

Barriers to the Implementation of Whole School Evaluation at Selected Primary Schools in the Southern Free State

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ABSTRACT This study explores the implementation of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) at selected primary schools in two Education Districts in the Free State Province. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. Simple random sampling of schools evaluated was done so as to give each school an equal chance of being selected. Data were gathered from 125 educators and twenty three WSE supervisors using questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted with the Chief Education Specialist: Whole School Evaluation, the parent complement of School Governing Bodies of sampled schools and the Director: Quality Assurance Directorate, Department of Education, Free State Province. Data from interviews were analysed by developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. The study found that the Provincial WSE unit is faced with the problem of shortage of resources and that the manner in which training on the WSE process is offered to stakeholders is inadequate. The stakeholders are not trained and are not aware of the role they should play in the process. Detailed conclusions and recommendations drawn from this study are included in the article.

INTRODUCTION

Studies show that although evaluation policies regarding teacher development and whole-school improvement have been put into place and even though schools express willingness to participate in such evaluation actions, they remain deeply suspicious of, and even subvert the original goals of these policies (Quambaffour 2000; Van Petegem 1998; MacBeath 2004; Fearnside 2000). This study explores the implementation of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) at selected primary schools in two Education Districts in southern Free State Province. WSE is the official evaluation system in South Africa (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). Schools undergo both external and internal evaluation.

Background

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) is a process of external evaluation of the work of a school carried out by the WSE teams of the Department of Education (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). 'WSE is the cornerstone of quality assurance systems in schools. It enables the school and external supervisors to provide an account of the school's current performance and show to what extent it meets national goals and needs of the public and communities' (Govern-

ment Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). The process is designed to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided by the state within schools. Schools should strive to improve on the quality of education they offer and should therefore be constantly evaluated or assessed. Different countries use a variety of methods of evaluation as a means of ensuring quality education for learners or a means of ensuring that schools are effective and efficient (Jose 2003; Nevo 2004). Within the international context, external inspection programmes are used to evaluate schools. In the United Kingdom (UK) England and Wales use a model of evaluation carried out under the auspices of the Office for the Standards in Education in England (OFSTED) and the Educational Review is used in New Zealand (Fearnside 2000). In Ireland a framework based on WSE derived from school development and quality assurance point of view was undertaken. The system has the disadvantage of 'being a disturbing distraction in the life of the schools' (Lennon 1998).

During the apartheid era, there were laws such as Bantu Education Act of 1953 which brought inequity into the South African education system based on race and ethnicity (Squelch 2000). Apartheid also left a legacy of differential allocation of resources to different racial groups. Inspectors visited schools without necessary

developmental support and mentoring. Support for teaching and learning was limited to short in-service courses offered by the state education departments which focused only on content and methodology (National Conference on Whole School Evaluation 2000; Squelch 2000).

Following the general elections of 1994 a new system of education and training was created in South Africa based on the fundamental principles of democracy, unity, non-discrimination, equity and equality (Squelch 2000). With the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa embarked on restructuring, reform and re-organisation in the education (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996, section 16). New policies were laid down and legislation passed such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 and the National Education Policy Act of 1996 which aimed at democratizing governance in schools and improving appalling conditions in previously disadvantaged schools to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities for education (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). This means, among others, that government is committed to the development of a democratic system that provides for participation of all stakeholders with a vested interest in education (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996 section 16).

Since 1994, the National Department of Education has expressed concern about lack of proper evaluation strategies in South Africa (Steyn 2003). For example, in September 2000, Prof K. Asmal, the former Minister of Education in South Africa launched *Tirisano*, a Quality education for all: statement of public service commitment. *Tirisano* means 'working together'. *Tirisano* spells out the priorities of the National Department of Education as including school effectiveness and teacher professionalism. In order for this priority to be realised, Whole School Evaluation was adopted as an intervention to improve performance and ensure quality education in South African schools (Tirisano 2000).

Whole School Evaluation is not an end in itself. It is the first step in the process of school improvement and quality enhancement. WSE is an interactive process which requires transparency and partnership amongst all stakeholders within the school (Headington 2001; Naicker and Waddy 2002). In order to understand the purpose and expected impact of Whole School Evaluation (WSE), one needs to look back at the

origins and problems of education in South Africa and the problems that have beset this important instrument of good citizenship and development.

