



School Development and Support Programme

Evaluation Report 2019–2023

*Making a difference in
schools and classrooms*



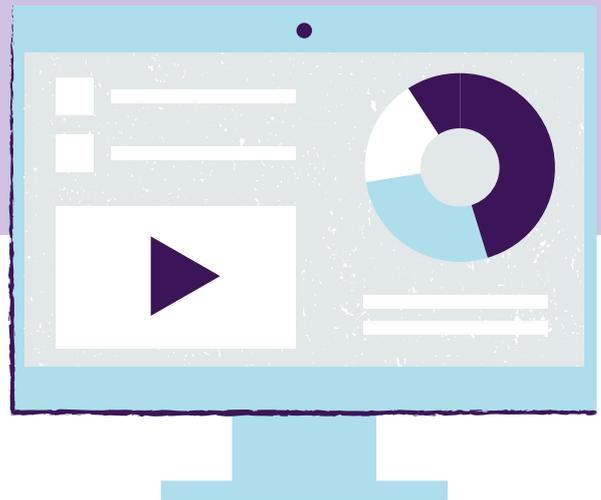
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Executive Summary



Introduction

The Marang Education Trust (MET), a SACE accredited research-based professional development organization, initiated a comprehensive school development programme from 2019 to 2023 across six provinces in South Africa. The initiative aimed to improve teaching and learning outcomes in under-resourced and disadvantaged schools focusing on leadership and management, curriculum implementation, relationships, and improving learner performance in reading and mathematics.

Methodology

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection through interviews, focus groups, document analysis, classroom observations and learner assessments. Quantitative assessments focused on Mathematics and Reading to Learn, administered to 1080 learners across 48 schools in grades 3, 6 and 9. The qualitative component involved content analysis within a grounded theory framework to identify patterns and themes.

Key Findings

1. Support Provided

Support was primarily directed at principals, School Management Teams (SMTs), and teachers. The programme emphasised leadership development, aiming to create a supportive and empowering environment for teachers and drive continuous improvement.

Regular school visits involving individual and group interventions with educators were conducted every 6–8 weeks to ensure consistency in learning and support provision. The programme also adapted to challenges posed by COVID-19 and extended support by an additional year.

2. Attitudes and Relationships

Support interventions that focused on improving communication, relationships, and emotional well-being among staff and learners fostered a more positive school climate. Increased parental involvement strengthened the school-community bond, highlighting the importance of holistic support beyond academic realms.

3. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Significant improvements in teaching strategies, accommodating learner diversity, and assessment practices reflect a concerted effort towards enhancing the quality of education. Embracing learner-centred methods, reading-centred approaches, and differentiated instruction created more engaging classrooms and improved content coverage.

4. Leadership and Management

Implementation of leadership roles, curriculum management, and classroom support practices demonstrate strides towards effective school management. Implementation of policies, regular monitoring, and supportive feedback have fostered accountability and professional development among staff, contributing to organisational effectiveness.

5. Learner Performance

Notable improvements were observed across all grades, with an increase of nearly 10% in the average mark obtained by learners in Mathematics and Reading to Learn. Grade 3 learners showed the highest improvement, followed by Grades 6 and 9. However, performance tended to decline as students progressed to higher grades.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The MET programme has significantly contributed to improving school effectiveness, teaching quality, and learner performance despite various challenges. The partnership with schools and districts has fostered a culture of continuous improvement and resilience. Moving forward, sustained collaboration and a whole school approach to development in the education sector that relies on all stakeholders is crucial to maintaining and building upon these gains.

Future research and development initiatives should explore the long-term impact of school support interventions and focus on enhancing the support for Grades 8 and 9 and addressing the specific needs of learners transitioning to higher grades, particularly as they move from one phase to another in the schooling system. Education districts need to be strengthened to provide quality support to schools that is characterised by compassion, commitment and accountability, rather than compliance.

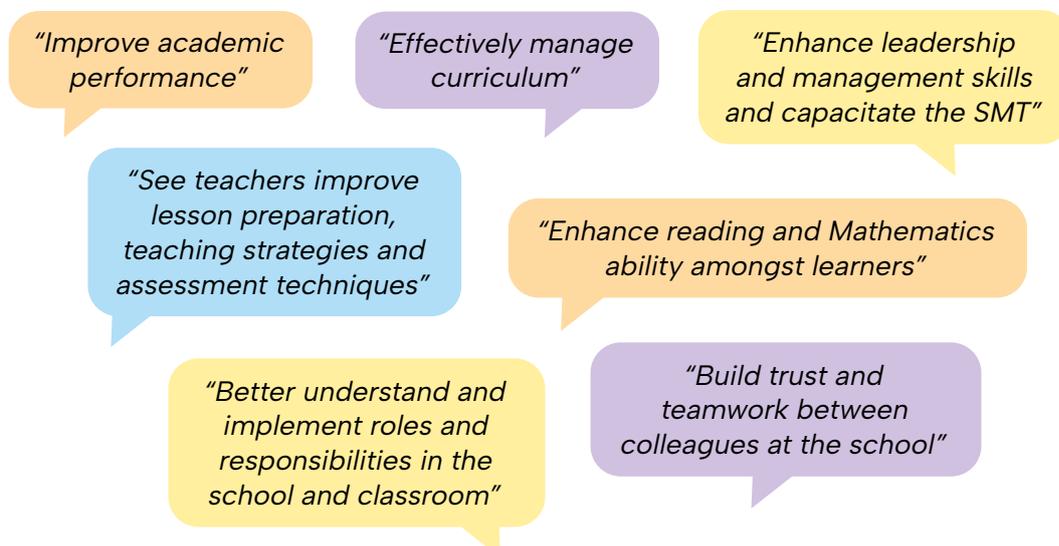
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Marang Education Trust (MET) is a SACE accredited, research-based professional development organisation. The Trust is Maskew Miller Learning's independent corporate social investment entity. It was established in 2008 as a Public Benefit Organisation designed to develop and support best practice solutions to improve teaching and learning outcomes within challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged contexts in South Africa. MET's mandate is to contribute sustainably to the education ecosystem through the provision of direct and indirect integrated personal and professional development and support to Teachers, School Management Teams (SMTs) and District Officials, particularly in rural and township schools, at no cost to the Department of Basic Education (DBE).

The 2019–2023 journey began with discussions at national and provincial level, where 6 districts were identified in each of the following provinces: Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KZN, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West. Schools were selected from a pool which was identified by the district and invited to submit an application to partner with MET to improve school effectiveness, whereafter final selections were made. Partnerships with 20 of these schools extended over four years in the North West and five years in the remaining 63 schools in the other five provinces. The qualitative study was conducted in all five districts, however, it was not possible to gather learner assessment data in the one district in Gauteng.

Schools partnered with Marang Education Trust because they wanted to:



The focus of the programme was on school level interventions that were designed to effect change in schools and classrooms. The partnership with education districts ensured regular feedback to district officials in an attempt to facilitate broader implementation of learnings in schools that were not part of the programme.

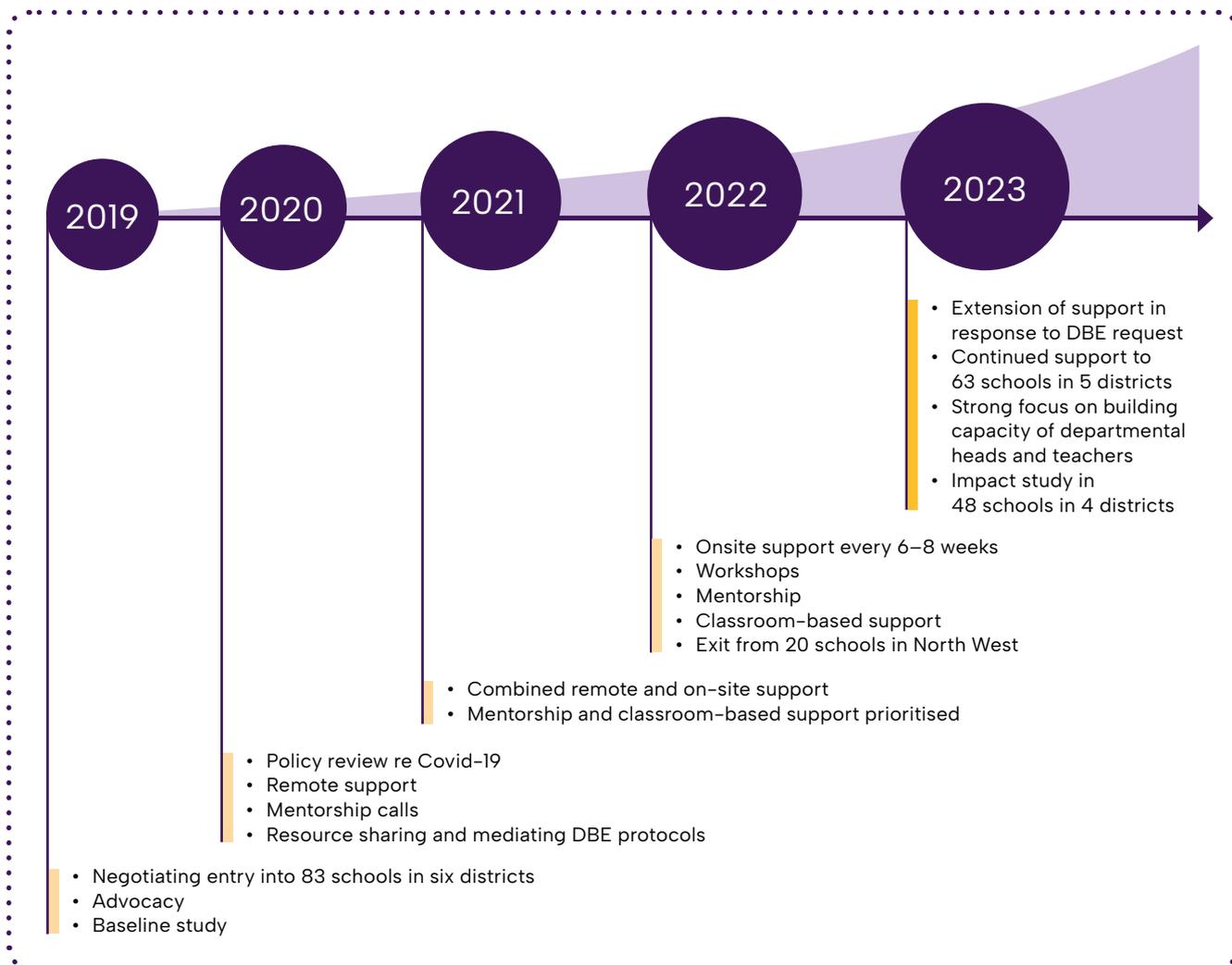


FIGURE 1. Timeline depicting programme implementation and evaluation

MET acknowledges the support of the District Directors and officials in each of the districts. This formal engagement, as well as various informal interactions, allowed for ideas to be shared that shaped interventions in schools and also provided a solid basis for opportunities towards larger scale implementation of learnings beyond the MET partner schools. This drive for sustainability was a primary goal in 2022 and 2023.

This report presents findings of an evaluation that includes data from 48 schools in 4 districts, based on quantitative and qualitative data generated and captured during school visits once every two months during the period under review. The report outlines the nature and form of support provided, including descriptions of the various interventions, and provides an overview of the progress made within the schools since 2019, with specific reference to key aspects of school effectiveness. The report concludes with a discussion of challenges and limitations and presents a set of recommendations for ongoing school development, future programme implementation and further research.

1.2. Theory of Change

Within the realm of programme evaluation, a Theory of Change serves as a powerful tool for articulating the pathways by which interventions are expected to lead to desired outcomes. A Theory of Change outlines causal relationships and anticipated changes and provides a roadmap for understanding how interventions are supposed to create meaningful impact. The Theory of Change presented below captures the thought process behind the planning, implementation, and evaluation of interventions encompassing the school development programme facilitated by the Marang Education Trust.

