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A publication for the leaders of South African schools

We are delighted with the response that we have had to the sample issue which we distributed to schools, DoE and PED officials, University Education faculties and others at the end of 2006 and would particularly like to thank those who have responded and have decided to subscribe to *School Management and Leadership*. We hope that you will enjoy this, the first subscription issue, and that you will encourage friends and colleagues who may be in leadership positions within the school sector to subscribe. Much of this first edition is devoted to the issue of literacy and language, which is perhaps as it should be, because language and literacy are such critical elements of quality education. We have focused mostly on primary schools because it is here, particularly in the Foundation phase, that good and proper teaching of literacy and language can unlock the potential of all children and where those who are deficient as a consequence of poverty, ignorance or neglect can be helped to catch up to their more fortunate peers. In future editions we will, however, look at what middle and high schools can do to promote language and literacy and the strategies that they can use to assist pupils whose home language is not the Language of Learning and Teaching - a matter that is a concern for many high schools.

With all the hullabaloo that the release of the Senior Certificate results elicits we felt that it was important to consider ways in which principals set benchmarks and

interrogate their results to establish the hard facts about how the school as a whole and individual subject departments are performing in this important examination.

One of the better ways to improve any organisation's operational efficiency is to review key processes and critical phases of events and projects thoroughly. Making sure your school year gets off to a good start can make the difference between a good, positive and successful year and one which is a constant battle, when everything seems to go wrong or turns into a problem. In *Starting the School Year* we provide you with a checklist which you and your Senior Management Team can use to review your performance in 2007 and plan for a better start in 2008.

As part of the build-up to the first National Senior Certificate examinations in 2008, high schools face the prospect of a nationally-set Grade 11 examination in addition to the last writing of the old SC examinations at the end of this year. *Preparing for the NCS and 13 things that high schools can do to improve Senior Certificate results*, provide some suggestions for what that principals and subject teams can do as they prepare to meet these challenges.

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Managing Editor

SM&L

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In the first (sample) edition of *SM&L* under the heading "Are we failing our students before they have even started?" we wrote about the distressingly poor levels of literacy and numeracy of the majority of primary school pupils in this country as revealed by recent research. This is not something that is unique to this country. It is a problem that is widespread across sub-Saharan Africa. Ekkehard Wolff, writing in the ADEA publication *Optimizing Learning and Education in Africa – the Language Factor. A Stock-taking research on Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education in sub-Saharan Africa*, argues cogently that the failure of African governments and international donor agencies to make meaningful progress in reducing underdevelopment and poverty is at least partly a result of the failure of the education systems in these countries to improve the literacy levels of the majority of their populations. The authors of the ADEA document use the

"Language is not everything in education, but without language everything is nothing in education."

following quotation from Wolff's work to summarise their findings: "Language is not everything in education, but without language everything is nothing in education." The quotation is apt because it emphasises how central literacy is to educational success and also stresses why it is so essential that steps be taken to improve the situation. Unless children leave primary school with a level of literacy which makes it possible for them to master the curriculum in secondary school and beyond school so that they can become economically active citizens, they are doomed to a life of poverty and their nation is likely to remain underdeveloped and impoverished. This need not happen and the authors of the ADEA document provide clear policy guidelines based on sound, evidenced-based research on what can be done at both a policy and an implementation level to address the situation. For schools, the recommendations stress the need to accept that

the need to accept that multilingualism will be a fact of life for the majority of children

multilingualism will be a fact of life for the majority of children and that some of their primary education and most of their post-primary education will take place through a language that is not their mother-tongue. On the basis of this reality, policy-makers need to look at those policies and practices which will be most effective and efficient at ensuring that pupils master this language of learning and teaching because mastery of this second language is going to determine ultimately whether they will succeed or fail at school. One area where the research

One area where the research findings are most emphatic relates to the importance of a solid foundation in a child's mother tongue

findings are most emphatic relates to the importance of a solid foundation in a child's mother tongue. What is interesting is that the research done in Africa on the value of mother-tongue instruction in a child's initial schooling is corroborated by a number of similar long-term studies undertaken in the USA using students whose mother tongue was not English. The findings are clear that pupils do best if their medium of instruction is their mother tongue until at least the end of Grade 6. The Executive summary of the ADEA document concludes with the following statement:

"The current research suggests that using African languages as media of instruction for at least six years and implementing multilingual language models in schools will not only increase considerably the social returns of investments in education, but will additionally boost social and economic development of African nations and contribute to the improvement of the continent to knowledge creation and to scientific development."

Pupils benefit most if their mother tongue is used as the primary medium of instruction to the end of Grade 6.

