2017

schools that Work II

NEEDU
NATIONAL EDUCATION EVALUATION & DEVELOPMENT UNIT

schools that Work II

Lessons from the Ground

SUMMARY REPORT

basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Read to Lead
A Reading Nation is a Leading Nation

2030 NDP

Schools that Work II

Lessons from the Ground

Summary Report

NEEDU

NATIONAL EDUCATION EVALUATION & DEVELOPMENT UNIT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CEM	Council of Education Ministers
CIPO	Context- Input-Process-Output
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DET	Department of Education and Training
DOE	Department of Education
ELO	Expanded Learning Opportunities
FAL	First Additional Language
FET	Further Education and Training
HL	Home Language
HoA	House of Assembly
HOD	Head of Department
HoD	House of Delegates
IQMS	Internal Quality Management System
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
NDP	National Development Plan
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OSF	Out-of-School Factor
PED	Provincial Education Departments
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
PPN	Post Provisioning Norm
RCL	Representative Council for Learners
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
SGB	School Governing Body
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMT	School Management Team
WSE	Whole-School Evaluation

MINISTER'S FOREWORD

Earlier this year, I tasked the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) in the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to conduct a study on schools that work. Because performance in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations is an objective measure of the system, it was also used as a yardstick to identify schools that work. Whether schools cater for learners in the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase, or Further Education and Training (FET) Phase, the principles of running a functional school are universal. The NSC examinations are the final step; but each of the twelve years preceding this step, is equally important. Learners are very seldom successful in the FET Phase, if they have not achieved in the Senior Phase. Similarly, learners cannot be successful in the Senior Phase, if they have not achieved in the Intermediate Phase, and success in the Intermediate Phase is reliant on the mastering of the fundamental skills on the Foundation Phase.

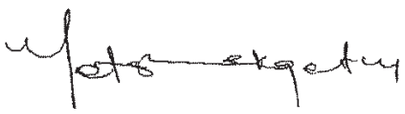
The teacher in the Foundation Phase may feel that she or he has very little to do with the Grade 12 learner some nine or more years later but to the contrary, if the fundamental literacy and numeracy skills are not in place, it is almost impossible for a learner to be successful in the NSC examinations. Likewise, if the initial cornerstones are not set in place in the Intermediate Phase, where learners are introduced to the basic principles of content subjects, extending and building their knowledge and skills in Senior and FET Phases becomes difficult. With regard to language, it is in the Intermediate Phase that learners need to transition from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn. If this vital stage is neglected, the mastery that learners need, in order to succeed in their further education, is significantly hampered.

It must be emphasised that although the study on *"Schools that Work II"* used schools that achieved well in the NSC examinations as a yardstick, many of the findings will be able to be used by schools, which cater for learners in the different phases in our educational system. This publication of the study on *"Schools that Work II"* contains findings, which convey best practices that are common to successful and improving schools. It is intended to start a conversation among all stakeholders—educators, learners, families, and communities, businesses, our social partners, and legislators on how to join ranks to increase excellence in our schools and districts. This is a challenge we must face together if all learners are to reach the high standards we now expect of them.

The bulk of this publication highlights best practices from top-performing schools serving learners from different socio-economic backgrounds. These practices can serve as a starting point for schools' self-introspection, and for schools to begin to develop their own vision on the kind of school that they want to become and to stimulate their thoughts about how to make their vision a reality. The intention is not to endorse any particular practice as the only route to improvement or to suggest that these practices are the definitive answers to school improvement. On the contrary, the purpose of sharing best practices in this publication is also to encourage meaningful reflection and discussion and to help schools develop shared goals for school improvement.

Sharing best practices should be an integral part of the work of an improving school. There are aspects of every school's work, which reflect the best of practice, which others can learn from. Districts can also draw upon this body of research to increase their understanding of the challenges and the potential they have for improving learning in all schools that they serve. If we move from the premise that says, "It takes the whole village to raise a child," then we must accept that the responsibility for raising a well-educated and civic-minded generation of children cannot rest solely with schools; it is a social and communal endeavour.

This publication therefore, provides some practical ways on how schools, parents, and the community can work together to ensure that schools are safe and secure spaces for quality teaching and learning, as well for accountable leadership, management and governance. I hope that you will find this compilation of best practices of practical use. I especially hope that it helps schools and districts – working alongside parents and communities – to create the habits of reflection, inquiry, and action that fuel continuous school improvement. I am confident that this publication will contribute immensely in making a difference in the teaching, learning, leadership, management and governance standards within our schools.



MRS AM MOTSHEKGA, MP
MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION
DATE: 15 September 2017

INTRODUCTION

As learner performance and achievement are increasingly placed under scrutiny, teachers are under more pressure than ever to produce good results in the international assessments and national assessments, including the National Senior Certificate (NSC). In this era of accountability, the performance of *all* learners is counted and schools must help every learner to succeed. In South Africa, while many schools are struggling to address low levels of learner achievement, others—referred to as *schools that work* in this report—have made remarkable progress not only in improving the NSC results but also in narrowing the achievement gap between top-performing learners and those that are struggling or lagging behind.

What makes top-performing schools work? The question resonates in an era when turning around chronically low-performing schools, especially those that serve large portions of children from poor backgrounds, tops the national agenda. International research has applied complex analytical tools to identify particular practices and policies that generate real and lasting improvements in learning outcomes.

Becoming a top-performing school takes many years of hard work. There is no silver bullet—no single thing a school can do to ensure high learner performance. The present study confirms local and international research findings that there is no standalone factor that defines an effective school. Nevertheless, different factors are at play within a multifaceted system to promote learning.

This report recounts how 111 high schools are able to produce quality results in the NSC examinations, narrow the achievement gap among learners and sustain their success over time.

In this report, we examine best practices for improving learner achievement, including strategies for engaging learners and improving learning outcomes. Among these practices, some consistently emerge as the key ingredients in successful schools.

We have organised this report into three parts, as follows:

- **Part I** describes the research methods, including the conceptual framework.
- **Part II** examines best practices, which schools that work associate with their success in improving learning outcomes and closing the achievement gap among learners. The best practices are summarised in this report but are discussed in sufficient detail in the full report[1].
- **Part III** presents conclusions and recommendations to school managers, district managers and policy makers about how to evaluate various strategies to improve learning outcomes and close the achievement gap.

Two additional sections, which are excluded in this report, are included in the full report. These are as follows:

- **Part IV** reviews literature regarding factors or practices that account for the ability of schools to be effective in promoting learning and at closing achievement gaps, especially schools that serve learners from less privileged backgrounds—that otherwise lack productive learning outside school.
- **Part V** presents a brief analysis of the NSC results with a view to locating the sampled schools in their performance context.

[1] The full report is available on the Department of Basic Education website: www.education.gov.za. NEEDU can be reached at (012) 357 4231

PART I: METHODOLOGY

This research followed qualitative methods.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that the present study sought to address are:

- *What are the characteristics of the schools that work in South Africa?*
- *How do schools in the lower quintiles (quintiles 1 to 3) succeed against all odds?*

Because learner performance in the NSC examinations is the objective measure of the system, it was used as a yardstick to identify schools that work. This study looked beyond curriculum delivery. It also sought to establish how schools' culture or climate created an environment where learners are afforded a well-rounded education.

1.2 STUDY DESCRIPTION

In this study, a qualitative, non-experimental, and descriptive approach was followed. This approach was seen as ideal because the aim was to capture in-depth views of both the teachers and their learners. Researchers had no pre-determined or pre-conceived ideas or views about what makes a school perform well. Nor did they allow their biases influence how schools narrated their stories of success.

1.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The study adopted the pre-visit questionnaire, focus group discussion methods and documentary analysis to collect data.

Pre-visit questionnaire: The first set of study data was based on the questionnaire method. A questionnaire was sent to all sampled schools prior to school visits to gather contextual information.

Focus group discussion: In each sampled school, focus-group discussions, using unstructured interviews, were conducted with school management teams (SMTs), teachers and learners. Schools were allowed to tell their stories without interruptions from researchers. All interviews were audio-recorded and were later transcribed word-for-word before they were analysed.

Documentary Analysis: Researchers collected a set of documents from each school visited, including mark schedules.

1.4 DATA ANALYSIS

A team of five researchers were trained to analyse qualitative data using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory. In grounded theory, procedures and techniques for analysing qualitative data involve *open* coding, *axial* coding and *selective* coding. Each of these techniques is briefly discussed below:

Open coding: A team of researchers took each interview transcription and conducted analyses line-by-line, by sentence or paragraph. As far as possible, data in this study was labelled using the same *names* as dimensions of schools in the Context-Input-Process-Output conceptual framework, which was used in this study. This framework is described in Section 1.5 (Figure 1) below.

Once concepts have been identified, they are then grouped to minimise their number. The process of grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena is called *categorising*. In this study, six *categories* or *themes* were identified through open coding analysis. These themes are discussed in Part II in this report.

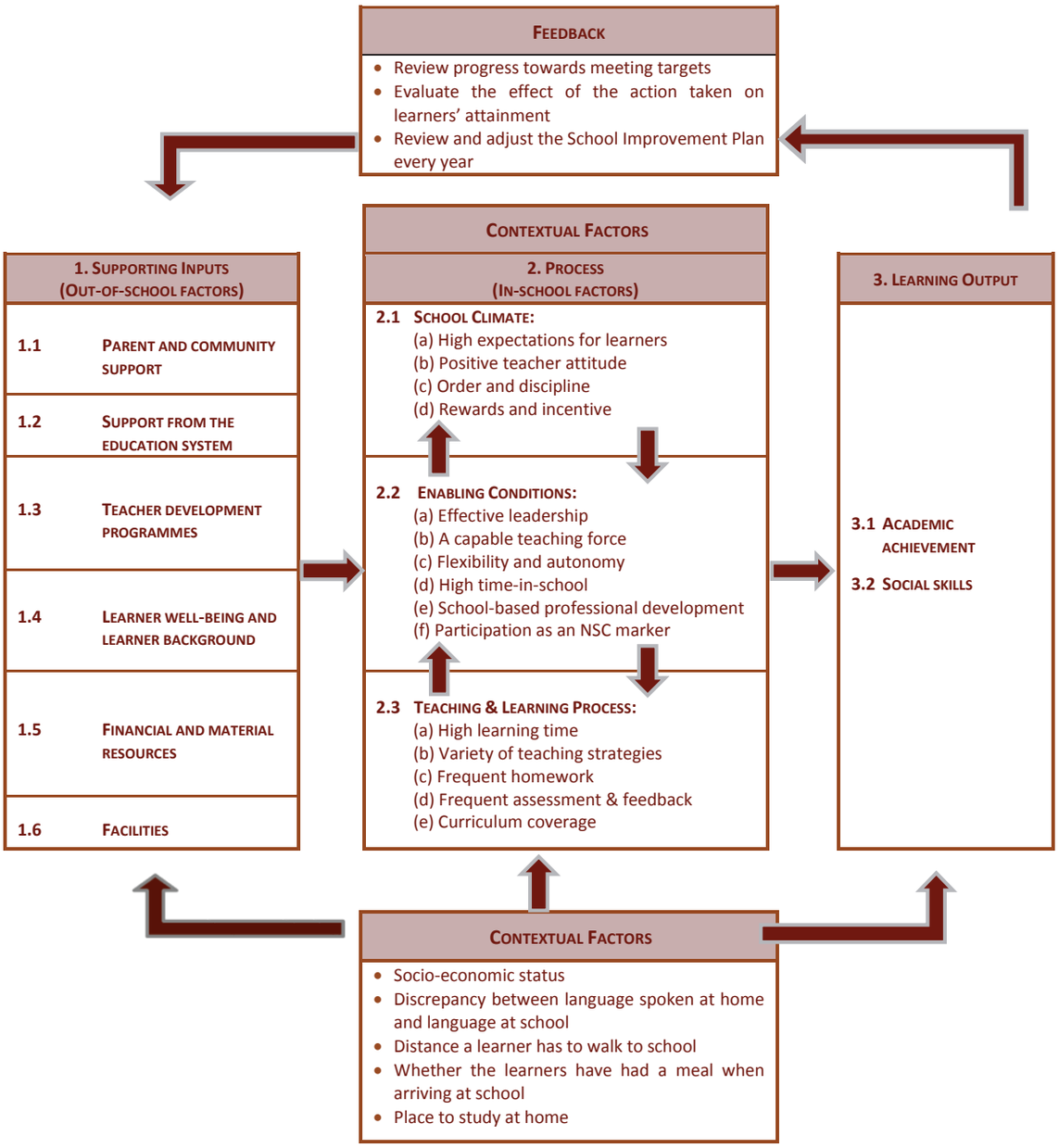
Axial coding involves putting qualitative data back together in new ways after open coding and making connections between *categories* and their *subcategories*. The connection between categories and their subcategories in the present study is illustrated in Figure 2 in Part II.

Selective coding is the process of selecting the *core category*, systematically relating it to other categories and validating those relationships. In this study, the "learning outcomes" was identified as the core category.

The interconnectedness among the six categories, identified through axial coding, in relation to the learning outcomes, the core category, is illustrated in Figure 3 in Part II.

1.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the present study, we employed the Context-Input-Process-Output (CIPO) framework (illustrated in Figure 1 below) to explore the myriad factors that account for the ability of schools to be effective in promoting learning and at closing achievement gaps.



Source: Adapted from Heneveld & Craig (1996)
Figure 1: Context-Input-Process-Output model

1.6 THE SAMPLE

In June 2007, the former Minister of Education, Mrs Naledi Pandor, MP, established a Committee to conduct a study on schools in the middle quintiles (i.e. quintile 2 to 4) that had performed well in the NSC examinations. Called "Schools that Work," the Ministerial Committee was tasked with exploring, through a qualitative study, the circumstances under which these schools achieved good results, while others in the same situation did not.

In April 2017, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, commissioned the NEEDU to replicate a similar study, the *Schools that Work II* (hereafter also referred to as the 2017 study) to address a similar research question as in the 2007 *Schools that Work* study (hereafter also referred to as the 2007 study). In the 2017 study, a set of three criteria were used to select top-performing schools:

- A pass rate of 95% or above in the past five years (2012-2016);
- 100 or more candidates were presented in the 2016 NSC examinations; and
- The "inclusive basket of criteria" that are used for the NSC resulting (briefly described below).

In 2016, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) made a significant shift in the NSC resulting from reporting overall pass percentage to reporting the results in a more integrated approach. This approach involves re-directing the focus to six other important criteria or critical quality indicators, also called the *inclusive basket of indicators*. These indicators are listed in Table 1 below.

The inclusive basket of indicators is captured in a consolidated format, which includes a weighting based on the importance attached to each of these indicators. The computation of the percentage obtained for each of these indicators by school, district, province and nationally, as a factor of the weighting allocated, determines the final score (or the *basket score*).

Table 1: The inclusive basket of performance indicator weighting

INDICATOR	WEIGHTING	FACTOR	FINAL SCORE
Overall pass percentage	35%	0.35	35
Percentage passed Mathematics	10%	0.10	10
Percentage passed Physical Science	10%	0.10	10
Percentage attained bachelor passes	15%	0.15	15
Percentage attained distinctions	10%	0.10	10
Mathematics participation rate	10%	0.10	10
Throughput rate	10%	0.10	10
TOTAL	**100%**	**1**	**100**

A perfect *basket score* of 100% indicates a school that performs extremely well on all seven inclusive criteria. Basket scores were used to rank all schools in the country, which presented matric (Grade 12) candidates in the 2016 NSC examinations. An inclusive *basket score* of 70% in the 2016 NSC examinations was used as a cut-off point for a school to be included in the 2017 study.

Among the schools which met the three selection criteria, 111 schools were sampled. These schools are shown in Table 2 below. All quintile 1 to 3 schools, which met the selection criteria, were selected. However, only the highest-ranking quintile 4 and 5 schools in each province were sampled.

