

# REPORT ON A GUIDELINE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

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# **I. Introduction**

This report contains the findings of a survey on and proposals for the development of a Good Practice Guideline on School District Management.

## **2. Background**

The Public Service Commission (PSC) undertook a survey from October 1999 to March 2000 on the degree to which government departments were implementing the proposals made in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery – *Batho Pele*.

This project was aimed at evaluating departmental compliance with the White Paper and at obtaining baseline information on progress in transforming public service delivery in terms of the principles promoted in the White Paper. These principles are:

- Consultation
- Clear standards
- Access
- Courtesy
- Information
- Openness and transparency
- Redress
- Value for money

The report showed that while progress has been made in establishing a framework for transforming public service delivery, much remains to be done. The principles remain valid and their importance is emphasized by the survey findings.



The project aimed at evaluating the performance of certain identified departments in implementing the White Paper. The project also aimed at

- evaluating compliance with the *Batho Pele* principles at grassroots level service points;
- obtaining baseline information on service delivery issues; and
- making recommendations on improving service delivery.

The survey evaluated compliance with the processes required in terms of the White Paper for setting standards and determining targets for improvement; it did not assess whether the standards were actually met or whether users of services were satisfied or not.

Data was gathered through a questionnaire completed by each department, and through interviews with managers responsible for service delivery in each department.

In its focus on education, the Public Service Commission *inter alia* established the following facts in relation to the following topics.

## ***2.1. Environment***

The environment plays a major role in the standard of education. For example, rural areas are not always supplied with telephones or electricity, which seriously hampers communication and the use of educational aids. The poor state of many rural roads makes access to some schools difficult. Following the policy of redeploying educators in the provinces, many redeployed educators find it difficult to obtain housing in rural areas. It also emerged from the survey that schools in rural areas receive little support from the education departments and that they are also being marginalized in terms of infrastructure. Books from urban schools (in many instances no longer prescribed) are redistributed to rural schools, which places learners in rural areas at a great disadvantage. Most of the

two and three-person schools are also found in rural areas, and because the number of learners dictates the learner/educator ratio, the absence of one educator has a dramatic effect on learners in various grades in these schools.

## ***2.2 Resources***

At many rural schools, the lack of books and stationery is a serious problem – some books and stationery are delivered only in April of the academic year. Various schools are community built, which means they consist of makeshift buildings without any toilets. Overcrowding at some schools seriously hampers the quality of education. In addition to this, in some areas schools are vandalized, making security an issue of considerable concern.

## ***2.3 Management***

Despite being deprived of facilities, some schools achieve excellent matric pass rates while others with better facilities have low pass rates. This can be ascribed largely to the quality of the management of the schools, especially the management exercised by departmental heads and principals. Schools are fairly well supported by subject advisors, who play an important role in ensuring a solid foundation for education. There are, however, problems regarding the role of area and circuit managers who are meant to assist schools with school management and governance – some schools are hardly ever visited by these managers and consequently they play no meaningful role in assisting education in the classroom. Some circuit managers have numerous (more than 50) schools under their jurisdiction, which makes it difficult for them to exert a positive influence of education in these schools. A direct relationship exists between well-performing schools and the management style and active participation of principals in the management of the schools. Without the visits and management assistance of circuit managers, the departments cannot

ascertain the actual standard of education in the schools under their jurisdiction. Such assistance creates a climate that is conducive to education and encourages commitment from principals and educators.

The intolerance of some educators towards any intervention by management in the classroom undermines the quality of education. Needs with regard to learning material and physical facilities are not always determined at grassroots level, and the provincial departments of education are therefore not always aware of what is going on at schools in certain areas. The communication between the various provincial education head offices and schools is also not satisfactory – especially regarding the redeployment of educators. This creates uncertainty among educators and impacts negatively on their teaching commitment.

Some schools have made good progress with transformation and have accomplished a lot with the few resources available to them. In order to share such good practices regional workshops should be held to exchange ideas and experience.

With due cognizance of the principles of the *Batho Pele* White Paper, and in order to enhance education in the provinces, the following recommendations are made in the report.

- The provincial education departments should give strategic attention to the re-allocation of resources, especially to rural schools.
- The departments should streamline all operational processes with specific reference to the flow of information to and from schools and the support of schools by provincial head offices.
- Uniform standards should be set for the implementation of quality education at school level. Rigorous performance measurement and comparison of schools (benchmarking) should be instituted.

- An organisational investigation and job analyses should be undertaken on the role of area and circuit managers, and capacity should be built in respect of the management of schools.
- An ethos of service delivery and professionalism should be established among educators to obtain commitment to the teaching of learners.
- Regional forums should be established where educators can share best practices and learn from each other.
- School governing bodies should be empowered – especially those in rural areas and in previously disadvantaged schools and farm schools.
- Schools should adopt annual programmes for regular meetings and interaction between schools and parents.

Following this, the Office of the Public Service Commission, in conjunction with the national Department of Education, requested proposals for developing a Good Practice Guideline on School District Management.

### **3. Aim of the project**

The aim of the project is to develop a Good Practice Guideline on School District Management.