Other findings related to literacy and literacy development include the following:

- The system in use in many African countries of an initial 2 - 3 years using mother tongue as the medium of instruction is not enough and pupils benefit most if their mother tongue is used as the primary medium of instruction to the end of Grade 6. There is very strong evidence that a child's future academic success is founded on his or her competence in their mother tongue.
- The majority of pupils, and particularly those from poor socio-economic communities where literacy levels are low, require at least 6 years of quality learning and teaching of a second language before they can use this language as a medium of learning.
- Under most conditions only those learners who have at least six years of mother tongue medium and good second language instruction (the language which will become the medium of instruction after Grade 6) will catch up with those learners who always learn through an international language such as English. Those who switch to the international language earlier, reach a plateau of proficiency well below 50% in the international

language by Grade 5 – 6 and increasingly fall behind in all subjects as they proceed through secondary school. *This finding struck a particular chord with me because it helped me to understand my own experience of the many Xhosa-speaking students whom I encountered during my years as principal whose results declined steadily as they moved through high school, despite, the fact that on admission they produced good results and were relatively fluent in English.*

- The importance of developing the level of literacy of those pupils whose mother tongue is an African language, and for all pupils irrespective of language who come from socio-economically deprived backgrounds.

Research shows that many of the most important elements of language acquisition, including those required in learning to read are acquired before children begin school.

Research shows that many of the most important elements of language, including those required in learning to read, are acquired before children begin school. Research in the USA has shown that children from low socio-economic backgrounds lag well behind their more affluent peers in vocabulary development, phonological sensitivity (the ability to identify and manipulate the sound structure of language) and alphabetic skills, all of which are strong predictors of later reading proficiency. The major reasons for these gaps appear to be related to the language and literacy interactions such as listening and speaking to parents that take place during pre-school years. The average child on Welfare, that is children whose parents or care-givers receive government grants, was found to have had half the experience of listening and speaking to parents (616 words per hour) in comparison to the average working class child (1 251 words per hour) and one third of that of a professional family (2 153 words per hour). If one were to relate this to the South African context, the poor literacy showing of the majority of our children becomes far more understandable. Their opportunities for language development prior to school are fewer, especially for those whose parents and community are mostly illiterate. The language development for these children is further stunted by the failure of the system to provide them with quality mother tongue instruction to the end of Grade 6. They are then faced with the daunting task of having to learn through a second language, which they will struggle to master because of their inadequate mastery of their mother tongue.

Research has shown that the education system of this country is currently failing the majority of our pupils in a number of crucial areas. This has dire consequences for their future and ultimately for the future economy of the country. The research gives a very clear indication of what needs to be done to rectify the situation. Fixing the situation is not, however, solely the responsibility of the politicians and the bureaucrats of the DoE and PEDs. Everyone involved in education can play a role, including

principals, teachers, governors and parents. What works is clear. We simply need to make sure that we do what works.

Literacy: SM&L says

It is time for everyone involved in education to meet the challenge posed by the dismal levels of literacy of the majority of our nation's children. We need to acknowledge the problem and take responsibility for correcting it as a matter of urgency. Pointing fingers and blaming others is easy but does little to help the children whom we are failing. Rather let us all focus on the things that we can do for the children in our school and those that we teach. It is no longer a question of knowledge, it is now a question of will.

Literacy: What primary principals can do

- Make sure that they and their teachers have a thorough understanding of language issues including:
 - the importance of mother-tongue instruction;
 - the knowledge and skills and teaching strategies required to improve language acquisition and of teaching the mother tongue;
 - knowledge and skill of the strategies needed to support children who enter school with language deficiencies;
- Increase the timetabled time allocation for the teaching of literacy where this is warranted. Policy guidelines for Literacy and Languages, particularly in the more junior grades, should be seen as the minimum time allocation for language teaching;
- Make meeting of grade-level assessment standards for Literacy and Languages for all pupils a school-wide priority and publicise this;
- Use professional development workshops and seminars and articles from professional journals to keep teachers motivated and informed about the value of literacy and of mother-tongue instruction for the future academic success of pupils.
- Provide guidance to parents and community members on the importance of literacy and of mother tongue instruction as well as advice on things that parents and community members can do to improve the language (mother tongue) and school-readiness

Literacy: What the DoE and PEDs can do

- **Provide funding for Grade R**

Generally children from more affluent families are more literate than their less affluent peers because of the resources and opportunities that are afforded to them and which expose them to a range of learning experiences which improve their all-round development. Providing funding for the training and employment of Grade R teachers at all public primary schools will improve the academic prospects of socio-economically deprived pupils.

