

# HOW SATISFIED ARE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WITH SUPPORT AND COMPLIANCE VISITS BY DISTRICT OFFICIALS?

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## INTRODUCTION

As a positive relationship between schools and education districts can help to secure school improvement and learning outcomes, we have explored the accountability arrangements implicit in this relationship in the South African context. An assessment of how well the district is rated by schools when it comes to the different compliance and support activities that officials carry out during school visits, as well as the variations in school satisfaction ratings, was undertaken using a sample-based nationally representative survey. The relationship between the focus of school visits and how satisfied respondents (mainly school principals) were about such visits offers some insight into the potential impact of visits on school operations and the opportunity a district may have to influence a school's ability to perform. This paper thus provides insights into the efficacy of district personnel in policy compliance and oversight visits to schools, as well as how schools perceive these visits.

## INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN DISTRICTS

Both the international and national literature confirms that educational districts that directly support teaching practice and content are better positioned to secure positive learning outcomes than those districts that practice superficial policy compliance (Hoadley & Galant, 2015; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). South African districts have to balance dual roles, i.e. overseeing school and principal performance and policy compliance, and supporting schools. Support visits include visits for orientation, training and professional development of school-based officials and staff. Compliance visits include visits to check the provision of infrastructure, books and texts; human resource (HR) issues; and other quality improvement programmes. In South Africa, schools are held accountable for their performance by their districts, which in turn are accountable to their Provincial Education Departments (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2013; Chinsamy, 2013).

According to South African national education policy, district officials are responsible for: (i) supporting planning and management in schools, using data and information; (ii) direct support of learning and teaching through school visits, classroom observations, feedback reports, consultations, and other means; (iii) coordinating information, ICT connectivity, and the environment to support staff and professional development; (iv) holding principals to account for staff and school performance as an organisation; and (v) public engagement and consultation at the local level (RSA, 2013).

Academic improvement and school management come particularly under the spotlight in schools that districts judge to be under-performing. Schools and districts also have conversations about performance when they discuss the self-evaluation processes associated with school management and governance, the application of the Whole School Evaluation Policy, and the performance management of teachers, Heads of Departments (HoDs), deputy principals and principals through the Quality Management System (previously called the Integrated Quality Management Systems). Districts also hold accountability-focused conversations, planning and reporting activities, which focus on the performance of individual schools (DBE, 2013; National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU), 2017; Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), 2003; WSE 2001).



IN SOUTH AFRICA, SCHOOLS  
ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE  
FOR THEIR PERFORMANCE  
BY THEIR DISTRICTS, WHICH  
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TO THEIR PROVINCIAL  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTRICTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's educational districts vary in size and endowment. The least populated districts, which are located in the Free State (Xhariep), Gauteng (North), Northern Cape (Namaqua and Pixley-Ka-Seme) and Western Cape (Overberg), are divided into between three and six circuits and contain between 31 and 77 primary schools, between 14 and 19 secondary schools, and 85 schools each, on average. The six most populous districts, on the other hand, which are all located in the Eastern Cape or KwaZulu-Natal, together account for 16% of the 25 613 schools in the country. These districts each have an average of 25 circuits, 393 primary and 118 secondary schools, and almost eight times the average total number of schools in the least populated districts (672 schools).

## SCHOOL MONITORING SURVEY

The School Monitoring Survey (SMS) is a unique dataset, which is used by the Department of Basic Education to track progress towards the goals set out in the national education sector plan. One such goal is to improve districts' performance and support of schools. In the SMS, school principals provide a satisfaction rating for school visits by district officials, which we used as a measure of schools' assessment of district official visits in a unique bidirectional (school to district, and district to school) accountability arrangement. The SMS also enables estimates of the number and the content or purpose of district officials' visits. We acknowledge that the satisfaction ratings as the outcome variable may have been influenced by variables other than those presented or measured in the analysis. For example, principals may be inclined to be more satisfied with visits that allow schools to maintain the status quo, and which do not challenge existing school processes.

Despite these limitations, this investigation assessed the satisfaction with district official visits from the point of view of the school principals in relation to the purpose of their visits, using descriptive and analytical statistics on the frequency and purpose of the visits, as well as possible areas for improvement in such visits. The data analysed were extracted from Questions 166 to 177 of the 2017/18 SMS questionnaire (DBE, 2018).



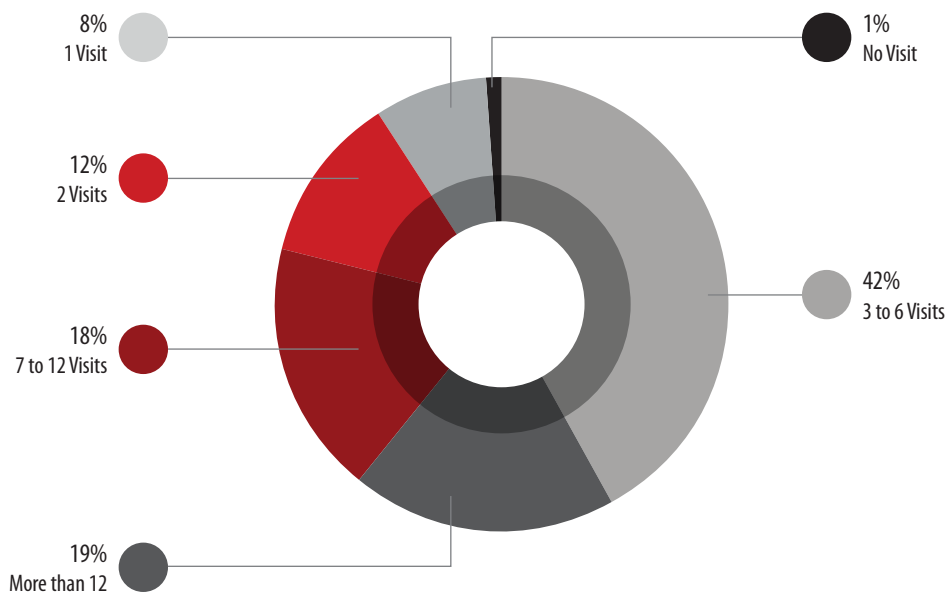
THE SCHOOL MONITORING SURVEY (SMS) IS A UNIQUE DATASET, WHICH IS USED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION TO TRACK PROGRESS TOWARDS THE GOALS SET OUT IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN.

# ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Our findings, based on the SMS questions regarding the frequency, nature and purpose of district official visits to schools and the level of satisfaction of school principals with these visits, are presented below under each question.

