LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Report on best practices from top performing outliers
2010

MONITORING AND EVALUATION DIRECTORATE

ABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

DBE	-	Department of Basic Education
FET	-	Further Education and Training
FFLC	-	Foundations for Learning Campaign
FY	-	Financial Year
HPS	-	Higher Performing Schools
IQMS	-	Integrated Quality Management Systems
IWSE	-	Internal Whole-School Evaluation
LPS	-	Lower Performing Schools
LSEN	-	Learners with Special Education Needs
NCS	-	National Curriculum Statement
PGP	-	Personal Growth Plan
PIRLS	-	Progress in International Reading and Literature Study
SACMEQ	-	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality
SDP	-	School Development Plan
SGB	-	School Governing Body
SIP	-	School Improvement Plan
SMT	-	School Management Team
TIMMS	-	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
WSE	-	Whole-School Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate conducted a study on learner performance in a sample of schools in Life Skills (Gr. 3) and in Natural Sciences (Gr. 6) in 2010. This sample represented schools across all quintiles. Subsequently, a qualitative study was done on schools that succeeded in achieving results above 50%, and below 20%, in the previous study. Of interest were the characteristics found in higher performing schools that were not prevalent in lower performing schools. After identifying the strong characteristics in the higher performing schools, it had to be established whether these characteristics were present in low performing schools. Lower performing schools were identified as schools with the mean score below 20% based on the 2010 report.

In 2011, members of the Quality Assurance Sub-Branch at the provincial and district offices conducted a qualitative study in the 48 primary schools. These schools were sampled based on the average mean scores for Life Skills and Natural Sciences as provided by the 2010 Systemic Evaluation report. Of these 48 schools, seven schools performed above 50% and seven below 20%.

Chapter 1 of the report gives an introduction to the study and explains the research questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of selected literature on similar research done nationally and internationally. It also sheds some light on good systemic practices and some systemic challenges. Chapter 3 explores the methodology that was used in the study.

Chapter 4 of the report gives a brief analysis of learner performance based on the 2010 Grades 3 and 6 report. The findings of the qualitative study are set out in Chapter 5.

In general, it was found that higher performing schools were dedicated, while focusing on their central task of teaching and learning. Schools had a strong managerial team dealing with curriculum matters, making sure educators experiencing difficulties are identified and developed as a matter of urgency. Classroom support is prioritized and frequent monitoring and moderation is being done to assist teachers in their primary task. In 10% of these schools they battle social conditions of poverty and low parental support, they have teaching staff not trained for the learning areas they teach and their teaching and learning resources are limited. Although support from the districts is limited, they take what support they can from external agencies, like the Police and the Departments of Health and Social Welfare, especially where learners with challenges in learning are concerned.

Themes explored in Chapter 4 include Management and Coordination; Teaching and Learning; Teacher Development, Assessment; Teachers' attitudes and Governance.

When interpreting the findings of this report, a question may be asked whether good practices in higher performing schools can be replicated in lower performing schools. It seems inevitable that

a school without a strong management team will find it difficult to bring about change in a school.

There is also the misconception that the availability of resources plays a significant role in the performance of a school. Previous studies, like the SACMEQ I and II (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality) as discussed in Nethengwe, found that countries carrying a heavy burden of poverty sometimes perform much better than better resourced countries (2010:89). The Ministerial Committee agrees with Nethengwe that ' when seen in regional context, South Africa grossly underperforms given that it has more qualified teachers, lower pupil-to-teacher-ratios and better access to resources' (2011:04).

Elmore R. is also referred to in *Schools that Work,* saying that 'internal accountability precedes external accountability and is a precondition for any process of improvement' (2007:114). Teachers are more successful if they have the will to succeed than when external pressure demands it. Elmore explains that inner capacity deals with 'the knowledge, skills and material resources' needed to engage successfully with teaching and learning.

It will therefore, imply that the inner capacity and desire to achieve success is stronger than poverty. This was also clearly illustrated by one quintile 1 school in Limpopo performing amongst the ten best performers in the 2010 provincial study.

A culture of recognizing success could make a difference in schools; staff knows that their efforts are supported and appreciated. This in itself could motivate staff to work more effectively and efficiently. With a similar strategy of support, incentives and rewards, schools performing between 40 and 50% could be motivated towards improving, while, at the same time, targeting the lower performing schools to address some of the critical challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the 2011 survey on best performances in top and low performing primary schools in Limpopo Province. This survey was conducted in an attempt to provide recommendations to respond to the *Budget Vote Speech –2011/2012 /F/Y* by Mrs Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education on the 13 April 2011 where she declared the theme for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) for this year as 'a delivery-driven basic education system ' (2011:1)

The mainstream primary schools in Limpopo, i.e quintiles 1 and 2 schools, are not performing as expected in the provincial systemic surveys of the past two years. Quintile 1 schools performed at a mean of 27.3% and quintile 2 schools at 28.1% in Life Skills (Gr. 3). In the case of Grade 6, quintile 1 schools performed at 31.5% and quintile 2 schools at 33.2% in Natural Sciences. Only 0.6% of the primary school population is semi-urban schools and 1.7% urban schools.

During 2010 the Minister of DBE, Mrs. Angie Motshekga, declared a plan for school improvement, called the Action Plan to 2014. This is part of a larger plan called Schooling 2025. The aim of this plan is to explain Government's vision towards effective schooling. Each of the 27 national goals described in this plan has certain national and provincial targets to be achieved by 2025 as part of the Schooling 2025 vision. One of these targets is the improvement of learner performance in Grades 3, 6 and 9 to an average of 60% by 2014. Mrs Angie Motshekga, the Minister of the Department of Basic Education acknowledged, though, that 'our weakness lies in the quality of education' (2011:2). With this in mind, we try to make a contribution towards reaching the goal that was set for 2014.

This brings us to the question of how underperforming or ineffective schools can be upgraded to become fully effective and producing acceptable results. According to the provincial report on learner performance of 2010, schools are still performing according to where they are located, thus higher performing schools are mostly urban or sub-urban schools, with the lowest performances found in the lower quintiles. There are, however, schools in the lower quintiles that perform very well under the same conditions. These schools can be regarded in a sense as 'exceptional schools' (Christie, in 2007:102).

This report evaluated certain contextual factors that distinguish good performing schools from lower performing schools in the primary phase. After identifying these factors, we asked ourselves which contextual factors might have an influence on higher learner performance; and whether these factors can be implemented and strengthened in lower performing schools.

The research questions governing this study are:

(i) What are the characteristics of higher performing schools?
(ii) How can these characteristics be introduced in lower performing schools to ensure improved learner performance?

(iii) Is it possible for schools in lower socio-economic circumstances to achieve better than schools in towns and suburbs?

In Chapter 1 a closer look at the methodology employed in this research is discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between the quality of school resources, pupils' socio-economic backgrounds and pupils' academic achievement has been covered in various research studies in the past. Coleman *et al*, cited in *Schools that Work,* is of the view that 'schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his (or her) background and general social context …. The inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school'(2007:17). It is implied, therefore, that schools are not able to compensate for social disadvantage and that it is difficult, if not impossible, for learners coming from poor socioeconomic backgrounds to perform exceptionally.

Of interest is the study that was done by Nethengwe ME in 2010 where he found that KwaZulu Natal was 'a little above the national average in terms of socioeconomic background of pupils' (Nethengwe, 2010:95) in the country. Incidentally, KwaZulu Natal was rated as the third highest performing province in Reading in SACMEQ II, after the 'richest' provinces Western Cape and Gauteng. Limpopo, *inter alia*, fell below the national average, thus being one of the poorest provinces (2010:95). He further reasons that reading scores for learners from Limpopo would have been higher if the socioeconomic background of learners was equal to or above the national average. With this in mind, he acknowledges the effort of the Government by trying to provide 'a good school education that would compensate for home background disadvantages' (2010:104).

The provision of resources was not enough to change the status quo as was illustrated in the analysis of the results of SACMEQ III by Servaas van der Berg *et al* when they say that 'rural South African children also fare poorly relative to their peers in African countries: rural South African students came 13th in reading and 12th in mathematics out of the 15 African countries.' (2011:04)

If we regard the influence of the socioeconomic background of learners on academic performance of major importance, it can be understood that a province such as Limpopo usually achieves the lowest scores in South Africa.

On the other hand, we should ask ourselves the question 'why the quality of education has been improving in some SACMEQ countries, while either remaining the same or deteriorating in other countries' (IIEP:2010). South Africa is one of the better resourced and 'richer' countries in the SACMEQ sample, but can only reach position no. 9 of fourteen southern and eastern African countries in the SACMEQ studies, and is, regarded by Nethengwe as having one of the 'poorer school systems' based on only 37% of learners reaching the minimum reading level in the SACMEQ test (2010:89). In view of being better resourced than most other countries in this sample, it is also mentioned that 'minimal change' was effected in South Africa after SACMEQ I and II. In PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literature Study) of 2006 and the TIMMS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) of 2007, South Africa scored the lowest of 45 international countries in reading (Gr. 4), science and mathematics (Gr. 8).