WSE involves holistic evaluation of performance of schools against set criteria with a view to improve quality of education. In order for WSE to be effective, it should be well communicated to all stakeholders within a school and take into account the different circumstances within South African schools. As cited by De Grauwe (2001) 'Improving the quality of schools and the achievement of students remains a priority throughout the world, not at least in the developing countries. To monitor quality, national authorities rely strongly on the school supervision system.' WSE serves a purpose of moderating externally the results of School Self Evaluation (SSE) as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of a school using agreed upon or set criteria (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). It enables supervisors to provide an account of the schools current performance and show the extent to which the school meets national goals, while able to meet the needs of the community in general (Du Plooy and Westrand 2004). WSE increases the level of accountability in education and involves all stakeholders as well as support by District Support Services (DSS) (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001; Du Plooy and Westrand 2004).

Feedback is given to all stakeholders as a means of achieving continuous school improvement. Who are the customers of the school or stakeholders in the process of WSE? They are the learners to whom education is provided, the parents of these learners, the department of education whose responsibility is to recruit suitably qualified and skilled staff and the community at large. Stakeholders have the right to know how well their school is doing and what role are they expected to play to bring about improvement and development in their school (Du Plooy and Westrand 2004; Headington 2001). WSE was introduced in South African schools to bring about an effective monitoring and evaluation process which is vital to the improvement of quality and standard of performance in schools (Steyn 2003). It is therefore through WSE that aspects of excellence of effective schools or models of good practice within the system are identified and shared in order to understand what contributes towards effective schools.

In conducting WSE, the supervisors are governed by the Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting which sets out general principles and guidelines under which members of the WSE teams should engage in the process of evaluation and reporting (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). A similar practice is applicable in countries such as Malaysia. The general principles of the Professional Code are that supervisors will be consistent, fair and courteous and will work with members of the school community in a climate of mutual respect (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). Supervisors in the Free State Province adhere to this Code of Practice. They are also committed to basing their judgments on first-hand evidence and to applying evaluation criteria objectively and reliably.

The Importance of WSE in Schools

There are notable similarities in school evaluation processes within various countries. Within the international context, external inspection programmes are used to evaluate schools. In the United Kingdom (UK) England and Wales use a model of evaluation carried out under the auspices of the Office for the Standards in Education in England (OFSTED) and the Educational Review is used in New Zealand (Fearnside 2003). In Ireland a framework based on WSE derived from school development and quality assurance point of view was undertaken. The system has the disadvantage of 'being a disturbing distraction in the life of the schools' (Lennon 1998). School evaluation systems have a rather long

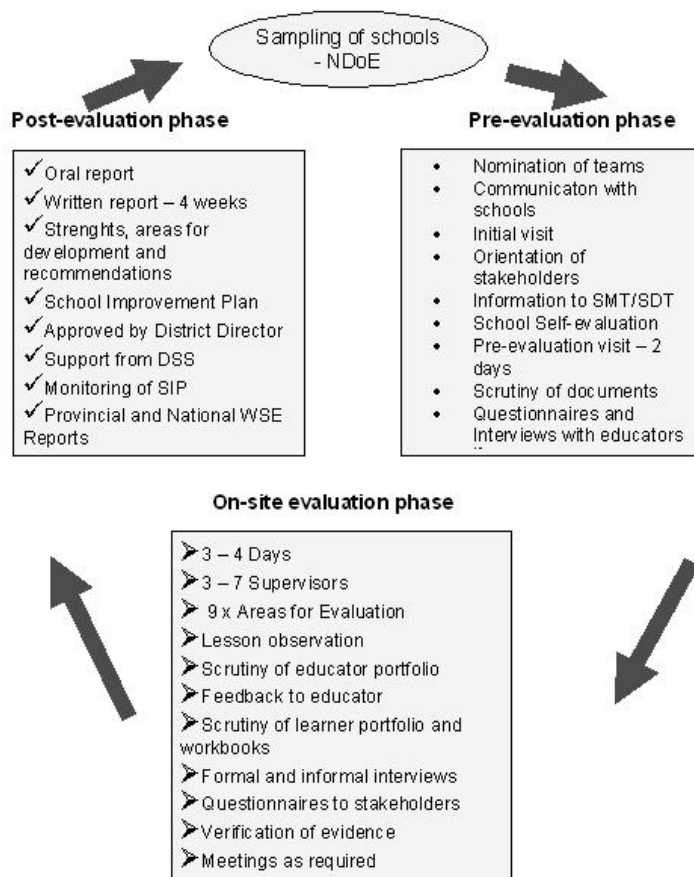


Fig. 1. The evaluation process

history in many countries and rest on the belief that the enlightened eye and connoisseurship is the sole province of wise and prescient outsiders. It is evident that evaluation has a critical part to play in assisting with all aspects of quality in schools. School inspectors or WSE supervisors are therefore responsible for identifying in schools good practice and encourage teachers to develop further the desirable practice. This will foster and promote collaborative work within schools as a unit as well as development (Naicker and Waddy 2002). It should also be noted that schools can empower themselves to do school-based self-evaluation in order to benefit maximally from WSE.

