UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

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GRADE 3 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT: MAIN REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

for

The Western Cape Education Department

and

The Western Cape Treasury

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Diagnostic testing of all Grade 3 learners since 2002 has made clear that, despite some gains in home language Literacy, performance with regards to Numeracy (a critical skill upon which the foundations for mathematics are formed) remains a significant challenge. The overall weak level of the results indicates that very little learning is taking place in many schools at the primary school level and that the Foundation Phase – Grades 1-3, accounting for 254 574 learners and roughly 43 percent (R1.8 billion in 2008/9) of the public primary ordinary school budget – is not providing an adequate foundation for further learning at higher grades.

At the end of 2009, the Department of Economics at the University of Stellenbosch undertook to do a study, funded by the Western Cape Treasury, for the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). The understanding in this collaborative effort was that this study should aim to identify the underlying causes of poor learner performance as measured by the Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy results, in order to focus policy interventions. The research was meant to identify school and classroom factors that contribute to learner performance while controlling for poverty and home background, and to use this to inform an intervention strategy. If successful, such interventions could have substantial positive knock-on effects for future years and could result in improved expenditure efficacy. To ensure that this research became a means to an end and that there was follow through, it was understood by all parties concerned that the recommendations of the research findings would be implemented to the extent possible. Furthermore, budget reprioritisation would also be considered.

Conceptual framework

The weak performance of Western Cape schools compared to international benchmarks and limited signs of a major recent improvement made a focus on improving performance at the earliest school grades appropriate. Current research suggests that providing additional resources by themselves, without the necessary reorganization to utilise such resources, may make only a limited contribution to improving education quality.

It is useful to first place education within a conceptual framework which would support such a study. Teachers and classrooms are at the centre of education, and they are in turn nested within schools. Schools and principals are in turn nested within communities and district and provincial education structures. Thus schools, principals, communities, and district and provincial structures provide the environment within which teachers and classrooms function.

Given this structure, one can distinguish two sets of issues. The first relates to what happens in the **classrooms** and what teachers do. Factors that need attention here are issues such as time on task (effort); teacher methodology, subject knowledge and assessment practices; and the availability and use of appropriate textbooks or workbooks.

The second set of issues relates to the **classroom environment**, such as school functionality, instructional leadership, inspection, support for teachers and appropriate courses (including teacher training), administrative burdens of teachers and principals, parental involvement and the role of schools governing bodies.

It was agreed that the research would be of assistance if it could help to identify the magnitude, nature and distribution of factors limiting learning in classrooms; impediments to learning, and those most amenable to intervention; and appropriate intervention strategies, such as teaching teachers to teach and assess, freeing teachers from administrative burdens in order to teach, and ensuring teachers spend their time teaching. Interventions also had to consider improving accountability of schools to the community, e.g. through making test results available to individual parents and the community. The research had to build on what was known and focus on policy/application. It was also understood that implementation of the policies derived from the research should focus resources and energies first on lower grades, on struggling schools, and on the creation of more focus ("model") schools.

Given the discussion above, the research was envisaged as consisting of two distinct strands, viz. research on what happens in the classroom, mainly based on a literature review and a school survey, carried out jointly by the team from the University of Stellenbosch and the WCED Project Team, and research on what happens in the school that sets the circumstances and tone for the classroom.

The research carried out included a survey, described below; a literature review of what is known about classroom behaviour in South African schools; interviews with teachers and other stakeholders about school functionality and accountability; a literature review of the relationship between school functionality, accountability and performance budgeting; a statistical investigation of the Grade 3 and Grade 6 test results; and finally, drawing on existing research, including the LitNum study.

THE SURVEY

As indicated at the initiation of the project, the survey was not designed so much to establish new knowledge and do so at conventional levels of statistical significance. Rather, the survey was meant to see whether what could have been expected to be found, based on the literature, was indeed encountered in Western Cape schools, and to use this information to derive policy recommendations. The survey was a joint effort, as mentioned above, and a unique feature was the use of fieldworkers who were mainly WCED Foundation Phase curriculum advisors. These fieldworkers undertook a difficult and tiring task with great enthusiasm and dedication.

Fifteen schools offering instruction in each of the three main languages of the Western Cape were identified for observation. These schools were further divided into groups of 5 to be allocated to one fieldworker, consisting of one well-performing school and four weakly

performing schools (this was be determined using the most recent Grade 3 and Grade 6 evaluation results). A fieldworker spent a week in each school, observing teaching of Literacy and Numeracy in all Grade 1 to Grade 3 classrooms, using an instrument developed to assist him/her to assess classroom practices and functioning of these classrooms. The emphasis in this process was on factors such as the following:

- How motivated/engaged teachers are
- How well time is spent within the classroom
- How well teachers prepare
- How well teachers assess
- How well teachers apply micro- and macro-pacing
- How well textbooks are used
- Whether the principal provides instructional leadership

To provide a context for this work in the poorly-performing schools, the first school observed was the well-performing one.

Thus, with 9 fieldworkers doing classroom observation in classrooms, learning processes in 45 schools and 136 classrooms were assessed over five weeks. At the end of each week, these was a thorough debriefing of fieldworkers by the researchers, inter alia to gather the more nuanced oral information that may not have been well captured in the survey questionnaires. More detail about this part of the process is provided in Appendix E that provides a review of the project process. As envisaged, at the end of the five weeks of fieldwork it became possible to obtain a good overview of the nature of the problems in these schools. An intense period of data capturing, verification, cleaning and management followed at the end of the survey, which is described in more detail in Appendix F. Only then could the data analysis start.

SCHOOL FUNCTIONALITY

This part of the research focused on whether schools were functioning in a way that protected and supported learning in the classroom. This involved a number of components, as described below.

A quantitative analysis of existing data

This involved analysis of data from the Literacy and Numeracy evaluations at Grade 3 and Grade 6 level and linking these to information from Emis. This helped to determine whether schools were consistently performing weakly and how this related to their resources and socio-economic status.

A literature study of school functionality and accountability structures

This study was undertaken within the context of two literatures, on education and on performance budgeting respectively. Part of this literature study assessed structures of accountability and how these were used to deal with school functionality in both the South African and international context.

Interviews and discussions with stake-holders

Related to the literature study, a series of interviews and discussions was conducted with principals, teachers, parents and members of education authorities, to determine how they perceived school functionality, ways of identifying it, and ways of dealing with it.

Analysis of Principal Questionnaires in the 45 schools

The fieldworkers in schools administered, as part of their week long engagement in each school, a Principal Questionnaire that included a focus on school functionality.

Results from LitNum study

In addition to the above, the research team was also kindly given access to the LitNum study conducted earlier in Western Cape schools. In some cases this could be used to triangulate findings from the current survey, while in other cases it offered alternative perspectives on issues that could not be dealt with in this (already long) survey.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

The Stellenbosch Research Team consisted of the following persons:

- Prof. Servaas van der Berg (University of Stellenbosch, study leader)
- Herman Meyer (independent consultant, project manager)
- Dr. Cheryl Reeves (Cape Peninsula University of Technology)
- Dr. Chris van Wyk (University of Stellenbosch, data manager)
- Dr. Ursula Hoadley (University of Cape Town)
- Dr. Monica Bot (independent researcher)
- Paula Armstrong (University of Stellenbosch, researcher)

At Stellenbosch University, Dr. Ronelle Burger, Stephen Taylor, Derek Yu and Cobus Burger all were involved in specific aspects of the project. Data were captured by experienced capturers from the Department of Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. Data verification and analysis was also undertaken with the assistance of a number of students.

The team from the WCED consisted mainly of officials linked to the Research Section, working under Sindy Mafanga-Kibi (Chief Director: Education Management Information & Quality Assurance) and Marcia Harker, DDG:

- Dr. Andile Siyengo (Director: Research Services)
- Audrey Wyngaard
- Vumile Nyalashe
- Dr. Ronald Cornelissen
- Nomawabo Makapelao

Adv. Lynn Coleridge, Director: Policy Co-Ordination, provided valuable insight and advice regarding the legal framework for possible interventions.

At Provincial Treasury, Anthony Philips provided the assistance in getting the project underway and Claire Horton assisted in maintaining the important link between Treasury and the research process.

General advice was also sought regarding specific aspects of the research from Dr. Nick Taylor (JET Education Services), Dr. Thabo Mabogoane (JET Education Services), and Eric Schollar (Eric Scholar and Associates). In addition, JET kindly offered the research team access to their LitNum research database (another study undertaken for WCED).

Workshops with the WCED research team also helped to strengthen research and analysis capacity within the WCED. This will enable the WCED to strengthen internal resources that can inform ongoing research and policy development on these and related matters.

THIS REPORT

This report contains main highlights of the research findings in Chapter 2, which also contains some specific recommendations from the classroom observations and survey results contained in Appendix A, and the main recommendations (Chapter 3). The report also has six appendices:

- Appendix A: *Analysis of survey data* – Dr. Cheryl Reeves, with data input by Dr. Chris van Wyk
- Appendix B: *What do we know about teaching and learning in primary schools in South Africa? A review of the classroom-based research literature* – Dr. Ursula Hoadley
- Appendix C: *Improving school functionality, with a special focus on the Foundation Phase* – Dr. Monica Bot
- Appendix D: *School functionality, accountability and performance budgeting* – Paula Armstrong
- Appendix E: *Project process review* – Herman Meyer
- Appendix F: *Data management process* – Dr. Chris van Wyk

In addition, data from the WCED Gr.3 and Gr.6 tests were converted to a single datasets and extensively analysed. Similarly, the LitNum data was fully described in Excel spreadsheets and graphs, and a large volume of potentially extremely useful data were collected from the field, only some of which could be analysed for this report. Further discussions with WCED will take place to decide on how this information should be dealt with.

CHAPTER 2

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FINDINGS

WHAT WAS EXPECTED IN WEAKLY-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

As background to this study, a literature review of international research on and more specifically the findings from classroom-based studies in South Africa was conducted. The findings from this literature review, attached as Appendix B, informed the design of the questionnaire, the training of the fieldworkers, and also the analysis of the data.

Broadly, the expected findings relating to classroom behaviour can be discussed under four headings, as set out in more detail in Appendix B. These can be briefly summarised as in Table 1 below. With respect to *classroom discourse*, the pattern that previous studies found was an emphasis on oral discourse, with limited opportunities for reading and writing, chorusing instead of individual responding, weak forms of assessment with lack of feedback, and little explicit instruction. Teacher *knowledge* is often low, as is the level of cognitive demand made on children, textbooks are under-utilised and concrete methods of problem solving dominate. Instructional *time* is eroded by other activities in the school and classroom and the pace is generally slow. In terms of *values*, there is much emphasis on communalised learning. In all of this, there is an absence of a focus on written text, reading and writing.

Table 1: Descriptive features of South African primary school classrooms

Discourse
. Oral discourse dominates – lack of opportunities for reading and writing
. Classroom interaction patterns that privilege the collective (chorusing)
. Weak forms of assessment and lack of feedback on students' responses
. Little explicit, direct instruction
Knowledge
. Low teacher knowledge
. Low cognitive demand
. Little use of textbooks or strong texts
. Everyday, context-dependent knowledge predominates
. Use of apparatus and concrete methods for solving problems dominates
. Lack of focus on written text, reading and writing
Time
. Slow pacing
. Erosion of instructional time
Values
. Learning largely communalised
. Collectivised as opposed to individualised learning

WHAT WAS FOUND: ATTENTION TO FORM RATHER THAN SUBSTANCE

General findings

From this general picture of South African primary classrooms, from a wide range of studies on classroom behaviour and school functionality, and based on personal and other experiences, the research team accumulated certain expectations about both schools and classrooms. It was expected that these would be confirmed by the observations in the field in these largely weakly-performing schools. Table 2 sets out what these expectations were, but also summarises the main findings with regards to these expectations. Some of these will be discussed in more detail below, but others are largely left for Appendix A, which deals in detail with the findings from the survey about classroom behaviour.