- **Provide funding and incentives for pre-service and in-service training of teachers who teach Grades R – 6**

This will ensure that these teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills they need to teach pupils in their mother tongue and to ensure that the majority have the mother tongue proficiency they need by the end of Grade 6 to tackle future learning through a second language.

- **Permit greater flexibility in the time schools may allocate to the teaching of basic literacy**

The teaching of literacy is so critical to the future success of children that if this is all that they do, provided they do it successfully, they will at least have given their students a sound basis for future success.

Things parents can do to help their child (ren) develop their language skills

Schools have a vital part to play in helping parents to help their children develop their language skills in their **home language**. Here are some suggestions for advice based on research and best practice which principals can pass on to their parent body.

- Encourage the development of reading skills by:
 - Making sure your child has a readily accessible supply of age-appropriate children's books and magazines.
 - Encourage use of the school and local library from an early age.
 - Read to your child daily from an early age.
 - Once your child learns to read encourage his/her reading by reading with him/her and having him/her read aloud to you.
 - Set a good example by reading yourself.
 - Discuss books and what you and your child have read: makes this a regular part of family time.
 - Limit TV watching and the playing of electronic games.
- Encourage the development of good verbal skills by:

Tips for primary principals to encourage and support literacy

Di Black, the recently retired principal of Greenfield Girls' Primary School in Claremont, provided *SM&L* with the following tips on how primary principals can encourage and support literacy in their schools.

- Create appreciation of the written word. Share stories, and informational texts with children. Invite them to wonder over the magic of a story or new ideas presented in informational texts.
 - Ensure that children know how books are organised. Is every child aware that books are read from left to right and from top to bottom; that pages are numbered and what purpose content and index pages provide?
 - Make the school environment 'print rich'. Label objects within the classrooms and the school.
 - Play word games, have daily word competitions. TARGET is a great game to play.
 - Create daily opportunities and support by teachers for children to write many kinds of texts for different purposes. Stories, lists, messages and poems are good examples of these.
 - Provide children with a 'new' word each day and get them to write an 'excellent' sentence with that word.
 - Listen to children read on an individual basis. Reading groups waste valuable time as only one child actually reads at any one time and the rest do not follow particularly well or get bored! Everyone benefits from individual attention every now and then.
 - Encourage the participation of people from outside the school to offer time to listen to children read or to play word games with them.
 - Arrange for older classes to 'buddy' with junior classes for 10 minutes a week to listen to reading on a one-on-one basis.
 - Allow children to read notices in Assembly and to make announcements where appropriate.
 - Ensure that there is DEAR time in the weekly programme (Drop Everything And Read).
 - Have a daily or weekly newspaper-type poster to highlight an event. (It can be very demanding to come up with a succinct headline!)
- Finally, do **you** know how children are taught to read? Do you know the difference between a phoneme, a phonic, a grapheme? If the answer is no, then I suggest you go to www.naesp.org and locate the article: *What Principals Need to know about Reading*. Happy research!

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25 best Internet sources for teaching reading

In an article published in the September 2006 edition of *The Reading Teacher*, Leah Wasburn-Moses a teacher from the Department of Educational Psychology at Miami University lists 25 internet sources which she considers to be the best sources of material for teaching reading. The list was compiled from an initial list of 252 websites identified by her students as part of an assignment to locate websites in the five areas of phonic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. She then reviewed the list and selected this final list of 25 based on amongst other things, the possibility for practical classroom application, comprehensiveness and variety of activities.

Phonemic awareness:

- www.manateee.k12.fl.us/sites/elementary/palmasola/rcompindex1.htm (Phonemic awareness games and activities)
- www.readwritethink.org (Phonemic awareness activities – click on “learning about language” and then scroll down the list to “phonemic awareness”)
- www.songsforteaching.com/avni/alliterativebooks.htm (books to teach phonemic awareness)
- www.getreadytoread.org (Early literacy screening tools and activities)
- <http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/patti/k-1/activities/phonemi.html> (Rhyming work activities)

Phonics:

- www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/index.shtml (Word and picture activities)
- <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/phonics/teach.htm> (Phonics Skills Chart)
- <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/phonics/nonsensewordtest.pdf> (Nonsense Word Test)
- http://eprcontent.k12.com/placement/placement/_langarts_2.html (Phonics assessment)
- <http://www.adrianbruce.com/reading/games.htm> (Reading games rooms)

Fluency

- www.interdys.org/pdf/T38-Reading-Fluency.pdf#search=i_reading%20fluency (Coaching reading fluency)
- Readers Theatre – downloadable scripts for children of various ages
 - www.aronshep.com/rt/RTE.html
 - www.teachingheart.net/aderstheatre.htm
 - www.lisablau.com/freescripts.html

- www.humbolt.edu/~jmf2/floss/rt-eval.html (a rubric that can be used to assess students' performance.)