Table 2: A proportion of top-performing schools in different quintiles

PROVINCE	QUINTILES				
	1	2	3	4	5
E Cape	0	0	3	1	5
Free State	3	1	2	0	2
Gauteng	0	2	3	3	9
KZN	3	3	1	14	5
Limpopo	1	3	3	3	4
Mpumalanga	4	0	0	3	6
North West	0	0	1	5	6
N Cape	0	0	0	0	5
W Cape	0	0	0	0	7
TOTAL	**11**	**9**	**13**	**29**	**49**

This section addresses the question:

How do schools with exemplary achievement growth achieve such results?

The site visits allowed researchers to conduct a categorical analysis of teaching practices in the sampled schools.

In the same manner that the authors of *Schools that Work* (Christie, Butler and Potterton, 2007) identified the common practices of excellent organizations, this study also sought to identify the extent to which there was a common set of behaviours exhibited by the managers and teachers in schools with high achievement, mostly serving learners with poor socio-economic backgrounds.

2.1 IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

One of the most significant findings of the *School that Work II* study is the continuous nature of the success of the top-performing schools in the lower quintiles, despite the poverty of learners attending these schools, remains intractable. These schools have consistently performed well (with a pass rate of $\geq$ 95%) in past five years, even as the effects of poverty grow more onerous, as parents relying on social grant for their livelihood increases, and as parents are less likely to be at home before and after school because they work.

The message that "because of your gender or the colour of your skin or your socioeconomic status, you are relegated to a certain level of achievement" (as expressed by **School ML**-Quintile 1)—is not the language the top-performing schools in the present study use.

2.2 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

As noted in Section 1.4, Part I, in this report, different groups of common practices were inspected for further commonality and trends amongst the top-performing schools. Out of this process, six distinct broad *categories* or *themes* emerged. These themes are as follows:

- System's support and partnerships,
- Learner-centred climate,
- Enabling environment,
- School leadership and management,
- Professional development and collaboration, and
- Quality of teaching and learning.

Through *axial coding* of data, connections were made between the six *categories* and their *subcategories*. Figure 2 below illustrates the connection between *categories* (in the middle circle) and their *subcategories* (in the outer circle).

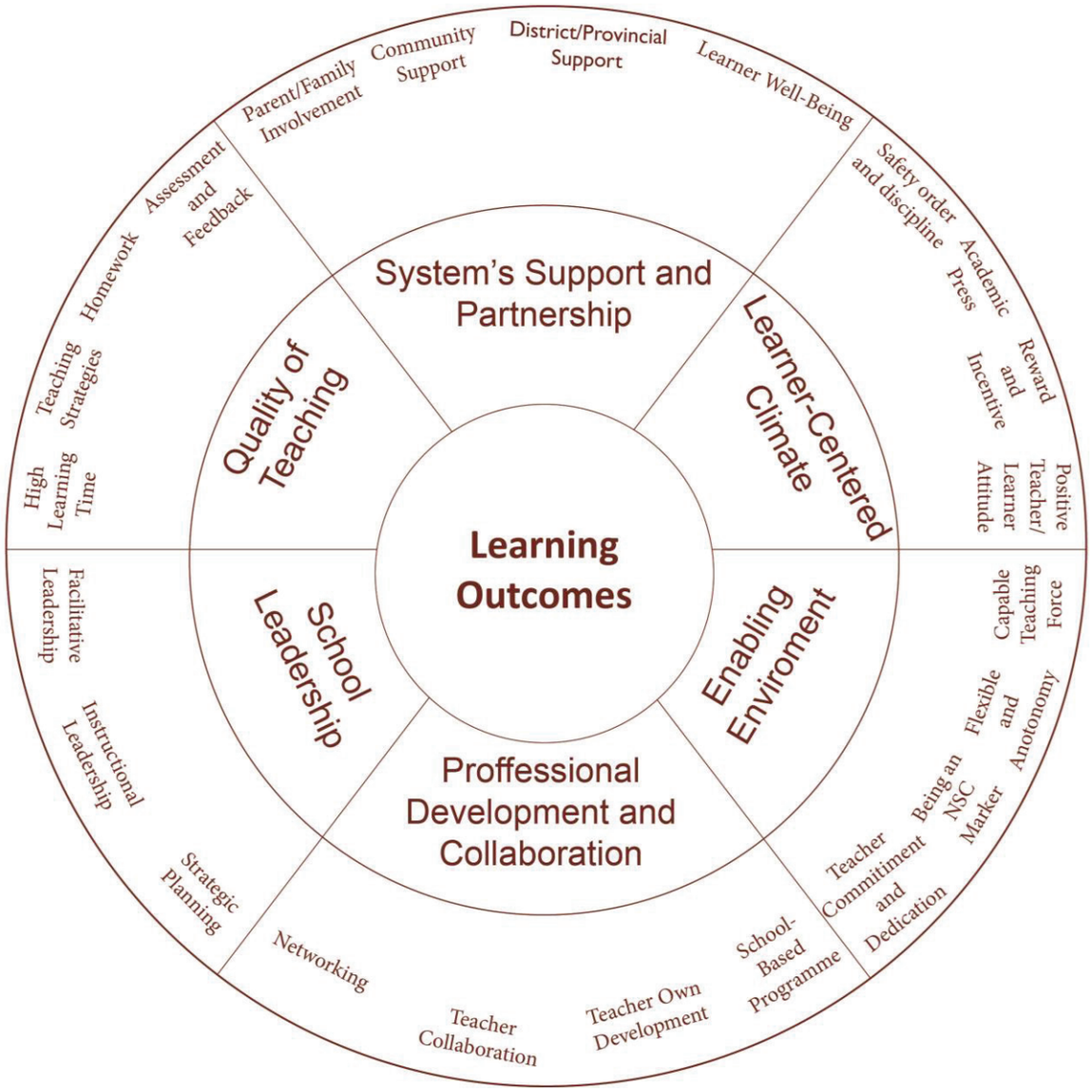


Figure 2 : Pathways to positive learning outcomes

The six themes should be viewed as integrated and interrelated—they are important to school effectiveness but not sufficient in isolation. Although they are treated discretely in this study, they are connected, impact on one another, and infuse the organization. Figure 3 illustrates the interconnectedness among the six themes, in relation to the learning outcomes, the *core category*.

Figure 3: Interconnections among the six essential supports for learning outcomes

2.3 SUPPORTING INPUTS [OUT-OF-SCHOOL FACTORS]

Inputs reflect the resources that schools have at their disposal and are generally divided into three categories: individual-level factors, group-level factors, and environmental factors. In the CIPO model, illustrated in Section 1.5 above, six *input* factors are identified as follows:

- Parent and community support
- Support from the education system
- Teacher development programmes
- Learner well-being and learner background
- Financial and material resources
- Facilities

Schools in the lower quintiles (i.e., quintiles 1-3) have little or no control over these factors, hence they are also labelled as "out-of-school" factors.

This section is divided into two parts, as follows:

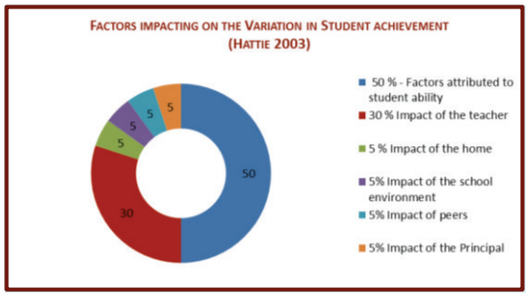
- **Part A** describes how each of these *inputs* or out-of-school factors affects the learning opportunities for learners in schools in the lower quintiles. In the full report, the circumstances, conditions or context under which these top-performing schools achieve good results in the NSC examinations are examined.
- **Part B** examines different approaches that top-performing schools in the lower quintiles use to reduce the impact of the out-of-school factors in their quest to deliver quality education to all learners.

2.3.1 THEME 1: SYSTEM'S SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP

A. HOW OUT-OF-SCHOOL FACTORS IMPACT LEARNERS' ABILITY TO LEARN

The *out-of-school factors* (OSFs), sometimes called "outside forces," affect the learning opportunities of learners, and accordingly limit what schools can accomplish on their own.

Hattie's (2009) synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement suggests that while the school does not have control over two OSFs that have a combined impact of 55% on learner achievement namely, learner ability and home background, it has control over four *in-school factors* that account for 45% of learner performance. These factors include teacher quality, school environment, peer support and Principal leadership. The strength of the impact of each of the latter factors is shown in Figure 4 below.

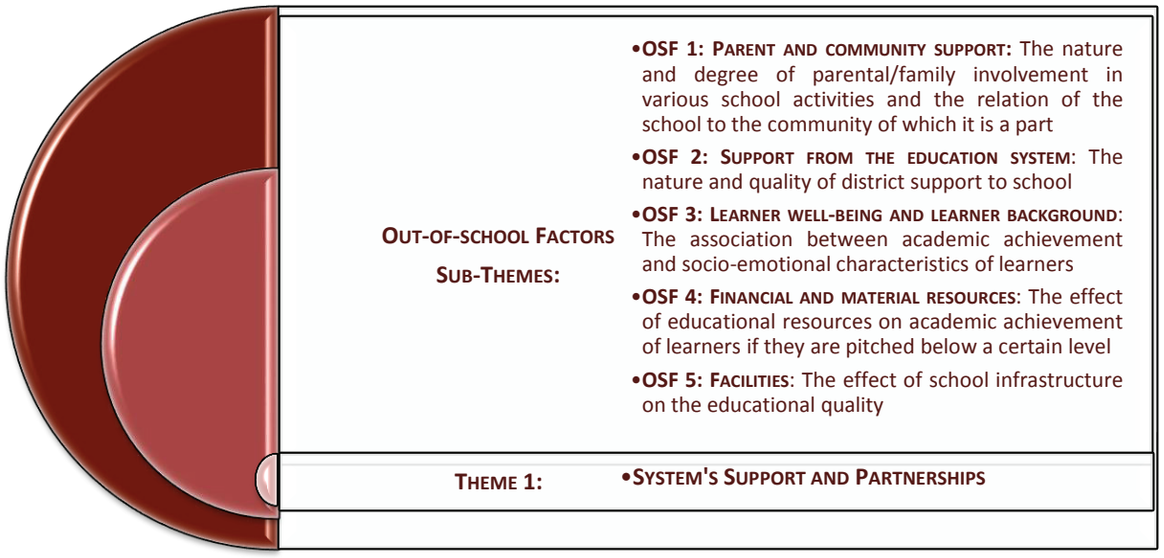


Source: Hattie (2003)
Figure 4: Factors impacting on the variation in learner achievement

Other studies (e.g., Grissom *et al,* 2013; and Sebastian and Allensworth, 2012) also corroborate Hattie's (2009) findings. These studies suggest that *in-school factors* that tend to have the most powerful influences on learning are teaching and Principal leadership. As noted in Section 2.4, where the *in-school factors* are discussed at length, findings in this study lend credence to these studies. First, we begin with a discussion on contextual factors, including the *out-of-school factors*, under which top-performing schools in this study achieve good results in the NSC examinations.

The extent to which OSFs impact on teaching in the sample of schools in this study corroborates the empirically supported premise that OSFs greatly influence school improvement and that OSFs are not distributed randomly throughout society. Instead, the negative effects of many OSFs are concentrated in the schools that serve learners from economically disadvantaged communities. This increases the burden on these schools to work harder than their more affluent counterparts to make broad

reductions in the achievement gap possible. OSFs are listed below and their impact on teaching in the sample of schools is discussed in detail in the full report.

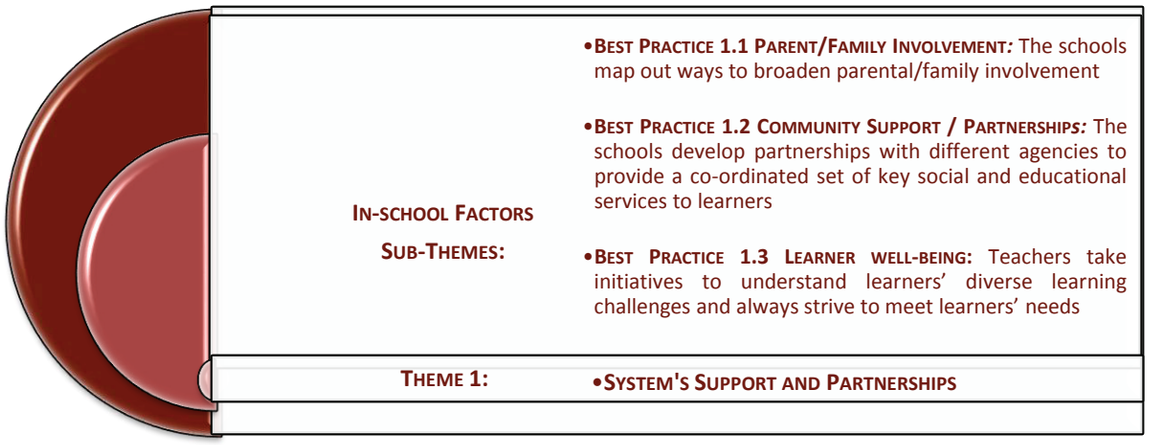


2.3.1 THEME 1: SYSTEM'S SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP

B. HOW TOP-PERFORMING SCHOOLS SEEK TO DEAL WITH OUT-OF-SCHOOL FACTORS

Described below are different approaches that top-performing schools use to reduce the impact of OSFs in their quest to deliver quality education to all learners.

Below are statements of best practices of *system's support and partnership*. These practices represent some of the practices that are most frequently discussed by top-performing schools:



The best practices are organised under three sub-themes namely, parent or family involvement, community support or partnerships, and learner well-being.

BEST PRACTICE 1.1—PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: The schools map out ways to broaden parental/family involvement

How do schools foster high-quality, successful parent involvement? Following are examples how top-performing schools foster successful parent involvement. They:

- Create a welcoming school climate, e.g., they take concrete steps to eliminate the barriers which may keep certain families from participating in the school;

- Provide families with information related to child development and creating supportive learning environments;
- Establish effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication; and
- Strengthen families' knowledge and skills to support and extend their children's learning at home and in the community.

BEST PRACTICE 1.2—COMMUNITY SUPPORT OR PARTNERSHIPS: The schools develop partnerships with agencies to provide a co-ordinated set of key social and educational services to learners

Schools do not exist in isolation. They reside within the communities they serve and must cultivate relationships with them. Schools that work in this study bring together diverse individuals and groups, including community-based organizations, youth development organizations, health and human service agencies, parents and other community leaders, to expand opportunities for learners, and to create supports that enable children and youth to learn and succeed. This is in line with the basic education sector **Goal 25** ("to use schools as vehicles for promoting access to a range of public services among learners in areas such as health, poverty alleviation, psychosocial support, sport and culture").

BEST PRACTICE 1.3—LEARNER WELL-BEING: Teachers take initiatives to understand learners' diverse learning challenges, and always strive to meet learners' needs

Among other things, top-performing schools co-ordinate with other social services in order to help resolve the socio-economic inequities that contribute to lower learning outcomes for learners.

One of the most effective ways that schools use to engage learners in learning is personalising learner and staff relations. What this entails in schools that work is that teachers:

- Make an effort to recognise each individual learner, including simple things like addressing them by name;
- Make learners feel personally known and cared for, e.g., making an effort to understand their experiences. Different schools share different approaches to support learners with greatest needs; and
- Establish a rapport with learners through several strategies, including creating an "open door policy" for learners and staff; demanding respect from learners and the teachers toward each other; and making teachers available to help learners before and after school, where necessary.

2.4 TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS [IN-SCHOOL FACTORS]

Five in-school factors or themes and their sub-themes identified through data analysis are *learner-centred climate, enabling conditions, professional development and collaboration, school leadership and management*, and *quality of teaching*. These factors are within the control of the school to manipulate and together they create the conditions for improved learning outcomes. They also create an environment that promotes learners' personal well-being, ensures a supportive context for learning, and provides *all* learners—regardless of their abilities and backgrounds—with the best opportunities to learn.

