

Evaluation of the Early Grade Reading Programme II (EGRP II) Northern Cape, South Africa, 2024-2025

Final Endline Case Study Report

**Prepared by
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BMGF	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CPTD	Continuous Professional Training and Development
CWPM	Correct Words per Minute
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Department Head
EA	Education Assistant
EFAL	English First Additional Language
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment or Activity
EGRS	Early Grade Reading Study
EGRP	Early Grade Reading Programme
EGRP II PMT	EGRP II Project Management Team
FB District	Francis Baard District Municipality
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FP	Foundation Phase
GGR	Group Guided Reading
HL	(African) Home Language
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
JTG District	John Taolo Gaetsewe District Municipality
KII	Key Informant Interview
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
LWB	Learner Workbook
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OUP SA	Oxford University Press South Africa
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PILO	Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes
PLC	Professional Learning Community
RC	Reading Champion
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
SLP	Structured Learning Programme
SBW	School-Based Workshops
SR	Shared Reading
SMT	School Management Team
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
RSA	Republic of South Africa
TOC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Summary

Background

The evaluation of the Early Grade Reading Programme II (EGRP II) in the Northern Cape, South Africa, aims to systematically assess the intervention's impact, fidelity, and sustainability from 2024 to 2025. The EGRP II initiative is part of a series of interventions and evaluations led by the Department of Basic Education in response to the urgent need for improved literacy outcomes in South Africa, particularly among foundation phase learners, since previous studies have indicated low reading proficiency levels, especially in historically disadvantaged schools. The EGRP II, like its predecessor EGRP I, utilises the 'triple cocktail' approach by incorporating external coaches, teacher training, and the provision of learning and teaching support materials (LTSM). This combination has been shown in previous studies to be effective in enhancing learner reading outcomes. However, this iteration is distinctly applied within multigrade classrooms, a context that has not been investigated in earlier reading studies.

Evaluation Objectives

The overarching objectives of the EGRP II evaluation are as follows:

- **Effectiveness and Impact:** Assess the extent to which external coaching, teacher training, and the provision of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) improve learners' reading outcomes in both Home Language Setswana and English First Additional Language (EFAL), comparing results between monograde and multigrade classes.
- **Contextual Factors:** Investigate the contextual influences that may favour or impede the effectiveness of EGRP II in multigrade classrooms compared to monograde classrooms.
- **Implementation Fidelity:** Evaluate the fidelity of the intervention's implementation to determine if it was executed as designed and identify the contextual factors that contributed to any deviations.
- **Data Utilisation:** Leverage existing national system-level data and primary learner assessment data to assess the programme's impact and pinpoint gaps and weaknesses within the national data collection systems.
- **Sustainability Assessment:** Determine the sustainability of EGRP II practices post-intervention, focusing on the programme's embedding within school, district, and provincial systems.

Methodology

The case study methodology for this evaluation included visiting eleven schools in 2024, early in the intervention, and revisiting the same schools in 2025 to document changes in classroom practice over time. The current report presents the findings of the 2025 iteration of case studies and provides commentary on changes observed since the 2024 iteration.

Key Findings

Key findings of the case study component of the EGRP II evaluation include:

- **Multigrade Teacher Transformation:** Multigrade teachers benefited significantly from the specific training, which provided necessary structure and processes for managing multiple grades simultaneously—skills they previously lacked. Many successful multigrade teachers shifted from grouping learners by grade to grouping by ability (Teaching at the Right Level), which improved classroom management.
- **Learner Engagement:** Learners expressed a strong liking for the *Ulwazi Lwethu* anthologies and the interactive nature of the lessons, particularly when teachers read with expression.
- **Adherence to Teaching Protocols:** Teachers demonstrated improved competence in Shared Reading and Group Guided Reading (GGR) compared to 2024, and complaints regarding lesson timing largely disappeared as teachers adjusted to the structure. However, some weaker teachers continue to rely on chorus reading rather than individual reading during GGR.
- **English First Additional Language (EFAL) Confidence:** Teachers showed increased confidence in teaching EFAL and were less reliant on code-switching (translation), a change attributed to coaches emphasising the exclusive use of English during these lessons.
- **Parity Between Coaching and Base Schools:** Contrary to the 2024 findings, by the 2025 round of case study observations, schools receiving only the "base programme" (materials and training) often adhered to EGRP II protocols better than schools receiving dedicated coaching. Furthermore, there was no qualitatively observable difference in learner reading ability between schools with coaches and those without.
- **Rejection of Administrative Trackers:** The use of curriculum trackers and assessment checklists remains a challenge. Most teachers do not use them, or use them only performatively to demonstrate compliance, viewing them as distractions from teaching.
- **Technology Adoption:** The majority of teachers expressed comfort with using tablets for lesson planning and could navigate them independently. However, resistance persists among some older, veteran teachers who find the technology overwhelming.
- **Written Work Deficit:** Learners continue to receive insufficient written work. There is frequently a lack of alignment between the learner workbooks and the dated lesson plans, and workbook completion is often incomplete or lacks thorough corrections.
- **Coaching Limitations:** While coaches overall were consistent in supporting teachers in the EGRP II methodologies and formed good relationships with teachers, the coaching model did not foster "critical reflection" skills among teachers.
- **Sustainability Risks:** The sustainability of the programme is viewed as fragile. The continued success of complex tasks, such as managing occupational work alongside reading groups, heavily depends on the presence of Reading Champions and the physical durability of the provided learning materials. Additionally, "exemplary" teachers from 2024 faced setbacks in 2025 due to external factors like class size increases, highlighting how easily progress can be derailed.

Conclusions

The 2025 case studies indicate that EGRP II has effectively strengthened classroom management and instructional structure, proving particularly transformative for multigrade

teachers who have successfully adopted ability-based grouping and improved lesson pacing. Ultimately, while the programme has established valuable pedagogical routines, the long-term sustainability of these gains is likely to remain fragile.

1. Introduction

The evaluation of the Early Grade Reading Programme II (EGRP II) in the Northern Cape, South Africa, aims to systematically assess the intervention's impact, fidelity, and sustainability from 2024 to 2025. The EGRP II initiative is part of a series of interventions and evaluations led by the Department of Basic Education in response to the urgent need for improved literacy outcomes in South Africa, particularly among foundation phase learners, since previous studies have indicated low reading proficiency levels, especially in historically disadvantaged schools. The EGRP II, like its predecessor EGRP I, utilises the 'triple cocktail' approach by incorporating external coaches, teacher training, and the provision of learning and teaching support materials (LTSM). This combination has been shown in previous studies to be effective in enhancing learner reading outcomes. However, this iteration is distinctly applied within multigrade classrooms, a context that has not been investigated in earlier reading studies.

Learning lessons about how to improve reading outcomes in multigrade schools is important as an equity issue, since many of South Africa's most vulnerable children are in such schools. Additionally, monograde schools might benefit from learning strategies employed by multigrade schools when addressing classes with a wide range of reading abilities - a common scenario in early-grade classrooms within monograde settings.

This report presents the findings of the case studies phase of the Early Grade Reading Programme II (EGRP II) Evaluation, interpreting data from the endline schools visits to eleven schools (in August 2025) in light of the baseline visits to the same schools in 2024. While this report can be read on its own and provides a detailed account of the qualitative insights gained by the EGRP II evaluation, the case study insights should be considered in relation to the broader evaluation methodology documented in the full evaluation report (published February 2026), which includes intervention fidelity, learner impact and programme sustainability components.

2. Background and Methodology

In line with previous iterations of the Early Grade Reading Study and Programme (EGRS and EGRP), this study aims to understand how a particular innovation or intervention impacts early-grade learner assessment results in the learners' Home Language (HL – Setswana) and first additional language (EFAL – English). Both EGRP I and EGRP II include a base programme of training for early-grade teachers, supported by high-quality learning and teaching support materials (LTSM). Added to this are various experimental approaches to supporting and coaching teachers in their classrooms. The EGRP II iteration, implemented in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa, examines the impact of utilising professional external coaches to support early-grade teachers to teach reading in both multigrade and monograde schools. Multigrade schools are characterised by two or more grades being taught in a single classroom, typically by a single teacher. This phenomenon is common in the Northern Cape (as well as various other provinces), with most such schools being in deep rural communities or areas with commercial farming and mining.

The EGRP II was implemented in the John Taolo Gaetsewe (JTG) District and Frances Baard District of the Northern Cape, covering 132 schools over two years, from January 2024 to December 2025. The school sample included 89 monograde schools and 43 multigrade schools (39 of which are in the JTG District and 5 in Frances Baard District). Fifty-six schools received the priority programme, which involves the direct coaching of teachers by professional coaches. The remaining 76 received the base programme of teacher training and LTSM, acting as comparison schools. 118 of these schools are part of a matched sample, randomly allocated to the priority (coaching) and comparison (base programme) streams, allowing for a robust measurement of the coaching intervention's impact.

The EGRP II intervention is implemented by Oxford University Press (OUP). SII Africa is the independent evaluator for the intervention. The evaluation includes multiple methods, including qualitative case studies (covered in this report), and a quantitative phase including learner assessments and teacher and SMT surveys. The quantitative findings will be reported on separately.

2.1. Methodology

The case study methodology for this evaluation included visiting eleven schools in 2024, early in the intervention, and revisiting the same schools in 2025 to document changes in classroom practice over time. The current report presents the findings of the 2025 iteration of case studies and provides commentary on changes observed since the 2024 iteration.

The rationale for employing a case study methodology lies in its suitability for the specific objectives of the research team, namely, to understand, over time, why certain schools adopt a pedagogical innovation. It also examines how various schools adapt the innovation to suit their unique contexts. With its naturalistic, context-sensitive, and richly descriptive approach, the case study methodology is well-suited to exploring how schools interpreted and implemented the EGRP II's innovations, including coaching, training, and LTSMs for multigrade classrooms, as well as how the programme's sustainability was integrated into the public education system.

Case study research is useful for examining why or how something occurred, as it is "the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context," based on data collected in a natural setting (Golby, 1994:11), in this case, within schools.

The EGRP II evaluation assumes that context is crucial to how each school adopts and utilises innovation. This method involves examining a specific case using both standardised tools (observation checklists and structured interview questionnaires) and flexible approaches (open interviews and observations). It is an organic research approach that utilises "thick descriptions," which are essential for understanding the specific context and situation. While case study findings may not be universally generalisable, they offer validity and value by potentially resonating with the reader.

The adoption of a pedagogical innovation in education is a complex process influenced by various factors. These are likely to include the school's management style and organisation (particularly in multigrade schools), the dedication and expertise of the teachers, and the

overall school climate. If these factors are found to play a significant role in the adoption of the innovation and in improving learner outcomes, they could be shared with other schools as good practices to emulate.

We are also interested in multigrade and monograde schools that enhance their learners' reading outcomes by adopting the innovation and tailoring it to fit their unique school culture. These schools, often seen as positive deviants (PDs) in innovation adoption, may be challenging to replicate due to factors such as the exceptional dedication of their principals. However, they can be paired with other schools, fostering openness to innovation and potentially inspiring their partner schools to achieve similar success.

The 2024 case study baseline aimed to understand the factors within schools that may influence their uptake of the intervention. Returning to the same schools in late 2025 enables us to assess which of the originally identified factors did, in fact, affect uptake.

Using a case study approach allows us not only to record *what* conditions are associated with the innovation's take-up and non-take-up but also to reflect on *why* these schools adopt and succeed with it. This is enabled by the phenomenological exploration of rich contextual data. This allows us to understand how individuals affected by the innovation perceived the intervention and how they interacted with it. By comparing this evidence against the 2024 case studies, we intend to provide a developmental or longitudinal perspective on the factors most closely associated with the adoption and ownership of the innovation and help us identify and understand the key levers that need to be managed to ensure long-term sustainability, a central focus of this programme.

However, as stressed in the 2024 study, it is important to recognise that the timeframe is relatively short for the full impact of the innovation. Educational interventions typically require more than two full years before measurable programme outcomes begin to emerge. For the 2025 case studies, we returned to the same schools only ten months after the original data collection process.

3. Multigrade schools: a brief international and national literature review

Multigrade schools and teaching have been a neglected area of study in education^{1 2}. This is an unfortunate oversight, as so many schools internationally are multigrade. Estimates indicate that some third to a fifth of all primary schools in developed countries include multigrade classes.³ In developing countries, the proportion of multigrade schools is thought to be even higher. Again, this lack of exact data highlights the scarcity of research on multigrade schools. One exception is Angela Little,⁴⁵ who has specialised in researching multigrade schools in developing countries and produced various seminal studies on the subject.

¹ Brown, B.A. (2010) Multigrade Teaching: A review of issues, trends and practices: implications for teacher education in South Africa. CEPD: Johannesburg.

² Cornish, L. & Taole, M.J. (2021) Perspectives on multigrade teaching: Research and practice in South Africa and Australia. Springer: Dordrecht.

³ Cornish & Taole op cit.

⁴ Little, A. (1995) Multigrade teaching: a review of practice and research, serial No. 12. Overseas Development Administration, London.

⁵ Little, A (2001) Multigrade teaching: Towards an international research and policy agenda. In [International Journal of Educational Development](#) 21(6):481-497

Multigrade schools are defined as classrooms or schools that offer more than one curriculum grade, taught by a single teacher in a single classroom. They have been built in many countries in response to the UN's 'education for all' drive, providing access to schooling in remote and rural areas, which lacked access previously, or in areas of declining population to help anchor the remaining community. While in many countries, such as South Africa, these schools are viewed as an unwelcome necessity, in many Western countries, they are seen as the best way to create child-centred, vertically integrated schooling.⁶ In the Nordic countries and some parts of the UK and USA, such schools are encouraged. They are cost-effective as they bring teachers who are tied to a particular remote community into the workforce, make good use of existing classroom space, and reduce the need to transport learners. Little⁷ argues that whether multigrade schools are seen as a choice or an unwelcome necessity has a big impact on the quality of the teaching and learning they offer. Where they are embraced and encouraged, programmes are in place to prepare teachers, with curricula and LTSM adapted for multigrade teaching. In contrast, where multigrade schools are seen as an unwelcome necessity, they are often neglected, with teachers posted to teach in them with no preparation and without access to appropriate LTSM and lesson plans. This is the case in South Africa.⁹

The Western Cape Department of Education asserts that 2 million children in South Africa "are taught in multigrade classrooms"¹⁰, as compiled for a 2022 international Multigrade Teaching Conference held in Paarl. These children are spread across all nine provinces. Recent statistics on the number of schools that practice multigrade teaching across South Africa are difficult to ascertain, as the available statistics are at least a decade old. At that time, the DBE reports mentioned that 27% of schools nationally included multigrade classes.¹¹ In 2015, the DBE's Rural Education directorate developed a toolkit for multigrade teachers.¹² These are rare positive actions in relation to multigrade schools.

In the absence of a comprehensive South African multigrade school and teaching policy, provincial departments have actively closed or amalgamated multigrade schools, viewing them as a problem rather than an opportunity. This tendency has been reinforced by university schools of education in South Africa and elsewhere, which rarely acknowledge multigrade schools in their initial teacher training courses¹³ and, at best, offer an optional course in multigrade teaching. An EGRP II programme teacher reported doing such a course, which she said failed to prepare her for the realities of teaching a multigrade class. In South Africa, the exception may be Cape Peninsula University of Technology, which in 2009 established the Centre for Multigrade Teaching.¹⁴

⁶ Brown op cit.

⁷ Little, A. (2005). Learning and teaching in multigrade settings. Paper prepared for the UNESCO 2005 EFA Monitoring Report. Available at: www.skoleplassen.hisf.no/Rapportar/LearningandTeachinginMultigrade

⁸ Little, A. (2006) Education for All and Multigrade Teaching: challenges and opportunities.

⁹ Brown op cit; Cornish & Taole op cit.

¹⁰ <https://wcedportal.co.za/multigrade-teaching-and-learning>

¹¹ Taole, J. (2022). English First Additional Language: Teacher written feedback practice in multigrade classrooms in rural South African primary schools. In South African Journal of Education, 42:4.

¹²

<https://www.education.gov.za/ArchivedDocuments/ArchivedArticles/Support-to-Multi-Grade-Teaching-in-South-African-Schools-1022.aspx>

¹³ Cornish & Taole op cit.

¹⁴ Desktop research failed to find any mention of the Centre after 2011, so it may no longer exist.

There is very little literature on teaching in multigrade classrooms.¹⁵ Teaching in multigrade schools is acknowledged by most of the available literature as being more complex than monograde teaching. The key challenge in South Africa and most other countries is that the curriculum and the assessment protocols are the same for monograde and multigrade classes.¹⁶ Multigrade teachers are required to complete the same number of tasks as monograde teachers each term, but they must do so for two or more grades simultaneously. In multigrade classrooms, teachers are expected to share the teaching and assessment time among the different grades for which they are responsible, which is a daunting task. Research shows that South African teachers struggle to cope with the demands of multigrade teaching.¹⁷ A recent study outlines the essential elements of successful multigrade teaching as

- seating that uses space well and supports the teaching routines;
- differentiated activities allowing learners to take responsibility for their own learning;
- learners collaborating through cooperative learning;
- connecting lessons to daily life;
- using technology; and
- being flexible.¹⁸

Overall, the authors of this study argue that the keys to success in teaching multigrade classes are efficient classroom and group management and creating conditions for collaboration across age ranges. It was these specific attributes that the evaluators were seeking to observe in the multigrade classes being visited.

4. Case Study Research Questions

The main research questions which the case study research addresses remain:

1. What was the extent of adoption of the EGRP among Foundation Phase teachers, and does it vary between multigrade and monograde schools? If so, what are the possible explanations for this?
2. What contextual factors may have influenced a school's and individual teachers' adoption of the early grade reading methodologies and the coaching model being promoted by EGRP II?
 - School being multigrade or monograde
 - Management – attitude to innovation; understanding of the importance of EGR
 - School resource base and wealth of community
 - Teacher time, stress, attitudes and commitment
 - Size of school and FP classes.
3. How prepared are the teachers to engage in EGRP II?
 - Teacher attitudes and views on the change and the intervention

¹⁵ Cornish & Taole op cit.

¹⁶ South Africa Department of Education (2005)

¹⁷ Brown, B.A. (2010) Multigrade Teaching: A review of issues, trends and practices: implications for teacher education in South Africa. CEPD: Johannesburg.

¹⁸ <https://lorimaracademix.com/teaching-multigrade-classes>

- Preparation for teaching – lesson plans in place and used, use of curriculum trackers
 - Do learner workbooks show work set and marked constructively?
 - Can teachers explain her/his approach to teaching reading?
 - What is the arrangement of multigrade or monograde classroom – grouping of learners based on age/reading ability; the role of the teacher in the lesson; reading corner; classroom library; desks grouped
 - How do teachers use LTSM in early-grade reading, including flashcards?
4. How does the multigrade teacher differentiate learning in the classroom for different grades? Does the monograde teacher, with a wide range of learner abilities in her class, use similar methods?
 5. How are the EGRP approaches, tools, and activities being implemented in schools and classrooms, and why do they have a differentiated impact on different schools? Do some teachers achieve much better results than others in the same school? Does this vary between multigrade and monograde schools?
 6. Can the external coaches adapt their methodology to the multigrade schools? If so, how do they do so, and with what results?
 7. What are the barriers to teachers adopting the coaching model of delivering the EGRP, its tools, and activities in the 11 schools?

5. Methodology

Sampling

The eleven case study schools comprise just under 10% of the 118 evaluated programme schools.

The case study schools were selected in 2024 by coaches and district officials based on their perceived ability to effectively adopt the programme. They were filtered to ensure we had a balance of schools on the coaching and base programme, including a mix of multigrade and monograde schools, some rural and more urban schools, and a mix of larger and smaller schools. The 2024 evaluation indicated that among this sample are some schools which do not adapt well, and these help us understand the challenges which even well-prepared schools are likely to face in implementing the programme. This supports our notion of conducting case studies in schools demonstrating early signs of stronger programme adoption. The distribution of sampled schools is shown below:

Table 1: Sampled Schools Distribution

Type of school	Base Programme	Coaching + Base Programme	Total
Multigrade school	3	4	7
Monograde school	2	2	4
Total	5	6	11

Training and Data Collection

The same research team gathered the case study data in 2024 and 2025. Both researchers have language competence in Setswana, with one sharing the same dialect of Setswana as the teachers and learners in the schools visited.

Changes to the 2024 case study tools introduced in 2025 included additional questions related to teachers' use of tablets, which were not in place during the 2024 exercise. The tools were clarified concerning the operations of PLCs/ school-based workshops/ cluster workshops.

Case study data collection took place from August 4 to 15, 2025. Each school was visited for a day by the team of two researchers. As in the 2024 case study process, the main forms of data collection included:

1. Lesson observations were conducted using structured observation schedules. Four lessons were observed in each monograde school (HL and EFAL for Grade 2 and HL and EFAL for Grade 3). In multigrade schools with two Foundation Phase classes, both classes were observed for HL and EFAL. Where all three Foundation Phase grades were in one class, that class was observed for HL and EFAL.
2. In each Grade 2 and Grade 3 class observed, five of the learner workbooks (LWB) and exercise books were reviewed. The examination focused on two specific lessons from the previous term to track curriculum coverage, as well as a broader focus to assess if the work and exercise books were up to date and included regularly marked and corrected exercises.
3. Coach observation, where present. Using a structured coach observation tool, the external coach was shadowed as they observed and coached the teacher after the lesson. Six of the eight OUP coaches were observed.
4. Semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with:
 - a. The Principal (one-on-one)
 - b. Each teacher whose lesson was observed (one-on-one). Teacher interviews followed the lesson observation, so that the interview was informed by the observation.
 - c. The Early Grade/Foundation Phase Department Head (DH), in the larger schools (one-on-one)
 - d. The Oxford University Press (OUP) coach who was present on the day of the visit (one-on-one)
 - e. All the Foundation Phase teachers in the monograde schools (FGD).

- f. 5-6 Grade 3 learners involved in at least one of the lessons observed (FGD). In small schools with fewer than 5 Grade 3 learners, Grade 2 learners were also included.
5. A school environmental scan was completed.
 6. School managers were provided with a school data sheet to complete during the visit.

In total, the team conducted 32 lesson observations across the 11 sample schools. The observations in the four schools receiving the 'base programme' focused on how teachers, who have been trained and received LTSMs, implement the EGRP II. In the seven schools receiving coaching support, the observations focused on the same aspects as in the base schools, as well as on how external coaches collaborate with these teachers. During each lesson, evaluators focused on the use of the EGRP II lesson plan, whether in digital or paper form.

Table 2: Sample completion Endline (compared to Baseline)

Respondent	Multigrade Schools	Monograde Schools	Total
Principals Interviewed	7 (7)	4 (4)	11 (11)
Teachers Interviewed	12 (12)	11 (15)	23 (27)
Department Heads Interviewed	0 (0)	3 (4)	3 (4)
Coaches Interviewed	4 (4)	2 (2)	6 (6)
Total Learners in FGDs	43 (36)	25 (22)	68 (58)
Total Respondents¹⁹	66 (59)	45 (47)	111 (106)
Total Lessons Observed	14 (14)	18 (16)	32 (30)
Teachers Observed	12 (12)	10 (15)	22 (27)
FGDs (learners and teachers)	7 (7)	4 (4)	11 (11)

The interviews and lesson observations focused on the teaching of early grade HL and EFAL in each school, based on the project's specifications. In particular, they focused on the elements of the EGRP II pedagogy (e.g. use of specific LTSM, Group Guided Reading, etc.) that teachers and schools implemented successfully and those that were not, the manner in which they were being implemented, and the impact they had. To understand the reasons for uptake, particularly in multigrade schools, the case studies focused on understanding the educators' perspectives on the project and its specific implementation configurations – particularly the role of the external coach. For each area of focus, we were interested in how perceptions and implementation had changed from the previous study.

¹⁹ Some teachers were both interviewed and observed and have not been counted twice in the totals.

Learner focus groups were introduced in 2024, to discuss how learners themselves understand the process of learning to read. The learner FGDs illustrated that learners are aware of changes in the way they are being taught and can articulate these. Learners are the primary beneficiaries of EGRS/EGRP innovations, but their perspectives had not been heard directly in studies and evaluations accompanying previous iterations of the EGRS/EGRP series.

For the Grade 2 and 3 LWB analysis, teachers were asked to select workbooks of learners with high performance and high attendance rates. We were interested in documenting the learning process and curriculum coverage at the teachers' and learners' best, and also to understand how the teachers in the programme perceive high performance in both multigrade and monograde schools. The evaluation assumed that data from both LWBs/exercise books and curriculum trackers would be directly related to each other and would, in combination, explain a significant degree of the variances in curriculum coverage and learner performance data. Unfortunately, in the 2024 evaluation, very few of the teachers were using the curriculum trackers or checklists, so we were particularly interested in their usage in the schools at the endline.

The research involved the following review of 5 LWBs and exercise books in each observed Grade 2 and Grade 3 class (20 books per school):

- The absolute amount of written work performed by the learners so far this year (quantity)
- The degree to which the teacher is on track in delivering the curriculum, including tracking specific topics from the previous term (coverage)
- The weight placed on different elements/outcomes of the curriculum (emphasis)
- The rate at which the curriculum is presented (pacing)
- The degree to which the curriculum is covered at the correct assessment standards (quality/depth).

Although not particularly informative in isolation, when triangulated with lesson observations and interviews, the LWBs help to understand how teachers are teaching the curriculum.

5.1. Limitations of Case Study

The limitation of case study research findings is that the results cannot be generalised to a whole population. However, they can provide possible explanations for observations made through other research processes, such as teacher interviews in the quantitative research phase, and are effective in helping to understand how those involved in the innovation, including learners, comprehend the EGRP and its impact. Through resonance, repetition, and triangulation, such qualitative data gain veracity and validity.

5.2. Outputs

The key case study phase outputs are:

- Eleven detailed case study school monographs.

- This report, which draws learnings from the case study monographs.

6. Key Findings

The main findings are organised by the key elements of EGRP II's teacher and coach training, as well as the EGRP expectations for teachers and coaches. They also talk to the evaluation's research questions.

6.1. Quality of teaching reading

As with the 2024 case studies, the 32 lessons the evaluation team observed presented a wide range of competencies, in teaching, classroom management and in reproducing the EGRP II methodology. Whereas the two most outstanding teachers in 2024 were teaching multigrade classes of Grades 1, 2 and 3 in deep rural schools, this was not the case in 2025. When observed for this evaluation, both of these exemplary multigrade teachers were facing real challenges. One was dealing with ill-disciplined Grade 1 students, and the other had a hugely expanded Grade 3 class, which made balanced teaching of all three grades problematic. The former teacher is nearing retirement and, as compared to 2024, appeared less motivated. Although she presented a good lesson, she was somewhat thrown by the behaviour of some of the Grade 1s.

The latter is a young teacher who was just back from maternity leave. She had separated the large Grade 3 class from the Grade 1 and 2 class and was trying to teach the monograde Grade 3 class in parallel with the multigrade Grades 1 and 2 class. Her coach encouraged her to combine the two classes into one and, given her extensive experience with multigrade teaching, indicated that she would assist her in managing this new, large multigrade class. However, the coach fell ill and was unable to carry through on her offer of assistance and support. The new coach, although highly experienced, was unable to assist the teacher in managing the combined class. The irony was that the Grade 3 expansion was apparently due to the word going out that the school was teaching reading so well. Learners appear to have moved from a neighbouring school, which is a base school in the EGRP, to be taught by this teacher.

Some of the weaker teachers from 2024 – particularly those in base schools without the benefit of external coaching – who were seen to be struggling with the EGRP methodology had shown improvement. In particular, some of the teachers in multigrade classes who, in 2024, had been grouping their learners by grade had started grouping by ability (see School K)²⁰, while also gaining facility in implementing the EGRP protocols. This seemed to have improved discipline and the learning environment.

Several coaches mentioned that the teachers they support had gained confidence in teaching EFAL and so rather than avoiding teaching it, were now teaching it with minimal code-switching and even requested to be observed while teaching EFAL lessons. This was a direct result of the coaches drilling into the teachers during training that they should not rely on code-switching in EFAL lessons. The researchers noted a change in teacher attitude to teaching EFAL in these schools.

²⁰ All references to specific schools have been anonymised.

Some innovation was seen. For instance, the Grade 3 monograde teacher in School K had rearranged her classroom desk in a U shape. This allowed her to check learner progress easily and move around the classroom. It also ensured that the learners were focused on her. However, it meant that they were not grouped. Other teachers supplemented the EGRP II texts with ones they already had access to, either to stretch more competent learners or to assist struggling learners.

Struggling teachers were observed in both the monograde and the multigrade classrooms. While almost all teachers demonstrated increased comprehension of the key elements of the EGRP II methodology compared to 2024, even with this increased knowledge and confidence, many still implemented Shared Reading (SR) and Group Guided Reading (GGR) in contravention of the EGRP protocol. In GGR, weaker teachers continued to encourage chorus reading rather than having the teacher read the Big Book and the learners read one by one. Stronger teachers were observed following the correct protocol of reading the Big Book to their class with expression and humour after engaging the learners in discussions about the pictures and their expectations on what the story would be about. It is admirable that the programme has achieved this level of compliance to the model and good practice in just over a year.

Learners' reading ability also varied hugely. Some deep rural schools exhibited both the best readers and the weakest readers. As in the 2024 evaluation, these schools particularly struggled with reading in English when teachers did not model English effectively. This is likely because exposure to English in these communities is limited to the time spent in school. The most significant improvements in reading and attitude towards the programme were observed mainly in monograde schools and often in base programme schools (not supported by coaches). As a result, there was no qualitatively observable difference in the quality of learners' reading ability between the coaching schools and the base schools in the case study sample.

The factors that seemed to predict improved learner reading mainly revolved around the support systems of the foundation phase teachers. In schools where foundation phase teachers supported each other and had the backing of a well-functioning management team, most teachers were successful in implementing the programme. However, even in such schools, weak teachers struggled to manage their classrooms, keep up with the curriculum, and teach reading effectively.

Overall, the teachers were much more comfortable with the timing of lesson elements compared to 2024, when there were many complaints about the difficulty of teaching their children based on imposed times. These complaints had all but disappeared, except among teachers who had been moved or recruited to fill vacated FP posts and so were new to the project.

6.2. Comparing multigrade and monograde contexts

Managing a multigrade class is more complex than managing a monograde class. It requires the teacher to ensure each grade is exposed to their specific curriculum content while also building reading and mathematical skills based on the skill base of each learner. This inevitably requires a certain flexibility in classroom organisation and grouping of learners.

Where teachers were doing it effectively, learners benefited, with slower learners being catered to with the grade below them and faster learners benefiting from being challenged by higher-grade vocabulary and concepts. In 2024, we witnessed two teachers who had mastered this: one was a veteran teacher who was also the school's principal, and the other was a first-year teacher. Both were still competent, but each was facing particular challenges this year as discussed above. This indicates the difficulties that even the best multigrade teacher is likely to face, and also hints at the difficulty of sustaining innovations introduced by the EGRP II.

The major differences between multigrade and monograde classrooms were how learners were grouped. In most instances, the multigrade teachers were seating the learners from each grade separately. This seemed to lead to a tendency in some multigrade classrooms to sit learners in rows, each row delineating a grade, rather than grouping learners' desks, which was more prevalent in monograde classrooms. The most impressive multigrade teachers grouped learners by reading ability rather than grade, mirroring how many monograde teachers organised their reading lessons, with learners of similar reading abilities sitting together. This enables a smooth transition to GGR and occupational tasks.

Apart from seating, the other significant difference between multigrade and monograde classes was the use of LTSM and presentation of the Listening and Speaking poster and linked vocabulary, as well as Shared Reading. All of these elements are meant to be taught to the whole multigrade class. However, the Learner Workbooks are differentiated by grade, so the different grades in a multigrade classroom are using different workbooks. In lessons involving new vocabulary, the various grades' new words would be presented together with questions targeted at the learners from the appropriate grade. As in 2024, this had two interesting effects: learners in the higher grade were able to revise vocabulary they had learned the previous year, and learners from the lower grade were exposed to more challenging words.

6.3. Multigrade teachers' reaction to dedicated training

Nearly all of the teachers greatly praised the EGRP II training. The multigrade teachers were particularly complimentary as they stressed that until this training, they had no clear idea of how to manage and teach a multigrade class. All the multigrade teachers interviewed in the case study schools (bar one, who is rejecting the programme's elements and insisting on teaching as she always has done) indicate that they now have structures and processes to inform the way they teach their multigrade classes so that they do not disadvantage one grade while working with the other grade. The best multigrade teachers have effectively adopted key elements of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methods and combined them with activity-intensive teaching.

The multigrade teachers mentioned specific aspects of the training which have particularly assisted them. These included:

- structuring the lesson and its various elements within the longer timeframe they are granted,
- the use of the Listening and Speaking poster and how to include vocabulary for both grades so all learners are involved,

- working intensively with weaker learners and
- the use of skill-based groups irrespective of the grade the learner is in, in line with TaRL principles.

They also emphasised the usefulness of the project materials, which explicitly state which page in which book learners from each grade should work on.

As indicated in the 2024 report, the mix of reading abilities in most monograde classes is nearly as broad as that in multigrade ones. This suggests that monograde teachers, as well as multigrade teachers, would benefit from being trained on managing classes with a wide range of abilities and learning how to ask differentiated questions to different ability groups within the class. However, there are aspects of teaching a multigrade class that remain unique to this modality, including the need to plan phonics and vocabulary exposure across two or three grade levels, and the need to measure individual learner progress against specific grade-level benchmarks. The multigrade teachers have benefited from being tutored on how to navigate these complex elements in their classrooms, and most are successfully doing so.

6.4. Interpretation of EGRP Protocols and Processes

Several of the case study teachers praised the EGRP trainers for their “step-by-step” approach to introducing new phonics, which they found particularly helpful. Both monograde and multigrade teachers have also benefited from the training they received on strategies to help struggling learners.

In most schools, teachers were using the EGRP II lesson plans and were generally following them. Some of the teachers, particularly the veteran teachers, were printing out the EGRP II lesson plans rather than using the digital lesson plans on tablets in class, possibly indicating that older teachers still face some comfort barriers with technology use in class.

As was also found in 2024, some teachers did not follow the Shared Reading, GGR, and occupational task protocols as expected. However, overall, teachers were able to conduct Shared Reading, GGR and occupational tasks significantly better than in 2024. Interestingly, while in 2024 teachers in the base schools were seen to be less familiar with the EGRP II protocols and methodology than those in the coaching schools, in this iteration of the case study observations, levels of adherence to EGRP II protocols were better in base schools than those with coaching support.

Teaching challenges observed in 2024 in base schools, such as teaching only one element in a lesson and grossly mis-timing the lesson, were not observed in this iteration. Even the most challenging aspect of the EGRP model, the occupational tasks alongside GGR, was being attempted reasonably well in most base and coach-supported schools. There were only a few classrooms where the teacher failed to set a defined occupational task; instead, they told the learners to read or complete an exercise in their workbooks. When the teachers had the support of competent voluntary Reading Champions (RCs),²¹ they found that managing occupational tasks was greatly eased, and they could focus on the GGR activity.

²¹ Reading Champions are the latest iteration of the Teaching Assistant role created during the period of COVID19. They are young people specifically trained to offer support to Foundation Phase teachers in the early grades. While not allowed to teach on their own, they can work with small groups and help manage the class and LTSMs.

Where teachers were not supported by an RC, it was observed to be much more challenging to manage both occupational tasks and GGR. RCs were also observed assisting teachers with listening to groups of learners as they read, distributing books, and generally supporting classroom management and discipline.

Teachers who, in 2024, had complained about the timing of the elements in the lesson plan and claimed that they were too tight for “our learners” now seemed quite comfortable with the discipline that following the timed elements brought. In addition, as had also been observed in the EGRP I study, their lessons showed that they had benefited from the timing with crisper, more organised lessons.

As in 2024, only a few teachers were using the checklist, which lists all their learners to note their reading levels during the GGR. Even when the checklist was used, it seemed that it was either being used to show compliance or was being implemented incorrectly. In only one school, as in 2024, were teachers implementing and using the full range of checklists and trackers as expected. At the end of an observed GGR session, one of the teachers commented that her inputs into the checklist indicated that one of the learners she had just assessed had improved so much that s/he would be moved up a group. This is exactly how the checklist should be used.

In other schools, the teachers held the checklists during GGR but did not complete them, and generally admitted that they do not use the checklists and trackers during lessons, despite having been trained on their use. Even in School S, which was an early adopter of trackers and checklists, the teachers had stopped using them, with one teacher complaining that their use distracts from her teaching and another complaining that she could not hold the flashcards and the checklist at the same time. The coach showed her how to manage the two at the same time by mounting the flashcards on the wall. The coaches have proven to be effective in helping teachers with these practical challenges.

6.5. Programme Impact on Teachers and Classrooms

As in 2024, many of the teachers claimed during their interviews that they had not changed the way they teach language – with a phonics approach – but that they now had plenty of resources to enrich the lessons and had more information on how to sequence the contents of each lesson. They generally view this as making their job easier, although one teacher argued that the approach requires more time than traditional chalk-and-talk methods. The teachers also stated that the training they received equipped them to teach phonics more expertly. As a result, they almost universally asserted that their learners are now reading better than they were before the intervention.

In 2024, many of the teachers asserted that they had been organising their learners in groups before EGRP II, which could not be verified without a baseline (the 2024 case study visits took place towards the end of the first year of the intervention). In 2025, the same teachers reiterated that grouping learners was not new to them, but stated that the EGRP II programme had given them greater facility and confidence in how to group learners by ability. This was particularly the case with multigrade teachers, although there is still a tendency to group the learners in multigrade classes in their grade levels rather than ability levels, and only put them in ability groups for GGR.

Based on the case study observations, we can assert that EGRP II has led to most teachers in the observed project schools improving their teaching of reading and their classroom management during lessons. This was mainly achieved by making teaching more clearly sequenced and structured. The teachers of multigrade classes were observed to have particularly benefited from the programme – mainly because they started with a historical training deficit. Most such teachers admit that, prior to the programme, they were unsure how to teach multiple grades and tended to teach only part of the class at a time, leaving half or more of the learners bored. The use of joint poster discussion sessions, Shared Reading, and the introduction of occupational tasks have transformed their ability to teach their multigrade classes. However, discipline problems, overlarge intakes, and resistance to the programme have undermined the ability of some multigrade teachers to benefit fully from the programme.

As in 2024, most of the classes visited were colourful and print-rich – with laminated posters and flashcards. All but one project school have invested in a lamination machine and lamination sheets. However, not all schools have invested adequately in resourcing the foundation phase classrooms, or the school lacks the funds. The result is that in several of the schools the teachers commented that they have used their own money to resource the programme. As one claimed,

“Overall, I would say I have spent R5000 if not more for my classroom to look like it does” - Grade 3 Teacher.

While LTSMs are mostly laminated at this stage in the delivery of the project, in a few schools there was concern raised about how long the posters and books will last. Some of the teachers had also mounted learner work on the wall, which the researchers encouraged after the 2024 evaluation, although this was not yet the case in the majority of the schools.

Most, but not all, of the Foundation Phase classrooms now have a functional reading corner. This is a change which the programme has wrought in the schools. However, in one multigrade classroom, which has seen a massive increase in learner numbers and the collapse of an extra grade into the multigrade class, the reading corner has been removed to make way for desks.

6.6. Use of Tablets and Technology in the Classroom

Overall, most of the early-grade teachers in both the base and coach-supported schools expressed satisfaction with the provision of tablets and indicated that they felt comfortable using them. The researchers tested this by asking the teachers they observed and interviewed to find a specific lesson plan on the tablet. Most were able to do so with no assistance. Only two of the observed teachers – one teaching monograde and the other multigrade – refused to use the tablet, while a few other veteran teachers struggled to access the lesson plan. One explained that although she uses the tablet – and she showed evidence that she does – the children at home always help her access the programme, so she could not open it independently.

There was some resistance to the use of the tablets, with a few teachers expressing similar sentiments as the veteran multigrade teacher in School W, who argued that the tablet and

the EGRP approach meant “too much work.” Generally, the younger teachers had adapted to the use of the tablet more positively than the veterans. A focus group in a large school supported by a coach asserted that there was selective use of tablets in the foundation phase, with one noting,

“Based on age and tech savvyness, teachers use tablets. For me it’s a lot better than heavy books because I walk to school.”

Another teacher in the same focus group admitted,

“I don’t want to use a tablet. I don’t even use the WhatsApp group that’s there.”

The presence of RCs in many schools helped less technical teachers access lessons and information on their tablets.

The researchers asked questions about how the teachers use the tablet for planning. In one peri-urban school, which has seen considerable improvement in the teaching of reading in the FP, the teachers report that they only plan for the week ahead and do not look at the activities to be covered for the term.

“I always have my tablet with me on Fridays, and I do my planning when I get home or over the weekend... we rarely ever plan together at school, but if someone needs something, I always help them.”

Several teachers indicated that they plan in this way. In another school, the veteran non-tech-savvy multigrade teacher (who was very much against having tablets when interviewed in 2024) reported that initially she struggled, but then stated,

“I used to struggle to open the tablet. I am not a phone person. I tell my children at home to help me, but now I love it, I’m able to Zoom. You know how our eyes are as old people. I love it more than the paper.”

6.7. Written Work

Similar to the 2024 observations, the team concluded that learners were still receiving too little written work during the observed lessons. This, in part, relates to teachers spending too much time on earlier sections of the lesson, leaving too little time for a writing exercise. One teacher in School K was observed setting written work, monitoring it and marking it in real time. This allowed her to provide immediate feedback to the learner, who then either returned to their desks to make corrections or did so with the teacher’s guidance.