The Whole School Evaluation Process

The traditional method of quality control in South African schools has been external evaluation by inspectors whose emphasis tended to be more on control rather than quality assurance (Squelch 2000). The WSE process is divided into three phases namely, pre-evaluation (a school's self measure and evaluation of its progress), on-site evaluation (which involves evaluation by WSE teams) and post evaluation (a report presented orally and in writing to the principal of the school which will in turn guide the stakeholders in the development of the School Improvement Plan). The WSE process is outlined in Figure 1.

Aims of the Study

The study was intended to:

- ♦ Unearth problems which lead to some schools exhibiting no noticeable change even after the WSE
- ♦ Ascertain the interpretation and understanding of WSE by schools,
- ♦ Examine and evaluate the impact of WSE intervention and the extent to which desired outcomes for quality learning and teaching are being achieved in the sampled schools
- ♦ Find out whether stakeholders are informed about WSE and do they know their role in the process as well as the extent of their involvement in the development and implementation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)
- ♦ Identifying problems, if any, that WSE cause for stakeholders and educators initiative

specifically relating to teaching and learning in the classroom and recommend solutions for such inadequacies.

- ♦ Find out if there has been any follow up or monitoring by the WSE teams after external evaluation

METHOD

Design

The qualitative approach was applied to discover how schools interpret the WSE process as well as reports thereof, particularly the parent representation of the school, the SGB on issues of governance to be able to formulate School Improvement Plans (SIP's) since parents in some schools are illiterate.

Population

Population in terms of this study was made up of stakeholders in WSE from forty two primary schools evaluated during the period 2003 to 2007 in Motheo and Xhariep Education Districts of the Free State Province, WSE supervisors, Director: Quality Assurance and Chief Education Specialist: Whole School Evaluation in the Free State Province.

Sample

The sample used was representative of the stakeholders in the WSE process at school level. A list of schools evaluated in Motheo and Xhariep Education Districts was sought from the Quality Assurance Directorate of the Department of Education, Free State. Primary schools in Motheo and Xhariep Education Districts were identified from the list. Numbers were assigned to these schools in both districts respectively. Eight schools per district were randomly selected. Random selection was also done to identify at least two parents from the SGB representatives of six of the sixteen selected evaluated primary school used in this study (12 parents were interviewed).

Instruments

Questionnaires were constructed and distributed randomly to a sample of evaluated primary schools in the Southern Free State. The sample was comprised of sixteen primary schools (public and farm) evaluated by the provincial WSE

teams (questionnaires were distributed to six schools), all WSE supervisors in the Provincial Quality Assurance Directorate. The researchers personally took questionnaires to respondents concerned and arranged to collect completed questionnaires.

Data Collection

Data was collected by means of questionnaires, telephone and semi-structured interviews from primary schools evaluated by WSE teams in the Southern Free State, that is, both Motheo and Xhariep Education Districts, all WSE supervisors in the Provincial Quality Assurance Directorate, the Chief Education Specialist: Whole School Evaluation and the Director: Quality Assurance.

Data Analysis

Analysis as cited by De Vos et al. (2007) refers to 'the categorizing, ordering manipulating and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions'. This process involves gathering questionnaire and interview responses for the purpose of identifying emerging topics and recurring patterns (Leedy and Ormrod 2010). Transcripts of interview recordings, notes from questionnaires were carefully scrutinised and analysed by identifying, coding and categorizing. A comparison of data in terms of similarities and differences was made to simplify the data analysis procedure. Frequency tables and graphs were generated.