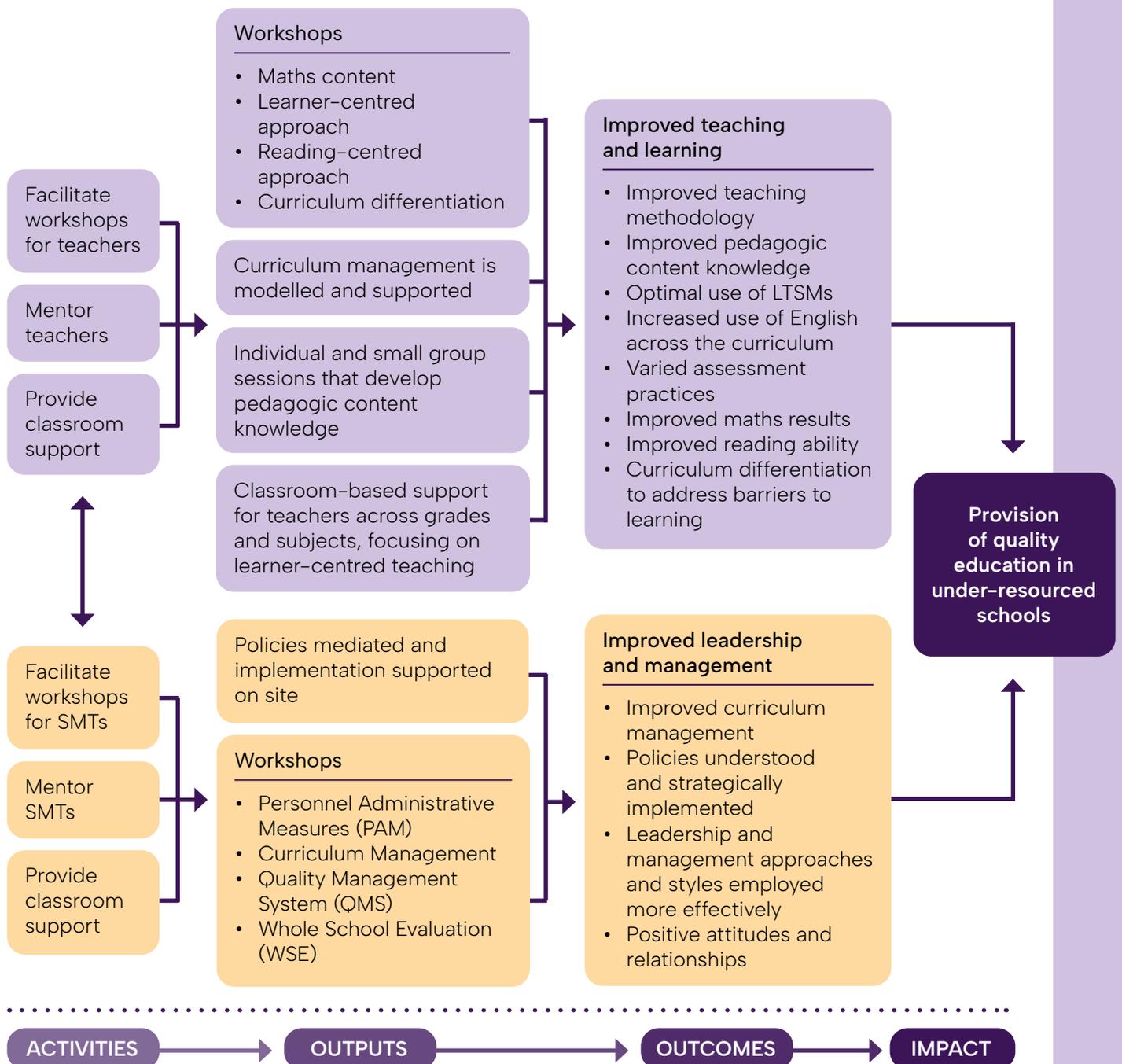


FIGURE 2. Marang Education Trust Theory of Change



A typical rural classroom

2. Context

2.1. Contextual Challenges and Opportunities

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education was significant and MET schools were not spared in any way. MET supported principals and SMTs as they navigated uncharted territory during the pandemic. This included coaching and mentoring to develop Covid-19 protocols; assisting with the administrative and management tasks by clarifying what the DBE and provincial education departments had promulgated as standard operating procedures related to learner attendance; screening, sanitising, identifying and reporting new cases of infection, and recommending treatment, isolation and quarantine. In terms of the school's curriculum component, MET support was focused on developing material to assist teachers to teach using WhatsApp, to share work with learners so they may continue learning at home, and developing ideas to share with parents in terms of what they could do to support their child's learning from home.

The requirement to ensure social distancing as a protective measure influenced learner attendance, and consequently, teaching and learning contact time. In small schools, the attendance issue was not always a huge challenge, but lockdown and rotational time tables impacted severely in larger schools where in some instances learners were attending school for only one or two days a week, or in some cases every fortnight.

A positive spin-off that emerged as schools navigated the pandemic was that it forced teachers to embrace technology to some degree. For example, as one principal explained:

“All SMT members had access to Microsoft Teams and conducted management meetings online in the evenings from home, because of the poor internet connection at school.”

Another “opening” which Covid-19 created was more ease in broaching matters of mental health and emotional well-being. This provided MET facilitators with an invaluable opportunity to support teachers and encourage a culture of compassion and psycho-social support in the schools with which we worked.

2.2. Education Districts and Schools



FIGURE 3. Education Districts where programme was implemented.

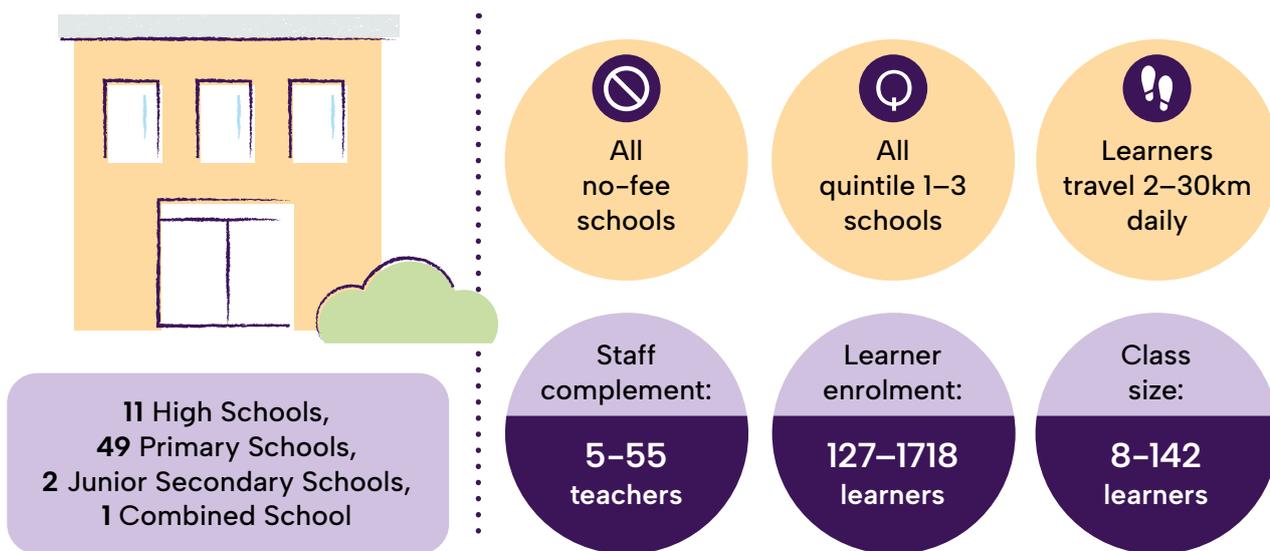


FIGURE 4. Demographics of the partner schools

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Aim and Objectives

Marang Education Trust launched the School Development Programme (2019–2023) aimed at providing support and developing solutions to improve teaching and learning in under-resourced and challenging school districts within the framework of national education policies. The research-based programme was framed by the following research objectives:



3.2. Research Design

A participatory action research approach was adopted. This involved collaboration and consultation with various stakeholders at various points in the implementation of the programme. The journey was characterised by regular feedback to schools and education districts as well as building research capacity of the facilitators who worked with and within schools.

Once the schools were selected and entry into the schools was negotiated through a consultative advocacy process, a baseline study was conducted in 2019. A mixed method approach was employed which involved gathering qualitative and quantitative data within a monitoring and evaluation framework that supported the action research approach.

Each school received a baseline report that identified strengths and outlined areas requiring support. These findings informed the interventions and ongoing research with the schools and districts. The action research process included a focused monitoring and evaluation framework that involved ongoing data collection and analysis over the five-year period. The baseline reports provided a crucial reference and served as the basis for assessing progress and efficacy in all areas where focused support was provided.

“Things will not get lost because I am there as a district official to sustain the programme... principals and SMTs will sustain learnings. District officials will need to follow up (with schools) on a quarterly basis.”



3.3. Data Collection

Qualitative methods were employed to generate data from principals, deputy principals, departmental heads, teachers and district officials. Learners were involved in the quantitative data collection through their participation in Mathematics and Reading to Learn assessments in Grades 3, 6 and 9.



FIGURE 5. Number of participants involved in qualitative and quantitative data collection

Key stakeholders within the schools were involved in the data generation process, however purposive sampling was employed in the selection of district officials and learners. District officials who worked closely in the field with the MET teams were invited to individual interviews and focus groups. The 1080 learners who were assessed across the 48 schools were randomly selected from mark schedules and included various levels of ability (high, average and low performance).

Participants

- Principals
- Deputy Principals
- Departmental Heads
- Teachers
- Learners – Grade 3, 6 and 9
- District Officials

Procedures

- Individual interviews
- Focus groups
- Document analysis
- Classroom observation
- School observation
- Learner Assessments in Mathematics and Reading to Learn



School Management Team in focus group discussion

The Mathematics assessment tools were designed to cover the concepts taught in the Grade 3, 6 and 9 CAPS curriculum as captured below, with sections of each question paper focusing on a topic:

Grade 3, 6 and 9

- Number operations and relationships
- Patterns, functions and algebra
- Space and shape
- Measurement
- Data Handling

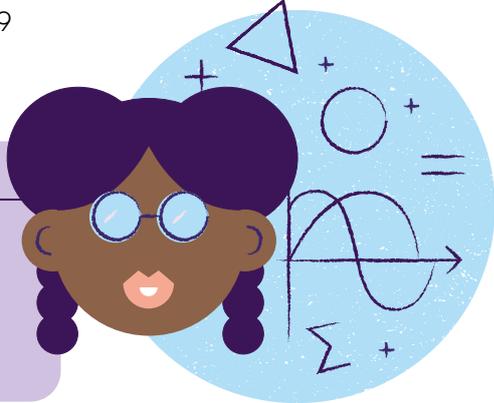


FIGURE 6. Topics focused on in Mathematics Assessments

The Reading to Learn assessments were designed to focus specifically on assessing a learner’s ability to read for meaning and, in so doing, test their ability to read to learn. The following reading skills were assessed in each of the three grades:

<p>Grade 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use clues to predict meaningfully • Read to find information • Read with understanding, follow sequence & retell a story to show understanding • Interpret a story correctly and identify the reasons that support this interpretation • Understand connections in a story and consequences 	<p>Grade 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use clues to predict meaningfully • Read to find particular information • Read to identify supporting information • Read to identify the differences between concepts and explain them • Read to follow sequence and retell the sequence to show understanding • Read for interpretation and consequences 	<p>Grade 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use clues to predict meaningfully • Read to find particular information and show understanding of the reason for a process • Read to find specific information • Read to identify the differences between concepts and explain them • Read and demonstrates understanding of a concept and an example of it • Read for specific information that describes the sequence in a process • Read for interpretation and consequences
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FIGURE 7. Topics focused on in Reading to Learn Assessments

The same tests were administered as part of the baseline study in 2019, and then once again in the impact study in 2023.

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed employing content analysis within a grounded theory approach. This involved systematically examining data generated in interviews, focus groups, document analysis and classroom observation to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories. Coding techniques were employed to categorise segments of the data based on their content and meaning. Initially, the coding process was open-ended, allowing for the emergence of new categories and themes; however, these were refined over time as patterns and relationships emerged in the data. These are reflected in the discussion of the findings in the sections that follow.