A high-level analysis of learner workbook data across the eleven schools continues to highlight significant challenges in several key areas, but showed overall improvement.

- Workbook completion was frequently incomplete (4 schools – down from 8 schools in 2024), with corrections often lacking thoroughness or not even providing minimal guidance (4 schools down from 7 schools in 2024),

- Setting adequate exercises (at least 2 per week) saw some improvement (6 schools compared to 4 in 2024),
- Regular marked assessments were insufficient in a few schools (3 teachers in 2 schools, compared to 6 schools in 2024),
- Alignment between learner work and specific dated lesson plans was frequently lacking (in 7 schools compared to 8 schools in 2024),
- The use of teacher trackers for monitoring progress was inconsistent or absent in almost all schools (in 9 schools – as in 2024).

Some schools demonstrated progress in setting and marking work constructively, particularly the base schools, of which three were more compliant than any of the coached schools. However, the overall picture continues to indicate a need for improvement in ensuring timely workbook completion, providing effective feedback, and providing adequate student exercises in line with lesson plans.

The LWB review process included tracking the exercises and written work set around two topics taught in two separate weeks in the previous term. In most schools, we were unable to find work related to these two topics. This is worrying as this indicates gaps in curriculum coverage.

6.8. School Management Commitment

As in 2024, management in all schools indicated a commitment to the programme. However, the teachers reported mixed levels of real commitment by management. Some of the school principals – particularly those in rural, multigrade schools where they also teach in the foundation phase – were very knowledgeable about the programme and committed to it. However, in one of the small rural schools, the principal plays no role in relation to the multigrade FP class, arguing that she is too busy with her own multigrade class. In this school, the teacher feels unanchored and unsupported, which undermines potential programme gains. This indicates that management support is critical to the success and sustainability of the programme in schools. Management support is particularly important when there is a high level of turnover among FP teachers. In one school, where two new teachers have joined the FP team, the Department Head (DH) is under pressure to bring them up to speed with the EGRP II approach. Luckily the school has a committed DH who has attended the training and understands her role in inducting new teachers to the programme.

Principals in the larger monograde schools were naturally less knowledgeable and, in a few cases, knew very little about the programme – although most indicated more knowledge than in 2024. However, in every larger monograde school, there was a senior teacher who had responsibility for the EGRP II programme and was reasonably or very knowledgeable about it. They were often teaching in the foundation phase, so they had direct experience of the training that the teachers were experiencing and first-hand knowledge of how the programme was being implemented in the school. At the school level, commitment was mainly shown through the allocation of funds for related purchases. All but one of the

schools have already purchased laminating machines. In the remaining school, the principal has been in an acting position for many years, which has undermined her ability to make decisions. One of the principals explained that s/he finds the Foundation Phase teachers to be “like learners”, by which s/he seemed to be saying they are incompetent. S/he has purchased whiteboards for all the FP teachers to encourage them to be more creative and less intimidated by innovation.

Overall, half the principals were rated as being democratic, with the other half being a mix of democratic and autocratic, as one teacher stated, “as the conditions require”. In five of the eleven schools, relations between the principal and the staff were reported to be strained. In one of these schools, there was talk of missing funds. These tensions are likely to harm teachers’ engagement with the project and innovation more generally. There were some standout good practices. For instance, one principal of a large school does Foundation Phase classroom visits and provides feedback to the teachers, as well as assisting them with assessment protocols and analysing them to assist struggling students.

6.9. Learner Responses

An innovation in the EGRP II evaluation case studies is the inclusion of focus group discussions with Grade 3 learners (and in some multigrade schools, Grade 2 learners). Learners were selected to participate in the focus groups based on being good readers. As in 2024, learners all indicated that they like reading (perhaps predictably) and understand its value to their educational progress and future. In some schools, learners reported a preference for reading in English. These were mainly attending the large peri-urban schools and were highly aspirational, seeing English as a gateway to success. English represents aspiration for these learners in a way that Setswana does not. However, some learners argued that they preferred reading in Setswana as it was their home language – these were mainly learners from rural schools.

Again, as in 2024, the learners reported that they like the Ulwazi Lwethu anthologies, which are part of the EGRP II LTSM pack for each school. In most schools, the learners were able to identify their favourite story from the anthologies. Their enjoyment of reading was largely dependent on their teachers following the GGR protocol faithfully. Where the teachers regularly taught GGR through chorused reading (as in School K) the learners expressed frustration that they were reading at a slow pace, and they were held back by the slower learners. Where GGR was conducted in line with the EGRP II protocol, learners generally enjoyed GGR. This was the case in most of the schools. Some learners explained that they liked GGR because the teacher helped them and also their peers could assist them, as one Grade 3 learner put it,

“In the group, they help me , and I help them”.

However, a number of the learners who expressed frustration with GGR explained that they preferred reading on their own, as one learner said,

“When I read by myself, I get better.”

Similarly, another learner said,

“I enjoy reading stories, and I want to read them on my own.”

They selected English and Setswana stories as their preferred anthology stories in about equal numbers across the schools. In schools where the home language of many learners was not Setswana, it is not surprising that they tended to prefer reading in English. The learners in the FGDs (who are among the stronger readers) showed good understanding of the stories they had read in GGR, and many were able to summarise the stories.

Shared Reading was again liked when the teacher followed the protocol and read to them with expression, while discussing the pictures and their assumptions about what the story would be about. The learners particularly praised teachers who read with expression and engaged them in the story. As one group of learners agreed,

“When teacher reads, she makes the story funny and loud and we all laugh.”

The learners recognised that their reading skills were progressing. One learner summarised what a lot of the learners said in the FGD,

“Last year we could not read long words, but this year we can. Next year in Grade 4 we will read even better.”

Unlike in the 2024 case study visits, several learners recognised that their teacher was differentiating the access to reading materials. One group of learners observed,

“Teacher gives other books that are easy for the ones who still need help.”

Interestingly, there was no sense of these stronger readers looking down on the learners who need such help. They do, though, find it frustrating when they are put in the same GGR with such learners.

Although few learners have books at home, which is the indicator most associated with learning to read fluently in the global literature, several learners mentioned obtaining books from community libraries, as well as borrowing anthologies and books from the reading corner. At home, some learners claimed that their parents or siblings help them with reading.

As compared to the FGD in 2024, several learners expressed real enjoyment in reading. As one learner asserted,

“Sometimes when we read the big book, I don’t want the story to finish because it’s nice.”

6.10. Coaching

A key finding of the EGRP I evaluation in 2021-2024 in the North West Province was that coaches did not provide teachers with sufficient opportunities to reflect on their own practices before offering feedback and advice. In the EGRP II programme, most, but not all, of the coaches started their post-observation conferencing session with teachers by asking how the teacher had experienced the lesson. However, most coaches then rapidly moved on to providing advice, resulting in few teachers truly being supported to reflect on their own

lessons. Critical reflection is a crucial skill that teachers struggle with, and so they need scaffolding and support to do it properly. This is generally not being provided by the coaches.

As also observed in 2024, the approach taken by the coaches during lesson observation varied substantially. Some stayed entirely in the background during the lesson, while others intervened, notably to support the administration of the occupational tasks or to help the teacher maintain discipline. Similarly, during the post-observation conference, the more extroverted and confident coaches reinforced their advice with modelling for the teacher in front of the class. In contrast, other coaches explained what they expected to see without modelling it.

Pleasingly, most of the coaches have started linking observation sessions, so they tell the teacher what they will be doing and observing next time they visit. This should help progressively build the teacher's skill base if undertaken consistently and rigorously. Since the evaluators only observed one visit, we could not verify the extent to which this is currently the case in practice.

The final stage of the observation and conferencing process – the teacher providing her own response on the observation reporting tool – was still not being undertaken well and, in most cases, remained performative rather than substantive, with little effort made by the coach to encourage the teachers to be reflective and self-critical in what they wrote.

Only one coach conducted a school-based workshop (SBW) on the day of the visit. The others all claimed that they hold them when the need arises, which is in line with advice from the OUP project management. Teachers occasionally mentioned these workshops, but emphasised that they were primarily intended for teachers who had missed the initial training. Access to cluster-based workshops (CBW) was only mentioned in half of the schools, with only one of the base schools, which could benefit from such workshops, reporting that they held such workshops. We recognise that more CBWs were held in the John Taolo Gaetsewe (JTG) district than in the Frances Baard (FB) district due to limited capacity among Subject Advisors and transport challenges in the latter case. Furthermore, teachers' availability for CBWs is affected by various other activities carried out by the provincial and district education departments. Since CBWs are recognised as a valuable part of the overall intervention design, such systemic constraints should be considered and planned for if future iterations of similar interventions include CBWs.

Most of the coaches mentioned that they had set up and administered a dedicated WhatsApp group or Professional Learning Community (PLC) for their teachers in both the coaching and base schools. Teachers in coaching schools acknowledged that these were happening, but only in one base school did teachers mention it. This suggests that the base schools are not getting the anticipated support. However, even where teachers have access to the WhatsApp groups, most coaches indicated that teachers are loath to use it. When interviewed, some teachers were unaware of the group, while others felt it had no relevance to them, as they reported being unsure of the group's purpose. In about half of the schools, however, teachers felt that it added value. The quotes below are from one school where teachers engage with the WhatsApp group.

“When I have any problems with materials, or things I am struggling with, I ask on the group and get assistance” - Grade 1 teacher

“I find the group to be very useful. There are no deviations or chain messages, we just talk about the programme” - Grade 2 teacher

“I don’t like the WhatsApp group because I sometimes feel like I’ll be misleading people. I usually just send my messages directly to the trainer and if they think it’s worth sharing they do so.” - Grade 1 teacher

When administered consistently and well by the coach, these groups do seem to add value, allowing the sharing of good practice – often in video form, along with daily motivational and administrative messages.

6.11. Sustainable Practices

One of the disadvantages of limiting the programme’s delivery phase to less than two years is that at the endline evaluation, the teachers were still grappling with the EGRP II requirements. In particular, they were still refining their implementation of GGR and Shared Reading, as well as the phonics and vocabulary sessions. Generally, while the majority of teachers have improved their fidelity in implementing the EGRP protocols, their levels of confidence are still below those needed to feel comfortable enough to innovate. In 2024, a few teachers were already realising that if occupational tasks are going to keep the fast learners busy, they need to be able to draw on a repository of extra tasks to stretch them. This trend continued in 2025. Teachers were using easier readers from outside the project for the struggling learners, and one was talking of using Grade 4 work for her more advanced Grade 3 learners. Such flexibility is commendable.

Some of the teachers had also restructured their whole class so that for all reading activities, the learners are in ability groups. Such use of Teaching at the Right Level methodology shows teachers reflecting on the reality they face and implementing appropriate solutions.

In monograde schools where FP teachers support each other and work closely together, undertaking joint planning and sharing resources and ideas, innovation has generally had a more significant impact.

As in 2024, it remains hard to predict which practices will be sustained beyond the programme’s lifecycle. As indicated in the last case study report, a key variable will be the durability and longevity of the LTSMs provided by the programme. As long as the conversation posters and the uLwazi Lwethu anthologies, along with the Big Books, remain in good condition, many teachers will continue to use them. They understand their use and seem to believe that their reading lessons are more effective because of using them. However, turnover of teachers, along with the effect of wear and tear on the books and posters, is likely to lead to them being used less over time. This can already be seen in schools where new teachers have been employed in the Foundation Phase since the program began. The same may well be the fate of the reading corners; as the range of books declines and the teachers change, these reading corners may well fall into abeyance. A few have already been removed from classrooms due to a lack of space.

The evaluation team maintains the belief that the highly structured approach to GGR, along with conducting occupational tasks, is unlikely to survive the end of the programme. This is because managing the classroom while doing these multiple tasks is difficult. This is

particularly the case in multigrade classrooms, which add the complexity of catering to two or more grades. The sustainability of these two linked tasks may depend on the continued presence of RCs. These RCs, like their predecessors during EGRP I, have relieved the pressure on teachers in schools where they have been placed. Effective RCs are invaluable in managing the occupational tasks and keeping learners quiet and occupied while the teacher is busy with GGR.

In contrast, teachers are increasingly realising that learners enjoy Shared Reading when the teacher does it correctly and reads with expression. Therefore, teachers trained on the programme are likely to continue reading to learners. They may also continue using pictures to introduce new vocabulary and trigger oral discussions, as teachers and learners seem to enjoy this process. However, as most teachers remain resistant to using checklists and trackers, it is improbable that these valuable recording and data-gathering processes will be sustained – except where the department mandates them. Similarly, as the teachers continue to struggle with planning and ‘publishing’ the learners’ stories, this innovation is also very unlikely to be sustained.

7. Concerns by Programme Participants

The case study interviews did not record many concerns. Interestingly, most of the concerns mentioned in 2024 had been resolved. For instance, the two sampled schools which were slated for closure at the end of 2024 were still operating; no mention was made by teachers of the focus being on only literacy and numeracy to the detriment of other subjects; and we even heard very little from teachers and school managers about two years being too short a timeframe for a complex programme like EGRP II to make a sustained impact.

The other specific challenges and concerns that teachers and school managers mentioned were:

- Ill-disciplined learners and overcrowded classes make the implementation of the EGRP methodology difficult.
- The likely lifespan of the anthologies and posters.
- In one school, the Northern Cape Department of Education failed to heed the advice of the principal and the community to remove an incompetent and clearly ill elderly multigrade teacher. Such a teacher undermines the implementation of the programme in one school and disadvantages all her Grade 1 and 2 learners.

8. Conditions for Sustaining Elements of EGRP II

The following seem to be critical in sustaining the EGRP II model and its various elements:

- Initial strong training, which builds on teachers’ existing knowledge and skills, combined with high-quality LSMs and support in the form of coaching or even WhatsApp group PLCs.
- Management support and understanding of the project’s elements and management implications. Comprehension by management of the requirements for effective Foundation Phase delivery and the need for learners to sit in ability groups is

essential. When management understands the importance of the Foundation Phase, it raises its profile and improves its positioning within the school.

- Stability in the staffing of the Foundation Phase. The movement of teachers - particularly the loss of more than one teacher in a monograde FP or a single multigrade teacher - sets back the implementation of project elements in those classrooms. It is a concern that many of the teachers in the case study sample schools - and probably across all project schools - are nearing retirement, so the knowledge and skills they have gained are likely to dissipate after their departure.
- Monograde schools where Foundation Phase teachers work closely together as a team to co-plan and share their tablets, create a stronger foundation for the project, even when, individually, some of the teachers may not be strong.
- Seating learners in ability groups, with opportunities for learners to move between reading ability groups as their reading skills progress, is critical. This creates an aspirational ladder for learners, allowing them to work with children who have similar reading abilities. It also allows the teacher to focus on groups of struggling learners.
- Supporting learners' increasing interest in reading by dedicating reading time and having teachers read to foundation phase learners regularly with expression and humour.
- Consistency in the coach. When a coach leaves for whatever reason, it tends to set the teachers back who were being supported by that coach, even if a new and experienced coach is brought in promptly. Coaching is about building a relationship based on trust, so it is not surprising that teachers who have lost a coach feel somewhat abandoned and struggle to build a new relationship with the new coach.

9. Conclusions

The implementation of the EGRP II is highly dependent on the quality of the teachers involved and their openness to change. At the one extreme is the multigrade teacher in a small township school (School W), who refuses to implement the project, teaches poorly and is holding back her Grade 1 and 2 learners so that by the time they reach the competent Grade 3 teacher, they have severe learning deficits. She refuses to take sick leave, despite it having been offered to her. Such a teacher does damage to the programme.

At the other extreme are the increasingly competent teachers, including some older ones, who have embraced the programme and its various elements, sometimes after initially expressing scepticism. These teachers assert that their learners' reading is improving.

Equally, the coach can make a big difference. About half are truly committed, holding school-based and cluster workshops, and running very active and effective WhatsApp groups for the teachers in their coaching and base schools. They also tend to be receptive to hearing how the teacher evaluates her own lesson before sharing their views during post-lesson conferencing, as well as being prepared to model specific elements of the EGRP approach with the teacher's learners. These coaches tend to be more flexible and less rigid in their interpretation of the EGRP model. When coaches are rigid, they can create problems: a multigrade teacher who wanted to use Teaching at the Right Level grouping for all elements of the reading lessons was told by her coach that she should only group on ability for GGR. Why?

One coach explained:

“It is only when I started coaching on EGRP I that I realised the dire situation in classrooms and why literacy levels were so low. [EGRP] II had a real impact. Teachers are offering the type of education that used to seem like it is only for private schools... Learners knowing how to read with understanding is a real inheritance for them.”

While EGRP II has made an impact on monograde and multigrade Foundation Phase teachers and classroom management, the improvement is not always linear. The resources, classroom management approaches and teaching ideas are making the learning process more structured and enjoyable, and so probably more successful. However, progress is modified in some schools by external influences – such as accusations of financial irregularity against the principal, an influx of learners into the class, the departure of a few trained teachers, or even the arrival of a few disruptive learners. Projects need to be robust enough to weather these challenges, and overall EGRP II has stood up to the test, but in individual schools these challenges have set the implementation back.

Although, as observed in the 2024 report, the two-year timespan is too short to show the results that the DBE would like to see, these case studies, combined with the learner performance results, are likely to show that real improvements have occurred in the EGRP coaching and base schools. It is already clear that multigrade and monograde teachers are benefiting from the intervention as they are learning how to manage a differentiated class and teach reading effectively.

However, it is too early to conclude that the changes wrought by EGRP II will be sustained. If the EGRP II protocols survive, it will be because they build on teachers' existing practices and make sense to them. However, experience tells us that as the LTSMs fade, the training becomes a distant memory, and as teachers and management change, the EGRP II protocols are likely to become diluted. In multigrade schools, assuming a level of staff stability, this may be less likely, simply because the project has helped multigrade teachers address the challenge of teaching two or more grades simultaneously, which they were acutely aware of. In multigrade schools, it is likely that learners will continue to be grouped by ability, as this makes the teacher's life significantly easier.

Two of the three recommendations in the 2024 report appear to have been implemented. Monograde teachers have been exposed to much the same differentiated or TaRL thinking as the multigrade teachers, and the base schools have benefited from more intensive training. Cumulatively, the training and LTSMs have made a real difference.

In conclusion, some elements of the EGRP II programme have demonstrated improvement since the 2024 case study iteration, while others have remained static or worsened.

Elements that have Improved:

- **Adherence to Protocols in Base Schools:** A significant shift occurred regarding schools receiving only the "base programme" (materials and training without coaching). In 2024, these schools were less familiar with EGRP II protocols than coached schools; however, in 2025, base schools often demonstrated better adherence to protocols than their coached counterparts. Errors observed in 2024, such as teaching only one lesson element or mismanaging time, were largely absent in these schools.
- **Classroom Management and Lesson Timing:** Complaints regarding the strict timing of lesson elements, which were prevalent in 2024, have largely disappeared. Teachers appeared comfortable with the pacing, and the structured timing resulted in "crisper, more organised lessons".

- **Implementation of Reading Methodologies:** Teachers demonstrated significantly better execution of Shared Reading (SR) and Group Guided Reading (GGR) compared to the previous year. In multigrade contexts, some teachers shifted from grouping learners strictly by grade to grouping by ability (Teaching at the Right Level), which improved discipline and the learning environment.
- **Confidence in Teaching English (EFAL):** Teachers showed increased confidence in teaching English First Additional Language. Unlike in previous observations, teachers relied less on code-switching and were willing to be observed teaching English lessons, a change attributed to coaches emphasising the avoidance of translation.
- **Technology Adoption:** Most teachers expressed satisfaction and comfort with using tablets for lesson planning, a capability that was less established in the previous iteration. The majority could navigate digital lesson plans independently, though resistance persisted among some older, veteran teachers.

Elements that have Not Changed or Worsened

- **Usage of Administrative Trackers:** The use of curriculum trackers and checklists remains a challenge. As in 2024, most teachers do not use these tools, or they use them performatively to demonstrate compliance rather than to inform instruction. Even early adopters of these tools in 2024 had abandoned them by 2025, citing them as distractions.
- **Quantity and Quality of Written Work:** Learners continue to receive insufficient written work. The alignment between learner workbooks and the dated lesson plans frequently remains lacking, and the use of trackers to monitor this progress is inconsistent or absent in almost all schools, mirroring the 2024 findings.
- **Coaching Methodology:** The coaching dynamic around supporting teachers to develop “critical reflection” skills has not evolved significantly; coaches continue to provide immediate advice rather than encouraging teacher self-reflection. This is consistent with findings from EGRP I and the 2024 baseline.
- **Reading Outcomes in Rural Contexts:** Deep rural schools continue to struggle with English reading proficiency due to limited exposure to the language outside the classroom.

The aim of this endline case study report is not to present recommendations for EGRP II implementation, as the main timeline of the programme has ended. Recommendations for future iterations of similar interventions will be integrated into the final report, which will cover implementation fidelity, quantitative impact results, system integration, and sustainability considerations, alongside these qualitative case study findings.

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11. ANNEXURES

Annex 1: Case Study Monographs

School A

1. Summary of key points

- Small township school operating mostly in ageing mobile classrooms.
- EGRP II implementation is uneven: Grade 3 shows improving alignment, but the multigrade teacher misinterprets the approach and prefers traditional methods.
- Grade 3 uses lesson plans, trackers, posters and flashcards; multigrade keeps many materials boxed and the reading corner is not inviting.
- Grade 3 embraces the tablet for planning/printing; multigrade uses it reluctantly and does not use trackers; there are no PLCs or WhatsApp groups for support.
- Sensitive HR issue: multigrade teacher's health episodes (panic/fainting) disrupt learning; principal is handling with empathy, union involvement, and referral to the DoE wellness unit.
- Many Grade 3 learners prefer reading on their own, saying GGR is often disrupted when slower readers take long or peers go off-topic.

2. Respondents

Multigrade HL and EFAL lessons were observed (Grade 1 and 2), and teacher interviewed
Grade 3 HL and EFAL lessons were observed and teacher interviewed

Principal interviewed

Focus group discussion with 6 grade 3 learners

3. School context

The school is located in a small township. The premises consist mainly of six mobile and temporary classrooms arranged in two rows, one of which also serves as the administration office, the principal's office, and the staffroom. The classrooms are in a poor state of repair, with walls beginning to collapse and floors breaking in some units. Despite this, the furniture across most classrooms is still usable, and the Grade 3 classroom has recently received a donation of new chairs.

Near the school entrance are additional facilities, including a mobile science laboratory and a mobile library. The science lab contains only a few items, while the library is well stocked. However, the librarian/teacher assistant reported that learners do not make use of the library. The computers in the library are also currently under repair. On one side of the school, the property opens directly into neighbouring houses with no fencing. Residents of these houses cannot enter from the street due to obstructions, which makes the school grounds a shared entry point. Learners use the nearby community sports field for games and physical education.

Basic services are available at the school. It is connected to piped municipal water, supplemented by a borehole system, and has both electricity and internet access. The kitchen, a small corrugated iron structure, is active and provides meals through the feeding scheme. One community member is responsible for preparing food, while another assists

with yard maintenance. The school has four standalone flush toilets, two for learners and two for staff, all of which were clean and well-maintained.

The overall atmosphere of the school is positive and collegial. Teachers were observed interacting warmly during break times, and teacher assistants appeared comfortable and integrated into the staff environment. The principal is described as highly approachable, fostering a supportive and cooperative culture among staff. While most teachers commute from Kimberley, approximately 30 minutes away, the principal and some of the assistants reside within the local community.

Table 1: School enrolment and staff statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	12	13	23	48
Classrooms	1		1	2
Teachers	1		1	2
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1		1	2
No. of DHs	0			0
Teacher-to-learner ratio	1:25		1:23	

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Four lessons were observed, an HL and EFAL lesson, with each of the foundation phase teachers.

Lesson Observation

Multigrade (Grade 1 and 2) Setswana Home Language Lesson

Inside the classroom, learners are seated according to their grades, with clear separation between the groups. The walls display a mixture of EGRP materials alongside other resources creating a print-rich environment. There is a reading corner in the classroom although not very inviting. Not all resources are fully utilised, as some of the EGRP materials remain packed away in boxes rather than being displayed or actively incorporated into lessons.

When the observation began, the teacher was still in the process of preparing her lesson. She explained that she had originally prepared her lessons using the ATP, but that morning the principal had reviewed her lesson plans and instructed her to rather use the EGRP materials for her teaching. She noted that she received assistance from the Grade 3 teacher, who was already implementing the EGRP approach.

The phonics lesson was divided between the two grades in the multigrade class. For Grade 2, the sound of the day was “KW.” The teacher introduced the sound by combining it with vowels to create syllables (KWA, KWE, KWI, KWO, KWU). She then invited two or three learners to come forward and give a word starting with the sound. Once this was done, the learners returned to their seats while the teacher compiled a list of words on the board. This process took some time, as she consulted books or wall charts before writing down the words. On average, about 10 to 15 words were produced, which left the learners without a task for several minutes.

After the list was complete, the teacher used a long stick to point to each word, and the class read them aloud in chorus. When learners struggled with a word, she supplied it herself and had them repeat after her. This process was repeated with the Grade 1s, who were working on the “KH” sound. While each group took turns, learners from the other grade sometimes joined in when they recognised words or sounds, but at other times they were idle and became noisy or disruptive. A teaching assistant (TA) was present in the class, but her role was mainly to address misbehaviour rather than to support instruction.

After completing the phonics activities, the teacher moved on to a shared reading activity using the text *Mifuta ya dipalangwa* (Different types of transport). She initially called the Grade 2 learners to the carpet for the activity, instructing the Grade 1s to remain seated and listen. Learners were encouraged to identify the pictures in the big book before the teacher read the story aloud. As the Grade 1s became restless, she eventually invited them to join the Grade 2s on the carpet. This allowed all learners to take part in the shared reading, although it also illustrated the challenge of managing two grades at the same time.

In her interview, the teacher indicated that she did not fully align her practice with the EGRP processes. She explained that, in her view, EGRP encouraged teachers to teach the grades separately and give them different activities, which she felt required dividing her attention in ways that were not workable. Her explanation suggests a different interpretation of the EGRP methodology.

The teacher noted that she had attended all EGRP training sessions except for the term 3 session, which she missed due to a family emergency. The principal, however, observed that she has not been applying the EGRP processes consistently.

Multigrade (Grade 1 and 2) English First Additional Language Lesson

The English lesson began with all learners gathered at the front of the classroom to perform rhymes. The class repeated one rhyme three times and then did an additional rhyme in Setswana. After this, the Grade 1 learners were asked to perform a separate rhyme on their own. While the activity engaged the learners, it took up a significant amount of time, leaving less time available for the main teaching and learning activities.

Following this, learners returned to their seats for the phonics session. The Grade 1s focused on the “SS” sound, while the Grade 2s worked on the “ING” sound. For each group, the teacher wrote an extended list of words on the board that contained the target sound. The learners then recited these words in chorus, similar to the approach used in the Setswana phonics lesson. This marked the conclusion of the English phonics lesson.

When asked about incorporating other EGRP routines, the teacher indicated that she was not prepared to conduct a Group Guided Reading activity during the observation. Similarly, when asked about implementing the Question of the Day, she stated that she was not familiar with the process. She explained that she intended to continue learning about the EGRP routines in order to strengthen her implementation in future lessons.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

At the start of the observation, the teacher immediately demonstrated strong organisation. She laid out her lesson plans, tracking paperwork, and files on the table, showing clear preparation and attention to detail. The classroom, although old and run down, had been made as presentable as possible. EGRP materials were displayed on the walls, creating a colourful and engaging environment. Learners were seated in ability groups, reflecting the teacher's effort to structure learning effectively.

The lesson began with a brief review, as the teacher asked learners to recall what they had done in the previous lesson. She reminded them that Mondays are used to introduce new sounds. The sound for the day was "TL." Learners were invited to raise their hands and call out words containing the "TL" sound, creating an interactive start to the phonics activity.

The teacher occasionally reinforced positive behaviour by prompting learners to recall the class rules, which helped restore order when the class became noisy. In teaching the new sound, she used flashcards, holding up each card for learners to read aloud. She then placed words on the board and guided learners in reading them by separating the words into syllables. Learners also practised using the new words in oral sentences.

In the second part of the English lesson, the focus shifted to Group Guided Reading. The teacher explained that learners were seated in ability groups and that, for this session, the higher-ability group would be reading. To minimise disruptions, she provided books to all learners so they could follow along while the selected group read aloud. She clarified that this was not her usual practice; ordinarily, the non-reading groups would complete occupational tasks. For this lesson, however, she chose to allow all learners to have books and participate in the reading process.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson

For the English lesson, the teacher conducted a shared reading activity with the support of the teaching assistant (TA), who is the school's designated "reading champion." The teacher explained that the reading champion assists with reading in different ways: sometimes she takes the Grade 3 learners to read with them separately, sometimes she helps facilitate shared reading, and at other times she supports with Group Guided Reading when the teacher is occupied with other classroom tasks. The teacher reported that she provides guidance and informal training to the reading champion, which gives her confidence in the TA's ability to manage these activities effectively.

In this lesson, the whole class gathered on the carpet while the reading champion read the story *The Blue Bracelet* aloud. The teacher remained present throughout, overseeing the activity and directing the learning process. She (The teacher) asked introductory questions before the reading to establish understanding, engaged learners in discussing the pictures,

and introduced some vocabulary in an informal way. At the end of the story, she led the questioning again, posing comprehension questions to the learners.

Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Reading Skills

The table below shows the estimates provided by teachers of these grades on how many learners in their classes can read.

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Reading Skills

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read with comprehension in EFAL	No. of learners who can read with comprehension in HL
1	12	6	6
2	13	6	4
3	23	11	11

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The Grade 1–2 teacher was not observed to be making significant adjustments to her classroom management in line with EGRP II. In her interview, she explained that she understood EGRP to require teaching the grades separately, with different content and activities. This interpretation differs from the intended EGRP approach, which encourages teachers to manage multigrade classrooms as a single group while differentiating tasks or questions according to learner ability. The teacher expressed little enthusiasm for EGRP, noting that she preferred her previous methods. She indicated that she would attempt to implement EGRP more consistently, but mainly because of pressure from the principal rather than because she saw value in the programme.

By contrast, the Grade 3 teacher reported that her understanding of EGRP had improved during her second year of implementation and after attending further training. She indicated that she had incorporated several EGRP methodologies into her classroom practice. However, observations suggested that some elements were still not fully aligned with the protocols. For example, in Group Guided Reading she used a chorus reading approach, which limited opportunities to listen to individual learners. In Shared Reading, the session was facilitated by the Reading Champion, with the teacher providing oversight and leading questioning before and after the text. While this differs from the standard EGRP approach, the teacher's tracking documents did reflect individual learner progress, indicating that she monitors reading ability on an ongoing basis.

Lesson content and methodology

In both Grade 2 and Grade 3, Group Guided Reading (GGR) and Shared Reading were carried out as teacher-led chorus reading, which goes against the intention of enabling learners to read independently.

The Grade 3 teacher appeared organised and reported using lesson plans and curriculum trackers to monitor coverage and learner progress. She even had detailed records showing that she usually tracks learner performance. However, during observation her practice did

not follow EGRP protocols. Instead of calling a group to the reading corner, she kept learners at their desks and led them in chorus reading. Learners who were not in the group were left without occupational tasks, which meant they were following passively rather than being actively engaged.

The multigrade teacher showed even weaker implementation of EGRP methods. When teaching the sound of the day, she did not use blending or segmenting strategies, nor did she use pictures or flashcards to support the lesson. During Shared Reading, she attempted to split her time between the different grades, but in practice this meant more chorus reading and little meaningful engagement with the story. Learners were not guided through the text using the strategies outlined in EGRP, and as a result, they gained very little from the session.

5. Learner perceptions

When the Grade 3 learners were asked why they thought reading was important, some explained that being able to read is useful because they would then be able to answer the teacher if she asked them to read something. They also shared that reading helps them do their homework with minimal assistance from parents. Others said that being able to read would help them progress to the next grade, and one learner mentioned that reading would one day be an important skill required for work.

“When the teacher asks you what is written, then you can answer.”

“Your mom will only need to help you when you are struggling.”

“When you are at work one day and you get a message, you will be able to read and know what to do.”

When the Grade 3 learners were asked about their language preferences, most of them said they enjoyed reading in English. They described English as more important and explained that it helps them learn new words. A few learners, however, preferred Setswana, saying that in Setswana they already know many words, can read more fluently, and do not need to pause as often. One learner explained that she liked English more because learning new English words helps her when she plays “house” or “school” at home with her younger siblings—she can then take on the role of teaching them English during play.

“I like Setswana because I know more words and I don’t have to stop so much.”

“I like English because when I play school with my siblings, I can teach them English.”

Learners were also asked about stories they had enjoyed, and they mentioned *Mai a ga Soso*, *Cora the Crab*, and *Matla a ga Neo*. They were able to recall details from these stories and showed excitement as they spoke about them. When asked about how they prefer to read, most of the learners said they enjoy reading for themselves because it allows them to concentrate and practise on their own. However, they were less positive about Group Guided Reading (GGR), explaining that it is often disrupted when slower readers take too long or when others go off-topic and start talking about things unrelated to the book.

"I like reading for myself because I can practise."

"When we are reading in groups, they disturb us and start talking about street things."

When the learners described how their teacher helps them learn to read, they said the teacher usually reads the words first, and then they repeat after her. They added that she sometimes segments the words, which makes them easier to read. Reflecting on their experience in Grade 2, they shared that they did very little reading the previous year, focusing mostly on writing. This year, they felt their reading had improved a lot because they know more words, understand the stories better, and don't have to ask for as much help from the teacher.

"In Grade 2 we did not know a lot of words and always put up our hands to ask the teacher to help, but now we read more stories alone."

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

In the Grade 3 classroom, learners were seated in ability groups. On the day of observation, the teacher worked with the higher-ability group during Group Guided Reading. She explained that the Reading Coach often takes the higher-ability learners for additional reading practice, which allows her to dedicate more focused attention to those who struggle.

The multigrade teacher acknowledged that she does not know how to manage different abilities in line with EGRP protocols. Instead of grouping learners by ability, she was observed teaching them in separate grade groups (Grades 1 and 2). Even during Shared Reading, she initially planned to separate the two grades but eventually brought them together only because the Grade 1 learners were becoming disruptive. As a result, she does not consistently teach at the right level and misses opportunities to address the specific needs of the lower-ability learners.

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The multigrade teacher missed one training session but attended all others, while the Grade 3 teacher has attended all training since she started teaching. The Grade 3 teacher is making an effort; some of her practices are commendable and show improvement compared to the previous year. In her interview, she mentioned that she is beginning to understand more as she attends additional training, although she is still struggling with certain aspects such as Group Guided Reading (GGR). The multigrade teacher, on the other hand, is failing to implement EGRP and appears reluctant to even try. She does not seem to understand the programme or its objectives, and this is evident in her teaching practice.

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching.

In the multigrade classroom, learners were grouped in their grades and in the grade 3, learners were grouped in their abilities.

Teacher

The Grade 3 teacher recently qualified in 2025, after first serving as a Reading Assistant and completing her studies on a bursary from Solar Plant (Global Link). She has attended all

EGRP training since last year and demonstrates enthusiasm for the programme. Although she is not yet following EGRP protocols completely, she is showing more understanding and improvement compared to the previous year.

The multigrade teacher has 27 years of teaching experience in multigrade classes but has struggled with EGRP implementation. She missed some training due to family emergencies and openly stated that she prefers traditional chalkboard methods. She feels the programme is “too much work” and does not address the specific needs of a multigrade classroom.

Use of LTSM

The Grade 3 teacher makes strong use of LTSM, employing lesson plans, trackers, posters, and flashcards to support her lessons. She also uses the tablet to supplement materials, printing what is missing and integrating technology into her planning. The multigrade teacher makes minimal use of LTSM. She did not use flashcards or pictures in her phonics lessons; she used the big book during Shared Reading but did not follow EGRP protocol. While she has access to the materials, they are largely kept in boxes rather than being used or displayed.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

The Grade 3 teacher strongly embraces the use of her tablet, reporting that it has made planning easier and lighter than carrying multiple books. She explained that the previous Grade 3 teacher misplaced some of the EGRP LTSM, and she has therefore had to print some charts and flashcards from the tablet. The multigrade teacher, however, uses her tablet reluctantly, often needing help from colleagues, and prefers to rely on paper-based resources for planning. She acknowledged that she does not use the tracker and feels the programme’s digital demands add to her workload rather than assisting her. Teachers report that they are not part of any PLC or WhatsApp group.

9. Key features of the school’s management and leadership

The principal of the school is highly supportive and knowledgeable about the EGRP. When asked about the programme, he was able to clearly articulate its purpose and objectives, showing that he makes an effort to stay updated on developments so that he can support Foundation Phase teachers effectively. He encourages teachers to freely use photocopying and laminating facilities and demonstrates a democratic leadership style, engaging staff in decision-making and maintaining an open-door approach.

A particularly sensitive issue he has had to manage relates to the multigrade teacher, who has been struggling with psychological health challenges, including panic attacks and fainting episodes in class. These incidents have had a negative impact on learners, with parents voicing concerns about the trauma their children experience when such events occur. The principal has attempted to intervene supportively, encouraging the teacher to take extended leave to recover and facilitating medical and psychological assessments. Although doctors have advised that she is currently unfit to teach, the teacher has refused to step away from the classroom.

In handling this situation, the principal has shown diplomacy and care. He ensures that a union representative is present during discussions with the teacher to avoid appearing insensitive, and he is in the process of referring her to the Department of Education's wellness unit for further intervention. In the meantime, he has arranged for other teachers to assist her with lesson planning and monitoring.

Overall, the principal is regarded as a gentle, understanding, and open leader who works well with both his staff and the administrative team. His approach reflects patience, empathy, and a commitment to supporting his teachers despite the significant challenges he faces in managing this delicate situation.

Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

At this school, there is no formally appointed Departmental Head for the Foundation Phase, and support structures are limited. In practice, the principal relies on the Grade 3 teacher to assist and monitor the multigrade teacher, often helping her with lesson planning and structuring of work. The grade 4-6 teacher also informally acts as a DH by carrying out some monitoring duties. The principal himself provides oversight by checking lesson plans and learner books on a regular basis and has indicated that he intends to begin formal lesson observations in the near future.

10. Workbook analysis

Colour coding – red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved)

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	Not up to date	Not up to date	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Partially	Partially	Yes	Yes
Exercise books up to date	No	No	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Some in red ink	Some in red ink	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	No guiding comments	No guiding comments	Yes, mainly in red ink	Done in red ink
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	No	No	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.	<i>T2 DBE minimally used (only 2-3 pages used in first term)</i>	<i>T2 DBE not used at all (only 2-3 pages used in Jan 2025)</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W5 and W9 work</i>	Term 2 activity of interest found within the same week	Term 2 W5 activity of interest not found and no evidence of activity in workbook.

		<i>also not found in workbooks</i>	<i>No evidence of June activities found in books.</i>	
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Not used, lesson taught also did not reflect current week	Not used, lesson taught also did not reflect current week	Teacher on T3 W4, only 1 week behind due to training	Teacher on T3 W4, only 1 week behind due to training

11. Community engagement

The school is situated in a community heavily affected by social challenges, particularly substance abuse. Directly behind the school is a tavern, which both staff and community members regard as a negative influence. The principal has repeatedly pleaded for its closure due to the risks it poses to learners. Parental involvement is generally very poor, with many parents showing little interest in their children's education. In some cases, learners live in child-headed households because parents are frequently intoxicated or absent. The principal shared a disturbing account of children being locked inside their home while their mother went out drinking. He noted that he is often in discussions with local social workers about the social issues affecting learners.

Despite these challenges, the school has also benefited from some positive community support. On the day of the visit, officials from the local solar plant came to engage with the principal and staff about further donations and the on-going needs of the school.

12. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

- The school environment: Both years highlighted the availability of a mobile science lab and library, though in 2025 it was noted that the library and its computers were underused despite being well-stocked. Security concerns persisted, with the school remaining open to neighbouring homes.
- Teaching and learning continued to reflect mixed practice. In 2024, both teachers attended training but did not follow EGRP protocols, defaulting to extended choral reading and worksheets, with weak comprehension questioning. By 2025, Grade 3 showed some improvement: the teacher was more organised, used lesson plans and trackers, seated learners in ability groups, and attempted to monitor progress. However, she still relied heavily on chorus reading during GGR and did not consistently provide occupational tasks to non-reading groups. The multigrade teacher, on the other hand, remained resistant to EGRP, continuing to interpret it as teaching each grade separately and preferring traditional chalkboard methods.