- www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfdocs/prtutor/prtutor_lesson3.pdf (Training of students for paired reading activities)
- www.poetry4kids.com/index.php (Teaching fluency through poetry)
- <http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/assessment/OFAcalc.htm> (An oral fluency calculator for use in Grades 3 to 5)

Vocabulary

- <http://www.vocabulary.com> (Includes vocabulary worksheets for Grades 1 to 12)
- www.kinderkorner.com/readalouds.html (This provides a list of books to read aloud at various grade levels)
- http://lessonplancentral.com/lessons/Language_Arts/Vocabulary/index.htm (Vocabulary lesson plans)
- <http://www.tampareads.com/trial/vocabulary/inex-vocab.htm> (Vocabulary lists of high-frequency words for Grades 1 – 5)
- <http://www.techteachers.com/vocabulary.htm> (Online vocabulary development)

Text comprehension

- www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown (Children's Literature Web Guide)
- www.bookadventure.org (A free, motivating reading programme to encourage independent reading.)
- <http://home.att.net/~teaching/litlessons.htm> (Provides a variety of strategies which help promote reading comprehension)
- <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/links.html> (A comprehensive collection of links to an assortment of reading strategies)
- www.mrsmcgowan.com/reading/rubrics.htm#Comprehension (An easy-to-understand and easy-to-use rubric to assess comprehension)

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Things parents can do to help their child (ren) develop their language skills

- encouraging your child to talk to you. Listen carefully and respond to your child in a way that will encourage conversation and stimulate his/her thinking. Don't just say mmm.. and continue what you are doing. You need to engage with your child.
- play with words and encourage your child to use new words and to practise using them in different contexts.
- × use words in rhyme and song that make use of their sound and meaning.

Preparing for the NSC

Things principals and teachers can do to prepare for the National Grade 11 examinations at the end of this year and for the National Senior Certificate examinations at the end of 2008

Towards the end of last year the press was full of reports of predictions of high failure rates as a result of the new examination regime, standards prescribed by the national curriculum statements for Grades 10 – 12 and the exemplar examination papers for each subject which had been distributed by the DoE. We have also heard from reliable sources that schools were instructed by their regional offices to adjust marks so that subject averages and pass rates for Grade 10 were within 10% of those recorded at the end of 2005 and that where this was not done, Circuit Managers simply raised marks so that they met this requirement. While this may be lamentable, it is understandable as one simply cannot have a public education system that produces significant variances in pass rates from year to year. As an example, a 10% change reduction in the pass rate in the Senior Certificate examinations translates into 52 852 more Grade 12s' failing, equivalent to 50 schools of 1 000 pupils each. In the lower grades, the numbers are significantly greater. As a consequence, the situation would become administratively and politically untenable. It was because of this reality that there was a need, as one district official was reported to have said, "to massage the result to within acceptable limits".

We must therefore assume and expect that the NSC results in 2008 will not be too different from those of 2007 or 2006.

We must therefore assume and expect that the NSC results in 2008 will not be too different from those of 2007 or 2006. Like all good bureaucracies, the system will not countenance it. That does not mean that nothing should be done. The DoE must be commended at least on the work that it has done thus far in providing schools with the exemplars this early in the process. This makes it possible for teachers to begin to understand the level at which the examination papers will be set. It is now time for school principals and their leadership teams to play their part and to use the exemplars, the curriculum documents and the available textbooks to assess and evaluate their approaches to their teaching and the assessment strategies that they have used across the school.

Concentrating on Grades 10 to 12 is not enough. The groundwork needs to be done in Grades 8 and 9 and the first things that principals need to do is to insist that Learning Area/Subject heads and their subject teams thoroughly review the Grade 8 and 9 Learning programmes and assessment strategies to ensure that pupils entering Grade 10 have the skills and knowledge that they need to cope and to make progress in the subject at Grade 10 level. It has, unfortunately, been too easy in

the GET phase for teachers to get away with teaching at a superficial level as a result of the manner in which departmental training programmes have emphasised such things as group work, projects, continuous assessment and the use of alternative forms of assessment. This has been at the expense of teaching the basics and ensuring that pupils are challenged to master the more cognitively demanding aspects of the subject, so that they can read subject-related material with understanding and can articulate written and verbal responses to questions that require more than a tick in a

The bottom line is that academic success is less about the curriculum.....and more about good classroom practice

box or a one-word answer. The bottom line is that academic success is less about the curriculum (although there is a need for teachers to have a good understanding of the scope and contents of the curriculum that guide their teaching) and more about good classroom practice – the strategies and skills used by expert teachers to help pupils master the subject matter. If principals and subject heads understand this, they will have gone a long way to ensuring that the students under their care perform to their potential.



