

The 2022 School Monitoring Survey

School Safety and Violence

The design and purpose of the School Monitoring Survey

The School Monitoring Survey (SMS) is a large nationally and provincially representative sample survey of South African schools, used to monitor progress towards the achievement of selected goals and indicators set out in the sector plan, to help inform planning, and to highlight areas that require improvement. To measure education sector performance, the DBE commissioned the last three School Monitoring Surveys 2011/12, 2017, and the third SMS in 2021/22 (DBE, 2023). The SMS 2021/22 focused on the 12 key indicators specified in the Action Plan to 2024: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030 as well as eight additional priority areas. This policy brief focuses on the findings related to issues of school safety and violence.

Introduction: School safety policy context

Ensuring safety and security in educational institutions has become as paramount as effective teaching and learning in South Africa. The South African Schools Act and subsequent amendments provide a legislative framework addressing various aspects of school safety and security.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is committed to fostering a secure and positive learning environment. To combat school violence, the DBE developed the National School Safety Framework (NSSF), a comprehensive strategy guiding both national and provincial education departments. This initiative aims to manage safety incidents effectively and sustain a violence-free environment for learners, educators, and school staff. The NSSF not only aids schools in recognizing and addressing safety issues but also establishes robust incident reporting systems and monitors progress over time, integrating broader community factors that may influence violence.

Partnerships with the Department of Justice and the Department of Social Development have strengthened these efforts through improved staff vetting processes and the formation of a National School Safety Steering Committee. The DBE also enhances safety protocols by overseeing the NSSF's implementation across 75 districts, ensuring compliance with safety guidelines and refining strategies based on observed outcomes.

South African law underscores the importance of children's safety and rights, recognizing their vulnerability and the necessity for comprehensive protection. Enshrined in the 1996 Constitution's Bill of Rights, these protections are bolstered by the Children's Act of 2005 and other pivotal legislation. The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, the National Education Policy Act (1996), the Children's Act No 38 of 2005, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act No 85 of 1993 collectively outlaw violence in schools, positioning the NSSF within a legal framework that prioritizes the safety of learners and educators as essential to quality education.

This policy brief aims to leverage the latest data to propose actionable recommendations for the DBE to effectively mitigate violence in schools, ensuring all South African students can learn in a safe environment.

The School Monitoring Survey 2021/22 Results

The graphs below focus on the results of the quantitative data collected on school safety and violence in South African schools through the national survey with a sample of 2000 schools in both primary and secondary schools across all provinces.

According to Figure 1, 81% of primary school principals and 75% of primary school teachers reported feeling safe at their schools. Feelings of safety were above 70% across all provinces, except for the Eastern Cape. The highest feelings of safety were highest in the Western Cape, Limpopo, and Northern Cape. However, in seven out of the nine provinces, primary school teachers felt slightly less safe than principals.

Figure 1: Primary school principal and teachers' views of feeling safe at school by province, 2022