## 1 How often do district officials visit schools?

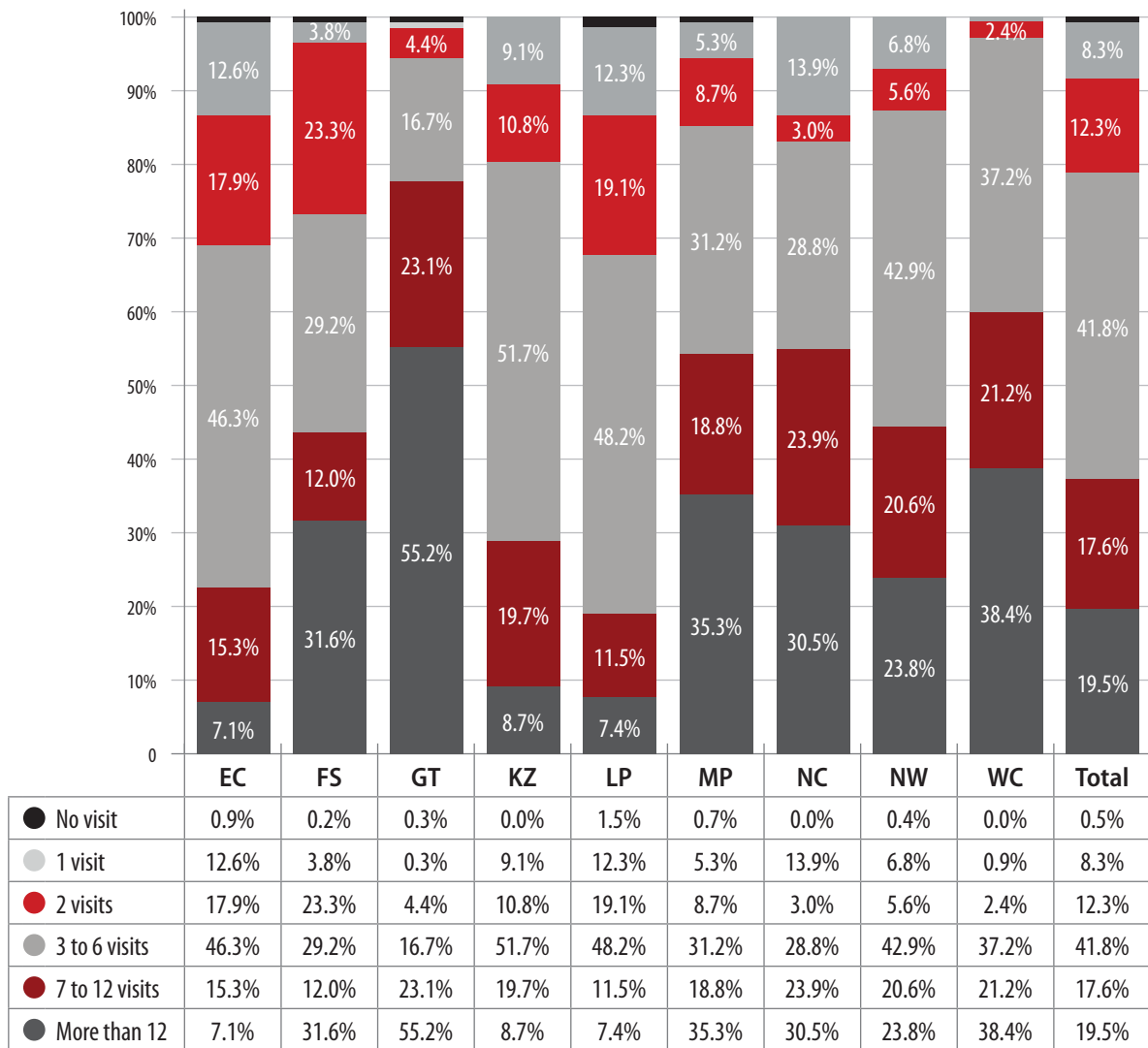
The first questions we attempted to answer were what the frequency of these visits are, and if the probability of a school receiving a visit from a district official varies by province, quintile and school type. In 2011, 86% of South African schools were visited at least twice by district officials.<sup>1</sup> By 2017, this proportion had increased to 95% nationally. Almost one-fifth of schools received more than 12 visits, and eight in every ten schools received at least three visits from the District Office.



