



2017 School Monitoring Survey: Executive Summary

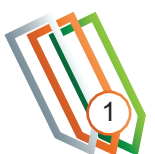


basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



2017 School Monitoring Survey: Executive Summary



Background

In 2017, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) commissioned a national survey to measure public ordinary schools' progress towards achieving the key goals and indicators set out in Action Plan 2019 and in the Medium Term Strategic Framework 2014-2019. In assessing how far these goals and indicators are being met, the School Monitoring Survey (SMS) 2017 builds on the SMS 2011, allowing the Department to track our delivery progress over this period.

The SMS focused on gathering information which is not available in other data systems or is collected in a different way and requires validation. In 2017, the SMS focused on 13 of the 15 Action Plan indicators which were measured in 2011. In addition, the SMS collected information about teacher and principal views on provincial, national and international assessments, provisioning for Grade R learners in schools, the value and use of the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS), and the feasibility of implementing the policy on Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIALS).

A key objective of this study was to ensure the quality and relevance of data obtained for SMS 2017. Ambiguities detected in the SMS 2011 study were addressed by revising and adding survey questions. Given that the construction of indicators often entails reducing a complex matter to a single number, case studies were also conducted to further understand the mechanisms driving the results in certain indicators. A separate report was produced to report on the findings of the qualitative study.

Methodology

The SMS 2017 was conducted in a nationally representative sample of 1000 schools offering Grade 6, as well as in a nationally representative sample of 1000 schools offering Grade 12. Only schools categorised as public ordinary schools formed part of the sample. The samples were designed to allow for reporting by province and by official school poverty quintile status with an acceptable degree of precision. The survey instruments were developed to ensure comparability with SMS 2011 data and to enhance the validity and reliability of the data. The instruments were administered in an interview style to principals, Grade 3, 6, 9 and 12 teachers, LTSM coordinators and the LSEN representatives. Document analysis and school observation were also used in the study.

Key findings

Indicator 1: The percentage of schools where all allocated teaching posts are filled.

The percentage of schools where all allocated teaching posts were filled in 2017 was 78%. In 80% of primary and 72% of secondary schools, all teacher posts were filled in 2017. The national average for primary and secondary schools combined appeared to have increased from 69% to 78% since the 2011 survey. However, caution should be taken in interpreting this statistic since temporarily filled allocated posts in 2011 may or may not have been reported as vacant due to the ambiguity in the questions used in 2011.

Indicator 2: The average number of hours per year that teachers spend on professional development activities.

The national average of 40 hours spent by teachers on professional development in 2017 equates to just over half the 2024 target of 80 hours per year. Fewer hours (36 on average) were devoted by primary school teachers to capacity development compared with the average of 44 hours by secondary school teachers. School principals spent an average of 43 hours per year on capacity development.

In 2017, significant¹ increases in the average hours spent on professional development were evident among secondary school teachers, with the overall average improving from 28 hours to 44 hours. For Limpopo, the increase was 19 hours on average, for Gauteng 34 hours on average and the Western Cape reported an increase of 52 hours on average. The overall average hours of professional development per teacher per year reflected an improvement since 2011, up from 36 to 40 hours.