It is best to start with findings at a high level. The main hypothesis set out in the Terms of Reference for this study was that learning in classrooms in weakly-performing schools was seriously negatively affected by one or a combination of three types of problems, viz. school dysfunctionality, weak ability of teachers in Foundation Phase classrooms to teach, or poor teacher effort.

Does the experience in the field confirm that such problems are pervasive in these weakly-performing schools in the sample? None of these problems was individually found to be as strong as had been expected. In particular, it appears from the survey results and the fieldworkers' feedback, both formally and informally, that school dysfunctionality was not as endemic as national studies may have lead one to believe. Instances of weak management and poor organisation, teacher absenteeism, weak discipline and limited instructional leadership do indeed impinge on learning. But compared to the experience in national surveys and from exposure to schools in other provinces, it appears as if Western Cape schools suffer less from this problem than elsewhere in the country, or even less than may have been the case in the province in the past. On the surface, it appears that most schools are functioning in the sense that normal procedures are being followed, basic functions are performed, resources (including teachers) are in place, and the daily routine is followed without too great interruptions or upheavals. Registers are kept, teachers and learners are in classes most of the time, and classes continue. Yet, in the most fundamental way, these schools are not fulfilling their most basic task, of substantive learning taking place in classrooms. *The form is present, the substance not.*

A similar situation applies to teachers' ability to teach. Fieldworkers (who, it should be remembered, were Foundation Phase subject advisors) were relatively impressed with the quality of much of the teaching observed in schools. Admittedly, what was observed may have reflected greater effort in terms of teaching performances and more careful planning of lessons in order to impress, as most teachers knew at least a day beforehand that they would be observed. Nevertheless, it did not appear as if there was an endemic problem of teachers not being able to maintain discipline, or being unfamiliar with teaching procedures

in teaching Literacy[1] or Numeracy. Lesson plans were kept, work schedules drawn up and assessments undertaken.

Yet when one delves deeper, there again appears to be an issue of form versus substance: Though the teachers taught, analysis of workbooks, homework and questions posed in class indicates that teachers seldom set the bar high enough for children, i.e. at high enough levels of cognitive demand; that macro-pacing was poor, so that full coverage of the curriculum was unlikely to occur in the year. They were muddled about assessment and about the curriculum, and though they professed frequently to teach children the times (multiplication) tables, yet this not borne out by learner performance on the most simple tests, as examples below will show.

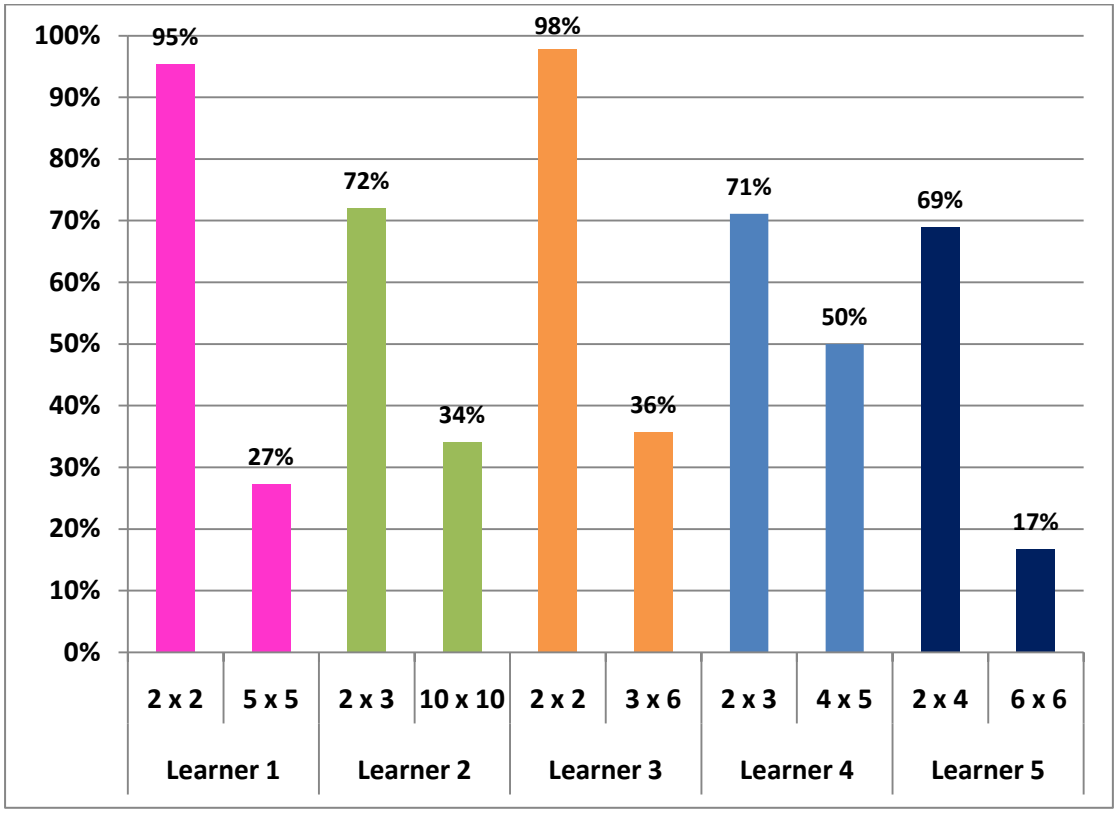
In the classes observed, fieldworkers did not generally find teacher effort to be lacking. But fieldworker expectations may also have been too low, as concrete evidence from the surveys and from children's books indicated that little written work had been done, and lesson plans and work schedules lacked concreteness and synchronisation.

So the overall impression is that none of these three factors – school functionality, teacher skills and teacher effort – were really *uniquely* the problem in these schools as a group; rather, it was the *combination*. Also, on face value none of these problems on its own was really a major one, but the combination was devastating. To illustrate this, it is worth turning to the results presented in Figure 1. In each school visited, five Gr.3 learners were randomly selected and asked two simple examples from the times table, which they had to answer orally, without counting on their fingers or using any other aid. To put children at ease, each child was first asked a very easy question, and then one of moderate difficulty, in the language used in Grade 3 at the school. The results were horrifying: one quarter of Grade 3 learners could not tell what 2 times 3 was, almost a third could not tell what 2 times 4 was, and almost two thirds did not know what 3 times 6 was[2] – despite the fact that three-quarters of teachers professed that they practised the times tables at least 3 times a week in class! Notwithstanding this, they clearly lacked confidence about the efficacy of such practice, as almost half of Gr.3 teachers were not confident that most of their class would be able to correctly answer what 2 times 4 is.

[1] For the moment, this analysis is confined to Home Language Literacy only, as there were special problems with First Additional Language Literacy that requires separate analysis.

[2] *The fact that most students could answer the very easy questions suggests that it was not simply stage fright that caused these wrong responses. It also became apparent that most students did not understand the concept of "times", and confused it with addition – the most common answer to 6 times 6 was 12.*

FIGURE 1: % OF GR. 3 LEARNERS WHO COULD VERBALLY ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW (IN THE SCHOOL'S LANGUAGE OF TEACHING IN GR.3) (ALL SCHOOLS IN SAMPLE)

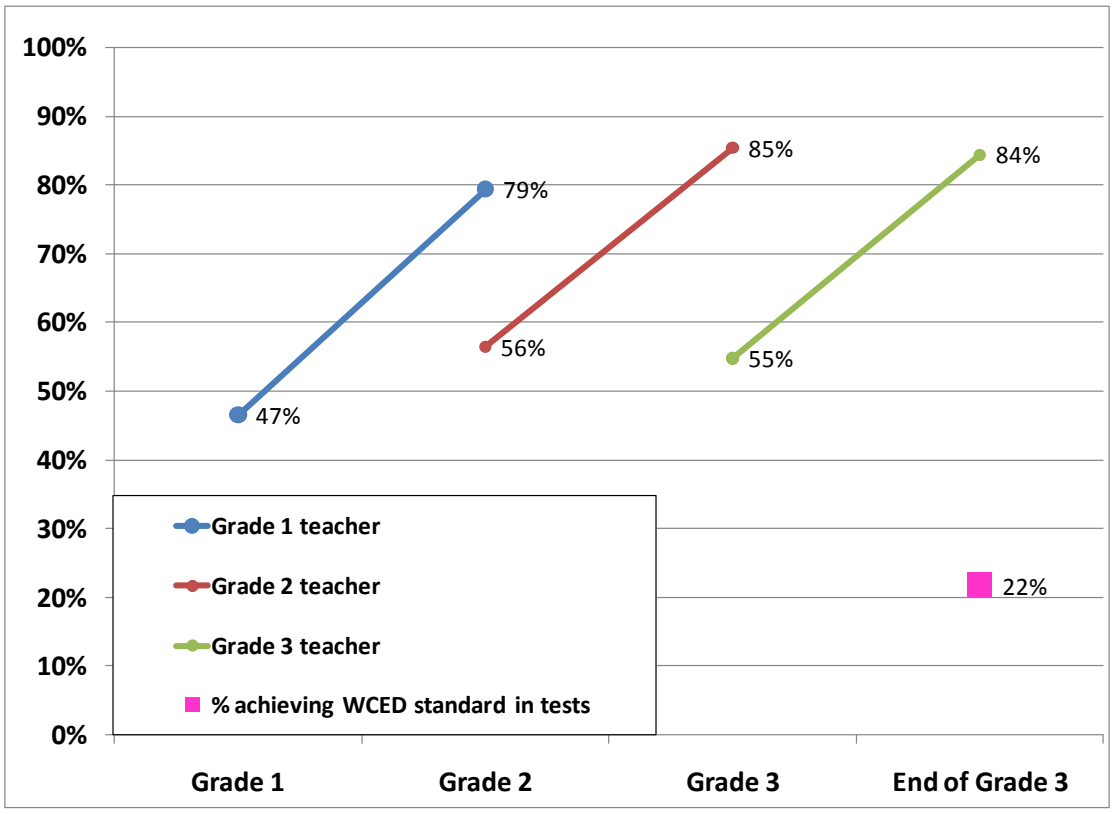


Note: Some very easy questions were asked more than once, to different learners. Results are presented in the order of the questions, so these questions appear twice.

Such pervasive differences between form and substance in all three the performance areas investigated – school functionality, teacher skills and teacher effort – are often symptomatic of a system that is over-monitored. In such a system, adherence to rules often engenders an emphasis on the form rather than the substance of the rule. Improving such situations usually requires reducing unnecessary monitoring, but also ensuring that monitoring deals with the substance of what is to be monitored, which in this case is teacher and principal behaviour. This is an issue returned to in the Recommendations part of this report in Chapter 3.