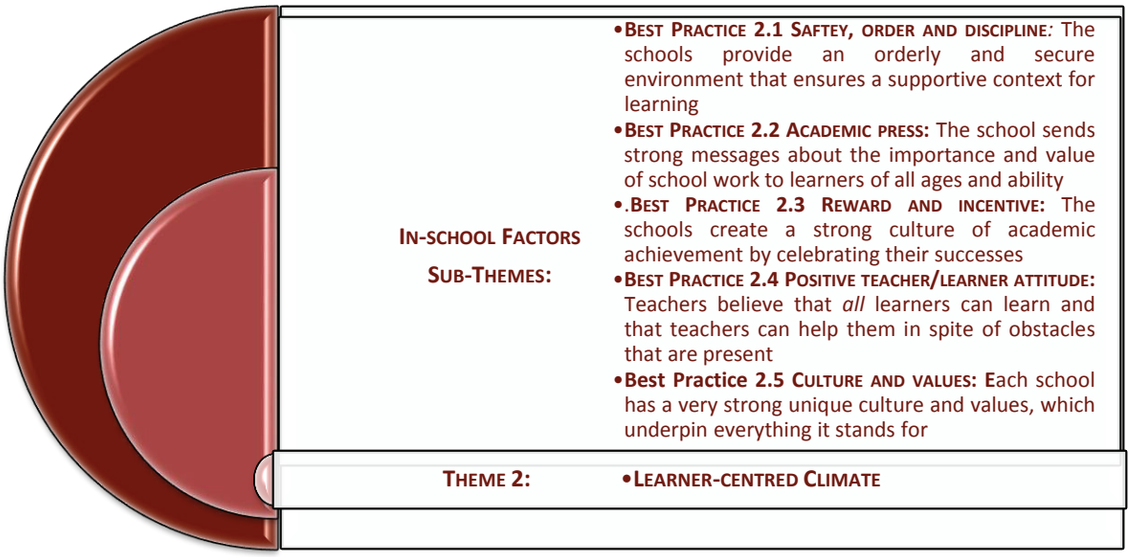
In this section, each of the five factors is introduced with a brief statement and then elaborated on through several best practices exhibited by top-performing schools. These best practices are supported by strong research based on improving and/or successful schools.

2.4.1 THEME 2: LEARNER-CENTRED CLIMATE

Top-performing schools do not ignore the connection between what students learn and where they learn. A philosophy that defines these schools is:

The climate has to be right. That's first and foremost! If it's not right, then forget it. No best teacher in the world can be effective in an environment where there is no order and discipline. Get that right first and everything will fall into place. (Deputy Principal, **School WL**-Quintile 3)

The statement of best practices that follows expresses key study findings about the role of a *learner-centred climate* in school improvement. These findings convey practices that are common to top-performing schools.



The best practices are organised under five sub-themes namely: Safety, order and discipline; academic press; reward and incentive; positive teacher/learner attitude; and culture and values.

BEST PRACTICE 2.1—SAFETY, ORDER AND DISCIPLINE: The schools provide an orderly and secure environment that promotes learners' personal well-being and ensures a supportive context for learning

The schools understand that "discipline and respect are a necessary prerequisite to any and all school improvement efforts" (Principal, **School MM**-Quintile 1) and that learners need an orderly and secure environment that promotes their personal well-being and ensures a supportive context for learning. Following are examples how top-performing schools maintain an orderly and secure environment. They:

- Spell out standards of behaviour in the learners' code of conduct and make sure that they are clear to all staff, parents and learners;
- Uphold agreed upon standards of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in a fair and humane manner that focuses on developing learners' sense of responsibility;
- Praise and recognise positive and improved behaviour and do not tolerate disrespectful language and behaviour; and
- Respect the cultures of its learners and use learners' cultural diversity as a resource and meet their schools' targets towards the eradication of racism and bullying.

BEST PRACTICE 2.2—ACADEMIC PRESS: The schools send strong messages about the importance and value of schoolwork to learners of all ages and ability

The top-performing schools send strong messages about the importance and value of schoolwork to learners of all ages and abilities (i.e. academic press). In these schools, there is reduction of non-teaching demands that draw

teachers away from their classes and their learners. To do this, schools ensure learner and teacher punctuality in the morning, monitor learner and teacher attendance closely, ensure punctuality between lessons and after break, set and meet high expectations for all learners, and set and meet achievement targets.

In this study, many schools acknowledge that achieving the national targets begins with schools meeting individual learner targets. Thus, targets are set at different levels chronologically as follows:

Learner target → Subject target → School target → District target → Provincial target → National target

Best Practice 2.3—Reward and incentive: The schools create a strong culture of academic achievement by celebrating their successes and commiserating over their failures in different ways

Many schools mentioned that although they have good and committed learners, a certain segment of the student body seems content with the barest minimum pass requirements—just getting by. Trying to inspire learners who are struggling, unmotivated, and have "an IDC [I don't care] attitude" (Teacher, **School LL**, Quintile 2) and to get these learners to work up to their potential is an ongoing challenge raised by many schools. To address this challenge, the schools have created a strong culture of academic achievement by celebrating their successes and commiserating over their failures in different ways.

Best Practice 2.4—Positive teacher/learner attitude: Teachers sustain a collective focus on learning: They believe that *all* learners can learn and that teachers can help them in spite of obstacles that are present

Teachers and staff believe that *all* learners can learn and meet high standards. While recognizing that some learners must overcome significant barriers, these obstacles are not seen as insurmountable. Each of the schools develops a culture that supports learners' success. To do this they:

- Cultivate optimistic attitude among teachers: "It's all in the mind. All you need when you work under such desperate conditions as ours is a right attitude—and lots of it. If you have a right attitude, the impossible will become possible." (Teacher, **School KY**-Quintile 1)
- Encourage learners to develop a positive attitude and disposition to their learning. Teachers in the top-performing schools accept no excuses. They consistently tackle tough challenges, and have an "I can-do" attitude.

Best Practice 2.5—Culture and values: Each school has a very strong, unique culture and value system, which underpin everything it stands for, and they live their values

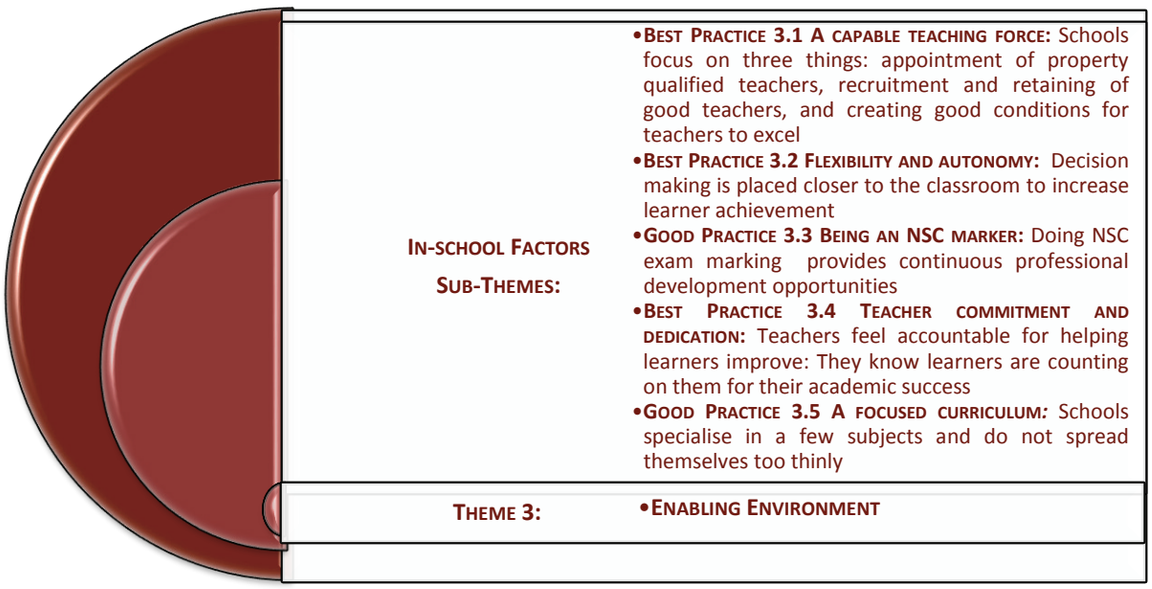
One of the crucial keys to the success of consistently outstanding schools is undoubtedly the culture and values of the school. These values take time to establish and require constant nurturing. Top-performing schools have a very strong culture, so powerful that "new staff is assimilated into it" (Teacher, **School EH**-Quintile 3). Following are different ways how values in the top-performing schools in this study become central to their ethos and how they underpin everything they stand for and do:

- Provide a sense of purpose, direction and self-belief that will ensure continuous improvement and see the school through any unpredicted challenges.
- Inculcate a strong work ethic: **"**Everybody—from a cleaner to the Principal—has minimum standards to live by." (Principal, **School KT**-Quintile 3)
- Ensure a high degree of consistency in approaches, regardless of which staff member is involved: **"**When teachers go to class, we make sure that they have lesson plans. We check the quality." (HOD, **School MK**-Quintile 1)

2.4.2 THEME 3: ENABLING CONDITIONS

The statement of best practices that follows expresses key study findings about the role of

enabling conditions in school improvement. These findings convey practices that are common to top-performing schools:



The best practices are organised under five sub-themes namely, a capable teaching force, flexibility and autonomy, being an NSC marker, teacher commitment and dedication, and a focused curriculum.

BEST PRACTICE 3.1—A CAPABLE TEACHING FORCE: Schools focus on three things: appointment of properly qualified teachers, recruitment and retaining of good teachers, and creating good conditions for teachers to excel

A well-qualified and motivated teaching force has been seen as one of the most vital assets for educational quality. All schools hold a view that teacher quality counts and that teachers make a substantial difference in learner achievement. Thus, in their quest to provide learners of different abilities and from different backgrounds with quality education, top-performing schools make sure that learners are taught by properly qualified and effective teachers.

To achieve this, they focus on three things: recruitment and appointment of most qualified teachers, retaining these teachers once recruited, and creating good conditions for teachers to excel. These are discussed at length in the full report.

BEST PRACTICE 3.2—FLEXIBILITY AND AUTONOMY: Decision-making is placed closer to the classroom to increase learner achievement

The Principals strongly believe that HODs and teachers know their learners best. For this reason, they feel that "placing the decision making closer to the classroom and holding HODs and teachers accountable for results is the best way to increase learner achievement" (Deputy Principal, **School GL**-Quintile 4). Schools that work do the following:

- Give flexibility/autonomy to the ***HODs*** in their Department. Driven by a belief that flexibility/autonomy encourages an environment of creative thinking so HODs and teachers can tailor teaching strategies to fit their departments and their learners, each department has flexibility to try practices or actions that would work for them.
- Give flexibility/autonomy to the ***teachers*** in their classes. Teachers decide how to teach in class (autonomy) but they are held accountable for learner performance. However, flexibility or autonomy and accountability are treated as two sides of the same coin.

GOOD PRACTICE 3.3—BEING AN NSC marker: Doing NSC exam marking provides continuous professional development opportunities

The overwhelming majority of schools indicated that exam marking is beneficial for their schools. Principals encourage teachers to apply to do exam marking because they know the benefits that it could bring, not just to individual teachers, but to their whole departments. Teachers are able to share their experience with their fellow teachers and effectively have in-house training. Teachers are able to offer training sessions to their fellow colleagues, particularly new teachers, within their own departments because they gained expertise in a particular paper. The benefits for being an exam marker which teachers mentioned are detailed in the full report.

BEST PRACTICE 3.4—TEACHER COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION: Teachers feel accountable for helping learners improve: They know learners are counting on them for their academic success

Teacher commitment and dedication is one of the highest-ranking factors that defines top-performing schools in this study. The teachers hold themselves accountable for helping learners improve. They know learners are counting on them for their academic success. Teachers in top-performing schools show commitment and dedication in different ways including the following:

- Teachers have ownership over their own performance as well as ownership over learners' performance, and they take that seriously and personally.

  "We know that this [good performance in the NSC examinations] might be our learners' last opportunity to get out of poverty because of the environment that they live in" (Principal, **School KV**-Quintile 2). Teachers in these schools accept no excuses, they consistently tackle tough challenges, and have an "I can-do" attitude.
- Teachers give learners more opportunities to learn within and outside school hours (see **Best Practice 6.1** for more details)
- Teachers' own children attend school in the same school where they teach.

GOOD PRACTICE 3.5—A FOCUSED CURRICULUM: Schools specialise in a few subjects and do not spread themselves too thinly

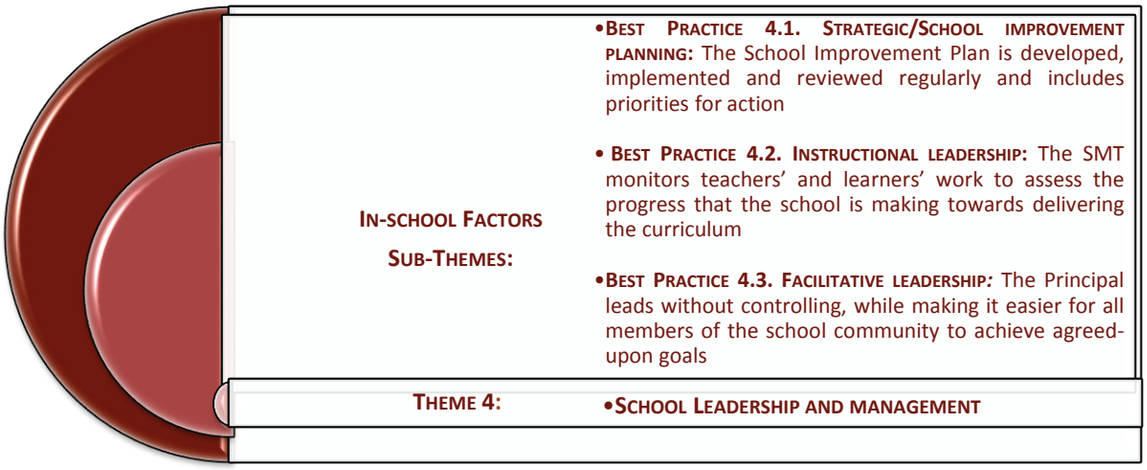
Many schools in this study offer specific streams because, as one Principal notes:

"It does not make sense to offer too many subjects or streams and then struggle to recruit qualified teachers in those subjects." (Principal, **School LL**-Quintile 2)

2.4.3 THEME 4: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Very rarely have schools been turned around without the leadership from the Principal who has set clear priorities and goals that are followed through by the staff. Many other factors contribute to positive change in schools, but in top-performing schools in this study, leadership is the catalyst. Principals influence teaching in a number of ways, such as by establishing a climate conducive to learning, ensuring quality professional development for teachers, and providing ongoing feedback to help teachers improve their practice (Grissom *et al*, 2013; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

The statement of best practices that follows expresses key study findings about the role of a *school leadership* in school improvement. These findings convey practices that are common to top-performing schools:



The best practices are organised under three sub-themes namely: Strategic or school improvement planning; instructional leadership and facilitative leadership.

BEST PRACTICE 4.1—STRATEGIC AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING: The School Improvement Plan is developed, implemented and reviewed regularly and includes priorities for action

Strategic planning melds short-term and long-term planning models and considers outside variables and school resources. Strategic planning provides a structure for accountability in school change. As an integral part of strategic planning, a School Improvement Plan (SIP) is a "road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made." (North Carolina School Improvement Planning Implementation Guide, 2013).

Top-performing schools initiate school improvement planning with a comprehensive needs assessment in order to determine high-need areas systematically. In terms of **Goal 21** in the Sector Plan (to ensure that the basic management processes take place across all schools in the country in a way that contributes towards a functional school environment), a SIP is one of the minimum set of management documents Principals are required to produce.

BEST PRACTICE 4.2—INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: The SMT monitors teachers' and learners' work to assess the progress that the school is making towards delivering the curriculum

In each of the top-performing schools in this study, Principals and HODs provide instructional leadership in line with three broad indicators of instructional leadership reported in the literature:

- The amount of time Principals spend on educational matters compared to administrative and other tasks,
- Whether or not Principals appraise the performance of teachers, and
- The amount of time dedicated to instructional issues during staff meetings.

