RESEP

Research on Socio-Economic Policy

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Structural inequalities in school leadership and management across South African schools

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RESEP Policy Brief

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In the National Development Plan strengthening the quality of school leadership and management was identified as a priority to support improvements in South African basic education.[2] But there are no available training programmes that have been rigorously proven to raise the quality of school leaders and managers. This policy brief,[3] however, highlights that opportunity exists for provincial administrations to at least improve the *quantity* of management in schools in line with policy guidelines.

Opportunity exists for provincial administrations to at least improve the quantity of management in schools in line with policy guidelines.

Current available research and national payroll data reveal patterns and trends in School Management Team resourcing that are at odds with an improvement agenda in basic education.

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2 NPC (National Planning Commission). 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work. Pretoria: National Planning Commission. pp 309–310.

3 This policy brief is based on research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant ES/N01023X/1].

1. Policy vs. practice in allocating School Management Team posts

School leadership and management (SLM) is a shared function distributed across a principal and set of middle-managers (deputy principals and heads of department (HoDs)) which comprise a School Management Team (SMT). The number of SMT members that a school should have is informed through formulas and ratios in policy guidelines.[4] SMT post-provisioning ratios should be applied to the number of allocated educators to determine how many and which types of SMT posts a school should have.[5] But school enrolment is the strongest predictor of how many educators are allocated to the school (although other factors do matter).[6] This means that a larger school is entitled to more managers than a smaller school.

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In practice, there are fewer school managers on the ground nationally than envisaged in policy. What is particularly concerning, and revealed in this brief, are the specific inequalities in SMT resourcing.

2. Wealthier schools have more SMT members who are better qualified

National payroll data (Persal) for 2016 was used to explore SMT resourcing patterns across schools. Statistical models are applied to this data to identify the expected number of SMT members in schools for a given set of school characteristics, namely; learner enrolment, urban status, distance from a metropolitan area, school phase-level, official quintile and province.

Box 1 — A note on Payroll data (Persal)

Permission was obtained from the Department of Basic Education, through official data request processes, to use payroll data. However, payroll data is not particularly suited to identifying how many educators are allocated to specific schools because sometimes provinces do not update links between educators in payroll and the schools in which they work. Nevertheless, patterns identified in this research remain even when limiting 2016 payroll data to samples of schools with better data quality linkages.

The models show that wealthier Quintile 5 schools consistently have more publicly employed SMT members on average than the poorest schools (Quintile 1). A simple two-way graph of SMT numbers by school learner enrolment illustrates this clearly in Figure 1. It is possible that some of the SMT resourcing advantage in Quintile 5 schools could be attributed to offering more subjects. But on average Quintile 1 schools are also less generously resourced with SMT members than similarly sized schools in Quintiles 2 to 4. By charging fees wealthier schools may also be able to buffer shortfalls in the provincial allocation of managers, hiring additional school governing board (SGB) paid managers or temporary administrative support staff to fulfil administrative functions. This option is usually not available to less resourced no-fee charging schools.

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4 See Department of Basic Education. Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), Government Gazette No. 39684, 12 February 2016.

5 Deloitte, 2013. National Implementation of Post Provisioning: National Report. Unpublished tech. report. and Sephton, S., 2017. Chapter 14: Post Provisioning, in: Veriava, F., Thom, A., Hodgson, T.F. (Eds.), Basic Education Rights Handbook – Education Rights in South Africa. Section27, Johannesburg, pp. 246–263.

6 In addition to enrolment numbers, the number of learners with special educational needs, the number of grades each school caters for and the subjects offered by a school inform educator post-provisioning allocations.