### **4. Scope of the project**

The scope of the project covered the following issues:

- The relationship between provincial education departments and the district office – where applicable also regions.
- The relationship between the district office and circuits/schools and their principals/places of learning, school governing bodies and organised learner groups or institutions and organised education.

- The authority and accountability of the district managers
- The organisational functioning and composition of a district
- The legislation impacting on districts
- The role and purpose of districts
- The role and purpose of circuit offices – where applicable
- Performance management and indicators
- Code of conduct
- Participative management
- School governance
- Gender
- Racial issues

## 5. Investigational approach

The methods used for evaluating the system included:

- Qualitative interviews with key informants in all spheres of government.
- Questionnaires developed and used for interviews with key stakeholders.
- Investigation of existing and evolving policies and laws.
- Consultation with key departmental officials.
- Two consecutive consultative workshops attended by national and provincial officials.
- Statistical sampling – in the selection of respondents, a stratified random sampling was used. The following locational and other school characteristics were also taken into consideration to ensure representivity.
  - Rural
  - Deep rural
  - Urban (township or suburb)

- Primary or high school
- Former Model C

The following components of the three provincial education departments included in the project were part of the sampling.

PROVINCE	HEAD OFFICE	REGIONS	DISTRICTS	CIRCUITS	SCHOOLS
Limpopo	1		2	3	6
Northern Cape	1		2		6
KwaZulu-Natal	1	1	4	4	8

## 6. Fieldwork

### 6.1 Limpopo

#### 6.1.1 Background

The provincial head office of the Department of Education in Limpopo is in Polokwane. The province has six education districts of which four were visited during the research: Vhembi, Capricorn, Sekhukhune and Bohlabela.

Visits were paid to the following schools:

- Thengwe Secondary School (rural school)
- Thoyandou Secondary School (township school)
- Phoroane Secondary School (rural school)
- Capricorn High School (Former Model C school)
- Dibatharo Primary School (farm school)

Inputs from the national Department of Education and the Limpopo Department of Education were also obtained to secure a cross-section of perspectives from the different components of the education system.

## **Factors affecting school district management**

### ***6.1.2 Reporting***

In the Limpopo Department of Education, the General Manager for District Coordination (at chief director level) is the person responsible for the management of districts. The district coordination structure was established only during 2003. This structure coordinates the activities of the following districts.

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| - Bholabela  | - Capricorn |
| - Sekhukhune | - Vhembe    |
| - Mopani     | - Waterberg |

These districts are in accordance with local government demarcation. The district coordination component of the Limpopo Department of Education assists districts in capacity building, provision of resources, monitoring and evaluation of educational policy implementation, and management support. It also provides guidance to districts on their general roles and functions as well as their line function operations.

Since this is a newly established structure, it is still in the process of filling posts whose incumbents will be responsible for overseeing functions such as Curriculum Development, ABET, Governance and Management, Labour Relations and Professional Further Education and Training. These posts are critical to the effective and efficient functioning of the Limpopo Department of Education. A district office is headed by a senior district manager (at director level). A district manager supervises six circuit coordinators. Each circuit coordinator is responsible for 4-5 circuits and each circuit manager oversees 30 schools on average. In the Bholabela district alone, the district office oversees 539 schools.

The district office plays a key role in assisting schools. It gives policy, curriculum, financial and human resource administration support and also

learner support materials to schools. The other critical area of support extended to schools concerns capacity building of school management teams (SMTs), school governing bodies (SGBs) and learner groups. However, this support is not provided equally to all schools. Schools that are regarded as “underperforming”, underresourced or “in crisis” are given more district attention than those regarded as functioning “normally”. Insufficient staff and resources at circuit and district levels are advanced as reasons why all schools are not given equal district attention.

The district office shares certain human resource management functions with the provincial head office. The advertisement of posts and the appointment of school and district staff are done at provincial level. However, the district office determines the demand for additional staff and makes recommendations to the provincial head office. Matters such as labour relations and disciplinary issues are handled at the district level, while serious offences involving possible dismissal are dealt with at provincial head office level. The provincial head office is requested to intervene in serious school issues. Admission policy disputes that have resource ramifications, and disruptions of teaching and learning in schools are examples of cases where provincial intervention may be required.

Job descriptions have been compiled for provincial and district staff. A work study investigation conducted in the provincial head office obtained union input during the compilation of job descriptions. All district managers have performance contracts with the General Manager: District Coordination to whom districts submit their monthly reports. District performance is monitored on a quarterly basis through district, circuit and school visits.



### **6.1.3     *Annual planning***

The provincial education departments draw up strategic and operational plans, which are informed by district strategic and operational plans and *vice versa*. The different components (School Governance Management, Further Education and Training, Curriculum Development, ABET, Early Childhood Development and Training and Development are involved in compiling these plans. The priority programmes and activities identified by the district are reflected in these plans. The implementation of plans is monitored on a quarterly basis.

It was observed that annual school programmes are not aligned with the provincial and district programmes. In fact, the principals who were interviewed indicated that their school programmes are often disrupted by district or provincial activities. The district does not make any input to the annual school programme.