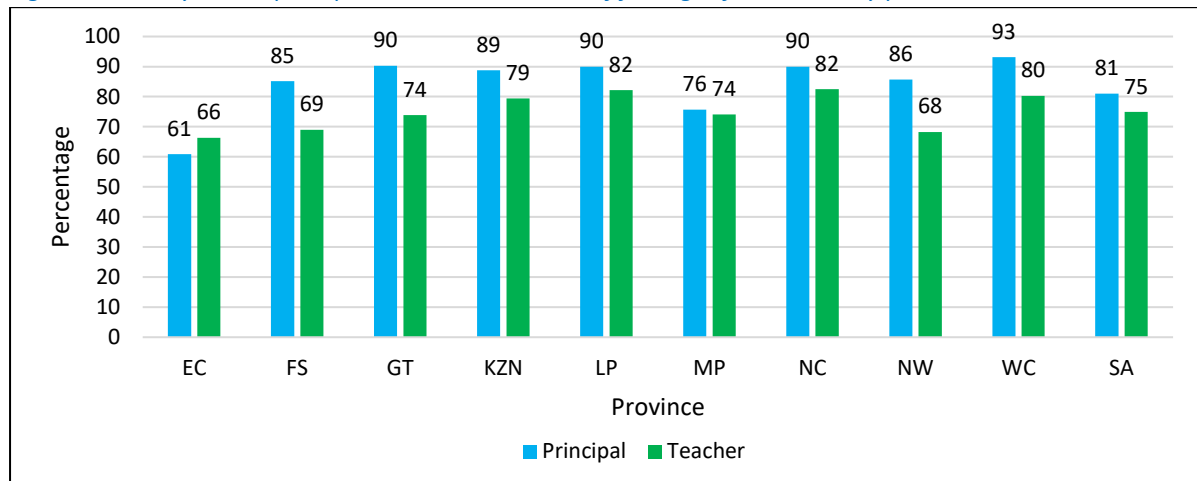


Figure 2 indicates that about 73% of secondary school principals and 62% of secondary school teachers reported feeling safe at their schools. The provinces with the highest proportion of principals feeling safe were the Free State (76%), Limpopo Province (78%), the Northern Cape (76%), and the Western Cape (85%). In terms of teachers feeling safe, Limpopo had the highest proportion (75%), while the Eastern Cape (56%) and KwaZulu-Natal (57%) had the lowest. The biggest differences between the views of principals and teachers at secondary schools were observed in the Free State (76% vs. 61%) and the Western Cape (85% vs. 68%).

Figure 2: Secondary school principal and teachers' views of feeling safe at school by province, 2022

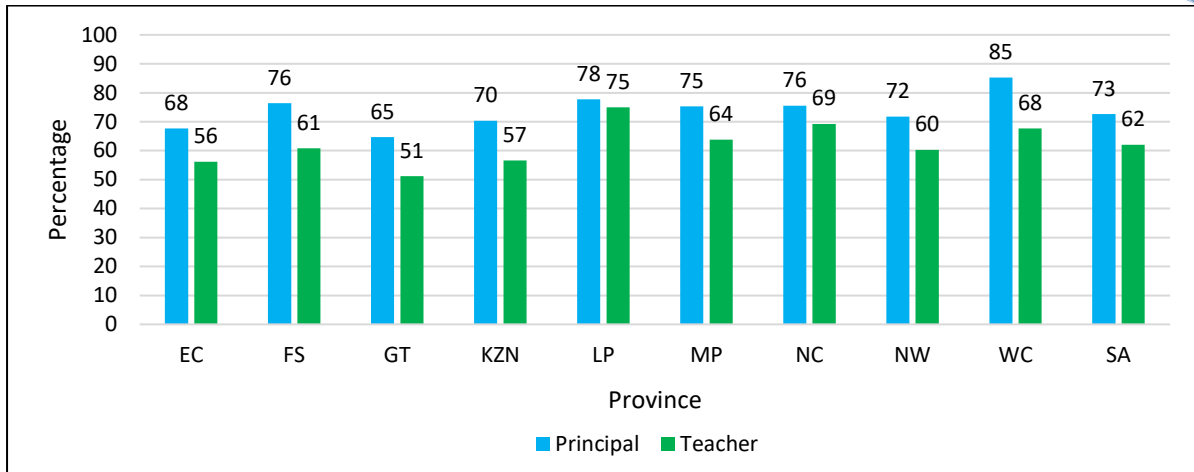


Figure 3 shows that more principals of primary schools across all quintiles felt safe in comparison to teachers at primary schools. The largest gap in feeling safe between principals and teachers was present at Quintile 4 (87% vs. 75%) schools.