In an earlier policy brief,[7] payroll data was used to show how much more qualified principals are in wealthier schools than principals in poorer schools. This implies inequalities not only in the quantity of management but in the quality of managers appointed across poorer and wealthier schools.
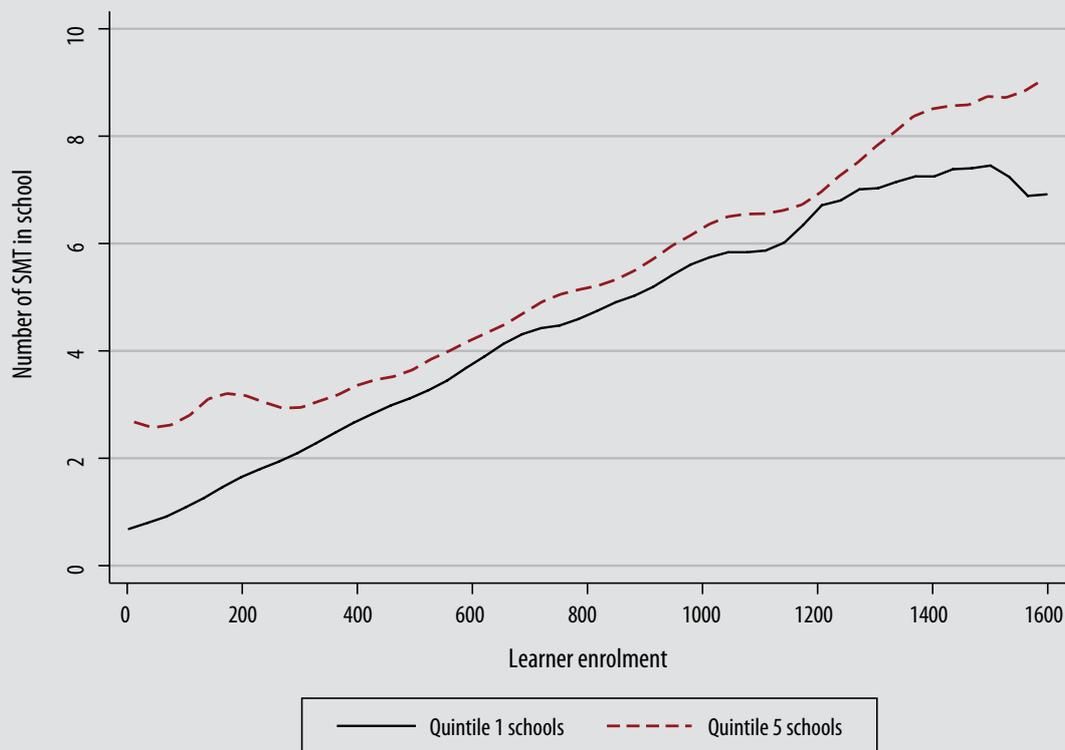
FIGURE 1: **The number of SMT members in the wealthiest Quintile 5 schools relative to the poorest Quintile 1 schools**

Source: 2016 Payroll data linked to school data, own calculations.

3. Provincial inequities in SMT post-provisioning practices

Schools in some provinces are more likely to be resourced with higher numbers of SMT members than in other provinces. For example, relative to Gauteng province, schools in all other provinces in 2016 had fewer SMT members after accounting for differences in school characteristics. The starkest contrast is observed between Gauteng and Limpopo schools, visually represented in Figure 2 which plots SMT numbers by learner enrolment for selected provinces. These findings suggest that some provinces are better at managing post-provisioning than others. This is an important observation as it reveals that improved practices are within the reach of local administrations.