A rural classroom

4. Baseline Findings: *Factors Impacting on Teaching and Learning*



The baseline study revealed four categories that impacted on teaching and learning, and consequently on learner performance. These were identified by principals, teachers and SMT members as areas that required support. The categories and themes that emerged were used to frame support interventions and engagements with the schools over the five-year period. These are captured below:

Contextual Factors

- Poverty
- Child-headed households
- Adult illiteracy

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- Overcrowded classrooms
- Teacher-centred teaching
- Poor lesson preparation
- Little reading taking place
- English across the curriculum not a focus
- Difficulties with CAPS compliance
- Content coverage inconsistent
- Ineffective classroom management
- Struggles in addressing diversity
- Teachers content knowledge
- Quality of assessment

Attitudes and Relationships

- Low morale amongst teachers
- Poor communication between SMT and teachers
- Tension amongst staff
- Lack of collaboration and teamwork
- Learner ill-discipline
- Learner absenteeism
- Lack of parental involvement

Leadership and Management

- Limited policy implementation
- Phase and subject meetings not taking place
- Roles and responsibilities not well understood or actioned
- Ineffective curriculum management
- Poor planning
- Ineffective leadership styles
- LTSMs not procured
- Monitoring and support of teaching and learning minimal
- Pre- and post-moderation not consistent
- Inadequate assessment planning
- Poor administration

FIGURE 8. Baseline study findings in 2019 on areas requiring support in schools



5. Findings: *Support Provided to Schools*

5.1. Who Received Support

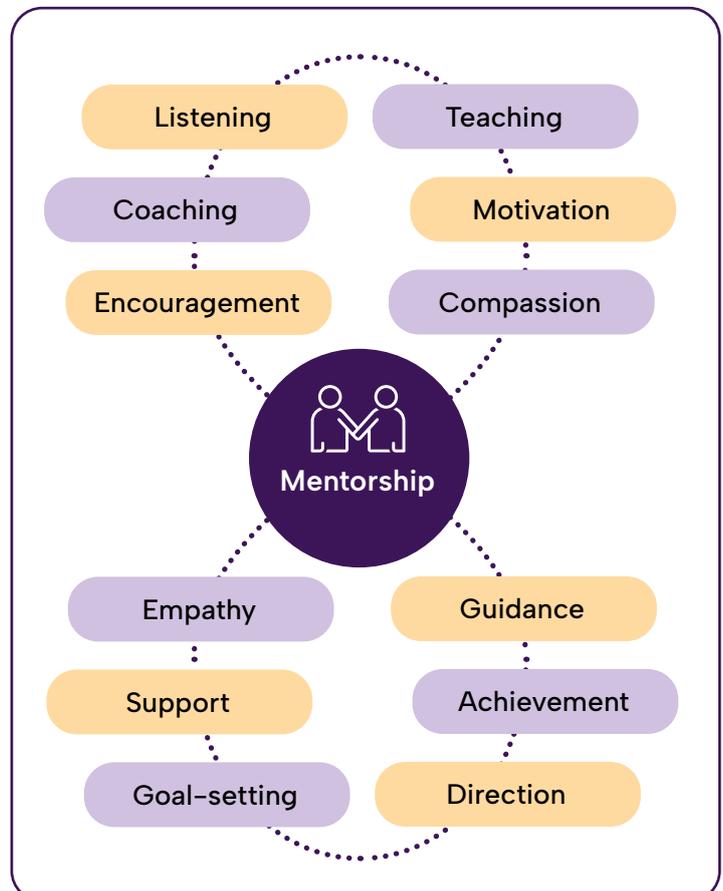
It is important to differentiate between who received support and who participated in the final evaluation. As mentioned previously, 63 schools received support from 2019 to 2023. Unfortunately, learners in 15 schools in one province were not able to participate in the quantitative data collection, so the findings on learner performance based on data generated in 48 schools.

As regards who received support over the five-year period, it is important to note that since our focus was on indirectly supporting the learners, interventions prioritised teachers and school management given the whole school development approach that was adopted by MET. The participatory action research design prescribes an inclusive approach in the implementation of development initiatives, so wherever possible offers of support were proposed and requests for support were incorporated within the scope of the programme.

The following stakeholders were prioritised in the partnership:

- Principals – as the heads of the schools
- School Management Teams
- Departmental Heads
- Teachers
- Circuit Managers
- Curriculum Advisors

Since leadership is central to school effectiveness, the programme of support included a focus on developing school leaders. This intention was supported by the identified areas requiring support that emerged from the baseline study which indicated a need to develop effective leadership that fosters a supportive environment, empowers teachers, and drives innovation and continuous improvement to enhance teaching quality, learning outcomes, and overall school performance.



To this end, principals received targeted support during every school visit which generally took place every 6–8 weeks. The team worked closely with deputy principals when the principal was not available, although many schools did not have a deputy principal given the size of the school.

Wherever possible, group support interventions were facilitated with School Management Teams (SMTs) to ensure that learnings were systemic. However, SMTs tended to be small, and were negatively affected by the delay in filling promotion posts at provincial level. Schools therefore resorted to co-opting PL1 (post-level 1) teachers onto the SMT. Since this is not a formal “acting” position, with no financial incentive, one is relying on good faith and a teachers’ sense of commitment to give of themselves and their time for the growth of the school.

In 2022 and 2023, the leadership support focus shifted to departmental heads who received intensive support to reiterate the need for effective leadership within the school. The ongoing monitoring and evaluation process which framed the programme implementation highlighted the gap in curriculum management and the impact thereof on curriculum delivery and consequently on learner performance. Departmental Heads are regarded as drivers of quality teaching and learning, so MET support then focused on strengthening their capacity to monitor and support teachers regarding curriculum implementation in the classroom.

As much as leadership is fundamental to school effectiveness, it is the teacher who is ultimately accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Without the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes a teacher is unable to transform a classroom into a creative critical and innovative learning space, where learners are able to develop and thrive emotionally and intellectually. Post level 1 teachers thus also received targeted support in, amongst others, learner-centred pedagogy, reading-centred methods, curriculum differentiation and mathematics. The focus and nature of support provision is explored in more detail in the sections that follow.



Mentoring teachers in small groups

5.2. Focus of Support

All support interventions were designed to respond to the areas requiring support as identified by teachers and the SMT in the baseline study and subsequent interactions over the years. These can be captured under three broad categories as outlined below.

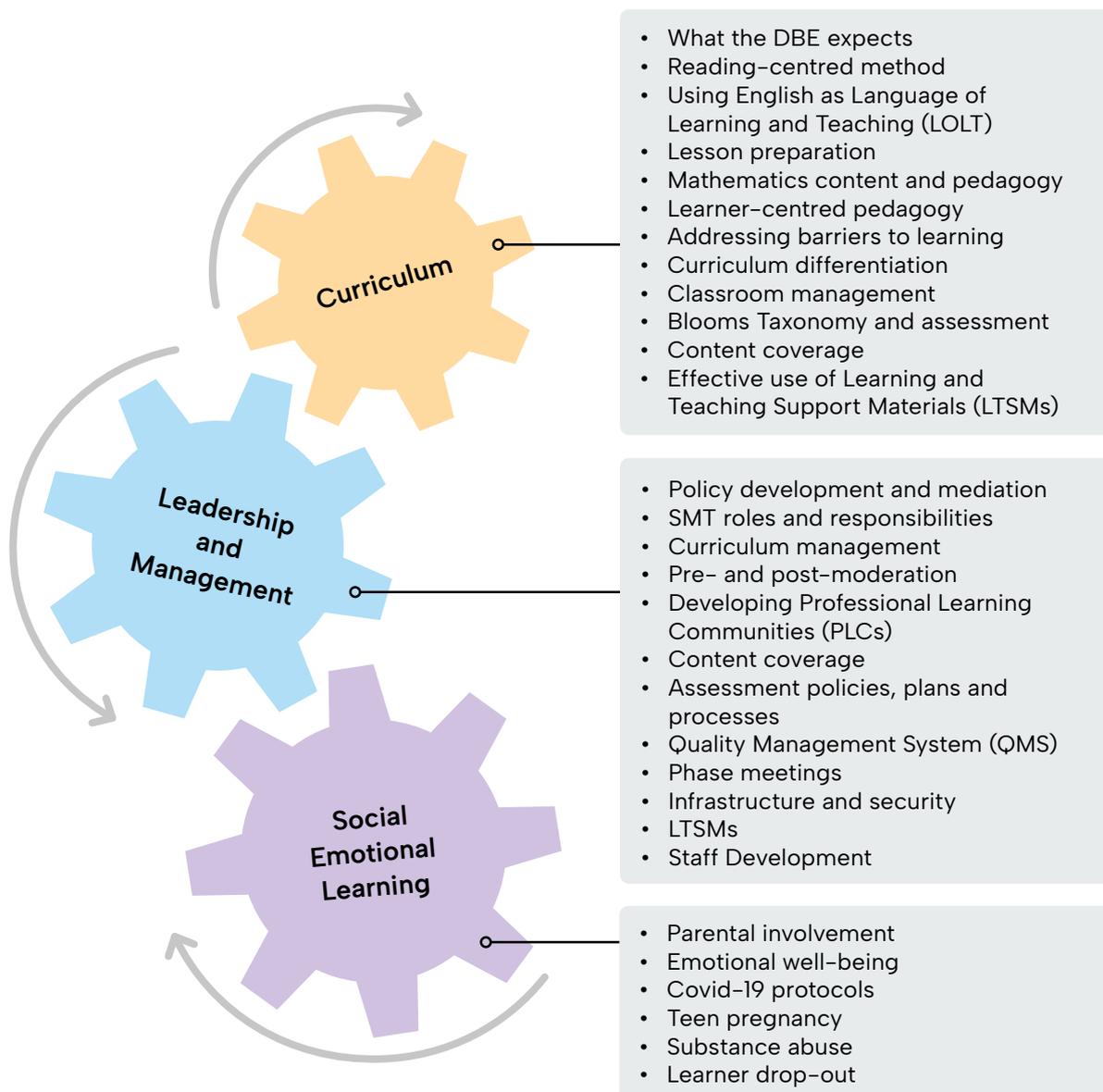


FIGURE 9. Categories of support provided to schools

All support was geared towards knowledge and skills development, improving accountability, and facilitating implementation of what was learnt.

5.3. Nature of Support

As mentioned previously, Marang Education Trust provided on-site and remote support to the principal, the deputy principal, heads of departments and teachers from 2019 to 2023. This variation in the form of support was necessitated given the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021. The team returned to schools as soon as they were able to and found that face-to-face engagements with educators were valued immensely and found to be of greater benefit in 2022 and 2023. However, remote support continued when school visits were not possible because of community protests, strike action by teachers, poor weather conditions, and so on.

5.3.1. Onsite Support

School visits

Facilitators spent the day at the school engaged in various support interventions with teachers and SMT members. The day was planned in consultation with the staff.

Demo-lessons

MET facilitators taught lessons that teachers would observe, especially when introducing new concepts and strategies that teachers struggled to implement.

Team teaching

Collaborative initiatives allowed teachers to develop confidence in the implementation of innovative teaching methods.

Mentorship

Sessions were conducted with individuals and small groups depending on the needs identified. This form of support tended to have deeper impact because of the personal nature of the interaction. Teachers tended to share more openly and explore their challenges without being too guarded.

Workshops

Sessions were conducted after school hours and included larger groups of educators, the whole staff or teachers from various schools within a cluster. They included the benefits of collective engagement and collaborative learning.

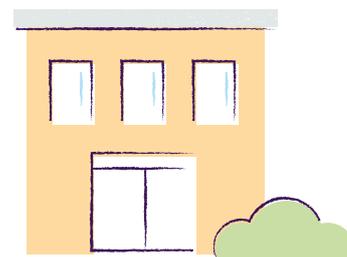
Onsite support

Classroom-based support

Once teachers were implementing new strategies, they would invite MET facilitators to observe lessons and provide classroom-based support. Members of the SMT were also coached on how to provide meaningful classroom-based support to teachers in accordance with Quality Management System (QMS) policy expectations.

Resource utilisation

MET did not provide learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) to schools; however, teachers were supported in the development of creative, relevant and appropriate materials that enhance teaching and learning.



“When I noticed challenges, I would share with the MET team and then we would strategise together.”