**FIGURE 1:** Frequency of district official visits to schools in a year

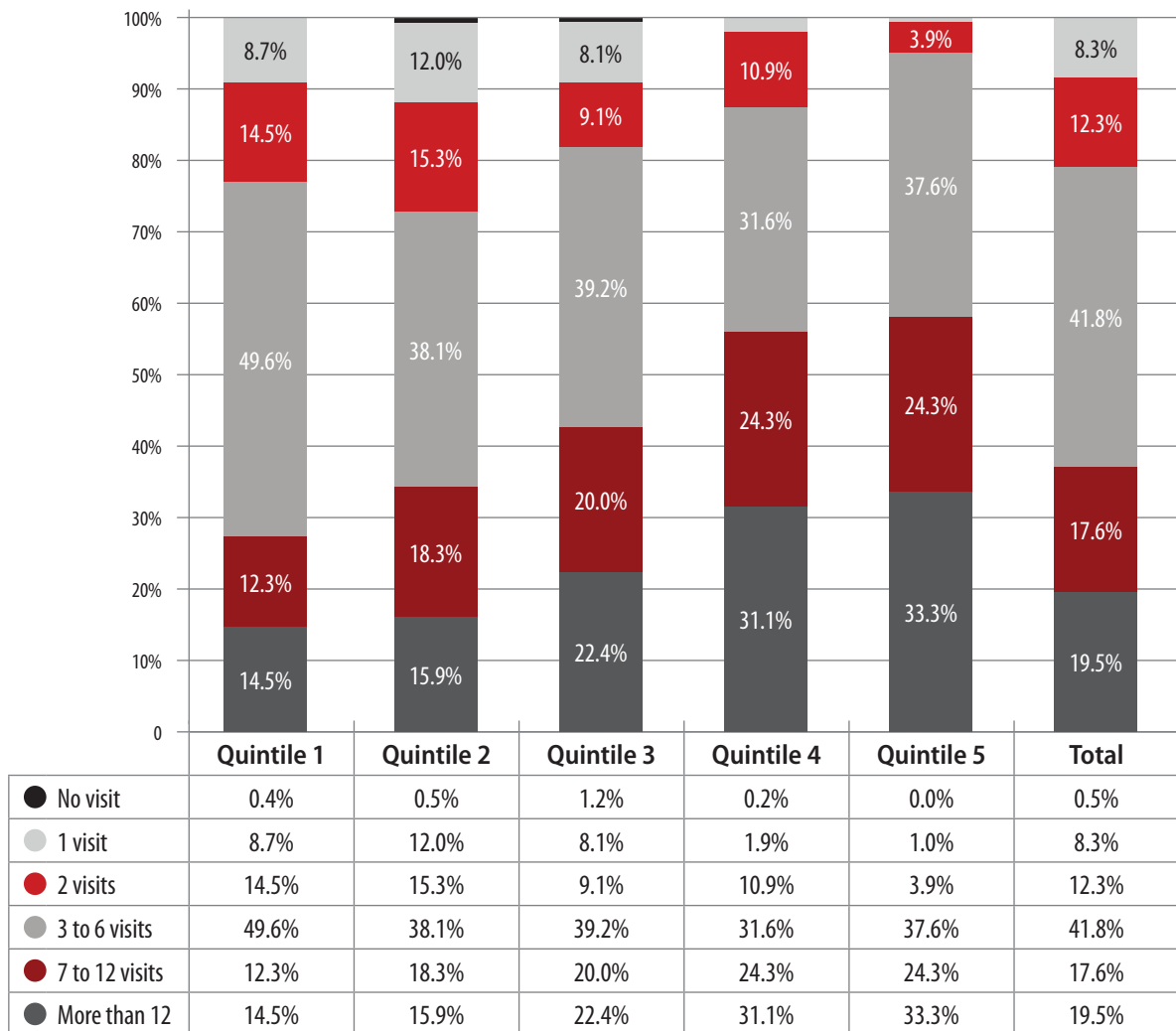
Provincial disaggregation shows further differences in school visit coverage, as per Figure 2. The frequency of visits is highest in wealthier and more developed provinces, i.e. schools in Gauteng (55%) and the Western Cape (38%) are more likely to receive more than 12 district visits, compared to between 7% and 8% in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Over 95% of the schools in Gauteng and the Western Cape received three or more district visits in 2017, compared to 68% in the Eastern Cape and 67% in Limpopo. Over 80% of Northern Cape schools and 70% of Free State schools were visited at least three times a year by district officials, despite the large distances facing them. Schools in KwaZulu-Natal (52%) and Limpopo (48%) were more likely to receive an average of between three and six visits per annum, while fewer than one in ten schools in these two provinces and in the Eastern Cape were visited more than 12 times. Reassuringly, few schools remained unvisited across all provinces.

<sup>1</sup> The School Monitoring Survey 2017/2018 Summary Report dated September 2018 erroneously quoted this figure as 84%.



**FIGURE 2:** Frequency of district official visits to schools by province

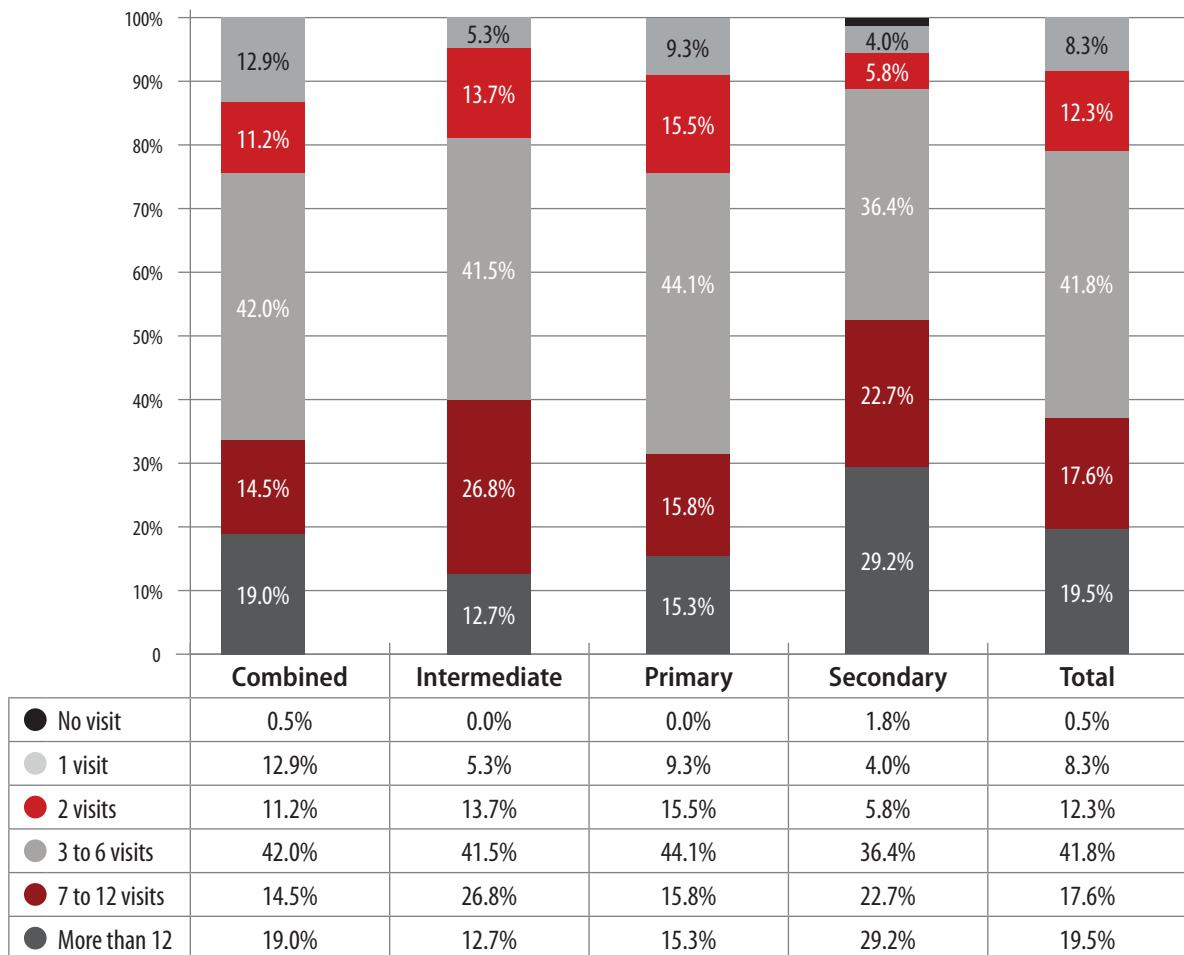
South African public schools are classified into five groups according to the wealth of the school community it serves. These groups are referred to as quintiles, despite the fact that they are not equal in size. Most schools in all school quintiles tend to receive more than two visits per annum, but Figure 3 shows that a larger percentage of the wealthier schools, schools in Quintile 4 and 5 received at least three visits from district officials. A high frequency of visits (more than 12) is more common in Quintile 4 (31%) and Quintile 5 (33%) schools, compared to between 14% and 22% of Quintile 1 to 3 schools.