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7 Wills, G. 2015. Improving the calibre of school leadership in South Africa. ReSEP Policy Brief. http://resep.sun.ac.za/index.php/research-outputs/policy-briefs/201–2/ and Wills, G., 2015. Informing principal policy reforms in South Africa through data-based evidence. South African J. Child. Educ. 5, 95–122.
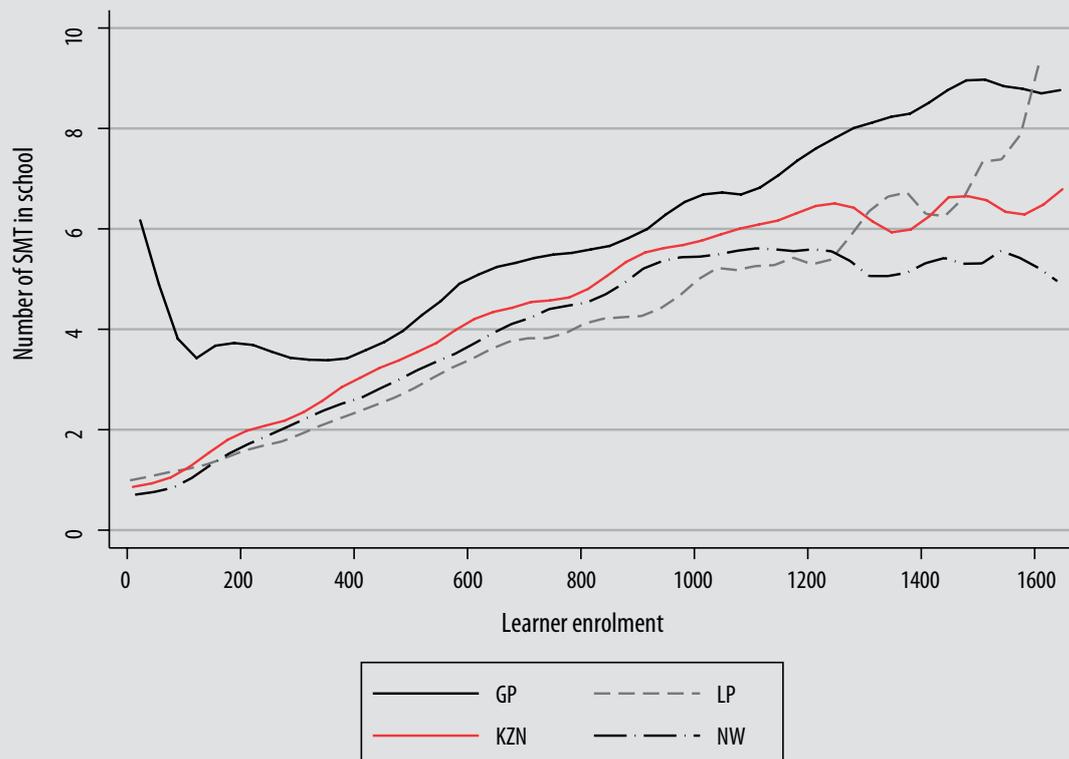
FIGURE 2: The number of SMT members in selected provinces

Source: 2016 Payroll data linked to school data, own calculations.

4. SMT declines in recent years

In recent years the number of SMT members that schools of a given size *should* have, has been compromised through

> *New research reveals that the total number of school-based managers had declined nationally by 6% between 2012 and 2015 – in absolute terms over 5000 fewer managers in schools.*

a combination of increased budgetary pressures, weak planning by provinces, a wave of retirements and pre-retirement exits of managers which has left vacancies that are not being filled. Temporary hiring freezes were also imposed on some provinces. New research[8] reveals that the total number of school-based managers had declined nationally by 6% between 2012 and 2015 – in absolute terms over 5000 fewer managers in schools. The presence of middle managers in schools has also declined with 7% fewer schools-based HODs (in absolute terms 3 400 less) between 2012 and 2016.[9] These declines have been particularly concentrated in the poorest province – Limpopo.

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8 Figures obtained from Gustafsson, at the Department of Basic Education via personal communication.

9 Gustafsson, M., 2016. Personnel spending pressures. Hiring and promotion cuts with enrolment growth. Unpublished report for the Department of Education. Pretoria. and Gustafsson, M., 2017. Who becomes an HOD? Unpublished report for the Department of Eduction. Pretoria.