We live in a country with diverse cultures and resources. Macbeath *et al*, are captured in *Schools that Work*, talking about 'schools on the edge' (2007:28) referring to schools that are living between success and failure. They say 'the history of school education, wherever and whenever it has been written,

provides accounts of schools in the center of the social mainstream as against schools perpetually on the periphery. What brings them together is a common policy framework but their social and economic circumstances are worlds apart. Schools on the edge face a constant struggle to forge a closer alignment between home and school, parents and teachers, and between the formal world of school and the informal world of neighbourhood and peer group.' (2007:28) The primary schools in Limpopo regarded as the numeric norm of the mainstream schools, are quintile 1 and 2 schools, with the quintiles 4 and 5 schools being on the periphery, setting the example of 'schools that work' or hegemonic norm. It should, however, be remembered that most schools are not like this.

The Ministerial Committee on Schools that Work (2007) researched the characteristics of successful secondary schools across all the provinces in South Africa. This report shows 'that context does not over-determine how effective schools are, strong though its influence may be. Human agency is able to shape social circumstances and change history' (2007:103). Christie *et al* continues to say in *Schools that Work* that 'it shows the exceptional imagination, courage and commitment that human beings bring to bear under the most intolerable of circumstances, and it shows the injustice of blaming them if they cannot.' (2007:103) The Ministerial Committee also comments on the reaction of public institutions on dealing with failure. They state in the same report that 'these include denial, task avoidance, demotivation, lowering expectations of self and others, projection of blame, a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency' (2007:33)

Although this report does not nullify the influence that the availability of resources has on the performance of learners, resources are rather viewed as making a 'good school' a 'better school'. The raw data of the systemic evaluation study that was done in Limpopo in 2010, indicate that there are schools that are defying the odds across boundaries of language, resources and culture and are performing like, or better than the so-called 'privileged' schools. It is these schools that interest us the most. These are 'exceptional ' (2007:28) schools that will indicate to us the strategies that can be put in place to have the majority, if not all, of our schools fully functional.

Characteristics of effective schools have been recorded by various researchers, such as Coleman, Sammons, Heneveld and Craig; and Christie (2007). Basically they agree on the characteristics that are found in schools that work. The basic characteristics by the above researchers are captured by Christie *et al* in *Schools that Work* (2007:22,23). These are:

Professional leadership
Shared vision and goals
A learning environment
Concentration on teaching and learning
High expectations
Positive reinforcement
Monitoring progress
Pupil rights and responsibilities
Purposeful teaching
A learning organization

Home-school partnership
Discipline
Rewards and incentives (Sammons *et al*,) and (Heneveld and Craig, 1996)

The Ministerial Committee summed up the major characteristics of secondary 'schools that work' as:

- All of the schools were *focused on their central task* of teaching, learning and management with a sense of purpose, responsibility and commitment; they had strong organizational capacity, including leadership (in various forms) and management; and professionalism was valued;
- All of the schools carried out their tasks with *competence* and *confidence*;
- All had *organizational cultures* or *mindsets* that supported hard work, expected achievement, and acknowledged success;
- All had strong *internal accountability systems* in place, which enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability (2007: 104)

Thus a number of primary schools were visited in Limpopo, so as to determine the common characteristics found in schools that are producing good learner achievement. The findings will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is an important approach in this study because it makes provision for the researchers to familiarize themselves with the behaviour or the phenomenon being researched. It affords the researchers an opportunity of gaining new insight or discover behaviour patterns that can used to make appropriate predictions. Interviewing groups in a participative manner creates room for interaction and issues are extensively dealt with because there is an opportunity of probing further through follow-up questions.

Thus, this approach has been adopted in an attempt to answer questions about the nature of learner-performance with the purpose of describing and understanding what factors contribute to performance in both high and low outlier schools.

3.2 PURPOSE/RATIONALE FOR THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

The qualitative research study was conducted based on the findings of the 2010 report on grades 3 and 6 learner-performance in Life Skills and Natural Sciences. This report prompted a number of issues that warranted further investigation.

Some of the observations/findings presented in the report relate to:

3.2.1 most schools that performed well in Life Skills also did well in Natural Sciences and *vice-versa;*

3.2.2 there is a huge variance in performance between the best performing and the worst performing schools (57.6% in Grade 6);

3.2.3 the general trend is that quintiles 5 schools perform relatively better that quintiles 1 and 2 schools;

3.2.4 One quintile 1 school performed is amongst the top performing schools;

There was a need, therefore, to conduct a further study to try and explore phenomena referred to above. Therefore, the qualitative research study has been designed to serve to:

a) add richness, detail and nuance to the 2010 report;
b) provide an opportunity for triangulation using FFLC report;
c) advance a novel perspective of the phenomena well studied quantitatively (as presented in the 2010 report) but not well understood because of the narrow perspectives used as required by the initial design.

3.3 RATIONALE FOR USING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW STUDY

Focus group is a form of qualitative research that adopts a group interview approach. The group interview technique is essentially a qualitative data gathering process. The interviewer directs the interaction and inquiry irrespective of whether the interview is structured or unstructured. The focus group interview approach makes provision for a diversified array of responses and affords the researcher more bases for exploration. It capitalises on communication among research participants in order to generate discussions and thus enable the researcher to gather more quality data. Focus group interview encourage participation from people reluctant to be interviewed on their own or who feel they have nothing to say (Kitzinger, 1995).

The key elements of this data collection approach are the involvement of participants to tap tendencies regarding their attitudes, opinions, beliefs and perceptions through interaction with one another.

Group discussion produces invaluable and informative data and insight that may not be easily collected through other methods in group setting. When some participants are listening to others giving their experiences and opinions, this tends to stimulate experiences, ideas and memories in the others.

Participants tend to relax and feel free to talk about questions posed by the researcher if questions are posed.

It is for these reasons that Focus Group interview is considered as the best way of collecting data in this research.

In this study focus group interview members were constituted by the principal or deputy principal, grades 3 and 6 Life Skills and Natural Sciences educators.

3.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

a. What are the characteristics of higher performing primary schools?
b. How can these characteristics be transferred in lower performing schools to ensure improved learner performance?
c. Is it possible for schools in lower socio-economic circumstances to achieve better than schools in towns and suburbs?

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Triangulation, which is generally considered to be an important aspect of qualitative research, has been factored in this study by using other data sources, i.e. FFLC reports.

3.5.1 SAMPLING METHOD

The 2010 Provincial Systemic Evaluation quantitative study constituted of a sample of 137 from a population of about 2 500 schools. For the purpose of conducting a qualitative study, a further sampling of schools was done from the original sample based on the mean scores of these schools that participated in the 2010 study.

An average mean score for Life Skills and Natural Sciences were calculated for each school. Consequently, the outlier schools based on the average mean scores were then selected. The cut off point for the bottom and top outliers was 20% and 50% respectively. This process yielded 48 altogether. The schools' spread covered all the districts and almost proportional to the district size.

The distribution of the 48 sampled schools across the districts was as follows:

Mopani (10); Vhembe (6); G Sekhukhune (15); Waterberg (3); Capricorn (14)

3.5.2 INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The instrument for data collection was developed by head office Systemic Evaluation sub-directorate officials and edited and ratified in a meeting with district QA officials before piloting. Items were structured under the following headings:

a) Management and Coordination
b) Teaching and Learning
c) Assessment
d) Educators' Attitudes
e) Teacher Development
f) Governance and Relations

3.5.3 FIELD TESTING AND REFINEMENT OF THE INSTRUMENT

The instrument was field-tested in 9 schools throughout the province:

Mopani (2), Vhembe (2), Capricorn (2), Waterberg(1) and G. Sekhukhune (2). Subsequent to the field-testing, certain aspects of the instrument were modified and items relating to governance added.

3.5.4 TRAINING OF DATA COLLECTORS

Data collectors constituted of a team from Systemic Evaluation sub-directorate from head office and districts. To minimize varied discrepancies and misinterpretation of the instrument items, training on the implementation of the instrument was provided to the data collectors.

3.5.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

A team of two trained officials was assigned to collect data in each of the five districts. Data collection entailed having to:

a) Interview relevant educators (SMT and educators for grades 3 and 6 Life Skills and Natural Sciences);
b) Examine/check relevant documents for evidence;
c) Write a short narrative depending on the type of items
d) Interview Life Skills and Natural Sciences educators in the absence of SMT on Teacher Attitude aspect).

Following the advocacy training provided, data collectors in each of the five districts had to first support each other by jointly collecting data from the first school before doing so differently in the remaining schools. This was done to minimize obvious flaws in data collection.