### **6.1.4     *EMIS***

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) is located at the provincial head office. The districts merely provide information to this office. Snap surveys are conducted in schools at the beginning of the school year to obtain information on school enrolment, school facilities and learners and educators. Such information is captured in the EMIS for planning and management purposes at provincial level. Districts are neither involved in analyzing the data nor do they have control over the use of the data.

### **6.1.5     *Finance***

The district manager is the accounting officer in terms of the Public Finance Management Act. He or she has delegated authority to spend up to R150 000, 00 per expenditure item. The Finance Section of the provincial head office monitors the financial records of the district office on a quarterly basis. Where financial issues arise such as financial

mismanagement, these issues are discussed with the financial officials at the provincial head office and corrective measures are taken at that level.

#### **6.1.6      *Educational aids***

Schools determine their educational aids needs and make requests to the district office, which then orders the required aids. Schools in remote areas usually have to contend with delays in the delivery of the aids. The schools interviewed in this research indicated that they had to “request and request until they got what they wanted”.

#### **6.1.7      *Code of Conduct***

Each school compiles its own code of conduct for learners, educators and school governing bodies. There is no indication that districts are involved in compiling codes of conduct for schools.

#### **6.1.8      *Participative management***

Districts strive to have an open door policy at all times. District offices convene meetings and seminars for principals to obtain their inputs on educational policies and issues. Districts believe that collective and consensus management should be inculcated in all principals. Although this is the view of the district officials interviewed, it is apparent that schools’ participation in managing educational processes is uneven. Some schools are visited only on a yearly basis, which therefore limits their participation in educational issues that are discussed and decided at district, provincial and even national level.

#### **6.1.9      *Delegations***

The powers delegated to districts are limited. Their financial delegation, for instance, does not exceed R150 000, 00 and they can appoint only CS1 educators (post level 1). The district officials interviewed believe there is too much red tape at the provincial head office. The district managers complained that they have to wait for provincial approval for the

appointment of educators, the building of additional classrooms and the procurement of vehicles. The district officials said that districts should be given more powers and the authority to appoint all district and school staff and to procure learning support materials and management services. They also mentioned that the EMIS should be decentralized to the districts.

#### ***6.1.10 School management***

The district officials were perceived to be either supporting underperforming schools or attending workshops. Hence, school management support is uneven across all schools in the various districts. In former Model C schools, support for school management teams (SMTs) is limited. Schools in the rural areas are rarely visited. None of the principals interviewed said that they sit down with circuit managers to discuss management problems at the schools. School visits usually revolve around checking class records, planning lessons, assessing school facilities and attending class sessions. They are generally routine visits rather than strategic discussion meetings with the SMTs. Issues such as overcrowded classes, shortages of teachers and inadequate learning equipment and materials are some of the issues that principals would like to see addressed at these meetings.

One principal commented, "Circuit managers come to furnish us with circulars or call us to a meeting to discuss district-driven activities. The school is unknown to the district office during the course of the year. We are only recognized when they release the exam results."

The management competency of circuit managers should be evaluated to ensure that these managers have the necessary skills to give support to and oversee schools. The workload of circuit managers and other district functionaries should also be analysed in order to establish what is

preventing the district from providing adequate management support to schools. More proactive, systematic school visits and more effective communication between the district and schools should be established to ensure greater collaboration between the two structures.

### ***6.1.11 Performance of schools***

The performance of schools is currently evaluated according to Grade 12 results. Regular monitoring and evaluation of school performance is rarely done. However, districts do implement "Whole School Evaluation" in schools deemed to be underperforming. District officials spend one week evaluating these schools. Schools regarded as performing well such as former Model C schools expressed a desire for curriculum support from the district.

Performance criteria based on benchmarks, standards and equity factors should be set and workshopped with schools in order to secure their participation in the process. The evaluation instruments are currently developed by the Curriculum Development component at the provincial head office. The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) has not yet been implemented. Officials are still receiving training in the system.

### ***6.1.12 Job descriptions***

District managers have job descriptions and performance contracts in which their key responsibilities and performance indicators are outlined. The organogram of the district indicates the responsibilities of the district staff. Labour unions such as the PSA, NEHAWU and SADTU were consulted during the compilation of the job descriptions.

At school level, principals and educators use the *Educators Handbook* as a guideline for their duties. Some educators consult old manuals, which they still find useful and relevant. They were not aware if the unions had any say in their job descriptions.

Except for the former Model C school that took part in the research, none of the schools have organograms. They are nevertheless aware what their reporting lines are and what they are accountable for.

### ***6.1.13 Facilities and logistics***

The facility/maintenance needs of schools are determined by the principals, staff and school governing bodies (SGBs). Facilities that can be financed at school level are identified by the SGBs. If the school funds are inadequate, the school requests assistance from the district office, which in turn submits a request to the provincial head office. It usually takes some time before such requests are attended to. Schools therefore have to make requests repeatedly through the official channels – from circuit to district to provincial head office. Districts do not have the authority to spend money on capital infrastructure such as school buildings.