In Figure 1, average teacher views of what proportion of their class is usually at the appropriate grade standard in Numeracy are presented (the picture for Literacy is similar). As can be seen, most teachers believe that considerable more children are at the correct standard at the end of the year that they teach them than at the beginning – implying that they are confident that they are doing well in covering the curriculum and even helping some children who started out behind to catch up (around 20% of them). Also, while teachers had confidence in terms of the quality of product they delivered, those who inherited these children (teachers in the next grade) were not as satisfied. All these views illustrate that these Foundation Phase teachers are oblivious about how far behind their learners are – while teachers think that 84% of learners have achieved the appropriate standard in Gr.3, the WCED tests indicate that only 22% of learners in these schools actually reached the benchmark level in Numeracy.

FIGURE 2: TEACHER VIEWS OF % OF CLASS THAT IS AT APPROPRIATE LEVEL IN NUMERACY FOR GRADE AT BEGINNING AND END OF YEAR (WEAKLY-PERFORMING SCHOOLS ONLY)



More specific findings

This section discusses more of the findings, by referring to specific expectations and whether these were actually confirmed. The table below sets out the expectations (much of it based on the background research, particularly Appendix B), that also guided the design of the study, while the final column indicates whether these were indeed confirmed. Asterisks indicate that these were strong findings with policy implications. Finally, the last part of the table contains both more negative and more positive findings where there were no *a priori* expectations about such findings.

The findings with respect to school functionality were generally not what were expected, at least not in terms of clear cases of dysfunctionality. One finding with major repercussions for policy, though, was that there was little instructional leadership by the principal in most of these schools.

TABLE 2: WHAT WAS EXPECTED TO BE FOUND?

What was expected to be found in weakly-performing schools?	Was this indeed found?
School functionality:	
Principal disinterest	Limited
Teacher and learner absence and late coming	Limited
Little teacher time on task	Limited

Poor teacher discipline	Limited
*Little instructional leadership	Yes
Social background	
Poor home conditions	Yes
Fear of violence	Limited
*Limited parental support	Yes
Teacher knowledge and attitudes	
Poor subject knowledge	Yes
Poor knowledge of curriculum documents	Limited
*Poor knowledge of when and how to assess	Yes
Poor ability to plan for progression	Yes
Inside the classroom	
*Lack of textbooks	Yes
Oral discourse dominates	Limited
Low cognitive demand	Yes
Weak assessment and little feedback	Yes
Slow pacing	Yes
Limited teacher knowledge of Literacy and Numeracy teaching	Yes
Everyday discourse dominates	Yes
Insufficient progression within and across grades	Yes
Erosion of instructional time	Yes, but limited
*Problems with second language teaching and learning, and inadequate teaching of First Additional Language (FAL) in schools where the Language of Teaching and Learning (LOLT) changes at higher grades	Yes
Literacy	
*Limited opportunities to handle books	Yes
*Limited teaching of reading and writing	Yes
*Read and write mainly isolated words	Yes
*Little emphasis on comprehension of text	Yes
*Little elaboration on learner responses	Yes
*Reading largely communalised (collectivised rather than individualised reading)	Yes
*Virtually no vocabulary and spelling development, little formal teaching of phonics	Yes
Numeracy	
*Teachers lack clear theory of how children develop number concepts	Yes
*Use mainly concrete methods for solving problems	Yes
*Everyday knowledge obscures learning of mathematics	Yes
*Extremely slow pace	Yes
*Low conceptual level of instruction	Yes
Largely negative other findings (not necessarily expected)	
*Subject advisors have limited opportunity for observing classrooms and teaching	
Subject advisors focus on teaching methods (form) rather than content and coverage (substance)	
*Teachers are confused as to which curriculum documents they should be using	
Some teachers think textbooks and workbooks are 'not applicable' in Foundation Phase	
No use of informational or expository text	
Widespread use of chalkboard and worksheets for giving exercises and limited use of pre-	

printed workbooks
Oral mental arithmetic tasks mainly take the form of counting or addition
Largely positive other findings (not necessarily expected)
*Systemic tests have an effect on behaviour of principals and teachers
Teachers are using available readers, albeit unsystematically
Teachers are giving individualised writing tasks
Most classroom walls are relatively print-rich and most classrooms have a book collection
Teachers are marking classwork regularly
SMT/HoDs are checking learners' workbooks as a form of monitoring
Maths problems mainly take the form of numbers and maths notation and not real-life contexts

Do principals and teachers realise how weakly their learners are performing?

Responses to questions posed to principals and to teachers give an indication of the extent to which they realise the limitations of the performance of their learners. Table 3 shows the responses of principals in weakly-performing schools (all of which are under-performing relative to schools of similar socio-economic status) on a question that assesses their views on their performance in the systemic tests compared to other schools serving similar communities. 35% of the principals believed their schools were performing better than their peers, and another 59% believed they were doing no worse. Yet the very fact that these schools were sampled as part of the group of weakly-performing schools indicates that their performance conditional upon their socio-economic status was below expectations.

TABLE 3: VIEWS OF PRINCIPALS ON HOW WELL THEY BELIEVE THEIR WEAKLY-PERFORMING SCHOOLS ARE PERFORMING ON SYSTEMIC TESTS COMPARED TO SCHOOLS SERVING SIMILAR COMMUNITIES

	Number of principals	Percent
Very much better	1	3%
Somewhat better	10	32%
About the same	20	59%
Somewhat worse	3	9%
Much worse	0	0%
Total	34	100%

Principals were overwhelmingly positive about the systemic tests. 85% believed these had assisted the school, and 88% felt that it was good that these results were to be shared with parents (though the question did not specify how this was to be done).

Views on assessment and on curriculum coverage

Three-quarters of principals of weakly-performing schools thought that the WCED should play a larger role when it comes to what assessments and tests are used by teachers. Also, 20 out of the 33 principals (61%) who responded believed that the department should play a bigger role in moderating the marking by teachers. Most principals (86%) definitely believed there should be more guidance for drawing up learning programmes.

Principals thought that Foundation Phase teachers generally covered the curriculum in the course of a year (79% agreed), and even more (84%) thought this would happen this year. In contrast, about a third of teachers indicated that they did not usually cover the curriculum by the end of the year (both for Home Language and in Numeracy), and about 40% indicated that they were not satisfied with their progress this year. This suggests that principals are poorly informed about what is happening in classrooms, in terms of curriculum coverage.

As to coverage and understanding of the learning material in the Foundation Phase as a whole, principals were somewhat more cautious (see Table 4), yet nevertheless only 3 out of 34 (9%) thought their learners were far behind at the end of the Foundation Phase and only half altogether thought they were at least slightly behind. In contrast, as indicated earlier, Foundation Phase teachers were quite optimistic as to whether their learners were at the right level: more than 80% of teachers indicated that at least three-quarters of their classes usually could perform at the appropriate standard at the end of the grade, in both Home Language Literacy and in Numeracy.[3]

TABLE 4: VIEWS OF PRINCIPALS OF WEAKLY-PERFORMING SCHOOLS ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH LEARNERS ARE BEHIND WITH THEIR COVERAGE AND UNDERSTANDING AT THE END OF FOUNDATION PHASE

	Number	Percent
Far behind	3	9%
Slightly behind	14	41%
Not behind, but can improve	16	47%
Fully up to the required standard	1	2%
Total	34	100%

Thus principals and teachers are all relatively optimistic about how well their children are performing. This is at odds with the situation on the ground, as the systemic tests and the simple test of knowledge of multiplication tables for the survey indicate that these schools are far from achieving satisfactory performance.

Summary statements from survey findings relating to teachers and classrooms

Appendix A contains detailed descriptive findings of the survey results for the 36 weakly performing schools. Accompanying this description of the findings is a series of summary statement that both describe what was found and analyse this briefly. These summary statements are reproduced below. These statements contain some suggestions for policy, particularly regarding classroom practice, but **the main policy recommendations are held back for Chapter 3**.

[3] *It should be noted that some confusion on the part of fieldworkers lead to numbers rather than coded responses being provided for about a third of teacher interviews. The data referred to above was obtained from only 70 out of the 106 teachers.*

Summary statement: Section 1.1 – Basic classroom equipment and conditions

Almost all of the classrooms appeared to have the necessary desks and chairs. The provisions of carpets or mats in Foundation Phase in all classrooms, particularly at the Grade 1 and 2 levels, would make 'story time' or similar shared reading experiences as well as one-on-one interaction with the teacher more feasible.

Summary statement: Section 1.2 –Availability of essential writing material

It seems that most Foundation Phase classes have necessary writing implements. However, about half the classes seem to have one language exercise book rather than separate books for different aspects as recommended in *Foundation for Learning*.

Summary statement: Section 1.3 – Class size

Class sizes of over 45 in the Foundation Phase suggest that in a few schools management may be allocating available teaching staff inefficiently. In some cases there may be a shortage of classrooms. The reason for this oversubscription needs to be established and dealt with as such large classes are making it difficult and demanding for Foundation Phase teachers to involve the whole class. The allocation of properly trained teacher aides, where they are not already available, especially in classes with more than 40 learners, would to some extent help teachers cope.

Summary statement: Section 2.1 – Learner absenteeism and monitoring of learner attendance

Learner absenteeism did not appear to be a major factor limiting learning time in the majority of the Foundation Phase classrooms. Absenteeism appears to be a problem at specific schools. Certainly, the issue of higher learner absenteeism on Fridays or Mondays needs to be investigated and dealt with. In general, Foundation Phase attendance registers at schools seem to be kept up-to-date, but learners in about a third of the classes need to be made more aware in class that their attendance is being monitored.

Summary statement: Section 2.2 – Learner latecoming and teacher monitoring of latecoming

As far as latecoming is concerned, children arriving more than 5 minutes late for the start of the first teaching session on the day of the classroom observation seems to be more of an issue in the Foundation Phase than children returning late to class after first or second break. The level of latecoming after breaks appears to be low overall. Data indicate that there were 13 (out of 36 schools) where one or more children arrived more that 5 minutes late for the start of the teaching day on all three days of the classroom observations (i.e. in each of the Grade 1-3 classroom observed). Teachers and schools in about a third of the classes needed to make their Grade 1-3 learners more aware that their latecoming is being monitored and to deal more effectively with the issue.

Summary statement: Section 2.3.1 & 2.3.2 – Use and management of allocated time for teaching

Data suggests that, in about half of 72 of the Foundation Phase classes observed, the time actually spent on Numeracy did not 'match' the time that is supposed be allocated to this

Learning Programme, according to *Foundations for Learning* requirements. The time spent on Language and Literacy in about half of the Grade 1 classes, and about one quarter of the Grade 2 and 3 classes (where time scheduling information was properly recorded), did not 'match' the time that should be allocated to this Learning Programme per day, according to *Foundations for Learning* requirements. It is crucial that teachers know exactly how much time should be spent in the classroom each day on the different Learning Programmes. They need to ensure that the time that is spent on each Learning Programme in class is in line with the time that should be allocated for the grade. The implication is that there needs to be clearer organisation of the teaching day in the Foundation Phase with specific times set for each of the learning programmes.

Summary statement: Section 2.3.3 – Non teaching episodes in Foundation Phase classrooms

Evidence is that there is a critical need to look at ways of increasing the amount of time Foundation Phase learners are actually engaged in 'doing' Numeracy and Language and Literacy each day through school and classroom management that maximises the time spent on each Learning Programme/subject area. Teachers and schools need to recognise that 'every minute counts' and that non-teaching episodes inside the classroom and outside interruptions to classroom instruction must be minimal.