3.5.6 DATA CODING, SCORING AND CAPTURING

The 48 schools from which qualitative data was collected were further divided into three categories based on their mean scores for Life Skills and Natural Sciences. This categorization yielded lowest, middle and higher category in terms of the mean scores performance.

Special attention was given to the 19 schools which fell in the lower and higher categories. The mean scores of these schools ranged from 16.8% to 69.0%. Of these schools 12 had mean scores below 20% and 7 above 50%.

The following codes were adopted for coding and scoring:

a) OW – once a week
b) OM – once a month
c) OQ – once a quarter
d) P – principal
e) D – deputy principal
f) H – head of department
g) S – senior teachers
h) LP – Lesson plan
i) MT – moderation of tests
j) FAM facilitation of meetings
k) TD – teacher development
l) CV – class visits
m) SB – suggestion box
n) BM – briefing meetings
o) FM – formal meetings
p) OT – others
q) CDE – code of school

These codes were used to analyse data for the purpose of identifying practices and performance trends.

CHAPTER 4: BRIEF ANALYSIS OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE IN 2010

The qualitative study was based on the findings on learner performance in Grades 3 (Life Skills) and 6 (Natural Sciences) in 2010. The mean performance in Gr.3 Life Skills was 29%, with some learners

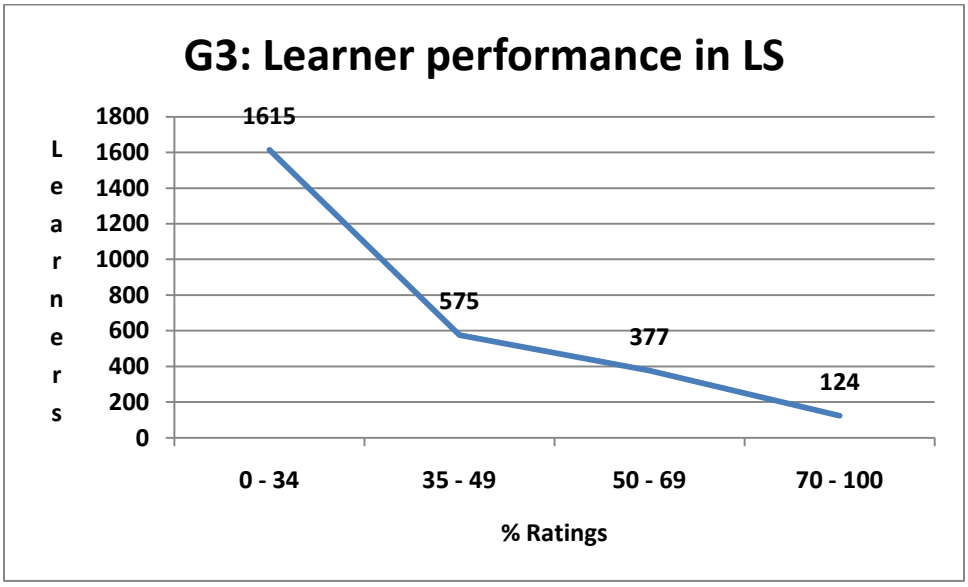
performing as low as 10% whilst other learners achieve almost full marks. The mean performance in Gr.6 Natural Sciences was 34.4%.

Grade 3 learners in the upper quintiles performed 25% higher than the learners in the lower quintiles. This significant difference indicates that learners in the poverty stricken schools (quintiles 1,2 and 3) are still, with a few exceptions, grossly underperforming in relation to learners in urban schools. The possibility that a lower quintile school can perform amongst the urban schools, was noted with appreciation. Recognition is given to these schools, since it takes enormous effort to raise performance under low socioeconomic circumstances.

When taking the mean performance of Gr. 6 schools in Natural Sciences (34.37%) into account, it was evident that the gap in performance between the best performing school (72.1%) and the lowest performing school (14.5%) is significant. This gap is even more evident in the Foundation Phase where the best school obtained 75.3% and the lowest school 6.5%. Looking at the data, the question came to mind why schools perform in certain ways.

It became very interesting to compare school achievement to the provincial mean. It is clear that learner performance in the province is skewed to the left, with most of the schools performing at a very low level and only quintiles 4 and 5 schools performing high. Grade 3 learner performance indicating this phenomenon, is presented in Graph 1 below:

Graph 1 Grade 3 learner performance skewed to the left



The qualitative study on best practices in outlier schools was based on the discussion above. The questions were raised as to what the reasons are for schools performing the way they do. Based on the 2010 research, six possible characteristics were identified that may have an influence on the way schools perform. These six characteristics are:

- Management and Coordination
- Teaching and Learning
- Assessment
- Teacher Development
- Teachers' attitudes
- Governance

A questionnaire was developed to be used in interviews with principals and educators. The findings will now be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

5.1 Management and coordination

In *Schools that Work,* Coleman *et al (*2007: 104), prioritizes schools that work as 'focusing on their central task of teaching, learning and management', having 'organizational cultures …….that supported

hard work' and having 'strong internal accountability systems in place'. These characteristics imply a strong, effective and efficient management team. The schools that were found to be 'working schools' in the Coleman *et al* study, were schools that achieved acceptable learning outcomes. It implies therefore that schools achieving better results, are having effective school management teams. This is also recognized by the Department of Basic Education when the Minister of Education in her 2011 Budget Vote Speech 'recognises the contribution to quality teaching made by effective school management and therefore target at least 8000 principals and deputy principals to complete an Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and Management(2011:6).

In this study, the characteristics of an effective school management team were researched based on the assumption of the Honourable Minister of Education, that if curriculum is effectively managed at school level, a school has a higher probability to achieve good learner results. Referring to the honourable Minister of Education, Mrs. A Motshekga, in her Budget Vote Speech of 2011 there are schools that 'continue not to manage and cover the curriculum adequately' and that there are 'ongoing challenges with the quality of teaching and assessment and with ineffective school-based systems for monitoring curriculum quality' (2011:8). It is, therefore, necessary to research the quality of school management in monitoring curriculum delivery.

Under management and coordination four (4) independent variables were looked at to give an indication of how the selected schools in this study deal with management of the curriculum and what effect their management has on acceptable learner outcomes.

For the purpose of this study the curriculum management structure at a school was defined as a group (or one official, in the case of very small schools) consisting of member(s) of the School Management team (SMT) who are managing, and controlling, all curriculum issues at the school. In certain cases, senior teachers are part of such a structure and usually are part of, or co-opted in, the SMT of the school.

The first independent variable that was looked at, deals with the existence of a curriculum management structure and its activities. The second independent variable looks at curriculum challenges from the viewpoint of the educator. A third variable treats learners with special educational needs and how these needs are addressed. The last variable looks at curriculum challenges and the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Under the independent variables are a number of dependent variables.

The variables were tested in the schools that performed above 50% average in Life Skills (Gr. 3) and Natural Sciences (Gr. 6). Findings were then compared to the findings in schools that performed lower than 30% average in the two Learning Areas. The findings are given according to the four independent variables.

5.1.1 Curriculum Management Team

All higher performing schools had a school management structure that managed and controlled all curriculum activities and challenges at the school. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the lower performing schools had such a structure and these schools indicated that some curriculum related activities were