All schools in this study have a purpose for monitoring teachers' and learners' work, i.e. to assess the progress that the school is making towards delivering the curriculum. Monitoring curriculum implementation involves:

- Reviewing teacher's work regularly (on a weekly basis) with regard to the schemes of work or annual teaching plans (ATPs) and lesson plans;
- Observing lessons: In schools where team teaching is practiced, an open door policy allows other teachers to enter their colleagues' classrooms at any time;
- Making sure that progress in terms of content coverage is matched to the identified timeline (i.e. correct pacing);

- Scrutinising/monitoring learners' work. HODs can walk into any class to collect and monitor learners' work;
- Collecting and analysing assessment results (see **Good Practice 6.4** for details); and
- Making sure that staff fulfil their responsibilities.

BEST PRACTICE 4.3—FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP: The Principal leads without controlling, while making it easier for all members of the school community to achieve agreed-upon goals

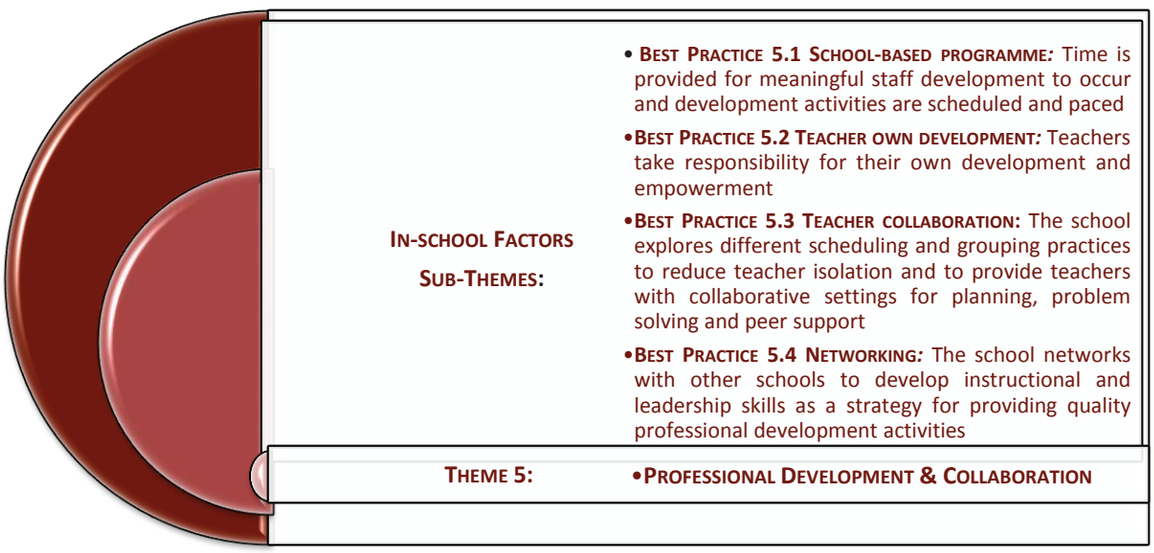
While individual Principals sometimes have a direct influence on the quality of teaching, a growing strand of research suggests that successful Principals often cultivate the leadership of teachers to grow (Portin, 2009). Thus, although the Principal is in a critical position to lead change, he or she cannot do it alone. Empowering others throughout the school to develop and exercise leadership roles and to share in the leadership of change is both desirable and achievable. The Principals in most top-performing schools encourage broad participation of teachers and parents in decision-making, school improvements, and increased academic performance. These Principals employ a distributive leadership style. They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership. HODs have more control over their departments.

The Principals who employ a distributive leadership style speak in one voice that shared leadership does not mean the abdication of responsibility on their part. On the contrary, their schools have an effective monitoring, evaluation and review programme including regular reviews of planning, learner work analysis and lesson observations with evaluative feedback to hold staff members accountable.

In the same vein, these Principals feel strongly that empowering all staff members to assume leadership responsibilities begins with the Principal setting the tone, forging and advocating a vision for school improvement. One Principal observes: "Everybody knows where they are going and why. The focus is on achieving a shared vision, and all understand their role in achieving the vision." (Principal in **School GP**-Quintile 2)

2.4.4 THEME 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

The statement of best practices that follows expresses key study findings about the role of *professional development and collaboration* in school improvement. These findings convey convictions and practices common to top-performing schools.



Best practices are presented under four sub-themes namely, school-based programme, teacher own development, teacher collaboration, and networking.

BEST PRACTICE 5.1—SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMME: Time is provided for meaningful staff development to occur; and development activities are scheduled and paced

Emphasis in top-performing schools is placed on training staff in areas of most need as identified through the IQMS processes, the analysis of learner assessment results, and findings of SMT members' observations during class visits. These are schools with a strong sense of professional community. The schools devote time to departmental meetings and whole-school meetings, run by HODs or directed by teachers, to common planning, teacher conversations about curriculum issues and empowerment of teachers to deal with issues that affect learners beyond individual classrooms at the school such as bullying, racism and HIV/AIDS.

During formal and informal class visits, SMT members observe "a lot of good things going on" and then ask teachers if they would share some of the good teaching strategies at departmental meetings, so that teachers can learn from one other. Departmental meetings are also used as forums where teachers are given space and time to discuss problems that they experience in their respective classes and share possible solutions. Schools also use departmental meetings to analyse and discuss learners' work.

BEST PRACTICE 5.2—TEACHER OWN DEVELOPMENT: Teachers take responsibility for own development and empowerment

Teachers mentioned different strategies they used to take responsibility for their own empowerment. Among other things, these teachers:

- Analyse and interpret learner data in order to evaluate and review their teaching strategies;
- Evaluate their own practice including feedback from learners;
- Engage with research;
- Use the internet; and
- Participate in courses, e.g., e-learning, distance learning opportunities and undertaking formal studies.

BEST PRACTICE 5.3—TEACHER COLLABORATION: The schools explore different scheduling and grouping practices to reduce teacher isolation and to provide teachers with collaborative settings for planning, problem solving and peer support

Teachers in the schools that work place a very high emphasis on teacher collaboration. Teachers are committed to working together in a culture of continuous improvement, not only to develop shared understanding of learners, curriculum and practice, but also to design and produce materials and activities to improve them.

A unique feature in these schools, which deviates from the norm, is that teachers *de-privatise* their practice by opening their classroom doors and sharing, observing and discussing their teaching. Team-teaching and peer-coaching or mentoring are common ways for teachers to achieve this (see **Best Practice 6.2A** for further discussion). When *de-privatising* their practice, teachers explore different ways to reduce teacher isolation and to provide teachers with collaborative settings for planning, problem solving and peer-support. Teachers learn with and from each other in different ways. They:

- Observe colleagues conducting lessons and provide feedback;
- Mentor, coach, model and do team-teaching;
- Help colleagues identify development needs;
- Lead staff meetings, workshops; etc.

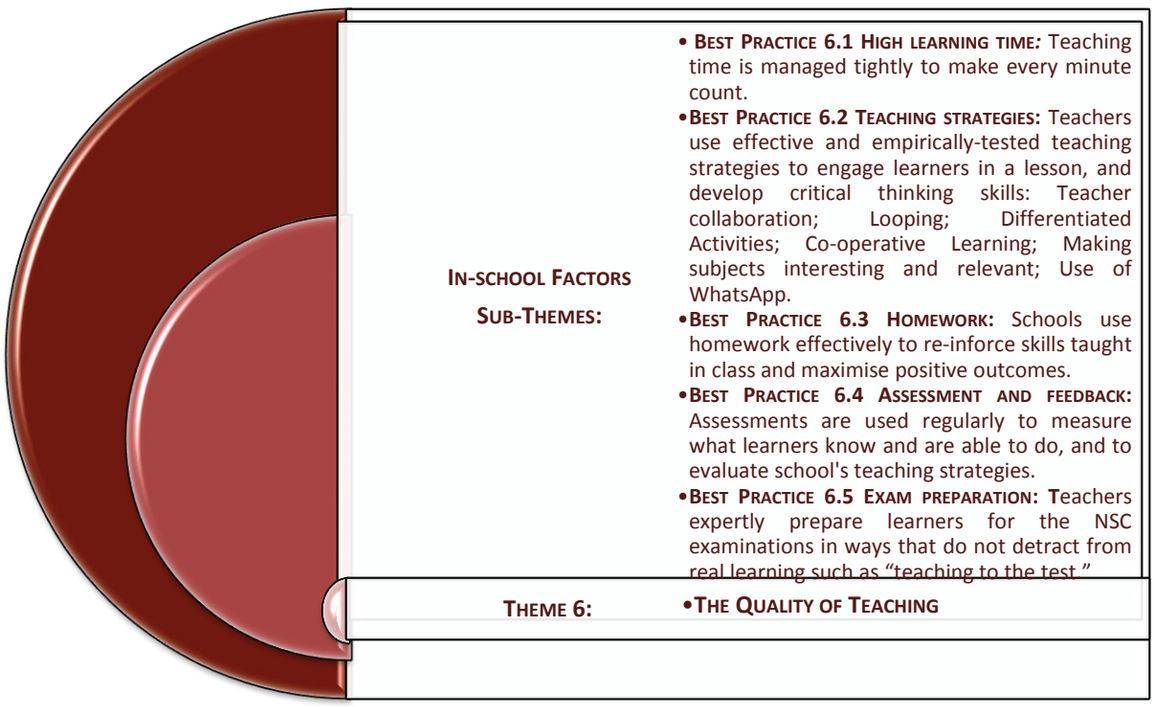
BEST PRACTICE 5.4—NETWORKING: The school networks with other schools to develop instructional and leadership skills as a strategy for providing quality professional development activities

Teacher collaboration in top-performing schools extends beyond their individual schools to networking in a broader education community involving other schools. A school networks with other schools to develop instructional and leadership skills as a strategy for providing quality professional development activities. Some of the networking strategies mentioned by schools include the following. They:

- Link with or set up links with other top-performing schools: "We have learnt to swallow our pride and acknowledged that as professionals, we can learn from other professionals." (Teacher, **School LH**-Quintile 3)
- Set up links with primary feeder-schools: "In our circuit, networking is not restricted to working with other high schools but we have started to engage with our feeder-primary schools." (Deputy Principal, **School KP**-Quintile 4)
- Share practices, lesson plans and other materials in cluster/partnership networks: "Last year, we started an initiative to set common papers for English for all schools in our circuit." (Teacher, **School KM**-Quintile 4)
- Take part in teacher exchanges: "We partner with other good-performing schools." (Teacher, **School LF**-Quintile 3)

2.4.5 THEME 6: QUALITY OF TEACHING

The statement of best practices that follows expresses key study findings about the role of *quality of teaching* in school improvement. These findings convey convictions and practices common to top-performing schools:



Teaching and learning is the first priority in top-performing schools. Teaching is judged to be at least 'good' across the top-performing schools. Five best practices relating to the *quality of teaching* are listed below and are each explained in some detail in the sections that follow:

- **BEST PRACTICE 6.1—HIGH LEARNING TIME**: Teaching time is managed tightly to make every minute count
- **BEST PRACTICE 6.2—TEACHING STRATEGIES**: Teachers use effective and empirically-tested teaching strategies to engage learners in a lesson, develop critical thinking skills, and keep learners on task
- **BEST PRACTICE 6.3—HOMEWORK**: Schools use homework effectively to strengthen or re-inforce skills taught in class, advance classroom lessons and maximise positive outcomes
- **BEST PRACTICE 6.4—ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK**: Assessments are used regularly to measure what students know and are able to do, and to evaluate school's teaching strategies
- **BEST PRACTICE 6.5—EXAM PREPARATION**: Teachers expertly prepare learners for the NSC examinations in ways that do not detract from real learning such as "teaching to the test."

BEST PRACTICE 6.1—HIGH LEARNING TIME: Teaching time is managed tightly to make every minute count

By far, the most common characteristic of the top-performing schools in this study is effective use of teaching time. Managing teaching time tightly to make every minute count is a prevalent practice in all top-performing schools. To do this, SMTs tighten up their monitoring systems to ensure that teachers use time within the day and across the year efficiently and effectively.

PLANNED TIME VS IMPLEMENTED TIME

There is a close match between time that teachers and learners actually spend at school by the end of each academic year (*implemented time*) and the allocated time in the school calendar (*planned time*). At the outset, the top-performing schools do not have more teaching time than other schools but because they guard it jealously, by the end of the school year, learners in these schools are exposed to more learning opportunities owing to minimal time losses.

USING ALLOTTED TIME EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY

Schools in our sample ensure that learners have enough time to learn in school by adhering to planned schedules, improving teacher learner and attendance, and building skills for effective classroom management to minimise disruptions. They are able to do this because not only do they strictly adhere to allotted time (*planned time*) but they also use it properly.

The schools that produce good results understand the pivotal role of time. SMT members make sure that time loss is kept to a minimum. Thus, extra time in these schools is not used to compensate for time loss. "You do not waste time because you are counting on providing extra time. You must use the time that you have effectively. Lost time can never be replaced; it's gone forever." (Principal, **School KK**-Quintile 4)

CREATING MORE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNERS

More support and teaching time are provided, either during the school day or outside normal school hours, to learners who need more help. Teaching is adjusted based on frequent monitoring of learner progress and needs.

An average school day has grown markedly in top-performing schools. These schools use more hours than the conventional school calendar (*planned time*). Teachers in these schools are effective within the conventional school calendar and use the time added to advance learning further.

Rationale/purpose for extending planned time: The schools that work employ an integrated series of practices to maximize the use of teaching time (i.e. *planned time*). If they have to extend teaching time (i.e. extra classes), there is a clear purpose for doing so. The use of additional time ranges from providing many opportunities for teaching and learning, to academic support to struggling learners, to teacher development and collaboration. The extension of the planned time in top-performing schools can be categorised into six purposes: to complete the curriculum; give more support to struggling or lagging learners; re-inforce what was taught in class; do remedial work; revise or catch-up; and build in many more opportunities for teacher development and collaboration.

How extended time is used: All schools emphasise that providing extra time is not done as a matter of routine. These schools also strongly believe that just adding more school time will not make a difference in learning outcomes unless the added time is used well. As one teacher cogently puts it, "you can add as much extra teaching time as you like, but if the quality of teaching is poor, extra time will not lead to achievement gains," (**School LM**-Quintile 2). Teachers in different schools use a number of different grouping formats to differentiate their teaching. These formats are detailed in the full report.

BEST PRACTICE 6.2A—TEACHER COLLABORATION: Teachers work together in different way to improve teaching strategies practice and improve learner performance

Teacher collaboration, in schools that reported it works, ranges from teachers working together in an informal, unplanned way to the implementation of more formal collaborative approaches, such as professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers in these schools believe that learners could achieve at high levels, and saw working together to implement the curriculum as a strategy to improve their teaching practice and, at the same time, improve learner performance.

Five types of collaboration were identified in the top-performing schools: joint planning, team teaching, teacher observation, sharing ideas and good practices (or reflection sessions), and cross-curricula collaboration. Each of these is briefly described below:

JOINT PLANNING

Teachers in these schools recognise that *teacher collaboration* is key to ensuring that change is promoted beyond individual classrooms and all teachers, working together, are responsible for learners' academic success. This recognition results in whole-school improvement because when teachers increase their expertise by learning together, they "work through the issues so everybody is on the same page and all learners benefit" (Teacher, **School LF**-Quintile 3). In other words, for these teachers, collaborative planning has both an individual and collective benefit.

Meeting times for joint planning vary in different schools. In some schools, teachers make time to come earlier in the morning to work together. In others, they stay in the afternoon and work together. Making time for that collaboration is the responsibility of the school's leadership. The SMT, particularly the HODs, play a large role in scheduling time for teachers in their department to meet and plan.

TEAM TEACHING

Team teaching is perceived among teachers as more helpful and extensive. There is strong teamwork among teachers teaching the same subject in Grade 12. Everybody is involved and connected to each other. Teachers work together to share the workload instead of doubling their efforts.