This policy brief is also available online at www.resep.sun.ac.za

5. Gender gaps in school leadership

This brief has so far highlighted structural inequalities in SMT post-provisioning. A related issue is how woman are overlooked for promotion posts. The observed gender leadership gap is larger in South African primary schools than the average for some other African countries, but it is not a unique issue to South Africa.[10]

Gender bias in the promotion of female teachers emerges at the middle management level and widens at higher post-levels. In 2016, despite most teachers being women (74%), women only held 63% of HoD posts. At the level of deputy principal, women only held 44% of these posts and a mere 36% of school principal posts as reflected in Figure 3. However, these gaps are driven mostly through secondary school promotion appointments which are more likely to favour men than primary school promotion appointments. There has also been little improvement in gender equality in school promotion. For example, the percentage of principals who were women only improved by 2% points from 34% in 2004 to 36% in 2012.[11]

New research shows that women are less likely to be appointed as an HOD in every province even after controlling for their age, race, experience, gender of the principal, union affiliation and indicators of quality as represented in Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) scores.[12]
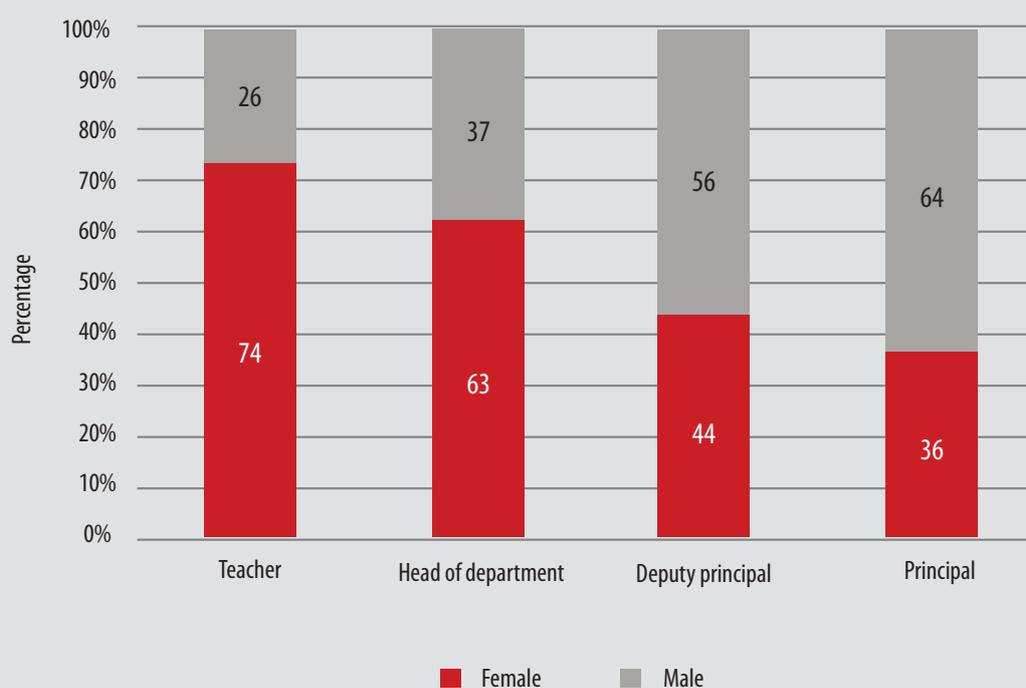

FIGURE 2: Gender division by post-level, 2016

Source: Own calculations using Persal, November 2016. Notes: Only educators in open public ordinary schools in 2016 are included in calculations. Gender composition statistics for teachers are calculated excluding SMT post-level educators.

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10 OECD, 2014. TALIS 2013 Results. An international Perspective on Teaching and Learning. OECD publishing. and Hungi, N., 2011. Characteristics of school heads and their schools (No. 3), SACMEQ Working Paper.

11 Wills, G., 2016. An economic perspective on school leadership and teachers' unions in South Africa. Doctoral thesis. Stellenbosch University.

12 Figures obtained from Gustafsson, DBE via personal communication. IQMS is a low-stakes educator evaluation system applied in all public schools.