Summary statement: Section 2.4.1 – Classroom control and learner behaviour

Learner behaviour appeared to be disrupting teaching in about a third of the Foundation Phase classrooms. Fieldworkers indicated that the main causes of misbehaviour in some classes were that some learners were hyper-active and lacked concentration. It seemed that some learners simply did not (or could not) pay attention to the teacher. Some classes overall 'just seemed rowdy'. However, other data which are presented later in the report, suggest the problem also seems to be that teachers are not keeping their classes busy enough, with the result that learners become restless and bored. Boredom is often a consequence of slow pacing and low levels of cognitive demand of tasks, as well as learner under-preparedness.

Summary statement: Section 2.4.2 – Pacing within lessons

Although the Foundation Phase teachers mostly monitored learners and checked that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing when the class was busy with work, about a quarter of the teachers in the sample tended to pace writing activities and written tasks at the rate of slower or the weakest learners in the class. In about one third of the classes, teachers wrote classroom exercises on the chalkboard for learners to copy into their workbooks. When this practice takes place during lessons, it is time consuming and generally reduces learners' opportunities to engage with extended texts and written instructions as teachers find it too laborious to write out task instructions and extended text. The practice of writing work on the board also makes it difficult for teachers to give learners who complete work ahead of others in class additional work. As will be shown later, the lack of individual textbooks and workbooks for learners plays a role in slow pacing as learners cannot easily continue with the next set of exercises without books. As far as learners moving around borrowing stationery from each other is concerned, of interest is that the data on the availability of writing equipment suggest that the problem may be caused by

small groups of learners in classes who are not bringing the correct stationery with them when they come to school.

Summary statement: Section 2.4.3 – The amount of written work learners are expected to do each day in class

In about one third of classrooms teachers' seeming inability to maintain a consistent instructional focus meant that the teacher and learners were off-task. Fieldworkers reported that, in some classes, teachers and learners seem to have 'mastered the art' of procrastination. Learners in these classes spent too much time copying out exercises or writing the date, etc. and took a long time to begin work. In general, teachers did not urge learner enough to 'pick up the pace' and learners were allowed to work at a fairly slow pace on written tasks. However, it seems that in about half of the Foundation Phase classrooms the pace at which learners are required to work is also loosely regulated by teachers in terms of the number of written tasks learners are expected to do. In the interviews, Foundation Phase teachers complained that they are faced with the challenge of covering the grade level work whilst also trying to 'close the gap' for learners who are under-prepared for the grade, or who have not benefited from Grade R, and do not have pre-Literacy skills. Whilst teachers may need to spend time in the classroom compensating for such gaps in knowledge and giving support to learners who need extra help, they still need to ensure that they cover the curriculum, and that learners complete enough writing and computation tasks each day. Essentially, the pace of written work in class needs to be tied much more closely to specific curriculum requirements. Learners who demonstrate ability need to be given opportunities to engage with more challenging work and be given additional or new tasks to complete. Evidence is that teachers and learners are not using available time in class as productively as they could be, and that much more effective use could be made of time *in class*.

Summary statement: Section 2.5. – Time spent on homework and the productive use of homework in class

It seems that only about a third of the Foundation Phase classes are getting homework three or more times a week. In spite of the difficulties related to giving learners homework, teachers need to see homework as a means of extending time on task beyond the school day, and as a means of giving learners' additional opportunities to practice. It is also important that, if homework is given, teachers use it constructively in class. The practices of learners' exchanging homework to mark in class should be encouraged. Schools and teachers need to formulate homework policies for the Foundation Phase with realistic but concrete goals.

Summary statement: Section 2.6 – Home-school interface to increase and ensure parental or family support for learners' out-of-school Literacy, Language and Numeracy learning.

There is a needs for a concerted campaign, not only to make parents more aware of the importance of reading stories to and together with their children, but also of the importance of enhancing their Literacy, Language and Numeracy development by assisting and monitoring homework. Schools and teachers should also try as much as possible to involve parents, or other family members such as older siblings, in basic activities such as helping children to learn the letters of the alphabet and numbers, practice mental arithmetic and memorise multiplication tables, and spelling.

Summary statement: Section 3.1 – Curriculum planning

What is remarkable is the multiplication of effort that is evident with regard to curriculum plans (for example, published teachers' guides also have to produce exemplars of lessons). It seems that teachers and schools are confused about which curriculum documents or sources to mainly use, and are consequently using a variety of sources to plan their work. As a result, planning in most schools seems to be happening in an eclectic fashion which does not in any way help to ensure comprehensive coverage and curriculum coherence. There needs to be greater clarity about which curriculum policy document schools and teachers should mainly use to align their planning with policy.

Summary statement: Section 3.2.1 – Curriculum coverage

At least one third of the Foundation Phase teachers in the sample seem unlikely to cover their grade level Numeracy and Literacy curricula in 2010. Approximately one third of the Foundation Phase teachers' plans were not consistent with what had been covered in their learners' workbooks indicating that, in April/May 2010, teachers had not covered work as intended. More assistance seems to be needed in ensuring that the curricula are covered in these classes if learner under-preparedness in Language and Literacy development in subsequent grades is not to become cumulative.

Summary statement: Section 3.2.2 – Curriculum exposure and the number of days' work in learners' workbooks

According to available data, about half of the Foundation Phase classes are getting exposure to Numeracy and Home Language teaching every day. By 20 April, learners' books, especially in Grade 3, should reflect at least 50 pieces of daily work. Data indicate that more than half of the Foundation Phase learners' Numeracy and Home Language books had less than 40 pieces of daily work in them. However, most classes' books had at least 20 pieces of daily work in them. In Numeracy, teachers are mainly focusing on Number concepts and Operations. There does not seem to have been enough exposure to the Data handling and probability; Measurement: Patterns, functions and algebra; and Geometry (shapes).

Summary statement: Section 3.2.3 – Making up time lost to teaching

Over one third of the teachers claimed that, when school days are lost or lessons missed, lost time is usually recovered by extending teaching time so lessons run after school. It is possible that this happens under exceptional circumstance, but it seems more likely that most of these respondents provided socially desirable responses.

Summary statement: Section 3.3 – Curriculum support and monitoring of curriculum implementation by School Management Team

Some form of monitoring of the Foundation Phase teacher's progress on covering their work plans by the School Management Team (SMT)/ Heads of Department (HoD) appears to be taking place in most schools. Indeed 65% of the teachers said that SMTs/HoDs are checking learners' workbooks, arguably one of the most reliable methods of monitoring time on task and learners' access to the curriculum. However, most SMTs/HoDs do not appear to be playing a significant enough role in ensuring that grade-appropriate and sufficiently demanding reading, writing and Numeracy activities and tasks are being done each day in class. Foundation Phase Heads of Department appear to need clearer input on what exactly

they need to look for in learners' workbooks. The volume and standard of learners' written work (the amount and type of work in learners' workbooks) should be checked regularly by HoDs as well as subject advisers (who also need to observe Foundation Phase learners reading and check the development of their mental arithmetic skills). Subject advisers and HoDs should ensure that enough time is being spent on all the different aspects (LOs) of Numeracy in each phase (and not only on Number concepts and operations). Section 4 will show that there seems to be a need to enhance the capacity of heads of department to monitor the work demands placed on Foundation Phase learners, ensure progression across grades, and check that classes are covering the intended curriculum in line with grade level expectations. Schools should be having regular meetings with Foundation Phase teachers specifically to co-ordinate and discuss aspects of Foundation Phase curriculum coverage, ensure internal coherence in curricular content over the school year, and progression in the organisation of teaching and learning across grades. This co-ordination needs to take place with a view to preparing learners for the transition to the next phase of schooling. Schools need to know that the emphasis, when selecting and recommending heads of department for appointment, should be on instructional expertise and knowledge of the Foundation Phase curriculum, as well as commitment and interest in building stronger Foundation Phase departments.

Summary statement: Section 4.1 – Content complexity and cognitive demand of written tasks given to learners – writing demands

Data indicate that Foundation Phase learners are most commonly involved in writing numbers and maths notation, and individual letters and words. Not enough classes are involved in writing extended text**.** Data also show slight, but decidedly insufficient, evidence of grade-level progression from Grade 1 to 3 in task demands especially related to writing long sentences, paragraphs and extended text.

Summary statement: Section 4.2 – Content complexity and cognitive demand of written tasks given to learners – mathematical demands

Clearly there needs to be much more progression in sequencing of Numeracy content and skills in terms of increasing developmental complexity across the Foundation Phase grades. Work in learners' exercise/workbooks show that learners are mostly not covering the curriculum at a high enough standard or level of content complexity and cognitive demand. Most teachers are not teaching learners how to use and interpret mathematical devices such as graphs and tables. The main focus in about half the Foundation Phase observations seemed to be on addition and counting, and about half the classes had no exposure to word problems. Most teachers need to raise their expectations of learners. They need to make sure that learners are being moved beyond their current levels of competence. It seems that some teachers are orientating Numeracy tasks towards the 'lowest common denominator' in their classes.

Summary statement: Section 5.1 - Use of Language and Numeracy textbooks and readers in the classroom

Teachers in most Foundation Phase classrooms seem to be making use of readers including 'older' readers that are still usable. However, learners in the majority of the Foundation Phase classes do not each have their own copies of Numeracy and Language textbooks. More disturbingly, it seems that some schools, teachers think that textbooks in the

Foundation Phase are 'not applicable'. Where books are being used, a wide variety of different sets of readers and textbooks appear to be used across Foundation Phase grades. Schools and teachers are not systematically using the same series within grades and across the Phase. This is an important finding because well-structured reading and textbook series are designed to be used in a set sequence and to build progressively on learners' learning and language experiences from one book to the next. Good series are designed to ensure across grade and phase progression in terms of difficulty. Graded reading series, in particular, should form an important component of Foundation Phase teachers' Literacy programmes. Not only does there appears to be a lack of availability and use of textbooks, but there also appears to be inefficient use of and a lack of 'know how' to use readers and textbooks for co-ordinating instruction across grades and phases. As the next section will show, textbooks are also not being used for giving homework.

Summary statement: Section 5.2 - Taking Home Language book home

Clearly very few of the classes are allowed to take any books home on the grounds that learners might damage or lose them. This makes it difficult for learners to read or work independently at home.

Summary statement: Section 5.3 – Teachers' views on the suitability and appropriateness of available readers and textbooks

It is possible that available Foundation Phase textbooks and workbooks are not being distributed to some classes because teachers do not find available books appropriate. Certainly some teachers, in the interviews, expressed a preference for a different series or publication from those that were available. A constraint in terms of pre-printed workbooks is that they can only be used by one learner for one year. A number of teachers expressed a preference for workcards over books or said they preferred to use their own (teacher-made) worksheets or photocopies of pages from books.

Summary statement: Section 5.4 – Use of worksheets

The widespread use of worksheets and photocopies appeared evident in about three quarters of the Foundation Phase classes. This practice, like the use of the chalkboard for writing exercises, has limitations. Firstly, the use of worksheets restricts learners' opportunity to handle books and find out how books work. Secondly, unless teachers consciously structure and build links between the tasks and activities that they give their learners, exercises or activities can be randomly selected in a very unsystematic fashion from different sources, and used in ways that do not reflect clear progression in terms of difficulty. Teachers need to recognize the difference between worksheets that consist of discrete activities and curriculum material that is systematically organized and sequenced. Thirdly, worksheets are usually used for closed (single word/phrase) writing exercises.

Summary statement: Section 6.1 – A print-rich classroom environment

It seems that, in about three quarters of the sample of Foundation Phase classrooms, the walls were relatively print-rich. However, new replacement and up-to-data resources are important, especially mother-tongue resources in Afrikaans and African languages.