- Learner perceptions shifted subtly between the two years. In 2024, Grade 3 learners expressed strong preferences for English, citing exposure through preschools, cartoons, and daily interactions, and recalled little specific content from their reading apart from one title (*Rocket to Space*). They also reflected that they had “not read in Grade 2.” In 2025, learners again expressed a preference for English, describing it as more important and linked to learning new words, though some still valued Setswana for fluency and ease. Importantly, they were able to recall story details (*Mai a ga Soso*, *Cora the Crab*, *Matla a ga Neo*) and described noticeable progress since Grade 2, particularly in decoding and comprehension. However, they also voiced frustrations with GGR, saying it was disrupted by slower peers or off-topic talk, and many preferred reading on their own for concentration and practice.
- The use of LTSM was uneven across both years. In 2024, teachers used anthologies, Big Books, and posters, but implementation was weak, with materials not used according to protocol and reading corners absent. By 2025, Grade 3 demonstrated stronger uptake of LTSM, using posters, flashcards, lesson plans, and trackers, and actively employing the tablet to print missing resources. In contrast, the multigrade teacher left many resources boxed, did not use flashcards, and only superficially used the Big Book. Her reluctance to adopt EGRP materials meant her lessons remained largely unchanged from traditional practice.
- Tablet use and digital integration marked a clear divergence. In 2024, the older multigrade teacher was expected to resist tablet use, while the younger Grade 2 teacher was seen as capable and tech-savvy. By 2025, this played out as predicted: the Grade 3 teacher embraced her tablet, printing resources and using trackers more effectively, while the multigrade teacher used her tablet reluctantly, did not use the tracker, and viewed the digital demands as burdensome. There were no PLCs or WhatsApp groups available to support either teacher in either year.
- Leadership remained relatively stable across the two years, though the demands on management increased. In 2024, the principal was described as supportive, patient, and resourceful in securing donations, but also “hands-off” in direct classroom oversight, relying instead on checking books and lesson plans. In 2025, he was more explicitly praised for his knowledge of EGRP and his supportive, democratic style, giving teachers freedom to copy, print, and laminate. However, he faced the sensitive HR challenge of managing the multigrade teacher’s health episodes, which disrupted lessons and raised parental concerns. He responded with empathy and diplomacy, involving unions and referring her to the DoE wellness unit, but the situation added a new dimension of fragility to the school’s teaching capacity.
- Workbooks reflected ongoing weaknesses across both years. In 2024, books were incomplete, trackers not used, and corrections minimal. In 2025, Grade 3 workbooks showed improvement—up to date, marked, and with evidence of assessment—while Grade 1–2 remained poor, with DBEs barely used, few exercises, and no guiding corrections. This reflected the same divide between the more capable Grade 3 teacher and the struggling multigrade teacher.

Taken together, the reading situation across the two years shows both continuity and

divergence. In 2024, neither teacher adhered meaningfully to EGRP, resulting in slow choral reading and poor comprehension. By 2025, Grade 3 demonstrated clear improvement through structured routines, use of materials, and active monitoring, even though not all protocols were followed. Learners themselves reported better reading ability and engagement. The multigrade class, however, stagnated, with the teacher resistant to change and struggling with health issues. This duality means that while progress is visible in Grade 3, sustainability is undermined by the fragile staffing situation, persistent weak practice in multigrade, and lack of systemic support structures like coaching or PLCs.

School B

1. Summary of key points

- This small mining town school has supportive school management, and is also supported by local mines/ businesses
- The school remains well-tended and well-managed with democratic decision-making
- The effective multigrade teacher observed in 2024 has been negatively impacted by a big increase in Grade 3 enrolment
 - The teacher struggles to differentiate her whole class activities for the different grades
 - Due to the EGRP II methodologies applied in the lessons, there was also very little evidence of grade-level teaching, leading to the exclusion of learners in lower grades in the lesson
 - The teacher's assessment of reading fluency during GGR was inaccurate, which would in turn hinder her ability to support learners in achieving fluency.
- The multigrade class is now overcrowded, which restricts the ability to have a reading corner and facilitate effective group work. Teacher morale has also dropped significantly due to the teacher being overwhelmed by the class size.
- Initially, the teacher had split the class into two separate classrooms (Grade 3 alone and Grades 1 and 2 together). Moving between the two classrooms was physically exhausting for the young teacher, and the coach intervened by raising the issue with the principal, encouraging the class to be merged into a multigrade foundation phase class with all three grades, as it had been the previous year. However, due to illness, the coach was unavailable to assist the teacher with the transition back to a single, larger multigrade class. Based on observations, the substitute coach also did not support this transition optimally, leading to a regression in the teacher's teaching.

2. Respondents

- Two multigrade lessons with the teacher teaching Grade 1, 2 and 3 learners were observed (EFAL and HL)
- A focus group discussion was conducted with seven Grade 3 learners
- One multigrade teacher was interviewed
- The deputy principal (not officially appointed) was interviewed
- EGRP II Coach was observed before, during and after lesson

- EGRP II Coach was also interviewed following the lesson observation

3. School context

The school is situated in a small mining town where mainly mine workers reside. It is securely fenced, although the gate remains open during school hours. According to the school, the surrounding community is considered very safe, with no reported security incidents.

The school grounds are well-maintained, clean, and neat. Learners have access to a play area with swings, which the Grade R learners mainly use. The toilets are moderately well-maintained and kept in a usable condition.

The school comprises 5 large classrooms that accommodate students from Grades R to 7. The foundation phase is taught as a multigrade in one class; grades 4 and 5 are also taught in this class. Additional rooms are used as a staff room, a storeroom, and a library, while one classroom remains unoccupied. The library also functions as a reading centre and is actively used by the 'reading champion' teaching assistant. The school has a small kitchen which is kept clean and neat.

The foundation phase classroom is bright and welcoming, with EGRP posters and learning materials on the walls. There is a reading corner for learners, though it is just a small bookshelf housing LTSM used during lessons. The classroom furniture is in good condition, well-maintained, and fully functional.

In the staff room, teachers have access to computers and a stable internet connection. There are also working photocopy machines available for daily administrative and teaching needs.

Although the school is small, it is well organised, clean, and fully operational, with resources in place to support both teaching and learning.

Table 1: Foundation phase enrolment and staff

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	9	11	23	43
Classrooms	1			1
Teachers	1			1
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1			1
No. of DHs	0			0
Teacher-to-learner ratio	1:43			1:43

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observation

The Foundation Phase teacher is faced with a challenge of an overcrowded classroom. A number of Grade 3 learners have transferred from other schools after hearing that this school performs very well. The teacher shared that she felt overwhelmed at the beginning of the year, as she had just returned from maternity leave and she is only in her second year of teaching. The new classroom situation is still an ongoing adjustment for her.

During the observation, it was noted that she focused more on the Grade 3 group, while the Grade 1s received less attention. The coach addressed this during their feedback session and suggested that she use the same shared reading story across all grades but differentiate the questions according to each grade level.

During the English lesson, the teacher spoke mostly in English, with very little code-switching. Some of the Grade 3 learners were able to comprehend the story and respond in full sentences. Learners were seated in their grade groups. Unlike last year, there is no longer sufficient space to have a reading corner where learners can sit on a carpet and read. The teacher called 16 learners to read as a group in GGR. The learners were all seated in front of the class on their chairs.

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) Setswana Home Language Lesson

The teacher's main focus was on teaching the Grade 3 learners the "oo" sound, while Grades 1 and 2 were meant to practice handwriting.

The Grade 3 group began the session by reading sentences containing the "oo" sound from the board. The teacher guided them through pronunciation and occasionally paused to explain the meanings of words with the sound.

The teacher then shifted to GGR. Sixteen learners who are able to read were brought to the reading corner, these learners mostly from the Grade 3 group, with some from Grade 2. Instead of sitting in a circle, they sat in rows as shown in the picture below, with the teacher standing beside them while guiding the GGR session.

To start, the teacher held up the storybook and discussed the illustrations. She then had learners read aloud one by one, tracking their performance in the GGR tracker. While she listened attentively to each learner, she was repeatedly interrupted by the need to reprimand learners in the class, whose noise levels increased as they completed their writing tasks.

Within the group, some learners read confidently but most struggled with fluency. During the post-lesson feedback session, the coach reviewed the tracking sheet and pointed out that some learners had been marked as fluent readers even though they were not reading fluently. The coach advised the teacher to ensure that tracker records accurately reflect learner ability. She also recommended assigning meaningful occupational tasks to the non-reading groups to keep them engaged, as this would reduce distractions during GGR.

Finally, the coach noted that the teacher had not modelled writing on the board for the occupational task given to Grades 1 and 2. She stressed the importance of modelling in helping learners understand the task requirements, particularly in multigrade settings where teacher supervision is divided.

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) English First Additional Language Lesson

The lesson began with a lively song to capture learners' attention, followed by a listening and speaking activity led by the teacher. The weekly theme was "health," and the teacher asked learners what they understood about the word "health" or being "healthy." She spoke only in English and some Grade 2 learners and most Grade 3s were able to respond in English. She then introduced the question of the day, involving as many learners as possible. However, she lost track of time and had to be reminded by the coach to move on. During the activity, she did not encourage learners to speak in full sentences, a point that was later addressed by the coach in the feedback session.

The teacher then carried out a shared reading activity. She started by asking learners to look at the pictures in the story and discuss what they can see. Then she read the story aloud and asked the learners to reflect on the content through comprehension questions. The teacher mostly focused on the Grade 3 learners and was engaging more with them, neglecting Grade 1 and 2 learners. The coach advised her during the feedback session to differentiate her questioning in order to also engage with the Grade 1s and 2s. The coach explained that the teacher should ask Grade 1s to describe pictures, while expecting more detailed reflections or summaries from Grades 2 and 3.

The table below shows the number of learners who can read in each Grade. While a high proportion of learners could read or at least decode the words, the teacher's estimation of the number of learners that could read is highly inflated, which may be linked to her inaccurate assessment of learners' reading ability using the GGR tracker. This is likely reflective of learners who can read at least singular words across all 3 grades as opposed to reading for meaning in Grade 2 and 3.

The coach was asked to estimate how many learners could read in the class. However, she was unable to do so because she had been hospitalised and away from work for over four months. This was her first day back. The substitute coach, who covered her duties during her absence, was also ill, so no formal handover has taken place yet.

Table 2: Learner reading ability per grade

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL	No. of learners who can read in HL
1 (singular words)	9	8	8
2	11	9	9
3	23	23	23

Coach Observation

The coach perceived the EGRP II as focused on improving literacy rates in the Northern Cape, without addressing learning about approaches for multigrade or diverse ability classrooms. This view may stem from her limited exposure to multigrade schools in the programme, as she coaches only one multigrade teacher. She strongly advocates for

teachers specialising in a single grade by not moving between grades annually in order to become a "master of your grade", an approach less applicable to multigrade settings.

The coach strongly believes that the EGRP II programme has been successful based on her interactions with learners and their ability to decode words (segment, blend, recognise sight words, etc.) and later read these with a string of other words. However, she emphasised that the EGRP I and II are not any different from each other as far as content is concerned, but EGRP II is better managed and has improved implementation monitoring. The coach reinforced that they only received refresher training on coaching early in 2024 and no additional training has been provided subsequently.

"Nothing has changed since EGRP I. We are still doing the same things, the coaching is the same. The only thing that has changed is data, we record our efforts better. [OUP SA] always reminds us to capture at the end of the week and ensure that data is available... I prefer Google Drive for capturing data because you can easily see when you have not recorded your effort."

The coach appreciated the sensitivity of the EGRP II training to teachers' needs. She highlighted this Term 3 training and its focus on learner handwriting, as teachers had started caring less about the neatness of learner writing. The training also emphasised bookmarking and remediation.

Group Guided Reading and Shared Reading were viewed as the core methodologies that most teachers struggle with. The coach attributed this to a lack of preparation by teachers saying,

"Very few master GGR and SR, nevermind paired reading, because teachers do not want to prepare occupational tasks. If a teacher knows exactly which material they will use during the lesson, and knows their learners they will know how long each occupational task will keep learners busy."

She argued that there is no reason for any of the teachers to struggle with these core methodologies because the LTSMs detail all the strategies and steps for applying them, and the coaches encourage them to contextualise these to their classes.

"If a teacher does not follow the lesson plan closely, then building on concepts that should have been introduced earlier becomes impossible".

The coach identified barriers to coaching primarily related to internal politics and external issues unrelated to the programme. She described a school where teachers resisted coaching as an act of defiance against their principal, but became receptive to a coach-coachee relationship after the principal's resignation. At another school, tensions between the school and the provincial department led to a policy requiring all visitors, including the coach, to provide one week's notice before visiting. The coach adheres to this rule to maintain a collegial relationship.

The coach described an excellent relationship with the multigrade teacher at the school. She noted the teacher's initial reluctance to manage a large class of 60 learners, explaining,

“{The teacher} really did not want to have such a large multigrade class and tried to do everything to avoid it. Her current class was split into two classrooms (one Grade 1 and 2 class and a separate Grade 3 classroom) and she would go (physically) between two classrooms. That way of managing her learners was not productive. Although she was very resistant to the idea of joining the classes, I advised both her and the principal that one multigrade classroom was the better way of teaching the learners”.

However, based on a lesson observation, the teacher continues to struggle with managing a Grade 3-dominated multigrade classroom, focusing primarily on Grade 3 learners while minimally addressing the needs of Grade 1 and 2 learners at their respective levels.

Coach Shadowing

Prior to the lesson, the coach engaged in a high level pre-observation discussion with the teacher to align on the lesson’s objectives and logistics. This included reviewing the teacher’s lesson plans, anticipated duration, potential timetable disruptions (evacuation drill), and the LTSM to be used. The coach also enquired about ability grouping for GGR and how this related to learner grades - all the reading groups included learners from two or three grades. For instance, the non-reader group included a few Grade 2 and 3 learners with mostly Grade 1s. Outside of GGR the learners are seated in grade groups.

During the lesson, the coach meticulously recorded all classroom activities and components covered. Her notes captured specific questions for post-lesson discussion, potential advice, and deviations from established protocols that could enhance engagement, particularly for learners in lower Grades. For example, she noted the importance of using a speaking frame, “I think [*apples/ chips*] are healthier,” to scaffold oral responses, with the teacher modelling the response to guide learners.

The coach maintained a non-intrusive presence, observing from the back of the classroom without interrupting the teacher. She evaluated the appropriateness of occupational tasks assigned to each grade, noting instances where instructions were unclear. To support the teacher and ensure that no learners were off task, the coach clarified task expectations for learners during the occupational task session, addressing gaps in the teacher’s initial explanations in order to preserve the flow of the lesson.

The feedback session, however, highlighted areas for improvement in the coach’s facilitation of reflective practice. The session commenced with a cursory question about the teacher’s perception of the lesson; however, the coach moved swiftly to her own observations without acknowledging the teacher’s input or fostering deeper reflection, or recognising the lesson’s strengths. This approach was similar to practices observed in the previous year, where most coaches failed to allow teachers time to reflect on their own lessons during the discussion. The main issue identified by the coach was the teacher’s focus on a single grade, which led her to demonstrate what she meant regarding the use of speaking frames to encourage Grade 1 engagement and the whole class speaking in full sentences. The coach showed what the Listening and Speaking session would look like if the teacher had implemented the methodology as prescribed (see image below).

In alignment with the GROW model, although not prompted by the coach, the teacher proactively identified a challenge she needed assistance with immediately after the feedback

session. She mentioned she has difficulty managing thematic vocabulary flashcards, which often become disorganised and hard to locate. The coach shared good practices from other schools where teachers systematically organised weekly thematic vocabulary and sight words. She quickly found images on her phone to illustrate effective organisation. Together, the coach and teacher agreed that the coach's next visit would focus on implementing a structured system for organising vocabulary flashcards.

Overall, the coach was able to identify how the teacher could better implement whole class teaching and was able to demonstrate her point. However, to enhance the feedback session, the coach needs to prioritise active listening, validate the teacher's reflections, and incorporate positive reinforcement to build confidence.

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The teacher is in her second year of teaching in a multigrade classroom and noted that she has become more organised since the introduction of EGRP. She highlighted improvements in both classroom organisation and management. She expressed that because of EGRP II she is focused on teaching learners how to read through strategies such as phonics, blending and segmenting words.

Lesson content and methodology

The teacher showed an understanding of the EGRP II requirements but did not follow protocols closely, and showed little evidence of implementing differentiation. Unlike last year, there has been a noticeable regression in her practice. She is struggling to cope with the increased number of learners and is primarily focused on the Grade 3 group, while the Grade 1 and 2 learners are largely neglected.

5. Learner perceptions

When learners were asked why it is important to read, they responded that it helps them to learn and to pass. Some also mentioned that reading is important for their future careers. A few shared their ambitions; some wanted to become doctors, one wanted to become a lawyer, and others wanted to be policemen or policewomen.

Five out of the seven learners said they prefer reading in Setswana. Their reasons were that it is easier to understand and it is their home language. The two learners who preferred English said it was because they already do a lot of Setswana, and they want to learn a new language.

The learners mentioned that they have read *Tsala e e sa Ikanyegeng*. However, when asked what they remembered or liked about the story, only two were able to respond. The rest said they did not recognise. Only two learners said they have books at home, such as Winnie the Pooh, but all of them shared that they often visit the community library. Their favourite book at the library is Nonsense, a story about a silly donkey.

One learner who previously attended a different school noted that the way they are taught now is different. She explained that their current teacher helps them understand sounds, blend words, and make sentences. She said she enjoys this more than just reciting words.

All the learners stated that they prefer group-guided reading over individual or paired reading. As one learner explained,

“When we are all reading in the group, we can all look at the teacher and no one is making noise.”

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

The multigrade teacher struggled to effectively engage the entire class, frequently failing to accommodate learners in Grades 1 and 2 within the lesson. Despite demonstrating a clear understanding of the lesson plan requirements and covering the necessary components, her delivery was suboptimal. Efforts to include Grade 1 and 2 learners in discussions and question and answer activities were evident, but these were pitched at a slightly advanced level, resulting in limited engagement for most of the lesson. In addition, the teacher displayed a lack of enthusiasm, which also impacted the delivery of the lesson

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The Foundation Phase teacher demonstrated a clear understanding of what is required of her, as she was able to teach effectively last year. The only change is the increase in learner numbers, which has significantly impacted her confidence and ability to teach effectively. When spoken to, she displayed good knowledge and understanding of the EGRP II requirements.

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching

Teachers

The school currently has five fully occupied teaching posts, including one designated for a Grade R teacher and another for a Foundation Phase teacher. A notable development occurred between 2024 and 2025, with Grade 3 enrolment increasing by 550%. The principal and coach attributed this increase to positive word of mouth within the small town, driven by parental testimonials highlighting improvements in their children's reading. Consequently, parents from a neighbouring control school transferred their learners to this school. It is also worth noting that the principal had previously announced an intensive recruitment campaign in 2024 to boost enrolment, though the significant spike was observed exclusively in Grade 3.

Based on current Grade R learner numbers, if retention rates remain consistent, the Grade 1 class of 2026 will also be very large and result in an even larger multigrade FP classroom. This may qualify the school for an additional teaching post, aligning with the principal's 2024 plans to expand staffing in response to growing enrolment.

Use of LTSM

The multigrade teacher utilised hard copy lesson plans, a discussion poster, an EFAL big book, Grade 3 uLwazi Lwethu anthologies and handwriting charts.

The classroom walls were recently repainted and renovated, as a result the classroom environment was notably less print rich as the teacher delayed hanging materials until the walls fully dried. The discussion poster repeatedly fell off the chalkboard prompting the teacher to take it off the board entirely. No flashcards of sight words or theme vocabulary were used either during listening and speaking, SR or GGR limiting the scaffolding of the lesson.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

During the lesson, the teacher attempted to use a tablet but was unable to connect to the MTN network. The coach explained that teachers were surveyed by the OUPSA to identify the most reliable network in their areas, however, all teachers were provided with MTN SIM cards which are loaded with data monthly. Despite the connectivity issue, the teacher was able to describe how she accesses LTSM on the tablet by talking about the different screens on the platform and where she clicks in order to get to her materials of interest. To mitigate technology-related challenges, the teacher relies on hard-copy lesson plans as a backup. Although the teacher did not use handwritten lesson plans, she did use a GGR tracker to monitor learners' fluency, self-corrections, and reading aloud/projection. The coach felt strongly that the teacher's assessment of learner reading (especially fluency) on the GGR tracker was inaccurate.

9. Key features of the school's management and leadership

The coach described the school principal as "very hands-on," attentive to teachers' concerns, and appreciative of their contributions and experience. The deputy head also described her as highly committed to her work and very professional. Her management style is democratic. She involves teachers in decision-making and includes them in discussions about new developments at the school. She often emphasises that agreements should be written down. She values efficiency and gives constructive feedback, while also being open to receiving feedback herself. As the deputy said, "We are free to correct her because she likes progress." The principal also encourages teamwork and often reminds staff, "It's not about competition, it's about helping each other."

10. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

The principal is actively involved in supporting early grade teachers and is described as being sympathetic to their needs and challenges. Regular school meetings are held to foster collaboration, provide mutual assistance, and hold one another accountable. During these meetings, they prepare for lessons and complete their administration tasks and are able to get input and help from one another.

The teacher mentioned that they are supported by management because they are given additional materials and have free access to photocopying and lamination facilities. The principal occasionally observes lessons and provides constructive feedback, particularly on classroom management, which the teacher has found to be especially helpful. The principal is also aware of the training provided to her foundation phase teacher and tries to be informed about the training dates, coach interactions and anything else relating to the EGRP 2 programme.

The teacher explained that the coach has set up a WhatsApp group, and the communication in the group primarily concerns training and logistics related to it. Occasionally, the coach will share information on new LTSM or best practice videos. She noted that participation from other teachers in the group is poor, and the main person sharing and communicating is the coach.

11. Workbook analysis

An analysis of five learner workbooks and exercise books for each language (Setswana and English) revealed inconsistencies in curriculum coverage. Notably, written work was absent for specific weeks in Terms 2 and 3, despite the teacher's claim of complete curriculum coverage. The absence of a curriculum tracker hindered verification of this alignment, raising concerns about the accuracy of the reported coverage.

	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Partial
Workbook correction	Marked with no correction (red ink)	Partially marked with no correction
Exercise books up to date	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes (no work found in June)	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes (comments likely in verbal, corrections present)	Yes (comments likely in verbal, corrections present)
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: <i>check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.</i>	Written work for days of interest not found (Term 2 Week 5 and Week 9) in exercise books Term 3 Week 1 content also not found in exercise books DBE page for Term 3 Week 1 completed	Written work for days of interest not found (Term 2 Week 5 and Week 9) in exercise books Term 3 Week 1 content also not found in exercise books DBE pages partially completed
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Tracker not used Teacher reported being on current week this aligned with lesson taught	Tracker not used Teacher reported being on current week this aligned with lesson taught

Colour coding: red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved

12. Community engagement

The deputy principal highlighted strong community involvement and support for the school. She mentioned that parents are very involved in their children's education and they attend sports days, participate in fundraising activities, and regularly come to school meetings. Parents also maintain good relationships with teachers, often calling to ask about their children's progress or to ask about homework and tests. She noted that the children are always neat and clean, a sign that parents take good care of them and value education. The wider community also plays a supportive role. For example, during a recent fire drill observed at the school, the local mine volunteered their time and resources to assist.

13. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

The fundamental shift in the early grade reading situation at School B since 2024 is the overwhelming effect of increased learner enrolment on teaching effectiveness.

Quality of teaching: In 2024, the teacher was commended for her ability to effectively manage and differentiate instruction within a small, multigrade class. However, the influx of learners in 2025, notably the 550% increase in Grade 3 enrolment, has overwhelmed her capacity to sustain the same quality of instruction and differentiation. This has resulted in a noticeable decline in her adherence to the EGRP protocol and her ability to engage all grades equally.

Reading outcomes: While positive reputation regarding the school's strong reading results in 2024 contributed to the surge in enrolment, observations in 2025 suggest a decline in learners' reading fluency, despite the teacher's perception of high reading proficiency for individual words. The inability to effectively differentiate and provide targeted support to all Grades is likely a contributing factor.

Classroom dynamics: The increased numbers transformed the physical classroom from a spacious, print-rich environment with a dedicated reading corner in 2024 to a crowded space lacking such facilities in 2025. The reduction in print materials on walls (due to renovations) and the absence of flashcards have further limited scaffolded support.

EGRP II implementation challenges: While the teacher's competence in 2024 demonstrated the potential of EGRP II training, the situation in 2025 highlights that the programme's effectiveness is highly dependent on manageable class sizes. The teacher's difficulties in preparing occupational tasks and maintaining protocol adherence, issues not observed in 2024, underline this vulnerability. In addition, technical problems with LTSM tablets and inconsistencies in workbook coverage highlight ongoing operational challenges.

Coach's role: The coach continued to provide vital support in 2025, identifying key areas for improvement in the teacher's practice. However, her limited exposure to multigrade settings and long illness may have hindered her ability to support the teacher in that context well.

The effective teaching that was noticed in 2024 has been eroded by the unprecedented rise in learner enrolment in 2025, posing significant challenges, leading to teacher strain and a regression in effective teaching practices. The school's capacity to sustain high-quality

reading outcomes is now critically tested by overcrowding, requiring additional support, such as the filling of more teaching posts, to meet these evolving needs.

School D

1. Summary of key points

- School D remains a large and well-structured township school
- The school operates within a challenging socio-economic context with high crime rates and unemployment
- Foundation Phase classrooms are colourful and mostly well-organised
- Teachers show familiarity with EGRP II methods
- Persistent challenges include: Classroom management issues, inconsistent use of tools such as the tracker
- Teachers reported improvements in learners' reading abilities, especially in Setswana HL
- Pressure to complete the full EGRP II routine was noted as a concern.
- Learners showed enthusiasm for reading, particularly in English. Learners view reading in English as important for future success.

2. Respondents

- One Setswana Grade 3 lesson was observed
- One English (First Additional Language) Grade 3 lesson was observed
- One Setswana Grade 2 lesson was observed
- One English (First Additional Language) Grade 2 lesson was observed
- Two of the observed teachers were interviewed in depth
- A focus group discussion was carried out with eight FP teachers
- Focus group discussion was conducted with six Grade 3 learners (two from each Grade 2 class)
- The Principal was interviewed
- The Departmental Head was also interviewed separately

3. School context

School D is a large township school within District B which was established 44 years ago. The school operates in a socioeconomically challenged community marked by high unemployment and crime rates, which impact school budgets and the teaching environment greatly.

The school's main areas are generally well maintained, and the school has access to essential services, including running water, electricity, and toilets connected to the municipal sewage system. The toilets are kept clean, and classroom furniture is adequately cared for, reflecting efforts to maintain a functional learning environment. However, the learner playgrounds are very polluted. The school faces frequent vandalism, including damage to the perimeter fence which exposes the school to unauthorised access both during and after school hours. Additionally, the crime in the surrounding community directly affects the school with monthly break ins reported. There is currently no electrical wiring in some sections of the school (mainly the toilet area) due to crime.

Most Early Grade classrooms at School D are print-rich with

reading corners that support literacy development, only a few teachers' classrooms lack these resources. While the school does not have a library on its premises, a community library located across the road provides an accessible alternative. The introduction of Reading Champions has enhanced the school's ability to utilise the local library, as these RCs are able to chaperone and monitor small groups of learners while at the library.

The school has limited technological resources, with six functional laptops primarily used by school management. The administrative team has dedicated computers, but the single computer available for teacher use is not functional, which has negatively affected teachers.

While this is a large school (see school statistics table below), it operates in an orderly manner with classes beginning and ending at the scheduled time.

Parental involvement, on the other hand, is very poor. The principal reported that, *"Parents do not show up even during emergency situations. I have been forced to open up cases against parents who choose not to send kids to school in order to get Social Workers to intervene. When grants are threatened, that is when you see parents sending learners back to school"*.

Table 1: Foundation Phase Statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	133	96	96	325
Classrooms	4	3	3	10
Teachers	4	3	3	10
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	4	3	3	10
No. of DHs	1			1
Teacher-to-learner ratio	1: 33.3	1: 32	1: 32	1: 32.5

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

The lessons observed in both grades were delivered by different teachers and revealed significant differences in teaching experience, lesson delivery, and learner engagement depending on the teacher's approach.

Lesson Observation

Grade 2 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The lesson began with the teacher introducing the sound of the day "au". She showed the class a flashcard with a word containing the sound, and learners were asked to read the word aloud. Learners were then encouraged to build full sentences using the word. This segment focused on developing word recognition and oral sentence construction.

The class showed good engagement overall, with most learners participating actively in reading and responding. However, the classroom atmosphere occasionally became rowdy, and the teacher had to work to maintain control. She later shared that classroom discipline is

one of her biggest challenges. Despite this, she remained calm and patient, using gentle correction and positive encouragement. As learners transitioned into writing activities, the teacher walked around the room, giving feedback, praising those who wrote neatly, and correcting spelling or grammar mistakes as needed.

After the writing activity, the teacher led a short physical activity that also reinforced the lesson vocabulary. She instructed the learners to stand up and participate in a movement-based rhyme: "wash the shirt, rinse, dry," using this as a stretch break. Learners responded positively and seemed to enjoy the movement, which also helped them refocus before returning to written work.

The class then moved on to practicing cursive writing. Learners copied a sentence from the board that included the sound of the day (e.g. words like *tau* and *gaufi*). The teacher continued to monitor closely, praising learners for their handwriting and for keeping their books neat and clean. It was clear that learners were confident in their cursive writing.

During the GGR, The teacher called the higher reading ability group and gave the other learners the occupational task which was to complete an activity in their DBE books. Learners read individually and while the teacher corrected them occasionally. She did not use a tracker during GGR.

Grade 2 English First Additional Language Lesson

The teacher started with introducing the phonic of the week - the "ee" sound. The teacher used a poster to show the learners words with the sound 'ee' and to demonstrate how to segment she used the 'robot arm' to introduce the sounds. The teacher would engage learners through gestures by getting the learners to show (thumbs up/down) for words that have 'ee' or don't .

A shared reading activity followed with the teacher reading from the Big Book. Learners were all seated at the reading corner as a whole group. They were very eager to participate. They raised their hands to read the title even before the teacher began with the lesson. Learners read the title and the teacher asked them to describe the picture they were looking at. The teacher read with lively intonation, changing voice for each character, and showing gestures and actions which helped in maintaining learner interest. She used English only and did not code switch. She managed her class well so the learners were well behaved and orderly. Even upon returning from break, they entered the class quietly. The teacher used strategies such as "Learners 1, 2, 3 eyes on me" as well as group leaders/monitors as a classroom management tool.

After the shared reading, the teacher gave the learners a task where they were required to draw a picture based on the Shared Reading story they had read, then write a sentence about the picture they had drawn. The teacher modelled (on the chalkboard) how the activity should be done by going through the writing process which includes: thinking about what you want to write, drawing a picture then writing your sentences. While learners were drawing and writing, the teacher monitored them and marked their work.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The Setswana lesson was delivered by a teacher in her early 40s with 28 years of experience in the Foundation Phase. Her lesson was focusing on the phonic “ph” and themed around the word “phaka” (park). Overall the lesson was fast paced, structured and well delivered and lasted approximately 36 minutes. The teacher has a charismatic and energetic demeanour which makes for a lively yet calm classroom environment. The teacher began by reviewing the previous day’s phonic (“aa”), engaging learners by having them recall the words discussed. She then introduced the “ph” sound using a phonic frieze with an image of a park.

The teacher employed interactive strategies to reinforce the phonic focus. She encouraged learners to identify words containing the “ph” sound, writing their suggestions on the board and highlighting the phoneme in a distinct colour. She prompted learners to look around the classroom, particularly at a discussion poster (with no vocabulary words on it), to find relevant items or words. After each word, the teacher requested another learner to construct a sentence using the word, emphasising longer sentences appropriate for Grade 3 learners. This segment, lasting less than 9 minutes, saw all learners actively engaged with no off-task behaviour. The teacher informed the learners that their writing task would be to copy the five words into their books during GGR later in the lesson.

She then proceeded with the shared reading component of the lesson. The teacher displayed two coloured images to prompt discussion about what the learners thought the story was about. She encouraged descriptive responses by follow-up questions like “Why do you think that?”. Flashcards were used to introduce key vocabulary in the story, with learners and the teacher collaboratively defining terms. The teacher did not have a Big Book but used an A3 printed story on an easel, guiding learners with a pointing stick to follow along as she read. Shared reading lasted 12 minutes during which the teacher maintained high learner attentiveness, with the teacher redirecting side conversations by posing questions about the story.

In the GGR session, the teacher worked with a small group (green group), using uLwazi Lwethu anthologies. Learners sat in a semi-circle immediately when told to go to the carpet, the teacher sat on a chair and reviewed sight words and allowed each learner time for picture based predictions about the story. Each learner read aloud while others followed, with the teacher tracking progress using a GGR tracker developed with the other Grade 3 teachers. One learner struggled to read, prompting the teacher to kneel closer to assist. Despite varying reading abilities, all learners answered comprehension questions correctly.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson

The EFAL lesson was taught by a less experienced teacher who trained in FP teaching in 1996 but was posted in a high school for her entire teaching career. She recently transitioned from high school teaching to the Foundation Phase following her resignation in 2020. She joined School D in 2025 after a brief stint at an Afrikaans medium school in 2024, she faced challenges adapting to younger learners and a language barrier, which impacted her lesson delivery significantly. Despite preparation and an attempt to adhere to her lesson preparation, the lesson lacked engagement compared to the Grade 3 Setswana lesson.

The EFAL lesson began with an editing task, where learners corrected a sentence with errors (provided on the board by the teacher) using a provided checklist. The majority of learners did not understand the teacher's instructions, leading to misbehaviour requiring intervention from an EA. The shared reading component involved a story read monotonously from a management document, resulting in disengaged learners, though some answered comprehension questions correctly. The lesson felt disjointed, with components poorly integrated.

The teacher also ran a GGR session involving 10 learners. Some learners were sharing anthologies as a result of the previous teacher having taken materials with her when she moved to her promotional post. The teacher went through sight words posted high on the wall and led the chorus reading of the sight words, followed by an individual reading. When one of the learners mispronounced the word "soap," the teacher applied a word attack strategy (sounding out letters and blending), but resorted to peer correction when difficulties persisted. The EA monitored other learners, who remained confused during occupational tasks.

The highlight of the lesson was the last component, a "Simon Says" style game introducing the "ee" sound, where learners raised their thumbs for words containing the sound. This activity fully engaged learners and was the most interactive part of the lesson.

Teachers' Perceptions of Learner Reading Skills

The table below shows the estimates provided by teachers of these grades on how many learners in their classes can read.

Table 2: Teacher estimates of learner reading ability

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL	No. of learners who can read in HL
2	32	15	20
3 (reading for meaning)	32	14	12

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

As a result of EGRP II, teachers at School D have introduced more structured classroom management practices, particularly around GGR. Learners are now grouped by ability to make GGR sessions more manageable, and occupational tasks are used to keep the rest of the class engaged while the teacher works with small groups. Teachers reported that the programme has helped them implement phonics-based teaching more consistently and systematically, improving lesson structure and routine.

Lesson content and methodology

Lesson content and methodology varied among teachers depending on their experience and exposure to the EGRP II programme. The lesson delivered by the most proficient teacher focused on a single theme related to that day's phonics. To reinforce the concept, the

teacher incorporated various activities, such as vocabulary building with flashcards and shared reading. The teacher's approach to delivering the lesson was learner-centred, ensuring active participation from all learners according to their individual ability levels by using differentiated tasks. The least proficient teacher, on the other hand, showed an understanding of EGRPII content and methodologies. However, while she had a thorough lesson plan, her implementation failed to engage learners.

All four teachers, although with varying degrees of success, applied different strategies, such as the word attack strategy, to ensure learners could decode words independently.

5. Learner perceptions

Learners expressed a strong desire to succeed academically, with several confidently stating that their goal was to progress to Grade 4. When asked why they thought it was important to know how to read, they stated that they wanted to be in the top 5. Others said they want to know more about things in life.

"I want to be a top learners, to be in the top 5" - Grade 3 learner

English was strongly favoured over Setswana, which learners described as less useful beyond the school environment. They associated English with opportunity, expressing that it is important for communication.

"I like to read more in English because when visitors come at my home I must be able to speak to them" - Grade 3 learner

It was also noted that learners prefer English because they do not actually speak Setswana at home. One learner speaks Shona, another Afrikaans and others a mix of languages. They did share however that as much as they speak these languages at home, they are not able to read in them but would like to learn.

"We speak Shona at home. I read a few words but I want to know more" - Grade 3 learner

"We praat at home (speak Afrikaans). I only do Tswana at school" - Grade 3 learner

The learners enthusiastically recalled several storybooks they had read, including Jabu's New Friend, Leano o a Dihumedisi, and Khumalo Made New Friends. Their ability to remember and summarise storylines indicated not only engagement with the material but also comprehension and interest. They spoke fondly about the characters and what they had learned from the stories.

Reading was not limited to the classroom for some learners. They reported enjoying reading at home, either alone or with the support of siblings and parents. One learner explained her reading routine at home.

"I have books to sleep, my mom reads before bed." - Grade 3 learner

Learners clearly recognized improvements in their reading abilities compared to the previous year. They explained that last year, teaching focused more on the alphabet recognition,

whereas this year they are learning how to blend and segment sounds. They felt that this helped them better understand how words are formed, and made reading easier.

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

While less experienced and less skilled teachers generally faced challenges in teaching, the more experienced and capable teachers recognised the diverse abilities among their monograde learners. For example, the Grade 3 teacher organised her classroom into ability-based groups but permitted movement between them, especially for GGR as learners advanced. Her expectations and questions reflected her awareness of each learner's capability. The complexity of occupational tasks was customised to the learners' abilities, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach.

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

Teachers are familiar with the programme's routines, materials, and methodologies, they follow phonics-based instruction, ability grouping for GGR, and the use of occupational tasks to manage other learners during small-group reading. The DH has attended training and understands the programme's objectives, enabling her to provide relevant guidance and resources. However, there are two recently appointed Foundation Phase teachers who joined after the 2024 training and have had to rely heavily on peer support to understand and implement EGRP II. While teachers generally use EGRP II lesson plans and LTSM, they adapt materials due to language errors, printing limitations, and the absence of certain resources. Despite these constraints, the staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the programme's principles, although challenges such as adherence to prescribed component times, inconsistent tracker use, and limited colour printing within the school hinder the proper implementation of the programme.

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching.

Teacher

The school is a monograde school with 10 filled teacher posts in the Foundation Phase. Two of the teachers did not attend EGRP II training in 2024 as they were not yet appointed in the school, and the teachers who were in their positions have been posted elsewhere. The two new teachers (Grade 1 and Grade 3) have very limited teaching experience, with one being older and having taught in a high school for 14 years and having been trained in foundation phase teaching in the 90s. The EGRP II training is the only training she has received for FP teaching in all those years.

Based on interviews with observed teachers and the focus group with teachers, they collaborate when planning, demonstrate things to one another, and serve as a support structure for each other within the school.

"We support each other and share lessons" - Grade 1 Teacher, FGD

"We plan independently because we work from the EGRP II lesson plans unlike before, but we still share materials and delegate responsibilities for preparing occupational tasks because the ones on the tablet are in colour we cannot print in

colour so we need to recreate these for ourselves. It creates more work” - Grade 3 Teacher

“The other teachers have assisted me so much. Training for them is just to remind themselves, for me it's a new experience. When I don't understand I lean on other teachers to explain things... They also demonstrate” - Grade 3 Teacher

Since 2024 the school has seen a slight increase, 3.5%, in Foundation Phase enrolment.

Use of LTSM

The classrooms are very print rich and walls mainly comprise of commercial language material provided by the EGRP II. In the lessons observed, mainly EGRP II materials were used by teachers.

In this school the teachers were very vocal about their own adaptations of the LTSMs citing various language errors in Setswana materials (including anthologies and big books), and the incompatibility of the LTSM with the resources available in their school.

“I have found so many Sesotho or Sepedi words on the materials and it is extremely confusing for my learners because they would have encountered the word in class... myself and the other teachers agreed to scratch out the words with the error and replace them by hand with the correct word” - Grade 2 Teacher FGD

“Resources are very limited in this school. We do not have access to colour printing. All the Grade 3 Big Books are on the Tablet; we never received Big Books last year. I need to do so many things (lighten images to remove colour, use colouring pencils to bring back colour). We don't even have A3 paper to print on. Preparing for shared reading is a hassle!” - Grade 3 Teacher FGD

“Occupational Tasks for multigrade are not in colour, I usually use those because the colourful ones we have come out as looking black when printed in black and white.” - Grade 2 Teacher FGD

“I just remake the occupational tasks to save myself the admin of trying to lighten images” - Grade 1 Teacher FGD

Teachers made numerous remarks about not having a budget ringfenced for FP activities. The school laminated discussion posters and none of the other materials and teachers are concerned about the durability of materials, estimating a maximum of three years' utility of materials and an added cost on the school reprinting the material.

“The LTSM funds should be increased by the province so that we can make all the print outs and copies we need... our management team compares the printing needs of the intersen phase and foundation phase. We do a lot of rewriting of the same things” - Grade 3 Teacher FGD.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

None of the Grade 3 teachers had their tablets at school on the day of the visit. However, the teachers could easily describe the tablet interface and how they access lessons. Despite their age, all of the teachers reported being able to use the tablets. Overall, though, teachers

mentioned they do not see the need to use the web platform yet because they have physical materials and the tablet “does nothing special that the hard copy materials don’t do”.

During the focus group discussion, teachers mentioned that they are most likely to use the tablets more when the materials start getting older. Only the new Grade 3 teacher, who does not have physical lesson plans, reported using her tablet extensively from home. She retypes the lesson plan and prints out her own recreated version for use in class and filing.

No issues were mentioned with the tablets other than the server being slow when too many teachers are on it simultaneously, which only happens during training.

- Key features of the school’s management and leadership

The principal was appointed as principal in 2024. She stated that her post is demanding and stated that provincial departmental support is limited. She cited joining a principals’ association for management support. The principal claimed to be friendly but strict, although teachers described her as autocratic and unapproachable.

Concerns were raised about her leadership style; teachers feel excluded from decision-making and report that she does not take criticism well. There were tensions over transparency, particularly related to financial matters. A R35,000 discrepancy was noted, but no clarity was given.

9. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

The DH provides support by observing Foundation Phase lessons during QMS, which gives her the opportunity to check whether EGRP is being implemented. Having also attended the training sessions herself, she is able to offer relevant and practical advice when necessary.

The principal expressed concern about reading levels in the Foundation Phase and stated that she strongly supports any programme aimed at assisting Foundation Phase teachers in this area. She added that she is willing to provide the resources teachers may need, such as laminating posters, printing materials, and supplying additional resources. Although the school had not budgeted for laminating, she authorised an expenditure of R2,900 to cover the cost in order to support the Foundation Phase teachers.