### ***6.1.14 Gender***

Gender issues seem to be a non-issue in most the schools that participated in the research. The principals had some general understanding of the meaning of gender equality. They associated it, for example, with boys and girls sweeping the yard together or boys and girls having equal access to educational resources and learning subjects. The more strategic issues surrounding gender violence and discrimination at the workplace were not mentioned. Only one school indicated that it wanted to appoint more male staff members because of the predomination of female staff.

### ***6.1.15 Racial issues***

Schools in the former homeland areas do not face any racial problems or problems related to ethnicity. In the former Model C school that participated in the research, racial integration is proceeding smoothly. No racial problems have been encountered at the school.

### **6.1.16 Communication**

Communication between district and school takes place via the telephone, letters and circulars. Most schools do not have computers or access to Internet and email services. Some district and provincial officials do not have direct telephone lines, obliging them to book calls from other offices. This situation makes it very difficult for officials to do their work efficiently.

### **6.1.17 Ratio of staff per function**

The table below was compiled from interviews at district level. The view of the schools and the district on the ratios did not differ significantly. For example, instead of 30 schools, one school interviewed mentioned 20 schools. The overriding aim of reducing the number of schools per functionary is to improve service delivery to schools.

Number	Functionary	Per
1	District manager	200 schools
5	Subject advisors	Circuit (30 schools)
1	Phase advisor	Circuit
3	ABET officials	District (34 centres)
1	ECD specialist	Circuit
1	HIV/AIDS specialist	Circuit
1	School nutrition	Circuit
1	Inclusion specialist	Circuit
1	Psychologist	Circuit
1	Speech therapist	Circuit
1	Physiotherapist	Circuit
1	Occupational therapist	Circuit
1	Social worker	Circuit
1	Sports, arts & culture specialist	Circuit

**Ratio: Staff per function**

## **6.2 Northern Cape**

### **6.2.1 Background**

The Northern Cape Department of Education has its head office in Kimberley. The execution of educational functions and the rendering of educational services take place in district offices throughout the province.

### **6.2.2 Interviews**

The Northern Cape Province was visited from 11 to 16 March 2004. In the process of gaining information on the functioning of district offices, the following institutions were visited where interviews were conducted with relevant personnel.

Northern Cape Department of Education: Head Office

District offices:

- Kimberley
- Upington
- Springbok
- De Aar

Schools:

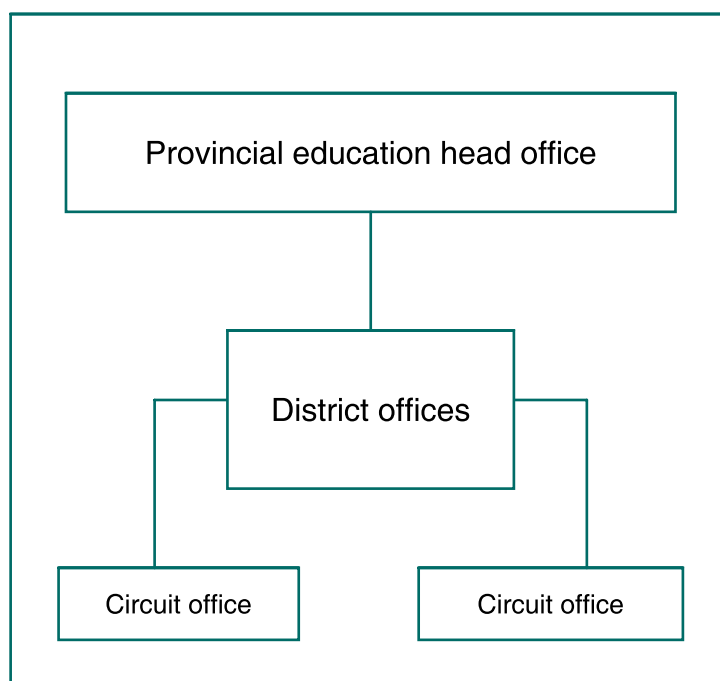
- Noord-Kaap High School
- Tweeriviere Primary School
- Friersdale Primary School
- Aggenys High School
- Bo-Plaas Primary School
- SA van Wyk High School

### **6.2.3 Reporting**

The organisational breakdown of the Education Department of the Northern Cape reveals a provincial head office in Kimberley and a district office in each of Kimberley, De Aar, Springbok and Upington. For practical

reasons (mainly distances between district offices and schools), some circuit offices are separate from the district offices.

Graphically, the setup can be portrayed as indicated below.



Within each district, district managers are responsible for overseeing a number of schools.

Districts are responsible for human resource management, educational services and corporate services. Each district also has the following resource units: ABET, Early Childhood Development, MIS, ERD, Skills Development and HIV/Aids. Two levels of reporting exist in the Province. Personnel in the resource units on district level report to the district office manager as well as to the head office resource unit in Kimberley.

District Managers, on the level of Director, are accountable to - and report to the Chief Director responsible for Districts in the provincial head office. Districts report on a monthly basis to the provincial head office. Job descriptions have been compiled setting the framework setting out the



responsibilities of district managers, and a performance management system for these managers is being developed.

The four districts also hold joint monthly meetings to discuss relevant issues.