Facilitating meetings as Professional Learning Communities



“Most valuable aspect of the support provided was the methodology employed by MET facilitators – mentoring, coaching, workshops and induction. Facilitators were ‘hands-on’ in their development and support”

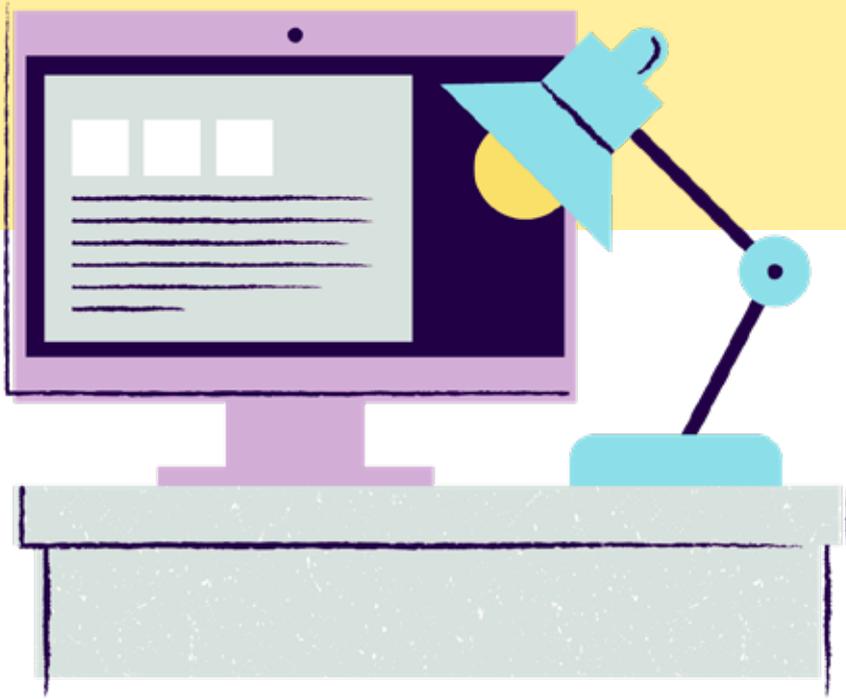
Unpacking SMT Roles and Responsibilities



5.3.2. Remote Support

Covid-19 and lockdown necessitated a review of engagement options. Although not ideal, remote support was implemented in 2020 and 2021, where contact via telephone calls and WhatsApp messages was the primary means of engagement. Individual and group mentorship sessions were organised while teachers were working from home initially and later using the speaker function to engage with groups when teachers returned to schools. Teaching and management resources were shared with teachers, principals and district officials via email and WhatsApp. Although the remote support strategies were useful, the challenge of data, connectivity and lack of devices in rural schools impacted severely on the quantity and quality of support provided in that time.

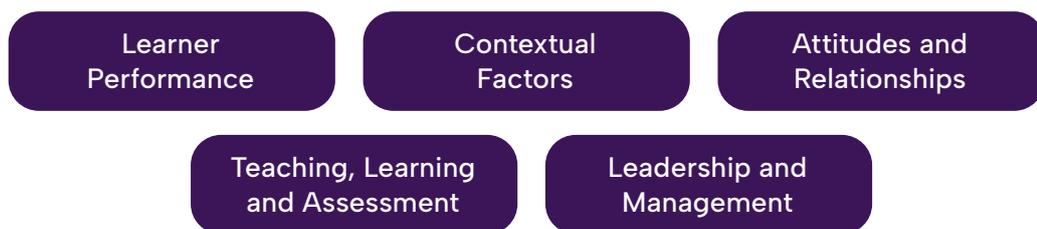
MET, in response to a call from the DBE for NPOs and other support providers to consider how they could assist in bridging the gap caused by Covid-19, extended the support provided to most schools by an additional year.



6. Findings: *Efficacy of Support Provided*

The sections that follow outline the overall findings across districts and schools. More specific data was shared with individual schools and districts in December 2023 in reports that were compiled specifically for them to use to continue the development journey that was initiated through the partnership with Marang Education Trust.

Findings in this report are captured within the following categories which align with the focus areas of support to schools:



6.1. Learner Performance

A sample of learners was selected at each school to participate in Mathematics and Reading to Learn assessments. The questions papers which were designed by MET and moderated by subject specialists in various districts were administered to 1080 learners in 2019 and 2023. Comparative findings are presented below.

6.1.1. Mathematics

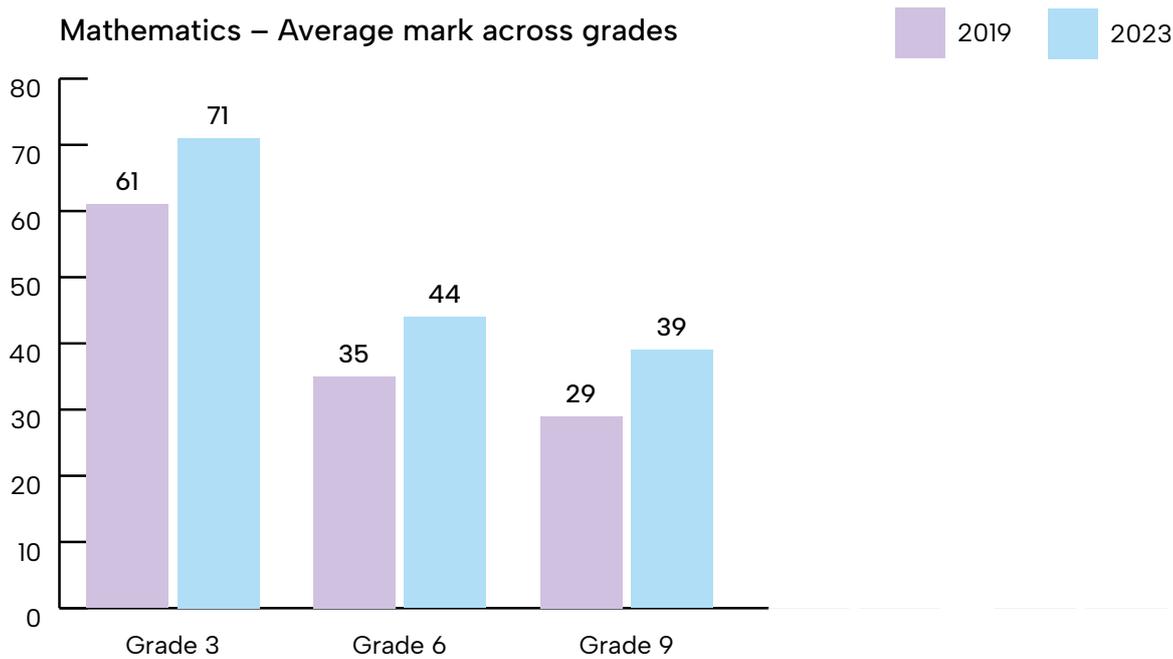


FIGURE 10. Average mark in Mathematics – Comparison of 2019 and 2023 in Grade 3, Grade 6 and Grade 9

The following is evident in the data presented in the data above:

An increase of almost 10% across all districts was noted, suggesting an overall positive impact on learner performance in Mathematics. It is interesting to note that in 2019 and 2023, the highest marks were obtained by Grade 3 learners, followed by Grade 6 and Grade 9 respectively, indicating a downward trajectory in performance as learners progressed from one grade to another. This may be reflective of the increased difficulty in concepts taught in higher grades, or imply various other influences, including quality of teaching, teachers competence and resource availability.

Data comparing districts (reflected in individual reports made available to schools and districts) indicated some variation in highest and lowest average marks obtained as well as the differences between average marks in 2019 and 2023. Even though the increase in performance in Grade 9 is significant (10%), it remains a concern that the average mark is 39%, which, although a pass mark as per DBE standards, is regarded by MET as requiring ongoing support.

The findings confirm the need for intensive, consolidated support in the “foundation years” in high school, namely Grade 8 and Grade 9.

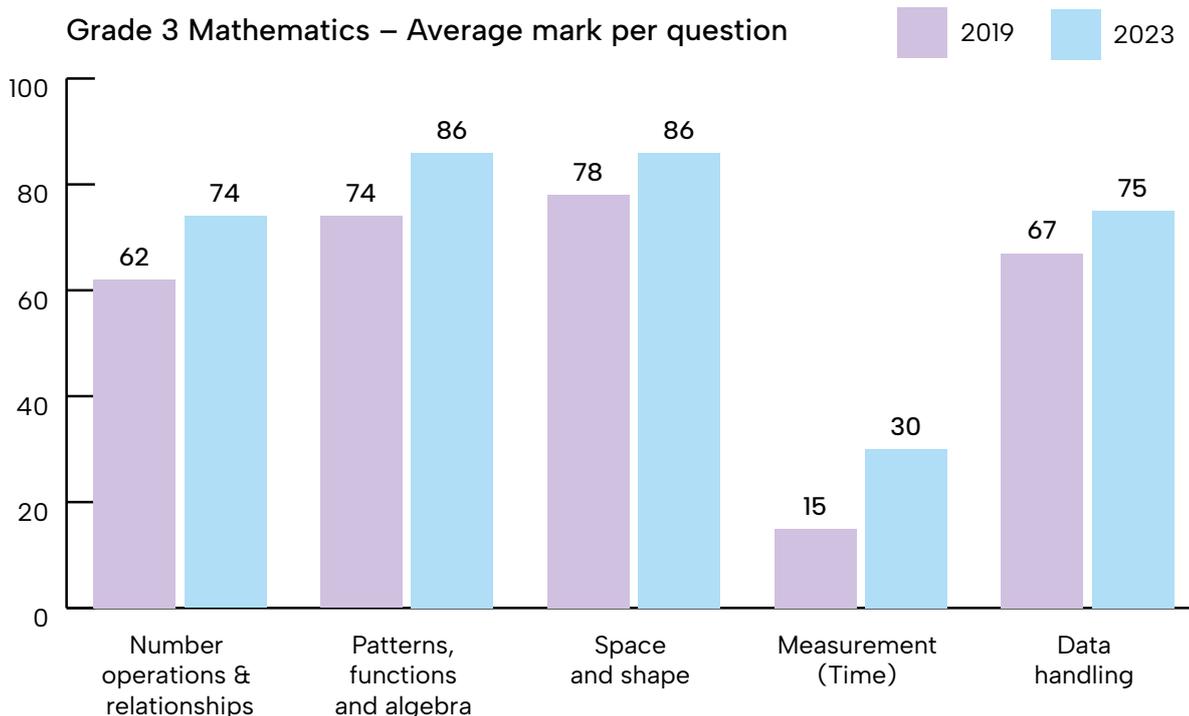


FIGURE 11. Average mark per question in Mathematics – Comparison between 2019 and 2023 for Grade 3



Grade 3 learners improved for all questions/topics assessed by between 8% and 15%. Although the greatest improvement in the average mark was for Measurement (Time), the average mark obtained in 2023 is 30%, which is still the lowest score and therefore cause for concern.

Grade 3 Mathematics results for the question on Measurement may be compromised by the fact that 'Time' is often taught in English, even though it should be taught in home language in the Foundation Phase. The question paper was set in home language (as per DBE prescripts) and may have been challenging for learners who seem to express themselves better or more easily in English for this Mathematics topic, based on how they are taught.

