PRINT: ISSN 0971-8923 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6756
JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Interdisciplinary Reflection of Contemporary Society

J Soc Sci, 30(2): 137-145 (2012)
PRINT: ISSN 0971-8923 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6756
DOI: 10.31901/24566756.2012/30.02.04

School-based Management and School Expenditure: A Case Study in Selected Primary Schools in the Gauteng Province of South Africa

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KEYWORDS School-based Management. Financial Reports. School Funding. School Expenditure. Self-managing Schools

ABSTRACT School-based management has become a reality in South African schools, and South African education legislation and education policy documents all bear this out. This policy framework for decentralised decision-making is also embedded in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. School-based management is, therefore, not a fad or a cosmetic change, but an enduring phenomenon in South African schools. In spite of its widespread implementation, little attention has been paid to assessing the impact of school-based management on a school's spending or expenditure. This article, based on a case study of selected South African primary schools, offers a dynamic perspective on the effect of school-based management on school expenditure. An analysis of financial reports coming from 10 self-managing South African primary schools over a four year period reveals that some schools have increased their spending on certain issues, but during the same period, schools' expenses on other, more important items, were slightly reduced. Based on the findings, the study concludes that a so-called needs-based funding formula is essential to ensure that financial autonomy granted to schools via school-based management will enhance their educational potential, rather than broaden the gaps between schools operating in different settings and serving learners from different socio-economic backgrounds, so prominent in South African society.