interventions and resource mobilisation.
- Facilitate the setting up of social compacts in the form of School Councils at identified underperforming schools.
- Develop 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:



5. REFERENCES

Western Cape Education Department. 2009. Provincial Turnaround Strategy for NSLA Schools.