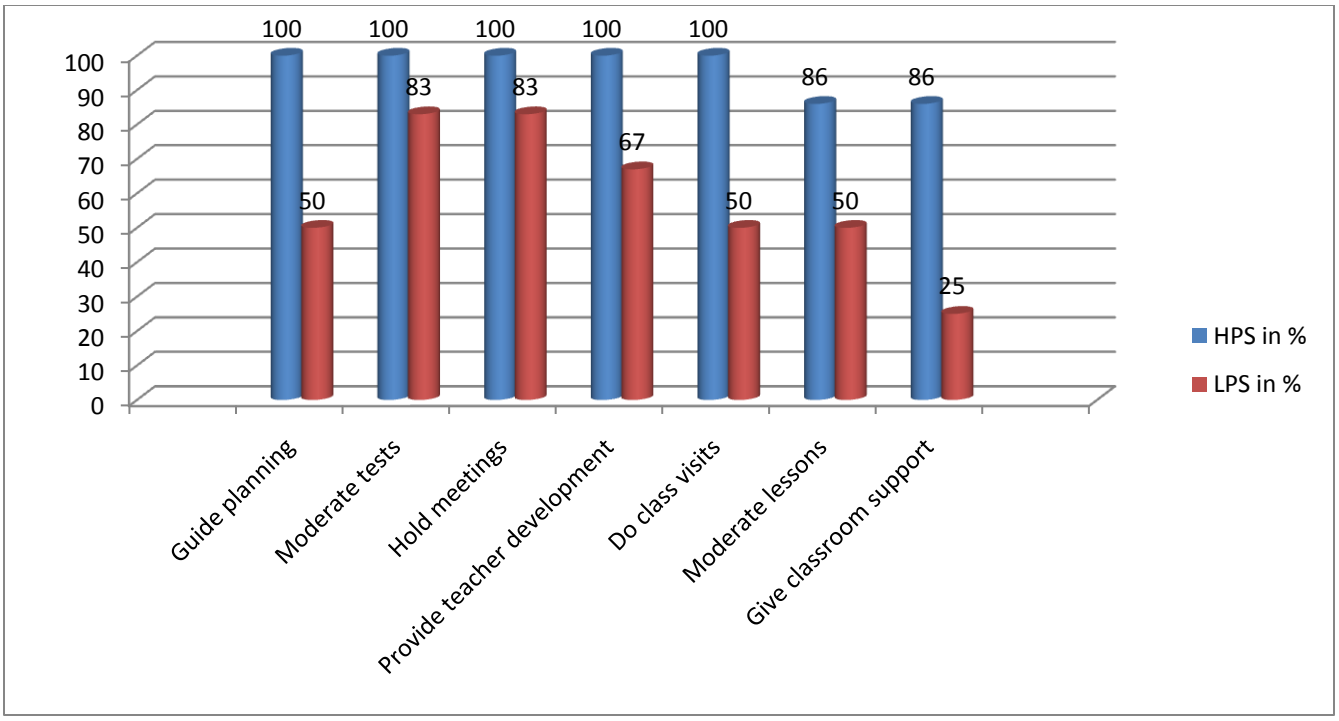
attended to, e.g. moderation of tests (83%) and the facilitation of meetings (83%). Lesson plans in higher performing schools are quality assured at least once in six months (86%) by the curriculum management structure to support a high standard of teaching and learning and to identify challenges in the system. There was, however, a lack in teacher development (67%) and in assisting teachers with lesson plans (50%) as compared to the 100% in both instances in higher performing schools. Taking into account that moderation of lesson plans were never done in 50% of the lower performing schools, it is obvious that teachers in lower performing schools are not receiving the support that they should.

A further indicator of high performing schools is that classroom support is given at least once in six months in 86% of the schools against the 25% in lower performing schools.

In summary, the study found that teacher development, assistance with, or moderation of lesson plans and classroom support are evident in schools achieving better results as opposed to lower performing schools.

A graphical presentation on the function of a school management structure dealing with curriculum-related issues is presented below in Graph 2. The acronym HPS is used for higher performing schools and LPS for lower performing schools:

Graph2: Curriculum activities of the School Management Team



5.1.2 Teachers' mechanisms to communicate their challenges

Teachers were asked how they communicate any challenges that they may experience with curriculum to the Curriculum Management Team. The response was that communication channels exist in all the primary schools in the study. Teachers mostly discuss such challenges in formal staff or phase meetings. In addition to formal meetings, all the higher performing schools stated that they held briefing meetings to address challenges as opposed to 58% of the lower performing schools. They also communicate electronically and prepare for inputs on agendas for formal meetings which are made available to them before any such meeting.

As reported under par. 1.1 above, there is a lack of teacher development (33%) and classroom support (75%) in lower performing schools. It might, therefore, be that teachers report their curriculum challenges but that the support that they receive in addressing these challenges is not sufficient.

5.1.3 The Curriculum Structure and Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN)

Learners with special educational needs are identified as learners experiencing challenges in learning but also learners who are gifted and who would need expanded opportunities to achieve optimally. Learners with challenges are mostly identified through observation of the teachers in class and in their performance in assessments and tasks. Whilst lower performing schools also identify school psychologists and the Department of Health in identifying the special needs of learners, higher performing schools have systems in place to deal with such challenges internally,

such as learner attainment meetings, analysis of performance, special committees dealing with challenges, remedial teachers, and occupational therapists.

In dealing with challenges relating to gifted learners higher performing schools reported that expanded opportunities are given to these learners in 86% of the schools. This is opposed to 25% in the lower performing schools. It would thus seem that in 75% of lower performing schools gifted learners are not given opportunities towards higher achievement. Higher performing schools also recognize higher performance through academic colours and 'top ten' honour rewards per grade.

In 33% of the lower performing schools there is a lack of supporting learners with special educational needs, although remedial teaching is attempted at 58% of these schools. In one of these schools they also try to solve challenges by team teaching or the exchange of teachers. In one case the school tried to involve hospital psychologists, but this attempt failed.

Higher performing schools have a variety of methods in dealing with lower performances of learners. Amongst these are remedial teaching (100%) by remedial teachers, grouping of learners in class according to performance to allow specific attention and assistance of occupational therapists.

In summary it is obvious that all learners in higher performing schools are given opportunities to attain better results. In poorer performing schools, learners having the capacity to rise above their challenged circumstances, are not given this opportunity sufficiently. Remedial teaching in lower performing schools should also be managed to enable learners to achieve optimally.

5.1.4 The Curriculum Management Team and school improvement

This variable concerns the existence and implementation of a School Improvement Plan (SIP) and how this can have a positive effect on learner performance.

According to the Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) Policy of 2000 and the Collective Agreement on Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) Number 8 of 2003 all schools should develop a SIP annually. The Sip is largely based on the educator needs as identified in the Personal Growth Plan (PGP) of the educators and in the challenges found when doing IWSE (Internal Whole-School Evaluation) when schools annually assess themselves against the nine areas for development in the WSE Policy. The SIP must be developed and submitted to the relevant Circuit Offices by the end of an academic year, thus ensuring that schools comply with policy.

In looking at the characteristics of higher performing schools the quality of these SIPs was looked into. The key responsibility of a school is curriculum delivery. The SIP should, therefore, prioritize curriculum related issues. It was found that higher performing schools (100%) developed their SIPs with curriculum challenges in mind, whilst only 58% of lower performing schools prioritized curriculum delivery. It is often only done for compliance, or for the general improvement of the school.

Implementation of the SIP was then looked at. In 100% higher performing schools the SIP was well developed and it addressed the needs of the school. Of these schools 86% schools could provide evidence that the SIP was implemented, monitored and controlled.

In the lower performing schools it was found that 75% of schools do not implement the SIP. No evidence could be provided that challenges identified on the SIP are receiving any attention. It seems, thus, that the SIP is developed and compiled only for the sake of compliance. A valuable opportunity to support challenges experienced by educators and learners is therefore lost, widening the gap between higher and lower performing schools.

Although this study could not possibly identify all challenges management has to address at school level to improve learner performance, some valuable characteristics were identified. The characteristics of a School Curriculum Management Team that were found supportive of higher learner performance are:

- Teacher development to address curriculum challenges
- Assistance and moderation of lesson plans
- Classroom support
- Challenges of gifted and slow learners are addressed
- SIPs are developed having curriculum challenges in mind
- SIPs are implemented, controlled and monitored

5.2 Teaching and Learning

2010 was a year in which some of the teaching and learning time was lost. The country experienced the opportunity to present a Soccer World Cup and learners had a prolonged school holiday as a result. There was also an industrial strike which had an impact on the amount of time that was spent on teaching and learning. Consequently, this may have had an impact on learner performance. In this section, the completion of the syllabus, and the possible reasons for not completing the syllabus are looked at. Another issue that received attention was the amount of written work being done by learners in both class work and home work.

The Department of Basic Education provided pace setters to assist educators in completing the amount of work to be done in certain Learning Areas/Subjects. We looked at the availability of pace setters in Life Skills (Gr. 3) and Natural Sciences (Gr. 6) and if so, whether educators taught according to that. It would imply that, if pacesetters are available and educators taught accordingly, the syllabus would have been completed. This also emphasizes the importance of pacesetters.

The last matter that was investigated is the ability of learners to read and interpret written text.

5.2.1 Completion of the syllabus

In her Budget Vote Speech of 2011/12 the Minister of basic education says that schools in South Africa 'do not manage and cover the curriculum adequately' (2011:8) She further commented that the school-based systems for monitoring curriculum delivery are 'ineffective' (2011:8). Completion of the work is not only the responsibility of the teacher, but of the school as a whole. Schools should have the necessary monitoring systems to ensure curriculum coverage – this being a school management function.

Learners wrote the Life Skills (Gr.3) and Natural Sciences (Gr.6) tests in October/November 2010. For learners to have the best chance to perform at acceptable levels, i.e. above 35%, it is significant that all higher performing schools reported that the completion of the syllabus is not negotiable and had therefore completed 100% of the work. In lower performing schools the percentage of schools having completed the syllabus is 8.3%. Obviously these schools did not have the same chance to achieve high results. Most of these schools reported that they completed around 50% of the syllabus. In Gr. 3, 50% of the schools completed half of the work, whilst 33% completed 70% of the work. In Gr. 6, 58% of schools completed half of the work and 25% completed 70% of the work. Eight percent (8%) schools only managed to complete 40% or less of the work.