Will the Senior Certificate Examinations start later in future?

Minister Pandor intimated in her press briefing when she released the results of the 2006 Senior Certificate Examinations that the examinations may start later in future because of the disruptive effect the exam timetable has on the whole system. She expressed particular concern about the practice adopted by some schools of closing in September or October to accommodate Senior Certificate study time - "We cannot continue the negative impact on education of almost four months of no schooling"..... Too much learning time is lost to this practice". *SM&L* supports her in this. It seems farcical that current school policy for Grade 12 makes provision for just three days of teaching in the fourth term. Even the most diligent and determined schools find it difficult to keep their Grade 12s focused at this time. Starting the Senior Certificate examinations in the last week of October or even the first week in November would have much to commend it. Most importantly, it would give the Grade 12 teachers the time they need to address the

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12 things high schools can do to improve Senior Certificate results

1 Understand that the road to Senior Certificate and good results starts in Grade 8 not Grade 12. Good results are the product of a five years of good teaching and learning, not one year of cramming or ad hoc arrangements.

2 Use your SC results as a benchmark for performance standards in the other grades. Pass rates, subject averages and symbol distributions across the school should be based on those obtained by pupils in their final Senior Certificate examinations.

3 Use the standard, structure, time allocation and nature of questions contained in the final, externally-set SC papers as models for examination and test papers set throughout the school, with appropriate adjustments for each grade.

4 Write two sets of examinations a year - one set in mid-year and one at the end of the year - in all grades. Use the results of these examinations to provide individual pupils and subject groups with feedback on their performance including:

- areas of strength and weakness
- the interpretation of questions
- the use of time in the examination
- other aspects of examination technique.

5 Make optimal use of teaching time. Make sure that teaching of the academic programme starts promptly on the first day of the year and extends for the full year. Treat teaching time as sacrosanct and refuse to shorten the school day, close early, extend breaks or use allocated teaching time for anything other than subject teaching.

6 Allocate the minimum possible time for examinations, particularly in the junior grades. It is not impossible for pupils to attend school for a full day during the examination period and for them to write two two-hour examination papers a day if the papers are separated by at least a three-hour interval.

7 Arrange the school timetable so that teachers teach the same subject in several grades. Insist that subject teams meet regularly to plan and discuss teaching priorities for the subject, including the knowledge and skills pupils will need by the time they enter Grade 12 if they are going to succeed in the subject.

8 Appoint a senior member of staff (an experienced HoD or deputy principal) as academic head with the responsibility of ensuring that teachers teaching grade 12 are provided with the data and other information that they need to perform well. This should include:

- access to past SC examinations papers and examiners' reports
- detailed analysis of past examination results of

the school for the subject (subject averages, symbol distributions etc) and those of other similar schools.

9 Insist that homework is set and checked regularly. All secondary school pupils should be given some homework every day starting from the first day of the school year. For Grade 8 a minimum of 1,5 hours of homework should be set. In Grades 11 and 12 pupils should be expected to spend a minimum of 3 hours a day after school hours on homework.

10 Make sure that all teachers teach their classes when they are supposed to be teaching them and that a significant part of their teaching consists of whole-class teaching. Research shows that teaching is most effective when a well-prepared teacher stands in front of the class and engages pupils in discussion about the topic of the lesson. When teachers ask questions and challenge responses, they force pupils to engage with the subject, making them think about the topic and clarify their understanding of it.

11 Make good teaching and learning a priority and central to all that happens in the school. Insist that it be included as an agenda item for every subject and staff meeting. Invite subject specialists and principals from other schools with a reputation for high achievement in the Senior Certificate examinations to talk to your staff or arrange for your staff to visit their schools, to sit in on lessons and attend subject meetings to see what they do.

12 Persevere. Good results are not achieved overnight. They are the results of persistent effort over time, and years, rather than weeks or months.



Will the Senior Certificate Examinations start later in future?

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shortcoming in content knowledge, skills and examination technique that are revealed by the so-called "mock matric" examinations that all schools write during the third term and which in themselves remove an inordinate amount of the available teaching time from the third term. SM&L is also of the opinion that the schools that would benefit most from a change of this kind are the worst performing schools because it is at these schools that the practice of closing early is most entrenched.