Learner-centred teaching

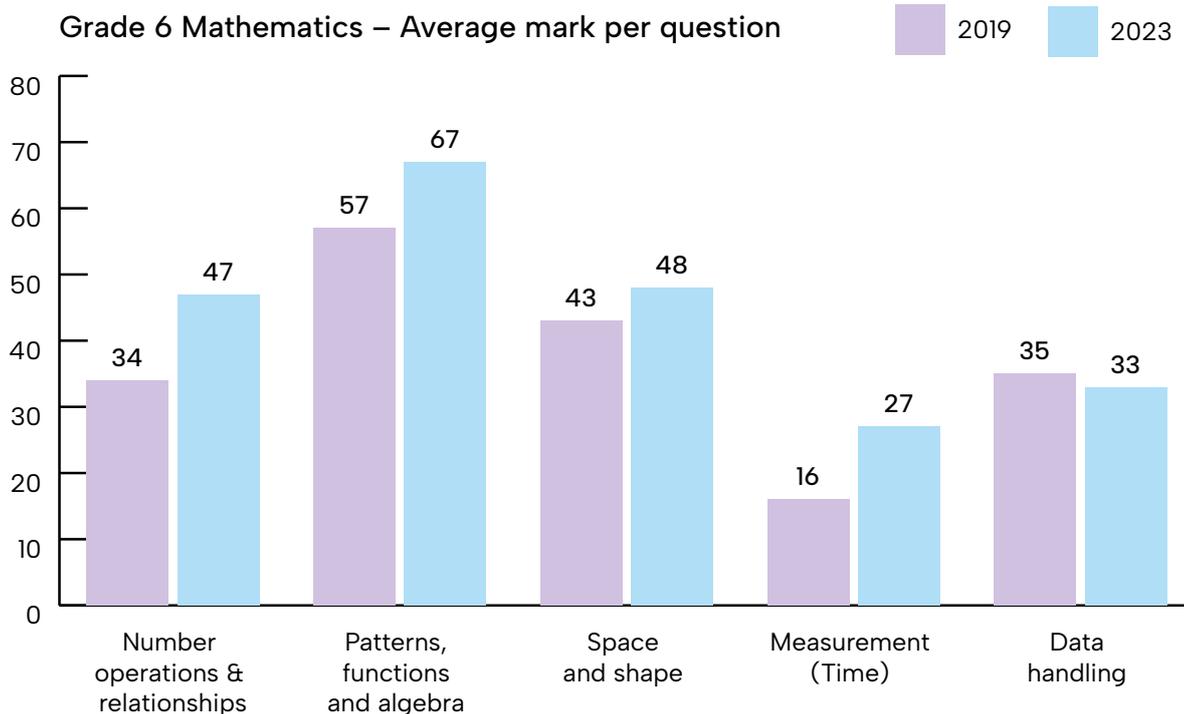


FIGURE 12. Average mark per question in Mathematics – Comparison between 2019 and 2023 for Grade 6

Grade 6 learners improved by between 5% and 13% in four out of five questions/topics assessed. Although the improvement in the average mark for Measurement (Time) was high (11%), the average mark obtained in 2023 is 27% which is still the lowest score and cause for concern.

Grade 6 learners also seem to have struggled with the question on Data Handling where a decline of 2% in the average mark across districts was noted. This finding however requires further investigation given that data from one district was significantly lower than others and clearly influenced the overall result.

The potential impact of Covid-19 and the loss of teaching time in 2020 and 2021 when these learners would have been in Grade 3 and Grade 4 may also partially account for conceptual gaps.

“We were mentored in ways to deal with learners with barriers in the classroom... how to unleash the full potential of learners with barriers. We developed teaching and learning strategies that accommodate learners with different learning styles and learning barriers.”

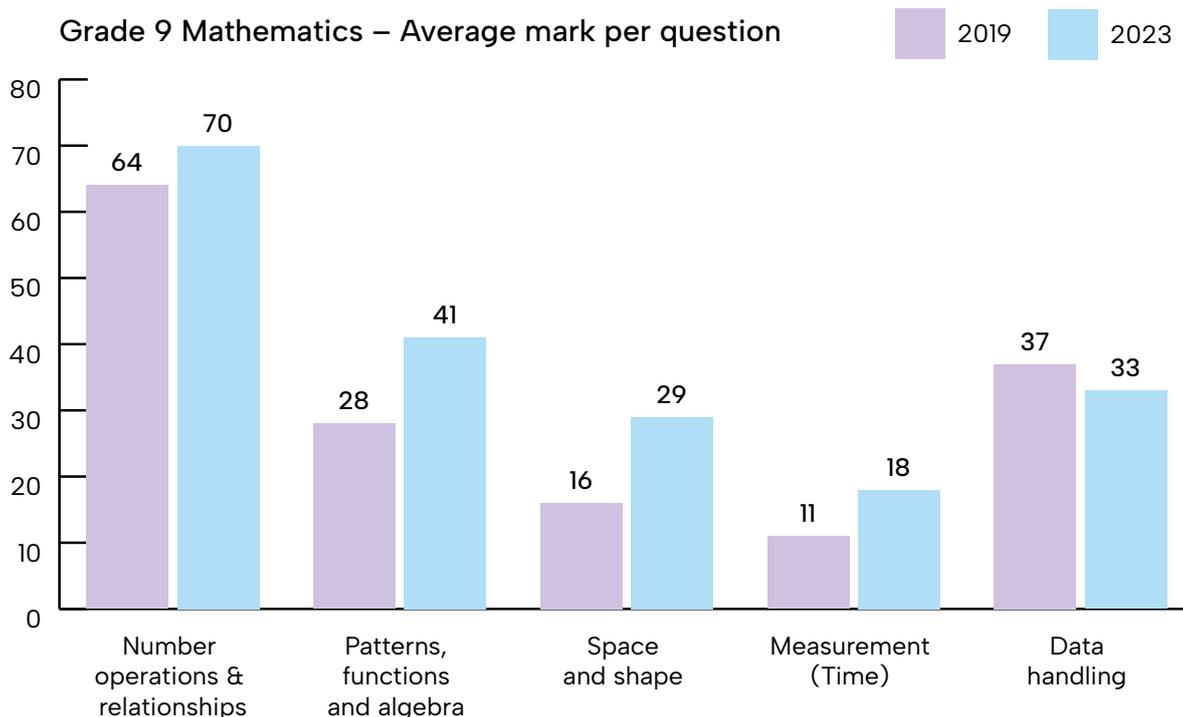


FIGURE 13. Average mark per question in Mathematics – Comparison between 2019 and 2023 for Grade 9

Grade 9 learners improved by between 7% and 13% in four out of five questions/topics assessed. The greatest improvement in the average mark was in the question on Space and Shape (13%); however the fact that the average in 2023 is 29% warrants attention. Although there was some improvement in the average mark for Measurement (Time) – 7% – the average mark obtained in 2023 is 18%, which is still the lowest score and a serious concern.

Grade 9 learners also struggled with the question on Data Handling where a decline of 3% in the average mark across districts was noted. This finding requires further investigation given that data from one district was significantly lower than others and clearly influenced the overall result.

It is not clear what the specific impact of Covid-19 (including lockdown and rotational time tables) may have had on the average marks obtained in Mathematics. Learners in Grade 9 in 2023 are likely to still be grappling with learning losses from lack of contact time in Grade 6 and 7 (2020 and 2021) when schooling in rural schools was severely impacted. If learners entered high school with poor basic conceptual understanding in the Senior phase, high school teachers would have needed to “back track”, to allow learners to catch up on learning losses, and this may have been challenging given the pressure to conform to Annual Teaching Programmes (ATPs) as set by the DBE.

The “Foundation years” in high school (Grade 8 and 9) warrant serious attention across the country. These grades are the base for consolidating skills and conceptual understanding in Mathematics that is crucial for the FET phase irrespective of whether learners choose Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy in Grades 10–12. Learners must be supported and encouraged to pursue Mathematics but will likely only do so if they feel confident and competent in the subject.

6.1.2. Reading to Learn

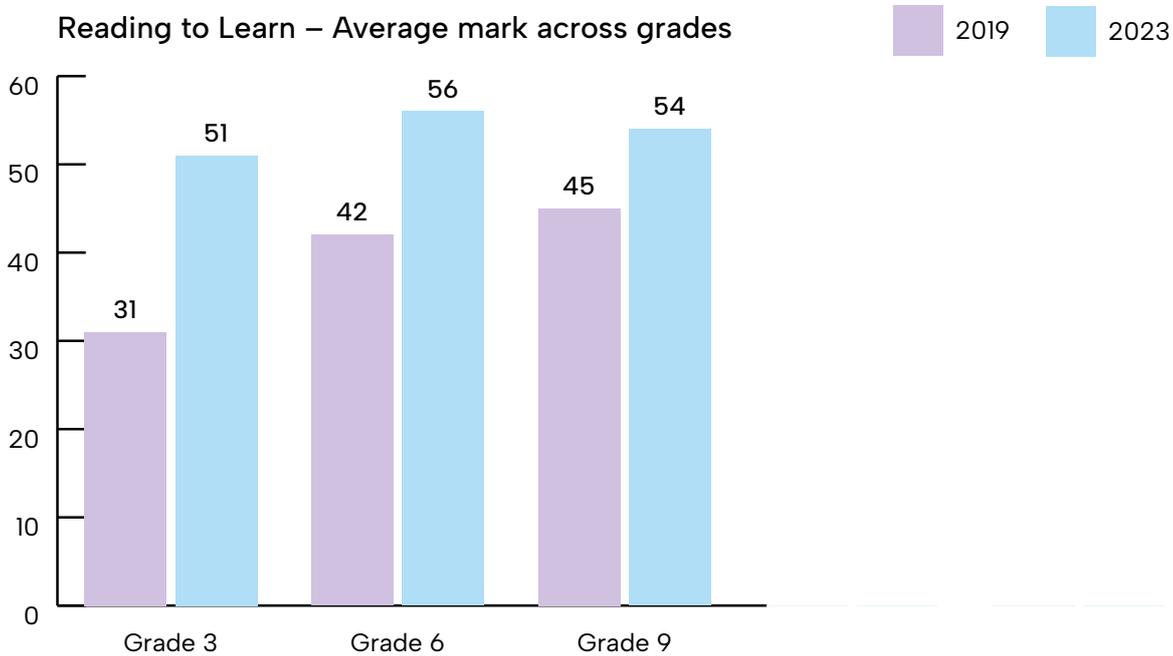


FIGURE 14. Average mark in Reading to Learn – Comparison of 2019 and 2023 in Grade 3, Grade 6 and Grade 9

The following is evident in the data presented above:

Average marks for Reading to Learn increased considerably (8%–20%) across all districts, suggesting an overall positive impact on learner performance. The highly significant improvement in Grade 3 average marks from 2019 to 2023 is encouraging and supports the finding in the qualitative data that suggest high levels of commitment by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance teaching and learning by shifting their own practice.

The average mark obtained across the three grades in 2019 did not vary greatly (51%–56%). This may be an indication of a “saturation” point that seems to be reached with regard to learners’ ability to read for meaning in English, which is not their mother tongue.

The slightly higher marks obtained by Grade 6 and Grade 9 learners may indicate an upward trajectory in reading ability as learners progress from one grade to another. This may also be explained by the fact that as learners get older, they may be increasingly exposed to the English language, not only at school, but via television, radio, various print sources as well as social media.

It is important to note that average marks in one district were significantly higher than others. This suggests that the average mark may not be as high in 2023, as depicted above.



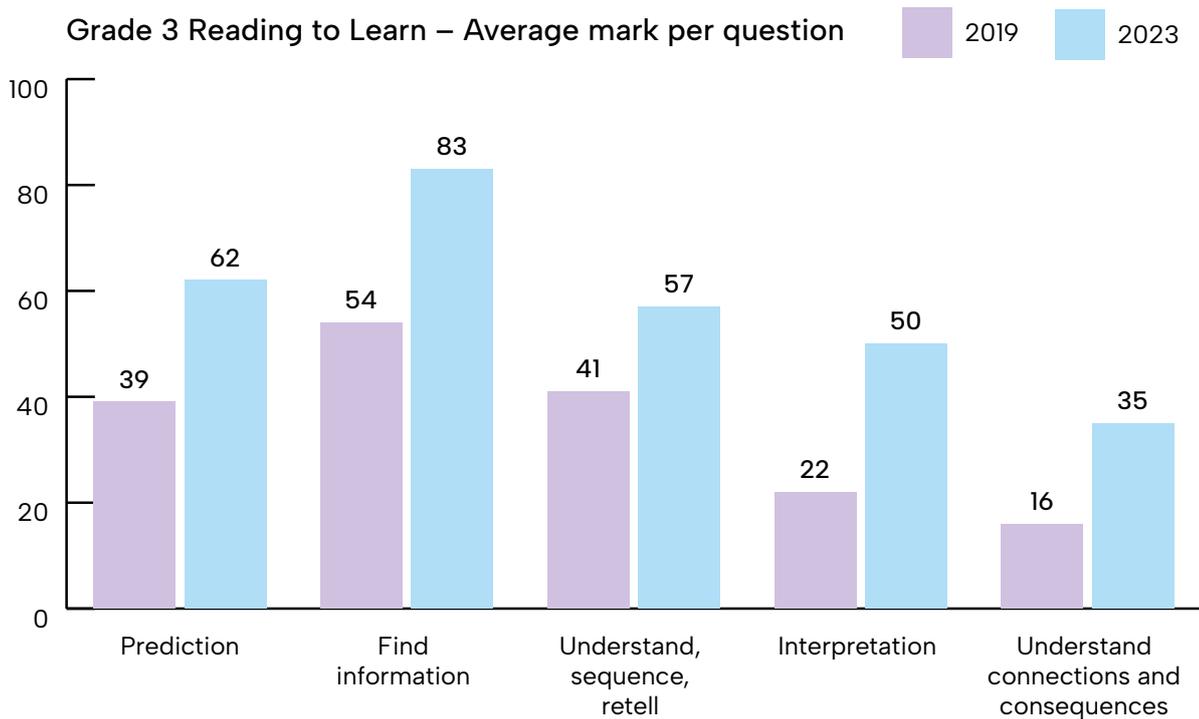


FIGURE 15. Average mark per question in Reading to Learn – Comparison between 2019 and 2023 for Grade 3

Grade 3 learners improved by between 16% and 30% for all questions/topics assessed. High averages obtained for ‘Prediction’ and ‘Finding information’ bode well for learning. The largest improvement was in the reading skill ‘Finding Information’ which is a skill that can be reasonably easily taught. This is testimony of teachers’ efforts to incorporate new methods into their repertoire.