**FIGURE 3:** Frequency of district official visits to schools by quintile (% of all responses in each quintile)

Figure 4 shows that secondary schools receive more attention from the district office than primary, intermediate and combined schools (the last two mentioned school types are less common). While 29% of secondary schools receive more than 12 visits from district officials, in primary schools this proportion is only 15%, reflecting the perceived importance of secondary school level support. In 2011, 94% of secondary schools were visited at least twice by district officials, compared with 80% of primary schools. This differential narrowed in 2017, with 95% of secondary schools and 90% of primary schools being visited at least twice.

The data and informal discussion with district officials and principals confirm the attention that districts pay to supporting schools in preparation for the Grade 12 NSC examinations as a key indicator of school performance. As there is no proxy for learning outcomes in the early grades, this high stakes examination may provide an incentive for officials to visit secondary schools to a greater extent than primary schools. A regression analysis would provide more insight into the real drivers of these patterns observed in the univariate analysis above.



**FIGURE 4:** Frequency of district official visits to schools by school type)

Smaller schools tend to receive fewer visits than larger schools. The few schools that received no or only one visit are also quite large, thus the next set of regression analyses tries to disentangle some of the correlated attributes that may explain district visits for support and monitoring seen in these tables above.

The probability of receiving a school visit from a district official may be influenced by the characteristics of the school. As seen in the univariate analysis above, schools that are larger, located in urban settings, and in higher quintiles tend to receive more visits from district officials. Factors that may influence the probability of a school receiving a visit from a district official were further included in a single regression to understand which of these factors were significantly associated with the likelihood of a school visit from a district official in 2017.

Separate regressions were estimated for primary and secondary schools. The results are presented in Table 1. Due to the high percentage (95%) of schools receiving visits, the outcome variable was recoded into a binary variable coded as 0=No if the school received up to seven visits and 1=Yes if a school received more than seven visits.

Once the other factors were controlled for, school size did not appear to be associated with a greater or lower frequency of school visits. It was consequently not included in the regressions shown here. On the other hand, the province in which a school is located makes a difference as to whether the school will be visited often, for both primary and secondary schools, confirming what one would expect, i.e. that institutional arrangements for district and other support and monitoring are determined by provincial factors. Primary schools in Gauteng (42 percentage points), the Western Cape (23 percentage points) and Mpumalanga (22 percentage points) were more likely to have received at least seven visits from district officials than schools in the Eastern Cape (the reference province). The results were similar for secondary schools, i.e. secondary schools in Gauteng (37 percentage points), the Northern Cape (30 percentage points), the Western Cape (28 percentage points), and Mpumalanga (18 percentage points) were more likely to have received at least seven visits from the district office than schools in the Eastern Cape. However, Limpopo secondary schools were 23 percentage points less likely to receive at least seven visits than schools in the Eastern Cape. In contrast to the univariate descriptive analysis, school quintile does not seem to affect the likelihood of school visits significantly, once provincial variation is accounted for.

These results highlight that multivariate analyses are needed to uncover the real drivers of patterns seen in the data.

**TABLE 1:** Regression of the likelihood of a school being visited more than seven times in a year by a district official

	PRIMARY	SECONDARY
EC	<i>(reference category)</i>	
FS	.06	.20*
GT	.42***	.37***
KZ	-.02	-.021
LP	-.05	-.23***
MP	.22**	.18*
NC	.17	.30*
NW	.10	.18*
WC	.23**	.28***
Quintile 1	<i>(reference category)</i>	
Quintile 2	.04	-.011
Quintile 3	.13**	.049
Quintile 4	.08	.0081
Quintile 5	.11	.016
Constant	.23***	.48***
<b>Observations</b>	<b>861</b>	<b>910</b>
<b>R-squared</b>	<b>0.114</b>	<b>0.158</b>

Notes: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001



## 2 Which district officials conduct visits?

Staff at the district level who are responsible for district management and oversight are the District Director, Circuit Manager (who manages the affairs of the circuit), the Subject Adviser (who is responsible for curriculum advice and support directly into schools, typically through a subject’s Head of Department). The nomenclature and responsibilities of the different staff positions vary somewhat across provinces, though all these positions appear in responses in all provinces, so responses may be affected by definitional differences, at least in the mind of the respondents. This is something that requires attention.

We investigated which district official is more likely to conduct a visit and variation by province, quintile, school type and school size. The results in Figure 5 show that in all the provinces, visits are most likely to be conducted by Circuit Managers or Subject Advisors, i.e. officials tasked with supporting the school in management and curriculum delivery. In Gauteng and Mpumalanga, over 70% of the schools were visited by the Educator Development Official. In Gauteng, over 86% of the schools were also visited by the Learning and Teaching Supply Material (LTSM) Coordinator, which is much higher than in other provinces.

There does not appear to be much variation in visits by school officials when the data are disaggregated by quintile or school type. All schools tend to receive most visits from the Circuit Managers, followed by the Subject Advisors and Education Development Officers, although the exact designation and responsibilities are province-specific.

