

The 2022 School Monitoring Survey

The visits of District Officials to schools for monitoring and support

Indicator 11: The percentage of schools visited at least twice a year by district officials for monitoring and support purposes.

&

Indicator 12: The percentage of principals rating the support services of districts as satisfactory.

Introduction

The School Monitoring Survey (SMS) covered all nine South African provinces in a quantitative nationally representative sample. In addition, qualitative data was collected in ten schools in each province. The newly released school monitoring survey results have shown that nationally there has not been a significant shift in the percentage of schools visited at least twice a year by district officials over the years.

- 2011:85%,
- 2017:84%,
- 2022:84%.

This brief explores what the policy says concerning school visits by District Officials from the perspective of both teachers and school principals from the findings of the School Monitoring Survey (SMS). Key findings from indicators 11 and 12 are analysed and recommendations are made based on the findings. One key finding was that primary schools received less visits from District Officials than secondary schools. The frequency of visits does not necessarily equate to the satisfaction of the teachers about the school visits.

Policy significance

The role of the district is extremely important in the South African school context. According to policy districts provide support in the form of curriculum management, project management, data analysis, monitoring, planning, reporting, accounting and problem solving (NDP, 2030). Some of the tasks given to District Offices are to assist schools in developing school improvement plans and giving support to principals and teachers in improving the quality of teaching and learning. This support is provided by circuit managers and subject advisors to all schools across the quintiles. Officials from the District are the closest government body to schools as they provide direct support to principals, department heads and teachers. Their visits are important as they give first-hand account of the situation in schools and can provide support directly.

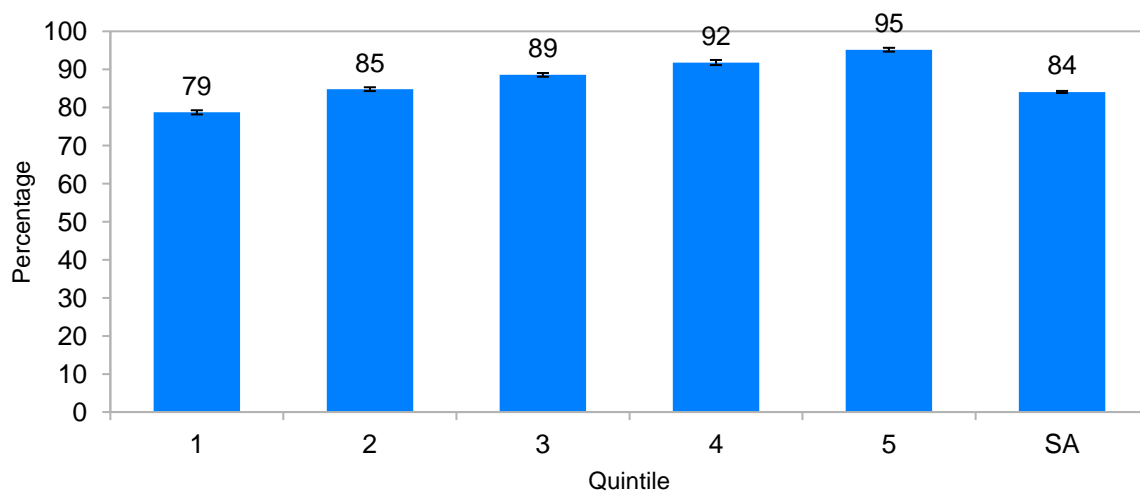
The policy on the organisation of roles and responsibilities of Education Districts states that regular and interactive meetings at all levels including the district level are important to address pertinent issues. The school visits are a key aspect of these meetings whereby the District Officials and school representatives can engage with key contextual issues that affect schools in a particular district. Lastly, the policy notes that support by districts to schools can be strained if there is an excessive

number of schools that the district is responsible for. However, the policy does not stipulate a required or preferred number of visits to schools.