Summary statement: Section 6.2 - Availability of books collections and the promotion of a book culture in classrooms

Most of the Foundation Phase classrooms had some sort of book collection. It seems that more picture books are needed in about half the classrooms, especially in Grade 1 and 2 classrooms. Classroom book collections also appear to need more information/non-fiction books with attractive pictures and appropriate language levels. It seems that most teachers need to foster an interest in books as sources of information as well as pleasure. The Foundation Phase classrooms visited did not particularly promote a reading culture which incorporates reading expository text, and reading (non-fiction/information) books to learn.

Summary statement: Section 6.3 - Availability and use of school libraries

Besides addressing the lack of provision of libraries in schools, there appears to be a need to address the issue of efficient use of, and the 'know how' to use libraries for assisting teaching and learning at the Foundation Phase level.

Summary statement: Section 7.1 – Reading instruction: the development of fluency and comprehension skills

About three quarters of the teachers seem to be teaching learners to identify individual sounds, the alphabetic principle, phonics skills, and word recognition. Nevertheless, data indicate that more emphasis needs to be put on directly developing learners' fluency and reading comprehension skills in most Foundation Phase classrooms. The ability to derive meaning when reading continuous text is dependent upon the ability to read fluently. Fluency depends on fast, accurate decoding and word recognition. 'Stop-start' reading, sounding out individual words, reading word-by-word, 'barking at print', and reading slowly makes comprehension difficult because it takes too long to reach the end of each sentence. To ensure the development of reading fluency learners need to be taught to use both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' reading strategies. It seems that most of the Foundation Phase teachers need to adopt a more highly structured and systematic approach (rather than an incidental approach) to teaching aspects such as phonics, syntactic and grammatical skills, and spelling skills. About half of the Foundation Phase teachers did not deliberately teach learners a variety of strategies for making sense of extended texts during the classroom observations. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that learners in most classes were not engaged in reading ***expository*** texts and did not have their own textbooks. To ensure the development of fluency and grade-appropriate comprehension skills, teachers also need to be providing Foundation Phase learners with extensive opportunities to read continuous text (and not only isolated words), especially expository text at their reading level. This aspect is discussed in more detail below.

Summary statement: Section 7.2 – Numeracy instruction: Moving learners from concrete to abstract; Mental arithmetic and memorization of tables

Data suggest that about one third of the Foundation Phase teachers are encouraging learners to deal with and think about numbers without having to use a physical model. However, it seems that number charts and/or counters were used in about half the observations, and data indicate that, in at least half the Foundation Phase observations, oral mental arithmetic tasks mainly took the form of counting or addition. About a third of the teachers said they never involved their learners in memorisation of multiplication tables. It

seems that what needs to be made explicit for Foundation Phase teachers is how to teach mental arithmetic and tables in practical terms. Demonstration lessons could be used to show teachers how to deal with numbers 'mentally', and how to assist learners to think about numbers without having to use a physical model. The demonstrations could also include exemplars of grade appropriate mental arithmetic activities. Foundation Phase teachers need to recognise that successful development of mental arithmetic skills is dependent on the ability to work with numbers more abstractly, and on practice. Grade 3 teachers, in particular, need to ensure sufficient practice in mental arithmetic and multiplication tables in class, so as to provide learners with opportunities to develop the ability to rapidly compute.

Summary statement: Section 8.1 – Classroom interaction patterns

It seems that most of the Foundation Phase classrooms are fairly interactive in terms of teacher-learner interactions, but not in terms of verbal knowledge 'exchanges' between learners. Most of the teachers tried to ensure that all learners participated in classroom interactions, although, in about half of the observations, the same learners tended to be asked to respond or solve problems on the chalkboard. However, almost half the teachers did not use learners' errors to identify misconceptions and provide explicit verbal feedback. The capacity to identify and work with learner error needs to be developed if teachers are expected to identify differences between learners' levels of learning, and to be more responsive to individual learners' needs.

Summary statement: Section 8.2 - 'Collectivised' and 'individualised' reading opportunities

Daily individual reading was not evident in every Foundation Phase class. The lack of opportunity for individual guided reading practice in about half of the classroom observations is of major concern. If every learner in the class does not regularly read individually to the teacher for guided reading so that s/he can monitor and record their individual progress, it is difficult for the teacher to accurately differentiate between learners' reading levels. Evidence also suggests that Foundation Phase teachers are generally placing the main emphasis on learning to read simple narrative text found in basic readers. Data show that learners have limited exposure to the language of explanation and a range of contents and syntactic structures. The reality is that, in Grade 4, learners will be required to 'read in order to learn' and to cope with texts with more complex language structures. Teachers need to be more aware that they are preparing Foundation Phase learners to make this academic Literacy and cognitive leap in the Intermediate Phase. They also need to ensure that learners also have regular individual practice reading ***expository*** texts for different purposes (e.g. for Lifeskills and Numeracy, as well as Language). Evidence is that learners in most Foundation Phase classes made little use of informational or expository text for accessing information. They need to be more involved in answering questions that require them to read, search for and use information in expository texts for their responses.

Summary statement: Section 8.3 - 'Collectivised' and 'individualised' writing opportunities

It seems that all or most learners in just under half of the Foundation Phase classroom observations were involved in written or writing tasks. The importance of every learner being involved in daily writing in class, particularly writing involving extended texts, needs to be stressed.

Summary statement: Section 8.4 - Strategies for coping with differences among learners

It seems that most Foundation Phase teachers are trying to address the issue of diversity amongst their learners. Methods for dealing with differences that some teachers mentioned included working intensively with one group of learners at a time in class. Unfortunately, especially in large classes, this often means that not all learners get equal 'contact time' with the teacher. Teachers who work with one group may also neglect to keep the remainder of the class on-task. This problem can be exacerbated when different groups are given a wide variety of concurrent activities. The issue of ability grouping is complex and very demanding in terms of classroom management, and one danger is that learners who are deemed weak are given tasks of very low cognitive demand. Teachers need to be assisted with classroom management and provided with appropriate support material such as individual workbooks and textbooks, as well as enough sets of graded readers, if they are to differentiate between learners who are performing at different competency levels. The challenge is to ensure that all learners are on-task and putting in their best effort, and that time is used productively.

Summary statement: Section 8.5 - Developing the capacity to work independently

Evidence is that learners in most Foundation Phase classes are not being taught how to read and follow instructions for themselves. Teachers need to realise that, unless learners have practise in working out what tasks require of them, Grade 3 learners cannot be expected to cope independently with assessment items. It seems, however, that most learners are not encouraged to ask questions, and some teachers are giving learners poorly constructed tasks or tasks with confusing instructions. Teachers need to be more aware that they should be developing learners' capacity to work independently.

Summary statement: Section 8.6 – Displaying learners' work

Teachers need to be aware of the ways in which they can adopt strategies such as the display of learners' work to enhance Foundation Phase learners' self-esteem, encourage individual and group effort, and foster learners' desire to achieve.

Summary statement: Section 9.1 – Assessment of written work

Data show that most of the Foundation Phase teachers are marking learners' classwork regularly themselves and that learners in most classes regularly do corrections in their Numeracy workbooks. However, learners in only 38% of the classes regularly did correction in their Home Language books, and there was little evidence in the Foundation Phase classrooms of learners marking their own work or each others' work as a form of reinforcing learning.

Summary statement: Section 9.2 – Assessment records

It seems that Foundation Phase teachers need greater clarity about structuring their programmes of work coherently through specified targeted goals for reading, writing, Language, and Numeracy achievement. Regular assessment points, where teachers establish whether learners are ready to continue to the next level, need to be built into year plans so that a common core of concepts, knowledge and skills are assessed *as they are covered*. The provision of well-designed and user-friendly exemplars of 'diagnostic' assessment tasks illustrating different levels of cognitive demand and content complexity would assist schools and teachers in this process. However, teachers also need to know how to use assessment

information to work out where and what type of revision or intervention is or is not needed, and what to do when learners are not reaching required levels. Another important aspect that seems to require attention in about half of the classes is the teacher's own ongoing informal gathering of information on individual learner progress, and how to use this data purposefully as a basis for knowing when learners are ready to move to the next level.

Summary statement: Section 10.1 - Language/s of instruction for Home Language and Numeracy, and vocabulary development

Of concern is that there does not seem to be enough deliberate development, particularly in Grade 3, of the conceptual language learners will need if they are to cope with subjects areas in the Intermediate Phase. Evidence is that there is some 'general' everyday vocabulary development (i.e. learning new 'everyday' words and meanings) taking place but very little development of the 'specialist' vocabulary or terminology and conceptual language that relates to mathematics, social sciences or natural sciences. This limited development makes it unrealistic to expect all learners to cope with the academic and linguistic demands of the curriculum from Grade 4 onwards. Foundation Phase teachers need to understand the relationship between language and learning and the importance of developing basic academic Literacy. They need to understand the importance of developing the conceptual language and 'specialist' vocabularies and terminology for the various Learning /subject areas for the next phase of schooling, and not only more 'general' or 'everyday' vocabulary (for example, by using terms such as 'subtract', 'divide', and 'multiply' when teaching new concepts).

Summary statement: Section 10.2 – Transition to learning in a second language

Data from the classroom observations showed that the Language of Learning (LoLT) in about one third of the classes observed was isiXhosa. About 15% of the Foundation Phase teachers indicated that the LoLT at their school is different from most learners' home language from Grade 1 onwards. Data suggest that at least half of the classes in the sample are either learning in a language other than their home language from Grade 1 onwards, or will be required to cope with a making transition to learning all subject areas in the First Additional Language (FAL) later on. The implication is that the medium of instruction in some schools, either currently, or at some point in the future, places an additional burden on these learners compared with learners who have instruction in their mother-tongue throughout their schooling. Such learners require very specific language education support to succeed.

Summary statement: Section 10.3 – Use of bilingual approaches

It seems that *few* Foundation Phase classes are being given opportunities to develop the conceptual language of mathematics, science, geography, history, etc. in the FAL, or bilingually during the observations. Few teachers used bilingual approaches to enhance second language learners' comprehension of and engagement with the Foundation Phase curriculum. Teachers may need input on the theory and practice of bilingual education, and when, where and how best to use bilingual approaches such as code switching, and where languages should be kept separate.

Summary statement: Section 10. 4 – Teaching of First Additional Language

Data confirm that there is a delayed introduction to English FAL as a subject with reading and writing, usually in Grade 3, in the isiXhosa mother-tongue sample schools. Data show that, in most of these schools, learners switch to English medium (LoLT) in Grade 4, just the point at which the primary school curriculum becomes more subject-focused. This means that, by the end of Foundation Phase, about a third of the Foundation Phase classes need adequate levels of proficiency in FAL (English) to cope when they are taught all other Learning Areas in English from Grade 4 onwards. Data also suggest that there is a mismatch between what this group of Foundation Phase learners are being expected to know in the FAL as their second language by the end of Grade 3, and what they will be expected to be able to do in the Intermediate Phase. It is vital that learners in these Grade 1-3 classes have time that is clearly demarcated and specifically allocated for teaching the FAL, and that this time is used to the maximum. Foundation Phase teachers need high levels of language proficiency in the FAL and the quality of FAL instruction needs to be of the highest standard. In the **teacher interviews**, most Foundation Phase teachers complained that there was far too little guidance for the FAL curriculum and that guidance about teaching FAL in general was neglected. Teachers of isiXhosa mother-tongue classes need explicit guidelines and activities that are specifically designed to help their learners in making the transition to learning in the second language. For example, it is very important that learners in these classes are given opportunities to read carefully graded readers which gradually expand their reservoir of FAL vocabulary, and that they gain a good grasp of the linguistic structure of the FAL. Consideration could also be given to introducing a 'FAL component' in the systemic testing at the end of Grade 3.