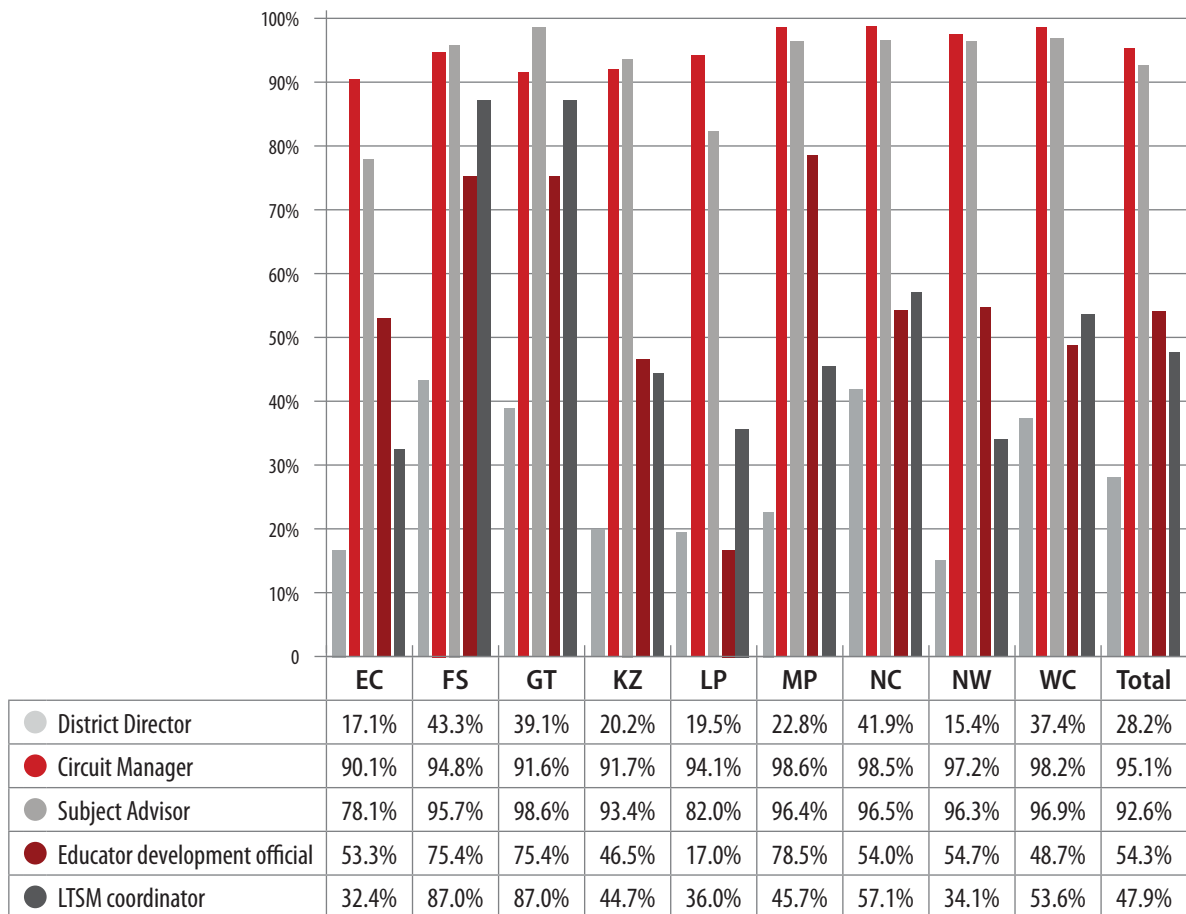


FIGURE 5: Percent of schools visited by a particular official by province



SEVENTEEN PERCENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS RECEIVE VISITS FROM THE LTSM COORDINATOR. SUCH VISITS ARE PARTICULARLY COMMON IN GAUTENG.

The estimates in Table 2 of the likelihood of being visited by a district official confirm that, all else being equal, primary schools are more likely to get a visit from a Circuit Manager (89 percentage points), followed by a Subject Advisor (55 percentage points) and an Educator Development Official (45 percentage points). Seventeen percent of primary schools receive visits from the LTSM Coordinator. Such visits are particularly common primarily in Gauteng.

The province in which a school is located also appears to influence the probability of being visited by district officials, but less so in the case of District Directors, Circuit Managers and Educator Development Officials. Schools in the Free State (19 percentage points) and the Western Cape (18 percentage points) have a greater probability of being visited by the District Director than those in the Eastern Cape. On the other hand, schools in Gauteng are 7.9 percentage points less likely than the reference province, Eastern Cape, to receive a visit from the Circuit Manager. Schools in Gauteng (35 percentage points) and Mpumalanga (25 percentage points) are more likely, while Limpopo (32 percentage points) is less likely, to receive visits from the Educator Development Official than schools in the Eastern Cape.

Eastern Cape schools are less likely to receive visits from a Subject Advisor or an LTSM Coordinator than schools in other provinces. This difference is more pronounced between Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape schools in the case of Subject Advisors. Similarly, schools in Gauteng (69 percentage points) and the Western Cape (46 percentage points) have a greater likelihood of receiving visits from an LTSM Coordinator than those in the Eastern Cape.

There is not a great variation in visits by the various officials related to the school quintile, except that schools in Quintile 2 tend to receive more visits from the District Director, Educator Development Official and Subject Advisor, and fewer visits from the LTSM coordinator than schools in Quintile 1. In addition, Quintile 3 schools are more likely to receive more visits from the Educator Development Official and Subject Advisor than Quintile 1 schools.