Different schools use different approaches to team-teaching. These include subject-splitting, inter-phase teaching and joint planning but separate teaching. Each approach is briefly discussed in the full report.

TEACHER PEER-OBSERVATION

A unique feature in these schools, which deviates from the norm, is that teachers de-privatise their practice by opening their classroom doors and sharing, observing and discussing their teaching. Schools have "taken the doors off the classroom" through their collaborative efforts. All schools that practice this type of collaboration maintain an open-door policy where teachers go in and out of each other's classrooms without offending anyone and without making teachers feel as though they are being violated. Teacher peer-observation is now the culture in these schools. It is an accepted norm and culture in these schools that teachers observe their colleagues teach. It is an approach that has become a strong vehicle for improving teaching and learning.

SHARING IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Teachers are open to sharing during the departmental curriculum reflection sessions, and they also collaborate informally. A professional culture where teachers are willing to share, support, and explore together exists in many top-performing schools. Such culture also enables teachers to engage in a professional dialogue to evaluate and modify teaching strategies and programmes.

These schools have made every effort to distribute a base of pedagogical knowledge among all teachers within a school as opposed to restricting it to individual teachers. Put differently, the focus in these schools has

shifted from individual teacher expertise to building a stronger learning and knowledge base of all teachers at the school.

Teachers use the opportunity to be part of a community that provides a sounding board for ideas and best practices without feeling pressured to hide their failures or vulnerabilities. The teamwork and feeling of trust prevails. This encourages teachers to confess their inadequacies knowing that they have the support system within their school to help address those inadequacies.

CROSS-CURRICULA COLLABORATION

While in most schools teacher collaboration is limited to teachers within a school teaching the same subject in the same grade, there are few cases of strong teamwork among teachers across different grades and subject areas, i.e. interdisciplinary collaboration. In a striking example of collaboration in some schools, the teachers in Mathematics, Physical Science and Economics collaborate to teach certain topics. This is elaborated in the full report.

BEST PRACTICE 6.2B—MOVING UP WITH LEARNERS (LOOPING): Teachers spend two or more years teaching the same group of learners

Teachers in some schools reported that teaching the same group of learners for more than one school year as they move up in different grades enhances teaching and learning. This practice, which is often called *looping*, is embraced by teachers because they understand its benefits. Thirty percent of schools described how they implement *looping* effectively and reap most benefits to enhance learning. In these schools, *looping* has been integrated as a regular procedure. It has become normal for teachers to spend more than one year with the same group of learners.

While good results cannot be linked to any one particular strategy or programme, some top-performing schools identified *looping* as one important contributing factor. Different schools derived different benefits from multi-year teaching or *looping*. These benefits include spending additional time with same learners, developing working relationships over time, understanding learner needs, and providing customised learner support. These are briefly discussed below:

ADDITIONAL TIME WITH THE SAME COHORT

One benefit of *looping* expressed by schools that work is that it saves time, which teachers use for different purposes. This includes providing teachers with additional opportunity to assess learner achievement, identify content gaps, diagnose potential academic problems, close or address content gaps and close achievement gaps among learners.

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

The context of *looping* results in improved relationships among teachers, learners and parents. These relationships are briefly discussed below.

- *Teacher-to-learner relationship:* Teachers describe how well they get to know their learners and how they have built up a rapport over the years.
- *Teacher-to-parent relationship:* Not only do teachers credit *looping* for building rapport with learners, they also say it enables them to know their learners' parents very well. Teachers rely on parents to "do the right things" at home to support their [teachers'] work in class.

UNDERSTANDING LEARNER NEEDS

Having taught the same subjects to the same group of learners over time, teachers say they know their needs, strengths, interests, personalities and how they learn best. "In other schools, often, when teachers only start to figure out their learners' needs and how best to address them, off they go into a new class with new teachers in the following year," (Teacher, **School LF**-Quintile 3).

One of the big advantages that multi-year teaching offer in the schools in our sample is that it puts teachers in a better position to close the accumulative content gap among leaners in a way that is impossible to achieve in a single year. Teachers are able to re-inforce skills that learners are lacking and close achievement gaps among low-performing

learners in a manner that is consistent over a looping cycle.

CUSTOMISED LEARNER SUPPORT

Because teachers, having looped understand learners' needs better and so they are able to differentiate more effectively in different ways—by academic needs, learners' learning styles, and learner interests. When they loop, teachers feel that they are afforded another opportunity to improve on what they did not do as well the first year. Thus, they can focus on topics and skills that learners are struggling with and that they [teachers] did not emphasize enough the previous year.

While there are many benefits to *looping*, there is plenty of literature that sounds a warning that disadvantages do also exist. In the present study, the *looping* schools feel strongly that the profound benefits have outweighed the drawbacks largely because *teacher collaboration* (see **Good Practice 6.2A**) "neutralises" the arguments against looping. Data in the current study suggests that where *looping* is practised or implemented in an environment characterised by strong *teacher collaboration*, it has a powerful impact on learning.

BEST PRACTICE 6.2C—DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES: Teachers use differentiated teaching methods to reach learners of a wide range of abilities

Teachers are often given the additional challenge of differentiating teaching for learners with a wide range of abilities and varying exceptionalities. All classrooms in schools in the present study have learners with a varying degree of diversity. Learners in the same classroom differ in respect of cognitive abilities, culture, language, prior knowledge, and learning styles or preferences. Faced with such diversity, schools provide various kinds of scaffolding through differentiated instruction to help all learners at different levels to learn.

HETEROGENEOUS AND HOMOGENOUS GROUPINGS

The most prevalent grouping is heterogeneous mixed-ability groups where lower achievers are taught the same but differentiated content from that taught to higher achievers. Most schools which practise mixed-ability groupings also indicated that they, at times, grouped learners homogeneously. Learners are placed in various groups mostly according to their performance level. Here, lower achievers, including the so-called "progressed learners" and lagging learners are pulled out for extra support and are taught separately.

Tomlinson (1999), an expert in the area of differentiated learning, identified four techniques that teachers can use to differentiate instruction in the classroom: differentiate by the ***content*** (what students learn); by the ***process*** (how students learn); by the product (how students demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge or skills); and by the ***learning environment*** (how the classroom works and feels). In the full report, we discuss how schools in our sample differentiate instruction by adjusting each of these elements of differentiated teaching.

BEST PRACTICE 6.2D—CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING (LEARNER PEER-SUPPORT): Learners work together and support one another for a mutual benefit

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) define *co-operative learning* as the instructional use of small groups so that learners work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Some schools in this study share a belief that learners could and should help one another do well at school (co-operative learning) because they care deeply about what their peers think. As one teacher notes, "learners would do anything to live up to their peers' expectations. Often what we say and think comes second." (Teacher, **School FD**-Quintile 3)

CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING APPROACHES

While all schools share a common purpose for using co-operative learning—i.e. learning together so that every learner subsequently can gain greater individual competency—they differ in their approach in the following respects:

- *Types of co-operative groups:* In some schools, learner co-operative groups are organised by teachers, while in other schools, co-operative groups are initiated by and controlled by learners with little or no teacher participation.
- *Nature of peer programmes:* Most schools prefer heterogeneous groups than homogeneous groups because they strongly believe that different learners have more to learn from each other. In each co-operative group (whether heterogeneous a homogeneous), there is a mentor and a mentee or mentees. Different schools in this study use one or all forms of mentor-mentee relationships. These are briefly discussed in the full report.
- *Setting up a learner-peer support programme:* When schools embark on a peer tutoring system, it is important to set up systems to ensure that the relationships work to the benefit of all learners. When setting up peer tutoring systems, schools that work define roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees, train peer-mentors, recruit mentors, identify mentees, match mentors and mentees, and consider the size of groups carefully.

BEST PRACTICE 6.2E—MAKING SUBJECTS MORE INTERESTING AND RELEVANT: Teachers use different strategies to engage learners in a lesson, develop critical thinking skills, and keep learners on task

One of the most pressing challenges confronting good teachers on a daily basis in their classes is finding ways to keep learners engaged and interested in their lessons. Teachers often grapple with one pertinent question in their classes: Do I simply go through all of the topics to complete the syllabus but leave my learners confused, bored and unmotivated, or do I spend some time getting them excited about my lesson?

Some schools in this study provide a range of approaches they use to make their lessons interesting and relevant to their learners. These approaches include making a subject meaningful; starting a lesson with an interesting real-life problem; starting a lesson with concrete examples; using technology to do the drudge work; and engaging learners in a lesson through creativity and ownership. Each approach is discussed further.

MAKING A SUBJECT MEANINGFUL

Often when learners cannot see the relevance of what they have to learn in their daily lives, in frustration they ask questions such as: "Why do we have to learn this?" "Why is this subject necessary anyway?" Teachers in the top-performing schools understand that many learners do not perform well, not necessarily because they are not capable but because "they are not interested in the subject and are not motivated to succeed because they cannot find meaning in what they are learning at school." (Teacher, **School EH**-Quintile 3)

Amongst other things, these teachers use highly engaging teaching techniques that their learners find more relevant and meaningful. These techniques include hands-on activities, cross-curricula linkages (subject integration) and individualized instruction that meet the needs of different types of learners. Teachers consistently use research to find out where and how learners would use or apply each topic they teach (particularly in more abstract subjects).

STARTING WITH CONCRETE EXAMPLES

Teachers describe how they start their lessons with concrete examples—leaving the abstract concepts for later. Large parts of our country are rural. Finding practical and local examples in Physical Science, for example, that learners can identify with can be challenging for many teachers who teach in these areas. So, when teachers say "imagine….," learners often find it hard to imagine what teachers are talking about due to lack of concrete experience with that concept. In these circumstances, teachers in the current study first research their environment as part of lesson preparation before presenting a lesson to find out what is

available within the reach of their learners that they could use in class as concrete examples.

USING INTERESTING, REAL-WORD PROBLEMS

Teachers in the current study also make attempts to motivate the learners to enjoy what they are learning by helping learners to make connections between the concepts they are learning in class and the "real world". They research to find out how the concepts they teach in class could be applied in the real world.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO DO THE DRUDGE WORK

Without doubt, teachers said the use of technology enhances teaching and excites learners to enjoy what they are learning. In a few schools, teachers made every effort to make learners understand the concepts they teach in class before they referred them to technology to get another view on the concept. Teachers also guided learners how to use technology when confronted with different real problems. However, these teachers believe that technology, no matter how advanced, cannot replace good teaching. Instead, they saw technology as assistive devices that help learners understand concepts better but as one teacher observes "the best technology in the world in the hands of an incompetent teacher is useless." (Teacher, **School KV**-Quintile 2)

ENGAGING LEARNERS THROUGH CREATIVITY AND OWNERSHIP

Making a lesson interactive is what drives teachers in top-performing schools in the current study to move away from teaching practices that bore learners in class. These teachers have realised that a traditional classroom setting where the teacher is standing in the front of the classroom lecturing to learners as they sit passively listening—or worse, their minds wandering—is not working. "Learners switch off if you give a boring lecture," one teacher observes, "because they are not interested in what we are teaching them," he added (**School LK**-Quintile 2). Consequently, teachers make their lessons interactive by getting learners involved in the lessons to make them interested in the content that they need to learn.

BEST PRACTICE 6.2F—USING WHATSAPP TO ENHANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING: Teachers use WhatsApp as an effective tool for teaching

The principal and common objective for creating WhatsApp groups is to create a safe milieu where learners and their teachers could extend learning beyond the classroom borders.

The main goals that motivate the creation of a WhatsApp group in our school sample are similar to those reported in the international literature (Chokri Barhoumi Taibah University, 2015; Bouhnik and Deshen, 2014). These goals or purposes are as follows:

- Communicating with learners to reach them and extend in class teaching beyond the classroom walls;
- Creating dialogue and encouraging sharing among learners;
- Creating a secure learning platform for learners to access learning materials;
- Enabling learners to learn any time and any place outside the classroom; and
- Nurturing the social atmosphere where learners share experiences and ask for advice.

These purposes are briefly discussed below:

COMMUNICATING WITH LEARNERS

Teacher participation: Teachers use WhatsApp to communicate with their learners for educational purposes. However, there are variations how teachers in different schools do this. There are variations with regard to the number of teachers who participate in WhatsApp groups, the nature of their participation and their level of participation.

Level of participation: While participation in some schools is haphazard, in others, teachers have a set of clear ground rules that all group participants have to abide by to stay in the group. Amongst other things, ground rules include respecting teachers' private space and knowing when to send teachers a message and when to expect a response from a teacher. This relieves teachers from unreasonable learner

demands and being swamped by too many learner messages.

Nature of participation: The nature of teacher participation in the WhatsApp groups also varies in schools. Teachers in different schools use WhatsApp for different reasons. These are discussed in sufficient detail in the full report.

CREATING DIALOGUE AND ENCOURAGING SHARING AMONG LEARNERS

In some schools, a WhatsApp group is initiated and is controlled by learners and only learners who are invited to the group could participate. Participation in the group is spontaneous and not directed by the teachers, it is non-formal and there are no rules of engagement. The use of WhatsApp is limited to one purpose, i.e. creating a dialogue between learners outside the classroom to work together to solve problems, share information, co-operate and work as a team, help each other, answer each other's questions, upload their work for the entire group to see and share their discoveries.

CREATING A LEARNING PLATFORM

Teachers in different departments have different objectives for creating WhatsApp groups as a learning platform. While in some departments the WhatsApp groups are used as a learning platform to share knowledge to improve learning, exchange experiences and ideas, in others the emphasis is on providing a space where learners could access learning materials, information, content and support provided by teachers. Others see WhatsApp groups as an extension of in-class teaching after the normal school hours. Most schools in the present study discourage learners from bringing their cell phones to school. Learners could only use cell phones outside the school premises.

NURTURING THE SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE

For most teachers, the principal objective for creating a WhatsApp group is for no other reason but educational purposes. It turns out that for some learners, WhatsApp has become a pleasant environment and a community where they have a sense of belonging. This is where learners share their thoughts, "private world", successes, fears and frustrations. Other teachers find the exposure to the personal lives of their learners useful because it helps them to understand, as one teacher puts it "why learners exhibit certain attitudes and behaviours in class."

Not only does WhatsApp contribute to the interpersonal relationship between teachers and learners, it also provides more learning time after school. Teaching and learning does not end when the school closes; it continues beyond the classroom's borders.

BEST PRACTICE 6.3—EFFECTIVE HOMEWORK*:* Schools use homework effectively to strengthen or re-inforce skills taught in class, advance classroom lessons and maximise positive outcomes

Schools that work use a "community approach," characterised by a working environment where teachers, parents, and learners work together as partners, to ensure that homework assignments maximise positive outcomes. In this approach, teachers design effective homework, assist learners to self-regulate and take responsibility for their work, and empower parents to support their children at home.

Discussed next are research-tested strategies that teachers, learners and parents in this study, working together as a formidable trio, use to improve the utilization of homework.

TEACHER STRATEGIES

Teachers use a wide range of strategies to make homework effective, more meaningful and to maximize positive outcomes. Listed below (and discussed in detail in the full report) are strategies that teachers in this study commonly use. They:

- Assign work that learners already know;
- Review homework before learners go home;
- Create homework that applies skills taught in the classroom to real-life situations;
- Differentiate homework—no one-size-fits-all;

- Accommodate learners with disadvantaged background;
- Hold learners accountable for completing homework and provide immediate feedback; and
- Co-ordinate homework given to learners so that teachers in different departments do not all give homework on the same day.