The general feeling at district offices and schools is that although they submit reports on a monthly basis as required, little attention is paid to these reports. As long as they present their reports on time, the provincial head office is happy. Some schools said that because of this state of affairs they discovered only after two years that they were not following the correct budget procedure. Problems also arise because there is no clear indication of who is responsible to check what. For example, is it the district managers' responsibility to check finances or that of the financial section at the provincial head office?

#### ***6.2.4 Annual planning***

The Northern Cape Department of Education has compiled a strategic plan for the period 2003-2004 containing measurable objectives and activities. From this plan, each district has compiled its own annual and operational plans. Progress is measured, and reporting takes place in terms of key outputs. Within each district, managers also compile annual operational plans that spell out on a daily basis what actions need to be taken. These plans are then used to monitor progress and assess feedback. Although progress is monitored, a well-defined monitoring and evaluation system must still be devised. Each level has to provide the next level with its monthly programmes.

#### ***6.2.5 EMIS***

The EMIS is a very useful tool in educational planning. Unfortunately, the system is administered only at the provincial head office with limited

district involvement. Consequently, districts cannot manipulate data from the database to do their own planning. They are merely data source providers and are not seen as users of the data as well. The Northern Cape Department of Education started their own database a few years before the implementation of the national EMIS. They included questions in their questionnaire which were relevant to their own planning system but not necessarily relevant to the national database. Since they cannot extract information from the EMIS, they have become frustrated because it is impossible to run two database systems at the same time.

#### **6.2.6 Finance**

The district offices do not have any executive powers or responsibilities in respect of financial management. All financial processing takes place at the provincial head office. It is evident that the value-adding role of districts in this regard is limited to that of mail carrier – receiving transactional documents and forwarding them to the provincial head office. The interviews revealed that this is one of the major factors preventing districts from fulfilling their role as primary service providers to schools.

The department lays down guidelines on financial management. However, these guidelines are difficult for the rural schools to follow because most of the management committee members have very low literacy levels. Although the department provides training, the level is often not appropriate and the training is presented in English despite the fact that 99 per cent of the community is Afrikaans speaking. The head office processing of payments to schools is not well administered, and the schools are not always sure what the money has been allocated for. Schools provide the head office with budgets at the beginning of the year, but these are rarely monitored or evaluated.

### **6.2.7 Educational aids**

Most of the schools order their own educational aids in terms of section 21 of the South African Schools Act. The provincial head office allocates money to the schools to buy the educational aids they require. However, it provides educational aids directly to the few schools that do not function in terms of section 21. Schools reported that they generally receive educational aids on time, except where service providers do not have enough books in stock.

All the schools in the survey indicated that the budget for educational aids is insufficient and creates problems in teaching. For example, in certain schools, learners cannot take books home because there are not enough books; they can only share the books in the classrooms with other learners.

### **6.2.8 Code of Conduct**

In line with the departmental code of conduct, the various districts have developed their own codes of conduct for educational personnel. *Batho Pele* principles have been included as part of professional conduct.

### **6.2.9 Participative management**

Active interaction takes place between the provincial and district offices. Regular workshops are held at which a participative management style is evident.

Communication from the provincial head office to the districts is good, but the same cannot always be said about the communication from the districts to the provincial head office.

### **6.2.10 Delegations**

The districts are empowered to take certain actions in respect of the following functions: financial planning, procurement and human resource

management. Salaries and the appointment of educators are, however, handled by the provincial head office. District offices have delegated power for the appointment of part-time educators.

### ***6.2.11 School management***

Schools are given guidelines (manuals and circulars) on school management. However, these guidelines are sometimes inconsistent and their implementation is not monitored. Schools do not have any say in the compilation of the guidelines.

School principals report directly to the district officials and are accountable to the district manager. In practice, however, the national and provincial education departments also communicate directly with schools, bypassing the district offices. School principals also sometimes bypass district offices to save time.

District officials visit schools randomly. The nearer the school is to the district office, the easier it is to obtain support from the district office and the higher the probability of being visited by district office officials. The other problem is the duration of the visits: schools feel that district officials do not have enough time to give proper attention to all their problems.

Direct steps are undertaken to support schools in respect of school management. Workshops are held on the topic, and district managers visit schools to help with school management. Some rural schools believe that there is little interaction on school management and that guidance and assistance should be given before the problem occurs and not afterwards as a remedy, as is currently the case. Learning area managers visit schools, but it was evident from the interviews that no proper planning is done with regard to these visits. District managers visit schools when they can – no annual programme is given to schools at the

beginning of the year to indicate such visits. Discussions with the district offices revealed either a lack of planning on the national level or poor communication with the district level. Often when the district offices are busy with a programme, they are suddenly informed by the national Department of Education about training that is going to take place at the same time. There is also no integrated planning between the various functional units within the provincial department. Once, when one school was visited, seven educators were absent due to training at provincial level. This hampers the effectiveness of the district offices and the services they provide to schools.