**TABLE 2:** Regression of probability of primary or secondary schools being visited by a particular district official

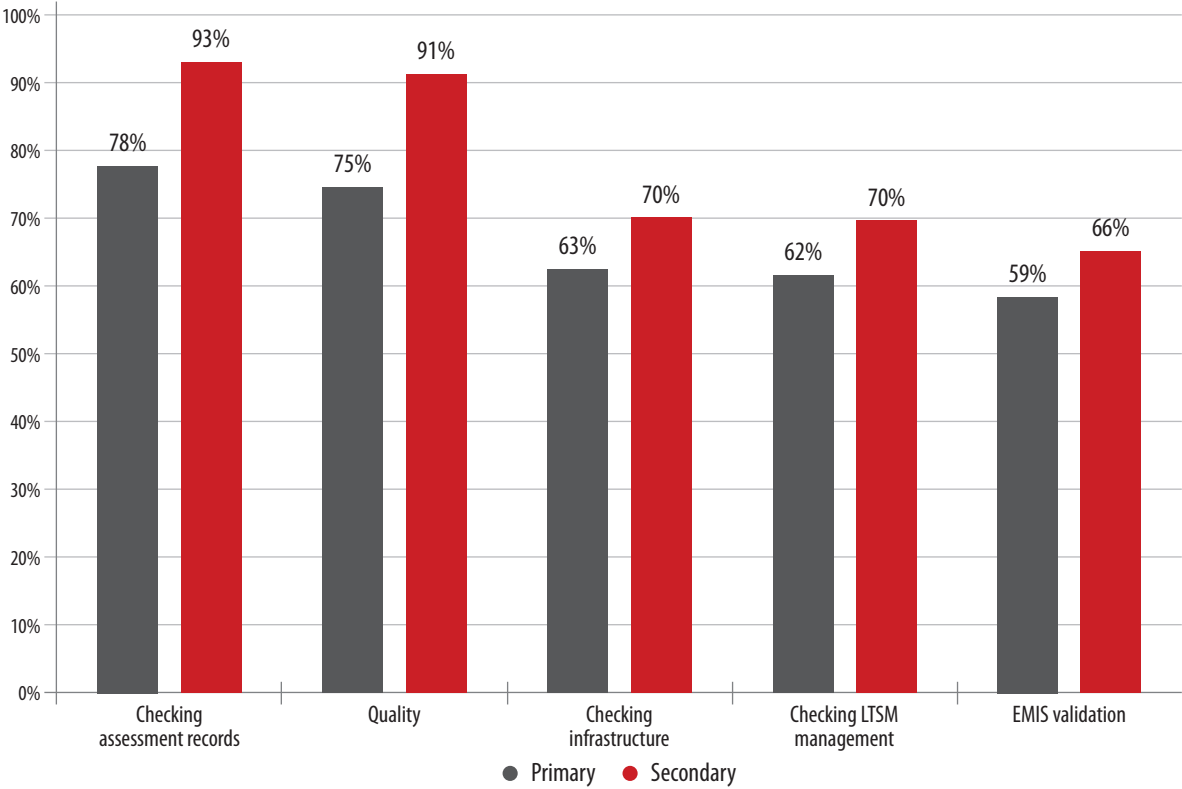
	I. PRIMARY SCHOOLS					II. SECONDARY SCHOOLS				
	District Director	Circuit Manager	Educator Development Official	Subject Advisor	LTSM coordinator	District Director	Circuit Manager	Educator Development Official	Subject Advisor	LTSM coordinator
<i>EC (reference category)</i>										
FS	.19***	-.24***	-.078	.1	.2*	.32***	.043	-.097	.081	.087
GT	.038	-.079	.35***	.36***	.69***	.41***	.02	.1	.085**	.6***
KZ	.027	-.028	-.057	.29***	.29***	.069	-.0019	-.24***	.064*	.071
LP	.028	.058	-.32***	.14**	.26***	-.02	-.011	-.45***	-.017	-.076
MP	.097*	.088*	.25***	.33***	.29***	.098	.063*	.19**	.076*	.17*
NC	.059	-.026	-.17	.16*	.31**	.37**	.055	-.023	.092	.32**
NW	.015	.074	.11	.35***	.076	-.019	.021	-.13	.08	-.0039
WC	.18***	.032	.07	.37***	.46***	.23**	.044	-.18*	.059	.22**
<i>Quintile 1 (reference category)</i>										
Quintile 2	.064*	.015	.093*	.062*	-.086*	.091*	.087***	.04	.016	-.072
Quintile 3	0.006	.034	.095*	.091**	.00069	.09*	.059**	.071	-.0075	.053
Quintile 4	.054	.055	-.12	.1	-.055	.064	.072*	-.039	.0024	-.041
Quintile 5	.073	.023	-.03	.096*	-.029	-.084	.071**	-.13*	-.0018	-.15**
Constant	.016	.89***	.45***	.55***	.17***	.19***	.89***	.62***	.9***	.36***
Observations	836	836	836	836	836	902	902	902	902	902
R-squared	0.051	0.064	0.158	0.135	0.136	0.094	0.039	0.177	0.031	0.157
Notes:	*p<0.05	**p<0.01	***p<0.001"							

A different pattern is evident regarding official visits to secondary schools. All else being equal, secondary schools are most likely to be visited by the Circuit Manager (89 percentage points) and/or Subject Advisor (90 percentage points), followed by the Educator Development Official (62 percentage points) and the LTSM Coordinator (36 percentage points). Northern Cape, Free State, Gauteng and Western Cape schools tend to receive more visits from the District Director than the Eastern Cape secondary schools. Secondary schools in Mpumalanga and Gauteng also tend to receive more visits than those in the Eastern Cape, but the opposite is true for secondary schools in Limpopo and Kwazulu-Natal, which are less likely to be visited by an Educator Development Official. LTSM Coordinators visit more secondary schools in Gauteng, the Northern Cape, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape than in the Eastern Cape.

As with primary schools, a secondary school's quintile does not seem to be an important factor in terms of being visited by a district official, apart from Quintile 5 secondary schools receiving fewer visits from officials, especially District Directors, Educator Development Officials and LTSM Coordinators.

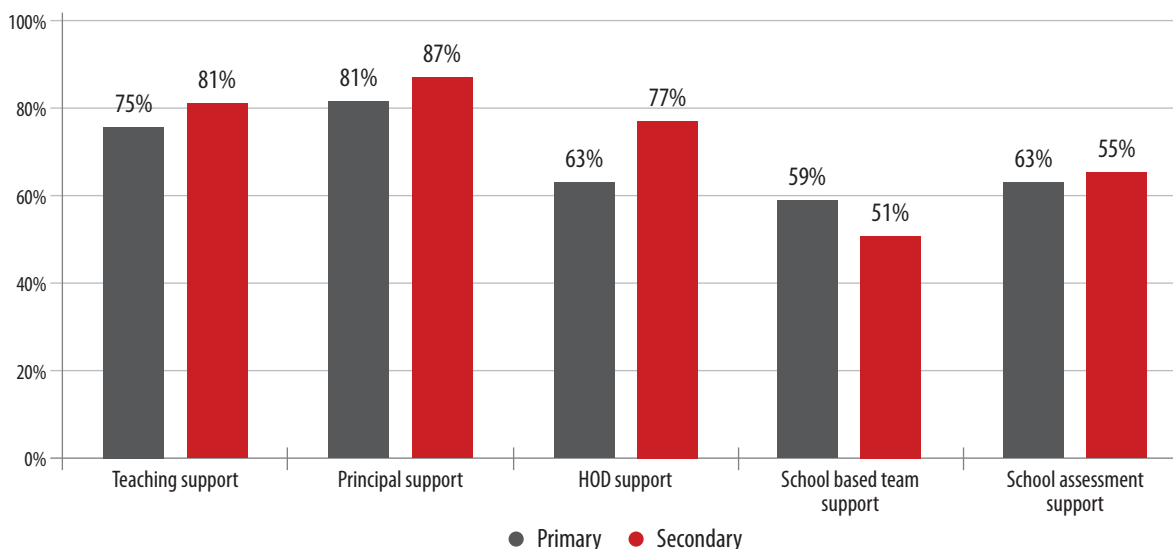
### 3 Main purpose of official visits

Oversight visits by Circuit Managers and Subject Advisors from a district focus on checking educators' assessment records, overall quality, and school infrastructure (see Figure 6). Although more secondary schools tend to receive visits to check assessment records and for education quality monitoring processes, there are no significant differences between primary and secondary schools with regards to the other oversight visits, e.g. checking infrastructure, LTSM Management or EMIS (Education Management Information System) Validation (see Figure 8).