LEARNER SELF-REGULATING STRATEGIES

Teachers in this study feel they do everything they can in class to teach "but there is a point where learners must also take responsibility for their own learning" (Teacher, **School KJ**-Quintile 4). To encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning, teachers use different approaches including:

- *Teaching learners self-regulatory skills* learners need to help them do work at home such as how to set-up a suitable work environment, manage time, handle distraction, and control negative emotions.
- *Asking learners to share their work with their peers in the classroom.* To save time and to encourage learners to take responsibility for their work, some teachers ask learners to share and discuss their homework, including any difficulties they experienced and approaches they used when completing homework, in their peer co-operative groups. (See **Best Practice 6.2D** for detail)

PARENT STRATEGIES

Taking into account varying exceptionalities in learners' homes, teachers provide opportunities for positive parent involvement. Schools that work use highly effective strategies to encourage parents and to keep them committed to serving in a supporting role in the education of their children. Parents are not expected to play the role of a teacher at home but teachers empower them at the beginning of the school year on how best to assist their children with their homework. Empowering parents includes providing some guidance to enable them to:

- *Understand the purpose of homework* so that they could understand why it is important that learners should complete homework at home;
- *Create a home environment that is conducive to learning*. This includes giving parents suggestions how to set a specific time and provide a distraction-free environment where learners can complete their homework and study; and
- *Know how to monitor and what to check if homework is completed* without being experts in the subject area.

Teachers use different means such as school newsletters and parent–teacher meetings to convey these suggestions.

BEST PRACTICE 6.4—EFFECTIVE USE OF ASSESSMENT TO ADVANCE LEARNING: Assessments are used regularly to measure what students know and are able to do, and to evaluate teachers' teaching strategies

While encouraging teachers to use different forms of assessment to enhance learning and teaching appears counterproductive considering the most frequently heard complaint across the educational landscape that learners are over-tested, Reeves (2003) cogently argues that "many students are over-tested; but they are under-assessed."

Teachers in the present study use different phases of the *assessment loop* effectively to improve learning and teaching. The *assessment loop* can be expressed as follows:

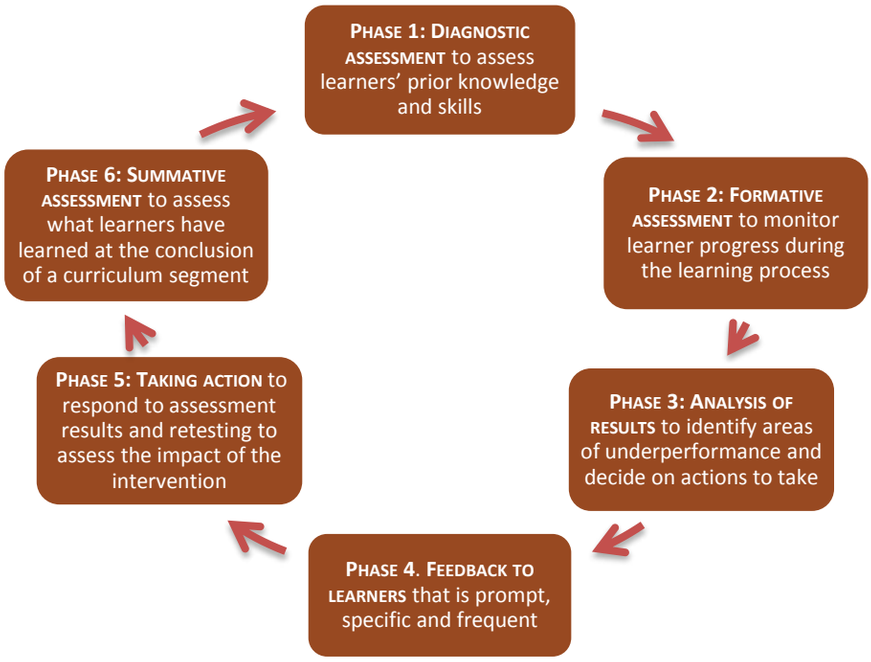


Figure 5: An assessment loop

Teachers in all content areas use a wide range of research-based and empirically tested assessment practices to advance learning and teaching. Classroom assessment practices that teachers use to provide the kind of specific, personalized, and timely information needed to guide both learning and teaching are consistent with those reported in research findings. They are briefly discussed below.

EFFECTIVE USE OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

Teachers use three forms assessment (diagnostic, summative and formative) to serve different purposes.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT: Data gained from *summative assessment* (sometimes referred to as *assessment of learning)* is used to assign marks, summarise learning and used as a baseline to set future goals. However, teachers understand that summative assessments are insufficient tools for maximizing learning "because by the time learners and their parents get to know how well learners have learned, the assessment results are ancient history in their eyes" (Teacher, **School KK**-Quintile 4).

It is for this reason that teachers use two other classroom assessment forms—diagnostic and formative—to provide, what McTighe and O'Connor (2005: 11) call, the "fuel for the teaching and learning engine [which] offer descriptive feedback along the way."

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT: Teachers use diagnostic assessments (also called *pre-assessments*) to pre-test learners' prior content knowledge for different objectives. Armed with diagnostic information, teachers said that they are able to:

- Gain insight into learners' prior knowledge, before delivering a lesson, including such things as skill gaps, skill levels, learners' misconceptions, abilities, strengths and weaknesses.
- Establish a baseline to which future learning can be compared: "Without a baseline score, you have nothing to measure progress against." (HOD, **School MM**-Quintile 1)
- Assist lesson planning in terms of knowing how to pitch the lessons and guiding differentiated instruction.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: The beneficial outcomes of formative assessment, otherwise known as *assessment for learning*, which have been highly touted by researchers and educators alike, are prevalent in top performing schools in our sample. Used as a teaching practice

focused on continual checks for learner understanding, teachers report that they use both formal and informal formative assessments methods regularly to:

- Provide teachers and learners with specific feedback on learning progress for the purpose of guiding teaching to improve learning.
- Gain more information about learner proficiency to adjust or modify their teaching and maintain or remediate the learning process on a continual basis with a view to helping learners realise their full potential in the classroom.

Grade 12 teachers prefer to draw questions from the NSC past papers. (See **Best Practice 6.5** for more details about how and why teachers choose this approach). One beneficial outcome of regular formative assessment that is widely touted in many schools resonates well with Reeves' (2003) findings that the consequence of learners performing badly is not an admonishment to "wait until next year" but rather the promise that "you can do better next week."

Analysis of assessment results

Teachers describe the analysis of assessment results as an important phase in the assessment loop. The next step that teachers take after administering an assessment is the analysis of the results to inform actions: "whether to proceed and teach the next concept or re-teach the concept if most learners did not perform well," (Teacher, **School EF**-Quintile 3). In this phase, schools do four interrelated activities: Analyse assessment results, identify teachers and learners who are having problems with particular topics, identify topics or concepts which are commonly found to be challenging, and discuss results and actions to take.

Frequent and real time feedback to learners

Analysing assessment results is not the end in the top-performing schools. Teachers give feedback to learners based on the careful analysis of formative assessment results. There is consistency in research findings about criteria that must be met if formative assessment feedback given to learners has to enhance learning. Feedback practices in the top-performing schools measure up in that feedback given to learners meet three empirically-tested criteria namely, that it must be ***frequent*** or regular, ***prompt*** or timely, and ***specific*** or understandable to the learner.

Determining how best to respond to assessment results

Taking actions based on the results of assessment is identified in literature as the final step in assessment, hence this phase of the assessment loop is sometimes called "closing the loop." Top performing schools in the current study identify gaps between a desired learning goal and the learners' present status towards that learning goal. These schools respond to the analysis of formative assessment results by holding everybody (learners, teachers, SMT and parents) accountable for learner performance, taking actions to improve teaching methodologies, and empowering learners to take responsibility for their education.

Best Practice 6.5—Exam preparation: Teachers expertly prepare learners for the NSC examinations in ways that do not detract from real learning such as "teaching to the test"

As Langer (2001) found in her study, data in the present study also suggests that teachers use both *integrated* and *separated* approaches to prepare learners for the NSC exams. In many schools, teachers use an integrated approach, which means that exam preparation is integrated into the ongoing class teaching throughout the year, as part of the curriculum. In majority of schools, exam preparation is allocated its own space in class time, often before exams start, apart from the rest of the year's work. Langer (2001) calls this the "separated approach". In schools where teachers follow the separated approach, exam preparation mostly starts after teachers have completed the syllabus—between May and

September. Few schools use a combination of both approaches, either with a slant towards separated approach or towards an integrated approach.

Schools following the separated approach tend to be *data-driven* in that they are driven by what results would look like in the NSC examinations. For this reason, teachers focus a lot of energy on teaching parts of the curriculum that are heavily emphasized in the exam. In *data-informed* schools, on the other hand, the primary focus is the infusion of the exam preparation into the curriculum throughout the year (an integrated approach).

Extensive research-based exam preparation practices can be grouped into four categories: teaching the content domain, providing practice tests, giving timed tests, and preparing learners to deal with test anxiety. The extent to which top-performing schools in this study prepare learners for the exams is consistent with effective means of exam preparation reported in the literature. How schools in the present study use each of these research-based exam preparation practices is discussed below.

TEACHING THE CONTENT DOMAIN

Although there is pressure on schools to engage in extensive exam preparation to prepare learners for the NSC examinations, most schools in this study adequately and appropriately prepare learners for the NSC examinations without detracting from real learning and without emphasising the objectives from the content domain that are sampled in the NSC examinations or "teaching to the test." These schools focus on learning rather than just raising exam scores.

The integrated approach is not about the NSC examinations per se but teachers align the curriculum and assessment by integrating appropriate exam preparation practices into regular classroom teaching and, in the end, this helps learners to do well in the exams.

PROVIDING PRACTICE TESTS

Schools use different ways to prepare learners for exams and taking exams less distressing and depressing to learners. One teacher explains the rationale for giving learners test-taking skills as follows: "Learners don't do well in exams because the way we assess them in class is different from the way they are tested in the exam in terms of the cognitive demand, style and format." (Principal, **School KT**-Quintile 3)

Applying the old adage "practice makes perfect," most schools collect NSC exam papers from prior years that are administered within a province and, sometimes, administered in other provinces and use them as practice tests. Schools use different approaches to practise past exam papers: an integrated approach or a separated approach or a combination of the two approaches (discussed above). The purposes for providing practice tests also differ among teachers.

GIVING TIMED TESTS

Following integrated or separated approaches (or a combination of both), some schools give learners different questions, one topic at a time, from a set of past exam papers and set a timeframe very similar to what it should be in exam conditions. For example, learners are given the same amount of time they would have during the actual NSC exam to practise answering a question. In every practice, teachers monitor not only whether learners improve their time management skills, but they also check the quality of answers. "We tell them, 'Look at the mark allocation. You cannot spend the same amount of time for a two-mark question and a ten-mark question." (Teacher, **School MG**-Quintile 4)

Other schools give much longer timed tests covering different topics. In these schools, learners are given a couple of practices to write a full-length paper—two or three-hours depending on the NSC requirements for each subject. Teachers find this strategy helpful because it gives learners an opportunity to practise writing an exam paper under the same

NSC exam conditions. Teachers also feel that this strategy helps learners to understand the criteria necessary to write quality answers within strict time limits.

PREPARING LEARNERS TO DEAL WITH EXAM ANXIETY

Teachers give learners practice tests under the same strict conditions that are similar to the actual NSC examinations to help them reduce exam anxiety. That is, learners take practice tests in exactly the same way and under the same conditions as it would be on the day of the exam. These conditions include making learners write practice tests and:

- Use the same room where they would write the NSC exam;
- Use the same seating arrangement they would use on the exam day;
- Follow the same strict rules prescribed for the NSC exams; and
- Write full-length exam papers using past NSC papers, as discussed in the sub-heading above.

2.5 LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning outcomes are not only defined in terms of what learners will know but also what they will be able to do or demonstrate as they progress through each grade and phase. Thus, learning outcomes, as defined in this study, refer to observable or measurable outputs with regard to knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This study sought to establish how top-performing schools:

- Achieved the outcomes relating to attainment and what learners learn, as encapsulated in the Action Plan to 2019 (the Basic Education Sector Plan) and the NDP; and
- Developed social skills to furnish learners with experiences that nurture aptitude in critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and the like.

Briefly discussed below is how top-performing schools in this study work towards achieving these outcomes of the schooling system.

2.5.1 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

First and most importantly, the top-performing schools have a laser-like focus on learner achievement. The focus on academic achievement in these schools, especially those in quintile 1 to 3, are driven by a quest to change their conditions where many learners come to school with academic skills that are substantially below grade level. These schools described how the considerable scale of challenges they faced necessitated spending more time on interventions designed to get learners to desired achievement levels.

All quintile 1 to 3 schools and some quintile 4 schools, mostly located in townships, described circumstances that led to them spending more time supporting learners to improve their academic achievement and paying less attention on enrichment programmes. These circumstances include the following:

- They have a large proportion of learners who come from poor or disturbed home backgrounds, where support for their learning, and expectations of their achievement, are low.
- Many learners are subject to emotional and psychological tensions, owing to their circumstances.
- The communities in which they live are subject to severe urban ills, such as drug and alcohol abuse as well as gangsterism that often characterise poorer communities and distract learners.

It is interesting to note that these schools significantly out-perform their peers with regard to the pass rate and the quality of results. In short, these schools make it clear to the most casual observer that academic performance is highly prized.

A focus on improving learner attainment in the top-performing schools in this study resonates well with the vision of both the NDP and the Sector Plan to achieve the following output goals:

- ***Goal 3:*** Increase the number of learners in Grade 9 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and Mathematics competencies for Grade 9
- ***Goal 4:*** Increase the number of learners in Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a bachelors programme at a university
- ***Goal 5:*** Increase the number of learners in Grade 12 learners who pass *Mathematics*
- ***Goal 6:*** Increase the number of learners in Grade 12 learners who pass *Physical Science*
- ***Goal 9:*** Increase the average performance of Grade 9 learners in *Mathematics*
- ***Goal 12:*** Improve the grade promotion of learners through Grades 1 to 9

2.5.2 SOCIAL SKILLS

In order to meet increasing pressures for greater accountability of academic outcomes, many schools in this study focus more on curriculum delivery (academics). As a result, the second facet of schools' mission—affording learners a well-rounded education—tends to take a back seat, even though research indicates that these "secondary" educational opportunities can have enormous impact on learning and growth (Allis and Frederickson, 2006). This trend of favouring academics over a well-rounded education is patently obvious just by looking at how learners are spending their time in school.

Without a doubt, the primary purpose of school is to prepare every learner to read, write, and calculate. However, schools are also held to a more far-reaching mandate, in addition to developing academic skills. However, many schools in this study, are shedding other enrichment programmes to make room for interventions in the academics. Only a 29% of schools in the lower quintiles in this study provide enrichment, or extra-curricular programmes. This can be contrasted with 100% of the quintile 5 schools which provide strong extra-curricular programmes.

A quintile 2 school which excels in both academics and other enrichment programmes. This top-performing school is also the 2017 national champion in the ABC Motsepe South African Choral Eisteddfod having gotten first position in four categories, i.e., male voice, Afrikaans, African, and the National Anthem.

The Principal, who is also the Grade 12 Physical Science teacher, was declared the best High School Conductor in the Country for 2017.

Source: School KV-Quintile 2

The effect of this shedding of enrichment programmes usually affects low-income learners attending schools in the lower quintiles harder than their more affluent peers.

There is a growing body of evidence that suggest that for children to lead fulfilling and productive lives, it's not enough for schools to focus exclusively on academics (Steedly et al, 2008, Feitosa et al, 2012).

The literature is clear: School improvement efforts that attend to just academic programmes miss important elements of what makes schools successful (Feitosa et al, 2012). These important elements include the non-cognitive and socio-emotional needs of learners that lay the foundation for ultimate academic success.

WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS THAT WORK 'TICK'?

Teachers go in and out of each other's classrooms without offending anyone and without making teachers feeling as though they are being violated.

(Principal, **School KK**-Quintile 4)

In our school, teachers take the same cohort of learners from Grade 9 to 12. So, I say to teachers "You've been with these learners for the last four years. What's your excuse?

(Principal, **School EE**-Quintile 4)

[Looping—moving up with learners] provides a second chance for teachers to reach individual learners who need support beyond one year of teaching them.

We group learners by their performance. The weaker ones get special attention. We also have a programme for the high performers. We do this so that we don't lose either of the group.