Figure 3: Primary school principal and teachers' views of feeling safe at school by quintile, 2022

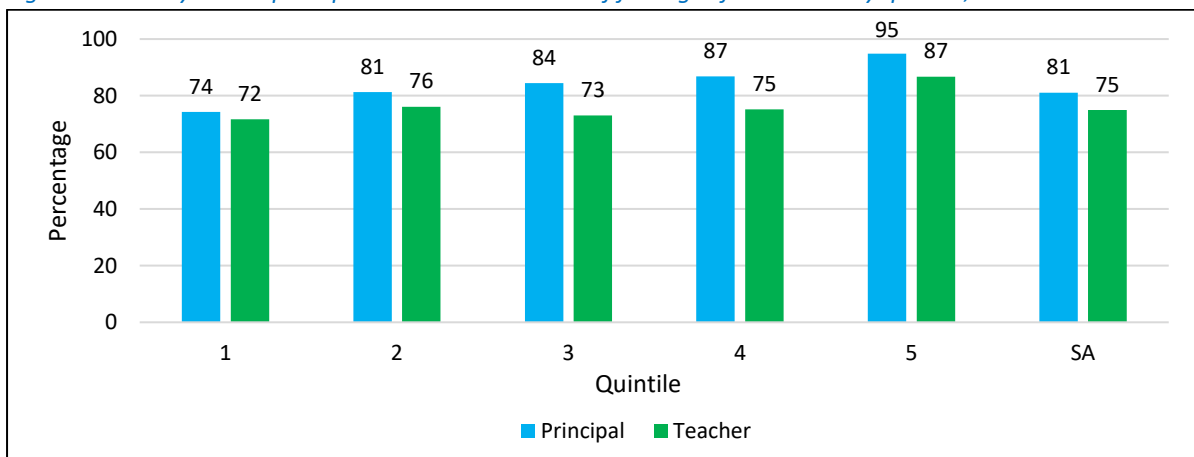


Figure 4 shows that more principals of secondary schools across all quintiles felt safe in comparison to teachers at secondary schools. Quintile 5 had the highest proportion of both principals and teachers at secondary schools feeling safe.

Figure 4: Secondary school principal and teachers' views of feeling safe at school by quintile, 2022