Benchmarking your Senior Certificate results – taking a critical look at how your school fared

By the time you receive your copy of *SM&L*, if you are the principal of a secondary school, you will probably have done what is expected of you concerning the positives of your 2006 Senior Certificate results, the spin that all schools put out in an effort to promote their achievements and to satisfy or pacify their parents, governors and past pupils. But, once this is over, as a principal or subject head who is worth his salt, you will close your office door, take out your calculator or open a spreadsheet on your computer and do the analysis which allows you to take a hard, critical and dispassionate look at how your Grade 12 pupils really did in 2006.

One thing that you can do, if you consider your school to be a top school academically, is to compare your school's results with those of the other top schools in your province. As an example, we have analysed the results of what we consider to be some of academically best performing schools in the Western Cape. We chose the Western Cape because we are most familiar with the schools in this province and because the WCED website provides ready access to the results of all of its schools. Our initial group was the 10 schools which the WCED identified as being its best-performing schools based on a specified set of criteria. We decided to include a number of other schools because their results were as good as, if not better in some respects than, those of the 10 schools identified by the WCED but which may have been excluded on technical grounds (for instance the relative size of their SC class). The final list included 18 schools, both public and independent. It is not our intention to give the names of the schools because we do not believe that it is relevant to the purpose of this article.

The table below (Table 1) gives the high, low and average for each of five categories. No single school performed best in all five categories. We did not include the percentage of passes because we were not able to obtain this data for all of the schools. We would assume that it would be in the range 99% - 100%.

How do you evaluate your school's performance and set benchmarks if your school is not in the same academic league as these schools? **There are a number of things that you can do.**

One of the simplest is to identify 5 or 10 schools with a similar pupil profile to that of your school in terms of SC numbers, situation (i.e. urban, inner city, rural etc.) and the socio-economic and poverty levels of the community within which it operates, as well as the school community it serves, if this is different. Once you have identified the schools, obtain the details of their SC results and do the same exercise that we have done here and then use it to see how you have fared. Where do you rank in terms of these categories? Obtain the subject data for each of the schools – the pass rates, subject averages and symbol distributions for each of the subjects offered at your school - and have your subject heads analyse these results and report on how their subject results compare with those of these similar schools.

Your own school's results over the past five or so years can also be used very effectively to develop a set of benchmarks for your school. Take your overall results over the past 5 years and list them on a spreadsheet such as Microsoft Excel.

An example of the kind of table and the headings you should use are given on the adjacent page (Table 2).

Your **benchmark** could be your average over the past 5 years while your **goal** should be to better your best results. You will notice that we have suggested that you include your September results in the analysis sheet. This is because it is important to ensure that there is a reasonable correlation between the results scored by pupils in their September examinations and those scored in the final examinations. Ideally, if you have established appropriate standards for your September examinations, there should be a small but significant improvement in your final results over those in the September examinations.

Subject heads should do a similar exercise using their subject results over the past five years, analysed by subject average and symbol distribution but separated by grade (Table 3). Subject heads also need to compare their results with those scored by their pupils in their examinations in June and September of their Grade 12 year, as well as with the results scored at the end of their

Table 1: Senior Certificate Benchmarks for 2006

High, Low and average of the best performing schools in the Western Cape

Category	No of passes	% ME	% Distinctions + Merit	% Distinctions	Av. no. of Subject distinctions per pupil
High	224	100%	95.3%	51.7%	2.4
Low	27	78.6%	64.2%	21.3%	0.8
Average	115	91.8%	83.2%	35.8%	1.8

Grade 11 year. This is to ensure that the Grade 11 results are in line with the final SC results.

This data provides the basis for an informed discussion about results as it provides evidence of performance. Evidence of poor performance relative to past results requires explanation and strategies for improvement. Evidence of good performance also requires explanation and offers an opportunity for successful subject teams and teachers to share their expertise and strategies for success with their colleagues whose overall results were not up to standard. The important thing to remember about the results of any form of assessment is that they

provide an opportunity for teachers and the school leadership team to:

- reflect on their performance
- consider what worked and what did not work
- learn from the past
- use what they have learned to perform better in the future (which is what good management and leadership is about).

Table 2: Data you can use to establish benchmarks based on your past results

Year	No. of Gr 12s	No. of passes	% Pass	No. of ME passes	% ME passes	No. of Merit passes	% Merit pass	No. of Distinctions	% Distinctions
2006 September									
2006 Final									
Average									
Best									
Worst									
2005									
2004									
2003									
2002									
2001									

Table 3: Data Subject Heads can use to benchmark their subject specific results

Year	% Pass	Av. (Prov.)	Av. (School)	A	B	C	D	E	F	FF	G/H
2006 (Dec.)											
2006 (Sept.)											
2006 (June)											
Av. (2001 - 2005)											
Best (2001 - 2005)											
Worst (2001 - 2005)											

How poor classroom practice is failing our children

Much is made of the inequality of resources between our best and least resourced public schools. These differences are frequently used as justification for the failure of the majority of our schools to provide an acceptable level of education to the children they teach. Those who are most vociferous in this regard usually infer that with better resources (and by resources they mean physical resources and improved funding) one could expect a substantial improvement in the academic performance of the pupils who attend these schools.