#### **6.2.12 Performance of schools**

The measure currently used for evaluating schools is the Grade 12 results. The pass rates of schools are monitored and those with a pass rate of below 50 per cent are targeted for direct interventions and assistance. This type of evaluation does give an indication of the level of performance but is in terms of quality management an *ex post facto* exercise. Quality management and quality assurance should be ongoing, and standards, or conformity to standards, should form an integral part of the whole education system from the lowest grade up to Grade 12. Although workshops are held and assistance is rendered to schools, more dedicated assistance should be given with regard to quality assurance.

The provincial head office as well as the district offices indicated that Grade 12 results should not be the only measurement. Currently, the provincial head office is implementing the Whole School Evaluation System. This system will, however, be implemented at only ten per cent of the schools each year. The results are consequently not providing a continuous assessment of school management. Although the schools reported that they used the DAS system in the past, no system is currently used.

### **6.2.13    *Job descriptions***

At district level, the district managers have job descriptions but lower in the provincial department hierarchy and at schools some form of generic job description is used. On the lower levels, the school governing bodies play a limited role in determining the job content of principals and educators. There is also no evidence that the labour unions take part in any of these actions.

### **6.2.14    *Facilities and logistics***

In terms of section 21 of the South African Schools Act, some schools are responsible for their own maintenance and services. The provincial head office allocates an amount of money per school and the school must then take responsibility for maintenance and services. The schools that do not function in terms of section 21 complained about the difficulty of procuring services from the provincial head office through the district offices.

### **6.2.15    *Gender***

No serious problems are evident. It is, however, clear that in most schools the female educators outnumber the male educators.

### **6.2.16    *Racial issues***

Most of the learners in the Northern Cape are either coloured or white. In some schools with coloured and black learners, tension is experienced at times. The schools stated that when parents complain about the behaviour of learners, the provincial head office is quick to identify the conflict as a racial issue, but when a school logs the same complaint (about racism), little is done about it.

### **6.2.17 Communication**

Communication from the provincial head office to the district offices is good, but communication from the district offices to schools often poses problems.

### **6.2.18 Legislation**

The South African Schools Act governs schools in South Africa. The provincial department provides schools with guidelines on the Act but, according to the schools, the guidelines do not always reflect the content of the Act. Principals therefore use both the Act and the guidelines from the department.

### **6.2.19 General**

It was evident from the visits to the schools that although proper planning and communication are vital for schools, they are largely lacking at this stage. Serious problems are often experienced in the period between visits from district officials to schools. There was a general feeling that no real monitoring or evaluation is taking place.

All the schools mentioned the national “poverty index” used by the provincial head office to determine the funds allocated to schools. Not one of the schools visited understood how the index works, and there was a general feeling that it is to a school’s advantage to be “poor” – because the poorer a school, the more money the department will give it.

## **6.3 KwaZulu-Natal**

### **6.3.1 Background**

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education has its head office in Ulundi. The execution of educational functions and the rendering of educational

services currently take place in regional, district, circuit and ward offices (four levels) throughout the province.

The department renders educational services to approximately 2 820 239 learners from Grades 1–12 and has 74 700 educators, 224 professional non-teaching staff and 5 875 administration and support staff on its post establishment.

### **6.3.2 Interviews**

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education was visited from 8 to 12 March 2004. In the process of gaining information on the functioning of district offices, the following institutions were visited where interviews were conducted with relevant personnel.

KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education: Head office

Region: Ethekewini

Districts:

- Ilembe
- Umlazi
- Vulindlela
- Obonjeni

Schools:

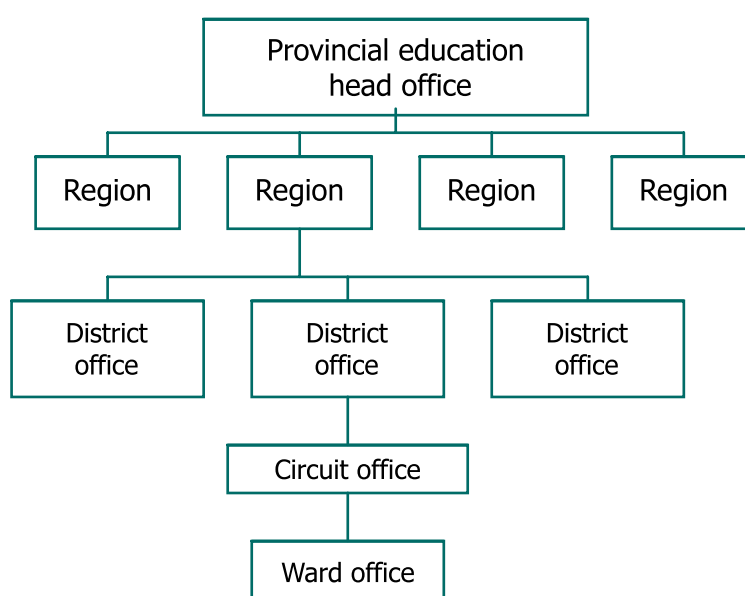
- Umlazi Commercial High School
- Zwelethu High School
- Ixopo Primary School
- Ash Burton Primary School
- Inkuthazelo Primary School
- Ezibukweni High School
- Msiyana High School
- George Campbell Technical High School



### **6.3.3 Reporting**

The organisational structure of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education makes provision for a provincial head office in Ulundi and four regions: Ethekewini, Ukhahlamba, Umgungundlovu and Zululand. The various regions cascade down to three districts in each region. Attached to the various district offices are circuit offices with a number of wards linked to each.