Learner performance in Limpopo and in South Africa, in the grades below Grade 12, has not been very good in the past few years (refer to SAQMEC, TIMMS and PIRLS results discussed in the Executive Summary and the Literature Review. It may be to the advantage of teaching and learning, if loss of contact time be closely monitored and controlled.

In this study, schools were requested to comment on the reasons for not having completed the work. Educators agreed that the work was not too much but that inadequate teaching time (42%), lack of resources (59%) and lack of curriculum advisory support (33%) play a significant role in them being able to complete work as desired. It should be noted that higher performing schools were able to achieve despite having lost time and a minimum of advisory support. This brings us again to the question of how important the influence of resources is. Where there is a lack of teaching time, would additional resources have made a significant difference? One of the top ten performing schools in the 2010 study is a quintile 1 school and managed to complete 100% of the syllabus because it is 'not negotiable' at the school not to complete the work.

The availability of textbooks proved to be problematic in both higher and lower performing schools, where only 50% learners had access to Life Skills and Natural Sciences text books. All the schools reported that they do not have science kits to give learners a sufficient background for doing experiments in Physical Sciences in the Senior and FET Bands. It should, however, be noticed that experiments are done more than once per month in higher performing schools than the once per quarter in their counterparts. We can then conclude that learners in the higher performing schools have a better chance of achieving acceptable results than those not making an effort doing experiments.

5.2.2 The frequency of written work

In this section the frequency of class work and that of home work was looked at. The DBE prescribes in the NCS how written work must be given. It is, however, clear from research done by the DBE (2007), the province (2009, 2010) and in international studies, e.g. SAQMEC (2004 -study), that learners experience challenges with written work. The question was then asked that if learners write more frequently, whether it will improve their performance. It was found that learners in higher performing schools write more frequently than learners in lower performing schools. In Life Skills (Gr. 3) 57% of schools recorded that learners do class work everyday and 43% do it once a week. Homework is also frequently done with 29% doing it daily and 71% weekly. In lower performing schools class work is done mostly (58%) once a week, with 8.3% doing it monthly and 17% schools reported that written class work is not done. Home work is also mostly (42%) done once a week, but 50% schools reported that home work is not done in Life Skills. The graphical presentation of the amount of written work given in Life Skills (Gr. 3) is given in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Frequency of class work and home work in Life Skills (Gr. 3)

Frequency	**Class work**		**Home work**	
	Higher performing schools	**Lower performing schools**	**Higher performing schools**	**Lower performing schools**
Daily	57%	17%	29%	
Once a week	43%	58%	71%	42%
Once a month		8%		
Once a quarter				8%
Never		17%		50%

The amount of written work done in Gr. 6 Natural Sciences reflects almost the same pattern as that in Gr. 3 Life Skills. Higher performing schools tend to give written work more frequently than lower performing schools, exposing learners to the skills of writing, reasoning and language use. It is a concern that written work in some of the lower performing schools is never given. The findings are presented in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Frequency of class work and home work in Natural Sciences (Gr. 6)

Frequency	**Class work**		**Home work**	
	Higher performing schools	**Lower performing schools**	**Higher performing schools**	**Lower performing schools**
Daily	71%	8%	29%	
Once a week	29%	67%	71%	50%
Once a month				8%
Once a quarter				
Never		25%		42%

5.2.3 Teaching according to pacesetters

The DBE provided educators with pacesetters in some Learning Areas. This is meant to guide the pace in which educators teach, enabling them to complete the amount of work in a specific Learning Area in time.

Pacesetters sometimes have to be adapted should the available time for teaching and learning be interrupted as it happened in 2010 with the Soccer World Cup and the industrial strike that shortened contact time. Efficient educators and their management structures usually do not find this too difficult to do. If time is not managed, however, it may result in learners not having the necessary knowledge and skills they should. This will also result in learners getting poorer results as their peers in schools where contact time is efficiently managed.

Educators in higher performing schools (86%) indicated that they had pacesetters for teaching Life Skills and Natural Sciences in Gr.3 and in Gr. 6. Some (29%) schools indicated that they experience difficulty to teach according to the pacesetters in Life Skills. In poorer performing schools 42% indicated that they have pacesetters in these learning areas but that only 33.3% taught accordingly.

The findings indicate that pacesetters are not always adhered to in both the higher as well as the poorer performing schools. The higher percentage of higher performing schools, teaching according to the pacesetters might, however, have made it easier for these schools to complete the syllabus, preparing learners better for the tests covering all outcomes and assessment standards for the two phases.

5.2.4 Reading and interpreting questions

It was indicated in the Literature Review that the SACMEQ 111 study found that Gr. 6 learners in South Africa scored position 13 of 15 African countries in reading ability. It is obvious that our peers in other countries, having fewer resources and bigger classes are outperforming us. In this study it was found that learners in Limpopo perform below expectation. Reading levels are not up to standard, especially in the lower performing schools where 67% Gr. 6 learners could not read and interpret the question papers without assistance. The percentage for Gr. 3 is even higher (75%).

Learners in the higher performing schools did much better, with 29% learners unable to read and interpret questions in Gr. 3 and no learner experiencing any problems in Gr. 6.

Reading and understanding the questions hampered the performance of learners in the lower performing schools. It is, therefore, advisable that the reading skills of learners receive the necessary support.

General characteristics of higher performing schools on teaching and learning in this study, are listed below:

- Complete the syllabus through careful time management
- Frequent written work, often above prescriptive of DBE

- Set and adhere to pacesetters
- Learners have advanced reading skills and can interpret questions without assistance

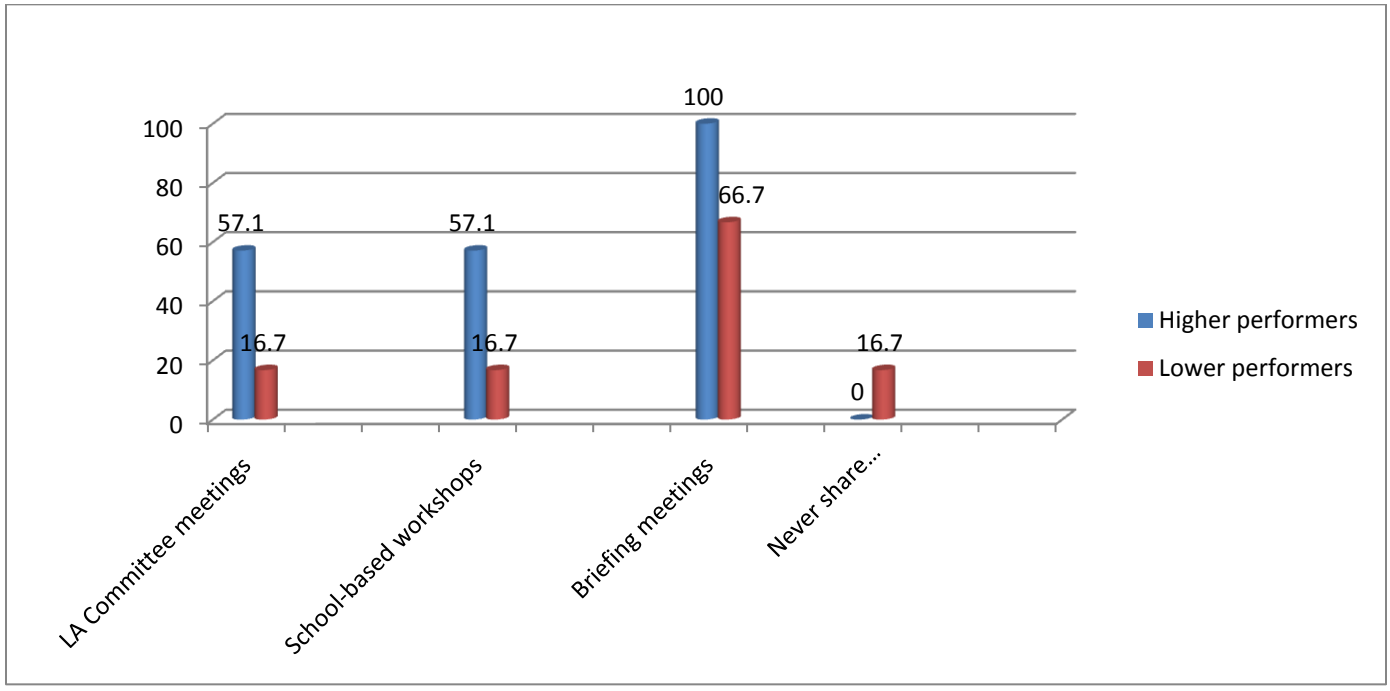
5.3 Teacher Development

The Minister of Basic Education said in her Budget Vote Speech of 2011/12 that 'teachers are a critical resource for improving quality' in schools (Motshekga: 10). She further emphasized that teachers' capacity and practices need to be developed to produce a delivery-driven basic education system in South Africa. The importance of teacher development is also acknowledged by Christie *et al* in *Schools that Work* by saying that it is 'one of the essential conditions for schools to work well and learners to be able to achieve their potential' (2007: 108). In this report an attempt was made to research the amount of time educators are professionally developed in primary schools in Limpopo.