(Principal, **School FH**-Quintile 1)

Learners in higher grades mentor learners in lower grades in different subjects. We target those subjects which are problematic, e.g., Grade 8 learners have huge content deficit in maths.

(Teacher, **School MK**-Quintile 1)

As members of the RCL (Representative Council for Learners), we come up with innovative ways to reach out to learners. In our school, you have to perform well in order to be a member of the RCL.

(Learner, **School LN**-Quintile 1)

Our teachers have hands-on approach. Instead of only teaching the theory straight from the book, they are very good at making us see the real world application of what they teach.

(Learner, **School KM**-Quintile 4)

We have a WhatsApp group in Accounting. Say, something is giving me a problem, I send it to the group. Other learners and the teacher help me to solve it.

(Learner, **School ML**-Quintile 1)

WhatsApp gives us space as learners not to gossip or use our cell phones for the wrong reasons. When I get confused or stuck, I don't have to struggle in isolation.

(Learner, **School MJ**-Quintile 1)

Learner participation in the WhatsApp group encourages even those learners who are lazy to study to participate in the group. They feel pressured to get involved and, in that way, they learn.

(Teacher, **School KK**-Quintile 4)

You need to find effective ways to make learners see the importance of doing homework and don't see it as a burdensome task or some form of punishment.

(Teacher, **School EH**-Quintile 2)

Many learners don't write homework. They copy from each other. That defeats the purpose of doing homework. So, in our school we don't give homework. Learners do the work here at school.

(Principal, **School GR**-Quintile 4)

If learners in another teacher's class performed well but not in my class, then it's obvious—the problem is with me.

(Teacher, **School GN**-Quintile 3)

After every [formal] assessment, there are accounting sessions where teachers, learners and parents are required to account for the quality of the results.

(Teacher, **School GN**-Quintile 3)

As much as academic excellence is emphasised, we still have time for social events and sports. Our teachers say we can't be academic giants and stay social dwarfs. We must have a correct balance.

(Learner, **School WL**-Quintile 3)

WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS THAT WORK 'TICK'?

I know that if I am away for a week or longer, angeke kube kwampunzi idl'emini [the hell will not break loose]. Quality teaching and learning will continue without my presence—as if I'm here.
(Principal, **School KY**-Quintile 2)

There is a wealth of expertise among teachers within our school. The capacity to empower teachers must be built within individual schools—and that's what we've done in our school.
(Teacher, **School GN**-Quintile 3)

Learner performance in any tests that I administer to my learners, is like a mirror. I see myself in that mirror. If learners perform badly, it reflects my image of failure.

(Teacher, **School GQ**-Quintile 2)

You just can't hold anybody accountable when you have not given them any support. Since there is no effective support anywhere, our best bet is the school-based support.
(Principal, **School LN**-Quintile 1)

As Mathematics and Physics teachers, we align our lessons so that Physics concepts that are dependent on Maths concepts, are introduced to learners first in maths lessons.

(Teacher, **School GP**-Quintile 2)

We have learnt to swallow our pride and acknowledged that as professionals, we can learn from other teachers. This has helped us to achieve our set targets.

(Teacher, **School LH**-Quintile 3)

Networking is not restricted to working with other high schools but we also engage with our feeder primary schools. We can't keep blaming primary schools for 'feeding' us with bad product.
(Teacher, **School KP**-Quintile 4)

We have strong internal controls and accountability. For example, period registers are controlled by learners themselves. They check if the teachers come to class and on time.
(Teacher, **School LN**-Quintile 1)

I am planning to take two SMT members [from KwaZulu-Natal] to visit [a school] in Limpopo. We are going to observe what they do and learn from them.

(Principal, **School KV**-Quintile 2)

Pupils must be at the school until the very last day. On the last day, we still teach four periods–so there's nothing like us missing time at the end or they are playing in the field. We teach up to the end.
(Teacher, **School KM**-Quintile 4)

If learners are already three to four years behind when they get here from primary schools, we extend our school day to allow teachers to provide more support.

(Teacher, **School WL**-Quintile 3)

In extra classes, we teach learners in three groups: those who are performing at levels 1 and 2 together; levels 3, 4 and 5; and levels 6 and 7. This allows us to pitch support at the correct level.
(Teacher, **School EE**-Quintile 3)

Friday afternoon is our planning day. We plan for the week ahead: What we are going to teach, decide on which activities we are going to give to all our learners for classwork and homework.
(HOD, **School LK**-Quintile 2)

In our school, we have a team-teaching room, e.g., all the maths educators in the school will just choose specific topics, which learners find challenging and we team-teach those topics.
(Teacher, **School KK**-Quintile 4)

In English, there is a teacher responsible for each of the three papers in the exam: Paper 1, 2, and 3. We treat each paper as a subject. The same applies in other subjects.
(Teacher, **School LN**-Quintile 1)

WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS THAT WORK 'TICK'?

When I see how our teachers go beyond the call of duty to help us succeed, I always say to myself 'I can't let them down.'

(Learner, **School KS**-Quintile 4)

Our present circumstance cannot and will not dictate our future. We may be poor, but our minds are filthy rich and with that, the sky is the limit.

(Learner, **School EI**-Quintile 2)

The climate has to be right. If it's not right, then forget it. No best teacher in the world can be effective in an environment where there is no order and discipline.

(Principal, **School WL**-Quintile 3)

Discipline is the mother of all. The beginning for success is discipline.

(Teacher, **School GO**-Quintile 3)

Anything below 95% is just not good enough but 100% pass rate of certificate or diploma passes is 100% of nothing. It's absolutely useless!

(Learner, **School KS**-Quintile 4)

It's all in the mind. All you need when you work under such desperate conditions as ours is a right attitude—and lots of it. If you have a right attitude, the impossible will become possible.

(Learner, **School KY**-Quintile 1)

We don't have the best of everything—few resources, large classes, poor and sometimes hungry children. All we have are committed teachers and the love they have for their learners.

(Principal, **School KV**-Quintile 2)

Our teachers are dedicated because who would come to school early in the morning at 6 am just to teach us? Sometimes they leave as late as 8 pm. This means a lot to us—it means they do care.

(Learner, **School MI**-Quintile 1)

In other schools, the best teachers are earmarked for Grade 12 and if they are placed in the lower grades, it's a demotion. In our school, it's the opposite. We value laying a solid foundation here

(Learner, **School KZ**-Quintile 3)

You must appreciate that we teach learners who come from child-headed families. Some of these learners are heads of these families. They have become 'parents' to their younger siblings.

(Principal, **School LH**-Quintile 3)

At the end of the year I must get 100% pass rate in my subject. I must get distinctions—no excuses. I can't blame learners' poor background when learners fail.

(Learner, **School KZ**-Quintile 2)

For our teachers, teaching is not just a job. They are our second parents. They spend time with us almost 24/7. I know they don't get more money for doing this but they do it because they care.

(Learner, **School LF**-Quintile 3)

Before teachers go to class, we make sure that they have lesson plans. The HODs first check the relevance of the lesson plan and its correlation vis-a-vis the ATP.

(Learner, **School MK**-Quintile 1)

Our target is 100% pass rate—which we have achieved for the past five years—100% bachelors, and we want to get 100% pass in all the subjects.

(Learner, **School KF**-Quintile 4)

We say to teachers, 'the non-negotiable is that you have to teach the whole syllabus. You don't have a choice. How you do that, we leave it to you and your team.

(Principal, **School GP**-Quintile 2)

WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS THAT WORK 'TICK'?

We have teachers who are here on Saturdays when they should be spending that time with their families but they trade all those important things for us. Just for us! We are blessed.
(Learner, **School KD**-Quintile 4)

We decided that were going to focus on maths and science. It wasn't easy to convince parents to agree to this. We said 'History and Geography are important but we can't offer everything.'
(Principal, **School LN**-Quintile 1)

We create time and space for teachers to plan collectively in different departments and subject areas. We make sure that time for teachers to plan together is in the timetable.

(Teacher, **School GN**-Quintile 3)

I do the class visits, classroom observation. These visits are unannounced—not to catch teachers out—but because we want to give them support that they need.

(Principal, **School FF**-Quintile 1)

Our own children attend or have attended this school. If you believe that the school where you teach is not good enough for your own children, you are saying other schools are doing a better job than yours.

We have formed WhatsApp groups for teachers in different subjects. This is extremely helpful because you know that you are not alone. You have a family to go to when you need help.
(Teacher, **School KM**-Quintile 4)

We simply could not offer the universe [all subjects] because the number of teachers allocated to our school remained the same. Each high school in the area specialises in one stream.
(Principal, **School EE**-Quintile 4)

Because in our school we have an open-door policy, any teacher can walk into your class and observe you. So, this means that you must always be on your toes and be prepared.
(Teacher, **School EH**-Quintile 1)

If I were to drop dead the next day, I would rest in peace knowing that the school will not fall apart because leadership does not reside in one individual but is shared

(Principal, **School FE**-Quintile 2)

I meet all the HODs on a weekly basis to monitor curriculum coverage. I check what is in the ATP and check that against what is in the learners' books. That's key for me.
(Principal, **School KU**-Quintile 2)

We don't have scheduled afternoon, weekend and holiday classes because we strongly believe that if teachers use every minute of the seven hours each day to teach, they should be able to complete the curriculum.

After each test, we conduct item analysis. We analyse every item in the question paper in every subject. This gives us extremely useful data, e.g., learners and educators who underperform.
(Teacher, **School MK**-Quintile 1)

There are weekly subject meetings with HODs. I expect HODs to give me minutes of their meetings so that I understand what it is that they discuss in their meetings.

(Principal, **School EF**-Quintile 3)

We monitor if teachers' plans, the learners' books and workbooks correlate. Every topic that appears in the Annual Teaching Plan must appear in the learners' book.

(Principal, **School FF**-Quintile 1)

We use extra time to support learners who need it but, you can add as much extra teaching time as you like, if the quality of teaching is poor, extra time will not lead to achievement gains.
(Teacher, **School LM**-Quintile 2)

PART III: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has documented best practices that are exhibited by top-performing schools. They are intended to assist school improvement planning by focusing on essential 'supports' for learning. School managers and teachers may not endorse all best practices presented here, but they could help them to sharpen and focus their own vision of school improvement.

3.1 CONCLUSION

There are five important conclusions that were drawn from the assessment of a variety of strategies and practices exhibited by the top-performing schools.

Firstly, there are no magic potions, no single golden bullet or any earth-shattering practice to delivering improved learning outcomes and reducing achievement gaps.

Secondly, while certain quintessential learning variables like time management were identified, an interplay exists between in-school practices and the quality of teaching. The interconnected practices blend in a web-like fashion to produce conditions that lead to higher learning outcomes. There is no one best practice presented in this report that is a standalone factor of effective schools, but each practice is a core component that operates within a multifaceted system to promote student learning and growth.

Thirdly, the schools that work focus on learning rather than just improving the NSC examination results. That is, the focus is not about the NSC examinations per se but how teachers align the curriculum and appropriate assessment practices into regular classroom teaching so that in the end this helps learners to do well in the exams.

Fourthly, the more the schools produce good results, the more they want to beat the previous record, i.e., success breeds success. All schools that work have actually internalised success, and they will not settle for anything less.

Finally, while school staff members interviewed by researchers talked often about the satisfaction they experienced when learner achievement improved, they did not minimize the hard work involved.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Every child deserves a high-quality education, regardless of his or her family's income or background. There is a need, therefore, to think beyond what is known as the traditional means of education and find a new vision for academics in our education system. This new vision must encompass several forward-thinking, innovative strategies aimed at meeting the needs of all learners in all schools. Seven recommendations have been made towards making this vision a reality. These recommendations are organised according to different layers of the system, namely schools, district offices and provincial/national offices.

3.2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO SCHOOLS

Our analysis leads us to the conclusion that it is the collective work of teachers, learners, parents, and different structures in the community that will ultimately lead to all children "accessing and benefitting from a high quality education" as envisioned by the National Development Plan (NDP, p. 264). Although many suggestions can be made to ensure that "schools provide all learners with an excellent education" (NDP, 2011: 264), we make the following three school-level recommendations, which can be actioned by the members of the school management teams led by the Principals:

RECOMMENDATION 1—INTRA-AND INTER-SCHOOL NETWORKING: Sharing successes should be an integral part of the work of an improving school. There are aspects in every teacher's work and every school's work which reflect the best practice which others can learn from.

It is recommended that sharing of good practices should begin with teachers having regular professional conversations about curriculum delivery among themselves within their department, across departments (inter-disciplinary discussions), and across different phases within a school, as well as across schools within a circuit, district, province and across provinces. Top-performing schools, in **Best Practice 5.4 (Networking)**, have provided some ideas how teachers and SMTs:

- Develop a climate of openness and sharing within school and across schools—sharing practice within school and beyond;
- Develop networking systems within school and between schools; and
- Link schools and teachers to address specific training needs and develop networking opportunities.

It is recommended that high schools do baseline assessments in Mathematics and the language of learning and teaching in Grade 8 at the beginning of the year. These baseline assessments should be analysed in terms of curriculum coverage and learners' skills knowledge. The high schools can then begin to address these shortfalls within their school. These results can also be fed back to the feeder primary schools, particularly if there are noticeable trends—in terms of content and skills gaps—in learners from the same primary schools.

RECOMMENDATION 2—TEACHER COLLABORATION AND EMPOWERMENT: Schools need to foster a collaborative culture among teachers that puts the students' learning first, and turns a teacher's best practice into a school wide best practice.

Many districts do not have the capacity to provide regular support to all teachers in every school. It is for this reason that school-based teacher support and empowerment becomes crucial. Top-performing schools in this study argue, in **Best Practice 6.2A**, that when teachers work collaboratively, share good practices and engage in on-going professional conversations, they distribute a base of pedagogical knowledge among all teachers within a school as opposed to restricting it to individual teachers. Put differently, the focus shifts from individual teacher expertise to building a stronger learning and knowledge base of all teachers at the school.

SMTs need to:

- Provide time and space for teachers to be part of a community that provides a sounding board for ideas and best practices without feeling pressure to hide their failures or vulnerabilities.
- Make sure that conditions for teacher collaboration—including a feeling of trust, a mutual or common goal, shared participation, and shared accountability —prevail. This would encourage teachers to confess their inadequacies among their peers knowing that they have a support system within their school.

RECOMMENDATION 3—SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING: If school improvement planning is to make an impact on the standards achieved by learners, then effective planning processes must be at the heart of the school and drive its development.

Schools must produce an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP), informed by school self-evaluation, as required, in terms of the national Policy on Whole School Evaluation (WSE). Towards the end of the school improvement planning cycle, schools must begin auditing activities to find out what impact has been made by the improvement strategies implemented during the year. The school improvement planning process needs to address the following important questions:

- *How well are we doing?* This stage requires the school to conduct self-evaluation to get answers to this question.

- *How well should we be doing?* In this stage, the whole school targets are determined. The schools should set targets from top-down—setting targets that bring them into line with other similar schools, as well as from bottom-up, whereby schools set targets for individual learners. The school target is arrived at by identifying the borderline learners who will bridge the gap between the bottom-up target, and the top-down target. **Best Practice 2.2** (Academic press) provides ideas how other schools set targets.
- *What will we do to make it happen?* To achieve the set targets, the school should identify a range of **improvement** strategies to be implemented at whole-school and classroom-level. These should be summarised in the SIP, providing a focus for practical action throughout the school. This report provides 30 strategies (referred to as "best practices") that top-performing schools in this study implemented to meet their targets. These practices are listed in Appendix A. It is important to focus on a few indicators of improvement in the SIP rather than to include a large number of unfocused and unmanageable activities. The indicators should be specific and measurable.
- *Are we there yet?* Schools should review their progress towards meeting their targets. The SIP should be reviewed and action plans adjusted every year. Staff development should be prioritised to ensure that improvement strategies are effectively implemented. Performance data will need to be regularly collected and analysed to check progress in relation to the targets which have been set.