1 The adjective 'significant' is only used in the case where a difference is statistically significant.

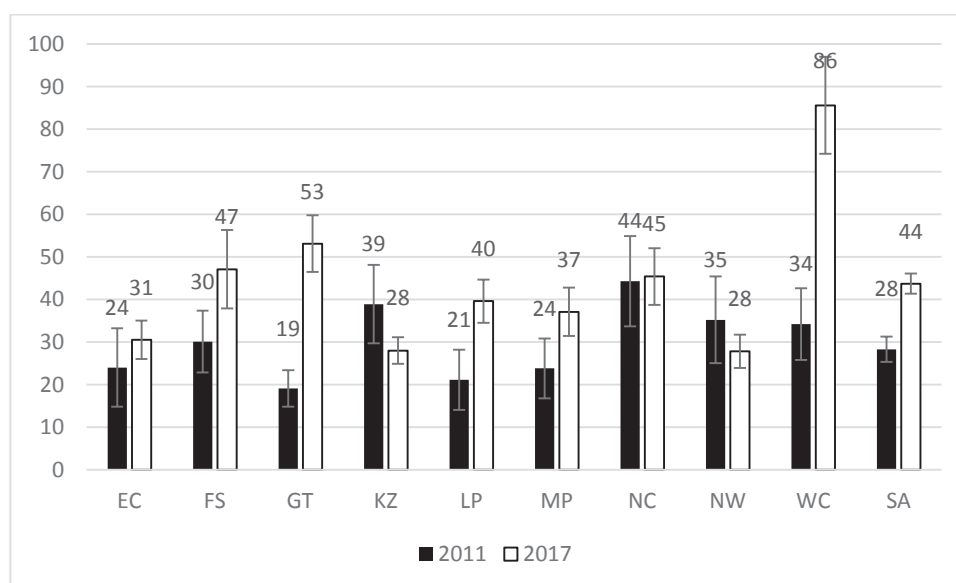


Figure 1: The average number of hours per year that Secondary School teachers spend on professional development

The qualitative study revealed the need for differentiation in the training that is provided to teachers, since well-seasoned and experienced educators often receive the same training as less experienced or struggling educators. Teachers also expressed the need for mentoring opportunities and monitoring of classroom practices through principal and head of department classroom visits. Unions were identified as potentially beneficial role players, especially in cases where insufficient district support means that schools are left without guidance or opportunities for professional development. Finally, the increasing beneficial role of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) emerged as a strong theme, with educators providing evidence of where such PLC's provided them with support and opportunities for development.

Indicator 3: The percentage of teachers absent from school on an average day.

The national average for teacher absence on an average day was 10%, with wide variations noted within primary and secondary schools, as well as across provinces and quintiles. Teacher absence in the Northern Cape (13%) and North-West and the Eastern Cape (both at 12%) was higher than the national average of 9% for primary-school teachers, whereas teacher absence in Limpopo (6%) and Free State (7%) were lowest. Comparison with the findings of SMS 2011 shows an increase in the national aggregate absence (from 8% to 10%) on an average day. It should be noted that this national absence rate is roughly in line with international norms and that the small change compared to what was measured in 2011 should not be interpreted as evidence of a systematic or substantial increase in teacher absence.

Indicator 4: The percentage of learners, per grade and subject, with access to the required textbooks and workbooks for the entire school year.

Access to textbooks was consistently high but varied across grades, with about 85% of Grade 12 learners having access to Home Language (HL), First Additional Language (FAL), Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy textbooks. About 81% of Grade 9 learners had access to Home Language (HL), First Additional Language (FAL) and Mathematics textbooks, while for Grade 6, this was approximately 84% of learners.

Approximately 95% of learners across all quintiles had access to their own workbooks in both the Home Language and Mathematics. The DBE Workbook programme, which has been rolled out and expanded since 2011, has clearly contributed to a massive increase in the availability and use of learning materials in South African classrooms. Compared to textbooks and workbooks, the level of learner access to readers and works of fiction for HL and FAL was somewhat lower, with approximately 68% of Grade 6 and Grade 9 learners having had access, while the corresponding figure for Grade 12 learners was 79%.

Indicator 5: The percentage of learners in schools with a library or media centre meeting certain minimum standards.

One of the major sectoral improvements observed through this survey has been the increased provision of libraries or media centres to schools, with the largest improvements having been experienced among the no-fee schools. At a national level, learners' access to libraries increased significantly from 45% in 2011 to 62% in 2017. It is encouraging to note that this increase has been largely pro-poor with the largest improvements having been among Quintile 1 to 4 schools. The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo were the provinces which have shown the largest increases in providing access to a library/ media centre, although a lot more progress in these provinces is still needed.