Although a significant improvement is noted for ‘Understanding connections and consequences’, the average mark of 35% obtained in 2023 indicates that learners still struggle with this skill. This is a reading skill that requires higher order thinking and thus may be particularly challenging for learners whose home language is not English.



Reading-centred teaching and learning

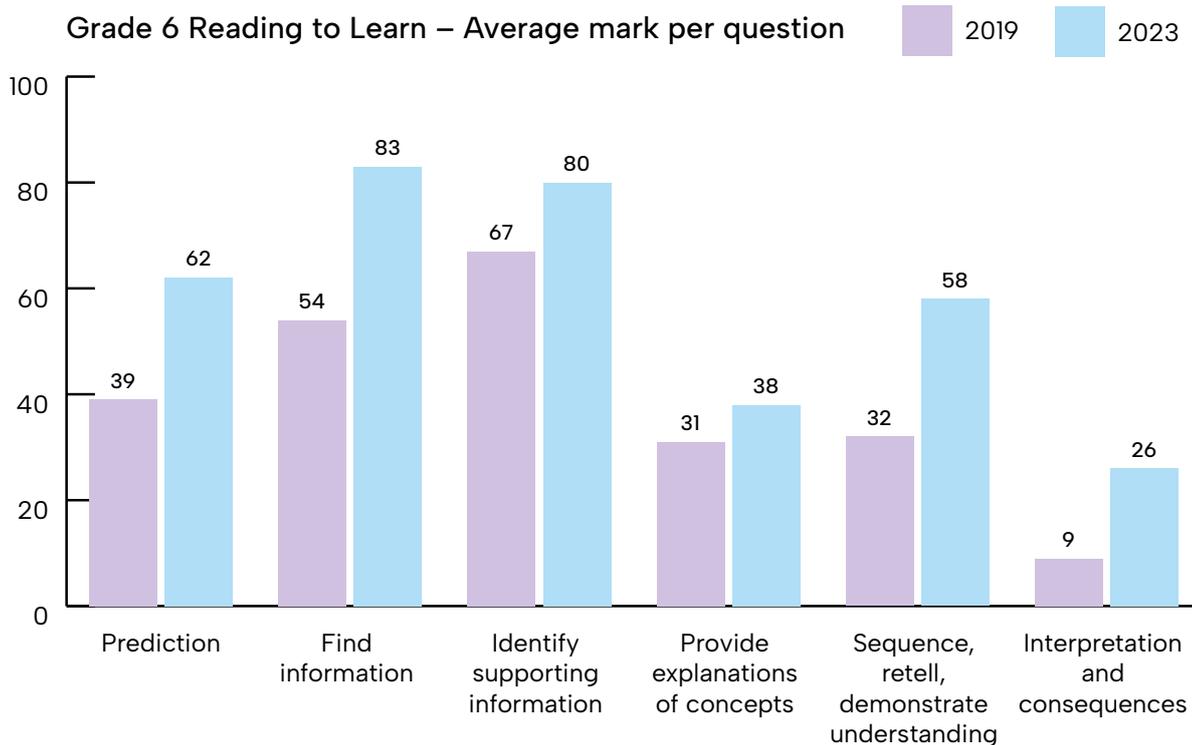


FIGURE 16. Average mark per question in Reading to Learn – Comparison between 2019 and 2023 for Grade 6

Grade 6 learners improved by 7% and 26% for all questions/topics assessed. High averages obtained for ‘Finding information’ and ‘Identifying supporting information’ bode well for learning. The greatest improvement was in the reading skill ‘Sequence, retell, demonstrate understanding’.

The average mark for ‘Provide explanations of concepts’ accounts for the smallest shift from 2019 to 2023 and refers to both content knowledge and reading ability.

Although a significant improvement is noted for ‘Interpretation and consequences’ the average mark of 26% obtained in 2023 is concerning. This is a reading skill that requires higher order thinking.

“Reading across the curriculum was new terminology that MET brought. That it is not just reading in the languages, it must be there in Technology, Social Sciences, and all gateway subjects, there must be reading, because without reading, learners cannot comprehend, cannot understand what they are supposed to.”

Paired reading during a lesson



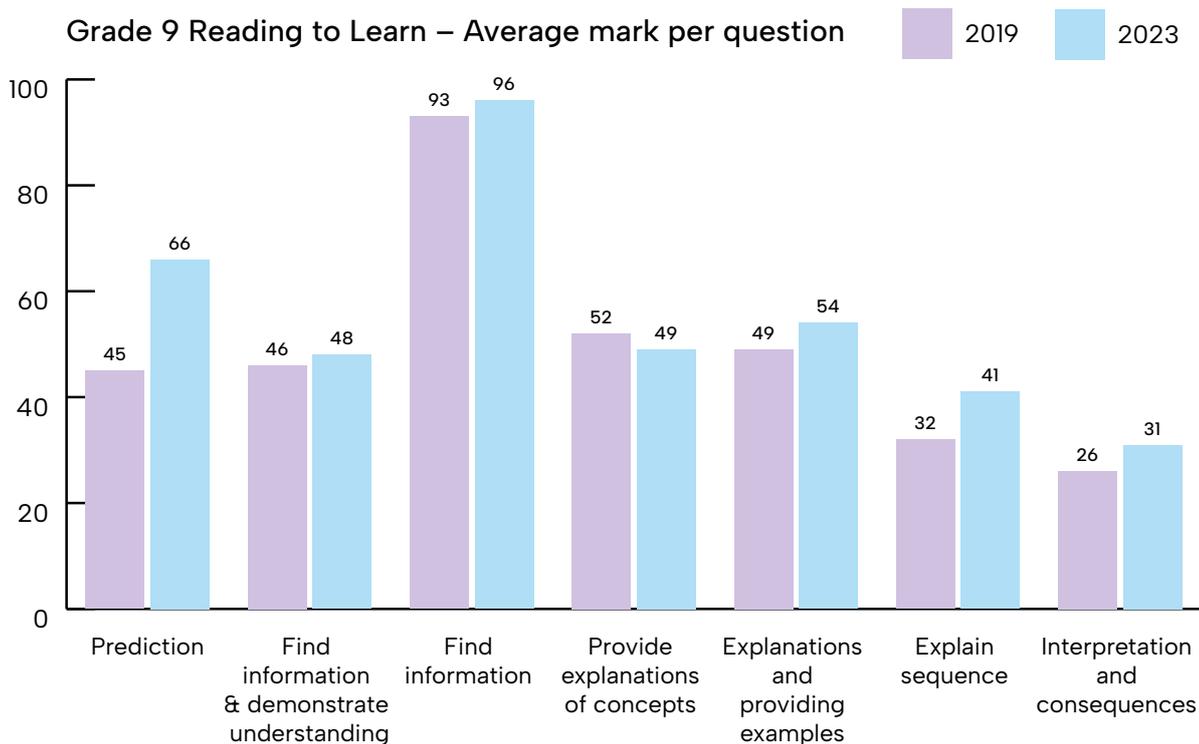


FIGURE 17. Average mark per question in Reading to Learn – Comparison between 2019 and 2023 for Grade 9

Grade 9 average marks improved for 6 out of 7 questions/topics assessed by between 2% and 21%. High averages obtained for ‘Prediction’, ‘Finding information’ and ‘Explanations and providing examples’ bode well for learning. The most significant improvement was in the reading skill ‘Prediction’ which is easily taught and an affirmation of teachers’ efforts in this regard.

The decline in the average mark for ‘Provide explanations of concepts’ is concerning since it refers to both content knowledge and reading ability. Although an improvement is noted for ‘Interpretation and consequences’ the average mark of 31% obtained in 2023 is problematic. This is a reading skill that requires higher order thinking which is imperative in high school as learners are on the brink of entering the Further Education and Training (FET) phase.

The higher order thinking skills referred to above will require concerted effort on the part of teachers in all subjects in teaching, learning and assessment processes. The more exposed learners are to activities that encourage the use of the reading and thinking skills, the more adept they will become. These are academic skills that learners must master in both home language and English, even though the MET assessment focuses on the latter.

Teachers must be encouraged to incorporate reading into all lessons as was proposed by MET facilitators. If this becomes the “culture” of teaching and learning in the schools, learners are likely to experience academic success.

It must be acknowledged that in some schools there were other reading interventions being implemented that may have contributed to the overall improvement in learners’ reading ability. These included the appointment of “reading champions” who were assisting struggling learners, hosting a reading competition at school and district level, and adopting the DBE recommendation to “drop all and read” for 15–30 minutes every day or at least once

a week. However, these initiatives were sporadic and implemented only at some moments in the year, rather than being consistently adopted as part of the school's culture. Furthermore, these programmes were not implemented in all schools or all districts.

When making sense of the data shared above, it is worth reflecting on the results of the systemic assessments conducted in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). This provides a helpful reference point, given that the evaluation referred to is a large scale project run by the department. The results presented below were released in February 2024 and schools were applauded for their efforts. The table below captures comparative data for Grade 3, 6 and 9 Mathematics and Language assessments conducted in 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023. The WCED highlighted that the results of the annual systemic tests for 2023 "indicate an improvement in Mathematics and Language scores across all school phases in the Western Cape." The Head of Department went on to state: "We must certainly celebrate the improvements made across all grades and subjects in the last year. This is significant... There is, however, still a long way to go to reach pre-pandemic scores, and to surpass them, but this demonstrates that we are on the right trajectory and that our system is moving forward."

Mathematics

Grade	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Diff 2022 to 2023
Grade 3	58,1		44,3	47,3	51,6	4,3
Grade 6	44,4		37,3	39,4	40,4	1,0
Grade 9	22,7		21,6	18,8	20,5	1,7

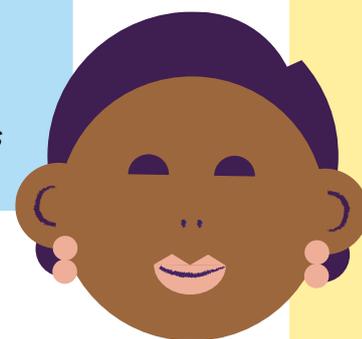
Language

Grade	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Diff 2022 to 2023
Grade 3	44,9		36,9	38,5	42,5	4,0
Grade 6	42,8		39,4	36,1	37,5	1,4
Grade 9	53,6		50,1	50,2	51,6	1,4

WCED results of annual systemic tests (WCED Circular Reference: 20240219-1774)

Although the MET school development programme and evaluation cannot be compared to the scope of the WCED evaluation in terms of reach or size, it is significant that the MET research findings in terms of improvements in learner performance in Mathematics and Reading to Learn far exceeds those quoted in the tables above. This is an accolade indeed and calls for affirmation of all participants and stakeholders in the MET partnership.

"We are not preachers, we are educators. Without being closer to the learners, using instruments, designing activities, measuring their work and providing feedback, interacting, you don't get it right... our traditional way of teaching is us standing in front of the learners and teaching, teaching, teaching, but my observation is that, with all my schools, it's more interactive now rather than learners being passive."



6.2. Contextual Factors

The baseline study conducted in 2019 revealed several contextual factors that were impacting negatively on the provision of quality teaching and learning at schools. Issues included poverty and unemployment, where most families depend on social grants, and child-headed families, with some learners taking care of siblings and grandparents.