PLCs

When asked about PLCs they are part of, although this is a base programme school, the teachers mentioned they are part of the WhatsApp group with all the other teachers who attend training at the same venue with them. They clarified that their trainers (i.e. EGRP II Literacy Coaches) usually post training dates and general encouragement on the group, but teachers themselves use it as a platform to share best practices and ask for assistance from other teachers. This group has been in existence since year 1 of the programme,

“When I have any problems with materials, or things I am struggling with, I ask on the group and get assistance” - Grade 1 teacher

“I find the group to be very useful. There are no deviations or chain messages, we just talk about the programme” - Grade 2 teacher

“I don’t like the WhatsApp group because I sometimes feel like I’ll be misleading people. I usually just send my messages directly to the trainer and if they think it’s worth sharing they do so.” - Grade 1 teacher

The school is currently not part of any PLC where foundation phase specific matters are discussed, however the DH has been attending other cluster meetings with other DHs from nearby schools.

10. Workbook analysis

The analysis of learners’ workbooks, shown in the table below, indicates that overall, work in exercise books tends to be marked and up to date, with corrections made by teachers in red ink on behalf of learners. However, DBE workbooks are generally not current or corrected. The Grade 3 Home Language teacher gave learners their Book 1 DBE Workbooks (Term 1 and 2) to complete at home. During the Focus Group Discussion, teachers were asked about their DBE workbook use, one teacher remarked, which was quietly agreed upon by others:

“We visit the DBE Workbook occasionally” - Grade 2 teacher

Item	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	Partially	Partially	Term 2 DBEs given to learners	Yes
Workbook correction	Term 1 only	Term 1 only	Term 2 DBEs given to learners	Partially marked (corrected in red ink)
Exercise books up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, occupational task also pasted
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Yes	Activities found on average once a week	Yes
Exercises marked	In red ink	In red ink	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes, mainly in red ink	Yes, mainly in red ink	Yes, mainly in red ink	Yes, mainly in red ink

Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes		Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: <i>check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.</i>	DBE pages of interest completed and exercise book activity found a month earlier than expect	DBE pages of interest not completed and exercise found earlier	Term 2 activity of interest found within the same week <i>No evidence of June activities found in books.</i>	Work done in workbooks generally correlated with lesson plans but no work found for June
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training

Colour coding: red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved

11. Community engagement

The principal shared that community collaboration is very poor; parents generally do not attend meetings or participate in fundraising activities. Learners in the school mostly come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many of their parents are young but show little interest in their children's education. However, the principal makes every effort to ensure that learners receive the best education and support. She has even insisted that learners from the most disadvantaged households receive leftover food from the school feeding scheme after school. Due to high absenteeism and some children bunking school, she has also taken it upon herself to open cases of neglect against parents.

The surrounding community is unsafe, and the school has experienced regular break-ins. Although the school has requested additional security, these requests have not been addressed. Unemployment is very high in the area. The principal makes an effort to award tenders, such as repairs to the school gate, to local community members to support the local economy.

12. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

- School environment and reading culture: The school environment remained clean with colourful, print-rich Foundation Phase classrooms in both years. However, a key development by 2025 was the enhanced ability to utilise a community library located across the road, facilitated by the Reading Champion chaperoning small groups of learners, addressing the school's previous lack of a school library.
- Reading outcomes: In 2024, learner reading progress and perceptions showed a noticeable positive trend. Management estimates of Grade 3 fluency ranged between

60% and 70%, and there was a general sense that reading standards had improved thanks to the project. In 2025, teachers report further improvements in learners' reading abilities, especially in Setswana HL. More importantly, the learners themselves recognise how much they have improved compared to the previous year, mainly because they had learnt how to blend and segment sounds. Throughout both years, learners consistently preferred reading in English over Setswana. They also continued to be enthusiastic about reading, enjoying group guided reading and recalling stories they had read..

- **Quality of teaching:** In 2024, teachers were observed to be consistently faithful to their EGRP II training, delivering lessons that were satisfactory and significantly better structured, with confidence. By 2025, however, it became clear that there were notable differences; teachers still had a good understanding of the methods, but their experience, lesson delivery, and learner engagement varied significantly depending on their approach. This is partly due to the new, less experienced teachers who had not received the 2024 training and had to rely heavily on peer support. Classroom management, which had been good in 2024, poses more challenges in 2025, with some teachers citing discipline as their biggest concern.
- **Use of LTSM:** In 2024, the use of LTSMs and tablets was positive, with laminated posters and flashcards playing a key role in maintaining the programme's impact. In 2025, however, only the discussion posters remained laminated, and teachers expressed concerns about how quickly materials deteriorated, estimating that they would only last about three years if left unlaminated, which meant more frequent reprinting and higher costs. A new challenge (which were most likely there in 2024) surfaced in 2025 with teachers having to modify LTSMs because of language errors, such as Sesotho or Sepedi words in Setswana materials, and printing limitations, such as the absence of colour printing. Teachers often had to scratch out errors and replace words by hand, and manipulate the colours of pictures to accommodate monochromatic printing, adding to their workload. Although teachers in 2024 anticipated tablets with hopes of reducing reliance on physical books, this year most feel there has been no real need to use the web platform yet, since they still have physical resources and saw the tablets as "nothing special". Only newly appointed teachers who do not have materials were using the EGRP II platform extensively.
- **Teacher workload:** In 2024, teachers consistently reported experiencing "significant time pressure" when trying to complete the demanding EGRP II routine and cover the syllabus. This ongoing challenge persisted into 2025, with the situation worsened by the additional administrative workload of adapting and recreating LTSMs, primarily due to resource shortages and the absence of a dedicated budget for Foundation Phase activities.
- **Use of trackers:** In 2024, teachers admitted to struggling with the tracking tools for GGR and mentioned that they had not been using it when observed. By 2025, this challenge remained inconsistent, with some teachers still not using the tracker. However, there was a positive shift, as a Grade 3 Setswana teacher was observed actively tracking progress using a GGR tracker developed alongside the other Grade 3 teachers, indicating that some staff have begun to adopt and adapt the tool.

- Teacher collaboration: Throughout both years, teacher collaboration and school leadership played an important role in shaping the programme's implementation. Teachers have consistently supported each other by sharing lessons, materials, and responsibilities for preparing tasks, which helped them manage their workload more effectively.

School E

1. Summary of key points

- Deep-rural multigrade school with one foundation Phase class (27 learners)
- Only one FP teacher (3 years' experience) covers Grades 1–3
- The principal shows limited grasp of EGRP II, teacher feels isolated and not supported
- EGRP II implementation is partial: teacher follows structured routines and uses the tablet/portal, but phonics was not grade-differentiated and EFAL differentiation was limited
- GGR included a positive practice-silent reading-but texts were sometimes too difficult for weaker readers and comprehension checks were sparse
- LTSM use is visible and adapted (Big Book, anthologies, phonics frieze, homemade charts; wall displays organised by grade); tablet used confidently for plans and best-practice videos
- Learners are enthusiastic about reading and report improvement from previous years.

2. Respondents

- The multigrade teacher was observed teaching HL and EFAL
- The following were interviewed:
 - The multigrade teacher
 - The school's principal
 - A focus group of Grade 3 learners

3. School context

The school, situated in a remote rural village, faces a challenging socio-economic environment exacerbated by its distance from economic centres. This year, it operates with only one foundation phase classroom, catering to a small group of learners across multiple grades, all managed by a teacher with just three years of experience.

The surrounding community deals with significant hardships, including high unemployment and limited job opportunities in farming areas near Upington. The principal remarked, "There are no jobs here because it's far from town and the mines. Young people leave to find work opportunities". This migration of working-age adults has resulted in many learners being raised by their grandparents, who actively participate in their education by attending parent meetings, despite being unable to assist with homework.

Security issues also affect the school, highlighted by a history of break-ins, with two incidents occurring since 2016. These security concerns create additional challenges in this already vulnerable setting.

This lean staffing structure, combined with the demands of multigrade teaching and limited time for additional support, creates a complex backdrop for implementing educational programmes.

Table 1: school enrolment and staff statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	4	9	14	27
Classrooms	1			1
Teachers	1			1
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1			1
No. of DHs	0			0
Teacher to learner ratio	1: 27			1: 27

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observation

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) Setswana Home Language Lesson

The Setswana lesson focused on phonics, beginning with a call-and-response poem to engage learners collectively, an effective strategy for unifying the multigrade group. The teacher then used a phonics frieze, initially covering the text to prompt learners to identify pictures, fostering active participation. She revealed animal names with the "th" sound highlighted in blue, asking learners to guess the sound they would be focusing on and explain their reasoning. Learners further contributed by providing words with the "th" sound at the beginning, middle, or end, demonstrating engagement with the phonics focus. However, based on the lesson plan the lesson only covered one of the Grade 1 and 2 sounds, but the whole class was instructed on that one phonic.

GGR followed, with the teacher explaining occupational tasks for different grades. Some groups worked on pages on their DBE workbooks while one group (made up of a Grade 1, 2 and 3 learner) participated in GGR. Learners were instructed to read silently before reading aloud individually, with others following along. One learner failed to follow in his book and struggled to even identify the sounds, while one of the learners was significantly better than the others prompting the teacher to consider adjusting his reading group. No comprehension questions were asked post reading given that all the learners could not read. For learners reading at that level, the teacher chose to use the Grade 3 anthology, which has some words which are more difficult to decode than the Grade 1 readers.

The teacher's strategy involved alternating between direct instruction and independent work, as seen in the division of DBE workbook tasks and GGR.

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) English First Additional Language Lesson

The English lesson, announced as a phonics session, shifted focus to vocabulary development themed around health. The teacher began by having learners greet her in

English, establishing a structured and language-appropriate start. To energise the class, she introduced an exercise rhyme, reciting lines while learners performed corresponding actions, fostering whole-group engagement in the multigrade classroom. The teacher then introduced vocabulary words such as "eat", "apple", and "orange", aligning with the health theme.

The core activity was shared reading from a big book. Although the teacher did not introduce sight words before reading. As vocabulary emerged in the story, the teacher paused to explain terms, unpasting words like "unhealthy", "healthy", and "snacks" from initial displays and repasting them on the classroom wall for ongoing reference. This visual reinforcement supported learners across grades, suggesting the teacher had prepared sufficiently for the lesson activities. To aid comprehension, the teacher also explained or had learners explain words like "peeled", "delicious", and "disgusting" in Setswana, ensuring accessibility for learners with varying English proficiency. Learners listened attentively and successfully answered questions about the story, indicating engagement and some level of understanding.

In the EFAL lesson there was minimal differentiation for different grades, suggesting the lesson leaned on collective instruction although more complex questions were asked to grade 3 learners.

Table 2: Teacher perception of number of learners who can read per grade

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL (singular word)	No. of learners who can read in HL (singular word)
1	4	2	2
2	9	5	7
3	14	11	11

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The teacher has begun to adjust her classroom management strategies in line with EGRP II requirements, though implementation remains uneven. She demonstrated familiarity with structured lesson components such as phonics, shared reading, and Group Guided Reading (GGR), and she used the tablet effectively to access lesson plans and best practice videos. For example, she introduced silent reading during GGR, a method highlighted in EGRP II training materials but seldom adopted in schools. This shows her willingness to draw from programme resources to improve her practice.

However, classroom management challenges remain pronounced, particularly due to the multigrade context. The teacher admitted that she struggles to differentiate instruction across three grades within the same classroom and acknowledged that some learners are significantly behind. She reported not knowing who to approach for support and expressed feeling isolated since the school is not part of the coaching programme. These constraints limit her ability to adapt lessons effectively for varying learner levels.

Lesson content and methodology

The teacher demonstrated a comprehensive understanding and application of EGRP II methodologies and strategies throughout the lesson. Notably, her implementation of GGR included silent reading, a practice observed in best practice videos on the EGRP II web portal but not adopted by teachers in coaching schools. However, the lesson's content occasionally deviated from the prescribed lesson plan, such as the grade-specific teaching of different sounds.

5. Learner perceptions

Learners expressed positive attitudes towards reading and viewed it as an important skill. They explained that reading helps them progress to higher grades, prepares them for future work opportunities, and equips them to succeed in life. Some also associated reading with personal enjoyment, particularly in being able to read and understand stories independently.

“Reading is important so that you can go to other grades and one day get work when you finish school”

“I enjoy reading stories and I want to read them on my own.”

When asked about language preferences, most learners indicated that they enjoyed reading in Setswana because it is their home language and therefore easier to understand. Others highlighted an interest in English, explaining that they valued learning a new language and recognised the importance of being able to read the books provided at school in English.

“I enjoy Setswana because it is the language I understand and speak at home.”

“I enjoy English because we do too much Setswana and I like learning a new language.”

Learners were also able to describe specific texts they had read. They mentioned that their favourite was *Maatla a ga Neo*, which they enjoyed because it taught them new things and was interesting and fun. Their ability to recall details of the story suggested good comprehension and engagement with the text.

In discussing reading practices, many learners said they preferred reading individually, as it gave them the opportunity to move at their own pace, learn new words, and focus on the pictures without being delayed by others. However, they also enjoyed shared reading because they found the teacher's style of reading engaging. Learners explained that their teacher uses blending and segmenting to help them decode unfamiliar words.

The learners believed that their reading had improved compared to the previous year. They reflected that they were now able to read longer words and anticipated that their reading would continue to improve in Grade 4, particularly because they enjoy reading and practise it regularly.

“Last year we could not read long words, but this year we can. Next year in Grade 4 we will read even better.”

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

The teacher reflected on the specific challenges of teaching a wide range of abilities in a multigrade classroom. She explained that managing learners at different levels is very difficult and admitted that she has realised she is not putting in as much effort as required to address these differences. She acknowledged the need to plan more effectively but expressed uncertainty about how to catch up on the parts of the curriculum that have already been missed.

She added that she does not know who to approach for support or where to find guidance on handling these challenges. The teacher thinks she is not allowed to contact the reading coach since the school is not part of the coaching programme. This has left her feeling unsupported in addressing the complexities of multigrade teaching.

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The principal demonstrated a lack of understanding regarding the programme, misidentifying it as "EGRA" and offering the non-specific explanation that it was intended to "improve learners", a statement applicable to almost every educational intervention.

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching. (In multigrade schools the way the class is structured and organised)

Teacher

The Foundation Phase teacher, with three years' experience, manages all 27 Grade 1–3 learners in a single multigrade class. She uses EGRP II lesson plans, best-practice videos, and a range of LTSM, including Big Books, anthologies, and self-made charts, and confidently integrates the tablet into her planning. While she has adopted structured routines, her implementation of EGRP remains partial, with limited grade differentiation. She expressed feeling isolated and unsupported, and workbook completion and tracking were inconsistent, reflecting gaps between lesson delivery and monitoring.

Use of LTSM

The teacher's adaptation of EGRP II materials for wall displays was a strategic response to her multigrade classroom's needs and her teaching style. She displayed materials for each grade side by side, creating a shared visual resource close to the board that catered to diverse learning levels. In the EFAL lesson, vocabulary words were prominently displayed and manipulated (unpasted and repasted) to maintain relevance throughout the lesson.

The teacher also made use of a Big Book, Anthologies, a phonic frieze and charts with rhymes from the management book which she wrote by hand and laminated for learners to follow easily.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

The teacher reported that the tablet has become an important tool for supporting her classroom practice. She uses it to access and follow lesson plans. The tablet also provides access to a range of resources, which the teacher integrates into her daily lessons. In addition, the teacher regularly views best practice videos on the device. These videos have

helped her to improve her instructional methods and gain new ideas on how to manage classroom activities more effectively. She was observed to be able to navigate the tablet with ease.

9. Key features of the school's management and leadership

The small staff, consisting of only three teachers, forms what the principal refers to as the school management team. Given their limited number, collaboration among the teachers is vital for the school's operation. The principal emphasized this point, stating,

"We are a small school of three teachers. I consider all three to be the SMT. We need to work together to make the school a success".

The principal herself admitted to being "hand-off" with the foundation phase due to her workload resulting in an inability to support the teacher.

10. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

The foundation phase teacher highlighted several key features of leadership and management at the school. She mentioned that the principal does not make an effort to monitor or observe lessons, ask questions, or involve herself in any meaningful way in the teaching and learning process. While the principal often sets dates for the Quality Management System (QMS), these commitments are not honoured, leaving the process incomplete. The teacher expressed that she would appreciate being observed and held accountable, rather than being left to her own devices without any form of support or guidance.

11. Workbook analysis

While the lesson presented by the teacher demonstrated implementation of the EGRP II programme and an understanding of the structured lesson plans and associated methodologies and content, the teacher's books painted a different picture. The Term 3 DBE workbooks contained some assignments. However, no written work was found in Term 3, and work in Term 1 and Term 2 was found predominantly in the first few weeks of school.

Note that Term 2 DBE workbooks were unavailable as the teacher had given these to learners to encourage learners to complete educational content while at home.

Table 3: Learner workbook analysis findings

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	No T3	Yes T3	Yes T3	Partially T3
Workbook correction	No	No	No	No
Exercise books up to date	No	No	No	No

Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	No, January and April only only one exercise found	No, January and April only only one exercise found	No, only for first month of each Term	No only for first month of each Term
Exercises marked	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes, corrections by learner	No	Yes, learner corrections with comments from teacher	Yes, learner corrections with comments from teacher
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.	No evidence of T2 W4 & W9 in exercise books No evidence of T3 work in exercise books Term 2 DBEs not available 30% of DBE Term 3 pages completed	No evidence of T2 W4 & W9 in exercise books No evidence of T3 work in exercise books Term 2 DBEs not available 90% of DBE Term 3 pages completed	No evidence of T2 W4 & W9 in exercise books No evidence of T3 work in exercise books Term 2 DBEs not available ALL DBE Term 3 pages completed	No evidence of T2 W4 & W9 in exercise books No evidence of T3 work in exercise books Term 2 DBEs not available 70% of DBE Term 3 pages completed
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher? (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Tracker not used	Tracker not used	Tracker not used	Tracker not used

Colour coding: red = not achieved; orange = partially achieved; green = achieved

12. Community engagement

The school's relationship with the local community, set in a deep rural village, is shaped by socio-economic challenges and a strong sense of mutual respect. The principal highlights a positive dynamic with parents and guardians, noting, "Parents have respect and no issues with them". However, the community's economic realities limit active parental involvement in learners' education. Many parents work in farming areas near Uppington, leaving children in the care of grandparents who attend school meetings.

The lack of local employment contributes to broader challenges, including crime, with the school experiencing two break-ins since 2016. Despite these adversities, the community maintains a supportive stance towards the school, with grandparents representing families at parent meetings. However, there is little evidence of direct parental engagement in supporting learners' reading or homework, likely due to the socio-economic constraints and the primary caregiving role of grandparents.

13. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

- School environment : In 2024, two Foundation Phase classes operated separately, but by 2025 the school had only one multigrade class for Grades 1–3, taught by a single teacher with three years' experience. This consolidation increased pressure on staffing, leaving the Foundation Phase teacher isolated and unsupported.
- Reading instruction showed important contrasts between the two years. In 2024, both Foundation Phase teachers implemented EGRP elements inconsistently, often extending HL lessons while reducing EFAL to very short segments, suggesting a misunderstanding of timing protocols. By 2025, the multigrade teacher demonstrated more structured routines, such as call-and-response phonics, silent reading in GGR, and systematic vocabulary reinforcement during EFAL. However, grade-differentiation was limited in both years: in 2024, GGR groups read chorally for only a few minutes, while in 2025, all learners were taught the same phonic sound regardless of grade.
- Learner perceptions showed consistent enthusiasm for reading across both years, but the emphasis shifted. In 2024, learners highlighted their enjoyment of English anthologies and Big Books, even though EFAL lessons were short and weak. In 2025, learners reported liking Setswana for ease of understanding while recognising the value of English as a new language. They also recalled specific stories (e.g., *Maatla a ga Neo*) and explained how they felt their reading had improved since the previous year, particularly their ability to decode longer words.
- Quality of teaching showed mixed patterns across the two years. In 2024, teachers misunderstood several EGRP routines: GGR was conducted as brief chorus reading, Shared Reading often involved the teacher retelling stories rather than reading from the text, and reading corners were absent. By 2025, the teacher displayed stronger fidelity to EGRP structures, including consistent use of the tablet for lesson plans and best-practice videos. However, she still struggled with multigrade differentiation, comprehension questioning, and over-reliance on higher-level texts for weaker learners.
- The use of LTSM improved between 2024 and 2025. In 2024, most materials remained in boxes and no reading corners had been set up, despite space being available. In 2025, the teacher displayed charts and friezes by grade, repurposed vocabulary words during lessons, and actively used Big Books, anthologies, and DBE workbooks. She also created homemade laminated charts to supplement project resources. The tablet, absent in 2024, became an integral part of planning and professional learning in 2025, showing clear uptake of digital support.
- Workbook analysis revealed persistent weaknesses. In 2024, learners' work was incomplete and tracking tools were not used. In 2025, a similar pattern was found: Term 3 books contained little written work, Term 2 DBEs were unavailable, and trackers were not used at all. While the teacher's observed lessons suggested understanding of EGRP methodology, bookwork revealed a gap between planned

and recorded practice across both years.

- Leadership and management continued to be a limiting factor. In 2024, the principal had limited understanding of EGRP and was not inducted into the programme, though she expressed willingness to be. By 2025, this lack of programme grasp persisted, with the principal misidentifying EGRP II as “EGRA” and offering only vague descriptions of its purpose. Support to the Foundation Phase remained minimal, leaving the teacher to manage complex multigrade demands alone.
- Taken together, the early grade reading situation shifted from inconsistent application of EGRP routines in 2024 to more structured, resource-rich, and digitally supported lessons in 2025. However, sustainability remains fragile: the single FP teacher continues to face isolation, management support is weak, and the multigrade structure makes differentiation extremely difficult. The absence of consistent monitoring, workbook completion, and leadership guidance threatens to undermine any gains.

School G

1. Summary of key points

- All the teachers in the school use the EGRP II resources effectively in their lessons and as displayed on their walls. The materials are also valued by teachers for their contextual relevance and grade appropriateness.
- Tablets are consistently used for planning and accessing tunes for EFAL rhymes and songs.
- Teachers rely on reading champions to support a reading culture in the school. Where teachers also feel they are not being understood by learners, reading champions are brought in to support learners.
- Consistent use of trackers remains an ongoing challenge.
- The EGRP II Literacy Coach provides generic feedback to school management to shield the teachers and ensure development without harming their image.
- The coach values the structured approach to coaching that EGRP II introduced. From applying these principles, she delivers coaching sessions that are teacher-led and allow reflection.

2. Respondents

- Three lessons were observed alongside the EGRP II Coach, and one without the coach:
 - a. Grade 3 Setswana
 - b. Grade 3 English FAL
 - c. Grade 2 Setswana
 - d. Grade 2 English FAL
- External Literacy Coach was interviewed
- School Principal was interviewed
- Deputy Principal also interviewed as a Foundation Phase Teacher (Grade 3)
- Focus group of Grade 3 learners
- A school-based workshop conducted by coach was observed

3. School context

The school is a village school approximately 20 minutes from Kuruman; its old buildings are generally well-maintained in main areas, though the back of the school and sports courts still require maintenance. In terms of resources, FP classrooms are equipped with whiteboards, which were prioritised for FP teachers due to their “slower adoption of innovations compared to Intermediate Phase teachers”. While teachers can make wishlists for resources, issues with resource care sometimes lead to other phases being prioritised. The school library boasts a wide selection of books, including non-EGRP titles, while the library was not in use towards the end of 2024, the introduction of reading champions has aided the utilisation of the school library.

The Foundation Phase currently serves 266 learners across nine classrooms, supported by 9 qualified FP teachers (three per grade). This represents a slight decrease in overall FP enrolment since 2024.

The principal's management style is adaptable, being strict when necessary but also allowing teachers to share suggestions. He described himself as competitive especially on the mission of meeting Annual Teaching Plan requirements. The principal fosters a culture of continuous learning by encouraging teachers to debrief after training sessions to establish shared standards and explain concepts to one another, and by sharing feedback from coaches for collective improvement.

The socio-economic situation of the community is described as dire, with some children attending school in torn uniforms and most families relying on grants. Community and parental support for the school is significantly lacking, as 90% of parents do not attend school meetings, and of the 10% who do, 90% are grandparents rather than the actual parents. The principal proactively visits the homes of Foundation Phase learners who appear neglected.

The community is grappling with a serious problem of alcohol abuse.

Table 1: Foundation Phase learner enrolment and teacher posts occupied

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	98	101	67	266
Classrooms	3	3	3	9
Teachers	3	3	3	9
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	3	3	3	9
No. of DHs	1			1
Teacher to learner ratio	1: 32.7	1: 33.7	1: 22.4	1: 29.6

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Over six lessons were observed. This was possible due to the coach's coaching approach, which focuses only on a single component and targets specific skills instead of whole lessons.

Lesson Observation

Grade 2 Setswana Home Language Lesson (with External Coach)

The classroom was clean, well-organised, and clearly maintained. All furniture was in good condition, and the classroom was visually rich with educational material. Learners' written work and drawings were proudly displayed on the walls.

The lesson began with a whole-class activity in which the teacher introduced the sounds of the day: "au" and "ei." She wrote several words containing these sounds on the board, encouraging learners to create their own sentences using them. As learners began writing in their exercise books, the teacher moved between desks, offering individual support and encouragement. She provided immediate assistance to those who were struggling, giving praise to those who demonstrated understanding and neat handwriting.

After allowing time for learners to complete their sentences, the teacher made corrections on the board. Learners were asked to review their work as the teacher discussed each sentence on the board. She showed learners how to write neatly and clearly, linking the correction activity to the next task.

Following the correction session, the teacher introduced the occupational task, which focused on practising cursive writing. She explained the instructions carefully and monitored learners as they began the activity. Once learners were settled with the writing task, the teacher called the lowest ability group (Group 4) to the reading corner for Group Guided Reading (GGR).

This group of learners had difficulty with foundational reading skills. They struggled to identify sounds, build words, and follow the reading text. On the floor in front of them, the teacher laid out a set of cut-out letter cards and reminded the group of a previously read story to create familiarity. She then gave each learner a word to spell using the cards, offering step-by-step guidance. For example, she would say *“Your word is Bojang. Start by giving me the letter B... now give me the letter O...”*

She worked through the word with each learner individually with patience. One particular learner who was said to have learning barriers struggled significantly but the teacher remained encouraging and positive, offering praise and reassurance even when learners found the task challenging.

The next group, Group 3, was also composed of lower-ability learners most of whom were repeating the grade. The teacher called them to the reading corner next and attempted a different activity of spelling. However, this group was unresponsive and appeared unsure of the task. The coach who was present for the lesson. She recommended that the teacher repeat the same phonics-based activity used for Group 4 over the next week, rather than progressing too quickly into spelling, so that learners could build confidence in their understanding of basic phonics.

The lesson concluded with a Shared Reading session. The teacher called the entire class to the reading corner and began by revisiting the story they had previously read. She discussed key vocabulary, asking questions and encouraging learners to share their understanding. Once the context was re-established, the teacher read the story aloud, using lively intonation, character voices, and appropriate pauses. Her expressive delivery captivated the learners, who listened attentively and remained focused throughout the session. This final component of the lesson not only modelled fluent reading, but also reinforced comprehension and vocabulary in a way that was both engaging and accessible.

Grade 2 English First Additional Language Lesson

The EFAL lesson began with a rhyme, “Do you know the alphabet?” The focus for the day was revisiting the “igh” sound, which had been taught previously. This recap aimed to reinforce sound recognition and spelling.

Holding up flashcards one at a time, the teacher led learners in reading each word aloud. As individual learners read the words, she paused to explain their meaning.

The class then transitioned into Group Guided Reading (GGR). A group of 10 learners was called to the reading corner while the rest of the class continued with their occupational tasks. As learners in the GGR group took turns reading aloud, the teacher interjected with comprehension questions related to the story. As the session progressed, learners seated at their desks began finishing their occupational tasks earlier than expected, leading to increased noise levels. This disruption was distracting both for the teacher and for the GGR group, some group members openly complaining about the noise. The teacher maintained her focus on the group but had to balance listening to readers with managing classroom behaviour.

Within the GGR group, there was peer support. Learners naturally stepped in to help one another when mistakes were made, offering the correct pronunciation or pointing to the right word. As learners continued to read, the teacher tracked their progress and reading ability.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

In this lesson, the teacher called a group to the carpet for GGR. The group leaders of the other groups distributed books for the occupational tasks to the other learners.

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher introduced sight words using flashcards and physical objects (e.g., tablet, computer, mouse, keyboard), allowing learners to touch and press where possible. The learners went on to read the story title together, followed by individual learners reading out loud. The teacher encouraged them to point and follow along as they read, and encouraged them to a faster pace and show expression.

The rest of the class remained silent, though one group sat idle due to a group leader's failure to explain their task.

Before the lesson started the coach discussed the teacher's plan for the lesson with her. During the lesson she took very detailed notes of the lesson, which were written as though directly written to the teacher, and she also completed her classroom observation form.

The coach began the feedback session by asking, *"How do you think your lesson went?"* The teacher elaborated on her successes, which the coach supported, expressing pride. The teacher noted having her tracker but struggling to manage flashcards and visual aids due to full hands, limiting tracker use. The coach suggested pasting flashcards for learner visibility to free her hands and advised recording tracker data immediately post-session to capture learner performance accurately. She also asked the teacher to take a photograph of her notes for future reference, outlining areas to improve and expectations for the next visit. Although there was also a thorough discussion between them on the successes and areas of improvement.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson External Coach, Component only)

It should be noted that this teacher was previously a subject teacher responsible for teaching Mathematics. She did, however, attend all EGRP II training sessions. This year, due to staffing constraints, the school reverted to learners having class teachers. The lesson began with greetings followed by a rhyme with actions. The teacher's discomfort was evident, likely due to uncertainty about the rhyme's tune, despite tune guidance being provided on the platform. The teacher introduced the "Honesty" theme through a scenario about a lost pencil,

asking learners whether it belonged to the finder or original owner. Learners used the sentence frame “I think...” to express their opinions, marking their choice on the board, while peers repeated, “XX thinks the pencil still belongs to him/her,” using correct pronouns. The teacher made several grammatical errors during her explanations, however despite this, learners used the correct grammar. She then went on to highlight the concept of ‘most’ and ‘few’ using this same exercise.

The coach reviewed the lesson plan beforehand, took notes as direct feedback to the teacher, and asked her to photograph them post-lesson. In the feedback session, the coach asked, “*How do you feel about your lesson and teaching English?*” Avoiding the grammar issue to build confidence, the coach affirmed the teacher’s progress, linked Listening and Speaking to Shared Reading, and suggested priming learners for “The Blue Bracelet.” The coach’s enthusiasm about the EGRP II’s component alignment was infectious and also got the teacher excited about implementing. She ended the session with, “You are fantastic!” which visibly boosted the teacher’s confidence.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The lesson started with a lively, interactive song, followed by a poster discussion introducing the “ph” sound, using “phaka” (park which was on a phonic frieze) as an example. Learners suggested additional words, which the teacher wrote on the board and used to prepare flashcards for others, she then segmented the words. Learners clapped to segment each sound, copied the segmentations in exercise books, and wrote sentences using the words.

The coach interjected after the song to discuss the lesson plan, redirecting the teacher from a Week 3 task to resume from the previous lesson, and started a timer to support time management. During the lesson, the coach took detailed notes as direct feedback (e.g., praising specific actions, suggesting improvements). Post-lesson, the coach asked, “How do you feel about your lesson?” The teacher expressed pride in keeping to time, which the coach reinforced, noting her growth in teaching Setswana despite initial discomfort. The coach encouraged more interactive elements, such as having learners write on the board, and advised consistent time awareness for both teacher and learners. She also advised that the teacher use a different colour for the phonic of interest when writing on the board. The coach inspected classroom walls and learner books, and the teacher was asked to photograph the notes.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson

The teacher began by greeting the class in English, then addressed individual learners to encourage responses. Learners moved to the back of the class, facing an easel displaying the Big Book story “The Blue Bracelet.” The teacher prompted learners to recall details about the story, introduced sight words like “sleeve” by pointing to a learner’s jersey, and encouraged discussion of pictures to predict the storyline, the teacher asked questions about what they see in the picture and what they think is happening as well as what happens in story, she also linked her questions to the “Honesty” theme. Quiet learners were gently prompted to contribute. The teacher also whispered occasionally which ensured that learners were always attentive.

Although intended as a pre-read session, the teacher read the story aloud, pausing to explain additional vocabulary not covered initially.

The coach assisted with classroom discipline before the lesson by using a call-and-response to draw the attention of learners. She also reviewed the lesson plan, and encouraged the teacher to time herself. During the lesson, the coach took detailed notes, written as direct feedback to the teacher (e.g., “I love the way you...,” “Make sure you go through your vocabulary...”)

In the post-session discussion, the coach prompted reflection by asking, “How did you think your lesson went?” and affirmed the teacher’s strengths while addressing her self-criticism. The teacher discussed stopping code-switching, using simpler words to explain concepts, and noted learner improvements. The coach expressed being “beyond proud” of the teacher’s confidence but advised preparing for learner difficulties to maintain timing. The teacher raised challenges balancing teaching and administrative duties, exacerbated by principal absenteeism, and the coach suggested marking outside lesson time to reduce pressure. The feedback session was very teacher-centric and encouraged the teacher to reflect deeply on the lesson. The coach asked questions about different aspects of the lesson (i.e. use of visual aids, learner engagement, lesson delivery). The teacher rated learner engagement at 80% which the coach rated 60% noting a focus on stronger learners. The coach demonstrated a pre-read routine using a speaking frame (“What do you think is happening? I think...”), emphasising prediction over reading.

The teacher did not make use of a shared reading checklist, this was identified as a focus for future coaching. The teacher took photographs of the coach’s notes for reference.

Teacher Perceptions of Learner Reading Skills

Table2: Teacher perception of number of learners who can read per grade

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL	No. of learners who can read in HL
2	33	15 can read	20 can read
3	23	12 (read with comprehension)	12 (read with comprehension)

The coach is young, energetic and passionate. She holds a PGCE and taught Grades 1 and 2 between 2018 and 2021, before transitioning to a coaching role in 2022 on the EGRP I. Her motivation for the career shift was influenced by a drive to have an impact beyond the walls of her classroom. Having joined EGRP I late in its implementation cycle, she did not attend any coach training which is why she values the structured approach of EGRP II, particularly the GROW model, which fosters teacher reflection and collaborative goal-setting.

“The GROW model actually tells you which questions to ask a teacher for self-reflection” - EGRP II Coach

She also found OUPSA’s training to be comprehensive, noting its focus on administrative systems, data capturing, and contextualised coaching strategies, describing it as “sticking with you” due to its structured nature compared to the less effective systems in EGRP I. Their coaching philosophy emphasises building tailored relationships with each teacher and developing a reflective “muscle” for professional growth.

In classroom observations in Grade 3 Setswana and English FAL classroom, the coach demonstrated a consistent, supportive, and reflective approach. Before lessons, they reviewed the teacher's lesson plan to ensure alignment with EGRP II structured lesson plans. During lessons, the coach took detailed notes addressed directly to the teacher, blending praise (e.g., "I love the way you...") with actionable suggestions (e.g., "Make sure you go through your vocabulary..."), whilst also completing classroom observation forms for systematic progress tracking which she would capture later.

Feedback sessions began with reflective questions like, "How do you think your lesson went?" or "How do you feel about your lesson?" to encourage self-assessment. She consistently affirmed the teacher's progress and boosted teacher confidence through her remarks which would make the teacher beam with joy.

The coach addressed specific methodological, pedagogical and classroom management challenges effectively, and was able to spot areas for further growth for teachers. Across all observations, the coach inspected classroom walls and learner books. While only one of the two teachers took notes during their session, the coach ensured teachers photographed her notes for reference. Their feedback was teacher-centric, with the coach fostering deep reflection on visual aid use, learner engagement, and lesson delivery by probing on each area.

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The teachers stated that EGRP has helped provide resources and transform their classrooms into print-rich environments, unlike before the programme when the walls had very little on display. The teacher interviewed explained that she had been teaching phonics prior to the programme, but EGRP has made the process easier by offering step-by-step instructions and a clear routine to follow.

It was also mentioned in the DH interview that EGRP has equipped Foundation Phase teachers with strategies to support learners with lower abilities. Teachers were previously unfamiliar with many of these approaches, and this has been of significant benefit.

"Previously we would have given up on these learners, but now, since we have strategies to help them, they sometimes come right." – Grade 2 teacher

Lesson content and methodology

Teachers explained that they teach reading through phonics, blending, and segmenting, as a result of the training they have received through EGRP. One teacher was observed using a tracker but commented that it distracts from her ability to focus on teaching effectively during reading time.

The DH also noted that, in the past, many aspects of teaching reading such as listening and speaking activities were often overlooked. She emphasised the importance of these methodologies and credited EGRP for making teachers aware of the significant impact that following these steps can have on learner outcomes. She estimated that approximately 70% of learners in grade 3 can read, while 30% cannot read a word. However, she does look forward to seeing an increase in learners who can read if teachers continue to implement.

5. Learner perceptions

When asked if reading is important, learners responded enthusiastically, linking it to intelligence, employment, and the ability to teach others. Career aspirations of the learners included becoming a police officer, nurse, doctor, or soldier.

Some learners expressed a preference for reading and learning in English so they could communicate with people of different races and for ease when travelling. Others preferred Setswana, with one learner explaining that he was not originally from the area and was eager to learn the language to communicate better with his peers.

"I like English more because you can talk to white people."

"If you go somewhere you can read anything."

Favourite stories mentioned included A Shark in the Pool, Mae a ga Soso, and Hot Toast Coming Up. Learners recalled these stories vividly and with excitement, often laughing as they retold events. One learner animatedly recounted,

"Sibi (the dog) stole Soso's (the chicken) eggs and Soso was so sad, but then all the other chickens hit Sibi so much. Sibi is so naughty."

Learners said they enjoy reading independently because they can go at their own pace and enjoy looking at the pictures.

"When we read for ourselves we have peace."

They also enjoy whole-class reading sessions led by the teacher, noting that she reads fluently and knows all the words. However, several expressed a dislike for Group Guided Reading (GGR), feeling that it slows them down when others in the group struggle. Others said they prefer to read without frequent pauses for corrections.

"They read rubbish and make us also read rubbish."

- Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

The Grade 3 teacher (Deputy Principal) differentiates tasks, planning independent activities for advanced learners and using simpler readers which the school had procured before EGRP II for struggling learners, as shared in her interview. Reading champions (Educational Assistants) run a 30-minute daily reading period, though they lack formal training they support a reading culture in the school by taking the learners who are not yet fluent to the school library to read. The Deputy Principal expressed a desire for EAs to start assisting with in-class reading activities under her guidance. Five Grade 3 learners have significant learning challenges and require transfer to ELSEN schools.

"I am planning on getting some content from the Grade 4 classes for my advanced learners to make sure they are also not bored and still get challenged" - Grade 3 Teacher

During the coach interview the coach mentioned,

“I support teachers in tailoring phonics and GGR to different ability levels, and encourage teachers to allow movement between reading groups as learners improve. Even when doing whole class activities a teacher knows what level the learners are, and that should inform how they engage learners. In a multigrade class this is easier as you can teach learners with lower or higher grades within the same classroom.”

6. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The individuals interviewed were able to express that the focus of the programme was to improve classroom practice so that learners can read with understanding.

The Coach explained that,

“It is only when [she] started coaching on EGRP I that [she] realised the dire situation in classrooms and why literacy levels were so low. [EGRP] had a real impact, teachers are offering the type of education that used to seem like it is only for private schools... Learners knowing how to read with understanding is a real inheritance for them”

The coach was also aware of what the programme required of her as a coach in the classroom and in an administrative capacity for implementation tracking.

7. Resourcing of early grade teaching.

Teachers

The school has a foundation phase enrolment of 266 learners and is staffed with 9 foundation phase teachers. Of these, 4 hold Bachelor's degrees in education, 2 have diplomas, and 3 possess advanced certificates. The teachers' experience in the foundation phase ranges from 9 to 31 years, with an average of 16 years. All foundation phase teachers are female.

The Deputy Principal also serves as a foundation phase teacher. The foundation phase has one Department Head (DH), supported informally by a senior teacher to assist with their duties.

Use of LTSM

Teachers at the school effectively utilise the Early Grade Reading Programme (EGRP) II resources as intended, with classroom walls consistently displaying the current theme, along with speaking and writing frames, to support learner engagement. The uLwazi Lwethu Anthologies and Big Books provided are loved by teachers for their contextual relevance and grade appropriateness. However, to accommodate learners who are not yet at the appropriate reading level, some teachers supplement these grade-specific materials with easier readers to ensure accessibility. Additionally, teachers have laminated their teaching aids to extend their lifespan for repeated use in the classroom.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

Teachers at the school prefer to plan in advance, preparing for a month at a time since topics typically span two weeks. This approach allows them to gain a comprehensive overview of upcoming lessons and activities. All teachers bring their tablets to school daily and occasionally refer to them during school hours, particularly to access tunes for songs and rhymes. One teacher noted,

"We really struggled especially with the EFAL songs and rhymes last year, but this year I know I can just check on the tablet,"

This highlights the tablets' value in supporting the delivery of English FAL content. Teachers also find the tablet interface intuitive, easily navigating to the lessons they taught. They experience no difficulties with data or connectivity, as OUPSA provides mobile data to ensure seamless access.

The only issue identified with the tablets is their sluggishness when one had too many windows open. Teachers also download content from the tablet for printing.