Findings from indicators 11 and 12

Indicator 11 of the school monitoring survey showed how often District Officials visit schools. The results in figure 1 show the percentage of schools visited by District Officials at least twice a year for monitoring and support, by quintile. This shows that nationally 84% of the schools surveyed were visited at least twice by District Officials in the year 2022. The schools were visited by both circuit managers and subject advisors. According to the interviews conducted in the qualitative component of the School Monitoring Survey, these visits were generally regarded by teachers as being capacitating and beneficial.

Figure 1: Percentage of primary and secondary schools combined having received at least two visits from district officials by quintile, in 2022.

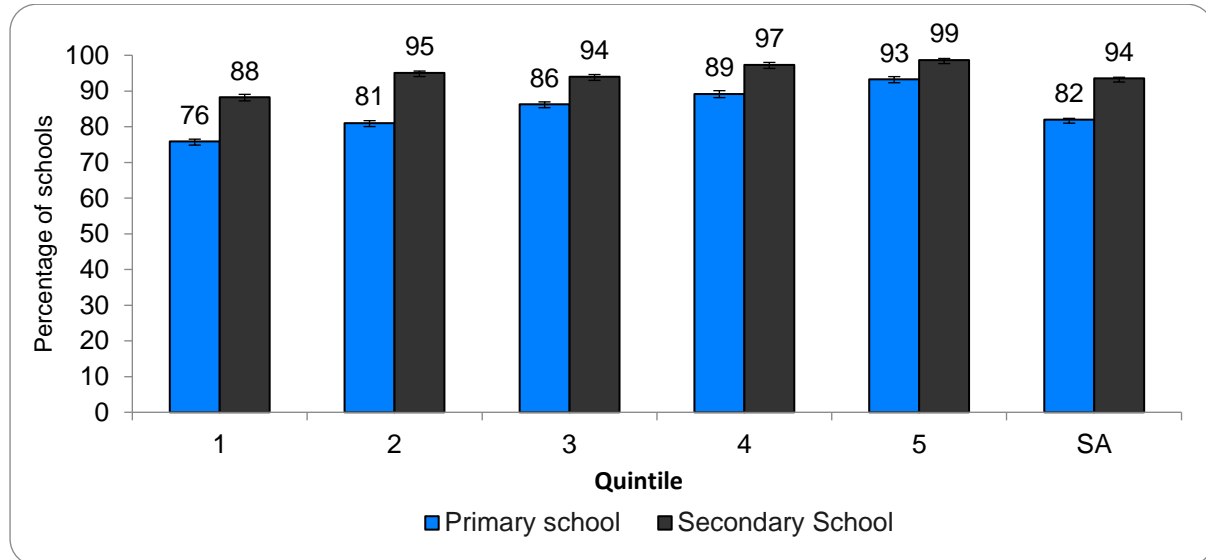


However, teachers also highlighted that an increase of school-based visits from District Officials would be beneficial, especially, classroom-based visits. According to the SMS “the proportion of teachers who proposed an increase in the amount or quality of district involvement is nearly half.” The teachers called for more frequent interaction, for example, one teacher noted that “[i]f maybe you’re not having workshops just yearly, maybe quarterly”. Another teacher said, “we need more in terms of guidance and support, once they do training they have expectations of us but I think they need to role model”.

The data from the school monitoring survey also shows that there is a discrepancy between the visits to primary schools and secondary schools. Figure 2 shows that across all the five quintiles, secondary schools are visited more than primary schools. Secondly, for both primary and secondary schools, quintile 1-3 schools were less likely to receive at least two visits in the year. The fact that schools in more vulnerable contexts, which are also known to have lower academic achievement on average, receive less support from districts is concerning. However, this pattern might not necessarily reflect the choices of District Officials to neglect Quintile 1-3 schools, but rather it could