Graphically, the structure can be depicted as follows:



The department envisages that the regions, which are primarily responsible for education management services, education support services and education corporate services, will be phased out, with the subsequent devolution of functions and responsibilities to district offices. This process has in fact already started.

District managers, on the level of director, are accountable and report to the chief directors responsible for regions. Districts report monthly to the regions. Job descriptions have been compiled setting out the responsibilities of district managers; a performance management system

for these managers is being developed. The various labour unions were not consulted during the compilation of the job descriptions.

#### ***6.3.4 Annual planning***

The department has compiled a Master Strategic Plan for the period 2003-2006 that outlines its measurable objectives, activities, performance criteria and performance targets. On the basis of this plan, each region draws up its own annual plans while the various districts also develop operational plans spelling out what actions need to be taken on a daily basis. Progress and reporting takes place in terms of key outputs, which are then used to monitor progress and give feedback. Although progress is monitored, a well-defined monitoring and evaluation system is not yet in place.

#### ***6.3.5 EMIS***

The EMIS is a very useful tool in educational planning. Unfortunately, the system is administered only to a limited extent in the regions. Only the provincial head office is involved in the actual data-capturing process. Consequently, districts are merely data source providers and do not have access to EMIS in their planning and in the execution of educational functions.

#### ***6.3.6 Finance***

The district offices do not have executive powers or responsibilities in respect of financial management. All financial processing takes place at the regional offices. The value-adding role of districts in this regard is thus limited to mail carrying – receiving transactional documents and forwarding them to the regional office. During our interviews, it emerged that this is one of the major factors preventing districts from fulfilling their role as primary service providers to schools.

### **6.3.7 Educational aids**

District offices play a limited role in the provision of educational aids such as books or learner materials. This service is performed by the regional offices, which reduces the district office (as in case of finance) to just another role player providing required information. During the visits to schools in March 2004, it was established that, despite the fact that they were three months into the academic year, certain materials had not yet been received. In some cases, books were delivered two years after they had been ordered – and frequently the wrong books were delivered. The fact that districts do not play a direct role in book ordering makes them totally dependent on the regions for the supply of books to schools.

### **6.3.8 Code of Conduct**

In line with the departmental code of conduct, the various regions have developed their own codes of conduct to guide educational personnel. The codes have been extended to include *Batho Pele* principles as part of professional conduct. Although some schools have developed their own codes of conduct, this has not been the case with other schools, especially rural schools.

### **6.3.9 Participative management**

The regions and the district offices interact well. Workshops are held regularly where a participative management style is evident. The longer chain of command from the school through the various levels to the region and even provincial head office inhibits a total bottom-up approach. The interviewed schools felt that their inputs stop at the ward manager level and that there is no carry-through effect to higher levels.

### **6.3.10 Delegations**

The districts are empowered to take actions pertaining to functional education. Because the financial, procurement and human resource management functions are centralized in the regional offices and the

provincial head office, the districts have no executive powers concerning the carrying out of these functions.

### **6.3.11 School management**

Direct support is given to schools in school management. Workshops are held and ward managers visit schools regularly. Some of the rural schools interviewed said there is little interaction on school management and that guidance and assistance are given too late. Certain urban schools complained about the level of intervention and assistance by the department – they stated that in some instances the schools guide and inform the ward managers and not the other way round.

### **6.3.12 Performance of schools**

The current measure for the evaluation of schools is the Grade 12 results. The pass rates of schools are monitored and those with a pass rate of below 50 per cent are targeted for direct intervention and/or assistance. This type of evaluation does give an indication of the level of performance but is in terms of quality management an *ex post facto* exercise. Quality management and quality assurance should be a continuous effort, and standards, or conformity to standards, should be an integral part of the whole education system from the lowest grade up to Grade 12. Although workshops are held and assistance is rendered to schools, more dedicated assistance should be provided on quality assurance.

### **6.3.13 Job descriptions**

At regional level, job descriptions have been compiled for most of the personnel. At district level, the district managers have job descriptions but lower in the departmental hierarchy and at schools some form of generic job description is used. On the lower levels in schools, the SGBs play a limited role in determining the job content of principals and educators. There was also no evidence that the labour unions make inputs in this regard.

#### ***6.3.14 Facilities and logistics***

The development, maintenance and repair of educational infrastructure are cumbersome processes. If a school identifies a need in terms of infrastructure, it is forwarded to the ward manager, then to the circuit manager and then to the district office. Once received at the district office, it is forwarded to the region and then to the provincial head office where officials responsible for infrastructure deal with it. After they are satisfied that the need warrants attention, it is forwarded to the Department of Works in the province, which is responsible for the development, maintenance and repair of school buildings. In this whole process, the only value added is by the provincial head office and the Department of Works, which both deal with identified needs directly. All the other levels merely fulfil the role of messenger or postman without adding value to the process.

#### ***6.3.15 Gender***

Gender issues are not a major concern for most of the schools that participated in the research. The principals had some general understanding of the meaning of gender equality. Issues of gender violence and discrimination at the workplace were not mentioned.