8. Key features of the school's management and leadership

The school's management team consists of a Principal, a Deputy Principal who teaches in the foundation phase, and three DHs, two of whom are in the intermediate phase. The Deputy Principal is the most experienced teacher in the foundation phase but maintains a respectful working relationship with the DH, avoiding any overstepping of boundaries and responsibilities. As noted by the EGRP II Coach,

"I have never sensed a power struggle between them [DH and Deputy Principal]. They work very well together and know their respective roles."

The Principal is not directly involved in foundation phase teaching, given the presence of two SMT members in that phase. To support the single DH overseeing 11 other teachers in the foundation phase, a senior teacher has been assigned to assist.

The Principal describes his management style as adaptable to the context: strict when necessary, but open to giving teachers leeway to share suggestions. He values idea sharing while strongly opposing procrastination, as it "hinders the school's mission to meet ATP requirements". He holds a generally low view of teachers, comparing them to learners who require constant reinforcement: "Teachers are like learners. You bring something today and tomorrow they have forgotten." This perspective is particularly applied to foundation phase teachers, whom he sees as averse to innovation and fearful of making mistakes due to limited exposure. To address this, he encourages teachers to explain concepts to one another and mandates phase meetings after training sessions to debrief, share learnings, and establish classroom standards. A notable example of this approach is the provision of whiteboards exclusively to the foundation phase, as,

"they are slower to adopt innovations and need time to settle in, whereas intermediate phase teachers adapt more quickly".

The Principal promotes a data-driven approach to teaching, urging the SMT to use DDD analyses to inform instructional practices. He is also direct in fostering collaboration, insisting that even disgruntled staff members participate actively by singling them out in meetings to speak and contribute to the team.

While the Coach gives feedback to the DH, Deputy Principal and Principal, she ensures that her feedback does not tarnish the image the management team have of teachers:

"I protect my teachers when I give feedback. I conceal a lot of things and just give generic feedback. I am there for development not to harm" - EGRP Coach

9. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

The teachers interviewed mentioned the QMS observations that the DH/ Deputy Principal conducts bi-annually. The teachers in the Foundation Phase also plan together in their Grades.

The Coach runs a WhatsApp PLC to facilitate communication and professional development among teachers. Teachers say they check the posts made on the group almost daily. They value the group as a platform for focused discussions, one teacher noted, "I like the group because we just talk about curriculum-based topics". Teachers reported sending their questions or contributions directly to the coach, who reviews the content before sharing it with the group. The group is also used for notices (training, visits, etc)

The coach, however, observes that teachers rarely post directly in the group themselves, instead relying on it as a generic feedback platform. The coach uses the group to address specific needs, such as sharing tips on shared reading and resources for multigrade teachers. To manage communication effectively, the coach maintains separate WhatsApp groups for coaching and base programme schools, with a primary focus on supporting the coaching schools to ensure targeted professional development.

The coach reported having only one group previously (late 2024) but was informed that "for research purposes" she cannot continue to run the group like that.

Cluster Workshops

Cluster workshops facilitate professional development and collaboration among teachers across multiple schools. In 2025, workshops were held in Terms 1 and 2, with two sessions conducted in 2024. These workshops faced logistical challenges, such as difficulty securing venues, leading the coach to collaborate with another coach. The most recent workshop focused on the writing process. The coaches used PowerPoint presentations and additional resources, and was described as "very successful" with "great" engagement.

A teacher highlighted the collaborative nature of these workshops, noting that more than 10 schools, including non-base programme schools, participate to share information, ideas, and effective strategies. They stated, "We get tips from each other," underscoring the value of peer learning. The workshops involve district personnel, including Subject Advisors, to ensure alignment. The pre-existing cluster meetings provide coaches with a dedicated slot, fostering consistency and reducing conflicting guidance between coaches and Learning Area Managers (LAMs).

However, challenges emerged last term regarding alignment with specialists. The coach noted an issue where formal assessments set at the workshop were not aligned with EGRP

II, despite teachers' year-long implementation and specialist involvement in the EGRP II Reference Group. This may be an indication that specialists lack deep programme knowledge.

School Based Workshop

The school based workshop, lasting approximately 50 minutes, took place at the end of the school day and was attended by 8 teachers, with only 2 actively taking notes. The session was coach centred, and drew on lesson observations from earlier in the day and the feedback given to teachers. The coach invited observed teachers to share their own observations, reflections, and insights from their lessons. During these discussions, teachers noted the teacher centred nature of their lessons and identified ways to increase learner involvement and better include students still developing foundational skills.

The workshop then shifted to strategies for improving Shared Reading practices. The coach suggested using vocabulary words with corresponding pictures and real objects for demonstrations to boost student engagement. Recommendations included finding images that clearly explain theme-related vocabulary and linking Listening and Speaking activities directly to the Shared Reading Story for better integration. A demonstration showed the value of encouraging students to explain concepts first to promote active participation. The coach also advised teachers not to move to seated activities before confirming completion of oral or occupational tasks and discussed the importance of effective time management.

The session continued with a focus on using colours to highlight phonics in words for visual reinforcement. The coach emphasised differentiating tasks, starting with basic sound identification to build phonological awareness gradually. Referencing a student in one class as an example, the coach advised, "Stop feeding students a whole loaf when they need a slice," advocating for breaking down content into manageable portions. Brief mentions were made of effective marking techniques and the use of trackers to monitor student progress.

Engagement varied during the workshop. One teacher appeared notably disengaged and uninterested, while others gradually lost focus, likely due to fatigue, and began using their phones more as the session neared its end. The coach concluded by thanking the teachers and expressing pride in their efforts.

The session closed with reflections on the need to include Grade 4 teachers in similar programmes, as they lack sufficient time amid their teaching duties and need targeted professional development. The school also proposed the introduction of two remedial teachers to the school to support struggling students, a request was made for the information to be shared with the province.

One teacher also cautioned against the coach and teachers' advice to focus more on struggling learners, commenting that they also need to challenge gifted learners to ensure their growth.

10. Workbook Analysis

The Grade 3 teacher, who also serves as the Deputy Principal, explained that she struggles to keep up with the curriculum due to her administrative responsibilities. As a result, she is

typically one week behind, despite her efforts to catch up through recovery plans and extending class time by 20 minutes for the intermediate phase.

Including filling in the table (with colour coding – red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved)

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Marked with comments	Marked with no comments	Marked with some correction in red ink	Only marked before May
Exercise books up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	yes	yes	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	yes	yes	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Some corrections	Corrections in red ink	Corrections in red ink	Corrections by learners
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	No	No	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: <i>check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.</i>	<i>Evidence of T2 W5 not found</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W9 not found</i>	<i>Evidence of T2 W5 found in same week</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W9 not found</i>	<i>Evidence of T2 W5 work found 1.5 weeks later</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W9 work found 1 week later</i>	<i>Evidence of T2 W5 work found 1 weeks later</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W9 work not found in exercise books</i>
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Tracker not used	Tracker not used	Curriculum tracker not used. Teacher is currently 1 week behind	Curriculum tracker not used. Teacher is currently 1 week behind

11. Community engagement

The school faces significant challenges due to limited support from the local community. The Principal emphasised, "The school has no support from the community, and parents don't support the school either." This is reflected in the low parental engagement, with only 10% of parents attending school meetings, and of those, 90% are grandparents rather than the learners' parents..

Socioeconomically, the community is in a dire situation, with many learners arriving at school in torn uniforms, as families rely heavily on government grants and have no other forms of income. The Principal actively visits the homes of foundation phase learners who appear neglected to better understand and address their needs. The community also struggles with an alcohol abuse problem, which likely exacerbates socioeconomic and family challenges. Additionally, the Principal noted, "Learners do not attend ECD and are kept at home until Grade R, and they miss a lot of foundational background," resulting in significant gaps in early education that the school must address.

12. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

- **Reading environment:** The school maintained its strong foundation in early grade reading from 2024, when it already boasted a good to excellent standard in both Home Language (HL) and English First Additional Language (EFAL), with teachers already employing a phonics-based approach. This strength has persisted, with teachers effectively utilising EGRP II resources and consistently implementing phonics, blending, and segmenting. The school environment remained positive, with classrooms evolving into visually rich and well-organised spaces.
- **Reading outcomes:** The coach observed a "slight improvement" in the reading abilities of learners in 2024 and stated that EGRP II. In 2024, an estimated 70-80% of Grade 3 learners could read in Setswana (HL) and 50-60% in English (EFAL), with specific data showing 43 out of 86 Grade 3 learners could read in EFAL and over 60 in HL (singular words). By 2025, out of 33 Grade 2 learners, 15 could read in EFAL and 20 in HL, while for Grade 3, 12 out of 23 could read with comprehension in both EFAL and HL. While they enjoy independent and whole class reading, several learners expressed a dislike for GGR, feeling it slows them down. Despite these gains, challenges include some teachers' initial lack of confidence in implementing differentiation and the need to ensure gifted learners are also sufficiently challenged.
- **Classroom environment:** The school's classroom environment has seen sustained positive transformation from 2024, when EGRP II began improving existing print-rich walls. This year, teachers explicitly stated that the programme had transformed their classrooms into print-rich environments moving beyond previous limitations. Classrooms are consistently clean, well-organised, and visually rich with educational material, including learners' work. While already well resourced with books in 2024, EGRP II's own materials, such as the uLwazi Lwethu Anthologies and Big Books, continued to be highly valued by teachers for their contextual relevance and appropriateness in 2025. Teachers in 2025 were also laminating their teaching aids to ensure longevity, addressing a resource desire noted in 2024.
- **Quality of teaching:** teaching methodology has seen significant improvement since 2024. While already employing a phonics-based approach before the programme, EGRP II improved this by providing valuable resources and strategies. This year teachers lauded EGRP for making the phonics process easier by offering

step-by-step instructions and a clear routine, enabling consistent implementation of phonics, blending, and segmenting. Crucially, EGRP II has equipped Foundation Phase teachers with effective strategies to support struggling learners, a notable shift from 2024 where teachers expressed they were tempted to give up on these learners. Differentiation remains a focus, with teachers planning independent activities for advanced learners using content from higher grades and providing simpler readers for struggling ones.

While EGRP II in 2024 introduced and refined protocols for GGR and SR, and teachers initially reported improvements in their delivery, the 2025 observations reveal a more complex picture of implementation. In 2024, learners enjoyed GGR as they could help each other, however this year, several learners expressed a dislike for GGR, feeling it slowed them down or involved too many corrections. Challenges with noise levels during GGR sessions were also observed in 2025. Although SR was generally well delivered with expressive teacher modelling, inconsistencies, such as a teacher reading aloud during a planned pre-read session and failing to use a shared reading checklist, suggest that full, consistent mastery and effective application of these components are still evolving, and should become a focus for future coaching.

- Use of trackers: The consistent and effective use of trackers and checklists remains an ongoing challenge at the school. In 2024, the school was an early adopter, with the Deputy Principal using the lesson tracker and other teachers indicating future use, although confusion existed due to perceived duplication and excessive paperwork. However, by 2025, the workbook analysis revealed that Grade 2 teachers were not using trackers, and Grade 3 teachers were also not using the curriculum tracker, resulting in them being 1 week behind in their curriculum coverage. One teacher even found the tracker distracting from teaching. This indicates that despite initial signs of adoption, the integration of these administrative tools into daily practice has not become consistent or seamless for all teachers, a point the coach reiterated needed immediate data capture.
- LTSM and tablet use: this has seen significant and successful integration since 2024. Initially, teachers expressed a desire for tablets but were concerned about the lack of mobile data and school WiFi. This major barrier has been overcome as OUPSA now provides mobile data, enabling access. Teachers consistently bring and use their tablets daily, finding them intuitive for accessing lesson plans and particularly valuable for tunes for English FAL songs and rhymes, which was a struggle previously. The only minor issue identified in 2025 was sluggishness when too many windows were opened.
- Coach role: The coach, a former Grade 1 and 2 teacher, values the comprehensive training from OUPSA and applies the GROW model to promote teacher self-reflection. In 2024, she perceived EGRP II systems as more formalised with increased pressure compared to EGRP I. Her coaching consistently involves reviewing lesson plans, taking detailed notes directly as feedback during observations, and initiating post-lesson discussions with reflective questions. This year, she adopted a strategy of observing only single lesson components to see

more teachers per visit, a shift she initially resisted but later found valuable. She consistently affirms teachers' progress and addresses specific methodological and pedagogical challenges, even demonstrating routines on the chalkboard for weaker teachers. Notably, this year, she deliberately protects teachers by providing generic feedback to school leadership to ensure developmental support without harming their image.

Teachers highly regard her as approachable and effective, appreciating her consistent presence and non judgmental support. She also facilitates professional development through WhatsApp groups and cluster workshops, though alignment of formal assessments with EGRP II content at workshops remained a concern in 2025.

School L

1. Summary of key points

- The small school is under-resourced but reasonably well-organised
- The single multigrade teacher is near retirement and resistant to being coached and to using some of the available visual aids provided by the project
- She taught reasonably well and inline with most EGRP protocols including being able to differentiate learning tasks based on grade and ability
 - Respondents
- The multigrade (Grade 1-3) teacher observed was interviewed
- The school principal was interviewed
- Six Grade 3 learners were also interviewed in a focus group discussion

2. School context

The school is small, with only four large classrooms. Some of these are divided, but the partitions do not extend to the ceiling, which means sound easily travels between the spaces. One of the divided classrooms includes a small section used as the principal's and administration office, as there is no dedicated staffroom or office. The Grade 1, 2, and 3 classes are taught in a multigrade setting, as are Grades 4, 5, and 6. The Grade R class is separate.

There is no running water at the school, so water is drawn from a JoJo tank located at the school gate. The school uses pit toilets, which are kept clean despite all the windows in the toilet blocks being broken.

The classrooms are in fair condition, with decent and usable furniture, although some chairs are broken and pose a safety risk. There are some posters and EGRP materials displayed on the walls, and the Foundation Phase classroom has a reading corner.

At the end of the classroom block is a small kitchen where meals are prepared daily through the feeding scheme. The school does not have a photocopy machine in working order and lacks many other resources.

Table 1: Foundation Phase enrolment and staffing

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	8	6	6	20
Classrooms	1			1
Teachers	1			1
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1			1
No. of DHs	1			1
Teacher-to-learner ratio	1: 20			1: 20

3. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observation

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) Setswana Home Language Lesson

The lesson began with the teacher organising the class. Learners sang as they moved to the carpet area at the front of the classroom. Once seated, the teacher asked for the “rule of the day,” after which the class sang the “Happy Birthday” song. The teacher then initiated a discussion about the weather before moving into the medumo puo (phonics) activity.

The teacher asked each grade to recall the phonics sounds (medumo) they had been learning. It appeared that each grade had been focusing on different sounds. She then selected the sound *oi* and asked learners to create sentences using it, beginning with Grade 3, followed by Grade 2, and then Grade 1. She then focused on Grade 3, introducing the concept of makwalotshwana (homonyms).

After the carpet session, learners returned to their desks for occupational tasks. The teacher explained to the Grade 3 learners that they would work in pairs, reading words from their DBE workbook and then making sentences from them. Grade 2 learners were tasked with practicing handwriting, while the teacher moved to the board to demonstrate letter formation to the Grade 1 learners, using the three part cat, which helps with knowing how to place letters in the line. All Grades made use of EGRP flashcards during their activities, which showed hand writing examples. The teacher modelled cursive writing for the Grade 3 learners.

In the second phase of the Setswana lesson, the teacher conducted a shared reading activity using the big book ‘bukakgolo’. She began by asking learners how many pictures they could see and encouraged them to respond in full sentences. The story, *Basimane ba ba botlhale*, was then introduced. Learners were first asked to describe what they could see in the pictures before reading. The teacher prompted them to think carefully before answering and corrected their Setswana where necessary. During this time, the coach assisted by reorganising the seating so that all learners on the carpet could see the pictures clearly.

Although there was no learner work displayed on the walls, the classroom did have some print materials. The furniture, while not in the best condition, was still usable. The chalkboard was divided into three sections, one for each grade (Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3), and learners knew which section to focus on for their work.

The coach began by discussing the teacher's plans prior to the lesson starting. Throughout the parts of the session where whole class teaching was in progress, the coach remained unobtrusive, seated quietly observing the teacher's delivery. Detailed notes were taken on a sheet of paper and observation form that scored aspects such as lesson preparation, classroom management, structure and presentation, core methodologies, discipline, and learner engagement.

During the handwriting task the coach went around the class and monitored how learners were writing. Seeing how slow the learners were writing, the coach modelled how learners can be made more aware of time by writing time intervals of five minutes on the board, crossing out the first 20 minutes to visually demonstrate elapsed time, and urging learners to write quickly due to limited remaining time. This was repeated in five minute intervals, with the coach announcing the time left. The coach advised the teacher to begin marking work as learners wrote, to optimise efficiency.

Additional supportive actions involved speaking to the EA to record learner attendance and absences. When the EA was distributing writing charts, the coach suggested providing them one at a time, though the teacher interjected to explain her preference for handing out packs to avoid jumbling.

The coach encouraged learner positive reinforcement by having them clap for themselves upon the completion of tasks.

During shared reading, the coach provided chairs for learners at the back to improve visibility of the big book. Midway through this component, the coach retrieved a management document and the teacher's lesson plan for reference, noting omissions such as the lack of new vocabulary explanation.

The coach's notes captured a comprehensive account of events, including the teacher's non-use of resources like posters and flashcards, time management issues, over-explanation of handwriting, prolonged waiting for Grade 3 learners, suggestions for countdowns to heighten time awareness, learner completion rates, the absence of identification of new vocabulary, use of open and closed questions, and corrections of language use or borrowed words. Advice was phrased in the third person, such as "coach to advise teacher".

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) English First Additional Language Lesson

The English lesson began with the learners singing the song 'If You're Happy and You Know It'. The teacher then introduced a new rhyme, first explaining to the learners the specific actions they would need to perform while reciting it. The rhyme was particularly beneficial as it introduced learners to new vocabulary such as 'yawn', 'skip', 'bend', and

'stretch'. Following this, the teacher moved to the "Question of the Day" activity: "Which snack do you think is unhealthy?" The options provided were dried fish, boiled egg, and peanuts. The teacher demonstrated good practice by following the EGRP protocol, ensuring that learners responded in full sentences after ticking their chosen option. For example, learners came up with sentences such as, "I think peanuts are unhealthy".

Some learners experienced difficulty with the activity and speaking English, but the teacher displayed patience, guiding them step-by-step through the process until they were able to answer independently. Once all learners had responded, the teacher concluded the activity by counting and calculating the total responses for each option.

The coach incorporated a song, greetings, a rhyme with actions, and did listening and speaking centred on the question: "Which snack do you think is unhealthy?" The coach again sat quietly, observing the entire lesson without major interruptions. At the end, the coach prompted learners to clap for themselves as a form of positive reinforcement.

Notes taken were detailed, outlining all activities and highlighting strengths such as the teacher reading along with learners and offering praise. Areas for improvement noted included omitted routine elements, lack of vocabulary or sight word use, and absence of visual aids like pictures for items discussed (e.g., peanuts). After the listening and speaking lesson, the coach directly advised the teacher to consolidate by using terms like "fewer" and "most" to reinforce concepts.

The feedback session addressed both lessons collectively, starting with the Home Language components before moving to EFAL. The coach prioritised teacher self-reflection by asking the teacher to evaluate her own performance first, though she initially forgot and began giving feedback before correcting herself.

The coach started by asking the teacher to indicate how she felt the lesson had gone. For the Home Language phonics segment, the teacher was highly self-critical, stating she had not used teaching aids, managed time poorly, and taught the wrong sounds, concluding, "I did nothing correct. This is not how I usually teach." The coach reassured her that reviewing past sounds was acceptable, then congratulated her on successes like the song, greetings, and grade-specific phonics review. However, the coach noted the need to teach the planned sound for the day and they reviewed the lesson plan together, with the coach explaining elements like using the DBE workbook for sentence building during GGR. The coach demonstrated mind-mapping for phonics, advised against learners repeatedly writing their grade with each task to save time, to which the teacher responded, "I like that idea". She also corrected the teacher's date notation. Clearer instructions for independent groups were suggested, and the teacher was asked to note missed elements. While reviewing the management document, the teacher spotted a swap in Grade 1 and 2 sounds, indicating her engagement.

In handwriting feedback, the coach again prompted reflection, but the teacher deferred, saying, "I thought you would tell me what I did well and what I should improve," before critiquing herself for confusing learners with multiple cards. The coach praised modelling but advised against over-explaining (e.g., the number 10), dismissing the teacher's rationale about learners' struggles with letter length without further exploration. Countdowns

for all components and reinforcing finger spacing were recommended by the coach though some learners already used it unprompted.

For shared reading, the teacher's reflection highlighted omissions like writing new vocabulary and not reading with learners, explaining, "It's a long story I did not know where to stop on the pictures." The coach affirmed this was correct for a pre-read per the management document, praised her for not mentioning the title, language corrections, and ensuring visibility, concluding, "It was a great lesson. Well done ma'am." The teacher responded positively:

"When you come next time I will have improved so much. I want to go on my pension knowing I did well by the learners ... I am feeling so small today to be honest. We've spoken about these things (so) I thought you'd be upset but I can see you are a darling."

The EFAL discussion elicited negative self-reflections from the teacher, such as not pre-drawing a table or using pictures. The coach probed learner responsiveness, suggesting repetition to build familiarity, and praised actions for word comprehension, commenting, "It was like you are not a SASSA person." Resources were also discussed. The coach's feedback followed her notes without clear separation of positives and improvements, but the teacher engaged fully, taking notes. They modelled the question of the day together. The coach encouraged sharing knowledge with neighbouring schools, but the teacher cited time constraints due to PLCs and learner focus.

The coach asked the teacher to record reflections on the observation form for future reference, but the teacher resisted, saying,

"Why should I write that I'm leaving the system? Don't come! Go visit other teachers because they will be implementing further."

Teacher Perceptions of Learner Reading Skills

The teachers estimate that four out of six (67%) of Grade 3 learners could read is reasonably close to the coach's estimate of three out of six (50%). This convergence most likely suggests that both are attuned to the learners' abilities, informed by their interactions with them.

Table 2: Teacher estimate of learner reading ability

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read with comprehension in EFAL	No. of learners who can read with comprehension in HL
1	8	1	2
2	6	2	2
3	6	4	4

The external coach's approach to supporting the foundation phase teacher, who manages a single multigrade class and is nearing retirement, was structured, empathetic, with the coach being strategic in managing the teacher's resistance to coaching. Despite the teacher's reluctance to coaching, evident in her statement cited above about ignoring her and focusing on younger teachers, the coach still encouraged teacher reflection and asked probing questions to deepen the reflection. She also provided targeted feedback, led goal-setting, and aimed to foster a growth mindset. However, the post-observation discussion leaned heavily on the coach's observations, missing opportunities to build on the teacher's hesitant reflections for more teacher-led development. This was somewhat understandable given the teacher's "uncoachable" disposition, as coined by the coach.

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The teacher has been teaching in a multigrade classroom since 2021 and explained that she finds it more challenging to manage than monograde teaching. She described the EGRP training as fruitful, providing both guidance and materials, and said it has helped her focus more on teaching learners to read through strategies such as phonics, blending, and segmenting words. Although she missed one term's training due to an injury, she continues to apply what she has learned and uses the lesson plans to guide her instruction and assessment. She is assisted by the school's reading champion, who works with lower-ability learners while she focuses on others.

Lesson content and methodology

The teacher followed EGRP protocols and demonstrated clear lesson structure in both Setswana and English. Differentiation was evident, with each grade working on level-appropriate tasks Grade 3 engaged in sentence construction and cursive writing, Grade 2 practised handwriting, and Grade 1 focused on letter formation. Phonics and shared reading were key strategies, with the teacher prompting full-sentence responses and using visual aids such as big books and flashcards. In English, activities included songs, rhymes to build vocabulary, and a "Question of the Day" that encouraged speaking in complete sentences. The methodology was structured, interactive, and aligned to programme guidelines.

4. Learner perceptions

Learners reported that their favourite books to read include *Toro ya* and *Matla aga Neo*. They viewed reading as important because it would allow them to progress to the next grade and help them answer questions more effectively. Most learners preferred reading in Setswana, explaining that it helped them understand the content better and that it felt more comfortable because it was their home language. However, some expressed a preference for English, saying they wanted to learn a new language.

When discussing whether they preferred reading by themselves or being read to by the teacher, several learners said they enjoyed when the teacher read to them because it helped them understand the story better. Others preferred reading by themselves, particularly during GGR, as it allowed them to ask questions and help each other. During the focus group discussion, learners even requested to read books aloud to showcase their reading skills. While peer support was evident, it sometimes became counterproductive, as

stronger readers would quickly supply words for those who hesitated, not giving struggling learners enough time to attempt the word themselves. This behaviour seemed to cause frustration for some and is likely to be present during GGR sessions.

Learners felt their reading skills had improved since Grade 2, noting that they now knew more words and could understand stories better. They shared that they did not have books at home, but their teacher occasionally allowed them to borrow anthologies and HRP books to practise reading. At home, family members such as parents and siblings would assist them when they encountered difficulties, providing some additional literacy support outside of school.

5. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

Limited resource use

The teacher's failure to utilise available resources, such as posters, flashcards, or phonic friezes, exacerbated challenges in addressing diverse reading needs. For example, during the English EFAL lesson, the teacher did not use pictures to support vocabulary comprehension (e.g., for items like peanuts), which could have aided less proficient readers. The coach noted in the interview that for multigrade classrooms, all the materials they need are provided suggesting that better resource use could facilitate differentiated instruction, yet the teacher's reluctance to engage with these tools hindered the delivery of the lessons.

Time management and lesson pacing

Time management issues further complicate the teachers ability to teach the class effectively, in that the teacher would give learners an infinite amount of time on a task meant to take a set amount of time. This inefficiency takes away from time for advanced learners to engage in challenging tasks or for struggling learners to receive focused support, such as phonemic awareness activities for those identified as needing foundational skills.

While the teacher made an attempt at teaching a wide range of reading abilities groups in this multigrade classroom, this was hindered by her limited resource use, poor time management, and resistance to coaching and adoption pre-retirement, compounded by the inherent complexities of a multigrade setting.

6. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The teacher exhibited partial understanding of the EGRP II and its requirements during her lesson. This was evident in her inconsistent application of the programme's methodologies, which can be attributed to her absence from training, health-related leave, and resistance to coaching.

Conversely, the coach also lacked a clear grasp of the EGRP II's strategic goal: to improve multigrade teaching and extrapolate lessons applicable to monograde settings, and vice versa. When questioned about the EGRP's objective, her response focused on the Northern Cape's declining performance, which she attributed to the mixing of three languages and the subsequent need for Setswana Home Language interventions. She did

not, however, mention the multigrade setting. However, in practice the coach was very clear on multigrade teaching and how each methodology is applied within that context.

7. Resourcing of early grade teaching. (In multigrade schools the way the class is structured and organised)

Teachers

A single, qualified Foundation Phase teacher- approaching retirement- covers Grades 1 to 3. She has attended EGRP training overall (missing one term due to injury) and, despite resistance to coaching and to some visual-aid use, generally teaches in line with EGRP protocols. The multigrade teacher, who is nearing retirement, indicated that she is unlikely to remain at the school next year. Given the school's small size and staffing norms, the principal currently serves in an acting capacity and is exploring opportunities for a permanent post elsewhere.

Use of LTSM

Core materials are in use: EGRP big books for Shared Reading, DBE workbooks for word/sentence tasks, handwriting charts and flashcards, and the tablet with the EGRP platform (the teacher was observed navigating it confidently for planning). However, several supports are inconsistently applied: daily vocabulary/sight-word boards are not routinely set up, pictures to anchor EFAL concepts (e.g., food items in the Question of the Day) were not used, and broader poster/phonetic-frieze use during instruction was limited. Tracker use is also irregular, hindered by the lack of photocopying but also by habit. The reading corner is present and functional.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

The teacher reported that the tablet has made a significant difference in how she prepares her lessons and manages learning and teaching support materials (LTSM). Before receiving the device, she relied on carrying a number of heavy books, but now she is able to use the tablet for preparation and to access the necessary materials more efficiently. She noted that the tablet has lightened her workload and allows her to prepare with greater ease. She explained that she does not use her personal phone frequently, which gives her more time to use the tablet specifically for work-related purposes. Over time, she has become more confident in using the device and feels that her planning has improved as a result. She was observed to be using the tablet and navigating the EGRP platform with ease.

8. Key features of the school's management and leadership

The school is led by an acting principal, who explained that the school does not qualify for a permanent principal due to its small multigrade context. She has been in the acting role for 5 years. She described her leadership style as dependent on the people she works with. While she tries to set rules and communicate expectations, she acknowledged that staff do not always respond positively and that teamwork is limited. She characterised her approach as soft-spoken and supportive, but also expressed feeling undermined at times by colleagues who do not follow her direction.

Despite these constraints, the principal described herself as approachable and open to dialogue, with communication often extending beyond formal structures to informal discussions with staff. Her leadership reflects a balance of accountability in certain areas, such as the submission of reports, alongside efforts to provide support to staff during transitions and curriculum changes. She also acknowledged the personal difficulty of being in an acting role for many years, remarking that she is still “searching for a way out” after having carried the responsibilities of leadership for such a long period without the security of a permanent appointment.

9. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

Support for early grade teachers is primarily provided through the schools management and the coach. The teacher reported that the coach visits her class three times per term. She described the coaching relationship as constructive, noting that feedback is practical and helps her improve her teaching. While she sometimes disagrees with suggestions, she feels comfortable expressing her views, and the relationship remains positive and supportive.

At management level, the principal reviews teachers’ work, encourages the use of assessment templates, and provides guidance on catching up when lessons are missed due to leave. However, limited resources, such as the absence of printing facilities, affect how effectively tools like trackers can be used for monitoring learner progress.

Although three schools in the area have attempted to collaborate, no formal Professional Learning Community (PLC) structures are in place. Teachers reported that they had met informally in the past, but these interactions focused only on EGRP matters and did not function as regular PLC meetings. The meetings were set up by the teachers themselves to further discuss what they had learned at training and to share further insights on EGRP. The teacher did mention that the coach has set up a WhatsApp group but that she is not aware of what is discussed in the group as she is not active in it.

10. Workbook analysis

Colour coding – red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved)

Table 3: Learner workbook analysis findings

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	No	No	No	No
Workbook correction	Marked but DBE barely used	Marked but DBE barely used	No	No
Exercise books up to date	No	No	No	No

Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	No	No	No	No
Exercises marked	Most are not marked	Most are not marked	Most are not marked	Most are not marked
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Red ink on some. Majority not corrected	Red ink on some. Majority not corrected	Red ink on some. Majority not corrected	Red ink on some. Majority not corrected
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.	<i>T2 DBE not used at all (only 2-3 pages used in Jan 2025)</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W5 and W9 work also not found in workbooks</i>	<i>T2 DBE not used at all (only 2-3 pages used in Jan 2025)</i> <i>Evidence of T2 W5 and W9 work also not found in workbooks</i>	<i>T2 DBE barely used (approximately 15 pages used)</i>	<i>T2 DBE barely used (approximately 10 pages used)</i>
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Not used, lesson taught also did not reflect current week	Tracker not used	Not used, lesson taught also did not reflect current week	Tracker not used

11. Community Engagement

Community involvement in the school was described as very limited. Parents were generally perceived as unsupportive, particularly in relation to helping learners with their schoolwork. Teachers reported that parents often say they are unable to assist with homework because they themselves cannot read or write. In addition, when learners experience challenges, parents are reluctant to consider alternative schooling options such as special schools, citing concerns about losing access to social grants.

The broader community was not reported to be engaged with the school's activities. While the area is considered safe, with no incidents of break-ins, parents and community members were said to show little interest in actively supporting learner development or contributing solutions to the challenges faced by the school.

12. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

Reading outcomes: In 2024, reading standards were very low, especially in EFAL where learners could not speak even simple English words after three years of instruction. Teachers and learners acknowledged an unwritten avoidance of English, with Setswana preferred and taught more confidently. By 2025, some improvements were evident. Teacher and coach estimates of Grade 3 reading aligned, with three to four learners out of six reading with comprehension. Most learners still favoured Setswana, but some expressed a desire to read in English, showing a shift towards valuing bilingualism. Learners themselves

reported feeling more confident, noting that they knew more words than in the previous year.

Quality of teaching: In 2024, teaching quality was described as weak, with neither teacher observed having a lesson plan ready. EFAL lessons were especially poor, with teachers avoiding English whenever possible and showing lack of preparation. In 2025, the multigrade teacher- though resistant to coaching and nearing retirement- delivered lessons more aligned with EGRP protocols, including structured phonics, Shared Reading, and ability-based differentiation across Grades 1–3. However, her failure to use certain visual aids and her poor time management limited the effectiveness of the teaching.

Use of LTSM: In 2024, teachers welcomed EGRP2 LTSM, with reading corners established and posters displayed, though the poor condition of classroom walls made it difficult to keep resources up. Conversation posters were already tatty, and teachers reported struggling to maintain them without laminating. In 2025, LTSM use was more systematic. The teacher consistently used big books, DBE workbooks, handwriting charts, and flashcards, and was observed using her tablet for planning and accessing materials. However, other supports, such as vocabulary boards, sight words, and pictures to aid EFAL vocabulary, were inconsistently applied. The reading corner was present and functional in both years.

Tablets and planning tools: In 2024, tablets had not yet been received, but both teachers and the coach anticipated that teachers would use them effectively, noting older teachers in EGRP I had adapted well. By 2025, the tablet was in active use by the teacher, who reported that it had significantly reduced her workload and made lesson preparation more efficient. Tracker use, however, remained a problem across both years, with teachers avoiding or inconsistently applying it.

Leadership and support: In 2024, the acting principal (also the Grade 1 teacher) expressed frustration with the stress of combining leadership responsibilities with teaching, budgeting, and managing feeding, and was reluctant to assume her leadership role fully. By 2025, the acting principal described herself as soft-spoken and supportive, with an open-door policy, though she admitted to feeling undermined by colleagues and expressed a desire to leave the role after many years without permanent appointment. Support from the district was weak in both years, with no consistent subject adviser engagement. Coaches remained the primary source of professional support, visiting three times a term in 2025 and providing structured but sometimes overly directive feedback.

Classroom management and methodology: In 2024, teachers often ignored EGRP protocols, with multigrade lessons poorly structured and time management a major issue. EFAL classes were particularly ineffective, with teachers frustrated by learner silence. By 2025, improvements were visible: the multigrade teacher followed lesson structures more closely, differentiated tasks across grades, and used phonics and Shared Reading as prescribed. However, her reluctance to use resources such as posters or friezes and her tendency to allow unlimited time for tasks undermined the efficiency of her teaching.

Learner perceptions: In 2024, learners said they enjoyed reading in Setswana and particularly valued Group Guided Reading, where they could help one another, but disliked English and showed little enthusiasm for it. By 2025, learners expressed that they liked

both being read to by the teacher and reading for themselves, and they even requested opportunities to read aloud during the focus group. They identified favourite books such as *Toro ya...* and *Matla a ga Neo*, and some learners explained that reading was important not just for school progression but also for understanding stories and answering questions. Although they still lacked books at home, some learners were able to borrow from the teacher, and family members provided occasional support, reflecting slightly more positive attitudes than in 2024.

Community engagement: In 2024, teachers and the coach described parents as uninterested, with many migrant labourers leaving children in the care of grandparents. Parents were often absent from meetings and openly resisted helping with homework, saying it was the teacher's responsibility. By 2025, the picture remained similar, with parents still described as unsupportive and reluctant to engage, citing their own inability to read or write. Some parents also resisted considering special schools, fearing loss of social grants. Community involvement more broadly was minimal in both years.

Overall reading culture: In 2024, the school lacked a reading culture, with EFAL largely avoided by both teachers and learners, and Setswana being the only language in which learners felt comfortable. By 2025, although Setswana continued to dominate, there were small but meaningful shifts. Learners expressed more confidence in their abilities, some showed interest in reading English, and they valued the opportunity to read aloud or listen to stories. These changes suggest that, even with persistent weaknesses in teaching and management, the overall reading culture at School L became slightly more positive by 2025.

Retirement : The Foundation Phase teacher was nearing retirement and openly expressed that she saw little value in further coaching since she would soon be leaving. This raises serious concerns for the sustainability of the project: once she exits, there is uncertainty about who will take over her class and whether the progress made through EGRP II will be maintained. The principal also highlighted that she has no authority over teacher appointments, which adds to the uncertainty and anxiety about continuity. The challenge is compounded by the fact that the principal herself was a Foundation Phase teacher in 2024,

School M

1. Summary of key points

- The school is very remote and faces problems in accessing water. The classrooms are old and in need of repair
- The school has two FP teachers - one multigrade, one teaching Grade 3
- The multigrade teacher of Grades 1 and 2 believes the EGRP has transformed her teaching although she has trouble maintaining discipline in the classroom
- Education assistants are viewed as supportive and important for reading sessions and behaviour control
- Multigrade room is colourful, well organised and print-rich with labelled EGRP II materials; the Grade 3 classroom is functional but less print-rich, EGRP LTSMs are in regular use
- Grade 3 teacher's tablet is water-damaged; she currently doesn't access the platform via phone/laptop and would need support to re-onboard
- Safe community with supportive partnerships (e.g., SIOC health drives), but parental engagement is limited and absenteeism is a persistent risk.

2. Respondents

- Grade 3 teacher (Department head)
- Multigrade teacher
- Grade 3 learners
- Principal

3. School context

The school is situated in an isolated remote village, over an hour's drive from Kuruman along a long gravel road. Getting to the school is challenging for staff and learners. The school operates as a multigrade school, employing two foundation phase teachers: one managing a combined Grade 1 and Grade 2 class, and the other teaching Grade 3..

The school's infrastructure presents a mixed picture. The buildings are old, with significant, unrepaired cracks in the walls, indicating an urgent need for structural renovation. However, the classroom furniture is in a relatively functional state, supporting basic teaching and learning activities. The school's kitchen and toilets are the newest and best-maintained structures on the premises.

The water supply is unreliable, sourced from the local village/ municipality, with the school going for weeks without water at times, disrupting daily operations. Electricity, however, is available and reliable.

Table 1: Foundation Phase enrolment and staffing

Enrolment			17		
Classrooms	1		1		2
Teachers	1		1		2
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1		1		2
No. of DHs	1				
Teacher to learner ratio					

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observation

Multigrade (Grade 1-2) Setswana Home Language Lesson

The Setswana lesson began with learners stretching their hands to create an engaging atmosphere and set a positive tone for learning. The teacher managed the multigrade classroom by assigning independent work to Grade 1 learners, allowing her to focus on direct instruction for Grade 2 learners. For Grade 2s, she revisits the “ng” sound, using the cat handwriting technique to teach handwriting, where letters are associated with parts of a cat (head, body, tail). Describing her hand movement as she wrote each letter on the board. She used one of the learner’s names “Boitumelo,” asking learners to identify where each letter fits within the cat’s structure, fostering active participation.

Shifting to Grade 1 learners, the teacher introduced the “th” sound and had learners practice how to write it. Then demonstrated handwriting further using a learner’s name “Kgopolo” and emphasising line placement of each letter within each line. She however taught the letter ‘t’ with the line touching the top line of the head.

While learners showed an understanding of the teacher’s lesson, during the writing task, many learners reverted to their usual writing habits, disregarding the cat structure, indicating a need for further reinforcement. The teacher when monitoring their work did not correct careless writing and not following the cat technique. She however provided active feedback on spacing issues and use of capital letters.

Multigrade (Grade 1-2) English First Additional Language Lesson

In the EFAL lesson, the teacher conducted a Shared Reading session focusing on vocabulary development and comprehension. She explained words like “herder” and “farmer” in Setswana, while “rich” and other words were explained in English. While reading she paused occasionally to simplify passages for better understanding. This approach tailors content to learners’ linguistic needs in a multilingual and multigrade context. However, classroom management proved challenging. Grade 1 learners, having completed

their writing task, become noisy and off-task, requiring intervention from a visiting DBE guest to maintain order. This incident underscores the difficulty of maintaining engagement across grades in a multigrade setting, particularly when independent tasks are completed unevenly. The disruption indicates a need for additional strategies or guidance on using more occupational tasks to sustain independent work across both grades.

The teacher's strategy of seating learners in rows by grade allows the teacher to easily manage the classroom, but does not help in implementing the EGRP model.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The classroom environment, while functional, was not particularly print-rich. There were a few posters and charts displayed on the walls, but no learner work was visible. A reading corner was available and considered adequate, providing at least some space for learners to engage with books. The classroom furniture was in decent condition and generally functional for teaching and learning activities. Learners were seated in their ability groups.

The session began with a rhyme, which immediately engaged learners and created a lively start to the lesson. After the rhyme, the learners moved to the front of the classroom and gathered around to participate in a poster discussion.

The poster was based on the theme of water pollution. The teacher facilitated an interactive discussion by asking learners a series of questions about the images on the poster, encouraging them to describe what they saw and to connect the visual prompts to their own understanding of environmental issues. This activity introduced new vocabulary words linked to the theme, including *letshollo* (diarrhoea), *leswefadiwa* (waste), and *cholera*. The vocabulary exercise not only developed language skills but also linked learning to real-life health and environmental concerns.

Following the vocabulary activity, the teacher shifted to phonics, introducing the sound "tl." Learners were asked to generate words containing the "tl" sound and were invited to come to the board to write the words themselves. To strengthen the link with the theme of water pollution, the teacher suggested that learners think of words containing the "tl" sound that could be associated with water.