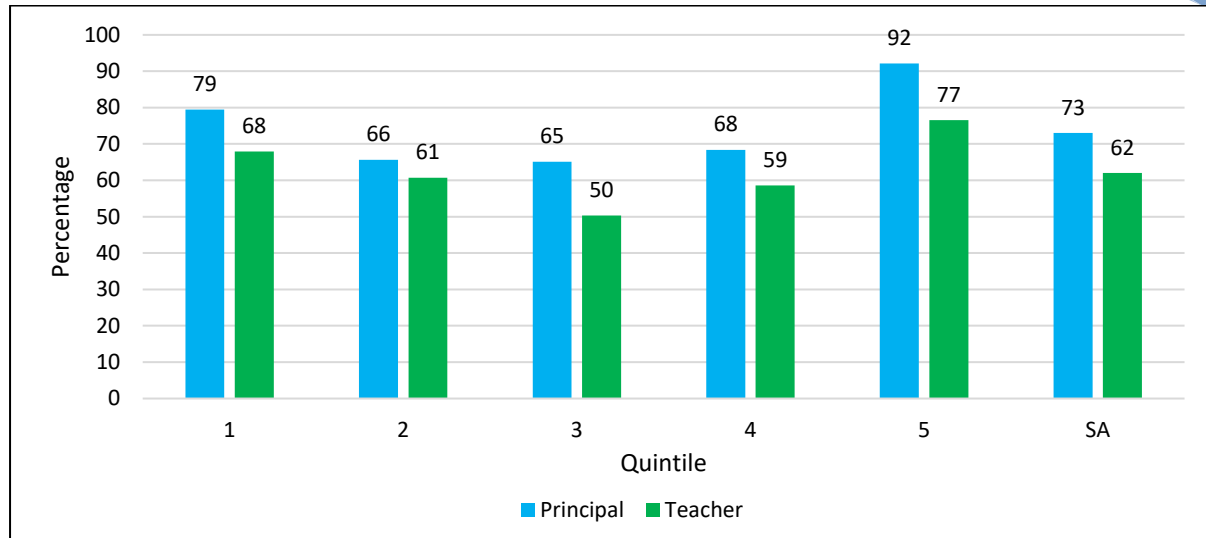
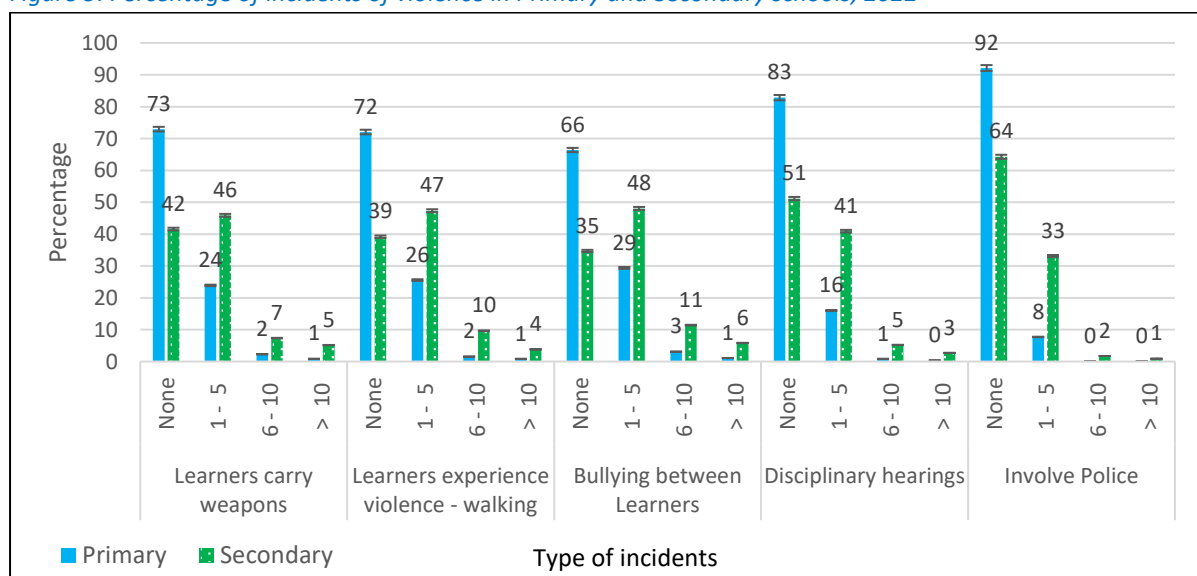