After the questionnaires were administered, data was examined to check the raw data for errors and accuracy. The statistical analysis for this study was based on responses from 18 (78%) subjects from the WSE supervisory unit as well as 86 (81.9%) subjects from the six primary schools sampled. Twelve parent representatives on the School Governing Bodies from six of the sampled schools (two from each school), ten educators from ten other sampled schools where questionnaires were not administered, the provincial Director responsible for Quality Assurance and the Chief Education Specialist: Whole School Evaluation were interviewed.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the Department of Education, Free State Province to carry out

research in Motheo and Xhariep Education Districts as well as the Quality Assurance Directorate. The purpose of the study was clearly stated on the letter to respondents. In this study, the researcher was conscious of the fact that conducting educational research requires honesty and integrity as well as protection of human rights, hence, for ethical reasons, all informants involved in this study remain anonymous and this was clearly stated on the instructions to respondents on the questionnaires completed and the respondents interviewed were also assured confidentiality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Themes were used in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis and the following shortcomings were identified in this study:

Lack of Clarity Regarding the WSE Process

The responses given by parents of schools used in this study revealed that there is lack clear understanding of what WSE is all about. To quote some parents verbatim, when asked about their knowledge regarding WSE process, some responded as follows:

Parent A: 'Re fumane mangolo ho tswa sekolong le ha feela ho ne ho sa hlaka hantle hore baeti bana ba tluile ka dife'. Meaning, we received letters from school although the information as to why the WSE team is visiting our school was not very clear to us.

Parent B: 'I got a letter from the school informing me that there will be people visiting our school from Head Office of the Department of Education but I don't know why they were coming'

Parent C: 'Yes, the principal informed us that our school is going to have visitors from the Department of Education, Head office and requested us to come help clean the school and to cook for the visitors'

A similar situation was also evident with some educators used in the study. One educator indicated that: 'as educators we were not adequately prepared for evaluation as a result were nervous about being evaluated by team members from department of education'.

It should be noted that lack of knowledge may prohibit participants to function successfully. Stakeholders in WSE should work towards

a common goal. According to Arcaro (1995). 'The vision provides people with the direction to follow. Once the direction is known, the next step is to remove obstacles and barriers that prevent people from achieving excellence in their performance.' In essence, when stakeholders are not trained and are not aware of the role they should play in the process then recommendations stated by the WSE teams on reports they send to schools evaluated will always remain words in the wind which will frustrate schools and WSE supervisors. If all stakeholders could thoroughly understand the aim of WSE and the roles that they as stakeholders have to play in the process we would see progress and improvement in the quality of education in our schools. More advocacies on Whole School Evaluation, particularly to clarify roles that stakeholders within a school should play are still necessary.

Stakeholder Involvement in School Self Evaluation (SSE)

When asked about involvement in School Self Evaluation, it was evident that parents and educators were not fully engaged in the process. It became apparent that there is a tendency of doing School Self Evaluation single-handedly amongst principals and School Management Teams since timing of principal training and the actual evaluation at their schools is usually not sufficient to allow principals to take stakeholders accordingly through the whole process, also taking into consideration other programmes going on at the school. Self-evaluation that is made as a result is a kind of reflective measure, but the data and observations so derived are not strategically used to provide feedback to informing pedagogical consideration or improving on learning and teaching as most of the stakeholders are not involved as such.

Some educators pointed out that the principal had not guided them to work on the revealed problems together. Moreover, they indicated that they were not widely involved in the follow-up discussions. It can be seen that the lack of follow-up discussions further limited the chance of educators in sharing their views on solving problems revealed from the SSE data.

It is recommended that, perhaps the principal and School Management Team member should attend training conducted by WSE Unit so as to be in a position to remind one another

and give support at their various schools. Some principals leave training being not very clear themselves and are expected to cascade training to other stakeholders in WSE at their schools. This creates a problem as it is not easy for a manager to own up to his or her subordinates and say he or she did not understand what was entailed in the training/ course he or she attended. Hence they mostly resort to doing the SSE single-handedly. The schools could also consider, through collaborative effort of the key players, formulating appropriate measures to further substantiate and refine self evaluation amidst their undertakings as a tool helping schools to make informed decision in support of school's development, to exercise quality assurance and to develop accountability.

Feedback has to be given to all stakeholders as a means of achieving continuous school improvement. Stakeholders have the right to know how well their school is doing and what role are they expected to play to bring about improvement and development in their school. WSE is introduced to bring about an effective monitoring and evaluation process which is vital to the improvement of quality and standard of performance in schools (Steyn, 2003: 6).