Teacher quality is not only captured by teacher knowledge. It is good to improve teacher knowledge, but focus should also be on helping teachers conveying subject material to learners. According to Servaas van der Berg et al teacher quality may even be more dependent on the 'teachers ability to convey knowledge or the teacher's motivation and dedication than on his subject knowledge' (2011:5).Doing class visits can be extremely helpful to detect any challenges that teachers may experience in conveying knowledge. Teacher development should, therefore, include professional development not only to ensure that teachers can technically teach all the required elements but should also provide teachers with the 'necessary time management and prioritization skills so that they can deliver within the set academic timeframe' (Van der Berg:2011:5).

It was briefly mentioned under Management and Coordination that the Curriculum Management Team provides teacher development in all the higher performing schools, as well as, in 67% lower performing schools. Class visits and addressing curriculum challenges of educators, however, did not receive sufficient attention in the lower performing schools. Of interest is that educators in higher performing schools share common professional development practices, such as meetings, workshops, class visits, etc whilst lower performing schools neglect most of these good practices. This phenomenon can be seen in Graph 3 presented below:

Graph3: Schools with common practices



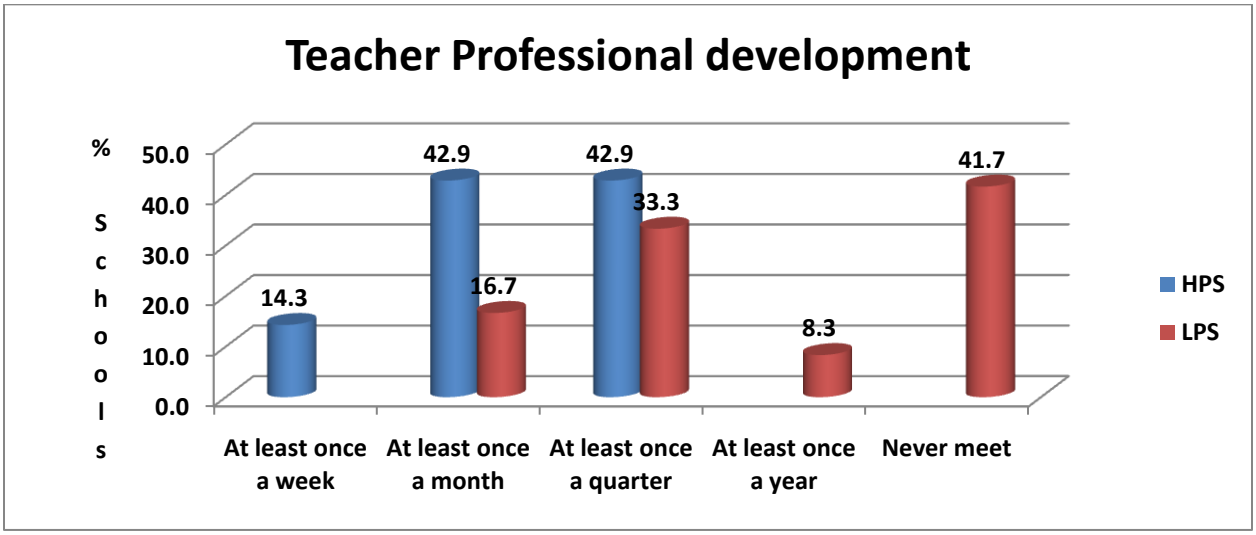
Educators were subsequently asked to comment on any development they receive at school.

In the higher performing schools, internal professional development sessions are held regularly. Through monitoring of lesson plans, class visits and the good communication practices that exist between staff, challenges are identified early and addressed immediately through briefing meetings (100%), whilst also being addressed in Learning Area committee meetings. Inexperienced educators and those who report the challenges they experience, receive ongoing support. General challenges are addressed in school-based work shops. Records are kept and continuous follow-ups are done. Educators also share their challenges and successes, thereby 'training' each other all the time on methods achieving success.

In lower performing schools educators do not receive the quality of support that is present in the higher performing schools. In 50% schools lesson plans are not quality assured and in 33% the needs of learners with challenges are not addressed. Classroom support is not done in 75% schools and the School Improvement Plan is not implemented in 75% schools. The Curriculum Management Team did, however, say that in 67% schools they provide educator development. The quality of support is questionable since few activities are done to identify the reasons for the challenges and evidence of teacher support could not be provided..

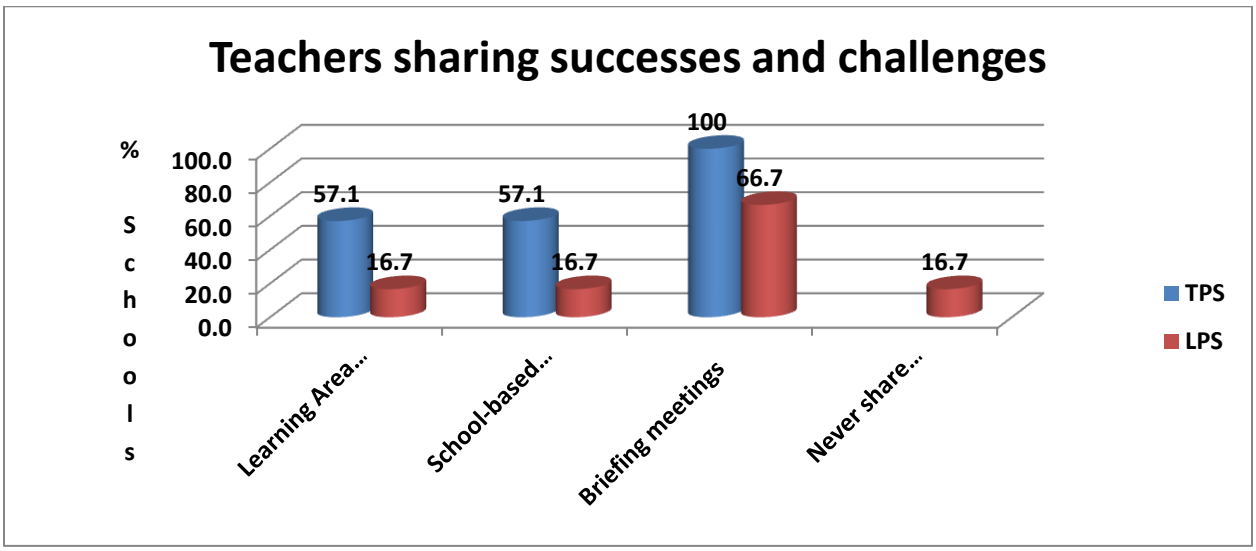
Teachers' professional development in the primary schools can be seen in Graph 4 presented below:

Graph 4: Teachers' professional development



Educators reported in lower performing schools that 33% schools receive some professional development at least once a quarter and that these are done mostly (66%)in briefing meetings. No evidence that these sessions actually happened, could be found. The schools that never meet for development (41%) are some of the schools needing it most. Information was also recorded that 16% schools never shared their successes or challenges. Should educator support be given to these schools, there could be an improvement in learner performance. Sharing of successes and challenges is presented in Graph 5 below:

Graph 5: Teachers sharing successes and challenges



In conclusion to this section, general characteristics of higher performing schools on educator development, are listed below:

- Internal professional development sessions are held regularly
- Challenges are identified early and addressed immediately
- Educators are monitored after challenges were addressed
- Inexperienced teachers are mentored and supported
- Teachers share their successes and challenges in meetings with each other, providing informal teacher development

5.4 ASSESSMENT

The National Protocol on Assessment for schools in the General and Further Education and Training Band defines assessment as a 'process of collecting, synthesizing and ***interpreting*** information to assist teachers, parents and other stakeholders in ***making decisions*** about the progress of learners' (2005:5). It emphasizes that it should 'provide an indication of learner achievement in the most effective and efficient manner by ensuring that ***adequate evidence of achievement*** is collected using various forms of assessment' and that classroom assessment should include both ***informal and formal*** assessment. (2005:5). For the purpose of this report, we have highlighted a few words in the text above for further discussion.

Van der Berg *et al*, in analyzing the PIRLS results, indicate that very large classes are associated with poor learner performance. They continue by saying that 'more frequent diagnostic testing and class exercises were also linked to better performance within the African language sample' (2011:08). It is, therefore, imperative for lower performing schools to do regular testing and assessment.

One of the purposes of classroom assessment is for promotion of learners. Importantly, a vast amount of knowledge available in assessment to support individual learners, as well as, schools to become more effective and to produce quality results.