Many schools also still struggle with infrastructure challenges including poor water supply, inadequate toilet facilities and shortage of classrooms. In addition, community protests and lack of parental involvement remains an obstacle to ensuring school functionality and the provision of quality education to learners.

Although addressing these factors directly did not fall within MET's mandate, facilitators provided support as far as was reasonably practicable. The MET research reveals that progress was significant in the following aspects:

Poverty

- Learners who qualify for social grants were identified, registered and were accessing grants.
- School uniforms were donated by local businesses, teachers and exiting Grade 7 learners in primary schools.
- Feeding scheme to provide nutrition was well structured in most schools.

Psycho-social issues

- Data base of vulnerable learners was kept in all schools.
- Schools reached out to other departments for support. Department of Social Development conducted awareness programmes on substance abuse and teen pregnancy.

Infrastructure/water supply

- Most schools now have a permanent supply of water.

Undocumented learners

- Learners were assisted through collaboration with Department of Home affairs.



Infrastructure challenges in rural education

6.3. Attitudes and Relationships

The baseline study in 2019 highlighted several concerns related to attitudes and relationships within schools. Psycho-social challenges that impact on teaching and learning that were experienced by learners include substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and poor learner discipline. Staff relationships were particularly problematic in many schools where poor communication, tension and low morale were flagged. This resulted in poor teamwork and little evidence of collaboration. The lack of parental involvement in the school and support for the education of learners was a significant challenge noted in the majority of schools.

This category of support is encompassed within the DBE policy on Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL). Unfortunately, it appears that this policy, although well-intended and comprehensive in its framework, has not gained any traction in most rural schools. Teachers and principals claimed to be unaware of the policy and lacked any understanding of its prescripts. Nonetheless, MET facilitators were able to place this matter on the 'development agenda' and achieved some success in this regard. Although not policy driven, positive shifts were noted in classrooms and staffrooms alike, as is captured below.

Relationships

- Improved communication, attitudes and relationships were noted between teachers and learners.
- Relationships between teachers improved. There was improved participation, greater collegiality, working relations were healthy, and attitudes were more positive.
- Positive engagement between teachers and the SMT because of improved communication and collaboration was evident.
- Most SMTs were functioning as a supportive collective.

"I witnessed an upsurge in collegiality among subject educators in schools that are in the MET programme."

Emotional well-being

- This was now regarded as a priority concern in most schools.
- Check-in sessions with staff and learners were taking place at all levels in the school to facilitate emotional well-being and establish psychological safety. Schools were working on creating safe spaces for sharing.
- Collaboration with Department of Social Development and SAPS was evident in schools where psycho-social issues like substance abuse and teen pregnancy had to be addressed.

"There is an improvement with regards to self-esteem, the confidence levels of our educators are very, very high, because of the support from MET. Once the programme was up and running, you could see that the environment was conducive."

Culture of Learning & Teaching

- Late-coming and absenteeism decreased.
- Period registers were kept to reduce bunking.
- The Code of Conduct has been mediated with learners in all schools.
- Learners in most schools were disciplined, allowing teachers to focus on the task at hand.

Improved engagement of parents

- Register class and grade meetings were employed as effective strategies that have improved parents' attendance of meetings.
- Book viewing sessions encouraged parental involvement.
- Attendance at parent meetings and participation in the life of the school improved.
- Quarterly meetings with parents were planned and communicated in advance.
- WhatsApp groups improved communication between parents and schools. A variety of communication methods were employed to reach the parent community.

Although Covid-19 facilitated an openness to discussing issues of a psycho-social nature, where the stigma around depression, grief and anxiety were lifted to some degree, this area must receive greater focus in school development initiatives in the future. The reintroduction of the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning policy at provincial and district level is thus very encouraging.



"They are functioning as teams and no longer working in silos."

Team-building exercise for staff at a school

6.4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Although there were strengths recorded in 2019, the baseline study revealed a number of issues related to teaching, learning and assessment that needed to be addressed. These included unavailability and ineffective use of CAPS documents and ATPs, inconsistent lesson preparation, ineffective use of textbooks and other LTSMs, ineffective strategies around learner absenteeism, lack of SMT support to teachers on content knowledge, and learner-centred teaching methods to ensure 75% learner involvement and 25% teacher interaction in a lesson were not fully implemented. The reading-centred method and English Across Curriculum strategy were not implemented, learner diversity was not catered for, assessment policy was not always followed, teaching aids and charts were not effectively used, and cognitive levels were not always considered. Classroom management was found wanting, where seating arrangements did not accommodate learner interaction, teacher facilitation or encourage self-discipline.

Data generated throughout the period of programme implementation and specifically at the end of the evaluation period, indicated significant positive shifts, as depicted below.

Teaching strategies

- Learner-centred methods were adopted. These included practical, hands-on approaches, demonstrations and role-play.
- Lesson preparation was consistent and comprehensive, and aligned to CAPS.
- Teachers were more confident regarding the content knowledge of subjects they taught.
- Teaching methods included groupwork as a methodology, which increases concentration, learner engagement and consequently builds confidence.
- Most Mathematics teachers were subject specialists and thus able to support learners and colleagues alike.

Addressing diversity

- Learners experiencing barriers to learning were identified and their progress monitored at the end of each term.
- Intervention strategies per subject, per grade were designed and implemented.
- Some teachers applied differentiation strategies to cater for learners experiencing barriers to learning as well as those who had above average ability.
- Schools flagged concerns with the district for intervention where appropriate.
- Learning Support Agents were available to provide support in some schools.

Reading to Learn

- More teachers were employing a reading-centred approach to enhance learners' ability to read for meaning. Learners were given opportunities to view, scan, read, write and present in most lessons.
- A reading culture emerged in schools where reading was encouraged in various ways, including 'drop all and read', reading competitions, and reading for pleasure.
- Most teachers embraced English as the language of learning and teaching. Code switching was employed to assist with understanding of key concepts and as a bridge to English.

6.5. Leadership and Management

Although the baseline study revealed some strengths in leadership and management, challenges were identified and teachers expressed the need for support on the following matters: policy understanding and implementation (especially Personnel Administrative Measures – PAM, QMS and Whole School Evaluation – WSE), there were no curriculum management plans in place, HoDs were not monitoring learners’ books and teachers’ lesson preparation, and the quality and quantity of informal assessment tasks were not being monitored. Teachers were not receiving directed support since classroom support visits were not taking place, a retrieval policy to audit and track LTSMs was not being implemented, and phase meetings were either not taking place or minutes were not being recorded. Planning by senior leadership was particularly lacking.

Findings of the impact study at the end of 2023 indicated that significant progress had been made in a number of areas, as reflected below.

Roles and responsibilities

- SMT members understood and were executing their roles according to PAM with confidence in most schools. Improvement in the application of knowledge and understanding of management functions was apparent.
- Directive, consultative leadership styles were being employed by the SMT, ensuring accountability of teachers.
- Staff meetings were conducted regularly and minutes were taken.

Curriculum management

- Curriculum implementation (content coverage, lesson plans and preparation, learners’ workbooks) were monitored on a quarterly basis using appropriate tools.
- Schools were engaging in pre- and post-moderation of formal and informal tasks using moderation tools. Bloom’s taxonomy was used as a guideline. All departmental heads in all phases were following due process and were being supervised by the deputy and/or principal.
- Phase and/or Departmental meetings were held. Planning was done, and decisions were taken and implemented in these spaces. This was particularly prevalent in the Foundation Phase in most primary schools.

Classroom monitoring and support

- Schedules for lesson observations were developed. In many schools this was taking place on a quarterly basis.
- Classroom support visits were conducted to monitor the implementation of the reading-centred method, curriculum differentiation and innovative teaching strategies.
- SMTs provided constructive feedback that contributed to teachers’ professional development and enhanced teaching and learning.

Policies and protocols

- Learners' Code of Conduct had been mediated with parents.
- Attendance registers were completed and monitored by the SMT on a weekly basis.
- A duty roster for staff was available and aligned to job descriptions as per Personnel Administration Measures (PAM). Fairness was an important consideration, so subject weighting and specialisations were factored in.
- Schools' policies were reviewed and ratified by the SGB, and these were available on file.
- Curriculum monitoring plans were in place.
- SMTs developed a year plan which reflects all key activities in schools. This was collectively implemented by the staff at various levels.
- Communication books were used to facilitate information flow and record meetings.
- Minutes of meetings were kept and referred to as required.
- Although MET's mandate does not include development and support of SGBs, all schools reported that they had a well-functioning SGB.

Quality Management System (QMS)

- Documentation was in place in most schools as per district requirements, with a QMS management plan that guides the process in the school.
- Improvement in the implementation of QMS was evident. Schools were complying with district expectations of mid-year and annual appraisals that allowed for staff development needs to be identified and planned for.

"All managers now know what is expected of them. Now SMT members are exercising their roles and responsibilities very well. Support enhanced school management skills, especially with regard to managing the curriculum – the tools to manage and monitor curriculum."

"Communication lines are now open, decisions are taken after consultation."



Mentoring a principal on Quality Management System (QMS)

6.6. In Essence

The evaluation findings encompass a comprehensive view of the efficacy of support provided to schools through the partnership with Marang Education Trust (MET) across various dimensions, blending qualitative insights with quantitative data. The synthesis reveals both challenges addressed and progress achieved within schools across four districts.

The qualitative data reveals that despite external challenges like poverty and infrastructure deficiencies, the support initiatives facilitated by MET have yielded significant progress. Additionally, efforts to address psycho-social issues highlight the value of collaborative endeavours with relevant stakeholders in creating a more conducive learning environment.

Support interventions that focused on improving communication, relationships, and emotional well-being among staff and learners have fostered a more positive school climate. Increased parental involvement has strengthened the school-community bond, highlighting the importance of holistic support beyond academic realms.

Significant improvements in teaching strategies, accommodating learner diversity, and assessment practices reflect a concerted effort towards enhancing the quality of education. Embracing learner-centred methods, reading-centred approaches, and differentiated instruction have created more engaging classrooms and improved content coverage.

Implementation of leadership roles, curriculum management, and classroom support practices demonstrate strides towards effective school management. Implementation of policies, regular monitoring, and supportive feedback have fostered accountability and professional development among staff, contributing to organisational effectiveness.

Quantitative assessments in Mathematics and Reading to Learn reveal notable improvements in learner performance across different grades and provinces over the 5-year period, underscoring the impact of interventions on academic outcomes.

Certain concepts and skills consistently show higher average scores compared to others across provinces and grades indicating potential strengths and weaknesses in curriculum content and pedagogy. There was some variability in learner performance with improvements in some districts being considerably higher than in other districts. The value of these outliers, both positive and negative, warrant further exploration in order to better understand these outcomes. Thus, while challenges persist, particularly in foundational years in high schools, the overall trajectory suggests positive growth and underscores the importance of sustained support in critical areas of learning.

The integration of qualitative insights with quantitative data underscores the multifaceted nature of school development. The findings reflect a journey of collaborative efforts, resilience, and continuous improvement, reaffirming the value of partnerships like the one with MET in driving positive change within schools as centres of learning, care and support. Moving forward, sustained focus on addressing challenges and leveraging strengths will be pivotal in ensuring sustained progress and equitable educational outcomes for all learners.





7. Challenges and Limitations

Several challenges influenced the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the support programme. These were evident at micro- and macro-levels, in schools and within the broader context within the education system. From staffing issues to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching, learning and mental health, a number of obstacles hindered effective implementation of support to schools over the five-year period. These challenges are outlined below. In addition, an outline of the limitations of the research is presented, shedding light on factors that may have influenced the findings and suggesting areas for further exploration.

7.1. Contextual Challenges



Lockdown during the pandemic resulted in school closures for extended periods in 2020 and 2021. This resulted in serious learning losses which have been documented globally.



Rotational timetables which were introduced in 2021 heralded a return to school but for a reduced number of days. This continued the downward spiral in terms of quality learning and teaching and content coverage.



The DBE instituted a policy of blanket progression of all learners into the next grade without any means of being able to assess knowledge and skills, so a number of learners entered a new grade without prerequisite skills and knowledge.



Anxiety, depression and poor mental health was experienced by many staff members as a consequence of uncertainty, illness and bereavement during Covid-19.