#### ***6.3.16 Racial issues***

Schools in the former homeland areas do not experience racial problems or problems related to ethnicity. In the former Model C school that was visited, racial integration is proceeding smoothly. No racial problems have been reported in the school.

#### ***6.3.17 Legislation***

The following legislation and policies govern the functioning of schools, including principals, educators, learners and school governing bodies:

- South African Schools Act, 1996
- Employment Equity Act, 1998

- Labour Relations Act, 1995
- National Education Policy Act, 1967
- Public Service Regulations
- Policies covering different educational areas

There is no policy to regulate the functioning of districts. This shortcoming is currently being discussed by the education departments.

Compliance with education legislation is monitored by means of school visits, workshops and meetings with school management, SGBs and representative councils of learners (RCLs). Training on the applicable legislation and policies is provided to schools.

## **7. Recommendations**

### ***7.1 Delegations***

Districts play a pivotal role in the effective functioning of schools. Through adequate resourcing of districts, decentralisation of provincial powers authority to districts and ongoing capacity building of district staff, a dramatic improvement of service delivery could be achieved, resulting in improved performance of schools.

A rapid programme of decentralisation of powers and authority to districts should be developed and implemented within five years. This programme should be accompanied by extensive capacity-building interventions, especially in the area of human resource and financial management, procurement and general administration.

All human resource functions should be decentralized to districts. This should include appointments, redeployment of staff and grievance and disciplinary matters.

The provincial head offices should provide policy support to districts and coordinate capacity-building programmes. Districts should be empowered to render all support functions to schools from the procurement of school facilities and learning materials to the appointment of staff. The curriculum advisory services should be placed at circuit level.

## ***7.2 Reporting***

Bureaucratic delays will be avoided once the decentralisation of powers and functions has been completed. Proper communication channels between provincial and district staff should be established by routing communication through the office of the district manager.

## ***7.3 Resourcing of districts***

Shortages of staff, vehicles, and communication and IT facilities are hampering the effective and efficient functioning of districts. These shortages must be addressed urgently as the items mentioned are basic to running a service organization such as a department of education.

## ***7.4 Capacity building***

Schools are undergoing rapid changes in line with the transformation policies of Government. School and district staff needs to acquire new skills to function effectively. District managers and officials directly overseeing and supporting schools should achieve a certain level of management competence so that they can effectively support schools on management and other issues of crucial importance to schools.

School governing bodies and learner groups have to be trained on their roles and responsibilities. The literacy level of members of school

governing bodies should be improved so that they can participate more effectively in school affairs.

### ***7.5 Planning***

The support programmes and activities of the district office should be reflected in the schools' annual programmes. These programmes and activities should be based on school needs. The priority needs of each school should be taken into account when compiling the strategic and operational plans of the district concerned. A yearly assessment of needs should assist districts in their planning.

### ***7.6 Monitoring and evaluation***

Not all district and school staff have been trained in the use of the monitoring and evaluation instruments (e.g. Whole School Evaluation and IQMS) developed for schools. It will take some time before they are able to implement these systems. In the interim, the district in consultation with the schools should develop a uniform monitoring and evaluation system that can be used in assessing the performance of schools based on clear performance indicators. This system should be simple and easy to implement and should be modified according to a particular school's circumstances. These indicators should be monitored at all schools. Circuit managers (and or district managers themselves) should play a key role in monitoring the indicators.

### ***7.7 EMIS***

The EMIS should be managed at district, circuit and school levels. Circuit managers and school principals should be extensively trained in the use of the EMIS and should be able to enter data, analyse them, report on them



and discuss their analysis at SMT, circuit and district management meetings.

### **7.8      *School management***

Circuit managers should visit all schools in their circuit at least once a month. A checklist to assist them in providing effective supervision should be implemented, and all circuit managers should be trained in effective support and supervision and the use of this checklist as a management tool.

A performance management system with performance management agreements should be implemented between the district manager and circuit coordinators, circuit managers and school principals.

The circuit managers should ensure that subject advisors visit schools and provide the necessary support (e.g. in terms of subject advice).

### **7.9      *Future focus***

During the two workshops that were held with representatives from the different provincial education departments, it became evident that a similar study should be undertaken to enhance the role of circuit offices. This is mainly because most provincial departments work in isolation and do not interact with each other on the role of circuits. Such a study could focus on the role of circuits and identify best practices for all interested parties.

Follow-up training or capacity building on the implementation of the guideline should be handled by either the national or the provincial departments of education.

## **8. Draft Good Practice Guideline for School District Management**

Following the fieldwork undertaken, the workshops held and the discussions contained in this report, the draft *Guideline on School District Management* was drawn up. In line with the proposals made at the said workshops, this document should be used as a normative guideline. A comprehensive manual with procedure manuals, frameworks and protocols should be developed using the guideline as a framework. Capacity building in terms of the guideline and manual should be tackled by the provincial education departments in consultation with the national Department of Education.

Provincial education departments should devise implementation and communication strategies to create awareness and ensure the implementation of the concepts and practices contained in the guideline.