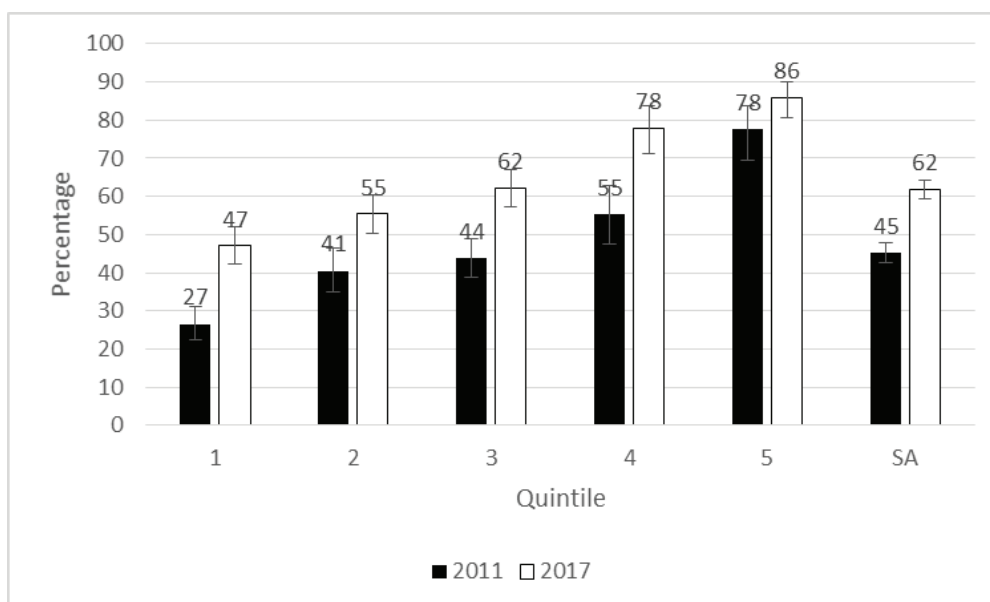


Figure 2: The percentage of learners in schools with a library/media centre, by Quintile

Indicator 6: The percentage of schools with the minimum set of management documents at the required standard.

This indicator was constructed by evaluating whether a school could produce a specified set of 10 management documents. Certain documents were almost universally available in schools (such as the teacher attendance register and the class registers). For this indicator, however, a school is only classified as compliant when all 10 documents are available. Therefore, even though each individual document was observed in a majority of schools, full compliance was only recorded in 31% of schools. The values for, primary and secondary schools were 33% and 26% respectively.

Schools in the provinces of Gauteng, Mpumalanga (both at around 45%) and Western Cape (65%) significantly exceeded the national average of 31%. At schools in the Eastern Cape, the availability of these set of documents was significantly lower than the national average. Academic improvement plans and non-textbook asset registers were the management documents which were most often found to be missing. Taking this into consideration, 75% and 72% of primary and secondary schools respectively produced at least 8 out of the 10 documents. Nevertheless, following the same methodology as in 2011, the level of compliance with the school management indicator decreased between 2011 and 2017 from 44% to 31%.

The qualitative study indicates that the presence of management documents could not be linked to district functionality. One would expect that more schools would comply with this indicator in better functioning schools and districts, but evidence to support this expectation could not be found. Even within districts, evidence was found of well-functioning schools that could not present the required documents at all. However, in such cases, schools would acknowledge that the required documents are used informally, in different formats and are tailored to their specific needs.