The lesson was structured and time-conscious, taking approximately 15 minutes in line with the EGRP recommendations for lesson pacing. Participation levels were high, and learners responded actively to the teacher's questions.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson

The theme of the week was Honesty. The session began with greetings, followed by a song ("If you are happy and you know it"), which created a lively and engaging start. The phonics focus for the lesson was the "-ing" sound. Learners were asked to call out words containing the sound, and the teacher encouraged them to use the words in simple sentences. This gave learners the opportunity to practise both word recognition and sentence construction. After the phonics activity, most learners returned to their seats, while Group 1 remained on the carpet for group guided reading.

The teacher assigned occupational tasks to the learners at their desks before beginning Group Guided Reading (GGR) with four children. The occupational tasks were to complete an activity in their DBE books. The teacher briefly explained the activity before focusing on the group. She started the GGR session by asking learners to describe what they saw in the accompanying picture, which supported comprehension and engagement with the text. One learner read at a time, while the teacher guided the process by pausing to explain vocabulary as it appeared in the story. She also asked comprehension and vocabulary questions throughout the session.

While GGR was in progress, the learners at the desks occasionally became noisy and needed to be reminded to focus on their tasks. Some were observed to be confused about what they were expected to complete, asking one another for clarification. Despite these challenges, the teacher maintained her focus on the GGR group.

Teacher' judgments on the number of their learners who can read

The multigrade teacher provided specific insights into the reading abilities of her Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners, highlighting the challenges learners face, more especially in EFAL.

Table 2: Teacher estimate of learner reading ability

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL	No. of learners who can read in HL
1 (words)	13	2	3
2 (words)	11	5	6
3 (Fluency)	17	5	14

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The multigrade teacher described a significant shift in her approach to classroom management, driven by the EGRP II training, which has rekindled her enthusiasm and equipped her with practical tools. Previously, she faced challenges in engaging learners effectively, often relying on traditional methods that were less interactive. She reflects,

"The teacher in me woke up. I am not a frustrated teacher anymore. I know what to do, which material I should use."

This newfound confidence is evident in her adoption of some routines and methodologies in her lesson.

One key change is her use of ability-based grouping, particularly for GGR. The teacher now employs a GGR checklist to track learners' reading progress and group them according to their abilities, rather than strictly by grade. She explains,

"I didn't know that I should use a checklist, I use it to mark where learners are so that when they improve I can move them to different groups. Now I know it's okay for learners to read at their own level ... There's a grade 2 child that I teach with the Grade 1s. She does work for both grade 2 and grade 1."

Another change involves the integration of structured phonics based teaching, which has made lessons more interactive. Previously, her phonics instruction was teacher-centred,
“Before, I used to write on the board, read it to them, and then get them to write ... now I know they have to get involved and talk.”

This shift fosters active engagement, helping her manage the classroom by keeping learners focused during phonics activities.

The teacher also employs occupational tasks to manage the multigrade classroom, assigning independent work to one grade while providing direct instruction to the other. The EGRP II materials, such as charts and anthologies, support this strategy,
“The materials are very helpful. We now have charts to help us”.

The teacher however acknowledges the ongoing challenge of curriculum pacing:
“I’m always behind on the curriculum; I don’t like to move when learners have not understood.”

Lesson content and methodology

In the multigrade lessons the teacher applied strategies that they were recently trained on (i.e. teaching handwriting). She followed the routine, starting with a song or rhyme, modelling how learners should write while asking questions to ensure understanding and allowing learners to write from writing charts.

While the application of SR could be strengthened the teacher demonstrated a clear understanding of the requirements. She attempted to give the other grade a writing task while focusing on one grade (although SR is considered a whole class activity in multigrade classes). She attempted to build learners’ vocabulary while showing sight words and she read and ensured understanding by asking questions.

In the grade 3 classroom, the lesson content was aligned with the EGRP framework for Term 3, focusing on phonics, vocabulary development, and Group Guided Reading (GGR). The teacher reinforced good language practice by encouraging learners to respond in full sentences during the English lesson.

Classroom management during the GGR session proved difficult at times. While the teacher focused on the small group, learners completing occupational tasks were occasionally noisy and appeared uncertain about the instructions.

5. Learner Perceptions

Learners expressed that they view reading as important because it enables them to learn and will help them in future workplaces, where reading skills are essential. They highlighted their enjoyment of reading specific books, including *Tapelo Otswara Legodu*, *Dinotsi*, and *Mama Afrika*. In discussing *Mama Afrika*, they explained that they found the story particularly interesting because one of the characters spoke a different language and the text included lyrics in Xhosa. Learners’ enjoyment of these books suggests that exposure to multilingual and culturally diverse texts can spark curiosity and deepen engagement with reading. The learners demonstrated genuine curiosity about the books they had read, and

while retelling the stories they eagerly engaged the interviewer with many questions of their own,

“Can you read that for us, what does it mean?”

The learners expressed that they enjoy reading in both English and Setswana. They explained that Setswana is easier for them to understand and requires little assistance, while English is more challenging but rewarding. They shared that they feel a sense of accomplishment when they learn new English words, and they are proud when their teacher praises them for answering in English. They also mentioned that they are able to transfer this knowledge and use it at home, which makes them feel confident in their learning.

“When the teacher says ‘well done’ after I answer in English, I am happy.”

“I use English at home sometimes, and my family laughs because they see I am learning.”

When reflecting on how they are taught to read, learners explained that their teacher uses phonics methods such as “A- E- I- O- U” especially for those who cannot yet read. They also noted that the teacher provides easier books for struggling learners to ensure that all learners are able to participate at their own level. In GGR, learners described that each member of the group reads individually while the teacher listens and provides help when needed. They said that they enjoy this activity because they are able to assist one another and learn from their peers.

The learners also reported enjoying Shared Reading sessions with the Big Books. They explained that they liked sitting together, listening to the teacher, and learning new things from the stories. They described these sessions as fun, emphasizing the enjoyment of shared participation and the explanations the teacher provided while reading aloud,

“We like just listening to the teacher. We sit on the carpet and just listen. It’s nice when the teacher is just reading and we are only listening”.

“Sometimes when we read the big book, I don’t want the story to finish because it’s nice”

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

The teacher faces significant challenges in addressing the diverse reading abilities in her multigrade classroom of 13 Grade 1 and 11 Grade 2 learners, particularly in EFAL, where fluency is nearly nonexistent. She notes, *“Learners struggle with English. I feel I am a failure when they do not understand”* with only two learners per grade reading words in EFAL, compared to three Grade 1s and five Grade 2s in Setswana.

Differentiating instruction is complex, as seen when Grade 1s became disruptive after completing their occupational task, straining her ability to manage both grades. Curriculum pressures exacerbate this,

“I’m always behind on the curriculum; I don’t like to move when learners have not understood.”

The EGRP II training has introduced ability-based grouping, enabling her to teach a Grade 2 learner with Grade 1s: *“Now I know it’s okay for learners to read at their own level.”* However, a broken tablet and the large class size hinder her ability to tailor instructions and so limits her ability to fully address the wide range of reading needs.

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The teachers demonstrated general awareness of EGRP II routines and requirements, making use of lesson plans, phonics, Shared Reading, Group Guided Reading, and occupational tasks. However, their understanding and application of these practices varied. In some cases, routines such as handwriting techniques, management of independent tasks, and the Question of the Day were not fully or consistently implemented. The teacher's interview with the grade 3 teacher confirmed that while EGRP has strengthened her understanding of methods she had previously used, certain components remain unclear and support is sometimes limited. Overall, awareness of EGRP II was evident, but full and consistent implementation across grades is still a challenge.

“I was using these methods even before EGRP but now it has refined everything. My understanding is much better” - Grade 3 Teacher

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching

Teacher

The Foundation Phase is staffed by two teachers. One teacher is responsible for teaching the multigrade class of Grade 1 and 2, while the other teaches Grade 3 and also serves as the grade head. The Grade 3 teacher brings 19 years of experience in the Foundation Phase. Both teachers have attended EGRP II training sessions, with the Grade 3 teacher noting that she missed one session due to rain and flooding.

Curriculum oversight is provided by the principal and the Department Head, who monitors compliance through weekly report submissions. While no formal PLC is currently functioning, teachers indicated that they rely on their EGRP coach and occasional cluster workshops for support. Additional assistance is provided through a teacher's assistant, who plays an important role in supporting reading activities and helping manage discipline, particularly in the multigrade class.

Use of LTSM

Teachers reported making consistent use of the EGRP II lesson plans and reading books in their preparation and teaching. In the Grade 3 class, posters and charts were displayed on the walls, and a reading corner was available. The multigrade classroom was colourful, well organised, and neatly labelled with EGRP II materials, with books arranged in a dedicated corner and charts and teaching aids displayed on the walls to support learning.

Big Books and DBE workbooks were actively used during Shared Reading and occupational tasks, while occupational cards from EGRP were also employed in the multigrade classroom. Teachers highlighted the value of EGRP resources in a rural setting,

explaining that the books exposed learners to knowledge and stories they would otherwise not have access to.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

The Grade 3 teacher reported that her tablet was damaged by rain and is no longer functional, which limits her access to the platform. She added that she does not currently use her phone or any other device to access the EGRP platform but felt that with support she would be able to manage it.

9. Key features of the school's management and leadership

The principal described his leadership style as democratic, explaining that he aims to involve others in decision-making processes rather than making decisions alone. He acknowledged that disciplining staff when they are in the wrong can be difficult, but he emphasised that he always tries to address issues by speaking to colleagues in a respectful, adult manner. He highlighted that he operates an open-door policy, encouraging staff to approach him freely with concerns or ideas, and seeks to foster a culture of openness and dialogue within the school. Teachers noted that the principal also provides instructional leadership by conducting classroom observations, giving feedback on lesson delivery, and offering advice on how to support struggling learners. In addition, he plays a central role in assessment oversight, with staff explaining that he monitors the use of assessment templates and provides direction on what should be prioritised in learner evaluation.

10. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

Early grade teachers receive support primarily through the Department Head's weekly monitoring and the principal's feedback, which includes classroom observations and guidance on assisting struggling learners. The teacher did share that the subject advisor does organise workshops once a term but that there is a challenge with distance and therefore they seldom attend the workshops. She further explained that at times when she did attend the workshop, the agenda was to discuss common tasks and assessments. She found these useful. No school based workshops were conducted. And she is not part of any WhatsApp group PLC.

11. Workbook analysis

Including filling in the table (with colour coding – red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved)

Table 3: Learner workbook analysis findings

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3

Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Partial, only marked in T1	Only marked for one learner	Yes, in red pen	yes , in red pen
Exercise books up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes, teacher leaves guiding comments on books and learners write corrections	Yes, teacher leaves guiding comments on books and learners write corrections	Yes	Yes
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.	<i>T2W5 phonic found 1 week earlier but did not make learners write sentences</i> <i>T2 W9 work not found in exercise book</i> <i>DBE exercises found</i>	<i>T2 W5 work not found in exercise book</i> <i>T2 W5 evidence found</i> <i>DBE exercises found</i>	<i>T2 W5 exercise not found. "Mph"</i> <i>T2 W9 work not found- DBE not available</i>	<i>T2 W5 found 1 week earlier</i> <i>T3 W1 work not found</i>
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Trackers not used	Trackers not used	Tracker not used	Tracker not used

12. Community engagement

Parental engagement at the school is limited. While some parents attend meetings, learner absenteeism remains a persistent challenge, with Data Driven Districts (DDD) reports warning that certain learners are at risk of dropping out. In response, the school has planned meetings with parents and has reached out to a social worker to assist in addressing these issues. A further difficulty arises from the community's lack of access to healthcare, as parents often cannot provide proof that a child was sick or had attended a clinic, making it harder to justify absenteeism.

Despite these challenges, the school is located in a safe community and has not experienced incidents of crime or break-ins. The SIOC has also partnered with the school on occasion, using the premises to host community initiatives such as health drives, where doctors and healthcare staff are brought in to provide services. These initiatives not only benefit the community but also strengthen the school's role as a central and trusted space within the area.

The principal explained that funding allocations from the Department are tied to learner enrolment numbers, which leaves the school at a disadvantage given its small role. She highlighted the need for additional assistants to better support teachers and learners, noting that donations and community partnerships are often essential to supplement what the Department provides.

13. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

Reading outcomes: In 2024, reading levels were amongst the weakest observed in the sample schools, with very few learners able to read in EFAL. For example, only one Grade 2 learner could read a paragraph in English, and only ten Grade 3 learners could read fluently in EFAL. In Setswana, results were stronger, with most learners able to read fluently by Grade 3. By 2025, EFAL remained a serious challenge, with only two Grade 1 learners and five Grade 2 learners able to read words, and five Grade 3 learners able to read fluently. However, Setswana reading outcomes showed improvement, with fourteen Grade 3 learners reported as fluent. Learners themselves expressed greater enjoyment of reading in 2025, saying they were proud when praised for their English, while also valuing Setswana for ease of understanding.

Quality of teaching: In 2024, teachers were often confused about how to apply EGRP protocols, especially in EFAL, leading to misused LTSMs, over-extended group sessions, and idle learners. Lessons were sometimes poorly paced, and teachers lacked confidence in their delivery. By 2025, training and experience had clearly had an impact. The multigrade teacher described the programme as having “woken up the teacher in me,” and applied ability-based grouping and more structured phonics. Nevertheless, classroom management remained a challenge, particularly when one grade finished tasks before the other. In Grade 3, lessons were more structured and time-conscious in 2025 than in 2024, with better alignment to EGRP routines, but discipline and pacing still presented difficulties.

Use of LTSM: In 2024, teachers welcomed the arrival of LTSMs but often used them incorrectly, for example using the Big Book with small groups instead of whole-class Shared Reading. By 2025, there was more consistent use of lesson plans, Big Books, DBE workbooks, occupational cards, and posters, especially in the multigrade classroom, which was described as rich in EGRP II materials. The Grade 3 classroom continued to lag behind, displaying fewer resources. Learners highlighted that the books exposed them to knowledge and stories otherwise unavailable in their rural setting, suggesting greater appreciation of the materials compared to the previous year.

Tablets and planning tools: In 2024, teachers and the principal expressed excitement about the possibility of receiving tablets, seeing them as a way to ease planning and access songs and rhymes. By 2025, however, the Grade 3 teacher’s tablet was damaged by water, and she was no longer accessing the platform, although she indicated she could re-onboard with support. Neither year showed consistent use of learner trackers, despite teachers acknowledging their importance.

Leadership and support: In 2024, the principal was described as “clueless” about EGRP II, confusing it with EGRA and rarely observing lessons. He admitted to being overwhelmed

by teaching and management responsibilities in a small school and felt neglected by the Department. By 2025, the same principal described his leadership style as democratic, maintaining an open-door policy and providing instructional leadership through classroom observations, assessment oversight, and feedback to teachers. Teachers confirmed that he monitored their work regularly, while additional support came from the Department Head and EGRP coach. Education assistants also played an important role in supporting reading activities and behaviour management, especially in the multigrade class.

Community engagement: In 2024, parents were seen as disengaged, often doing homework for their children and failing to provide school supplies, with gambling and alcohol noted as prevalent problems in the community. By 2025, parental engagement remained limited, but the school was actively addressing absenteeism through meetings with parents and collaboration with a social worker. The Data Driven Districts (DDD) reports were used to track learners at risk of dropping out, reflecting a more structured response. The school community was also described as safe, with positive partnerships such as SIOC health drives that brought doctors to the school, strengthening its role as a trusted community hub.

Overall reading culture: In 2024, learners expressed little enjoyment of Group Guided Reading and preferred Setswana because English felt too difficult. By 2025, however, learners were far more positive about reading, saying that they enjoyed both English and Setswana, were curious about multilingual texts, and felt proud when recognised for their efforts in English. They highlighted specific books they enjoyed, such as *Mama Afrika*, and expressed enthusiasm for Shared Reading sessions where they could sit together and listen to their teacher. This shift suggests that, despite persistent weaknesses in EFAL fluency, the overall reading culture at the school had become more positive and engaging by 2025.

received EGRP II training, but is no longer teaching in that phase. She further indicated that she hopes to transfer to another school in search of a permanent and more stable post. This creates a double risk to sustainability: the current FP teacher is leaving due to retirement, while the principal, the only other staff member with EGRP II training in the phase, is also planning to leave. Without a succession plan or efforts to embed the programme more broadly across staff, the school faces the likelihood that much of the training investment will be lost.

School Q

1. Summary of key points

- The learners claimed that due to lack of space their teacher only uses GGR when they are being tested (or when evaluators come to the school!)
- Non-coaching school with high community crime, a break-in stripped 20+ devices (incl. 2 EGRP tablets and EGRP II resources.)
- Staffing changes created a very large Grade 3 class (52 learners) after merging two classes; this drives crowding, behaviour issues and limits GGR/reading-corner setup.
- Due to stolen tablets, most teachers access EGRP II on phones/PCs.
- Low parental attendance/ support, high learner absenteeism.
 - Respondents
- One Setswana Grade 3 lesson was observed
- One English (First Additional Language) Grade 3 lesson was observed
- One Setswana Grade 2 lesson was observed
- One English (First Additional Language) Grade 2 lesson was observed
- Observed teachers were interviewed in depth (3)
- Focus group discussion was conducted with six Grade 3 learners
- The Principal was interviewed
- The Departmental Head was also interviewed separately

2. School context

The non-coaching school is located in a rural village approximately 20 minutes from the town of Kuruman and is approximately 50 years old. The surrounding area experiences a high crime rate (primarily driven by poverty/ unemployment), which has directly impacted the school. Notably, 20 computers and tablets, including two EGRP tablets and a box of EGRP II resources, were stolen from the school's safe room, which was drilled into.

Despite these challenges, the school is still well-resourced and benefits from donations by numerous companies. It is securely enclosed by a fence with an electric gate, ensuring that all visitors are monitored and required to report to the administrative block upon arrival.

The learner population primarily comes from households where grandparents are the main caregivers, and many parents are very young and are not involved. Community members mainly rely on government grants for financial support.

The school maintains a structured daily schedule with classes and breaks starting on time. It has a reliable water supply from a borehole and operates an active feeding scheme, supported by a well-equipped kitchen and dining area where meals are served to learners.

Educationally, the school participates in various programmes, particularly in the intermediate phase. The school currently has three Grade 1 teachers, as a Grade 3 teacher was reassigned to Grade 1 due to a reduction in Grade 3 enrolment. Approximately half of the foundation phase classrooms feature reading corners, though only one foundation phase classroom displays learner work on its walls.

Table 1: Foundation Phase enrolment and staffing

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	78	59	52	189
Classrooms	3	2	1	6
Teachers	3	2	1	6
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	3	2	1	6
No. of DHs	1			1
Teacher to learner ratio	1: 26	1: 29.5	1: 52	1: 31.5

3. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observation

Grade 2 Setswana First Language Lesson

The Setswana lesson was delivered by a teacher who has been teaching in the foundation phase for seven years.

The teacher started by announcing that they would be covering the lesson. She directed a group of learners to the back of the class, where they eagerly moved to the reading corner, which was equipped with comfortable cushions for them to sit on.

A writing exercise was already written on the board, and the teacher instructed the Educator Assistant to help learners copy it into their books. The EA took an unusually long time distributing the books, which caused the initially quiet class to grow noisy. The EA also struggled to clarify what the learners were supposed to do, resulting in most learners sitting idle during the GGR session.

With the small GGR group, the teacher presented sight words, read them aloud, and placed them on the wall near the learners without explaining their meanings. She mentioned that they knew the words from their pre-read. The learners read the story's title together in chorus and continued reading in chorus for about six minutes. The reading sounded like they were decoding syllables rather than reading whole words. The teacher then invited some learners to break away from the small group and sit closer to her to read. The remaining learners, unable to hear clearly, did not follow along as their peers read. Half of the group read with automaticity, while others took longer to decode words. The teacher monitored their progress using a GGR tracker, and each learner would go back to their seat after reading.

As it was a Friday, the lesson concluded with a spelling test. The teacher read the words and sounded out the syllables as she dictated words containing the sounds "ng" and "th." When all the words were dictated, she wrote the correct spellings on the board, sounding out the syllables in each word. Learners marked each other's work and then wrote their own corrections.

The classroom had learner work displayed on the walls, and learners were seated in their ability groups.

Grade 2 English First Additional Language Lesson

This lesson was delivered by a young teacher who recently graduated and joined the school this year after having worked at another EGRPII school last year.

The teacher organised learners to sit in rows in the classroom. She called learners to the front of the class for Shared Reading, with learners taking their seats on the carpet in the same order they sit in the class.

The lesson commenced with one learner reading the title of the story aloud, followed by the rest of the class reading it in chorus. The teacher then read the story “Zweli Makes a Ball” to the learners. Initially, she did not show the pictures but promptly corrected herself, displaying the images and pointing to them as she read. Some comprehension questions were asked and learners battled to answer them resulting in the teacher answering them herself.

The phonics component introduced the “-ed” sound, with the teacher explaining that it is typically a suffix used to indicate the past tense. The learners were very disengaged and disruptive. The teacher essentially asked questions and answered them herself, she wrote down a few words ending in -ed and made an attempt to engage learners with questions such as “Who can read this word for me?”, “Do you know another word with ‘-ed’ at the end?”. It was evident that learners struggled with English and the teacher also battled with disciplining learners.

The learners were then asked to read the words on the board, and more were engaged at this point of the lesson. One learner would read and the rest would repeat the same word.

The learners displayed disrespectful behaviour, including pulling faces, yawning in the teacher’s face, and continuing to play even after her reprimands.

The writing task was a continuation of the previous lesson, where learners wrote about something they wanted to make. Where they used the following writing frame:

“I am going to need...”

“I can’t wait to see my...”

Although the lesson was structured and the teacher made an attempt at delivering the routines as per the lesson plan. It was highly ineffective and learner engagement was extremely low, even with the teacher codeswitching frequently.

Grade 3 Setswana First Language Lesson

The classroom was not particularly print-rich, with only a few EGRP materials displayed on the walls. The furniture was in poor condition, and the floors were dusty and dirty. Learners were seated in rows arranged according to ability and behaviour: the first section for stronger learners, the middle for those with weaker abilities and the most behavioural

challenges, and the last for learners of average ability. The teacher explained that space constraints were a significant challenge, noting that there was no room to set up a proper reading corner.

The lesson began with a Shared Reading activity. The teacher opened with a short recap on *Matla a ga Neo*, incorporating a brief comprehension discussion to check learner understanding. He asked targeted questions and allowed several learners to respond, prompting them to answer in full sentences.

Following this, he introduced a new story titled *Komputer ke eng?*, which focuses on computers, laptops, and cellphones. Before reading, he engaged the class in a brief discussion about what learners already knew about these devices, allowing them to share their own experiences.

To make the story relatable, the teacher brought his own laptop and other devices into the classroom. As he read, he paused to show learners the actual objects mentioned in the text. For example, when the story referenced typing, he opened the laptop and typed a short sentence so learners could see the letters appear on the screen. When the story mentioned taking a picture, he used a tablet to take a quick class photo. The teacher's story reading was animated and expressive. He moved around the classroom to ensure all learners could see the devices clearly. Learners were highly engaged.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson

The lesson topic was Honesty. The teacher began by introducing the topic and asking learners what "honesty" means. Most learners were unable to read the word at first. The teacher then explained related vocabulary such as "truth" and "honest" to build understanding.

The lesson then moved to the Question of the Day: "Do you think it is okay to tell a lie?" The teacher called learners to the front of the class one by one. Each learner would tick their chosen answer and then say, "I think it is okay/not okay to tell a lie." This activity gave learners the opportunity to practice speaking English in complete sentences.

Each time a learner came up to the front, the whole class would read the question aloud together. After the learner sat down, the class would recite the learner's response, for example: "Learner X thinks it is okay to tell a lie" or "Learner Y thinks it is not okay to tell a lie."

The teacher showed patience with all learners, including those who struggled to speak English. He gently corrected their mistakes and allowed them to try again. Throughout the activity, he followed the correct EGRP protocol for the Listening and Speaking component.

To provide a break, the teacher instructed the class to stretch by playing "Simon Says." After the game, learners moved on to a spelling test. Once the test was completed, they swapped books and marked each other's work.

The final part of the lesson involved shared reading from the Grade 3 Term 3 anthology, "Dev and the Owl Cup." The teacher began by asking comprehension questions before

reading. He made use of props throughout the session, such as tennis balls and stones, to help learners understand the concept of sinking and floating that was in the story. Throughout the session he would pause to check understanding and continue to ask comprehension questions as the reading progressed.

Table 2: Teacher estimates of learner reading ability

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL (singular word)	No. of learners who can read in HL (singular word)
3	52	20	28

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The DH felt strongly that “EGRP II Training has helped teachers with improving classroom arrangement, adherence to routines and the curriculum”. All the teachers felt strongly that the LTSM provided has been instrumental in enhancing instruction and facilitating smoother learning, largely due to the abundance of visual aids that support learner comprehension. EGRP II LTSM were found on all the walls in the Foundation Phase classrooms, although not as visually appealing as the coaching schools visited.

Lesson content and methodology

All the lessons observed were in line with the structured EGRP II lesson plans and the teachers were at the correct point of the curriculum on the day of the visit (Term 3 Week 3, Day 5).

In the Grade 2 classes observed teachers followed the EGRP lesson plans closely and they made an attempt to implement the routines to the best of their ability. While the application of GGR in the Grade 2 Setswana lesson did not reflect a strong adherence to the routines and norms of the methodology, the teacher noted,

“Before when we were at training I used to wonder how you can work with a small group while also not neglecting the rest of the class. I failed to do it before, but now I am excelling at it. I understand the usefulness of occupational tasks.” - Grade 2 Sestwana Teacher

The Grade 2 EFAL teacher on the other hand adhered to routines but her delivery and effectiveness of the lesson fell short due her inability to manage learner ill-discipline and to make the lesson understandable to learners who are not exposed to the English language.

“My learners are still very slow, and they don’t listen” - Grade 2 English FAL Teacher

In the Grade 3 class observed, the teacher was following the EGRP lesson plan. In the English lesson, the teacher was a week ahead of the curriculum (Term 3, Week 4, Day 5). The routine was implemented well, with the “Question of the Day” used to encourage learners to respond in English, which supported the development of their listening and speaking skills.

For the Setswana lesson, the teacher was on track with the curriculum (Term 3, Week 3, Day 5). Shared reading was conducted effectively, with good practice demonstrated

through the use of intonation and expression. The teacher also included practical examples to strengthen learner understanding. However, he noted challenges in implementing GGR due to the large class size and lack of resources.

“I have 52 in the class, I don’t have enough books and don’t have space to have a reading corner.” – Grade 3 Setswana Teacher

Learner perceptions

Learners shared that they believe reading is important because it helps them learn, behave well, and succeed academically, which will allow them to pass in school and build a better future. They linked reading to overall success in life, including being able to achieve personal goals and improve their living conditions.

“So everything can go well, your school can go well, and you can build a house.”

When discussing language preference, some learners said they preferred both Setswana and English so they could speak many languages, while others favoured English because they saw it as a gateway to travel and future career opportunities. Several linked English to the possibility of living or working abroad.

“I like English because when you have a business one day you will be able to speak to white people.”

“If I know English I can be a policeman in America.”

Their favourite books included *A Shark in the Pool* and *Khumo’s New Friend*. Most learners preferred reading by themselves rather than being read to by the teacher. They explained that self-reading allows them to see pictures, practice difficult words, and explore stories more independently.

“When (teacher name) reads for us we don’t get to practice the hard words. We want to see ourselves, press the computer ourselves.”

“We want to see the picture to see that the story is true.”

Learners also noted that they no longer participate in Group Guided Reading (GGR) because there is no space in the classroom. The only time they read for the teacher is when they are being tested. They explained that in Grade 2, they regularly did GGR, but this year it is no longer part of their lessons.

4. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

Addressing the wide range of learner abilities in the classroom is a critical challenge at this school, particularly given large class sizes and resource constraints. The EGRP II supports differentiated instruction through phonics-based teaching and GGR, enabling teachers to tailor literacy activities to varying skill levels. A Grade 2 teacher highlighted the pivotal role of the EA in managing this diversity. She explained that when she focuses on weaker learners, who require intensive support to recognise letter sounds and syllables (a time-consuming process) the TA works with more advanced learners, listening to their reading or monitoring their writing. This division of labour ensures that all learners receive

targeted attention suited to their abilities. Sometimes the TA is the one who works with the weaker learners because “she might be understood more”. Although this practice was not directly observed, the teacher emphasised that she adapts instruction to each learner’s level, with weaker learners focusing on foundational phonics and advanced learners engaging in independent reading or writing tasks.

The Grade 1 teacher also mentioned having a range of books beyond the EGRP books, some of which are at grade R level, which helps learners not feel discouraged or overwhelmed.

The Grade 3 teacher explained that it was difficult to manage the wide range of reading abilities in the class, largely due to the class size and learner behaviour. He explained that learners with lower abilities were often the most disruptive and least engaged in lessons. This made it challenging to include them effectively, and as a result, he tended to focus more on the stronger group, who were answering questions and showing willingness to participate, while the weaker group remained passive.

5. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The Foundation Phase Head of Department (DH) demonstrates a clear understanding of the Early Grade Reading Programme II (EGRP II) and a newfound openness to its implementation. She articulates that EGRP II aims to “develop learners’ reading ability through specific reading strategies,” with the ultimate goal of enabling them to become proficient readers. The DH places particular emphasis on the phonics approach, supported by various LTSM, such as Big Books, anthologies, and phonics charts, to build learner fluency. She notes that she has used a phonics approach since the start of her teaching career, evidenced by syllable charts placed on each learner’s desk. However, she admits to initial resistance to EGRP II in 2024, only recently recognising its benefits for learners. Her primary challenge in implementing the programme is time management, particularly in balancing its structured requirements with classroom demands.

Other Foundation Phase teachers share a similar understanding of EGRP II’s purpose but began implementation in 2024 and are facing several challenges. These include difficulties in managing GGR alongside occupational tasks, which they are beginning to get better at.

6. Resourcing of early grade teaching.

Teacher

The Foundation Phase at the school is staffed by six teachers, a reduction from the previous year’s seven due to one teacher’s resignation. Previously, the staffing structure included two Grade 1 teachers, two Grade 2 teachers, and three Grade 3 teachers. Following the resignation and a lower number of Grade 3 learners, the SMT decided to merge the two Grade 3 classes into one, resulting in a single Grade 3 class of 52 learners. One of the former Grade 3 teachers was reassigned to teach Grade 1 to accommodate an enrolment of 71 learners in that grade (leaving classes of 26 in Grade 1). This reassignment has placed significant pressure on the Grade 3 teacher, who is struggling to manage the large class size of 52 learners and struggles to implement certain methodologies (ie. GGR). This challenge is compounded by the school having done subject

teaching in the past year. Only two teachers are currently teaching the grade they did in the previous year.

In terms of qualifications the school only has qualified teachers: one Foundation Phase teacher holds an Advanced Certificate in Education, three possess bachelor's degrees, while one is currently pursuing a postgraduate diploma and another is pursuing a bachelor's degree. The Foundation Phase includes one male teacher, and the youngest teacher (with only two years of teaching experience) has been at the school for one year, suggesting a mix of experienced and relatively new educators.

The staffing adjustments and large class sizes, particularly in Grade 3, highlight challenges in resource allocation and teacher capacity which impact the quality of early grade teaching and classroom management.

Use of LTSM

Teachers utilised the EGRP II LTSM as intended. Classroom walls are updated with phonics displays, the question of the day, and a speaking frame, all aligned with the current theme and lesson plan. During lessons, teachers employed EGRP II Big Books, anthologies, and handwriting charts, demonstrating a comfort and consistency of using these materials.

Of the three Foundation Phase teachers observed and four interviewed, only one consistently used EGRP II trackers. This Grade 2 teacher habitually employed the curriculum tracker from the management book, making copies for filing purposes. Additionally, she created her own Group-Guided Reading (GGR) trackers, which she printed for each group in her class, showcasing a proactive approach to monitoring learner progress.

"Curriculum trackers were not introduced to us by the EGRP. They are there on the ATP, this is something I've been using from before which made it easy to start EGRP ones... Using the tracker is very simple after delivering a lesson, I just mark that I did it. Then the next day I just make sure I've covered the necessary work from before. I never skip, unless it is on phonics and we have already covered that sound."

The other teachers along with the DH have not started using the curriculum tracker but most reported making use of the GGR checklist. The DH was under the impression that none of the teachers made use of the curriculum tracker.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

All the Foundation Phase teachers in this school make use of EGRP II platform on tablets, except for two (a Grade 1 and the Grade 3 teacher). Although all the teachers are able to access the platform should they need to.

"We told our trainer that the tablets were stolen when we had a robbery, thinking that they might give the two teachers new ones. But the trainer showed them that they can use it on their phones or on a computer." - Departmental Head

The EGRP II web platform's adaptability ensures that teachers can continue programme implementation even when tablets are not functional, making it a highly effective tool.

The interviewed teachers who had their tablets at school were all able to open the tablet and navigate to their lesson plan of the day, even explaining the different features of the platform.

For planning purposes, most teachers only plan for the week ahead and do not look at the activities to be covered for the term.

"I always have my tablet with me on Fridays, and I do my planning when I get home or over the weekend... we rarely ever plan together at school but if someone needs something I always help them." - Grade 2 Setswana Teacher

Speaking broadly on the topic of using technology, the one of the teachers mentioned,

"To be honest, before EGRP II I did not teach. I found videos of someone else teaching on YouTube and [I] projected them using one of the [four] projectors in the school. Then all I would do is give my learners writing tasks and monitor them. This also made English songs and rhymes easier for the learners... I do not know what other [Foundation Phase] teachers used" - Foundation Phase Teacher

7. Key features of the school's management and leadership

During the interview, the principal explained that he aims to be supportive of Foundation Phase teachers by keeping up to date with their work through regular reporting. Reports are checked every Monday, and as direct classroom visits are discouraged by SADTU, he is only able to conduct observations during the QMS process. He therefore relies heavily on feedback from the Department Head, who serves as the head of curriculum.

The principal described his leadership style as situational. In some cases, such as the requirement for the timely submission of reports, he is firm and non-negotiable. However, in most areas he adopts a democratic approach, involving staff in decision-making and keeping them informed of developments. He noted that he tries to support teachers during periods of transition, such as the introduction of the BELA Act, by ensuring they are aware of changes and not caught off guard.

8. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

Other than curriculum support offered by the DH there is minimal support offered by the SMT. With members of the SMT feeling as though "[they] are the same as PL1 teachers" and are not involved in real decision making on matters that affect their phases. The DH conducts the bi-annual QMS classroom observations and does not have time to observe lessons. A teacher described that,

"Our DH visits us twice in a year for QMS but she knows what is happening in our classes generally because we discuss our curriculum coverage. When she is passing our classes she'll also look at the board to see if we are not doing work from previous weeks." - Grade 2 Teacher

Teachers at the school report that there is no formal space at the school level for collaborative learning or sharing of best practices. However, they engage in informal lesson sharing with one another, indicating a degree of collegial support despite the lack of structured opportunities.

The school participates in a Cluster Professional Learning Community (PLC) comprising three schools, established this year by a language expert. The PLC meets monthly, with EGRP II trainers attending and presenting at these meetings. However, most teachers express dissatisfaction with the frequency and relevance of these meetings, feeling they do not adequately address their needs. Below are quotes extracted from interviews with teachers:

“We decide on doing things together but it never happens. We agreed to set assessments together but we will only meet in two weeks and we that will be after the assessments” - Grade 1 Teacher

“The useful workshop are the ones with the EGRP II trainer because they are very practical and we discuss teaching strategies which are useful” - Grade 1 Teacher
“The workshops cause us to fall behind on the curriculum. We are already struggling” - Grade 2 Teacher

“As teachers from different schools we have different challenges. Sometimes most teachers want to discuss topics I’ve already understood. I am better off discussing with other teachers in my own school” - Grade 2 Teacher

9. Workbook analysis

The analysis of Grade 2 learner books corroborated the teachers’ accounts of their practices regarding curriculum coverage. The books demonstrated that work was completed within the expected timeframes. Additionally, teachers consistently marked the books and provided corrections/

red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes (T3)	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Marked, and corrected in red	Marked in red	Marked in red	Marked in red
Exercise books up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes	Yes, some by learner	Yes

Correction of exercises with guide comments	Comments offered in class, corrections written by learner	Yes Some corrections in red in, some by learner	Corrections but no comments	Corrections
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.	On track. Term 2 Week 5 and Week 9 Exercises found within the same week	On track. Term 2 Week 5 and Week 9 Exercises found within the same week Term 3 Week 2 DBE work also found within same week	Term 2 week 5 Exercise not found Term 2 week 9 Exercises found in same week	On Track Term 2, week 5 exercises found within same week
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Tracker not used	Yes	Tracker not used	Tracker not used

10. Community engagement

The school is situated in a challenging community context, which directly affects levels of parental involvement. It was reported that only about 40% of parents attend school meetings, and when they do, discussions are often dominated by political issues rather than matters related to learner progress or wellbeing. Parents were also described as being defensive, frequently speaking on behalf of their children even when the learners are in the wrong.

Cooperation from parents is limited, as seen in situations such as the introduction of a new school uniform, which was agreed upon but not honoured by many families. A large number of learners live with grandparents, and there are also many child-headed households. These circumstances contribute to high rates of absenteeism, as children are often required to care for younger siblings at home.

11. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

- Classroom environment: In 2024, classrooms were not print-rich and notably lacked dedicated reading corners, with teachers reportedly hesitant to display posters due to a lack of lamination sheets. There was a marked improvement; approximately half of the foundation phase classrooms now feature reading corners, and EGRP II LTSMs, including phonics displays and speaking frames, were found on all Foundation Phase classroom walls. Learner work was also displayed in some classrooms. Seating arrangements in 2024 were universally by ability group, a

practice that largely continued into 2025, though differentiation in tasks was not always observed.

- **Teacher capacity & support:** In 2024, the Grade 2 teachers were less confident, and two elderly teachers nearing retirement were identified as "blocks" to innovation and EGRP II implementation. The DH, being a full-time teacher, lacked time for regular lesson observations and relied on checking learner books. Critically, there was no formal school-level collaborative learning space PLC for teachers. While this year, the DH still faced time constraints for lesson observations and minimal support from SMT, a significant development was the establishment of a new external Cluster PLC comprising three schools that meet monthly with EGRP II trainers. Despite some teacher dissatisfaction with the frequency and perceived relevance of these meetings, they acknowledged the value of the practical teaching strategies discussed during workshops with EGRP II trainers. The school also saw a reduction in staff from seven to six teachers due to a resignation, and only two teachers were teaching the same grade as the previous year, indicating some staffing volatility.
- **Quality of teaching:** The 2024 baseline revealed a general non-adherence to EGRP protocols and routines, with teachers selectively adopting elements they favoured while omitting others, and no evidence of curriculum tracker use. Shared Reading was observed, but not entirely in line with EGRP protocols. At the endline, there was a significant shift towards compliance: all observed lessons were consistently in line with structured EGRP II lesson plans, and teachers were found to be at the correct curriculum point. The DH expressed a newfound openness to EGRP II and credited the training for improving classroom arrangement, adherence to routines, and curriculum coverage.
- **Learner outcomes:** In 2024, learners were generally engaged and enthusiastic, with a pleasing reading standard. They recognised the importance of reading, particularly in English, for their future aspirations. Workbook analysis from 2024, however, showed that only Term 3 workbooks were consistently up to date, with inconsistent marking and partial corrections often done by learners themselves without guiding comments. By contrast, 2025 observations presented a mixed picture of learner engagement, with the Grade 2 EFAL lesson notably experiencing high disengagement and disruptive behaviour, and the teacher struggling to make content comprehensible. Furthermore, many Grade 3 EFAL learners initially struggled to read basic words. Nonetheless, an apparent positive change was evident in workbook management in 2025: work was consistently completed within expected timeframes, and teachers routinely marked books and provided corrections, a significant improvement from the previous year. Differentiated instruction was also observed, with EAs supporting varying abilities and a Grade 1 teacher using Grade R-level books for struggling learners.

School R

1. Summary of key points

- This large school is well-maintained, but tensions between teachers and the principal, as well as union restrictions, undermine her ability to monitor the implementation of EGRP
- The teachers are committed and have print-rich classrooms, supplemented with their own resources
- Implementation of EGRP II protocols vary a lot between teachers, and while this is a coaching school chorus reading during GGR is still an issue
- Use of the tablets is poor with some resistance and no school-level culture of use to plan or even access WhatsApp group videos
- The coach is impacting positively although there are some inconsistencies in her interventions and advice and she needs to let teachers reflect more during conferencing
- Most teachers and learners at the school are more comfortable with Afrikaans and English which affects the effectiveness of lessons.

2. Respondents

- A Grade 3 Setswana and English FAL lesson was observed (delivered by one teacher, other teacher was absent) alongside the EGRP II Literacy Coach
- Grade 3 teacher was interviewed
- One Grade 2 Setswana lesson was observed
- One Grade 2 English FAL lesson was observed
- Two Grade 2 teachers were interviewed
- Focus group discussion was conducted with seven Grade 3 learners
- Deputy principal (not officially appointed) was interviewed
- EGRP II Coach was observed before, during and after lesson

3. School context

School R is a large no-fee township school in District B with 7 foundation phase classes. The school is generally well maintained. Internal and external walls in the school are built with clay face bricks that have been painted with enamel needing very little maintenance and no repainting. The main (visible) areas in the school yard are very tidy with no litter, however there are spots in the school that need more tidying up. The school only has a playground for Grade R learners and the football pitch is flooded and abandoned. The school benefits from basic services, including running water, electricity, and clean toilets connected to the municipal sewage system.