At the launch of a campaign called Quality Learning and Teaching, the Minister of Education in South Africa then, Naledi Pandor emphasised the importance of stakeholder involvement in ensuring quality education by stating that 'Education changes lives and communities, but communities must also get involved. Let us all get involved' (City Press 11 January 2009). She further said 'we have to move away from the belief that education is the sole responsibility of the government and the office of the education minister. We have to awaken South Africans to promote quality learning and teaching' (City Press 11 January 2009).

Not All WSE Supervisors are Trained and Accredited

From the quantitative results 12 (66, 7%) of the WSE supervisors who participated in the study indicated that they did not receive formal training and accreditation as Whole School Evaluation supervisors and only 6 (33.3%) indicated that they received formal training and are accredited as Whole School Evaluation supervisors. It is evident that most of WSE supervi-

sors in the Free State Province have not as yet received formal training and accreditation as per requirement of the WSE policy. The National Policy on WSE (2001) clearly states that supervisors have to be trained and accredited.

As for the training of WSE supervisors, there is a dire need for the other WSE supervisors who were not trained and accredited to be taken aboard. All WSE supervisors also need to be well informed regarding the details in training of principals so that they are in a position to give appropriate support where necessary as they monitor evaluated schools after WSE.

Lack of Co-ordination between the WSE Unit, District Offices, Examination and Curriculum Development Sections of the Department of Education and Teacher Training Institutions

As cited by De Grauwe (2001: 13) 'Improving the quality of schools and the achievement of students remains a priority throughout the world, not at least in the developing countries. To monitor quality, national authorities rely

strongly on the school supervision system'. It is therefore proposed that a Monitoring and Evaluation unit be established under the Quality Assurance Directorate of the Department of Education to monitor, evaluate, research, oversee and support the activities of Whole School Evaluation and Systemic Evaluation respectively. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit team should be made up of a representation of membership with expertise in at least one the following respectively as illustrated on Figure 2 in the next page.

- ♦ Research
- ♦ School governance and management
- ♦ Curriculum
- ♦ Physical planning
- ♦ Examinations
- ♦ School safety and security
- ♦ Finance and provisioning
- ♦ Sports

The team of this unit has to be trained in Whole School Evaluation, the same way it is done with the WSE supervisors so as to be able to support and in particular assist schools with