Summary statement: Section 11 – Teacher training and qualifications

In terms of future requirements of Matric + 4 years of professional training, 48% of the Foundation Phase teachers appear to be under-qualified. The need for this group of teachers to upgrade their qualifications provides an opportunity to enhance their capacity through targeted teacher development. Of interest is that most teachers in all three grades at the poor performing schools said that they had received training in Literacy teaching in their initial training to become a teacher, and felt confident about teaching Literacy. Approximately 60% of the teachers reported that they had three or more years of mathematics in their teacher training, and 94% of the teachers said they felt confident about teaching Numeracy. However, only one quarter of the Foundation Phase teachers in the poor performing schools had Grade 12 mathematics, and fieldworkers and most teachers recognised knowledge or skills gaps in Foundation Phase teachers' teaching competence that are in need of development or support. In the Western Cape, only the University of Stellenbosch and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology currently provide education and training for new Foundation Phase teachers. There is a need to establish the capacity of all Western Cape Higher Education Institutions to help with providing the kind of in-service teacher development and education required for the Foundation Phase. The possibility of testing teachers to identify areas where Numeracy knowledge is weak could be investigated so that these areas can be targeted. If Foundation Phase teachers do not have cognitive command of the mathematics topics they are required to teach, it is difficult for them to teach for conceptual understanding regardless of the teaching methods they employ.

COMMENDATION TO THE WCED

The experience in the field brought out that there were some quite positive aspects regarding recent policy intervention, particularly when compared to the situation as it used to be in WCED schools. Two aspects stand out in this regard.

The one positive feature is that teacher absence has become less endemic, with the greater attention being paid to attendance registers appearing to pay off in many schools. Teacher absence is still quite high. The observed average teacher absence rate of 5.9% in the schools visited for the week of the visit is about 1 percentage point *higher* than the 4.8% recorded absence rate amongst children in all grades. Nevertheless, teacher absence appears to be less of an issue than in the past and in many schools absentee rates are quite low. Yet the problem has not completely disappeared and more diligent use of registers may have shifted teacher shirking to a within-school phenomenon. Principals generally do not appear to regard teacher absenteeism as quite as serious a threat to learning in the classroom as learner absenteeism (69% of principals in all sampled schools regarded learner absence as an important problem hampering learning, versus 54% who regarded teacher absence as such a problem). Yet "teachers disappearing during the day" is more prominent than one would have expected (38% of principals think this is an important factor affecting learning time). Clearly, important issues remain, but the stricter enforcement of the use of the register at least appears to have improved teacher presence at school.

A second positive development is that the regular testing is beginning to be taken seriously within the primary school system. Schools and teachers are aware of these tests and are in some cases anxious about their performance on the tests. This concern is a healthy development and has clearly already influenced behaviour within classrooms in a positive manner. Though some teachers complain about the test itself or too much emphasis being placed on it, they are starting to take it seriously, and so are principals.

Despite this, the WCED should consider whether it is getting the full benefit from the testing cycle, the more so now that it has been institutionalised and expanded. This is an issue again returned to in the recommendations.

CHAPTER 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Two important principles for policy guided the recommendations:

- As it is easier to maintain quality than to recover it, policy interventions should be sure to do no harm, and should not endanger existing capacity.
- Strong improvements require drastic interventions.

The inherent tension between these two principles requires that the second principle be balanced against the first principle. It is well understood by now that existing capacity in the education sector suffered severely from too many interventions and too much policy uncertainty.

The recommendations aimed to be cognisant of resource shortages and are therefore concentrated on solutions requiring limited additional resources. Where possible, one should look at redirecting resources rather than using more resources.

Recommendations were drawn from a wide variety of experiences in educational interventions, e.g. the model of cross-marking suggested below was observed in Botswana, as well as from wider experiences with interventions to improve service delivery. Central to the interventions is the need to overcome teacher ignorance about the levels of cognitive demand and the fact that many remain oblivious of the fact that they are not setting or achieving appropriate standards.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK[4]

Potential policies must stand legal scrutiny. Thus proposals attempted to take cognisance of the provisions of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and other relevant legislation and ordinances. Of particular importance in this regard was the *Memorandum on the Objects of the Draft Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Bill, 2010*. Two changes relevant to the policy proposals are:

"2.3 Clause 3 seeks to amend section 3 of the WCPSEA so as to increase the Provincial Minister's policy making powers, provide for better standards of performance by educators, learners, moderators and supervisors, better monitoring and assessment of performance to ensure accountability, efficiency and increased effectiveness"

[4] *Adv. Lynn Coleridge, Director: Policy Co-Ordination provided valuable insight and advice on this matter.*

"2.6 Clause 6 seeks to amend section 9 of the WCPSEA to provide for access by the employer and employer's nominees including outside agencies, to schools, to monitor performance and professional management of the school"

The *South African Schools Act* and the *Draft Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Bill, 2010* together provide a legal framework that has important features for the proposals set out below. The first of these relates to the school governing body (SGB) as the legal custodian of schools; SGBs will have to be engaged actively as potential agents for change. As increased accountability requires mobilisation of the parent community to expect and demand quality education, the proper functioning of the SGB is crucial. Secondly, the legislative framework allows for the identification of underperforming public schools and certain actions to rectify this, such as counselling of principals and appointing academic mentors or even substitute principals, under certain conditions. A third feature is the annual reporting requirement for principals, inspection of schools, and effective performance evaluation of schools, educators and learners. These are closely linked to some of the proposals put forward below.

INTERVENTION STRATEGY

The proposed intervention strategy has been designed with awareness of how the support required by schools may vary depending on their context and situation. Thus it starts by distinguishing four levels of support and monitoring and providing guidelines for how to allocate schools into these four categories. It is crucial that schools facing a variety of obstacles should be assisted and inspired to rise above these constraints. Consequently the intervention strategy aims to motivate schools in poor communities to improve their performance by founding two model schools that can serve as role models, showing what schools in poor surroundings can achieve.

Differentiating between schools by performance

For differentiated strategies schools must be grouped into categories. Considering the need to improve performance and the nature of the planned interventions, the most important criterion for differentiation should be performance in the Foundation Phase tests. The WCED may, in some cases, wish to use additional information for categorisation, but this should be done only as an exception, so as to keep the process transparent and to emphasise the central role given to school performance. Both Literacy and Numeracy results in Gr.3 tests across all years should be considered, with greater weight given to more recent performance.

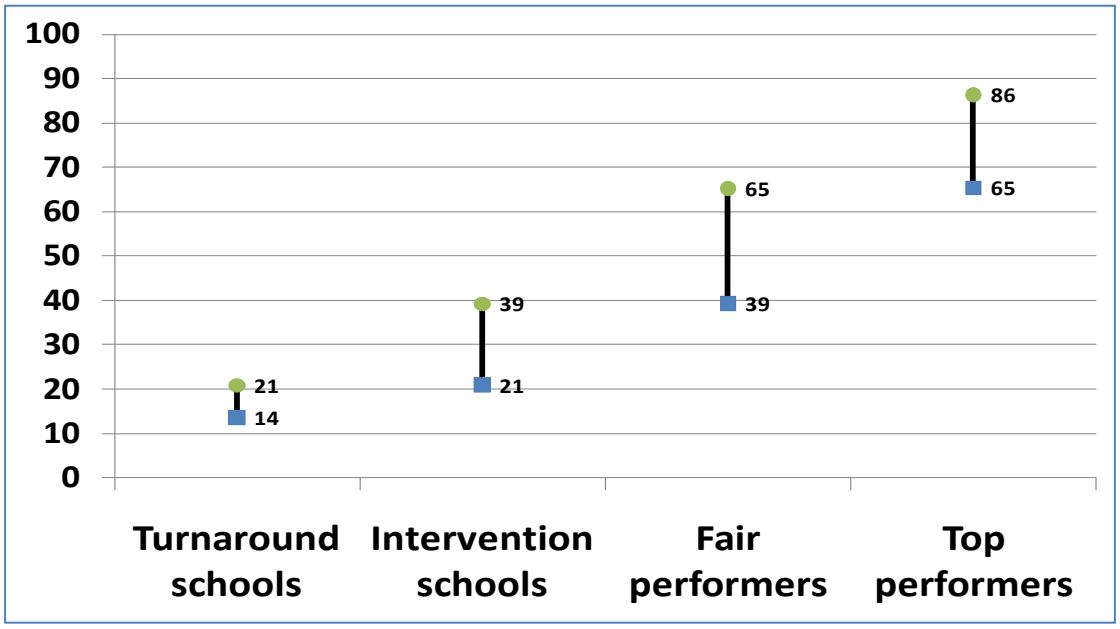
In small schools, test results fluctuate more from year to year, even if school quality remains unchanged. Also, some of the proposals may not be applied equally well to small and rural schools. Thus the WCED could consider either placing such schools in a separate group, or incorporating them into the same structure of interventions. In the latter case, modifications may be required that consider both the specific circumstances of such schools and that fluctuating test performance should be more carefully interpreted due to the smaller sample size (number of learners).

The four categories of schools and their suggested size are listed below:

- **Turn-around Schools** (perhaps 20 schools). A turn-around team should be appointed to apply drastic interventions (as discussed below) as a turn-around strategy for a small group of schools showing little evidence of any learning taking place across the grades.
- **Intervention Schools** (perhaps 30% of schools) are those schools where interventions are to be concentrated. This includes more regular monitoring and reporting, as set out below.
- **Fair Performers** (perhaps 50% of schools) should be offered whatever support they request and otherwise only infrequently monitored, as long as they continue to show consistent performance or gradual improvement
- **Top Performers** (perhaps 20% of schools) should be given the freedom to set their own standards, as long as they maintain their performance.

Figure 3 below shows the distribution of average performance in Gr.3 Numeracy for all years of testing for schools with more than 200 learners in 2009. Turn-around Schools had an average performance of less than 22% on the Numeracy test. Intervention Schools had scores of 21% to 39%. Fair Performers still include a number of low scoring schools, with scores ranging from 39% to 65%. In the Top Performer category, average scores for schools ranged from 65% to 86%.

FIGURE 3: RANGE OF GR.3 NUMERACY PERFORMANCE ACROSS SCHOOL CATEGORIES (AVERAGE SCORES ON TESTS IN 2002, 2004, 2006 & 2008)



Note: Only schools with at least 200 students in 2009

In the last two categories there is less need for high-frequency intervention, so schools in these categories should be given greater freedom and less monitoring and reporting would be required. Of course they could still obtain support from WCED and district offices upon request. It is also important, particularly amongst Fair Performers, that quality of performance should not be endangered by neglect.

As it may be difficult to immediately introduce all interventions in Intervention Schools, it may be necessary to initially start with a smaller group, say 15% of schools, and then to broaden this category gradually to also encompass other schools.

Establish model schools in poor communities

The second strand of the intervention strategy is to create model schools. Present performance patterns perpetuate the belief that poor schools cannot perform well. There are in particular two groups of schools in different parts of the former education system that could benefit from aspirational role model schools: The Xhosa-language schools and poor schools serving largely the Cape Flats community, mainly in Afrikaans. Thus a model school in each of these groups is proposed, as set out in the section on Model School below.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: First, more details are provided about the plans for Turnaround Schools and Intervention Schools respectively. As these targeted interventions are not enough to deal with the endemic problems of poor learning affecting the majority of schools, some more general policy recommendations follow that. The final section touches upon the road ahead.