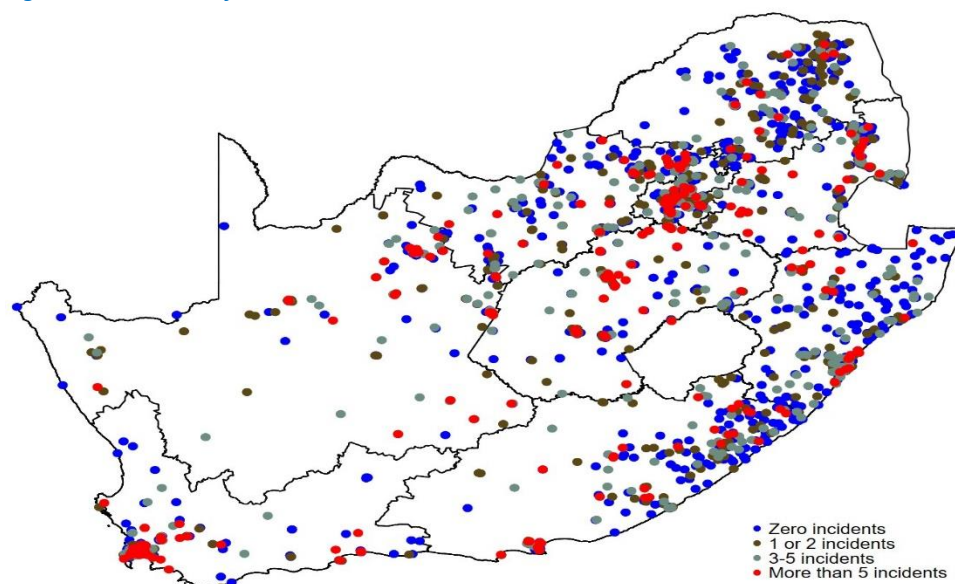
Figure 5 shows the incidents of safety affecting learners at primary and secondary schools and the extent to which this was a problem at schools in 2022. When comparing primary and secondary schools, it's evident that the incidence of various incidents is higher at secondary schools. In terms of learners carrying weapons, 73% of primary schools reported no such incidents, while only 42% of secondary schools reported the same. Similarly, 72% of primary schools reported no instances of learners experiencing violence while walking to or from school, whereas only 39% of secondary schools reported the same. Regarding reported incidents of violence or bullying involving learners, only 8% of primary schools mentioned 1-5 incidents requiring involvement from the South African Police Services (SAPS), while 33% of secondary schools reported the same range of incidents. These comparisons indicate a higher prevalence of incidents at secondary schools, including weapons possession, violence during a commute, and incidents requiring police intervention.

Figure 5: Percentage of incidents of violence in Primary and Secondary schools, 2022



The map in Figure 6 has colour-coded schools in the SMS by the frequency of weapon-related incidents. In South Africa, reports of students bringing knives, firearms, and other weapons to school have raised serious safety concerns. These incidents, sometimes claimed as self-defence, often lead to violence and distress, prompting increased security measures but highlighting ongoing issues with school safety.

Figure 6: Incidence of violence at schools



Summary of School Monitoring Survey results

The findings indicate that most primary school principals and teachers feel safe in their schools, with principals generally feeling safer than teachers. The provinces vary in terms of safety perceptions, with higher percentages of safe-feeling principals in the Free State, Limpopo Province, the Northern Cape, and the Western Cape. Similarly, teachers at secondary schools' report feeling safer in the Free State, Limpopo, and the Western Cape. Generally, teachers and principals feel safer in primary schools compared to high schools.

Secondary schools overall have more safety incidents affecting learners, warranting increased monitoring of incidents involving disciplinary hearings and the South African Police Services. Primary and secondary school principals have similar views on the impact of violence and the school environment, which they consider a potential challenge. Teachers in both school levels have slightly differing views on the prevalence of violence among learners, with secondary school learners seen as more problematic. The transition from primary to secondary school presents increasing challenges for both learners and teachers due to the higher prevalence of violence.

Incidence of violence at school according to the General Household Survey (GHS)

The GHS conducted by Statistics South Africa since 2002 aims to measure service delivery nationally in a sample of about 25,000 households. This is conducted annually between the Census. Data

collected includes household measurements of the quality and educational progress. The GHS seeks to determine if students have encountered any type of violence, corporal punishment, or verbal abuse in school within the past three months, as well as the specific forms of violence experienced. Encouragingly, the overall percentage of individuals encountering violence has been decreasing (Figure 7). This has nearly halved, from almost 20% in 2011 to about 10% in 2019.

As shown in Table 1, Eastern Cape, North West, and KwaZulu-Natal are the provinces with the highest percentage of students who reported experiencing corporal punishment or verbal abuse in school. Gauteng, Western Cape, and Limpopo have shown the lowest prevalence in recent years. Notably, there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of experiencing corporal punishment or verbal abuse. Examining the types of violence students experienced, it is evident that corporal punishment by a teacher was the most frequently reported form in 2019, at 7%. This pattern is consistent across all provinces with the highest prevalence observed in KwaZulu-Natal, North West, and Eastern Cape.