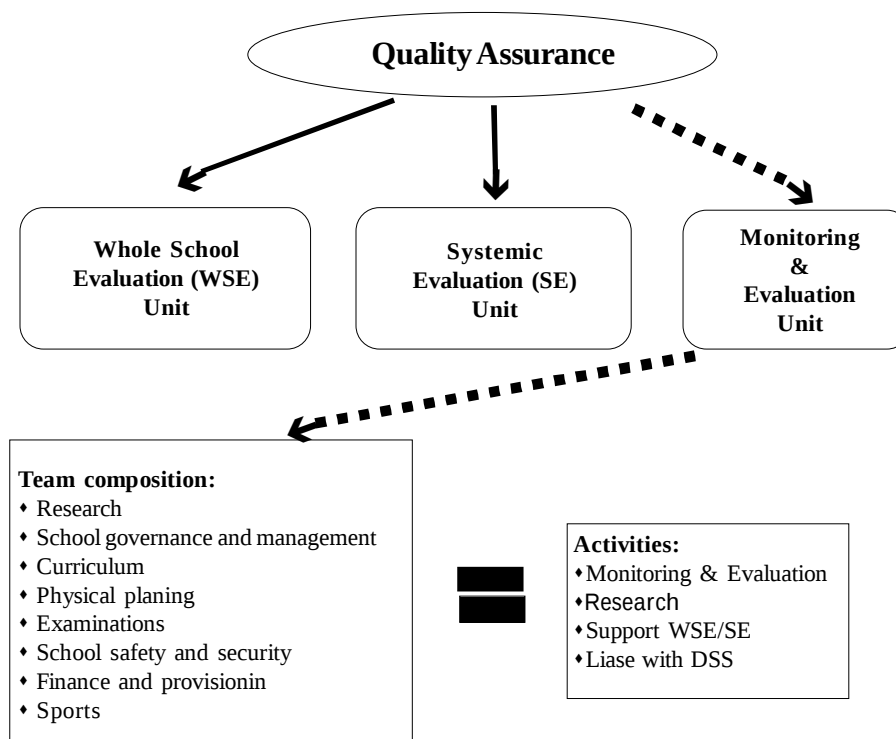


Fig. 2. Proposed structure for the quality assurance directorate

Post-Evaluation activities in collaboration with the WSE unit and various structures of the DSS where necessary. As cited by Nevo (2002: 4), 'even before the term accountability was used, there was a clear demand by politicians, administrators, parents and public at large that schools be evaluated externally to find out if they were fulfilling their duties. There was also a hope that such external evaluation would motivate teachers and school principals to work harder to improve their schools'. External evaluation relies on outside 'experts' reporting on the school such as school inspectors. Nevo (1995: 165) concurs in that schools in many countries are routinely reviewed by national and regional inspectors and supervisors. External evaluation occurs when those who are not participants of the institution conduct assessment (Naidoo 2003: 12). The assumption is that people who have no relationship with the school will be objective in their evaluation.

Stakeholders Not Kept Informed About the Happenings and Developments within the WSE Unit

To cite verbatim the some of the responses by parents and educators when asked about WSE:

- Parent D: *'No, I don't know anything about Whole School Evaluation'*
- Parent E: *'I am not very certain, but I can say I have little understanding about the whole process, I think it is some sort of inspection'*
- Parent F: *'I read about it on the newspapers'*
- Educator 2: *'Mam I cannot confidently say that I knew exactly what the visit was all about. But I knew that our school was going to be evaluated'*
- Educator 3: *'To be honest, I still am not very clear about this WSE. How I wish we could be trained'*
- Educator 4: *'Hey lady, I have even forgotten about that WSE. I am not so sure that I can explain well to you what the process is about. What I remember is that those people came to check our work'*

From the responses above, it is very evident that these parents and educators were not aware of what WSE is all about.

As a means of improving communication and updating stakeholders with the developments

within the WSE unit, manuals, newsletters etc on WSE activities could be sent to schools and other stakeholders in addition to an annual report. At school level, strategies that will enable two way communication between parents and the school need to be devised.

The training of principals in preparation of evaluation and report writing by WSE teams thus enabling schools to make sense out of the whole process involved as well as suggested recommendations for school development and improvement needs to be revisited. This will contribute meaningfully towards training of principals for WSE and improvement of quality of reports emanating from WSE teams, which will in turn enable schools to meet national goals of achieving quality in education

CONCLUSION

Sorting out the obstacles in the implementation of the Whole School Evaluation process may lead to drastic and positive improvement in schools and this would ultimately have a positive effect on the quality of education offered at our schools and also quality life and prosperity within the communities in South Africa. If all stakeholders could thoroughly understand the aim of Whole School Evaluation and the roles that they as stakeholders have to play in the process, there would be progress and improvement in the quality of education in schools not only in the Free State Province but South Africa as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of findings of this study it is recommended that:

- More staff be employed in the supervisory unit (as well as to avoid a situation where supervisors might be tempted to speculate the happenings at schools due to constraints of time and pressure to evaluate a large number of schools within a certain timeframe). The Systemic Evaluation section should also have its own staff to carry out their activities instead of using the WSE supervisors. This will enable WSE supervisors to be more focused on their work which is to evaluate schools, also, to avert the problem of lack of close supportive contact between schools and the supervi-

sory unit through school visits seminars etc. one post evaluation visit to complete a survey form is not enough. Perhaps an increase in the number of WSE supervisors within the province would make this feasible as the present supervisors are overloaded with work.

- ♦ Instead of letting supervisors write reports of schools they have evaluated whilst engaging in pre-evaluation activities for the next school to be evaluated, they should be given at least a week in between evaluations to devote to administrative work, report writing and school monitoring and support. This could curb situations where reports may be hurriedly compiled or in some cases be delayed and end up reaching schools long after the period as stipulated on the WSE policy.
- ♦ A budget should be set up by the Department of Education to do a full scale review of the implementation of WSE. The system has been in place in this province since 2002. This will enable the Department of Education to improve on the areas for development as they may be stated on the research report.
- ♦ The Department of Education should allocate sufficient budget to this directorate towards professional and career development of the WSE supervisors as this directorate impacts directly on improving the functioning of schools.
- ♦ The manner in which training on the WSE process is offered to stakeholders be revisited. Training plays a significant role for all role players (WSE supervisors inclusive) in the in Whole School Evaluation process. The directorate should ensure that newly appointed supervisors are trained and accredited accordingly as per the requirement of the National Policy of WSE (DoE 2001). Training offered by the WSE unit on WSE process should not only be confined to principals but to other stakeholders at the school who need to be taken aboard the process so as to awaken their awareness and understanding their role in the process.

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