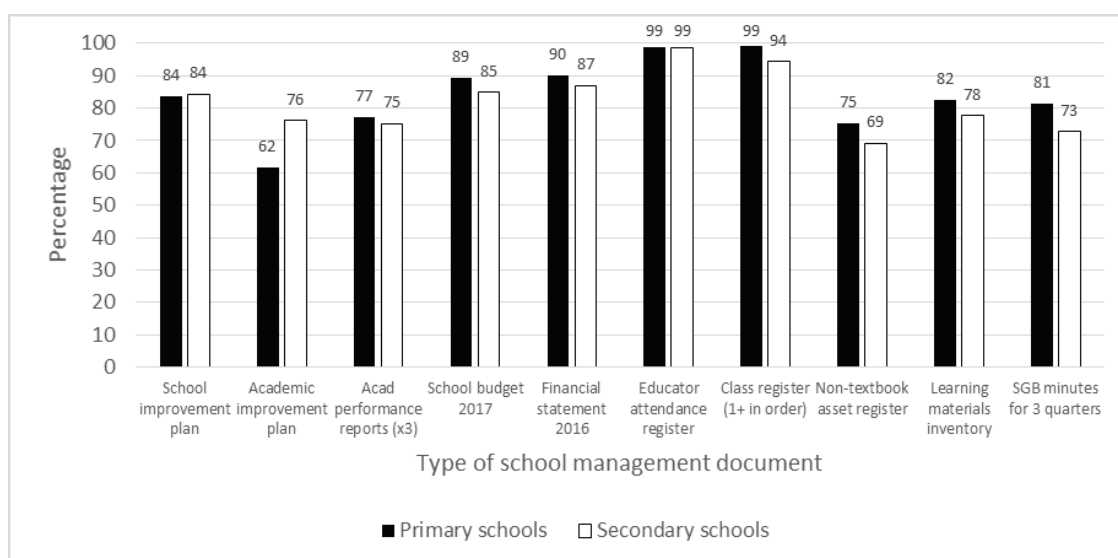


Figure 3: The percentage of schools the produced the minimum set of management documents

Indicator 7: The percentage of schools where the School Governing Body (SGB) meets the minimum criteria of effectiveness.

Nationally, 62% of schools complied with the requirement of having the four identified SGB functions in place (i.e. SGB composition adheres to the policy, SBG meetings are recorded, SGB is involved in key management activities of the school, and SGB has met at least once a term), and having had three sets of meeting minutes. SGBs met the minimum criteria of effectiveness in 65% of primary schools and at 55% of secondary schools. The level of compliance increased significantly from 54% in 2011 to 62% in 2017, with compliance at Quintile 1 schools having improved most substantially from 50% to 64%. Provincially, the Northern Cape, North West, Free State and the Western Cape showed the largest improvements.

The qualitative research component indicated that good relations exist between the SGBs and school staff in general and that they are characterised by cooperation and a committed sense of putting the learners' needs first. It emerged that SGB's could potentially play increasing roles, but only if more training on their roles and responsibilities is provided, especially in areas of finance. In deep rural areas SGB functioning faces constraints, where SGB members live far from schools and regular visits to the schools are not always possible.

Indicator 8: The percentage of learners in schools that are funded at the minimum level.

In order to enable meaningful measurement of this indicator, data was collected for the most recent completed year (2016) as well as for 2017 up until the day of the survey. Similarly data was collected for 2010 and 2011 in the previous survey. For 2016, 75% of learners were in schools where the expected amount or more had been transferred to the school. With regards to the communication of the funding that schools will be receiving, over 95% of principals indicated that they had received letters stating the allocations for 2016 and 2017, and in 90% of schools such a letter was seen by the field worker in 2017. However, the "per learner amount" was stated in the letter for only 76% of schools.

For 2016, the same percentage of learners (75%), compared to 2010, were in schools where the expected amount or more had reportedly been transferred. The 2011 and 2017 surveys were conducted before the end of the school year and one can therefore compare schools that had already received at least half of their allocation for the year of the survey, noting that some schools may still have received their allocations after the data was obtained. For 2011, this figure was 59%, while in 2017 the figure was 66%. Given the proviso mentioned it could only tentatively be viewed as an improvement from 2011 to 2017.

Indicator 9: The percentage of schools which have acquired the full set of financial management responsibilities on the basis of an assessment of their financial management capacity.

This indicator was constructed by asking principals three questions based on the schools' responsibility for certain financial functions. The principals' answers to these questions were taken as indicators of the presence of these financial management functions at their respective schools. It is worth noting, however, that the focus of the questions was not on the *acquisition* of the responsibilities but rather whether schools are *exercising* the responsibilities. Changes in provincial practice particularly around LTSM procurement have a bearing on the interpretation of this indicator. Despite this issue, the indicator was retained as defined in 2011 to allow for comparability.

Nationally, 57% of schools (i.e. 56% primary and 60% secondary) reported to be exercising the full set of financial management responsibilities in terms of Section 21 of the South African Schools Act (i.e., maintaining and improving the school's facilities, purchasing required materials or equipment and paying for services). Among primary schools, Quintile 5 schools were more likely to have the full set of responsibilities than Quintile 1 schools, but the same trend was not apparent among secondary schools.