Figure 7: Percentage of learners who have experienced violence

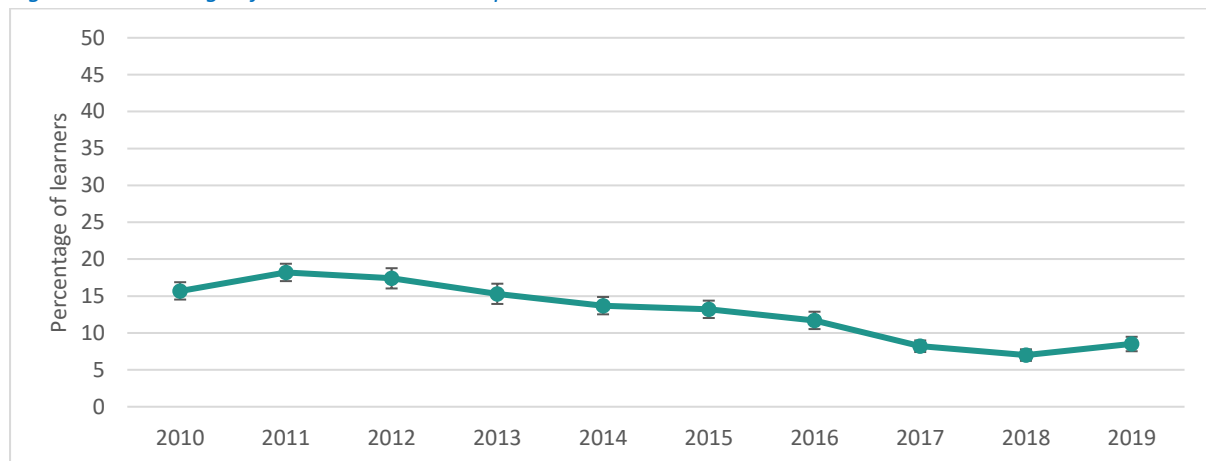


Table 1: Types of violence experienced by learners

	No violence experienced	Corporal punishment by a teacher	Physical Violence by Teacher	Verbal abuse by a teacher	Verbal abuse by learners	Physical Violence by Learners
Western Cape	94,9	2,7	0,2	0,6	1,8	1,6
Eastern Cape	88,5	10,9	0,2	0,1	0,6	0,5
Northern Cape	93,2	4,0	0,1	0,4	2,1	2,1
Free State	89,1	9,6	0,5	0,6	1,7	0,9
KZN	86,0	13,5	0,3	0,4	0,6	0,2
North West	87,8	11,1	2,2	1,7	2,0	1,9
Gauteng	95,3	2,0	0,3	0,7	1,9	1,2
Mpumalanga	93,8	4,6	0,2	0,1	1,0	1,1
Limpopo	96,7	3,0	0,1	0,0	0,2	0,3
National	91,5	7,1	0,4	0,5	1,2	0,9

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, school safety and violence in South Africa are critical issues that require ongoing attention and action. The figures and data presented highlight the prevalence of violence, corporal punishment, and verbal abuse experienced by learners in different provinces. While progress has been made in reducing overall violence (mainly driven by decreases in corporal punishment, which is the most common type of violence), certain regions still face significant challenges. Eastern Cape, North West, and KwaZulu-Natal stand out as areas with higher rates of corporal punishment. The School Monitoring Survey indicates that Gauteng and the Western Cape, on the other hand, have relatively high rates of learner-initiated violence, like bringing weapons to school. Policymakers, educators, and communities need to collaborate and implement effective strategies to ensure a safe learning environment for all children. This includes comprehensive anti-violence policies, teacher training on alternative discipline methods, and promoting a culture of respect and non-violence. By addressing these issues and working towards safer schools, South Africa can provide a conducive and nurturing environment that enables learners to thrive and reach their full potential.