This report describes the key drivers of curriculum delivery and best practices that inform them. These best practices are detailed in the report and are summarised in Appendix A. In addressing the question "How well are we doing?" it is recommended that schools follow four steps listed below to think critically about the best practices that could be used to increase learner achievement based on the needs of each specific school through a permanent cycle of inquiry and action:

- **Step 1:** Read and discuss each best practice and think about how it applies to your school, and discuss what you believe to be most appropriate for your particular circumstances. The best practices presented in this report are neither the only route to improvement nor are they meant to be a definitive answer to school improvement. A school may decide to have separate teams, composed of staff and other relevant stakeholders, work on each of the six themes around which the best practices are presented in Part II in this report.
- **Step 2:** Decide whether you would endorse the best practices for your school or develop alternatives that are more appropriate for your school. Indicate the best practices that you have endorsed or modified by completing the last column in Appendix A.
- **Step 3:** Once you have settled on a set of best practices that are appropriate for your school, ascertain how close you think your school is to the ideal as expressed by each best practice (either as presented in this report or as modified by your school). This will entail collecting, analysing and discussing concrete evidence where your school is in relation to the best practice. What evidence does your school have to support a conclusion about how your school can be described in relation to the best practice or your alternative version?
- **Step 4:** Determine your school's priorities for improvement. The priorities identified must inform your school improvement plan.

3.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO DISTRICTS

Our findings point to the need for major departures from business-as-usual for many district office staff in order to realize effective learning in all schools. Because many districts have limited capacity, they need to consider limiting improvement initiatives to a few fundamental efforts. Three areas that can be prioritised as a starting point are:

- Improving co-ordination among different units in the district,
- Better use of data to take decisions and to inform improvement strategies, and
- Supporting Principals as instructional leaders in their respective schools.

RECOMMENDATION 4—REORGANIZING DISTRICT RESOURCES TO SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS: Individual parts of the district need to strategically co-ordinate their work better so that they operate in concert with one another as opposed to working in separate silos or in competition for limited district resources.

Findings in this study suggest that strong, co-ordinated support from the district office is essential to realising effective learning for all schools and all learners. No matter how committed individual district officials may be to school improvement, their plans will likely be stymied unless they find ways to bring every part of the system into alignment with the goals of excellent teaching and learning for all learners. Top-performing schools described how officials from different units in their district offices worked together as cross-functional teams to support them (see **OSF 2**-District support in Part IV of the full report).

RECOMMENDATION 5—EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA: In addition to setting the expectation of data-driven decision-making, districts need to take responsibility for collecting data, analysing it, and using it effectively to support learning.

Districts need to develop a data-driven culture. Managers in district offices must have access to the "right data" to help them answer questions that are fundamental to system-wide improvement. "Right data" can loosely be defined as data that addresses specific measurable outputs. Right data would assist districts to address important questions such as:

- Which of our learners are chronically low-performing across grades and subject areas?
- Which teachers and Principals, if any, have these learners had in common?
- What other features of these schools might help explain such results?

Among other things, such data can be arrived at by doing question, item and error analyses. This is described in detail in **Best Practice 6.4** (effective use of assessment to advance learning). Districts need to ensure that, when requesting data from schools, the data can be used to inform specific decisions regarding school improvement. Having access to better data and using it effectively to inform its decisions, districts will resist the temptation to blanket their schools with professional development offerings, in the hope that some of them might pay off. Instead, they would be careful to target their efforts on the areas of greatest need, to focus their school improvement efforts and to refine their supports for individual schools. See **OSF 2** in the full report how some districts use data effectively to support their schools.

RECOMMENDATION 6—FOCUSING ON SUPPORTING PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: In pursuit of quality education, districts need to take deliberate steps to reduce the amount of time circuit managers spend on operational or administrative issues and monitoring schools' compliance, and shift their focus toward improving teaching and learning in schools.

District office staff influence teaching and learning not directly, but their support influences the behaviour of those who do have a more direct impact on the learning outcomes, i.e., teachers and SMT members. Therefore, circuit managers would have the greatest impact on their districts' efforts to

improve teaching and learning when they dedicate their time to specific teaching strategies such as modelling effective instructional leadership, both in one-on-one settings and in professional learning communities. However, circuit managers can become progressively more capable of helping Principals become effective instructional leaders only if they receive ongoing support, too. It is recommended that circuit managers receive intensive professional development as well, in order to perform their role effectively. (See **OSF 2**-District support in the full report).

It also recommended that circuit managers and district directors encourage a "cross-pollination" of ideas among the Principals and create platforms where Principals freely share good practices among schools within a circuit and across a district. A "District Good Practice Register" could be created where schools can share what works in their schools for other schools to learn.

3.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO PEDs AND DBE

RECOMMENDATION 7—MINIMISING THE LOSS OF TEACHING TIME: A standard must be set regarding the number of teacher days in each term that cannot be exceeded attending workshops, union meetings, memorial services, sporting events and cultural activities.

There are substantial variations among schools in respect of *planned time* and *implemented time* or "time-on-task." The Minister determines the school calendar *(planned time),* which specifies the number of days that teachers and learners must attend school in a given academic year. However, the amount of time that teachers and learners actually spend at school by the end of each academic year *(implemented time)* relative to planned time is significantly reduced in many schools. The implemented time spent in different schools varies remarkably among schools owing to a number of factors.

The variation between *planned time* and *implemented time* among schools can be attributed to seven factors:

- Non-adherence to notional time allocation prescribed in the curriculum;
- Learner and teacher poor attendance;
- Learner and teacher late coming;
- Teachers leaving school early for a variety of reasons;
- Teachers and learners returning to class late after break;
- Poor time management for the National School Nutrition Programme; and
- Early commencement of June and November examinations.

The centrality of learning and teaching time lies in the fact that if time is not managed effectively, it has a negative impact on learner proficiency owing to poor curriculum coverage and limited learning opportunities.

More compelling research findings consistently argue that the impact of time lost is often more detrimental in schools serving economically disadvantaged learners, who tend to trail behind their more affluent peers academically, continue to lag as they proceed through each grade, and have fewer opportunities outside of school for learning. For these millions of learners, reduced time in school has a debilitating effect.

There needs to be a zero-tolerance approach to the factors listed above and detailed records need to be kept so that different officials at different levels in the system can be held accountable.

A standard needs to be set, i.e. a point at which teachers can no longer leave their classes because too much teaching time has been lost already—where any additional loss of time would result in the school not being able to complete the curriculum adequately.

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Appendix A

LIST OF BEST PRACTICES

THEME	SUB-THEME	BEST PRACTICE NO.	BEST PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR	ENDORSEMENT OF BEST PRACTICES*		SPECIFY THE MODIFIED BEST PRACTICE
				UNMODIFIED	MODIFIED	
1. **System's support and partnership**	Parent/Family Involvement	No. 1.1	• Map out ways to broaden parental or family involvement			•
	Community Support/Partnerships	No. 1.2	• Develop partnerships with agencies to provide a coordinated set of key social and educational services to learners			•
	Learner well-being	No. 1.3	• Take initiatives to understand learners' diverse learning challenges, and always strive to meet learners' needs			•
2. **Learner-centred climate**	Safety, order and discipline	No. 2.1	• Provide an orderly and secure environment that ensures a supportive context for learning			•
	Emphasis on academic success	No. 2.2	• Send strong messages about the importance and value of school work and have high expectations			•
	Reward and incentive	No. 2.3	• Create a strong culture of academic achievement by celebrating learner successes			•
	Positive teacher & learner attitude	No. 2.4	• Inculcate a belief that all learners can learn and live up to the expectations			•
	Culture and values	No. 2.5	• Identify and develop a strong unique culture and set of values, which underpin everything the school stands for			•

* Use "X" to indicate the best practice or best practices that your school plans to put into action in 2018 as part of your School Improvement Plan.

Theme	Sub-theme	Best practice No.	Best practice descriptor	Endorsement of best practices*		Specify the modified best practice
				Unmodified	Modified	
3. **Enabling conditions**	A capable teaching force	No. 3.1	• Recruit good teachers, retain them, and create good conditions for them to excel			•
	Flexibility and autonomy	No. 3.2	• Place decision-making closer to the classroom to increase learner achievement			•
	Being an NSC exam marker	No. 3.3	• Encourage teachers to become markers in the NSC examinations and to share their experiences with their fellow teachers			•
	Teacher commitment and dedication	No. 3.4	• Appoint, identify and develop teachers who feel accountable for helping learners improve their performance			•
	Focused curriculum	No. 3.5	• Specialise in few subjects or academic streams and stay focused			•
4. **School leadership**	Strategic and improvement planning	No. 4.1	• Develop the School Improvement Plan, which includes priorities for action, implement it and review it regularly			•
	Instructional leadership	No. 4.2	• Monitor or control teachers' and learners' work to assess the progress that the school is making towards delivering the curriculum			•
	Facilitative leadership	No. 4.3	• Lead without controlling, while making it easier for all members of the school community to achieve agreed-upon goals			•

Theme	Sub-theme	Best practice No.	Best practice descriptor	Endorsement of best practices*		Specify the modified best practice
				Unmodified	Modified	
5. **Professional development and collaboration**	School-based programme	No. 5.1	• Provide time for meaningful staff development as well as scheduling and pacing development activities			•
	Teacher own development	No. 5.2	• Take responsibility for own development and empowerment			•
	Teacher collaboration	No. 5.3	• Explore different scheduling and grouping practices to reduce teacher isolation and provide teachers with collaborative settings for planning, problem solving and peer support			•
	Networking	No. 5.4	• Network with other schools to develop instructional and leadership skills as a strategy for providing quality professional development activities			•
6. **Quality of teaching**	High learning time	No. 6.1	• Use allotted time efficiently and effectively • Mitigate factors that lead to loss of teaching time • Create more learning opportunities for learners			•
	Variety of innovative teaching strategies	No. 6.2A	• *Teacher collaboration:* Provide time and space for teachers to do the following: joint planning, team teaching, teacher observation, sharing ideas and good practices (or reflection sessions), and cross-curricula collaboration			•
		No. 6.2B	• *Looping:* Teach the same group of learners for more than one school year as they move up in different grades			•

Theme	Sub-theme	Best practice No.	Best practice descriptor	Endorsement of best practices*		Specify the modified best practice
				Unmodified	Modified	
6. Quality of teaching	Variety of innovative teaching strategies	No. 6.2C	• *Differentiated instructional strategies:* Design and deliver lessons to best reach different learners with a wide range of abilities and varying exceptionalities			•
		No. 6.2D	• *Cooperative learning (learner peer support):* Use small groups so that learners work together to maximize their own and each other's learning			•
		No. 6.2E	• *Make subjects interesting and relevant:* Make lessons engaging for learners and increase their relevance and rigor			•
		No. 6.2F	• *Use WhatsApp as a teaching tool:* Create a safe milieu where learners and their teachers could extend learning beyond the classroom borders			•
	Frequent homework which is monitored	No. 6.3	• Design effective homework to assist learners to self-regulate and take responsibility for their work, and to empower parents to support their children at home			•
	Regular assessment	No. 6.4	• Use different phases of the assessment loop effectively to improve learning and teaching			•
	Thorough exam preparation	No. 6.5	• Prepare learners for the examinations adequately and appropriately without detracting from real learning and or "teaching to the test."			•

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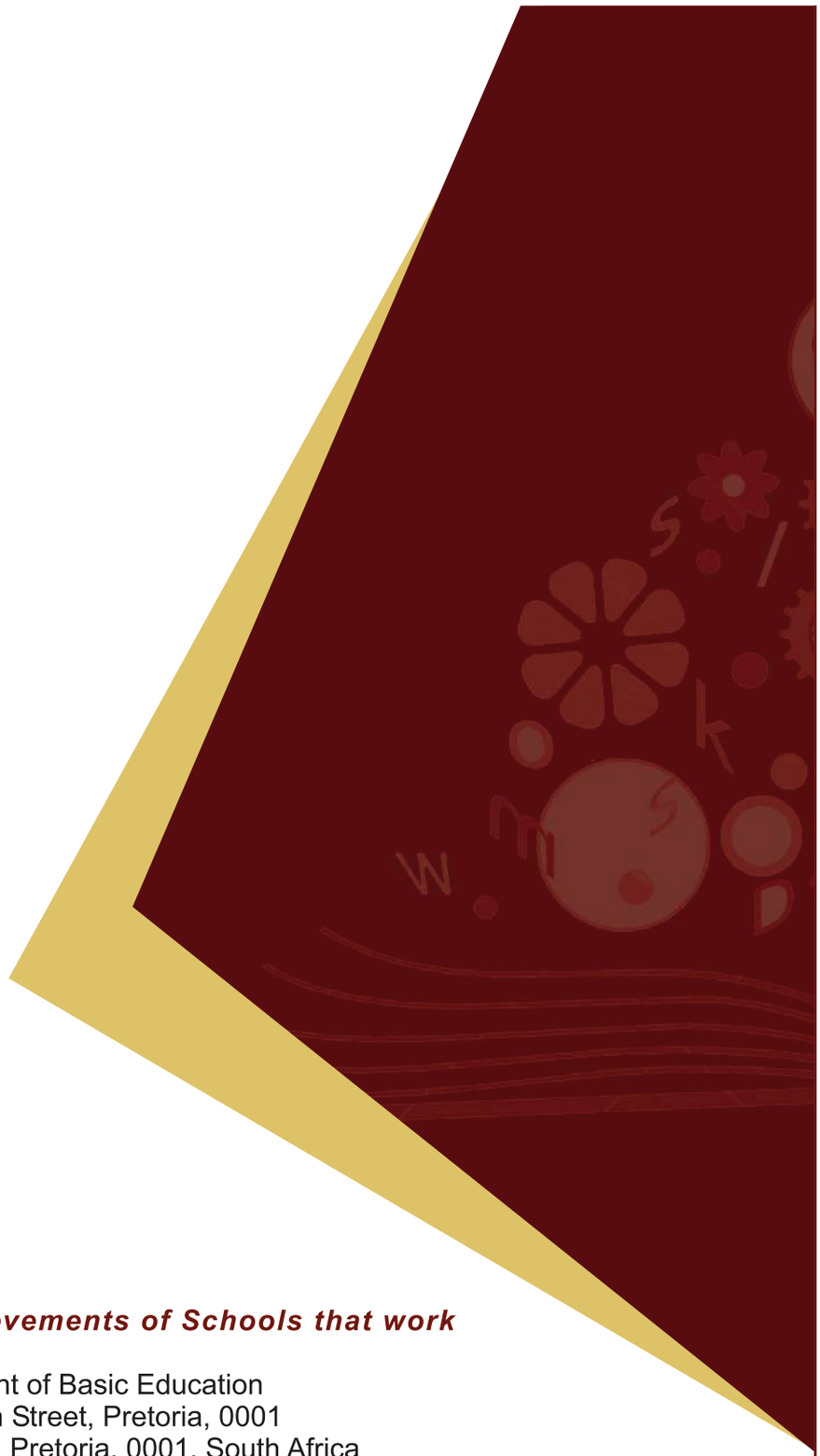
NEEDU MISSION

The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) was established in 2009 and is semi-independent. It is accountable to the Minister of Basic Education for the performance of its functions. The Report of the Ministerial Committee that investigated the establishment of NEEDU and the NEEDU Bill, which was based on the recommendations of the Committee, frame the work of the Unit. NEEDU focuses on the improvement of schooling, and its principal functions, as set out in the NEEDU Bill. The functions of NEEDU are to:

- Identify, on a system-wide basis, the critical factors that inhibit or advance school improvement, including evidence of good practice
- Analyse and identify approaches and strategies necessary for achieving eqaulity in the provision of quality education
- Evaluate the monitoring and evaluation of schools by the provincial and national departments, including their structures
- Evaluate the support provided to schools and school governing bodies by the national and the provincial departments, including district offices
- Evaluate the state of South African schools--in particular, the quality of schoool leadership and learning
- Provide the Minister of Basic Education with an authoritative, analytical and accurate account on the state of schools in South Africa, in particular the status of teaching and learning in all schools
- Make focused recommendations for redressing the problem areas that undermine school improvement and, in this respect, to recommend appropriate developmental interventions to support schools



Celebrating the achievements of Schools that work

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