Between 2011 and 2017, there was a substantial decline in this national indicator value from 74% to 57%. It is important to note that this change is being driven by certain provinces, in particular the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Limpopo, where a deliberate strategy of centralised procurement of learning materials has been increasingly pursued. The change in the indicator value is therefore not necessarily a reflection of deterioration in school financial management capacity, and may even be a reflection of an improved practice at the level of provincial education departments.

Indicator 10: The percentage of schools which comply with nationally-determined minimum physical infrastructure standards.

Schools were classified as adhering to the minimum criteria for physical infrastructure if sanitation (toilets), electricity and running water were all in working condition on the day of the survey. It is important to note that the SMS measured whether these school facilities (such as running water) were in working condition on the day of the survey (something which is beyond the control of education departments) rather than only if the infrastructure had been installed.

Nationally, 59% of schools complied with all the determined minimum physical infrastructure standards and it was evident that certain important facilities were not universally available (only 76% of schools had running water and 80% had adequately functioning sanitation). This value was only marginally improved from 2011.

The SMS also measured the percentage of schools with adequate classroom infrastructure in 2017. This aspect of school infrastructure will become part of the official norms and standards in 2020. Classrooms were considered as sufficient if the observed number of classrooms was equal to or more than the school enrolment divided by the norm of 40 learners per class. Nationally, 67% of schools had sufficient classrooms, with considerable variation across provinces.

It has to be noted that reporting based on the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) produces figures much higher in relation to learners with access to running water. The reason for the difference is that the SMS 2017 followed stringent observation criteria on the day of the visit, including the functionality of services, while the NEIMS data is based on official delivery history and records about the installation of infrastructure.

Indicator 11: The percentage of schools with at least one educator who has received specialised training in identifying and supporting learners with special educational needs (LSEN).

Improved support to learners with special educational needs has been a major focus of the DBE in recent years. For example, in 2018 for the first time, the National Senior Certificate examinations can be taken using sign language. The SMS shows that 78% of schools nationally complied with the set standard of having at least one educator who has received formal/informal training or an LSEN qualification to provide them with the specialisation for identifying and

supporting learners with special education needs. Nationally, the secondary school indicator value was 12 percentage points lower than for primary schools. In just more than 60% of schools, teachers reported being somewhat confident or confident in supporting LSEN, in almost 20% they were not confident at all, whereas in another 20%, they were very confident.

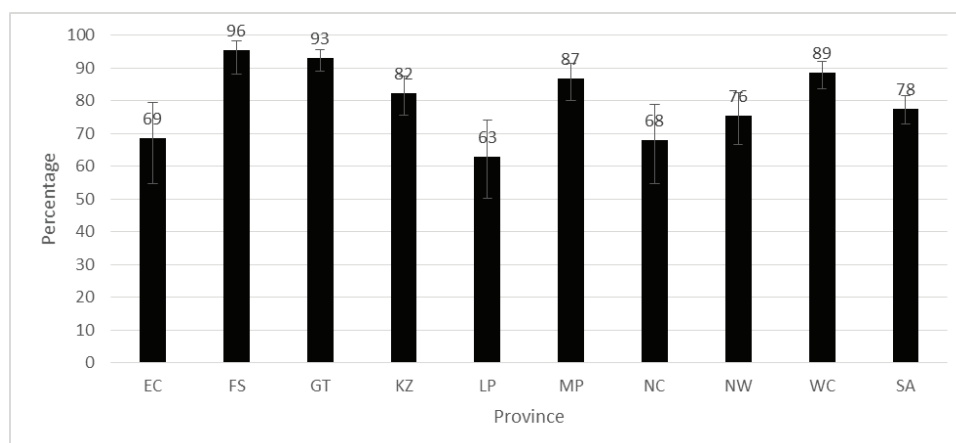


Figure 4: Percentage of schools with at least one educator who has received specialised training in the identification and support of special needs

Indicator 12: The percentage of schools visited at least twice a year by district officials for monitoring and support purposes.