Firstly, the assessment results can be analysed and interpreted. Interpretation of results is more than just classifying results into performance levels, such as 'outstanding' or 'not achieved'. Interpreting the results is more like 'looking into a mirror where you can take a closer and find a more detailed description of what learners really understand'( ) and where educators can improve on their lesson presentations. We can do item analysis. Item analysis will indicate which sections of the work or assessment standards learners have not mastered, allowing the educator to direct his/her attention to the real challenges when giving feedback to the learners. With additional support aimed at the problem area, learner achievement should improve. Discussions in staffrooms and staff meetings can be used to iron out the remaining obstacles or where decisions are made to elevate certain challenges to the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

The better you know the potential of your learners, the better effect your assistance and support will have on learner performance. Knowing learners' potential, is done by ensuring 'adequate evidence' is collected through regular formal and informal assessment. The DBE prescribes the amount of formal assessments to be done. This is usually one formal assessment per quarter. When using assessment to diagnose the challenges around learner performance, it might be necessary to have tests more frequently.

In-depth analysis is especially necessary in the Annual National Assessment tests where gaps in learner knowledge are clearly visible. Interpreting these tests can also show the desired standard on which school tests ought to be set.

With the above discussion in mind, schools in the sample were asked a few questions on assessment. There was not a significant difference between the amount of formal testing being done in higher and lower performing primary schools. Around 58% schools reported that formal testing is being done at least once a month. Some (14.3%) higher performing schools reported that they test learners once per week in the Foundation Phase.

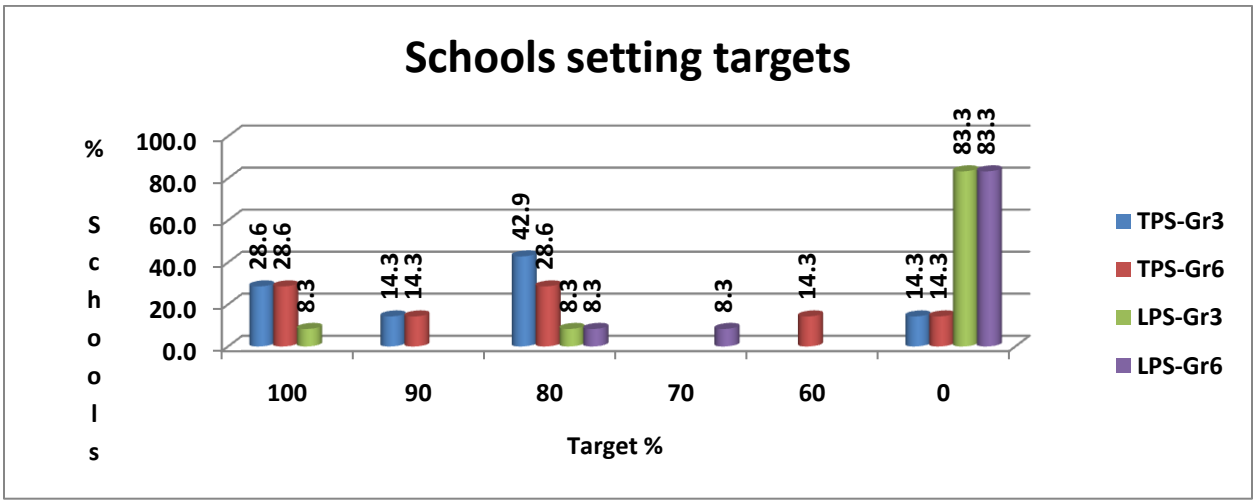
Tests are moderated prior to the writing of tests in all the higher performing schools. In two of these schools, a system was found where all tests are recorded on a sheet of paper, indicating the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards that were tested in each test. Such methods can assist the educator and the moderator to ensure that all assessment standards are tested in a specific group.

Almost all the tests (83.3% for life Skills and 75% for Natural Sciences) in the lower performing schools are moderated. Attention should be given to the few schools where no moderation is taking place so as to verify the quality of tests.

Learner performance is analysed and interpreted in all the higher performing schools and in 75% lower performing schools. The interpretation of results is mostly done according to performance levels, which is also submitted to the circuit offices. In-depth analysis to diagnose challenges in learner knowledge is not frequently done.

The setting of performance targets in schools, is still problematic, especially in the lower performing schools where less than 20% schools set targets for learner performance. The absence of targets for learner performance also indicates that learners are not motivated to achieve higher outcomes and that educators may not have high expectations of learner performance. The setting of targets is presented in Graph 6 below:

Graph 6: Schools setting targets



Characteristics of assessment in higher performing primary schools can be summarized as follows:

- Schools adhere to formal prescribed quarterly testing but also do additional formal testing
- Formal tests are moderated in all schools

5.5 TEACHERS' ATTITUDES

It leaves no doubt that an educator plays the largest role in the performance of learners, as Christie says 'learner performance is directly attributed to the competence of a teacher' (2007:107). The influence of the educator is so important that Christie *et al* believe that 'human agency is able to shape social circumstances and change history' (2007:103). If the school is organized and competent, it 'give(s) stability and confidence to members of staff' (2007:107). According to them these educators have a 'focus on their *real work'* and a 'sense of purpose and motivation that operate in self-sustaining ways' (2007:105). They also believe that educators work hard and take responsibility for the achievement of learners (2007:108) in higher performing schools. Elmore is also cited in *Schools that Work* that internal accountability 'precedes external accountability and is a pre-condition for any process of improvement' (2007:110).

Successful schools, therefore, 'earns' the right to assign success or failure to themselves whilst schools without internal accountability blames 'forces outside their control: learners, their families, the community, the *system' (*2007:110).

Educators' attitudes towards teaching and learning; even the circumstances under which they are rendering their service, can influence the effectiveness of how they are teaching and how learners are learning. Educators' attitudes towards their tasks were, therefore, looked at. They were presented with certain questions and requested to respond as honestly as possible but it should be kept in mind that some of their answers might not reflect their true feelings. We will now report on some of the questions we asked educators and their responses.

5.5.1 Teaching Life Skills/Natural Sciences and having the content knowledge to do so

Educators teaching Life Skills feel comfortable teaching this learning area, but some (25%) educators in the lower performing schools feel that they do not have the content knowledge to do so. During discussions with the educators they report that Life Skills is not a subject that they previously studied and that the textbooks do not cover all the information that they should teach learners. They have to rely on their own experiences which might be influenced by culture, the community or their personal perspectives.

Educators teaching Natural Sciences feel more comfortable in having the content knowledge and that leads confident teaching and learning.

5.5.2 Teacher enthusiasm teaching in the current education system

Educators teaching Natural Sciences report that they still have the enthusiasm for teaching that they had when starting their careers. In the higher performing schools they are also satisfied teaching in the current system. Forty two persent (42%) of the educators in the lower performing schools report that are not satisfied teaching in the current system. It might be that they did not receive enough training in the NCS and therefore not having the confidence teaching the NCS. This was, however, not researched and will need further investigation.

Some (25%) educators teaching Life Skills in the lower performing schools feel that they were more enthusiastic when they started teaching and 42% are not satisfied teaching in the current system. The reasons for this might be the uncertainty on the content of Life Skills and also the duration and effectiveness of NCS training, which should be researched further.

5.5.3 Educators' and learners' attitudes towards Life Skills/Natural Sciences

Despite the 25% educators in lower performing schools feeling that Life Skills teaching is not important, all educators, generally, have a positive attitude towards teaching both learning areas. They also report that learners are motivated to learn the learning areas. The response of learners was not tested to confirm educators' opinions.

5.5.4 Leaving the teaching profession for another job

Educators were asked if they would leave the teaching profession for another job if the opportunity arrives. Educators in the higher performing schools, teaching Life Skills all reported that that they would not consider it, although 14% of those teaching Natural Sciences would do so. In lower performing schools 83% educators in both learning areas would not consider leaving teaching.

Characteristics identified under teachers' attitudes in higher performing schools, are:

- Educators are confident of their knowledge of Life Skills
- Educators are satisfied teaching in the current system

5.6 GOVERNANCE

The DBE prescribes in the South African Schools' Act (Act 84 of 1996, Chapter 3, Par. 16.1) that all schools should be governed by a School Governing Body (SGB). The SGB is a legal structure, holding office for a three-year period. Certain functions, i.e regulation of the finances of the school and developing of a School Development Plan (SDP), are prescribed functions of the SGB.

The SGB is expected to ensure that the finances of the school are managed and controlled effectively, that financial statements are audited annually and reported to parents during a formal parents' meeting. Since learner performance is the key objective of a school, the largest percentage of funds should be directed at teaching and learning.

An SDP is also developed for the school for the time of office of a specific SGB. The SDP is a broad planning structure, encapsulating professional and physical development, reflecting the vision and mission of the school. The SGB should refer to this plan regularly to register achievements and to adapt it should it be necessary.

It should be noted that Limpopo is largely a rural province, with many schools located in areas where parents are not educated and doing labour work. Parents such as these may find it difficult to understand budgets and to develop SDPs. There are, however, schools in very poor areas who succeed in these activities by training their SGBs sufficiently in their functions.