Recent results of research findings by the Joint Education Trust (JET) and others suggest that the problem may lie more with the Human Resources – the teachers and principals who teach at these schools – than with the lack of physical resources. One study of reading and writing in Grade 3 classrooms in a sample of rural schools found that in over 40% of the language classes and nearly 70% of the Mathematics classes no interaction with texts of any kind was observed even though textbooks were available in sufficient quantities. Where reading was observed, it generally took the form of the teacher reading three or four sentences off the blackboard, with children following in chorus. Interaction with texts was observed in only 5% of the language classes and less often in mathematics. In 30% of classes, no writing was observed during the lesson.

Another study (by the HSRC) found poor time management in the form of lack of punctuality and sporadic attendance by teachers was a problem in 80% of schools and that fixing just this facet of school management could result in a 15% improvement in the performance of schools and a 20% improvement in rural schools.

These are very significant figures. A 15% improvement nationally in matric results would have seen 52 725 more pupils pass, 12 875 more achieve a Matric Endorsement and 3 783 more leaving school with a HG pass in Mathematics. In economic terms, an improvement of this magnitude is likely to be significant. These are things that can be fixed relatively easily, provided there is both the political will and the determination by departmental officials and principals to do what needs to be done to make the system work. This means acting rather than talking. The question is whether those responsible are willing to do the job. *SM&L* would like to believe they do but wonders whether they will.



Starting the school year: a leadership and management checklist

How well did your school year start? Use our checklist on page 11 to rate your planning and preparation for the start of the 2007 school year. Two dates are given because the school calendars of inland and coastal schools differ.

Use the following scale

A = Very much like my/our school

B = Mostly like my/our school

C = Partly like my/our school

D = Unlike my/our school

Score 2 for an A, 1 for a B, 0 for a C and -1 for a D

Total the score for your school and see how you rate!

50 to 60 = Excellent. Your school has got off to a fine start thanks to the thorough planning and good leadership and management of the principal and his/her senior management team.

30 to 49 = Good. This was a reasonable start to the school year, but there were also a number of shortcomings which need to be addressed. The principal and senior management team need to review their planning and programme to eliminate the shortcomings. This needs to be done soon if you are not to forget the problems. Make a note of your decisions and file them in your planning file for 2008.

10 to 29 = Not good. There are serious shortcomings in the way the principal and his/her management team planned and managed the programme for the start of your school year. Set aside 2 to 3 hours on an afternoon, evening or Saturday morning for a thorough review of the way you plan and manage your programme for the start of the school year. If necessary get advice from principals of other schools in the area which have a reputation for being well run on how they plan and manage their programme at the start of the year.

Less than 10 or a negative score = Very poor. The principal and management team need urgent and comprehensive assistance and support as the results show that the school may be close to dysfunctional. Contact your Circuit Manager and/or an experienced principal for advice and support as a matter of urgency. You can also contact *SM&L* for advice and guidance on how to tackle the serious challenges that you face.