PLAN FOR TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

The 20 worst performing schools, in which average performance over four rounds of Gr.3 Numeracy testing ranged between 14% and 21%, clearly need a fresh start. Closer monitoring is not enough: The whole functioning of the school is at issue and drastic interventions are required. Strategically, it is important to frame this programme as a collaborative effort, so that key stakeholders (principals, teachers, unions, and parents) can see themselves as participants in this process and support the intervention because it is clear how it would benefit the school and specifically the learners. Providing details of weak performance in the systemic tests could be an important way of substantiating the need for incisive intervention.

In terms of the overall commitment to working within current resources as far as is possible, the turnaround schools represent an exception, because *turning them around would require some additional resources.*

One of the post important parts of this intervention should be the appointment of mentors for the principal or even substitute principals, and perhaps also mentors for the Foundation Phase HODs. The mentor principal should actively be located full-time within the turn-around school and have the authority to ensure that instructional leadership is given within classrooms. The mentor HODs need not necessarily be located within the school, but could be departmental staff that spend some time within the school on a weekly basis. In such schools, there should be close monitoring of learning and teaching, including regular observation of classrooms, workbooks and assessment by curriculum advisors, the mentor principal and the mentor HODs. (Monitoring is discussed in more detail in the section below on Intervention Schools; what applies there regarding monitoring should also apply to these turnaround schools). Special attention should be given to timely provision of readers and textbooks, and monitoring should ensure that these books are regularly used. There should be special training or even re-training of teachers where deemed necessary, and in these

schools it is essential that replacement teachers should be provided when teachers are away for training.

PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS IN INTERVENTION SCHOOLS

Interventions and monitoring should be concentrated in the Intervention Schools. They should be introduced in all of the Foundation Phase, but where it has to be phased in, it should start with Gr.1. Interventions are aimed greater awareness among principals, teachers and parents that the standards achieved fall far short of those desired. These interventions should take at least the following forms:

Instructional leadership and curriculum coverage

To ensure principals in Intervention Schools take instructional leadership in the Foundation Phase seriously, they should be required to **report quarterly**[5] to districts and to parents what level of curriculum coverage each Foundation Phase class has achieved, based on their own observations and on feedback from their HoDs. Principals should be held accountable for this, e.g. through monitoring by curriculum advisors. Where curriculum coverage has not been adequate, explanations should be offered not only to the district but also to regular meetings of parents, and remedies should be put in place. It should be made clear *against which curriculum* coverage should be measured, *at what standard* or depth of coverage, and *what volume*. (The issue of confusion around the content of the curriculum is discussed in more detail in Appendix A and also in Chapter 2 of this Main Report, and receives further attention below.)

Observing and monitoring classrooms

Foundation Phase Curriculum advisors should regularly **observe classrooms** in Intervention Schools for an extended period, to observe the level of cognitive demand placed on learners, macro pacing, time on task, and whether lesson plans and assessment tasks are in line with the work schedules.[6] They should also regularly check the volume and quality of **written wor**k undertaken by learners in such schools, check that such work has been marked, and check that feedback has been given to children and that corrections have been done by the

[5] *The proposal that principals in these schools should report quarterly may require some changes to the* Draft Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Bill, 2010*, or further expansion of the requirements of this draft act in ordinances which stipulate quarterly rather than only annual reporting. This can be changed so as not to represent* additional *reporting, but that quarterly reporting simply becomes part of the more extensive annual reporting requirement.*

[6] *Analysis of data from the LitNum study is instructive in this regard. Most teachers indicated that principals did sometimes check their work schedules (in 76% of cases) and lesson plans (85%), but only 24% said lesson plans were checked against work schedules. Similarly, 86% of teachers indicated that monitoring occurred through learner books being checked and 71% that assessment records were checked, but only 22% encountered checks of learner books against lesson plans and 18% check of assessment records against work schedules. 58% of teachers in such schools referred to class visits by the principal, but only 17% had actual lessons compared to lesson plans.*

children. In addition, a random selection of learners should from time to time be asked to read aloud to them, or to do mental arithmetic.

Introducing standardised assessment tasks

Quarterly standardised assessment tasks (largely replacing existing ones) should be given for Intervention Schools within a District within each PF grade to serve as indicator to Intervention Schools teachers of how children are meeting required cognitive standards. These tasks should be drawn up in interaction between curriculum advisors and teachers, but should be marked *within* the schools themselves *by teachers from another grade*. (e.g. Gr.2 teachers mark these tasks for Gr.1 classes, Gr.3 teachers for Gr.2, Gr.1 teachers for Gr.3).

Limiting class size and improving induction of Gr.1 children

Ideally, no Foundation Phase classes should have more than 40 learners in Intervention School. The Foundation Phase should be protected from large class sizes that result from over-allocation of teachers to higher grades or from excessive free periods for some teachers. As Grade R is not universal and often of varying quality, induction into Gr.1 is often difficult. It therefore makes sense to concentrate teaching assistance here, within available resources, and after appropriate training. Principals and curriculum advisors should ensure that this is not simply a way of lightening the load of Gr.1 teachers, but is used to give more attention to the needs of Gr.1 learners.

ESTABLISHING MODEL SCHOOLS

As indicated above, the rationale for establishing model schools (which could be completely new schools or existing schools that have been “re-tooled”) is to illustrate that good learning is possible in poor communities. At present, too little of that is evident.

Amongst Xhosa-language schools, none achieved more than 52% across all four the Gr.3 Numeracy tests. As a consequence of this discouraging performance levels, many parents have come to consider sending their children to more affluent and particularly English-medium schools as the only escape from weak education. This outflow of learners whose parents value education more or who may be better motivated themselves makes it more difficult to achieve good quality education in such schools. It is imperative to break down the perception that proper learning can only occur in a small segment of schools, defined by language and previous advantage. Another contribution such a model school can make is to act as laboratory for the further development of Xhosa terminology, and a show-case for excellence in Xhosa-based teaching in the Foundation Phase.

Amongst poor (national quintiles 3 or less) Afrikaans-language schools, mainly on the Cape Flats, the best average performance across the four Numeracy tests was below 63%. This still places them some 5 percentage points behind three-quarters of the formerly advantaged schools and keeps the perception alive that remaining in such schools condemns people to an inferior education. It is thus essential that a model school be established here that can illustrate that good education need not be the preserve of the rich. Here too

language is an issue: Many parents believe that both economic advantage and proper education are easier to obtain by educating their children in English.

The interventions required for establishing model schools are in the first place the concentration of a very good principal, teachers and HoDs in such schools, who understand what poor children are capable of, and there should be close support and monitoring by the WCED and its curriculum advisors. Teachers and principals should be supported to understand the role of good instructional leadership, high levels of cognitive demand and individualised learning, and assessments tasks should from the beginning be set at more challenging levels than is customary in most schools. It is imperative that such schools should not be seen to have more resources than others, e.g. a better teacher-pupil ratio or more financial resources, as that would dilute the message that it is possible to have good learning in poor schools.

INTERVENTIONS ACROSS THE FOUNDATION PHASE

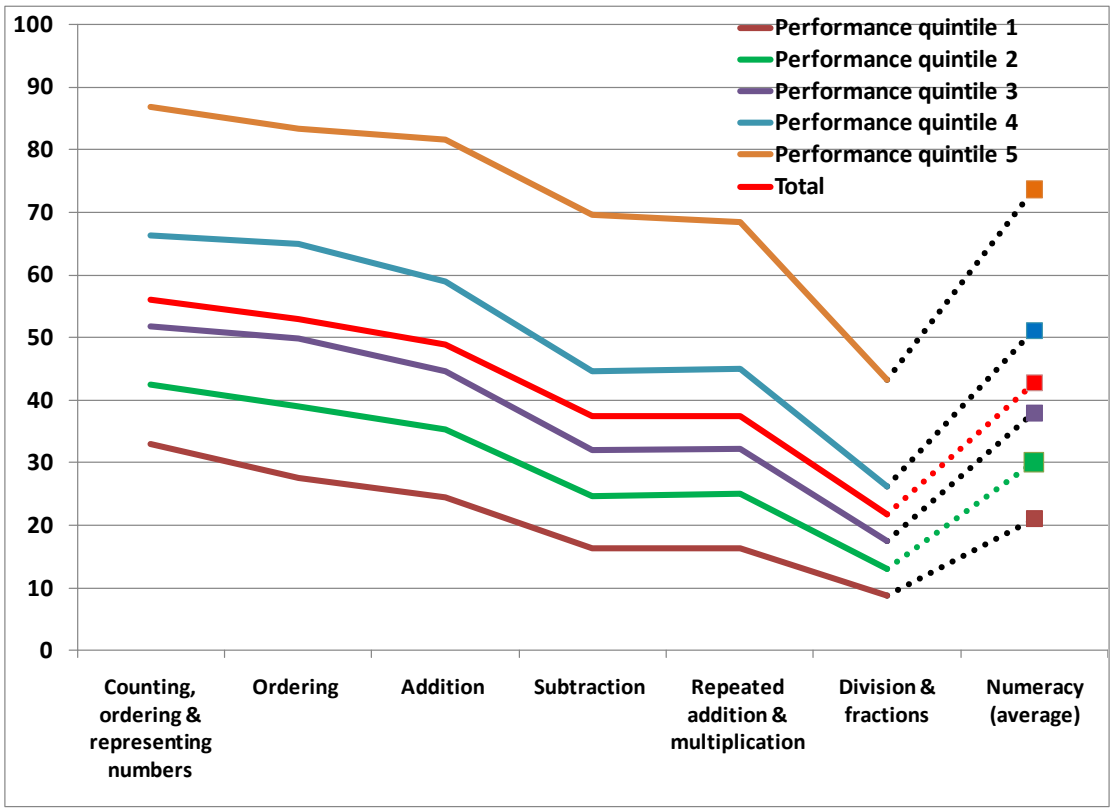
The interventions set out above refer to Turnaround Schools and Intervention Schools, in which improvement is most urgent. However, there remains a need for the rest of the WCED educational system to perform better at the Foundation Phase. This is well illustrated by the fact that the lowest performance in the group of schools here dubbed the “Fair Performers” in Numeracy was only 39%. Even Top Performers have much room for improvement.

Thus focused policy interventions at lower performance levels are not enough. Some more general recommendations across the Foundation Phase are consequently discussed in the rest of this chapter, again with the aim of increasing the awareness of the inadequacy of present performance and instilling a greater sense of urgency and challenge to principals, teachers, parents and learners. As the proposals set out for the Interventions Schools are implemented and once systems have been put in place, a broadening of this category can also certainly be considered. Though this was not the focus of this study, some of these and earlier recommendations could also be considered for higher grades as well.

Recommendations across the Foundation Phase: Teachers and curriculum advisors

Both teachers and curriculum advisers tend to set too low standards in terms of cognitive demand placed on children, across all Foundation Phase grades. More information can certainly help to improve this, but training can also help. Test results indicate that much of the weakness in Numeracy, for instance, does not so much derive from the inability to make the transition to more difficult work: In weak schools the weakness stretches across all tasks. If the problem was largely in making the transition to more complex tasks such as multiplication, one would have expected better performance in the weaker schools in Figure 4 in the more simple tasks (counting, ordering, adding), and a widening gap only between weaker and stronger performers for the more difficult tasks. It is noteworthy that even for simple addition, Gr.3 children on average do not meet WCED benchmarks (50% performance level).