**FIGURE 6:** Purpose of oversight visits to primary and secondary schools

Figure 7 shows that providing support to teachers and principals tends to be the main purpose of these visits, followed by support to the HoDs. Secondary schools tend to receive more HoD support, principal support and teacher support visits than primary schools, while conversely, primary schools tend to receive considerably more school-based team support.



**FIGURE 7:** Purpose of support visits to primary and secondary schools

Table 3 shows that there seems to be little division of labour in terms of the purpose of visits by district officials. District official visits typically focus on both oversight and support. Circuit Managers and Subject Advisors are most likely to conduct these visits, doing very similar activities during the visit.

**TABLE 3:** School visits by purpose and district official designation

	DISTRICT DIRECTOR	CIRCUIT MANAGER	SUBJECT ADVISOR	EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT OFFICIAL	LTMS COORD
<b>Oversight visits</b>					
Checking assessment records	18%	94%	92%	49%	44%
Quality	19%	94%	91%	50%	45%
Checking infrastructure	20%	94%	90%	53%	48%
Checking LTSM management	20%	94%	91%	53%	56%
EMIS validation	21%	94%	89%	53%	50%
Checking HR matters	22%	94%	93%	54%	52%
<b>Support visits</b>					
Teaching support	19%	94%	91%	51%	46%
Principal support	19%	94%	88%	50%	45%
HOD support	21%	93%	92%	56%	49%
School based team support	21%	94%	92%	61%	52%
School assessment support	32%	94%	91%	56%	53%



GENERALLY, THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS (THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS) ARE SATISFIED WITH THE VISITS BY DISTRICT OFFICIALS TO THEIR SCHOOLS, WITH CLOSE TO 80% INDICATING THAT THEY ARE SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED.

#### 4 How satisfied are schools with visits by district officials, and which schools are more likely to be satisfied?

Generally, the school principals (the survey respondents) are satisfied with the visits by district officials to their schools, with close to 80% indicating that they are satisfied or very satisfied (see Figure 8). Furthermore, this applies across all provinces (Figure 9). The Eastern Cape (63%) has the lowest proportion of schools satisfied or very satisfied with district visits, followed by the Northwest (67%) and Limpopo (70%). In contrast, 90% of Gauteng schools and 91% of Western Cape schools are satisfied or very satisfied with the visits.

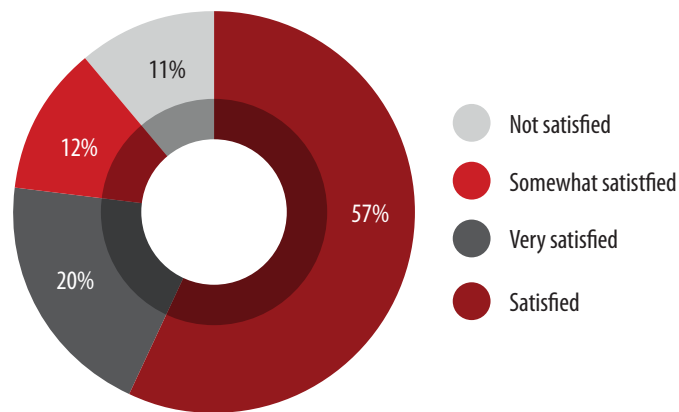


FIGURE 8: Levels of satisfaction with district official visits

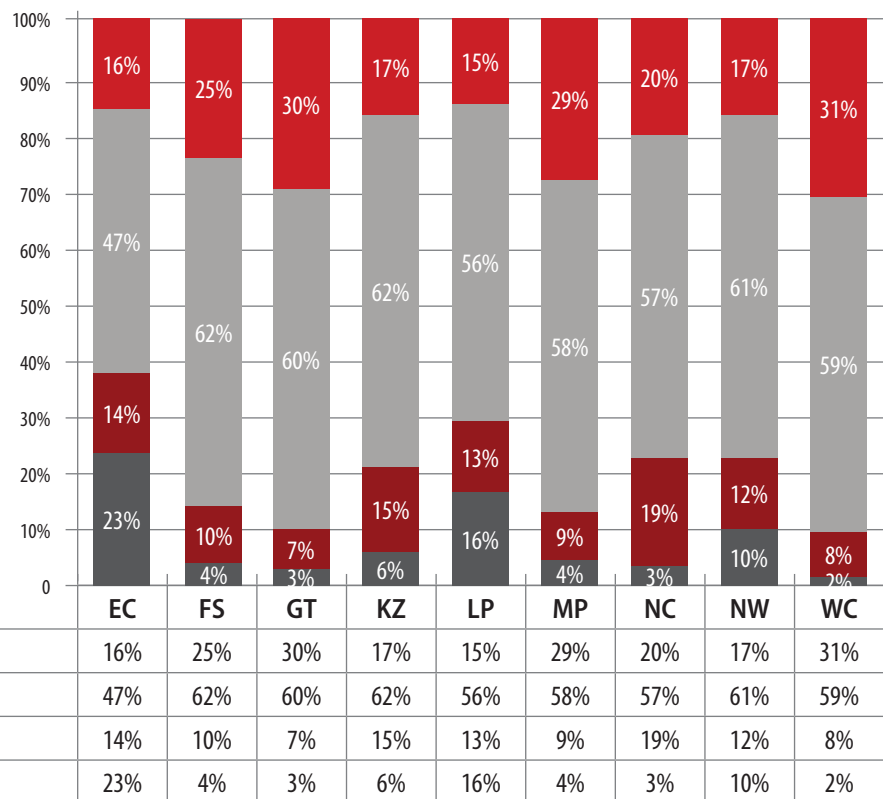


FIGURE 9: Satisfaction with district visits by province

The descriptive analysis showed little variation in satisfaction levels by school type, which is confirmed in Table 4. However, the table does show significant differences in levels of satisfaction between schools that receive visits and those that do not. For primary schools, receiving at least one visit makes an impact on the satisfaction level, while for secondary schools, a higher frequency of visits (more than seven) is needed to make a large impact.