Starting the school year - a planning checklist

- 1 The school buildings and all teaching venues were clean, neat and set out ready to receive the pupils and teachers prior to the start of the school year.
- 2 Arrangements were in place to ensure that all pupils had the textbooks and stationery they needed for the new school year before the start of their first school day.
- 3 The timetable was completed prior to the start of the new school year.
- 4 All teachers were issued with their teaching allocation and timetable before the start of the new school year. (i.e. before they arrived at school on 8/15 January).
- 5 All pupils had been assigned to classes prior to the pupils' first school day on 10/17 January.
- 6 All staff appointments had been finalised before the start of the school year on 8/15 January.
- 7 All teachers were present punctually at the start of their first school day on 8/15 January.
- 8 The principal and school management team prepared a detailed programme for the teachers' first two days (8/15 and 9/16 January)
- 9 The programme for the teachers' first two days included at least the following:
 - a review of the 2006 SC results.
 - a detailed programme for the first school day for pupils.
 - a presentation on the priorities and goals for the year.
 - the procedure that would be followed to direct pupils who are new to the school to the venue where they must gather or to their classes.
 - time for phase and/or grade heads to meet with their class teachers to discuss issues pertaining to the organisation of the phase/ grade
 - time set aside for subject/ phase heads to meet subject/ phase teachers to discuss the teaching programme for first week.
- 10 The principal and secretary had processed all holiday post prior to the first day of the school year.
- 11 Subject / phase heads prepared detailed programmes/ schemes of work for the 2007 school year prior to the start of the year.
- 12 The detailed programmes/ schemes of work were issued to teachers on or before the teachers' first day.
- 13 All teachers knew what was required of them on the pupils' first day including the teaching programme they needed to follow in their first teaching lessons.
- 14 Within 20 minutes of the start of the first school day all pupils were present at their assigned venues.
- 15 Within 2 hours of the start of the school day a register had been taken of all pupils present.
- 16 Within 2 hours of the start of the school day a start had been made in all classes on teaching the academic programme.
- 17 The school had a programme in place to process late arrivals and late applicants.
- 18 Late arrivals and applicants were promptly assigned to classes and teaching groups and issued with the textbooks and stationery that they needed.
- 19 All pupils received some homework assignments on the first day.
- 20 The first school day was a full school day (i.e. students and teachers are present at school for the full number of hours prescribed by policy)
- 21 At least 80% of the first school day was devoted to teaching the academic programme (as opposed to organisational and management issues)
- 22 The principal and/or deputy-principal walked through the school at least twice each day during the formal school day for the first week to ensure that things were going smoothly and that teaching was taking place.
- 23 The school's extra-mural programme (sport and cultural activities) was up and running by the start of the second week of term.
- 24 The school had a programme in place to help pupils new to the school to understand the school's expectations and rules
- 25 The effectiveness of the programme for the first week of the year was reviewed by the whole staff and by the senior management team and analysed to identify problems areas and recommendations for improvement for 2008. Problems and recommendations were noted and filed for reference when planning for the 2008 school year.



Policy Update

In every issue of *SM&L* we bring you a list of recent legislation and policy changes.

1 Revised School Fee Exemption Regulations (Notice 2006 in Government Gazette No. 29311 of 18 October 2006)

The much-delayed Regulations Relating to the Exemption of Parents from Payment of School Fees in Public Schools were published in Government Gazette No. 29311 dated 18 October 2006.

It is clear that even now there are schools in some provinces which have not had these Regulations provided to them by their PEDs. The Regulations can be downloaded from the DoE website.

Readers are advised to:

- Read and operate in terms of the full Regulations and not according to any summary provided by PEDs
- Make arrangements to handle the significant administrative burden placed on the school in communicating the information to parents and processing the checklist forms [annexure A to the Regulations]

2 No Fee Schools

Although legislation has for some time allowed for the formal declaration of identified schools as schools at which no school fees may be charged, delays in the administrative procedures prevented the formal declaration of these schools during 2006. Instead the PEDs worked on the basis of getting SGBs to volunteer not to exercise their statutory right to set fees in conjunction with their parents.

The system of no fee schools is predicated on the PEDs being able to guarantee a minimum per pupil subsidy to the school. Although no fee schools are meant to be schools in quintiles 1 and 2, a number of PEDs with sufficient funds have extended this provision on a voluntary basis to schools in quintile 3.

The lists of declared no fee schools in all nine provinces are on the DoE website.

3 Addendum to Policy Document, the National Senior Certificate: A Qualification at Level 4 on the National Qualification Framework (NQF), regarding Learners with special needs (Government Gazette No. 29466 of 11 December 2006)

This policy makes provision *inter alia* for a 5-subject NSC with lower pass requirements for learners in special schools.

Addendum to the National Protocol for Recording and Reporting (Grades R-12) (Government Gazette No.29467 of 11 December 2006)

This Addendum to the Policy Document, the National Senior Certificate: A Qualification at Level 4 on the National Qualification Framework (NQF), regarding the National Protocol for Recording and Reporting (Grades R-12) means that the National Protocol on Assessment which was implemented on an experimental basis in 2006, has now been finalised and determined policy for implementation from 1 January 2007.

The Further Education and Training Colleges Act, Act No. 16 of 2006 (Government Gazette No. 29469 of 11 December 2006)

This act determines the curriculum, funding and the management structures of the public FET Colleges.



Next Issue

Subscriber survey

We bring you the results of our initial subscriber survey

What one primary school did to improve pupil performance

We report on the successful strategies used by one elementary school in the U.S. to dramatically improve the literacy and numeracy levels of its pupils (carried over from the February issue as a result of a lack of space).

NSC update

We bring you news and views on implementation of the NSC curriculum and the strategies schools are using to meet the challenges that it brings.

School Safety and School Discipline

We look at what the DoE, PEDs and schools can do to improve discipline and school safety.

Quality Assurance

We take an initial look at what is involved when the DoE and your PED decide that your school needs to be Quality Assured.

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