6. What should be done?

1. Addressing SMT resourcing inequities

As the nation faces increased fiscal demands in a low growth environment there is an increased likelihood that the non-filling of SMT posts will continue unless these posts are prioritised and allocated in line with existing national guidelines. SMT posts are considerably more expensive than post-level one teachers and there is a strong temptation for provinces to 'save' by not filling SMT vacancies or just appointing individuals in an 'acting' role at little additional cost. Effective post-provisioning in this environment requires effective planning and up-to-date data.

- *Provinces must streamline processes related to post-provisioning*. This includes getting clearer on budgeting requirements, excellent financial management with concurrent planning and up-to-date EMIS and Annual Survey of Schools data to allocate SMTs and educators fairly and equitably across schools.

2. Addressing gender discrimination

Reducing inequities in SMT appointments may have implications for improved school functionality and learning outcomes if there exists a pool of high quality female leaders that have been overlooked for appointment.

- *More research is needed to identify the cultural complexities underlying gender discrimination and how policy could mediate these factors.* Affirmative action policy, which already applies directly to promotion appointments in education, should give preference to women over men in selection processes. However, "the law does not address the stereotypes and subtle practices of discrimination suffered by women in the work place and at home".[13]
- *Mentoring young female middle managers.* Rather than just minimising irregular appointments that may favour men over women, programmes should target the preparation of female teachers for leadership through organised networking, formalised mentorship programmes and targeted career development coaching.
- *Monitoring discrimination by collecting data on who applies for posts.* The school leadership gender gap in South Africa may also be attributed to the possibility that fewer female teachers apply for leadership positions, rather than just reflecting the unequal appointment of men over women. But no data exists on who applies. By collecting and monitoring data on who applies for SMT posts, sources of discrimination can be appropriately identified and action taken.

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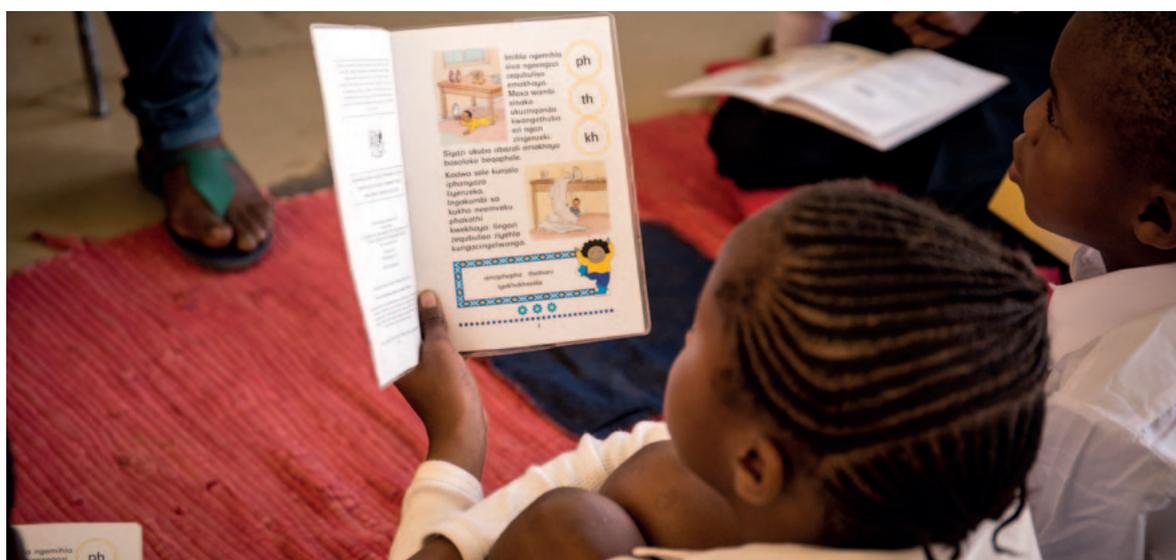
13 Moorosi, P., 2010. South African Female Principals' Career Paths: Understanding the Gender Gap in Secondary School Management. Educ. Manag. Adm. Leadersh. 38, 547–