The community surrounding the school is mainly RDP housing and there are very high levels of unemployment. An estimated 60-70% of learners come from families that rely on social grants, with many children cared for by grandparents even though their own parents are alive. 80% of parents are not involved in school activities and school fundraising efforts can only get up to R15 per learner for civvies and other forms of fundraising. Despite all these challenges, the school maintains an orderly schedule with classes starting and ending on time

Table 1: Foundation Phase learner enrolment and staffing

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	93	78	86	257
Classrooms	3	2	2	7
Teachers	3	2	2	7
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	3	2	2	7
No. of DHs	1			1
Teacher to learner ratio	1: 31	1: 39	1: 43	1: 36.8

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Before 2016, Foundation Phase mathematics was taught in both English and Setswana. The principal and teachers discussed at length the difficulties they faced in adjusting to teaching exclusively in Setswana, especially considering that the community speaks Afrikaans and English, and both learners and teachers struggled to adapt to “long and complex” Setswana number names. These challenges with the Setswana language still persist. During the focus group, learners also expressed feeling more comfortable interacting with teachers in English due to their exposure to English media such as cartoons and shows.

Despite these linguistic challenges, teachers in the school consistently ensured their classrooms were welcoming and aided learning. While the EGRP II programme provided additional resources, teachers emphasised that these only supplemented what they had already personally funded.

Lesson Observation

Grade 2 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The Grade 2 Setswana HL lesson was delivered by a teacher who had recently returned from a week-long absence due to a family funeral.

The lesson began with the teacher introducing a discussion poster. She explained key vocabulary using a mix of everyday Setswana phrases and more formal vocabulary, helping learners understand the meaning of new words. Learners then read aloud words containing the "kg" sound.

The teacher moved to the board and wrote down words as learners called them out, encouraging active participation and reinforcing letter-sound correspondence. She then prepared the class for GGR by first clearly explaining the occupational tasks to the rest of the learners before moving a group of higher-performing learners to the reading corner.

Initially, learners read in chorus, but the coach intervened during the lesson, reminding the teacher of the correct GGR procedure. The teacher adjusted accordingly, allowing each learner to read individually while she tracked their progress using the tracker tool. The group selected for GGR showed confidence and fluency.

Later in the interview when asked about curriculum coverage and a plan to catch up, the teacher explained that she plans to “squeeze” the first and second weeks’ content into a single week by combining the related phonics sounds from both. For example, when teaching sounds like “kg” and “kgw”, which are phonetically and structurally similar, she can introduce them together within the same lesson cycle.

Grade 2 English First Additional Language Lesson

The EFAL lesson focused on the theme of “compassion.” The teacher greeted learners and began with an original song she created, calling all learners to the front to sing and act out the words. While the activity was creative and engaging, it consumed a significant portion of time, creating pressure within the already tight EGRP schedule.

Following the song, the teacher introduced vocabulary and then moved on to the “Question of the Day” activity: “How do you feel when you are excluded?” Learners were called to the board to tick their responses, but the teacher did not prompt them to speak or elaborate, and so missed a critical opportunity to practice oral language skills.

The coach later addressed this during feedback, noting that the speaking component is essential in Listening and Speaking lessons. The teacher was also unable to produce a lesson plan and had not brought her tablet, which she claimed to use for planning. This raised concerns about her preparedness and consistency in lesson delivery.

After the Question of the Day activity, the teacher called 5 learners to the front of the class to read for the class. The learners each read a portion of a story from the Anthology. This was not part of the EGRP routine for the Listening and Speaking session but the teacher was unprepared for the lesson and tried to fill in gaps.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The lesson began with an engaging discussion prompted by a poster about celebrations and parties. The teacher used flashcards to introduce theme-related vocabulary, guiding learners to provide meanings for each word. This led to an in-depth exploration of invitation card components, where the teacher seized the opportunity to reinforce the concept of time, connecting literacy to mathematics. Teaching aids, including a gift box, clock, and invitation card, supplemented the EGRP II LTSM, enriching the discussion. The lively exchange extended to party activities, with learners spontaneously singing songs, creating a dynamic and joyful classroom atmosphere.

The teacher transitioned to phonics by introducing the “ei” sound using a phonic frieze, linking it to the celebration theme through a discussion of party salads and their ingredients, leading learners to the word “eiye” (onion). The teacher then took out approximately 20 flashcards featuring words with the “ei” sound, with learners explaining the meaning of each word and the teacher providing support when needed. An interactive activity required learners to select a flashcard, read the word aloud to the class, and identify whether the “ei” sound appeared at the beginning, middle, or end of the word then the teacher would paste it in its correct spot on the board. The class repeated each word, reinforcing pronunciation. For learners unable to read a word, the teacher prompted them to point to the “ei” sound

and specify its position, after which the class read the word in chorus. This approach ensured all learners were involved.

In the GGR component, the teacher assigned an occupational task for the whole class to copy the “ei” words from the board into their exercise books, keeping all learners engaged throughout the session, though most did not complete the task due to its length. The classroom was well-managed, with minimal disruptions, reflecting effective discipline and organisation. A reading group, drawn from various table groups, was instructed to go to the reading corner. All learners had a clear awareness of their reading group. At the start of GRR, the teacher introduced sight words and provided definitions before having the learners read from the uLwazi Lwethu Anthologies in chorus reading. However, this approach went against the guidelines they were trained on in the EGRP II where learners are to read in turn. The learners read the words by their syllables during, though some proficient and impatient readers preferring to read full words, occasionally moved ahead of the group. A few learners repeated words without reading from the book, indicating varying engagement levels. The teacher concluded with comprehension questions, which learners answered correctly despite the varied fluency and syllabic reading. The lesson took 48 minutes.

Grade 3 English First Additional Language Lesson

The lesson began with the teacher calling the whole class to join the small reading group at the reading corner. An easel displaying the EFAL Big Book “Stone Soup” was placed in front of the class. The teacher initiated the session by prompting two learners to recall key details from the story, fostering engagement and allowing them to use prior knowledge. She then read the story aloud, pausing periodically to explain scenes in detail to enhance understanding. Before reading certain pages, she encouraged learners to describe the illustrations to exercise their prediction skills. The teacher also posed comprehension questions to assess learner understanding, she also prompting the learners to think of how they could apply lessons from the story to their lives (i.e “sharing is caring.”) This approach helped learners connect the story to their own experiences.

The lesson culminated in an independent activity where learners were tasked with drawing a picture of a memorable scene from “Stone Soup” and writing a single sentence about it. To support this task, the teacher displayed the Big Book’s illustrations again, allowing learners to revisit key visuals before returning to their seats.

Teacher estimations of readers

The Grade 3 teacher who was interviewed highlighted that the learners in her class read better in English because of the media they are exposed to, estimating that 64% can read for understanding in EFAL and 54% in Setswana.

Table 2: Teacher estimates of learner reading ability

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL	No. of learners who can read in HL
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2 (read with understanding)	43	22	25
3 (read with understanding)	39	25	21

The coach observed two Grade 2 lessons, one Home Language (HL) and one English First Additional Language (EFAL) lesson. Before one of the lessons, she had spoken to the teacher in advance and agreed on the content to be taught. The teacher had unfortunately not prepared for the lesson and could not provide a lesson plan.

During the lessons, she observed the lesson and made notes. These notes mainly recorded what the teacher was doing at each stage of the lesson, often using single words such as “occupational”, “tracker”, or “material.” She then elaborated on these points during the feedback session.

In the feedback sessions, the coach did not begin by asking the teachers to reflect but instead went straight into providing her own feedback. She addressed the issue of the teacher not using all the required LTSM for the lesson, instructing her to display charts with words and corresponding pictures on the wall so that learners could make clear connections when vocabulary was introduced.

The coach also noted that the EFAL teacher did not provide enough opportunities for learners to practice speaking English during the listening and speaking component. She then demonstrated to the teacher by briefly repeating the “question of the day” and allowing learners to respond, giving them more practice in speaking English. In doing so, she modelled the lesson with the teacher’s class.

The coach also commented on the occupational tasks given to the other learners while a group was called to the reading corner for GGR. She noted that the teacher usually differentiates occupational activities but had not done so on this day. This may have been because it was the teacher’s first day back after a week-long leave due to a funeral in her family. The coach asked to see the book from which the teacher sourced occupational tasks. Although it was not part of EGRP, the coach acknowledged that it contained good and appropriate activities and was disappointed that it had not been used during the lesson.

When giving feedback on GGR, the coach pointed out that the teacher had marked some learners as fluent readers when, in fact, a few were not yet fluent. She advised the teacher to pay closer attention to learners’ ability to recognise words without breaking them down, the speed at which they read, and the number of mistakes made.

Finally, the coach addressed handwriting, noting that some learners were writing in cursive before becoming competent in it. She recommended that learners only use cursive during handwriting practice, and at other times they should write in print.

The coach’s role in the classroom also extended to disciplining learners. Given the large class size, she often stepped in to manage behaviour. Learners would also approach her to check their work while the teacher was busy with GGR. After break, the teacher had other

matters to attend and was not in class for an extended time. The coach was present in the class and continued to monitor learners ensuring that they behaved and continued with their work as instructed.

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

According to the teachers the physical classroom environment has not changed too much as a result of the EGRP. However reading corners and their materials were sourced from EGRP (books etc) or as a result of the programme (mats, easels, bookshelves, etc). The programme has reshaped classroom management by introducing structured lesson plans. While the Grade 3 teacher still organised learners in ability groups before the management of the groups and monitoring of learner progress became more structured with interaction and feedback from their coach.

Lesson content and methodology

The lesson content was informed by the ATP/ EGRP lesson plans with the Grade 3 teacher introducing a theme and using teaching aids such as discussion posters, flashcards and teaching aids to support her teaching. The Grade 3 lessons were well paced with a diversity of activities taking place and highly engaged learners.

5. Learner perceptions

When asked why it is important to know how to read, learners gave a variety of answers. Some explained that being able to read would allow them to read confidently on stage. Others said that reading was necessary for learning in general, because if you can read, you can learn new things. One learner added that reading helps you to know your letters and, in turn, to write well.

In terms of language preference, learners were divided. Several preferred English, with one explaining that it would be useful “when I go to other countries,” while another said they already speak a lot of Setswana at home and wanted more time to practice English. One learner preferred Setswana because they found it more difficult and wanted to improve. Another said, “It is the time to learn English,” showing a recognition that school is a key opportunity to develop their English skills.

When talking about books they had read in class, learners mentioned ‘A Vet on the Farm’ and were able to recall the storyline in detail, showing good comprehension. They also mentioned ‘Malatsi a Boikutso a ga Leano’. Their ability to remember key events from the stories indicated not only engagement but also understanding of the material.

On the question of whether they preferred to be read to or to read for themselves, learners expressed a preference for reading independently. They explained that they did not enjoy Group Guided Reading (GGR) because some learners in the group were not fluent, spelling out words slowly before reading them, which they found frustrating.

“We want to read fast, they make us read too slow”

“We like to read for our self because it is more fun when you read alone and learn the words”

Learners also reflected on their progress, noting that in Grade 2 they did not know as many words as they do now. They explain that in Grade 2 the teacher only taught them how to spell words but this year, in Grade 3, the teacher taught them how to read better. They described how their teacher uses the Big Book during lessons, explaining that she sits in front of the class, points at the words while reading, and sometimes shows them the pictures. Learners expressed that they enjoy reading the big book but wish they could read them for themselves.

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

Only a small interaction was observed during the Grade 3 lesson, where the teacher considered learner ability while teaching. Since the Grade 3 learner could not yet read, the teacher only had the learner identify if the sound of interest occurs at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. When asked how she differentiates her teaching, the same teacher showed evidence of the materials (flashcards and sentences) she uses with struggling learners- the phonic cards included Grade 1 level words.

“These are the methods we’ve been using since the 1990s. They really work, EGRP just helped me realise I am on the right track” - Grade 3 teacher on teaching methods.

Some teacher practices did not enable proper screening of learners (i.e. GGR in chorus) because learners merely repeat what others say which does not offer opportunities for the teacher to support the learner within a smaller group context.

Systemic progression policies exacerbate these challenges, as learners advance without mastery, particularly in Setswana due to its complex terminology. The School Based Support Team (SBST) and external Educational Support Services (ESS) are engaged for severe cases, but the ESS team’s limited capacity restricts referrals, leaving teachers to manage most interventions in-class.

Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The principal has a clear understanding of EGRP II’s objectives and requirements. She articulates its focus on improving Setswana as the LOLT, noting that,

“The EGRP focuses on Setswana and provides materials for teachers. Training is intense and kept in tune with teaching in this language and practically showing teachers how to improve their lessons.”

She acknowledges the programme’s role in addressing the province’s struggle with LOLT, particularly since most learners speak Afrikaans at home, and highlights the shift to teaching FP mathematics in Setswana since 2016, with EGRP helping teachers improve their language proficiency and results. The principal is also aware of the programme’s impact on classroom environments, stating,

“Classrooms have always been print rich and the learners can relate to things on the walls. The materials improve the learning experience.”

She actively ensures compliance with EGRP II requirements, such as ensuring “workshops by department are attended every term” and that “curriculum coverage is submitted at the department” using Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs). Her awareness extends to monitoring classroom activities, as she “looks at books and sometimes when passing goes to observe”, though she notes limitations due to union constraints.

The teachers also displayed an understanding of the programme but highlighted challenges such as time lost during training and the amount of paper work that has to be done (i.e. recreation of their own curriculum”.

“We lose a lot of time because of training. We now release learners 30 minutes later in order to catch (up). You feel that you have lost the time.” - Grade 1 teachers

“In Grade 1, two sounds a week is too much, and the ATP requirement is only one sound per week.” - Grade 1 teachers

Resourcing of early grade teaching

Teacher

The Foundation Phase is staffed by seven teachers, supported by one DH and additional staff. Six of the seven teachers hold a BEd or equivalent qualification, while one possesses a diploma. All teachers have attended all the EGRP II training sessions and are mostly teaching the same grades as the previous year, ensuring continuity in their roles. T

The DH oversees FP curriculum compliance, such as submitting coverage reports, though a previously active PLC ceased functioning after the departure of an intermediate phase DH. Additional support includes a mathematics assistant intern, contributing to a maths club, and an EA who alternates weekly among three educators, assisting with tasks like typing flashcards and monitoring learners.

Use of LTSM

“Learners love books and story telling is easier. Even keep reading by themselves after they read the story as part of the lesson” - Grade 2 teacher on EGRP story books

They also recognise the programme’s contribution to classroom resources, stating,

“Classrooms were always print rich, EGRP II added to that... I love that the pictures are colourful,”

With this being one of the schools with the most colourful classrooms teachers were asked about whether this was from the school budget, all of them noted that they spend their own money for materials like printing and laminating with some having purchased their own printers and laminating machines.

“Overall I would say I have spent R5000 if not more for my classroom to look like it does” - Grade 3 Teacher.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

There is a limited adoption of the web platform among educators, primarily due to discomfort with technology. The principal notes that only one teacher actively uses the tablets, stating,

"Most teachers here are scared of computers, even capturing marks they don't do. Maybe the tablets will alleviate that fear."

She acknowledges the tablets' helpful content but highlights a general reluctance among staff to use them.

The Grade 2 teacher expressed disinterest in technology, saying,

"I am not a technology person... I've checked lesson plans before but found hard copies to be better."

She only uses the tablet weekly with colleagues to access materials which are shared with her via WhatsApp. Initially she could not find her password.

The focus group teachers indicate selective use of tablets in the foundation phase based on tech savvyness, with one noting,

"Based on age and tech savvyness, teachers use tablets. For me it's a lot better than heavy books because I walk to school".

but another admitted,

"I don't want to use a tablet. I don't even use the WhatsApp group that's there".

Overall, tablet use is minimal, with most teachers preferring traditional resources due to familiarity and technological apprehension.

Key features of the school's management and leadership

The principal balances democratic and directive leadership styles. She rates her leadership as "7/10 democratic," engaging with her deputy and departmental heads but stipulating expectations when necessary. She noted,

"There are things where you don't need to consult. I am not too democratic but not dictatorial either."

She faces challenges with teacher resistance, such as when teachers refused to show books to subject advisors, requiring her to "deal with it" calmly despite heated situations.

The principal actively monitors EGRP II implementation, ensuring workshops are attended and curriculum coverage is submitted, stating, "We ensure that workshops by department are attended every term." However, her oversight of classrooms is limited by union constraints, as she mentions being

"I'm very aware of what is happening in early grade classes but I am restricted in direct interventions".

The focus group teachers and Grade 2 teacher refused to explicitly comment on her leadership style but the gestures they made suggested a strained working relationship. The principal also described an in-school PLC as "dead".

Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

EGRP Coach

The EGRP coach is a significant source of practical, classroom focused support. She visits the school fortnightly (and sometimes on Saturdays) to:

8. Observe lessons and provide actionable feedback.
9. Follow up on whether previous feedback has been implemented.
10. Facilitate cluster workshops with neighbouring schools for sharing challenges and good practice.

Teachers value the coach's understanding of classroom realities and her previous teaching experience, which they feel makes her advice practical and empathetic.

Peer and Cluster Support

Within the school, teachers share materials especially through grade-specific WhatsApp groups, and occasionally meet in person to exchange resources from the EGRP tablets. Cluster workshops with neighbouring schools, facilitated by the coach, offer opportunities to reflect on implementation challenges, discuss formal assessment tasks, and share strategies. These have strengthened professional bonds between teachers and created a collaborative support culture.

"EGRP has brought a bond between teachers where we can consult and help each other." - Grade 1 Teacher

Workbook analysis

7. Learner workbooks and exercise books analysis.

While teachers generally did not make use of curriculum trackers, the written evidence indicates that Grade 3 classes demonstrated more consistent teaching and learning activities compared to Grade 2, with a greater number of exercises recorded and books more regularly updated.

	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Partial	Marked	No	No
Exercise books up to date	Partial	No	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Partial (appr. Once a week)	Partial (appr. Once a week)	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Last marked in May	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes, red ink	Yes by learners	Partial, underlined in red	Partial, underlined in red
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done on exercise	No evidence of exercises of	Sound of interest had been done	No evidence of exercises of	Exercises of interest found 1

<i>books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.</i>	<i>interest in learner books</i>	<i>before but the revision not done</i>	<i>interest in learner books</i>	<i>week later for T2 W5, W9 writing exercises not found</i>
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Tracker not used DBE workbook work for T3 W2 Day 2 was done but exercises not found	Tracker not used DBE workbook work for T3 W2 Day 2 was done but exercises not found	Tracker not used Teacher currently two weeks behind (T3 W1) due to training	Tracker not used Teacher currently two weeks behind (T3 W1) due to training

Colour coding: red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved

8. Community engagement

Parental engagement at the school is limited, with attendance at school meetings being consistently low. According to the principal, with approximately 450 Intermediate Phase learners, only about 90 parents typically attend meetings, and these are often the parents of learners who are already performing well. This means that the parents of learners requiring the most support are frequently absent from key discussions.

“Those who attend are the ones you don’t need – their kids are fine.”

Many learners are cared for by grandparents, while biological parents (though present in the community) do not take responsibility for their children’s education. The majority of households rely on social grants, with an estimated 60–70% of families dependent on this income source. Unemployment is widespread, and where adults are employed, they work in low paying jobs such as domestic work, retail, or in petrol stations.

Financial constraints in the community affect the school’s ability to raise funds, with contributions from fundraising activities averaging only R15 per child. This further limits resources available for supplementary educational activities or infrastructure improvements.

While these socio-economic conditions create barriers to stronger school–community partnerships, teachers continue to maintain a print-rich and engaging classroom environment—often funding materials from their own pockets. However, broader parental participation in learning activities, homework support, or school governance remains minimal, and there are no sustained, structured community-led initiatives to bolster the school’s educational efforts.

9. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

- Management support for early grade reading: while teachers still feel that not enough resources are allocated to the foundation phase. There has been a shift in the principal’s understanding of the EGRP and more involvement in ensuring compliance and an understanding of what is happening in early grade classrooms.

- **Quality of teaching:** In 2024, teacher performance varied, with one Grade 2 teacher excelling in phonics, GGR, and handwriting, while others were less effective and inconsistently applied EGRP principles. In 2025, variability continued, with some engaging lessons but issues like a Grade 2 EFAL teacher lacking a lesson plan and tablet, indicating preparation gaps. GGR faced challenges in 2024 due to chorus reading, making individual assessment difficult and frustrating fluent readers, undermining tailored reading support. This persisted into 2025, with chorus reading still observed. Although a coach intervened in one Grade 2 lesson in 2025 to promote individual reading, this wasn't consistent. In 2024, differentiated teaching improved slightly, with learners moved between ability groups, but reliance on chorus reading hindered accurate assessment. In 2025, a Grade 2 teacher tried to adapt activities for struggling learners using Grade 1 materials, indicating some effort to tailor instruction.
- **Classroom dynamics:** Classroom management saw some improvements attributed to EGRP II, particularly in teachers' ability to manage group work and reading methods. In both 2024 and 2025, the physical classroom environment remained largely unchanged, but EGRP II enhanced teachers' capacity to structure group activities and engage with coaches for better management. The consistency in improved group management from 2024 to 2025 reflects a positive impact of EGRP II, with coach interactions providing more structured support.
- **Coach's role:** This has improved significantly from what was observed in 2024, where the coach's post-observation meetings were short, lacking substance and guidance, and did not connect to future actions. This year the coach has become a significant source of practical, classroom-focused support, visiting fortnightly, sometimes on Saturdays, to observe, give feedback, and lead cluster workshops. Teachers appreciated the coach's advice and understanding. Peer and cluster support through grade-specific WhatsApp groups has grown markedly, promoting professional bonds and shared strategies, and being recognised as a strong support network in both years. Despite increased awareness from the principal, management issues have persisted, notably the strained relationship with the DH and teachers. The principal is still unable to carry out formal lesson observations due to union restrictions, relying instead on walkabouts. The schools' PLCs have remained inactive in both years.
- **Learner engagement and perceptions:** Learners consistently showed enthusiasm for reading in both 2024 and 2025, enjoying books and anthologies like "Life without Limits" and "Dave in the Garden" in 2024, and recalling stories such as "A Vet on the Farm" in 2025. Shared reading and the Big Book continued to be popular among learners across both years. However, a recurring challenge was the frustration with the pace of Group Guided Reading (GGR), which learners found boring or slow because peers struggled to read, especially affecting fluent readers who felt held back. This issue remained consistent from 2024 to 2025. On a positive note, in 2025, Grade 3 learners expressed a growing awareness of their reading progress, noting they read better compared to Grade 2, where they focused more on spelling words. They also showed a desire to read the Big Book independently, indicating increased confidence and engagement with reading materials.

- LTSM use and adoption: In both 2024 and 2025, the school maintained an adequate number of trained and well resourced Foundation Phase teachers, supported by a reasonable stock of EGRP LTSMs. Classrooms remained print-rich, However, technology adoption posed a challenge. In 2024, the principal expressed enthusiasm for tablets, putting pressure on teachers to adopt them when they became available. Despite this optimism, there is limited adoption and minimal use among teachers primarily due to discomfort with technology. Most teachers preferred traditional resources.
- Use of trackers: there is a discrepancy between what was observed in 2024, with a teacher citing moving children between groups based on records from a tracker. However, this year, the workbook analysis table for all grades and subjects consistently states that trackers were not used.

School U

1. Summary of key points

- The two foundation phase teachers at the school are elderly and plan to retire in the next two years.
- The FP teachers follow the EGRP II methodology routines closely and demonstrate an understanding of programme requirements. Both teachers utilised LTSMs, and both had GGR checklists during their GGR session, however, only one used the checklist.
- The multigrade teacher who struggled in 2024 showed marked improvement by adopting a structured phonics approach, confidently teaching EFAL with minimal code-switching and enhancing classroom management with support from the EA.
- A key change in the multigrade classroom is the intentional shift from grade-based teaching to teaching at the right level, which deviates from EGRP II guidelines but the teacher finds highly effective.
- The presence of EAs is essential for logistical tasks and monitoring learners, especially during programme training days, as well as for supporting logistical arrangements, overseeing occupational tasks, and enabling the teacher to focus on instruction.
- While the coach's home language is not Setswana, she has a working knowledge of the language, and this does not hinder her ability to coach effectively. Teachers value their relationship with her.
- While the feedback sessions were very coach centred and directive, the coach's focus is on development. She only conducts school based workshops for targeted support, especially for teachers who missed training or need help with specific issues
- WhatsApp PLC engagement is very low; in this school's case, this is due to limited technological proficiency.

2. Respondents

- An interview was conducted with the multigrade teacher observed
- An interview was conducted with the Grade 3 teacher who was observed. She serves a teacher and the school principal

- A Focus Group Discussion was conducted with six Grade 3 learners
- An interview was conducted with the coach

3. School context

The school is located in a rural village. The infrastructure is old, though classrooms are equipped with adequate and functional furniture. The school grounds are big and spacious, with functional sports grounds for basic activities, but there are no formal, purpose-built sports facilities. A small vegetable patch supplements the feeding scheme, and a small kitchen supports daily meals, while toilets and the school grounds are kept clean.

The school relies on basic services: a borehole water supply, toilets, and modest learning spaces, with some rooms serving dual purposes (e.g., classrooms doubling as admin and storage space).

The learning environment is safe and orderly. Despite the absence of fencing for nearly two decades, there have been no thefts or vandalism—a sign of strong community trust and ownership. Parents and grandparents participate in meetings and events, though socio-economic challenges and low literacy mean they provide limited direct academic support at home.

Overall, the school climate is positive and collaborative, with a trusted and supportive principal, orderly classrooms, and a community that safeguards the school despite hardships.

Table 1: Foundation Phase learners enrolment and staffing

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	13	9	13	35
Classrooms	1		1	2
Teachers	1		1	2
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1		1	2
No. of DHs	0			0
Teacher to learner ratio	1: 22		1: 13	1: 17.5

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observations

Multigrade (Grade 1& 2) Setswana Home Language Lesson

The 45 minute lesson started with the teacher explaining the occupation writing task to the learners, followed by a song which was only sung by the GGR group (Grade 2 level readers). The teacher gave GGR instructions to learners, saying they were to read aloud when called upon and answer questions.

Before the learners started reading the story “Ke tse dikgolo le go nna!” (They don’t fit me!), the teacher initiated a discussion about the cover page picture by asking, “*what looks big on the girl in the picture?*”. The learners were able to successfully answer the question in

detail. The learners read individually, with the learner reading standing up, which hindered their ability to point at the text or see clearly in some instances. The teacher posed two questions about the reading, which learners answered correctly, and she reinforced their efforts by encouraging them to clap for each other. The teacher demonstrated how to read with expression when encountering exclamation marks. Although the teacher held a GGR tracker, she did not complete it during the activity.

Following GGR by the learners reading from the Grade 2 anthologies, the coach requested that the other group also read. The teacher instructed the EA to distribute Grade 1 readers and provide Grade 2-level readers to those who had just completed GGR for silent reading as an occupational task. The less advanced group of learners then took turns reading from the Grade 1 anthology; two could read proficiently, while others read syllable by syllable, skipping unfamiliar words or relying on occasional teacher intervention. During this session there was also some peer interaction, where learners helped each other with words they could not read (see image E below). Throughout this segment of the lesson, the EA monitored the Grade 2 learners as they read silently (image F).

Before the lesson began, the coach requested the lesson plan and verified it against the physical management document to confirm alignment of the planned activities.

The coach documented her observations on a table in her notebook that looks like the lesson observation database they complete for monitoring purposes. She did not make use of the observation form, noting that her table covers all the topics and makes it easier for her to capture later.

The coach began by asking the teacher how she thought the 45 minute lesson went. The teacher mentioned that she thinks she did quite well and was satisfied with her lesson because the learners read and showed comprehension which was the goal of the lesson. After agreeing with her, the coach showed the teacher notes and asked the teacher why she thinks she received a rating of 1 on assessment: the teacher was quick to acknowledge it was due to not using the GGR checklist/ tracker. The coach provided guidance on using the checklist effectively, suggesting that all questions should be answered by individual learners to make it easier for the teacher to assess their understanding of the story and ability to respond to direct and inferential questions. The coach also advised on removing the total score on the checklist, explaining that a checklist only has 'yes' or 'no' indicators not scores. The coach advised that the teacher should start using the checklist so that they can discuss it in the subsequent lessons where they will review it.

For the Grade 1 group, the coach noted that when a learner struggles, the teacher should not allow them to skip syllables but instead have them repeat after her to "cross the bridge" rather than leaving them behind. She recommended that the teacher model reading first, followed by choral reading, then individual reading of the same line for such learners. The teacher expressed a concern about learners merely memorising the text. The coach explained that learners already know sounds but require modelling for fluent reading (speed), which is the focus in Term 3 for Grade 1 learners. The discussion also addressed learners standing while reading, with the coach suggesting they sit and point to the text while reading.

Multigrade (Grade 1& 2) English First Additional Language Lesson

The lesson commenced with the teacher calling the entire class to the front in preparation for a Listening and Speaking poster discussion. During this discussion, the teacher asked the learners what they could see, prompting responses using the speaking frame "/ see ...". Learners approached the poster individually pointing out specific items depicted. The teacher then guided a discussion on which foods shown were healthy or unhealthy while writing down the foods mentioned by the learners on the board. Following this, the teacher asked the learners to categorise these foods as either fruits or vegetables.

The lesson progressed to a flashcard activity where learners read cards, such as one displaying "sugar", and the teacher prompted them to identify foods containing sugar. The teacher then asked the learners to indicate items like ice cream, bread, apple, and cool drinks on the poster. However, this time the learners did not speak as they pointed.

The lesson concluded with the repetition of a poem that had been performed previously. Throughout the lesson, the teaching assistant was occupied with organising flashcards.

Before the lesson began, the coach requested the lesson plan and verified it against the physical management document to ensure alignment with the planned activities. During the lesson she recorded some videos, while also taking notes in her notebook.

After the lesson the coach asked the teacher how she felt the lesson went and what her objectives were to which the teacher provided brief responses. The coach then shared her feedback, with the teacher taking notes. She praised the teacher for recognising her mistake and incorporating the song which was intended to follow the greeting, as well as for covering 90% of the required content. Additionally, the coach commended the teacher for maintaining the correct language without code switching. Areas for improvement included the teacher's failure to explain how unhealthy foods affect health and not adhering to specific lesson plan guidelines, such as learners pointing to people on the poster who were ready to participate in exercise or sports.

The coach encouraged the teacher to ensure her lesson plan is comprehensive, highlighting key goals and referring to it during the lesson to ensure she covers all required elements. The coach assigned the teacher a rating of 1 on assessment but did not discuss this rating during the feedback. No comments were made regarding the timing of the 30 minute lesson which was meant to cover only a single component and so should have been briefer.

Grade 3 First Additional Language Lesson

Learners were seated in a U-shaped arrangement, with desks placed around the sides of the classroom and an open space in the centre. This layout allowed all learners to face the teacher as well as one another. The lesson focused on listening and speaking.

The teacher started the session with a vocabulary activity. She introduced the words honest, steal, and dishonest. Learners were able to use these words in sentences when

prompted, but many struggled to explain their exact meanings in their own words. The teacher then moved to the question of the day: Is stealing from your friend dishonest? This encouraged critical thinking, and learners were able to respond by linking the word “dishonest” with everyday experiences. The teacher’s questioning technique created an opportunity for learners to practise speaking in English, and most learners were actively engaged in responding.

The teacher had clear routines established. When she asked a question or gave instructions, learners knew what to do without much repetition. For example, when she called groups to the front, they moved quickly and smoothly, showing that the classroom routines were well practised and understood.

While Group 1 came forward for GGR, the rest of the learners were kept occupied by finishing off previous writing activities in their exercise books. This allowed the teacher to focus on the small group without disruptions. In GGR, the learners read individually while the teacher tracked their progress using a tracker. She would occasionally gently nudge the learner if they got stuck on a word. The teacher then called Group 2 to come read and repeated the process, she then called one learner to the reading corner and mentioned that he has the weakest reading ability therefore reads with him individually.

The teacher demonstrated strong differentiation strategies. She paid particular attention to the learner with the lowest ability in the class, who was placed in Group 4. The teacher used a different book from the EGRP II anthologies read by the other groups. The book contained more pictures and simpler, two-syllable words, which were easier for the learners to decode. She guided the learner patiently through the process of breaking down words into syllables, blending sounds, and building sentences.

During the group guided session, the teacher ensured that the other learners remained productively engaged with additional written tasks. Her pacing of the lesson was appropriate, and the activities were varied enough to maintain learners’ attention.

Grade 3 Setswana Home Language Lesson

The teacher first greeted the learners, she then led them in a short song that involved clapping and chanting in Setswana. Learners participated enthusiastically, and the singing served both as an ice-breaker and a way to capture attention before moving into formal learning activities.

The learners were seated in a U-shaped arrangement around the classroom, with desks positioned along three sides and an open space in the centre.

After the opening, the teacher introduced the “sound of the day.” She held up flashcards and asked learners to read the words aloud together. Initially, the focus was on teacher-led recognition, where learners read words directly from the cards. The teacher then encouraged them to provide their own examples of words containing the target sound. This shift from recognition to production was deliberate, pushing learners to apply the sound knowledge in authentic contexts.

The main vocabulary focus included words such as tlata and tlala. The teacher not only pronounced the words clearly but also explained their meanings in context. She supported the learners by giving real-life examples of how these words might be used in everyday life. For example, when introducing tlala (hunger), she prompted learners to link the word to their own experiences, asking them questions to check their understanding. Learners responded with short sentences, which she corrected and expanded when necessary.

Once the oral practice was completed, learners were guided to write the new vocabulary in their exercise books. The teacher gave step-by-step instructions, first modelling the correct spelling on the chalkboard before asking learners to copy. She circulated inside the U-shaped seating arrangement, checking that each learner was on task.

When learners completed their writing, the teacher marked their books immediately, giving direct and timely feedback. She ticked correct answers, underlined errors, and in some cases asked learners to correct the mistakes on the spot.

Teacher Perceptions of Learner's Reading Abilities

When asked about what percentage of learners Grade 3s can read, the coach estimated 90% although she mentioned that some are not entirely fluent. Despite the teacher mentioning that learners read better and like English better, the coach estimated that only 60% of Grade 3 learners could read for meaning in English.

Table 2: Teacher Perceptions of Learner's Reading Abilities

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL (singular word)	No. of learners who can read in HL (singular word)
1 (singular word reading)	13	9	9
2 (read for meaning)	9	7	7
3	13	11	12

The coach holds a BEd qualification in FET teaching, and began teaching in 1993 in Grades 11 and 12, before transitioning to private teaching in 2017. In 2022, became a literacy and library coach for multigrade schools in Sepedi and Xitshonga, focusing on Grades 1 and 2 before joining the EGRP II in 2024. Her motivation to coach stems from a desire to address weak foundational reading skills, which she notes "*hindered matric learners' ability to understand instructions*"; a challenge she witnessed in the higher grades. Transitioning to Foundation Phase coaching was difficult, requiring her to adapt from Sepedi to Setswana and also learn from other coaches. However, her exposure to Setswana as home language when growing up and in university made the transition easier. In her interview, the coach highlighted EGRP II's aim to strengthen home language reading to improve comprehension and transferable skills to EFAL, addressing the root causes of poor academic outcomes.

“We are trying to solve the issue related to Grade 12. A lot of focus was put on it, but the foundation is unstable, which is why the results are not good.”

She considers the programme successful, noting a shift from teacher resistance in the previous year to increased confidence and motivation as learners demonstrate reading fluency and understanding. She highlighted that some teachers were teaching EFAL in Setswana or skipped it entirely, but now they request her to observe their EFAL lessons. She promotes a phonics-based approach: starting with listening and speaking through songs or poems, linking sounds to letters, building vocabulary, and advancing to decoding, fluency, and comprehension through questioning and dramatisation, ensuring all five reading components are covered. For resistant teachers, she models lessons to prove their effectiveness. She finds OUPSA's training, which includes termly coaching and teaching sessions, weekly feedback meetings, and reading materials, to be highly structured and effective. As she said,

“The programme is doing well. I can see that now teachers are more confident. Last year many were fearing the unknown and were very fearful and resistant.”

During observations the coach adopted a methodical but less energetic approach compared to some peers. She spoke Setswana with a Sepedi accent and occasional Sepedi words, which teachers understood without issue. During lessons, she recorded videos and noted strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. Feedback sessions, which were held immediately after, were coach-centred and directive rather than interactive, beginning with brief teacher reflections followed by praise and then a host of areas for improvement unlike some coaches who allowed the teacher to lead the conversation. She also did not inspect classroom walls or learner books, and her feedback lacked deep reflective prompts or strong affirmations, though it remained development-focused.

The coach noted that she uses observation data to track progress, encouraging teachers to devise their own improvement strategies. She really values EGRP II's multigrade lesson plans as a unique achievement and contribution to the system.

“I am happy that EGRP came with lesson plans for multigrade and special training for them – the teachers were really suffering. I think this is the only province where multigrade schools have structured lesson plans”.

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

The incorporation of occupational tasks to occupy learners while the teacher focuses on a group aids the management of the multigrade classrooms. The teacher appreciated that the tasks are "real content" related to the curriculum.

Coaching under EGRP II includes training on creating and enforcing ground rules collaboratively with learners to address management issues. This promotes a democratic classroom environment while reducing disruptions. Positive reinforcement techniques, such as clapping for correct answers, were observed in lessons, which also fosters engagement and managed learner behaviour.

The multigrade classroom had an EA who was responsible for distributing books, monitoring learners during GGR and organising flashcards. The teacher highlighted the EA's role in managing classes when she is not present,

"He makes sure that when I am at training learners know what to do. That's why I don't fall behind"

This delegation allows the teacher to focus on instruction.

Wall displays and materials (e.g., posters, flashcards) are now more systematically used, with the coach providing guidance on setup.

Lesson content and methodology

While not true for this school as the multigrade teacher always used the phonics approach the coach reported that at the start of the programme there were schools that still used an alphabet and whole word approach to teaching reading. She stated,

"In one school, two teachers taught sounds and others did alphabet,"

The multigrade teacher noted that though she taught phonics before it was less structured. She noted how she has adapted EGRP II's comprehensive sequencing of lessons:

"Start off with teaching them one sound, then move to words, then sentences then paragraphs. This shift has made teaching reading more structured and I know the exact building blocks."

During the EFAL post observation, the coach repeatedly mentioned how proud she was that the teacher is teaching EFAL in the correct language and with confidence, which is another change that occurred as a result of EGRP II coaching.

"EGRP has introduced checklists for tracking learners and can be used for intervention." - Multigrade teacher

5. Learner perceptions

When learners were asked about the importance of reading, they gave thoughtful and straightforward answers that reflected their age and aspirations. For them, reading was not only about classroom activities, but also about their future. They explained that reading was important because it would help them succeed in school, finish their education, and eventually get good jobs. They also mentioned that reading would help them understand what was happening in class so that they would not fall behind.

"Reading is important so that one day I can be a boss."

"If I can read, I will know what is happening in class and I won't be lost."

Learners also described their experiences with reading at home. They explained that sometimes the teacher allows them to take their reading anthologies home, and when this happens, some parents are able to help them. However, most learners said they preferred

reading on their own, as they felt more confident and independent. This shows that learners are beginning to develop a sense of ownership over their reading progress.

"Sometimes my mom helps me when I take the book home, but most times I like to read alone."

"I can read by myself. I don't always need help."

When asked about Group Guided Reading (GGR), learners expressed that they enjoyed the activity because it gave them a chance to demonstrate their reading skills to the teacher. They appreciated that during GGR, both the teacher and their peers could correct small mistakes, which made the process supportive rather than intimidating.

"I like group reading because the teacher can see that I can read."

At the same time, learners highlighted their enjoyment of shared reading sessions. They said these sessions were lively because their teacher read to them in an animated and expressive way. They explained that listening to their teacher read made stories exciting and helped them understand better. Some learners even demonstrated how their teacher reads, raising their voices and acting out the parts, showing how much they enjoyed these experiences.

"When the teacher reads, she makes the story funny and loud and we all laugh."

Learners reflected on their progress over the years. They shared that in Grade 2, they needed more help with reading, but now in Grade 3, they found it easier to read on their own. They explained that they were older and more confident, and that only a few learners in their class still struggled. For those learners, they noticed that the teacher used easier books to provide extra support. This matches what was observed in the classroom, where the teacher used a simpler book with a struggling learner during GGR.

"In Grade 2 I needed help, but now in Grade 3 I can read by myself."

"The teacher gives other books that are easy for the ones who still need help."

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

Prior to EGRP II, multigrade teachers often grouped learners strictly by grade, even for GGR, without mixing based on ability. Now, as seen in this school, grouping is by reading competence across grades, allowing stronger learners from lower grades to join higher groups and vice versa. This facilitates better differentiation and management during activities like GGR, where only this component uses ability groups, while phonics remains grade-specific.

The coach noted that multigrade setups enable *"better ability grouping with materials available,"* and the teacher confirmed,

"In multigrade sometimes I didn't group learners by ability or move them between groups. Now my GGR groups are a mix of grades."

This ensures learners are taught reading at the appropriate level. The teacher in this multigrade classroom further noted that for most components of her lessons she allows learners to work according to their own ability, as it allows them to be challenged and to learn better. While this may be a strategy that the teacher has found to be effective, it goes against the EGRP II guidelines (followed by the coach and that teachers are trained on) which state that only GGR is to be done by ability while keeping to grade teaching for components such as writing and phonics, and whole class teaching with some differentiation for listening and speaking and shared reading.

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

In this multigrade school, both the teacher and coach demonstrate some awareness of the EGRP II, which aims to strengthen foundational reading skills in Setswana and EFAL to improve comprehension and facilitate transition into Grade 4. The coach views it as addressing systemic issues in early education that affect later grades, and in line with this the teacher sees the programme aiming to improve Northern Cape pass rates. As the coach stated,

“We are trying to solve the issue related to Grade 12. A lot of focus was put on it, but the foundation is unstable, which is why the results are not good. We want learners to master reading in their home language, so that they can understand what they are reading, the same skills can be transferred to EFAL.”