The research team looked at the functions of the SGB in relation to the percentage of the budget being prioritized for curriculum delivery, the management and control of the budget, how the SGB provided resources to the schools and whether the SGB monitored academic activities. The findings are presented in the following paragraphs.

Schools achieving higher results prioritize curriculum delivery. A large percentage of the budget is spent on curriculum provision, i.e. buying of textbooks, reference books, computer software and developing educators. School budgets indicated that 85% of schools spend at least 60% of the budget on curriculum. Budget expenditure is presented in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Budget Expenditure

Budget % expenditure	Higher performing schools	Lower performing schools
+60	85.7	33.3
-60	14.3	66.7

Expenditure of the budget in lower performing schools indicates that these schools may not have the necessary competency on developing a school budget to serve the needs of curriculum delivery. In some of these schools (16.7%) it is also indicated that the SGB does not provide the school with the curricular resources they need.

All schools have a School Development Plan available. It may be that some schools do it for compliance only, since it was found that only 58. 3% of lower performing schools monitor the implementation thereof. SDPs are not updated and completing of activities is not indicated. The SDP is not seen as a document reflecting the needs and development for ultimate improvement, but rather as a document for compliance sake only.

In contrast to the above, all higher performing schools see the SDP as a working document that is constantly reviewed and commented upon. The SGB plays an active role and monitor (100%) the implementation thereof.

A standing point on the agenda for SGB meetings should be the success of the academic activities of the school. This requires the SGB to monitor and evaluate these activities on a regular basis through meetings and interaction with the school. This activity does not receive the necessary attention in both the higher performing schools (42.9%) and the lower performing schools (66.6%). It should, therefore, be emphasized in all the schools in the province.

In summary, we find that higher performing schools have the following characteristics:

- Curriculum delivery is prioritized
- A large percentage of the budget is reserved for curriculum activities
- The SGB monitors and evaluates the implementation of the School Development Plan (SDP) regularly.
- The SGB facilitates the provision of resources

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate visited the seven highest performing schools and the seven lowest performing schools in Life Skills (Grade 3) and Natural Sciences (Grade 6) during the 2011 systemic evaluation survey. The visit was made in April – May 2011. These schools represented all the quintiles across Limpopo Province. The aim of the visit was to identify common good practices in the higher performing schools that might have assisted them to attain better results than the poorer performing schools. A further aim of these visits was to investigate whether some of these practices could be introduced, (or strengthened where it exists), in lower performing schools.

The Directorate identified three research questions, (vide supra 1 & 7) namely:

(i) What are the characteristics of higher performing schools?
(ii) How can these characteristics be introduced in lower performing schools to ensure improved learner performance?
(iii) Is it possible for schools in lower socio-economic circumstances to achieve better than schools in towns and suburbs?

Building on the findings discussed in the previous chapter and previous national and international research, as discussed in this report, the following conclusions are drawn.

Attempting to identify common practices in the higher performing schools, reference should be made to the reality that most of these schools are found in the higher quintiles where resources are available at, or in the vicinity of the school. The question whether resources could make all the difference in learner performance, has still not been answered fully. It should therefore be kept in mind that physical resources might have an impact on learner performance, but whether this impact is greater than that of human resources, is in part answered by this report. The strongest characteristic of higher performing schools is found in the way these schools manage curriculum development.

5.1 WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHER PERFORMING SCHOOLS?

Characteristics of higher performing schools are mentioned under the six main variables that were looked at:

5.1.1 MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

- SMTs prioritize teacher development
- Assistance with and quality assurance of lesson plans
- Classroom support through class visits are regularly done
- Communication of curriculum challenges is good (briefing meetings, preparation for staff meetings, electronic communication)

- Challenges of gifted and poor learners are addressed
- Teacher development is continuously done to address curriculum challenges
- SIPs are developed having curriculum challenges in mind
- SIPs are implemented, controlled and monitored

5.1.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Completion of the syllabus through careful time management
- Frequent written work, often above DBE prescriptions
- Learners have advanced reading skills and can interpret questions without assistance

5.1.3 TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

- Internal professional development sessions are held regularly
- Challenges are identified early and immediately addressed
- Educators are monitored after challenges were addressed
- Inexperienced educators are mentored and supported
- Educators share their successes and failures, providing informal teacher development

5.1.4 ASSESSMENT

- Formal testing, additional to prescriptive, is done

5.1.5 EDUCATOR ATTITUDES

- Educators are confident teaching Life Skills
- Educators are satisfied teaching in the current education system

5.1.6 GOVERNANCE

- Curriculum delivery is prioritized
- A large percentage of the budget is reserved for curriculum delivery
- The SGB monitors and evaluates the implementation of the School Development Plan
- The SGB facilitates the provision of resources

5.2 CAN THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGHER PERFORMING SCHOOLS BE INTRODUCED IN LOWER PERFORMING SCHOOLS?

Much has been done by the Department of Education to normalize the difference between schools of lower quintiles and higher quintiles. The most important intervention might be the introduction of 'no fee schools', where the Department provides all poor schools with the resources they need for teaching and learning and where parents don't contribute financially to the tuition of their children. On the other

hand, quintiles four and five schools receive limited funds from the Department and have to generate additional funds to provide in the needs of the school.

Apart from the use of e-mails, all of the above characteristics rely on human capacity. In higher performing schools the SMT and staff display an inner capacity to achieve good results and the whole staff work together to achieve this. Staff is developed and supported to achieve the main aims of the school and do not need external pressure. Good performance is acknowledged and awarded making staff feel respected and appreciated. This feeling leads to further internally driven improvement.

It is acknowledged that schools in Limpopo are not the same and that they should receive a different approach to realize the same good performance. The difference in social, economic and linguistic backgrounds should be taken into account when expecting them to achieve the same outcomes as more privileged schools. We refer to Christie *et al* (2007:103) where they state the Bordeau challenge 'that equal treatment of learners from unequal backgrounds is likely to perpetuate inequality, while giving the appearance of meritocracy'. We should, therefore, be cautious to introduce the findings above without taking into consideration the inequalities that exist. It may be wise to introduce them one at a time, while intensive training and support is given by the relevant structures in the Department.

Schools are also not on the same level of achieving the characteristics identified above. Some of the schools (achieving just below the cutoff point of 50%) already display some of these characteristics. With a little attention and support, they can be encouraged to perform at the same level as the higher performing schools. The lowest performing schools will need extensive and intensive support to reach the same level. This can even take a number of years to build them up to such a level. It is, however, possible to achieve a higher standard of performance in all schools with the right kind of support.

One of the most important findings of this study is the functionality of the Curriculum Management Team in the higher performing schools. Their functions are directed by policy and should be supported in all other schools. These functions include regular monitoring of curriculum delivery, giving attention to lesson plans, teacher development, class visits and time on task. At the same time, educators should feel appreciated to nurture the inner capacity to achieve.

Circuit Managers who know their schools, and who are equipped to support their schools, can implement the characteristics of the Curriculum Management Team with the required sensitivity based on the circumstances in the schools.

5.2.3 IS IT POSSIBLE FOR SCHOOLS IN LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES TO ACHIEVE BETTER THAN SCHOOLS IN TOWNS AND SUBURBS?

The Grades 3 and 6 survey on learner performance in 2010 showed that schools in lower socio-economic circumstances can achieve better than schools in suburbs. A quintile one school in the rural areas in Greater Sekhukhune performed amongst the ten best performing schools in the study. This school attained better results than a quintile four school and a number of State-of-the-Art schools, of which one is in a suburb. This school has several of the characteristics of the highest performing schools in the Province.

It was also proven that several quintile one schools were able to outperform schools of higher quintiles by performing in the 40 -50% category. It may be worthwhile to assist these schools as they clearly have the capacity to become some of our best performers.

There is hope for systemic improvement because

a. There are schools performing well despite being located in a poor socioeconomic environment
b. There are educators who are capable of delivering good quality lessons everyday and meet the curriculum delivery requirements
c. There are principals who get their educators to focus on instruction and assessment.

Our schooling system requires large numbers of educators and principals to do what the Higher Performing Schools are doing.

CHAPTER 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing findings and discussions above, the following recommendations are made to improve learner performance in primary schools:

1. Improve the functionality of the school Curriculum Management Team by monitoring lesson plans, conducting classroom support, addressing the challenges of educators and implementing a well-structured School Improvement Plan (SIP)
2. Prioritize time management to complete syllabi by setting and adhering to pacesetters and targets
3. Develop educators through identification of challenges and giving internal(school) and external (circuit) support
4. Introduce formal monthly tests which are standardized
5. Appreciate and reward good performance amongst educators
6. Assist Life Skills educators with content knowledge
7. Prioritize curriculum delivery and monitor the implementation thereof

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