

## IT'S TIME TO IMPLEMENT SIP:

### Identifying and prioritising strategies for improvement

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**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to the national Policy on Whole School Evaluation, in 2017, all schools were expected to develop a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to be implemented in 2018. One major shortfall in SIPs developed by many schools is that they do not yield the intended results, amongst other things, because they are not:

- specific and detailed,
- results-oriented, and
- evaluated and monitored.

Schools that work or high-performing schools provide valuable lessons about how they set out the changes they need to make to improve the level of learner achievement. This advocacy brief outlines elements of an effective SIP developed by the schools that work.

What specific strategies can schools implement in their SIPs so that the level of learner achievement is enhanced? Discussed in this advocacy brief are key drivers of curriculum delivery which are expressed in 30 best practices exhibited by schools that work.

### INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of school is to prepare every learner to read, write, and calculate. And so, all schools are expected to make every learner succeed academically. To do this, schools need a good plan that defines its targeted work to raise achievement for all of its learners.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING PROCESS:** A process that schools can use to set goals for improvement, and make decisions about how and when these goals will be achieved is *school improvement planning*. When schools focus on specific goals and strategies for change, a school's school improvement plan (SIP) will lead to a lasting improvement in learner achievement levels.

Literature<sup>1</sup> suggests that as many as two-thirds of the improvement plans developed by schools do not yield the intended results, amongst other things, because ...



- The plans are **not specific and detailed** enough. It is unclear what exactly was intended to occur.
- The plans are **not results-oriented**. It is unclear what would happen as a result of each activity/strategy.
- The plans are **not monitored**. It is unclear who would do what and when to implement the plan.



Schools must produce an annual SIP as required, in terms of the national Policy on Whole School Evaluation (WSE). By the end of the 2017 academic year, all schools were expected to have produced a SIP for implementation in the 2018 academic year.

<sup>1</sup> Maryland Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development



**IS YOUR SIP ACTIONABLE?** Four questions posed below may be used to ascertain how close your school is to an ideal SIP—one that is actionable and which breaks down year-long goals into achievable quarterly, weekly, and even daily objectives, allocating time, resources, and actions to achieve those goals.

**LESSONS FROM SCHOOLS THAT WORK:** Schools that work<sup>2</sup> provide some useful insights about how school improvement planning is initiated to set out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of learner achievement, and how and when these changes will be made.

One school defines its school improvement planning process as follows:

*A comprehensive needs assessment—determining needs and examining their nature and causes—precedes the school improvement planning process. After that, we identify areas for improvement and prioritise these areas.*  
(Principal, School LD-Quintile 4)

## ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SIP IN SCHOOLS THAT WORK

In their SIPs, schools that work or high-performing schools follow four distinct but related steps to promote focus on continuous school improvement. These steps are listed and briefly discussed below:



- Establish problem areas
- Set goals and performance targets
- Develop and implement strategies or a plan of action
- Monitor progress in achieving set goals



<sup>2</sup> In April 2017, the Minister of Basic Education commissioned NEEDU to conduct the *Schools that Work II* study. This study sought to examine the characteristics of top-performing schools in South Africa. The best practices discussed in this advocacy brief are based on the findings of that study. The full report is available on the Department of Basic Education website: [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za).

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### STEP 1: ESTABLISH PROBLEM AREAS

Schools that work clarify problem areas to increase the chances that the strategies that the school selects will produce the desired results.

At this stage of the school improvement planning process, schools need to address the following question:

#### How well are we doing?

In these schools, addressing this question precedes any school improvement planning process and involves the following:



- **Conduct needs assessment** of their current practices and results (involving all relevant stakeholders) in order to:
  - ✓ know their starting point; and
  - ✓ gather information about the school and its learners systematically so that they can determine what needs to be improved in their school.
- **Analyse the collected information** to establish problem areas and to accurately gauge their strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement
- **Prioritise the needs** as indicated by the analysed information



### STEP 2: SET GOALS AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS

At this stage of the school improvement planning process, schools need to address the following question:

#### How well should we be doing?

After conducting needs assessment and have a clear sense of where they are currently, schools that work begin to ...



- **Define challenging but feasible or achievable goals** which focus everyone's attention on the most important levers and indicators of progress
- **Set goals and performance targets** to indicate the level at which the school would like to be performing on a given goal by a given time



Further details how schools that work set goals and improvement targets are provided in Policy Brief N-03.

### STEP 3: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN

As a third step in the school improvement planning process, schools that work develop and implement strategies or a plan of action to help them towards achieving their goals in each of the priority areas.

At this point in the school improvement planning process, schools need to address the following question:

#### What will we do to achieve our goals?

In high-performing schools, mapping out strategies for progressing to where they want to be includes ...



- **Developing strategies or actions** the school will take to raise learner achievement for all of its learners
- **Identifying effective strategies** to help the school to work towards achieving its goals in each of their priority areas
- **Prioritising or limiting strategies** (to be implemented at a time) that can yield better results, faster
- **Establishing time lines**, responsibilities and milestones for monitoring progress over time
- **Communicating the plan and expectations** for what role each staff member plays in the implementation of the school improvement strategies
- **Implementing improvement strategies** as planned



### STEP 4: MONITOR PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING SET GOALS AND TARGETS

During this final stage of the school improvement planning process a school needs to address the following question:

#### Are we there yet?

Schools that work understand that what gets monitored gets done and so they assess whether they are on target to meet their achievement goals. Specifically, these schools...