“They want NC to be like other provinces.”

The multigrade teacher appeared to be reasonably well-versed in EGRP methodologies and protocols although during her lesson she veered away from the set approach on occasion, which the coach noted in her feedback. The Grade 3 teacher was similarly very well versed in EGRP II methodologies and routines, and made adaptations to what was prescribed by using additional resources such as lower grade readers in her Grade 3 classroom. The teacher implemented the routines as prescribed and also used trackers to record progress, although she noted that completing trackers and reflection tools sometimes posed a challenge for her given all the other administrative tasks she had to complete. The learners in both classes were also very familiar with the methodologies used by the teachers in their lessons, moving quickly between different parts of the classroom and demonstrating an understanding of what was expected of them, which indicates that the teachers consistently apply these routines in the same way.

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching

Teacher

The school has only two FP teachers, one of whom serves as the principal, juggling teaching with administrative duties, which the coach described as keeping her "busy." Both teachers, with over 18 years of FP teaching experience, are planning to retire within the next two years.

The presence of an EA in the multigrade classroom is a critical resource, supporting logistical tasks such as distributing books, organising flashcards, and ensuring learners remain engaged during independent work, particularly when the teacher attends EGRP II training. The multigrade teacher noted,

“The EA plays a huge role at this school... helps with occupational tasks and ensures the learners are quiet.”

However, more controversially the teacher believes that the EA's role is not fully optimised, when she suggested that training EAs to deliver lesson components could alleviate workload pressures.

Use of LTSM

The EGRP II LTSM, including uLwazi Lwethu Anthologies, posters, sight words, and flashcards, were integral to lesson delivery. The content and LTSM displayed on both classroom walls are term-specific, updated to align with the current term's curriculum focus.

“Lesson plans by EGRP; I absolutely love them. It makes my work very easy and everything is laid out.” — Multigrade teacher

The Grade 3 teacher consistently used the LTSM provided through EGRP II to support her lessons. She relied on the lesson plans and reading anthologies to guide daily teaching, ensuring that learners were exposed to both Group Guided Reading and Shared Reading activities. For GGR, she selected different-level readers, including simpler texts for struggling learners, which allowed her to differentiate instruction.

In the Setswana lesson, the teacher used flashcards to reinforce the sound of the day and vocabulary practice. Learners were then guided to copy new words into their exercise books, linking oral practice with written reinforcement. Posters displayed in the classroom provided additional print-rich support, and the teacher pointed to them occasionally to remind learners of sounds or vocabulary. Although she acknowledged gaps, such as the lack of phonics posters and big books in Setswana, she supplemented these by creating her own materials to fill the gaps.

“The lesson plans and books guide me, but where there are no posters, I make my own so that learners always have something to look at.”

Tablets for planning and LTSM

Both teachers, including the older multigrade teacher, have adopted tablets for planning. The non-tech-savvy multigrade teacher reported that initially she struggled, stating,

“I used to struggle to open the tablet. I am not a phone person. I tell my children at home to help me, but now I love it, I'm able to Zoom. You know how our eyes are as old people. I love it more than the paper.”

However, when asked to open the lesson plan from her tablet, the multigrade teacher opened a pre-downloaded lesson plan saying,

“I don't know how to get to the app but I know how to use it. My kids download for me and I can find those ones easier.”

The coach agreed that teachers have been able to transition to tablet use, noting,

“Tablets are being used even by the old teachers. In the last training we made them use them for everything.”

This included tasks like registration and pre/post-tests and completing training evaluation forms.

The coach highlighted challenges such as lost tablets, network issues, and unregistered new teachers, with some resorting to phones or laptops. The coach remarked,

“We showed teachers who lost their tablets how to use the platform on their phones and laptops, especially if they knew their logins”.

The teacher reported that the tablet has become a valuable tool in her daily practice. She uses it to access lesson plans, resources, and demonstration videos, which she described as making her preparation and teaching more convenient. The tablet allows her to quickly navigate content and stay aligned with the requirements of EGRP II.

“I use the tablet for lesson plans and resources. It makes things much easier, and I can even watch videos to see how a lesson should be done.”

9. Key features of the school’s management and leadership

The principal described her management style as collaborative and supportive. She explained that she often involves teachers in decision-making and values their ability to solve problems independently. She expressed appreciation for her staff, noting that they are capable and dedicated. The principal also highlighted that her deputy principal is already able to manage responsibilities in her absence, which she saw as a strength for continuity in leadership.

10. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

Cluster Workshops

There are non-EGRP cluster workshops with approximately 4 schools included, the workshops happen on a quarterly basis. However, as noted by the coach not all teachers attend which often results in assessments not aligning with the content that has been taught to learners in all the schools. The Language Experts/ Subject Advisors also do not attend these sessions, which leads in the focus of these meetings being about assessment as opposed to broader development and lesson sharing.

The teacher highlighted the cluster workshop’s role, stating,

“After setting papers, we take it to the LAM for moderation... When we have issues we also ask for assistance.”

Cluster Workshops (coach-led):

The coach organises cluster workshops for 8-10 schools, including two non-coaching schools, grouped by subject advisors. These workshops focus on revising EGRP II methodologies, such as phonics based teaching and multigrade strategies, based on observation data identifying teacher challenges. The coach argues that in these workshops,

"I don't use slides because I want engagement. We are doing a revision of something they were trained on."

These are held irregularly due to scheduling conflicts with subject advisors, so only one occurred in Term 4 last year, with none in Term 1 this year. Teachers demonstrate components that they have mastered, like GGR, to their peers. The multigrade teacher confirmed attending these workshops, finding them useful for addressing classroom needs, though their infrequency limits impact. She stated that subject advisors rarely participate, reducing alignment with sustainability goals. The coach explained that we,

"Agree on topics ... looking at data collected on what issues teachers still struggle with."

School-Based Workshops

The coach conducts school-based workshops, particularly when teachers miss training or face specific classroom challenges. These workshops address issues like phonics implementation or curriculum coverage, with generic feedback to avoid singling out individuals. The coach stated,

"I do them especially when I find that there are teachers that didn't attend training ... I give feedback generically in a group but won't say who did what."

The engagement is strong, with teachers demonstrating techniques they have mastered to their peers. On average, two such workshops occurred per school. The coach reported that she did two in each school in Term 2, mainly for schools with new teachers. The teacher noted their occurrence *"sometimes probably when she notices something we both need some advice on,"* indicating responsiveness to observed needs. The coach observed that *"Engagement is very good ... other teachers demonstrate."*

WhatsApp-Based PLCs

The coach manages WhatsApp PLCs, including a dedicated group for multigrade coaching schools and a broader group for sharing visit schedules and training programmes. Resources, such as wall display guidelines, are shared, with the coach noting,

"I recently sent pictures of what the walls are meant to look like with Term 4 content on walls currently."

Engagement is very low, with only 20-30% of teachers responding due to data constraints on personal phones, though tablets have data provision. The discussions cover practical strategies and assessment moderation, but the coach desires greater participation to enhance utility. The FP teachers confirmed the coach's statement by indicating that their tablet phone numbers had been added to the WhatsApp group, however, they seldom

access the group and are unaware of the shared content. The teachers explained their lack of participation by citing their age and limited technological proficiency.

The principal reported that PLCs are held twice each term with the support of the coach. These sessions are used to discuss trackers and recording sheets, although she acknowledged that teachers often find them difficult to interpret. She also explained that cluster workshops are organised but are mainly subject-specific, which means they do not always address broader challenges faced in the school.

11. Workbook analysis

Colour coding – red=not achieved; orange=partially achieved; green=achieved)

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
	Grade 2	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 3
Workbooks up to date	No	No	No	No
Workbook correction	Yes	No	Partially	Yes
Exercise books up to date	No	No	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes, mainly in red ink	Yes, mainly in red ink	Yes, mainly in red ink	Partially corrected in red ink
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: <i>check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.</i>	DBE pages of interest not found	DBE pages of interest not found	Term 2 activity of interest found within the same week <i>No evidence of June activities found in books.</i>	Term 2 W5 work not found

				Term 2 W9 work not found
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training.	Teacher on T3 W2, only 1 week behind due to training.

12. Community engagement

The principal reported strong community trust in the school and in her leadership. She explained that she works closely with social workers to address children's needs and that parents are actively involved, particularly during open days and school events. Although she acknowledged that most community members are unemployed, she emphasised that the area is safe and that the community takes responsibility for protecting the school. She noted that despite the school having no fence for 18 years, there have been no incidents of theft or vandalism, which she viewed as evidence of a strong sense of community ownership.

13. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies.

The early grade reading situation improved between 2024 and 2025, especially regarding the multigrade teacher's performance and approach. In 2024, the Grade 3 teacher (also the principal) was consistently proficient, resourceful, well-organised, and effective, maintaining a calm, orderly classroom with structured learner grouping and managing four reading groups. Her lessons were well-structured, and she effectively used LTSMs. The multigrade (Grade 1-2) teacher, however, struggled with key EGRP II elements, delivering a poor EFAL lesson marked by chaos, forgotten tasks, and confusion about the Big Book and anthologies. Restless learners challenged her classroom management, and her awareness of EGRP II protocols was weak. Her classroom was set up in traditional rows, unlike the Grade 3 teacher's flexible grouping.

This year's multigrade class showed significant improvements, mainly due to EGRP II interventions and coaching. The teacher has adopted a structured phonics approach, progressing from sounds to paragraphs, and confidently taught EFAL without code-switching, a major improvement from her past struggles. Though some areas, like using the GGR checklist needs work, her lessons were more structured with clear occupational tasks. Classroom management improved with occupational tasks and support from an EA.

A key development was the intentional shift from grade-based grouping to ability-based grouping across grades for GGR, allowing learners to be taught at their "right level". She showed strong awareness of EGRP II's requirements and expressed appreciation for the provided multigrade lesson plans.

Learner outcomes: the overall narrative from the coach and teachers in 2025 strongly indicates positive shifts in learner outcomes, such as increased reading fluency and understanding. The 2024 baseline already established a strong learner love for reading and appreciation for classroom routines like Big Book reading and GGR, which formed a positive foundation for the improved pedagogical approaches in 2025. The persistent challenge of few learners having books at home was noted in 2024. The Grade 3 teacher maintained high standards and structured grouping. The coach's estimate of 60% of learners reading for meaning (down from 86% reading with fluency in 2024) focuses on comprehension, not a decline in capability.

Resourcing and the role of EAs: The resourcing of early grade teaching shows positive developments, particularly in technology adoption and utilisation of support staff. While the number of Foundation Phase teachers remained constant, the role of the EA in supporting logistical tasks and classroom management is more evident.

Adoption of technology: Both teachers adopted tablets for planning and LTSMs in 2025, up from only the principal and administrator having laptops in 2024. This shift narrows the gap in instructional quality, with the multigrade teacher making significant progress in EGRP II implementation.

Coach's role and teacher support: Formal school-based support remained challenged by the principal's administrative duties. The coach leads WhatsApp-based PLCs for resource sharing, cluster workshops for methodological revision and teacher demonstrations, and school-based workshops for targeted support. However, challenges persist, such as low engagement in the WhatsApp PLCs due to data constraints. Cluster workshops are still struggling with the infrequency and limited participation of subject advisors.

School V

1. Summary of key points

- This remote, small rural multigrade school is well run and maintained
- The multigrade teacher is struggling this year, after being rated as a good multigrade teacher and principal in 2024
- The main cause of Grade 1 and possibly higher grade declining performance is her struggle with discipline among hyperactive Grade 1 learners and their lack of Grade R experience
- She has two Education Assistants in her class whom she does not seem to be using to maximum impact
- The coach is very supportive and empathetic while following protocol and advising the teacher where she can improve

2. Respondents

- A multigrade teacher (Grade 1 to 3) who is also the Principal observed and interviewed as both multigrade teacher and principal
- EGRP II Literacy coach was interviewed
- Focus Group Discussion was conducted with six Grade 3 learners

3. School context

The school is located in a rural community. It is a very well-kept school that presents a neat and welcoming environment. The premises are clean and orderly, with a small mobile library situated on the grounds, although it was not accessible on the day of the visit. Behind the classrooms, there is a small vegetable patch that is well maintained. The learner toilets and the kitchen were observed to be clean and tidy, while the classrooms and furniture were also well maintained.

The foundation phase includes a multi-grade classroom that is bright, colourful, and learner-friendly. Learner work is displayed on the walls alongside EGRP materials. The reading corner is attractive and well resourced, with books neatly placed in order, while learner books are neatly stored on shelves. Overall, the learning environment is highly organised and stimulating.

The school's climate reflects a positive and collegial working environment. The staff members get along well, demonstrating warmth and friendliness. The principal, who also teaches the multigrade foundation phase class, is very passionate about the school. She expressed that she wants the best for her learners and does everything within her means to ensure that they have the resources and support they need to succeed.

Table 1: Foundation Phase enrolment and staffing

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Total (FP)
Enrolment	5	4	10	19
Classrooms	1			1
Teachers	1			1
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1			1

No. of DHs	0	0
Teacher to learner ratio	1: 19	1: 19

4. Early-grade teaching and learning

Lesson Observation

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) Setswana Home Language Lesson

The teacher started the lesson with the whole class singing a rhyme/song (Ntate Moholo), which immediately captured learners' attention and created a lively atmosphere. She then went on to clearly explain the occupational tasks to the Grade 3 and Grade 2 learners, ensuring they understood their specific writing activities. The two EAs in the class were assigned to monitor the Grade 3 and Grade 2 learners and handed out the DBE workbooks for the learners to complete their tasks.

While the EAs, with some assistance from the Literacy Coach, monitored learners, the teacher focused on the Grade 1 group for GGR. She started by looking at sight words with the learners, guiding them to read aloud. To engage learners, she deliberately read a word incorrectly ("sega" instead of "dijo"). This sparked excitement and laughter, with learners quickly correcting her, showing that they were actively listening and able to detect mistakes. This playful interaction fostered learner participation and kept their interest.

The teacher then facilitated a discussion about the content in the uLwazi Lwethu Anthology, encouraging learners to describe what they saw in the pictures. Individually, learners read to the teacher, who patiently pointed to each syllable and supported them in decoding words. At times she asked peers to assist, encouraging a collaborative environment. Most learners struggled to read full words, instead reading sounds and needing help to blend and segment. However, learners were able to segment and blend sounds with guidance, showing gradual progress in phonics skills.

During the lesson, one learner appeared to be very 'hyper' and overly eager to answer questions even before being asked. The coach had to intervene to help the learner calm down and respond in an orderly way, ensuring fairness in participation.

Throughout the session, the teacher consistently reassured learners, reinforcing correct responses by having them "Take 5," which motivated them to try again and boosted their confidence. Although the teacher did not initially ask comprehension questions, the coach stepped in and posed a series of questions about the text. Surprisingly, despite their struggles with fluent reading, learners were able to answer comprehension questions directly from the text, demonstrating understanding of what was read aloud.

Before the lesson, the coach looked at the lesson plan against her hard copy management document. Then, during the lesson she continued to refer to the management document to follow along with the lesson structure. She observed the teacher closely as she explained the occupational task to the learners. When the teacher struggled to find the sight words, which were misplaced inside a book, the coach assisted in locating them. She also

documented the session by taking pictures and notes on both her notepad and the observation form. To manage classroom behaviour, the coach took a hyperactive Grade 1 learner aside to minimise disruptions.

She reminded learners to read aloud and point to the words as they read, reinforcing active participation. When the teacher expressed fatigue after the reading activity, the coach took the initiative to ask learners comprehension questions related to the story which they answered successfully.

Post Observation Discussion

The post lesson conferencing was guided by the teacher, which encouraged self-reflection while providing supportive, constructive feedback aligned with the EGRP II goals. The teacher opened the discussion by identifying significant challenges impacting her teaching. She highlighted the lack of foundational preparation among her learners, stating,

“One of my biggest issues is that learners did not go to Grade R. I am starting from scratch. That’s why they aren’t like my kids from last year.”

This absence of Grade R experience meant she was building basic skills from the ground up, unlike her previous cohort. She also noted being behind in curriculum coverage due to workshops and PLC meetings.

The teacher expressed significant frustration with managing hyperactive learners, stating, *“I don’t know what to do with the hyperactive learners. They stress me so much ... I once tried to close the mouths of the learners with tape, but they spoke through the tape”*.

She also noted that her classroom rules were in place but insufficient for addressing persistent behavioral issues.

Finally, the teacher highlighted challenges with curriculum coverage, particularly in writing, stating, “Writing is far far behind,” with one exercise missing from the last two weeks. She attributed this to time constraints, explaining,

“I lose so much time because of the principal meetings and workshops, and the [LAMS] expect so much of us and forget they get us out of the classroom.”

She also shared learner awareness of these disruptions, saying,

“My Grade 2 and 3 learners are so aware of this time issue that they ask me... what can we be doing while you’re away.”

The coach responded with a supportive and encouraging tone, acknowledging the teacher’s efforts while offering practical strategies to address the identified challenges. To tackle the issue of foundational skill gaps, she encouraged the teacher to “think about how she could intervene” and suggested revisiting phonics instruction tied to the story learners were reading. Addressing the teacher’s concerns about hyperactive learners, the coach responded with empathy and humour to the teacher’s tape anecdote, avoiding judgment. Instead, she offered a practical solution, suggesting, *“Contact the parents of the one child so they can talk about the learner’s behaviour.”* She acknowledged that such behavioral

issues might be *“beyond [her] expertise”* but emphasised the need for intervention, as *“his behaviour rubs off on other learners.”*

On curriculum coverage, the coach validated the teacher’s challenges, commending her efforts by saying, *“You are doing a good job and are trying your best.”* She recommended using a tracker to document lost instructional time, advising,

“If you had your tracker, you can keep track of all the days lost because of workshops and principal meetings.”

She also acknowledged the teacher’s sentiment about external pressures, agreeing that *“going the extra mile is overrated, we need our weekends for life,”* which built rapport and showed understanding of the teacher’s workload.

To address the writing lag and overall curriculum coverage, the coach suggested using *“Week 9 & 10 to catch up – revision weeks,”* providing a concrete plan to recover lost ground. She planned for the next visit to focus on managing disruptions and classroom management and proposed conducting a SBW to further support the teacher, stating,

“Next time – we will talk about managing disruptions and classroom management. I will go find my EGRP notes on this topic.”

Multigrade (Grade 1-3) English First Additional Language Lesson

The lesson commenced with the entire class singing “The Wheels on the Bus” to engage learners. Learners were seated in mixed class groups (Grades 1, 2 and 3 together), which made managing tasks across grades easier. Following this, Grade 1 and Grade 3 learners were sent back to their seats, allowing the teacher to focus on teaching the Grade 2 learners. The teacher instructed the EAs on the occupational tasks to assign to the other grades.

The phonics lesson centred on the “oa” sound. The teacher asked, “Are these vowels or consonants?” and learners correctly identified “o” and “a” as vowels. Initially, learners pronounced the sound as “o-a,” but the teacher clarified that it should be pronounced as “ow.” At one point, when learners reverted to giving the alphabet name, the teacher reminded them to say the sound instead, reinforcing phonics practice. To reinforce learning, the teacher encouraged other learners to clap for those who answered correctly, fostering a supportive atmosphere.

The two EAs in the classroom assisted learners with their tasks. The teacher provided words containing the “oa” sound (e.g., boat, goat, road, coat, goal). After this, she invited learners to contribute their own examples with the “oa” sound, which encouraged participation and learner ownership of the lesson. The teacher modelled breaking words apart into sounds, for example c-oa-t, and encouraged learners to attempt the same with other words by writing them on the board. Learners practised saying the sounds separately and then blending them back together. The teacher then prompted learners to create sentences using words with the “oa” sound, though some were able to do so while others struggled.

After completing the phonics segment with Grade 2s in 20 minutes, the teacher announced a transition to shared reading. During a toilet break, she expressed disappointment upon realising that her Grade 1 learners were unaware of the upcoming shared reading activity, indicating a lack of clarity or communication.

The learners, particularly Grade 1s, struggled to understand English, highlighting language barriers. The teacher conducted picture reading, posing both open-ended and closed-ended questions to engage learners. She instructed Grade 1 learners to fetch words mentioned in the activity from a word wall. She then asked Grade 2s to identify the sound in the word “food,” while another learner read the word and others followed along. This activity aimed to build vocabulary and comprehension through visual and interactive methods.

The writing tasks were differentiated by grade. For Grade 3 learners, the teacher explained the task of writing about the proteins Lomusa took to school and the sequence in which she took them. Grade 3 learners understood the task and completed it successfully. For Grade 2 learners, the task was to write a complete sentence about the proteins Lomusa took to school. Some Grade 2 learners completed the task successfully, while others struggled. For Grade 1 learners, the teacher explained the task from the front of the classroom, instructing them to draw healthy foods they liked to eat. She wrote a list of healthy foods on the board for learners to copy based on their drawings. The teacher repeated words slowly to ensure learners knew which words to write, and the coach assisted with this process. While learners were at lunch, the teacher marked the writing tasks.

The coach prepared for the lesson by discussing with the teacher what she planned to teach, ensuring alignment with the lesson objectives. They requested learner books from the EA to review prior work. Additionally, she asked the teacher for her lesson plan, demonstrating a focus on understanding the planned structure and content of the lesson.

During the phonics component, the coach took detailed notes in her notebook and completed an observation form to document the lesson’s progress. She referred to the lesson plan in the management book to ensure alignment with the teacher’s objectives. While the teacher taught the Grade 2 learners, the coach assisted with the occupational tasks assigned to other grades, ensuring learners remained engaged. She observed the teacher’s delivery, noting both strengths and weaknesses of the delivery of the lesson.

During the writing component, the coach reviewed the lesson intention and plan in the management document to ensure the writing tasks aligned with objectives. She moved around the classroom to check that learners understood their grade specific tasks, re-explaining where necessary. For Grade 1 learners, she supported the teacher by instructing them to identify healthy foods on a poster before drawing them. She noted spelling errors on the board and flashcards, such as “aple” instead of “apple” and “stave” instead of “starve.” The coach also observed that the Grade 2 task was challenging for some learners and suggested that the teacher could have referred them to the conversation poster for support. She documented the duration of each lesson component and noted overall lesson dynamics.

Post Observation Discussion

The coach structured the post-observation discussion to encourage teacher reflection while providing constructive feedback. She began by asking the teacher about her lesson goals and self-assessment. The teacher felt the phonics lesson went well, stating, *“The lesson was good and the learners were able to blend and segment.”* However, she assumed the occupational tasks were understood because learners were *“busy and not disruptive.”* The coach gently contradicted this, noting,

“According to my observation, the occupational task was not understood by learners because it was not explained by the EA.”

She suggested that the teacher provide an example to clarify tasks and recommended using pictures to contextualise words like “boat, goat, road,” as “learners know how to spell the words but cannot apply them in context.”

For shared reading, the teacher expressed disappointment, saying,

“Learners were not interacting or talking. I didn’t enjoy the lesson. My learners were so passive except for one Grade 1 learner.”

The coach reassured her, stating,

“Don’t beat yourself up. You encouraged the Grade 1s to go to the wall as a means of getting them involved and you did many other good things.”

She highlighted strengths, such as introducing new vocabulary, encouraging predictions, linking to previous themes, and incidentally incorporating tenses and grammar without code-switching. She noted,

“You probed learners to think critically ... Was it right for father to give Lomusa a snack? why and how - you also asked those (questions)”

and she commended the teacher for preparing learners for the writing task through sequencing.

For the writing segment, the coach asked the teacher to reflect on its success. The teacher explained,

“I assisted Grade 1s by showing them the sounds and having them read so they know which word to put on their paper.”

The coach commended her for explaining tasks clearly this time, which enabled most learners to complete them, and for working separately with Grade 1s due to their limited EFAL exposure. However, she identified areas for improvement, suggesting, *“Make reference to the conversational poster.”* She also noted that the lesson components were well-linked and not taught in isolation. The coach reviewed learner books and observed improvements in struggling learners, and discussed curriculum coverage, advising, *“Week 9 & 10 to catch up – revision weeks.”* She encouraged the teacher, saying,

“For a principal and multigrade teacher, and admin support. You’re doing a good job!”

However, when asked to complete the observation form, the teacher was unsure how to do so, indicating a lack of familiarity with this process, which the coach explained in detail.

The teacher repeatedly expressed concern about “losing points,” suggesting she perceived coaching as an assessment. The coach attempted to mitigate this perception by maintaining a supportive tone, focusing on encouragement and practical solutions.

Teacher Perceptions of Reading Ability

Including teacher perception of number of learners who can read per grade

Table 2: Teacher Perceptions of Reading Ability

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL (singular word)	No. of learners who can read in HL (singular word)
1	5	2	3
2	4	2	3
3	10	8	10

The very experienced and well-qualified coach has a well-developed ability to navigate the complexities of multigrade classrooms and support teachers effectively.

The coach did not engage the teacher’s lesson plans superficially but ensured proper coverage of the intended goals. Because of this thorough approach she was able to spot errors in the management book on a book listed for GGR in EFAL which was a SR book.

The coach attempted to employ a teacher-centred approach, influenced by her training in the GROW model (Goal, Reality, Options, Will). She began post-observation discussions by asking the teacher to reflect on her goals and self-assess her lessons. In the EFAL lesson, she asked the teacher, “*What was your goal and how do you feel it went?*”. Where the teacher was too self-critical the coach gently corrected misconceptions about herself and her lesson but was also able to provide constructive criticism to the teacher gently by using “*According to my observation...*”, which also made room for the teacher to disagree with her.

The coach’s feedback is delivered with empathy and encouragement.

In her interview the coach mentioned that the training in the GROW model means, “*Now the discussions have to be more teacher-centered.*” This year’s training focuses on teacher personalities and tools like trackers, unlike last year’s methodology and routines focus.

As per the Coach’s reflection, the teacher’s approach to reading instruction lacked consistency, particularly in EFAL. The coach noted that teachers previously mixed various reading methods, which diluted effectiveness.

“Since the programme started, I’ve noticed that the classroom environment has changed and the teachers are more confident in teaching the two languages,

especially English First Additional Language, and even the teaching methodology has improved.” - EGRP II Literacy Coach

The coach’s interview confirms that all teachers now use a phonics-based approach involving “review sound, blending and segmenting, use sound and word in context, rhyme and song” for EFAL, with Setswana methods remaining consistent but enhanced by EGRP II resources like the decodable ELS anthologies. The coach noted that

“Ulwazi Lwethu anthologies are not decodable, but the learners are excited about reading because of the stories”

suggesting that the anthologies serve complementary roles.

The programme has standardised phonics instruction, moving from eclectic methods to a systematic approach, particularly in EFAL, where teachers previously struggled. Training and resources like flashcards and posters have bolstered teacher confidence, though the teacher’s concern about passive learner engagement shows that this is still a work in progress.

Changes in classroom management related to EGRP II

EGRP II has emphasised differentiation to manage diverse learner needs in multigrade classrooms. In the EFAL lesson, the teacher implemented grade-specific tasks during the writing segment: Grade 3 learners wrote about the sequence of proteins Lomusa took to school, Grade 2 learners wrote a complete sentence about the proteins, and Grade 1 learners drew healthy foods and copied words from the board.

In her interview, the coach explained, “In multi there are grade specific, ability group and whole class activities,” contrasting this with monograde classrooms where content is strictly grade-specific. This shift ensures that classroom management accounts for the diverse abilities within a single classroom, allowing teachers to maintain engagement across all grades simultaneously.

The introduction of EAs is a plus however the EAs in this school struggled to assist the teacher effectively and did not explain tasks to learners during occupational tasks.

Lesson content and methodology

The teacher’s lesson content was aligned with both phonics and literacy development, focusing on sight words, phonics sounds, picture reading, and differentiated writing tasks. In Setswana HL, her content centred on Group Guided Reading for Grade 1s, using the *uLwazi Lwethu Anthology* and phonics-based activities such as segmentation and blending. In EFAL, the focus was on the “oa” sound, shared reading, and vocabulary building through visual aids and sentence construction. The use of songs at the start of lessons helped capture attention and created an engaging environment for learners.

Her methodology reflected a multigrade approach where she divided attention between grades by assigning occupational tasks through EAs and the Literacy Coach, while

focusing directly on smaller groups. She used interactive strategies, such as deliberately making errors for learners to correct, prompting peer assistance, and encouraging clapping for correct answers to build confidence and participation. Although comprehension questioning was limited and some instructions lacked clarity, especially for Grade 1 learners, her use of scaffolding, phonics drills, and differentiated tasks showed an effort to adapt teaching to varying learner abilities within the multigrade context.

5. Learner perceptions

Learners expressed that they value reading because it helps them to learn, avoid failure, and eventually pass so that they can achieve their future goals. Many linked reading to their dreams of becoming professionals such as teachers, doctors, or police officers, while others highlighted the importance of reading in order to help other children. Overall, learners viewed reading as a pathway to success and a way of securing their future.

“If I read, I will pass and be a teacher.”

“I want to be a police officer, so I must read.”

“I want to read so I can help other children.”

In terms of language, learners had different preferences. The majority said they enjoyed reading in Setswana because it was easier to understand and helped them to pass. For them, reading in their home language provided confidence and comfort. Others, however, preferred English, describing it as “nice” and exciting because it challenged them to learn something new. For these learners, English was seen as a language of opportunity and growth.

“Setswana is easy, I can understand.”

“English is nice, I like new words.”

“I want English because one day I will go far.”

Learners also shared their views on how they liked to read. Some explained that they enjoyed reading on their own because it helped them to practise and improve, while others preferred reading in groups because peers could assist when they struggled. They also said that reading to the teacher was enjoyable because she gave them guidance, corrected mistakes, and encouraged them to keep trying. Even though many found fluent reading difficult, they were able to understand and answer questions when guided.

“When I read by myself, I get better.”

“In the group, they help me and I help them.”

6. Specific issues related to teaching a wide range of reading abilities

The multigrade teacher struggled to give equal attention to all three grades, with Grade 1 learners in particular receiving less support while she concentrated on Grade 2 or Grade 3 tasks. Learners were at very different levels of ability: some were able to segment and blend sounds, while others could only identify letters or say the alphabet instead of the sound.

In her interview, the teacher explained that many Grade 1 learners were behind because they had not attended Grade R, but she has been trying her best to get them to a better level, and her efforts are slowly starting to show. As she put it, *“As a teacher, I can see something is happening.”* She further noted that while strategies like going back to phonics can help weaker learners, there is not enough time to apply them fully. The coach also added that discipline problems placed additional strain on the teacher, making it harder to manage the different ability levels within the same lesson.

7. Awareness of EGRP II and its requirements

The teacher showed awareness of the EGRP II programme and its requirements, particularly around lesson planning and phonics instruction. In her interview, she mentioned that EGRP is not complicated and that the lesson plans are helpful in guiding her daily teaching. She demonstrated knowledge of phonics principles, segmentation, blending, and the importance of scaffolding learners step by step. However, she also highlighted gaps in the support tools, noting that multigrade teachers had not been provided with trackers to monitor learner progress, which made it difficult to keep track of abilities across grades. Despite these challenges, she expressed confidence in her understanding of what is required, remarking that she knows how to go back to phonics to support weaker learners, even though time constraints often limit full implementation.

The coach demonstrates a detailed understanding of the aims of the EGRP II, also mentioning the multigrade setting in her response. She highlighted the programme's structured approach to teacher support, resource provision, and tools like Google Drive, which she describes as “the greatest tool that [EGRP II] came with.” She also noted the importance of tracking “dosage and coverage” to ensure sound programme delivery.

8. Resourcing of early grade teaching

Teacher

The school only has one foundation phase teacher who also serves as the school principal.

Use of LTSM

The teacher made use of the standard LTSM provided through the EGRP II programme, such as the DBE workbooks, anthologies, and word walls. In the Setswana HL lesson, she drew on the *uLwazi Lwethu Anthology* for picture discussions and individual reading, while in EFAL she used the DBE phonics activities and the word wall to reinforce vocabulary. Two Education Assistants (EAs) supported her by distributing and monitoring workbook tasks for Grade 2 and Grade 3 learners, allowing her to focus on smaller groups.

In 2025, the teacher continued to use DBE workbooks and EGRP II Phonic Friezes and Flashcards, but there were instances of misplaced sight words and spelling errors on

classroom materials, suggesting a slight decline in the meticulous organisation of physical LTSMs compared to the highly organised environment observed in 2024.

EGRP II has also introduced tracking tools like shared reading, writing, and GGR checklists to continually assess learners. However, according to the coach and as observed, their use remains inconsistent. Regarding curriculum coverage, the teacher admitted to missing exercises, lacking a catch-up plan and not using the curriculum tracker.

The teacher's unfamiliarity with completing the Coach Observation form may suggest that she is also not used to completing the observation tool with her coach during visits.

Tablets for planning and LTSM

The multigrade teacher explained that although the tablets provided under EGRP II contain the same lesson plans as the printed versions, she prefers to work with hard copies. She said the printed lesson plans are easier to manage when preparing for class, especially given her already heavy workload. In her view, the duplication of content on the tablet and in the books makes the printed materials more practical and straightforward to use. She also mentioned that she feels too overwhelmed with other school responsibilities to spend additional time engaging on WhatsApp PLC groups, and therefore she rarely participates.

At the same time, the coach has observed a similar trend of low adoption of tablet-based content across most schools in her circuit. She pointed out that some teachers face technical issues such as malfunctioning tablets, forgotten login details, platform glitches, and network problems. According to the coach,

“Some teachers prefer using the platform on their phones because they are worried about losing their tablet, or didn't receive one in the first place.”

She also explained that WhatsApp PLC groups were set up using the tablet numbers to try and reduce barriers such as data and storage costs on teachers' personal devices. However, despite these efforts, engagement in the WhatsApp groups has remained quite low.

9. Key features of the school's management and leadership

The principal, who is also the foundation phase multigrade class teacher, described herself as a committed and experienced leader, having taught for 36 years and served as principal since 2009. She explained that she still manages a class of 20 learners and follows the EGRP lesson plans, showing that she remains directly involved in teaching as well as in school management. She acknowledged the pressures of her role, admitting that she often feels overwhelmed, especially since the school lost administrative support, which makes it difficult to attend PLC meetings or keep up with communication across schools. Despite these challenges, she emphasised her dedication to doing her best for learners and staff, highlighting her awareness of the programme requirements and her efforts to balance leadership responsibilities with classroom teaching.

10. Support provided for early grade teachers by DH/subject adviser/school management

Cluster Workshops

According to the multigrade teacher, cluster workshops held every term in JTG bring together coaching and non-coaching schools. The coach noted, “The engagement is very good”. She reported that the workshops cover common topics and skills that are particularly challenging, as well as tackling broader curriculum issues. However, she also mentioned that although the workshops are usually helpful, they add to her stress levels by taking up time and increasing her administrative workload. As a result, she has not been attending them.

The coach explained that the size of the cluster workshops differed based on where the school is located, with the biggest one being made up of 19 schools and the smallest one having only 4 schools. Schools are invited to cluster meetings by the subject advisors, who also organise workshop venues. The main challenge flagged by the coach with these cluster workshops is that when common papers are set, there is no distinction between monograde and multigrade and she often has to correct teachers to use relevant assessments for their learners.

School-Based Workshops

The coach conducts these SBWs on a needs basis, targeting issues like classroom management and other matters teachers may be struggling with.

According to the coach, there is one of her schools where she does not run these SBWs, as the teachers there have already taken ownership of the programme and its implementation, and the school is already “excelling”.

WhatsApp-Based PLCs

The coach shares pedagogical content on the WhatsApp PLC every week, but engagement is low, with only 10% of WhatsApp group members engaging with the posts. She put this down to technical issues and teachers being overwhelmed.

When asked about the WhatsApp PLC, the multigrade teacher did not mention the Coach’s weekly posts but thought the WhatsApp group was for teachers to communicate with each other. The teacher admitted to not being active, and not seeing WhatsApp updates. Because of this this teacher misses out on experiencing the full benefit of the programme.

11. Workbook analysis

The table highlights delays in curriculum coverage, inconsistent correction practices, and missing DBE workbook entries, likely due to the teacher’s dual role. Untrained EAs and external disruptions further hinder book maintenance.

Setswana (Home Language) Grade 2	English (First Additional Language) Grade 2	Setswana (Home Language) Grade 3	English (First Additional Language) Grade 3
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Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Marked with no corrections	Yes by teacher	Marked with no corrections	Yes, by teacher
Exercise books up to date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Not enough, approximately 1 per week	Not enough, approximately 1 per week	Not enough, approximately 1 per week	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	No, circled by teacher	Sometimes corrected	No, circled by teacher	Sometimes corrected by learners, sometimes by teachers
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alignment with lesson plans: check if work done on exercise books and workbooks is within the range specified by lesson plans and interrogate deviations with the teacher. Indicate deviation in week.	<i>T2 W5 exercise found 2 weeks later - DBE not available</i> <i>T2 W9 work not found in exercise books - DBE not available</i> <i>Evidence of T3 W1 sounds found</i>	<i>T2 W5 and W9 work not found in exercise books - DBE not available</i> <i>Partial evidence of T3 W1 work found in both DBE and exercise books, done at right time</i>	<i>T2 W5 exercise not found. "Mph" sound only covered in dictation- DBE not available</i> <i>T2 W9 work not found- DBE not available</i>	<i>T2 work not found in exercise books - DBE not available</i> <i>Partial evidence of T3 W1 work found, done at right time</i>
Was the coverage reflected in the teacher tracker as reported by the teacher. (Yes, No, Tracker not used)	Tracker not used Teacher currently on T3 W3	Tracker not used Teacher currently on T3 W3	Tracker not used Teacher currently on T3 W3	Tracker not used Teacher currently on T3 W3

12. Community engagement

The school is situated in a small community that is generally safe but has very limited resources. Parents are not well educated and therefore cannot provide much support with specific school tasks such as helping learners with homework or reading. However, they do contribute in other practical ways by assisting with the upkeep and maintenance of the school. This type of support reflects the community's willingness to be involved within their means, even though academic engagement with learners remains a challenge.

13. Analysis of the early grade reading situation in the school and how this has changed since the 2024 case studies

- Reading outcomes: In 2024, the school exhibited a notably strong reading culture for a deeply rural setting, with nearly all learners in Grades 1, 2, and 3 demonstrating good reading and comprehension skills in both English and Setswana, along with a reported passion for independent reading, especially in

English. Students were confident in speaking and engaging with adults, and Grade 1s benefited from being in multigrade classes with older students who had some English exposure. However, in 2025, observations of Grade 1 learners during the Setswana lesson showed that most struggled with reading full words, often reading individual sounds instead. Despite this, they could answer comprehension questions directly from the text when prompted by the coach. This indicates a possible decline in foundational reading skills among the younger learners, which the teacher linked to their not attending Grade R, forcing her to teach basic skills from the ground up. This was compounded by their lack of discipline and understanding of how to behave in a classroom situation.

Quality of teaching: The multigrade teacher, who also acts as the principal, maintained her energetic and engaging teaching style throughout both years, effectively managing different ability groups within her classroom. In 2024, her lessons were well-structured, and she efficiently used red/green cards for discipline. She adopted a more organised phonetic approach to reading, progressing from sounds to paragraphs, which she found more enjoyable due to EGRP II. That year, she continued implementing differentiated instruction by grade and ability, especially evident in the diverse writing tasks assigned to Grade 1, 2, and 3 students. However, 2025 observations revealed ongoing challenges such as struggles with time management, causing the curriculum coverage to slip and fall behind, particularly in writing. Although she maintained EGRP II strategies like phonics and shared reading, there were times in 2025 when she did not consistently ask comprehension questions during Setswana GGR, which led to the coach's intervention.

In 2024, the teacher demonstrated successful classroom management by using flexible desk setups, shifting from rows to group arrangements as needed, and effectively utilising classroom mats for multiple activities, with learners showing an understanding of routines. By 2025, despite implementing differentiated tasks to cater to diverse learner needs, the teacher expressed considerable frustration with hyperactive learners, noting that her existing rules were not enough to address ongoing behavioural challenges. A new issue arose in 2025 involving EAs struggling to assist effectively and failing to clearly explain occupational tasks to learners, which resulted in disrupting the lesson flow and learner engagement. The teacher expressed frustration with the EAs not being trained, as she usually assumes they understand her instructions until they are required to support learners.

- Use of LTSMs: The school was well-resourced in 2024, boasting a functional library and a print-rich classroom with neat, child-eye-level posters. The teacher consistently used EGRP II LTSMs with fidelity, including the Big Book and conversation posters, integrating them effectively into lessons. Her primary critique in 2024 was that OUP readers were too difficult for struggling learners. In 2025, the teacher continued to use DBE workbooks and EGRP II Phonic Friezes and Flashcards, but there were instances of misplaced sight words and spelling errors on classroom materials, suggesting a slight decline in the meticulous organisation of physical LTSMs compared to the highly organised environment observed in 2024.

- Coaching and support for teachers: The coach consistently provided strong, empathetic, and non-judgmental support to the teacher across both years. In 2024, the coach, with extensive multigrade and EGRP experience, demonstrated her hands-on support, sharing ideas via WhatsApp, and helping the teacher balance her principal duties with teaching responsibilities. This continued in 2025 with the coach offering practical strategies for addressing challenges such as foundational skill gaps (revisiting phonics), hyperactive learners (parent contact), and curriculum catch-up (using revision weeks). While provincial department support remained limited to curriculum checks, the subject adviser's involvement in cluster PLC meetings ensured support for the EGRP II programme. The withdrawal of experienced TAs in 2024 continues to be a challenge in 2025, as the newly assigned EAs struggle to provide effective direct classroom support.