FIGURE 4: PERFORMANCE ACROSS DIFFERENT TYPES OF TASKS BY SCHOOL PERFORMANCE QUINTILES IN 2002 NUMERACY TESTS



Teachers also need to understand the importance of feedback to children better, e.g. correcting errors and elaborating on learner responses, and they should be made more aware of the importance of individual work and individual assessment of students. Group work, seating in groups and more collective forms of learning need to be complemented by individualising pedagogies.

Though teacher training is obvious and necessary to address these gaps in teacher understanding, past experience does not indicate that this is a promising way of changing teacher behaviour. Two complementary proposals may help to improve outcomes:

- **Curriculum advisors**, who have an important role to ensure that appropriate pedagogies are practised in the classroom, **must be trained** to be more cognisant of levels of cognitive demand, elaboration on learner responses and the importance of individualised learning.
- Lesson demonstrations (videos) should be produced and distributed to teachers that focus on higher levels of cognitive demand and the "sense of urgency" needed to cover the curriculum (using teaching time productively). Many teachers expressed a need for such lesson demonstrations to fieldworkers and principals too thought that more support of this nature would be beneficial.

Recommendations across the Foundation Phase: Curriculum

A clear finding from the survey is the high level of confusion regarding the curriculum. Curriculum coherence is needed so that teachers can be clearer about what they are

required to teach and at what level. Clarity (such as that provided in the Foundations for Learning) should be provided on a term by term basis regarding content coverage to improve macro pacing of the curriculum.

Greater guidance could be given to teachers, through curriculum stipulation, regarding how students learn to read and how they learn numbers. The notion of practice and the repetitive practicing of basic skills at this level should be emphasised.

One way of assisting assessment practices is to provide examples of assessment tools that are closely aligned to the curriculum to teachers in all schools to use at their discretion, with some indication to them how the results should be interpreted and what they could learn from such tests, in particular how to interpret errors.

Recommendations across the Foundation Phase: Books and other learning material

Though many learners have readers in the Foundation Phase, there appears to be some resistance to using textbooks at this level. Workbooks and worksheets are more common, but cannot in equal measure overcome the effects of bad teaching as good textbooks can: Without textbooks, more motivated learners have nothing to fall back on where teachers fail them, and as pointed out in Summary Statement 2.4.2 in Chapter 2, the lack of individual textbooks and workbooks for learners plays a role in slow pacing as learners cannot easily continue with the next set of exercises without books.

Financial considerations may play a role in this at school level, as allocating more funds for textbooks for the Foundation Phase reduces schools' resources for other purposes. On the other hand, textbooks, unlike workbooks, need not be replaced every year. It is recommended that every learner should have a personal copy of a good textbook for Home Language Literacy, Numeracy and, in schools where the language of instruction changes at higher grades, First Additional Language. Curriculum advisors should monitor that these are used. Teachers also need some training in the use of textbooks and need to understand the value of textbook and reading series that stretch within and across grades. As indicated in Summary Statement 5.1 in Chapter 2 and Appendix A, well-structured reading and textbook series are designed to be used in a set sequence that builds progressively on learners' learning and language experiences.

As discussed in the next section, good textbooks also need to be developed, along with an appropriate curriculum, for FAL in schools where the LOLT changes at higher grades. (See the recommendations on language below, as well as Summary Statement 10.4 in Chapter 2 and more detailed results referring to FAL in Section 10.4 of Appendix A).

Recommendations across the Foundation Phase: Language

First Additional Language in schools where LOLT changes to English at higher grades

Children in schools where the language of teaching changes at higher grades (usually from Xhosa to English) have an extra hurdle to overcome. An early and successful start with teaching First Additional Language in such schools is an issue of even greater importance than it is in other schools. Unfortunately, there is a lack of support for this need, given that

there is no clearly FAL curriculum and no appropriate textbooks (currently, many teachers simply "translate" the home language curriculum for use in FAL, but this clearly leads to an inappropriate curriculum).

FAL (English) in such schools should get specific time allocation in the curriculum to ensure that it is taught alongside the mother tongue from early grades. It is crucial that the FAL curriculum for English be developed fully and should give clear guidelines to teachers how to teach English in these early grades. Similarly, textbooks and workbooks are required. Schools that have to make this language switch are at a disadvantage in a number of ways, and special funding dispensation should be considered to assist them to obtain these materials, because the need for such support is more acute in these schools. It is thus recommended that such allocations for Foundation Phase FAL materials be made to schools in this category as a "top slice" within the budget for learning and teaching materials.

Children attending non-home language schools (e.g. Xhosa or Afrikaans children in English schools)

Many children struggle to adjust to a new language in Gr.1, thus leaving them at a disadvantage and also making teaching more difficult in classes where this is common. This is particularly the case where they have little exposure to this language in the normal course of events at home. It would be optimal that such children undergo a good Grade R schooling in the language concerned, to act as an induction into the new language before they get to Gr.1. The WCED could consider allowing schools to insist on this induction for non-home language learners into the new language in Grade R, thus protecting Gr.1 classrooms from this heterogeneity. However, this is a sensitive issue and should be communicated to parents and the community at least a year ahead of implementation, so that parents can take decisions about Grade R with full information, and to prevent this becoming an unintended barrier to access.

Recommendations across the Foundation Phase: Presentation of test results

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the more successful interventions by the WCED has been the introduction and the gradual expansion of systemic testing. This has clearly had a positive influence on effort in schools and classrooms, despite some criticism levied at the tests.

Some critics claim that tests are too difficult. Judging by performances of better performing schools, this does not appear to be the case. There may even be an argument for adding some difficult questions to better distinguish between good schools, particularly in Literacy. Even in 2002, three-quarters of learners achieved the WCED Gr.3 Literacy benchmark, whereas scarcely half of Western Cape participants in the PIRLS study reached the low international benchmark in Gr.5. This suggests the WCED benchmark is at a far lower level of cognitive demand.

A second argument brought against the tests is that over-testing in a school system is intrinsically bad. However, the SA school systems cannot be accused of over-testing – there is no external examination at the primary level (unlike in most other African countries) and internal assessments tend to be lenient.

A third criticism of the tests is that many children are not well-prepared for writing tests of this sort, and that not enough attention is paid to putting children at ease and explaining to them what is required of them. **This criticism may be valid and may need some response from the WCED.**

A greater issue around the testing, however, is that the WCED may not be reaping the full benefit from this important tool. There are a numbers of ways in which the testing can bring further benefits, both at the Foundation Phase (Gr.3) and at higher levels (Gr.6 and Gr.9, currently). This can entail a more thorough analysis of the data, presenting information on school performance to schools in ways that would assist them in better understanding their performance in context, and putting more information in the hands of parents and the community, to whom schools and the education system are accountable.

More thorough analysis of the data at the individual school level as well as across the system should assist in policymaking and in planning interventions. Data being scattered across a large number of datasets rather than being consolidated in a single dataset impeded comparisons of performance over time and may sometimes lead to invalid comparisons (e.g. if some schools did not participate in all tests). Moreover, both progress and persistence can be better measured if data are captured and analysed within a single dataset.

Secondly, **test performance data should be presented to schools in a way that assists them to understand their performance in context**. A special team, perhaps working with a service provider, should be tasked with presenting results in a simple format that would allow principals, teachers, communities and individual parents to evaluate the performance of a school on these tests against its previous performance, but also against its peers (schools serving similar communities). Analysis of systemic test results could help Foundation Phase teachers to identify areas where their learners are weak and consequently provide information for corrective action. Therefore results should be discussed exhaustively in meetings involving the principal and *all* Foundation Phase teachers, not only Gr.3 teachers.

Thirdly, **information about performance on these tests should be placed in the hands of parents**. Parents have a right to know how well or how poorly their children are performing at school. Presently the only *reliable* feedback parents receive in many schools is the Grade 12 examination results. Standardised tests provide a far more reliable benchmark of their performance than internal assessments, which vary in accuracy and standard.

Such test results should also be put in context for parents, though. This requires a major **communication campaign to put tests results in perspective** and to help parents interpret them, involving the press, NGOs, SGBs, etc.

Other recommendations across the Foundation Phase:

Grade R

The quality of the intake of Gr.1 learners in terms of school readiness will always be highly differentiated, even if universal Grade R is introduced. The quality of Grade R provision will long remain a problem in many communities, thus schools should not assume that Grade R

will provide school-ready children. This requires special efforts to go into dealing with this in Grade 1; schools should, where this is possible, allocate teaching resources accordingly.

Teacher tenure

It became apparent during the survey and in interviews with stakeholders that many teachers, even quite senior ones, only have teaching experience at one school. This lack of mobility across schools limits potential learning from experience. (It also means that many teachers appear face an appointment panel only once in a lifetime.) To induce more teacher mobility across schools, particularly in urban areas where distance is not a great factor, it could be considered to make promotion less easy within the same school, or to offer financial incentives to teachers who have experience in more than one school.

Libraries

Access to libraries well-stocked with Foundation Phase material is critical for establishing and maintaining a population of eager readers. **Yet the present model of each school trying to offer a separate well-stocked library and maintaining it through the services of a dedicated librarian is neither cost-effective nor sustainable.** Few schools have well-stocked libraries that have enough Foundation Phase books, and such libraries are often poorly managed, leading to erosion of the existing capacity.

More cost-effective options need to be considered to ensure access to libraries for all children from the Foundation Phase. These could include introducing and/or expanding mobile libraries that visit schools on a regular basis, encouraging and easing the exchange of well-stocked box libraries between schools and classrooms, and establishing greater cooperation with municipalities to offer library services to schools.

THE ROAD AHEAD

So as not to lose the focus on strong recommendations that the research team believes could, if implemented, drastically improve learning in Foundation Phase, this report has tried to limit the number of recommendations and not tried to deal with the details of implementation. Some other minor issues that can be dealt with more readily (e.g. the widespread experience of fieldworkers that the nutrition break is too long and disruptive) will be communicated directly to policymakers concerned. Also, Appendix A and the summary of findings in Chapter 2 of this report contain a number of suggestions that could be fruitfully used to improve classroom teaching and learning, even though these were not all presented as proposals.

This study was a first collaborative attempt by WCED, WCT and the University of Stellenbosch research team to investigate and develop policies to improve learning in Western Cape schools. The focus fell on the Foundation Phase, as the foundations need to be established there, and gaps in learning are so large that they make it virtually impossible to address this at higher levels. But this does not mean that improvements at higher levels cannot also make some difference, particularly once improvements at the Foundation Phase start bearing fruit. Further investigations need to be focused on:

- Monitoring Foundation Phase performance

- Tracking performance of cohorts to higher grades, as has now become better possible between Gr. 3 and Gr.6 because the same children are now being tested at different levels
- Better understanding the language challenges facing children who have to make the transition from initially being taught in an African language to a new language of learning and teaching in Grade 4
- Improving the quality and use of textbooks throughout the school system
- Improving teachers' ability to use assessments appropriately so as to provide appropriate feedback to children and to revise their teaching strategies accordingly.

These are not all areas in which this research team has expertise. Nevertheless, the team wishes to confirm its willingness to assist in these matters in appropriate ways, where its research can potentially help to improve policies and implementation. This will be discussed further with WCED and WCT at an appropriate juncture.