Nationally, 84% of schools had been visited at least twice by district officials for monitoring and support purposes. This value can be regarded as a significant achievement in light of the huge distances that must be covered by district officials in some of the more rural areas. A substantively larger percentage of secondary schools (94%) than primary schools (80%) received at least two visits from district officials in 2017. These differences were substantive for schools in Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. For primary and secondary schools combined, the national percentage of schools receiving at least two monitoring and support visits from district officials revealed no statistical differences between 2011 and 2017.

Indicator 13: The percentage of school principals rating the support services of districts as being satisfactory.

For primary and secondary schools combined, 78% of principals were satisfied with monitoring and support visits by district officials. The national average for secondary schools (78%) was similar to the national average for primary schools (77%). Although not substantively so, Quintile 5 primary school principals reported greater satisfaction with monitoring and support visits by district officials than school principals in Quintile 1 to 4 primary schools.

The qualitative evidence collected for indicators 12 and 13, suggests that district visits sometimes occur in a haphazard fashion without long-term planning or confirmation of visits to schools. Schools experience visits to be erratic, varying in frequency and purpose. While no distinct patterns emerge from participants, it is clear that more classroom support is needed during these visits where subject advisors have the freedom to venture into the classroom and advise the educator on areas of improvement, areas of satisfactory progress or areas where educators are excelling and need confirmation of this from the subject advisor who has been to the classroom.

Additional information on Common examinations, National/International Assessments, Grade R, Use of information systems and Teaching of Languages

A large majority of teachers (90%) found common examinations useful. However, while 87% of teachers and principals supported a common examination at Grade 9 level, only 66% of them supported such an examination at Grade 3 level. Provincial assessments were rated as useful by 91% of teachers and 95% of principals.

According to both teachers and principals, the Annual National Assessments conducted by DBE served a useful purpose. They underpinned the provision of relevant feedback, particularly to teachers, as teachers marked the scripts of their learners themselves. The majority found that the ANA results assisted them in planning revision with their learners before final examinations. There appears to be room for improvement in relation to the extent to which district and/or provincial offices can provide principals and teachers written feedback about assessment results, and the usefulness of such feedback. It is planned that the newly designed national assessment system will serve many of these purposes and improve upon the ANA system.

Ninety-one percent of primary schools had Grade R classes, with an average of 50 Grade R learners per school. About 68% of Grade 1 learners had completed Grade R in government schools. Other household survey data indicates that nearly 95% of Grade 1 learners have completed Grade R in any institution.

Approximately 92% of schools make use of the SA-SAMS electronic information system, if one excludes the Western Cape, which uses a different electronic system. Most schools use SA-SAMS for learner registration, reporting on assessments and submitting data to the Department but only 58% of schools use SA-SAMS for financial management.


Regarding the Incremental Introduction of African Languages policy (IIAL), 73% of principals in primary schools and 70% in secondary schools reported that they were aware of the IIAL policy. At Quintile 5 primary schools (which is where the policy is most likely to affect schooling), 73% of principals indicated that it would be feasible to introduce the IIALS policy in their schools. The corresponding figure at secondary schools was 61%.

Conclusion

The 2017 SMS allows the Department to both reflect on the progress made in terms of service delivery, as well as focus on the areas which will require further support. One of the major achievements that emanated from this survey has been the increased provision of libraries or media centres to schools, with the largest improvements having been experienced among no-fee schools. A further accomplishment is a substantial increase in the percentage of schools where the School Governing Body (SGB) meets the minimum criteria of effectiveness, with the largest improvements seen among Quintile 1 schools. Although not strictly comparable, the survey also suggests that there may have been improvements among the number of schools where all allocated teaching posts were filled.

Finally, the 2017 SMS also provided insights on some interesting trends concerning school management practices, such as the increased practice of centralised procurement of textbooks by provinces, as well as the relative importance placed on various school management documents.

The information provided by the 2017 School Monitoring Survey will enable the Department to fulfil its mandate of monitoring and evaluating education provision across provinces and provide a more informed path towards realising our vision for schooling in 2030.



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