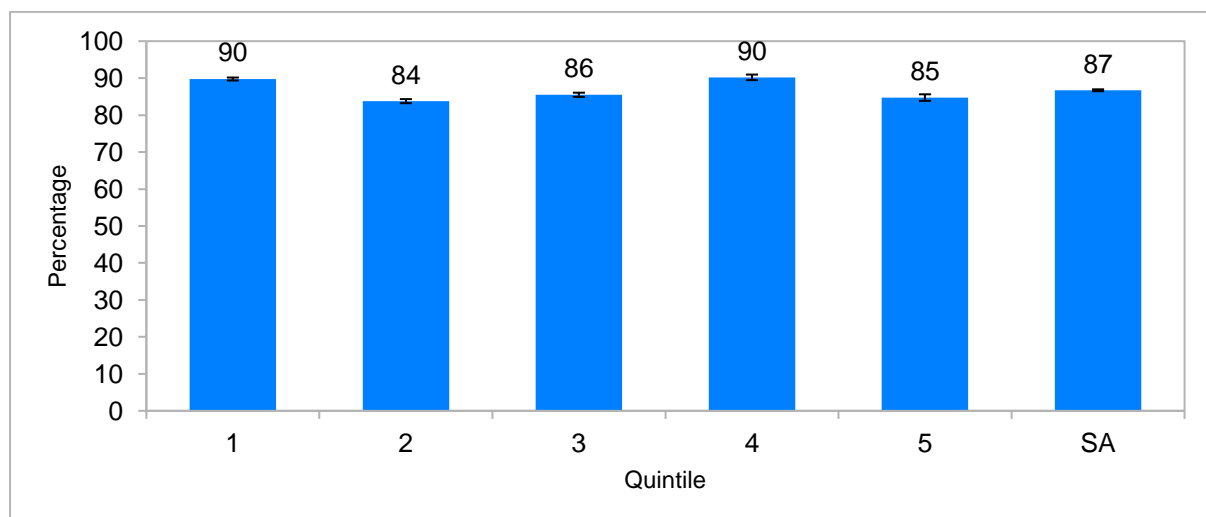
be that these schools tend to be located in districts with higher ratios of schools to district officials or where distances to travel to schools are greater.

Figure 2: Percentage of primary versus secondary schools having received at least two visits from district officials by quintile, 2022



As Figure 3 shows, most school principals (87% nationally) were satisfied with the visits by District Officials. Across the five quintiles support was relatively similar.

Figure 3: Percentage of primary and secondary schools combined who were satisfied with the support visits by district officials by quintile, 2022



Enablers and constraints for District support

District Officials, and Subjects Advisors in particular, are government officials and therefore hold power and authority. This can be an advantage for Subject Advisors in so far as their monitoring and instructions are taken seriously. This can promote compliance with the curriculum implementation and following teaching plans. However, their official power can also inhibit a relationship of trust and openness on the part of teachers to being observed. Other constraints to the work of Subject Advisors include time and resource allocation which make it difficult for Subject Advisors to provide in-classroom support to teachers. Resources such as vehicles, were cited as a constraint especially for reaching schools that are in rural areas. Time is also a big constraint according to a Subject Advisor study carried out by the NECT that found that some Subject Advisors are responsible for over 200 schools. This is an alarming number and explains why classroom visits from Subject Advisors are so low.

Therefore, whether more support is possible is not clear. While the policy on roles and responsibilities of districts prescribes support, it also acknowledges that “Some district offices do not have the necessary capacity to handle their current administrative, management and professional responsibilities”. Ultimately, there seems to be a mismatch between the need for classroom support and the amount of district support that is currently available within existing resources.

Recommendations

An increase in the number of school and especially in classroom visits by District Officials (particularly subject advisors) could be beneficial in improving teachers’ pedagogical practices. Teachers in the survey called for an increase in classroom visits and this should be a key consideration for districts across the country. Based on figure two it is also recommended that schools in quintile 1-3 should receive more support from the district to promote quality education and that generally non-fee paying primary schools are given more support.