There are higher levels of satisfaction among primary schools in the Free State and secondary schools in KZN compared to the same categories of schools in the Eastern Cape, the reference province. Both primary and secondary Quintile 2 schools tend to be less satisfied than Quintile 1 schools and Quintile 3 primary schools. On the other hand, the identity of district officials does not affect school visit satisfaction levels, except for District Director visiting secondary schools.

Generally, secondary school principals tend to be more satisfied with district visits. Besides the frequency of visits, primary schools' satisfaction levels are higher when they receive visits that provide principal and school assessment support, and check quality and LTSM management. Primary schools are, however, less satisfied if the visit is made to conduct EMIS validation, presumably due to enrolment and school record concerns. In secondary schools, satisfaction is higher in the Free State compared to the Eastern Cape when they receive teaching, principal, and school assessment support. Secondary schools are less satisfied than those in the Eastern Cape if the purpose of the visit is checking assessment records. This is significant considering the high stakes matriculation examinations in secondary schools. All else being equal, overall, secondary schools (37 percentage points) are much more likely to be satisfied than primary (25 percentage points) schools.



BESIDES THE FREQUENCY OF VISITS, PRIMARY SCHOOLS' SATISFACTION LEVELS ARE HIGHER WHEN THEY RECEIVE VISITS THAT PROVIDE PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SUPPORT, AND CHECK QUALITY AND LTSM MANAGEMENT.

**TABLE 4:** Regression of the likelihood of being satisfied or very satisfied with district official visits

	PRIMARY	SECONDARY
1 visit	<i>(reference category)</i>	
2 visits	.11*	.15
3 to 6 visits	.057	.18*
7 to 12 visits	.15**	.22**
More than 12	.098	.25***
EC	<i>(reference category)</i>	
FS	.26***	.11
GT	.1	.021
KZ	.024	.11*
LP	.016	-.093
MP	.087	.037
NC	.067	-.086
NW	-.042	.0094
WC	.069	.092
Quintile 1	<i>(reference category)</i>	
Quintile 2	-.093**	-.12**
Quintile 3	-.096*	-.037
Quintile 4	-.063	-.0043
Quintile 5	.0055	-.013
District director	-.015	.1**
Circuit manager	.074	-.16
Curriculum /subject advisor	.054	.02
Educator development official	-.015	-.02
Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) coordinator	.045	.012
Teacher support	.022	.2***
Principal Support	.24***	.12**
HoD Support	.033	.033
School-based support team support	-.067	-.018
School assessment team (SAT) support	.046	.12**
Checking educator assessment records	-.11*	-.11
Quality	.25***	.09
Checking school infrastructure	.018	.012
Checking LTSM management	.15***	.0051
Validation of EMIS information	-.13***	-.027
Checking HR matters	-.014	-.015
Constant	.25***	.37**
Observations	755	799
R-squared	0.281	0.267

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001"



## CONCLUSION

District visits are an important aspect of support and oversight in the schooling system in many countries, including South Africa. Our analysis acknowledges the possible interaction between satisfaction levels with a visit by district officials and the nature of their visit, and provides descriptive statistics on the frequency of visits and ratings. Anecdotally, visits that deal with policy compliance appear more satisfactory to principals than those that rigorously interrogate accountability arrangements and performance (such as adherence to technical standards and in-depth examination of assessment records). This is borne out by the data. Principals in primary schools are less likely to be satisfied if the purpose of a district official's visit is to conduct an EMIS validation, perhaps because validation discussions involve robust conversations about adherence to information processing and records management standards. The probability of secondary schools being satisfied is high when they receive teaching, principal and school assessment support, but less so if the purpose of the visit is checking assessment records. The number of and satisfaction with visits by district officials provide some insight into the dynamics of dual accountability at the boundary between the school and district. In general. Visits to schools have increased across the country between the 2011 and 2017 surveys, and satisfaction levels with these visits are encouragingly high. However, the division of labour between district officials (subject advisers and circuit managers in particular), needs attention, as they appear to carry out similar activities at schools.

Secondary schools in urban contexts are more likely to receive more visits, as academic performance at secondary level is the dominant indicator of performance in the country's education system. Larger, more well-resourced urban schools receive the most visits. This does not augur well for rural schools serving the poorest communities, whose performance is of particular concern in the bi-modal patterns of performance encountered in the South African education system. Though the data indicates that satisfaction with visits by district officials has generally improved, they need to use such visits to start and sustain conversations with schools that emphasise accountability for academic performance in ways that help to improve learning outcomes. For district officials to carry out "Direct support of learning and teaching in schools through school visits, classroom observation, feedback reports, consultations and other means", the content of district official visits must be strengthened beyond only information exchange and policy compliance.



... THE CONTENT OF DISTRICT OFFICIAL VISITS MUST BE STRENGTHENED BEYOND ONLY INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND POLICY COMPLIANCE.



DESPITE THESE LIMITATIONS,  
SATISFACTION LEVELS  
PROVIDE A MEASURE THAT  
CAN BE LINKED TO THE  
NUMBER OF VISITS TO  
SCHOOLS WITH DIFFERENT  
CHARACTERISTICS.

We acknowledge the limitation of principals' satisfaction levels as an objective measure of district performance, as satisfaction ratings may be influenced by perceptions, which limits their usefulness for trying to discern causal relationships. Factors other than those measured and used in this analysis may be driving the satisfaction levels observed in the survey data.

Despite these limitations, satisfaction levels provide a measure that can be linked to the number of visits to schools with different characteristics. Further research building on this analysis could include the use of data on learning outcomes (from standardised assessments of examinations), to assess how satisfaction levels are related to such school outcomes. School monitoring surveys could also further explore principal perceptions by focusing on those aspects of support that are most proximal to learning and instruction, as well as enquiring about reasons for satisfaction ratings. Principals could also be asked to provide estimates of time and effort that they use in interacting with district officials to improve instruction, and to identify concrete examples of satisfactory interactions with district officials during visits, in order to increase the credibility of the ratings attached to these interactions.

Our analysis confirms that although district visits improved both in frequency and in satisfaction of principals between 2011 and 2017, school and district personnel could use those visits to: better reflect on school-level performance; identify opportunities for academic improvement; and design tangible support programmes for instruction so that schools are well-positioned to improve their learning outcomes. visits to rural and primary schools need particular attention, and primary schools need a measure of academic achievement which is standardised across districts so that officials can prioritise support and their instructional and school improvement efforts.



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