- **Gather information** as the improvement strategies are implemented and compare it to the same sources of information gathered to conduct needs assessment. This information is collected regularly to:
  - ✓ indicate whether the school is making sufficient progress toward its end goals.
  - ✓ track the progress of each learner toward the attainment of proficiency in different subjects.
- **Monitor progress** by:
  - ✓ building into the SIP a series of *checkpoints* for formal evaluations of the plan in progress
  - ✓ developing *milestones* to evaluate if learners are progressing satisfactorily toward meeting the set targets
  - ✓ building in opportunities for review through regular (at least monthly) *status updates*
- **Act on needed changes** if the rate of progress does not indicate that the school is on track to hit its set target. This includes:
  - ✓ *assessing, reflecting and adjusting practice* based on data indicating what is working to ensure that goals are met, and
  - ✓ *revising* implementation strategies based on the same kinds of information as that used to determine the original goals, focuses, strategies, and time lines



#### RESEARCH-BASED IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

The 2018 SIP was developed and finalised in 2017. What remains to be done in 2018 is the implementation of steps 3 and 4 (discussed above) in the improvement planning process.

What specific strategies can schools implement so that the level of learner achievement is enhanced? Discussed in detail in the *Schools that Work II* study are 30 best practices pertaining to the key drivers of curriculum delivery. These research-based practices are as follows:



SUB-THEME	BEST PRACTICE
<b>1. SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP</b>	
Parent/Family Involvement	<b>No. 1.1:</b> Map out ways to broaden parental or family involvement
Community Support/Partnerships	<b>No. 1.2:</b> Develop partnerships with agencies to provide a coordinated set of key social and educational services to learners
Learner well-being	<b>No. 1.3:</b> Take initiatives to understand learners' diverse learning challenges, and always striving to meet learners' needs
<b>2. LEARNER-CENTRED CLIMATE</b>	
Safety, order and discipline	<b>No. 2.1:</b> Provide an orderly and secure environment that ensures a supportive context for learning
Emphasis on academic success	<b>No. 2.2:</b> Send strong messages about the importance and value of school work
Reward and incentive	<b>No. 2.3:</b> Create a strong culture of academic achievement by celebrating their successes
Positive teacher & learner attitude	<b>No. 2.4:</b> Believe that all learners can learn and living up to this expectation
Culture and values	<b>No. 2.5:</b> Develop a strong unique culture and set of values, which underpin everything the school stands for
<b>3. ENABLING CONDITIONS</b>	
A capable teaching force	<b>No. 3.1:</b> Recruit good teachers, retaining them, and creating good conditions for them to excel
Flexibility and autonomy	<b>No. 3.3:</b> Place decision making closer to the classroom to increase learner achievement
Being an NSC exam marker	<b>No. 3.3:</b> Encourage teachers to become markers in the NSC examinations
Teacher commitment and dedication	<b>No. 3.4:</b> Appoint and develop teachers who feel accountable for helping learners improve their performance
Focused curriculum	<b>No. 3.5:</b> Specialise in few subjects or academic streams
<b>4. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP</b>	
Strategic and improvement planning	<b>No. 4.1:</b> Develop the School Improvement Plan, which includes priorities for action, implementing and reviewing regularly
Instructional leadership	<b>No. 4.2:</b> Monitor or control teachers' and learners' work to assess the progress that the school is making towards delivering the curriculum
Facilitative leadership	<b>No. 4.3:</b> Lead without controlling, while making it easier for all members of the school community to achieve agreed-upon goals
<b>5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION</b>	
School-based programme	<b>No. 5.1:</b> Provide time for meaningful staff development as well as scheduling and pacing development activities
Teacher own development	<b>No. 5.2:</b> Take responsibility for own development and empowerment
Teacher collaboration	<b>No. 5.3:</b> Explore different scheduling and grouping practices to reduce teacher isolation and providing teachers with collaborative settings for planning, problem solving and peer support
Networking	<b>No. 5.4:</b> Network with other schools to develop instructional and leadership skills

SUB-THEME	BEST PRACTICE
<b>6. QUALITY OF TEACHING</b>	
High learning time	<b>No. 6.1:</b> Use allotted time efficiently and effectively; mitigate factors that lead to loss of teaching time; and create more learning opportunities for learners
Variety of innovative teaching strategies	<b>No. 6.2A:</b> Teacher collaboration <b>No. 6.2B:</b> Moving up with learners (looping) <b>No. 6.2C:</b> Differentiated instruction <b>No. 6.2D:</b> Cooperative learning (learner peer support) <b>No. 6.2E:</b> Making subjects interesting and relevant <b>No. 6.2F:</b> Use of WhatsApp
Frequent homework which is monitored	<b>No. 6.3:</b> Design effective homework to assist learners to self-regulate and take responsibility for their work, and to empower parents to support their children at home
Regular assessment	<b>No. 6.4:</b> Use different phases of the assessment loop effectively to improve learning and teaching
Thorough exam preparation	<b>No. 6.5:</b> Prepare learners for the examinations adequately and appropriately without detracting from real learning and or "teaching to the test"

## RECOMMENDATION

To address the question "What will we do to achieve our goals aimed at improving learner achievement?" it is recommended that schools follow four steps listed below to think critically about the best practices that could be used to increase learner achievement:

### STEP 1

- Read and discuss each of the best practices listed above and think about how it applies to your school, and discuss what you believe to be most appropriate for your particular circumstances.

### STEP 2

- Decide whether you would endorse the best practices for your school or develop alternatives that are more appropriate for your school.

### STEP 3

- Ascertain how close you think your school is to the ideal as expressed by each best practice. This will entail collecting, analysing and discussing concrete evidence where your school is in relation to the best practice.

### STEP 4

- Select and prioritise practices that you will consider including in your SIP which you feel will improve learning outcomes.