Teacher supply in rural schools continues to be a challenge. Many teachers remain committed to “giving back” in this context, however a number of factors seem to mitigate against this. The withdrawal of the rural allowance to teachers implies that there is no longer a financial incentive. In addition, the lack of amenities, resources, poor living conditions and professional isolation unfortunately do not make for attractive job prospects.



School closures during the pandemic resulted in serious learning losses



Union (at school level) resistance towards an external stakeholder providing support to schools continued to be a challenge. This was a particular concern because MET support includes working with teachers in the classroom, which some union representatives regard as sacrosanct territory. Sadly, there were instances where, even when teachers requested classroom-based support, site stewards would block this, leaving many teachers and classrooms 'untouched' in some districts.



Weather conditions often affected access to schools, which impacted on support provision by MET, contact time with learners, content coverage and consequently learner performance.



Community protests, similarly, impacted on contact time, content coverage and the quality of teaching and learning.



Macro issues, including poverty, community unrest, infrastructure, electricity, water and sanitation, continue to impact on the quality of teaching and learning and require government intervention.



Parental involvement and learner discipline rely on a mindset change which is beyond the school's locus of control.



Overcrowded classrooms remain a challenge, with minimal efforts at district and provincial level to address infrastructure. This has serious implications for the implementation of innovative teaching and learning strategies, especially as regards addressing barriers to learning and accommodating diverse learning abilities.

7.2. Challenges at the Level of the School



Not all teachers volunteered to be supported in the classroom, since support often included an aspect of observation.



Staff turnover resulted in teachers who had been “upskilled” leaving the school with knowledge and skills. While other schools gained, this implied induction and “on-boarding” of new appointees on a regular basis.



Grades 8 and 9 remain a neglected space in high schools where the focus is essentially on Grade 12. This influences resource allocation, contact time and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that consequently impacts on learner performance in all grades leading up to grade 12.



Teachers in the Intermediate phase in primary schools, particularly in Grade 4, tend to assume that learners are able to read for meaning and do not reinforce this in their pedagogy. When learners struggle there is a tendency to blame Foundation Phase teachers for not doing enough without acknowledging the move to English in Grade 4 for which Grade 3 teachers cannot be held responsible.



Not all schools receive quality support from the education district or have trusting relationships that can drive school improvement. This limits the ability of the school to access quality support from the districts which are expected to play this role.



The principal, SMT and teachers now hold primary responsibility to ensure sustainability of practices once MET is no longer a formal partner. Without a firm commitment and effective leadership and management throughout the school and from district officials, it is likely that learnings will not be sustained.



7.3. Limitations of the Research

It is important to critically reflect on the constraints that were encountered during the implementation of the programme and the evaluation study. These included data collection disruptions, participant selection and engagement, and the challenge of accurately tracking shifts over time. These limitations prompt reflection on the scope and potential avenues for future research.

Covid-19 impacted on access to schools and consequently interrupted both the learning process and the data generation process in 2020 and 2021.

The M&E framework had to be revised because of Covid-19 and resulted in the challenge of accurately tracking shifts over the 5-year period.

All members of school staff did not participate in all data collection processes.

Focus groups were conducted with a sample of teachers and not the whole staff.

Findings from self-reporting by participants did not always concur with the data obtained from observations and document analysis conducted by facilitators. This raises questions that deserve further exploration.

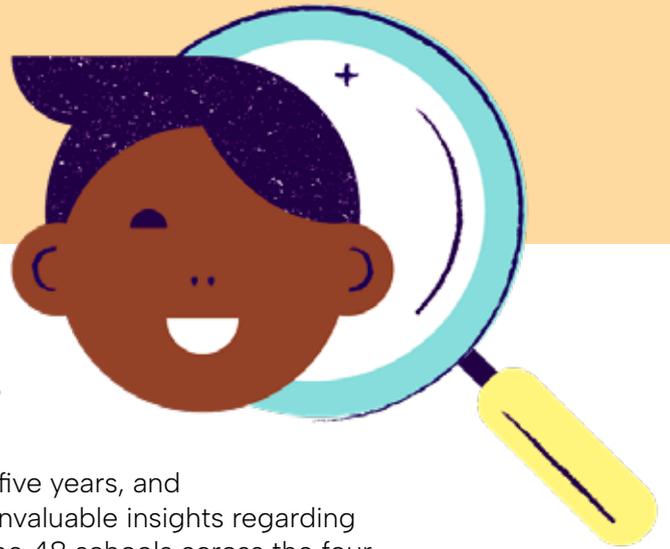
Limitations of the Research

School-based Assessment (SBA) tasks were not a reliable measure of learners' performance. These could therefore not be employed to effectively measure progress from one year to the next, nor used as a triangulation measure.

Only a selection of learners was involved in the learner assessment processes. In this regard, six learners were selected in each grade for each assessment.

Grade 3 Mathematics question papers were set in mother-tongue and FP teachers conceded that they often use English in the teaching of numeracy. This influences learners' responses to some questions.

MET does not bar schools from accessing support from other NPOs or social change entities. The evaluation did not explore the extent to which other support interventions may have influenced overall findings.



8. Recommendations

The data that has been generated over the last five years, and particularly over the last few months, provides invaluable insights regarding various aspects of the school development in the 48 schools across the four districts that were involved in the partnership from 2019 to 2023. It is clear that huge strides have been made in terms of the leadership and management of the schools and shifts have been noted in attitudes towards and practices of teaching, learning and assessment. Relationships between teachers and learners and amongst members of staff have improved as well. Together these developments have all contributed to the positive findings evidenced in the Mathematics and Reading to Learn assessments.

Within this framework of acknowledging the progress made by schools, while being mindful of areas of improvement needed, the following recommendations are offered. These suggestions address schools, researchers and development practitioners.

8.1. Recommendations for Partner Schools and Districts

All schools received a school evaluation report that captured qualitative and quantitative findings, as well as recommendations to ensure that gains are not lost and the investment in development is ongoing. These reports were discussed with school management teams and shared with the whole staff at each school. Furthermore, the findings at district level have been captured in District Trends Evaluation Reports, which have been shared with District Directors, District Management Teams and district officials who participated and engaged in various support interventions from 2019 to 2023.

It is crucial that district officials, principals and SMT members in the schools concerned continue to lead and manage the schools as they have now become accustomed to in partnership with MET facilitators. Similarly, it is important that teachers continue to own the influential position they hold in young people's lives. To this end, the following are highlighted as general priorities:

Sustaining and enhancing school effectiveness

The School as an organisation

- Schools and districts need to provide ongoing, integrated **personal and professional development** to all staff in all schools.
- Schools must establish **open communication** and ensure information flow through productive and critically reflective meeting spaces.
- School Management Teams, under the leadership of the principal should develop, implement and monitor **plans and policies** at school level.
- SMTs and teachers must take responsibility for **procurement of quality LTSMs**.
- SMTs should facilitate **quarterly reflection meetings** using the 'Stop, Start and Continue' activity to ensure that plans are reviewed regularly. This may include the whole staff where possible.
- Phase and Subject meetings within and between schools should be run as **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**.
- **Lead Teachers** who are preparing lessons well and achieving success in implementing learner-centred, reading-centred, and differentiated methods should be encouraged to share their skills and knowledge with colleagues in staff development sessions.
- Primary schools need to focus on the **transition between Grade 3 and Grade 4** and consider how best to support teachers and learners in the space.
- High schools need to **focus on Grade 8 and Grade 9** since this is where the foundation is laid for the FET phase.
- Primary and high schools must begin to engage more meaningfully to address the emerging challenges in the **transition from Grade 7 to Grade 8**.

The Classroom

- All stakeholders in the schools must ensure **quality teaching, learning and assessment** that is creative and addresses diversity.
- SMTs and teachers must prioritise identification and support of learners who experience **barriers to learning** with district officials actively engaging as well.
- Teachers and departmental heads must ensure that **reading** is incorporated into every lesson in every subject in every school, every day.
- SMTs and Subject Advisors must encourage a **learner-centred approach**. Teachers need to be active 100% of the time when preparing lessons, and to reduce their 'lead' to 25% of the time during lessons. Learners should be actively involved in their own learning (75% engagement) and working with peers in the learning process.
- **Mathematics** teachers need to reflect on the underlying factors resulting in challenges experienced by learners in topics such as Measurement and Data Handling and to institute appropriate shifts in teaching practices.
- SMTs and teachers must ensure the effective and creative **use of LTSMs** to ensure quality teaching and learning.
- Departmental Heads should develop and support teachers to employ **learner-centred, reading-centred and curriculum differentiation strategies** in the classroom.
- Departmental heads, deputy principals and principals must provide **classroom-based support** as a fundamental staff development activity. SMTs are encouraged to continue with the good practices embraced in this programme.

8.2. Recommendations for School Development Initiatives

For School Development Initiatives

Focus development and support interventions to **target Grade 4 teachers** in primary schools.

Prioritise **support to Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners and teachers** in an effort to work from the roots and strengthen the foundation in high schools rather than repairing when learners possibly reach grade 12.

Adopt a **whole school approach to school development interventions** to address needs systemically.

Actively **embrace inclusive education** in all endeavours to address barriers to learning and provide quality education for all, especially given the lack of specialised support services in rural contexts.

Foreground **Social Emotional Learning** so that matters related to psycho-social support and the well-being of teachers and learners are addressed by all who work with and within schools.

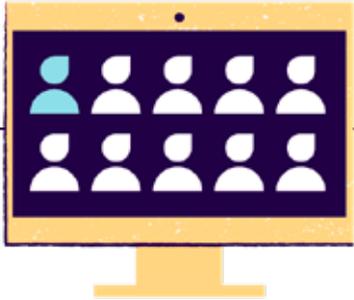
Explore **multi-level systems interventions** by designing and implementing development initiatives that move beyond the school and reach other layers of the education ecosystem, particularly education districts.

Arguably, school level interventions can only be sustained if **education districts are capacitated** to provide quality support that is characterised by compassion, commitment and accountability, rather than compliance.

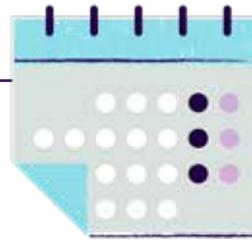
Prioritise **support to education districts** that supports district officials to fulfil their roles in a structure that was designed to be a 'developmental engine' and not an 'information bearer'.



8.3. Recommendations for Further Research



Increase the number of learners who participate in the baseline and impact assessments. A larger sample will provide districts and schools with more reliable data to reflect on to implement support for teachers and learners alike.



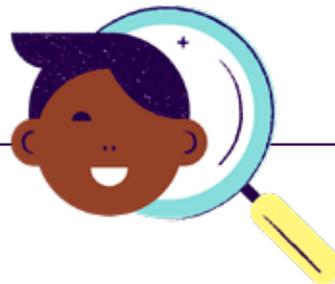
Conduct annual assessments as opposed to only at the beginning and end of each 4-year cycle.

For Further Research

Consider use of accessible technology (e.g., smart phones, tablets) and research technology to simplify yet deepen the M & E process.



Follow up with a selection of participants at school and district level and investigate the differences that emerged between schools and districts to better understand the factors that contributed to the varied outcomes and learn from these.



9. Conclusion

Marang Education Trust is deeply appreciative of the opportunity to have walked alongside the schools and districts in this developmental journey. We are particularly grateful to the principals, SMT members and teachers who invited us into their offices and classrooms, who engaged in courageous conversations and changed practices to impact positively on the learners and the school as a whole.



When the Japanese mend broken objects, they aggrandize the damage by filling the cracks with gold. They believe that when something's suffered damage and has a history it becomes more beautiful.

– Barbara Bloom

The five-year partnership has been fraught with challenges, COVID-19 being one of them. Together we navigated these difficulties, and the schools were resilient in their responses. We are hopeful that all participants will benefit from the learnings emerging from our working together. We trust that the positive culture and practices that have developed over the last 5 years will be sustained long after the departure of the Marang Education Trust facilitators.

The development journey now continues, and we trust that teachers and school leaders will continue to invest in strengthening the aspects that contribute to excellence in a school. We are optimistic that district officials will pick up the baton in the schools we have left and continue to provide quality support to all schools that are under their wing.

Schools are the spaces that can make a difference, teachers can make a difference – where cracks emerge, we have a responsibility to fill them with gold.

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A partnership with
Marang Education Trust
is a partnership towards
**quality, sustainable
development, support
and learning.**

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