

Implementation Evaluation of the National Curriculum
Statement Grade R to 12 Focusing on the Curriculum
and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)



planning, monitoring
& evaluation

Department:
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Policy Summary

In July 2009, the Minister of Basic Education appointed a Task Team to investigate the challenges experienced in implementation of the school curriculum. Following the Task Team's wide-ranging recommendations, a re-packaged curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (NCS), was launched in schools, commencing in 2012, together with the establishment or improvement of a number of key support systems, including systemic testing, the provision of workbooks, and educator development. In 2016, the DPME commissioned an implementation evaluation of the NCS. The evaluation took the form of case studies in 12 primary and 12 high Quintile 1-3 schools in four provinces, supplemented by engagements with curriculum officials at national, provincial, and district levels.

There is unanimity among both officials and researchers that in its design, the NCS is superior to any of its predecessors and offers clear guidance to teachers.

There is also general agreement that implementation is inefficient. A major problem, long known in the media and research literature alike, is the inability of leaders to ensure that teachers follow the timetable. On average, across the 24 schools, 18% of teachers were not in class during one or both of the two observation periods on each day of the field visit. In addition, there are frequent disruptions to the timetable for a variety of reasons: training, union meetings, memorial services, and choir competitions. Under these circumstances, no curriculum is implementable. Interviews conducted at system level indicate that district, provincial, and national officials are aware of and complain about this problem frequently. Yet most do not accept responsibility for school functionality, while those who do feel powerless to intervene.

A second major problem hampering curriculum delivery is poor teacher knowledge. On tests consisting of typical tasks encountered in the curriculum, only five of the 22 Grade 2 teachers tested achieved the modest benchmark of 60% in English First Additional Language

(EFAL), and three achieved it in Mathematics. The picture for Grade 10 teachers is similar: on the same test administered to Grade 2 EFAL teachers, six of the 12 English teachers achieved 70%; on a Grade 10 level Mathematics test, four of the 12 Mathematics teachers scored 70%, and three of the 12 Mathematical Literacy teachers 60%. These results suggest that the majority of these teachers do not have the subject content required to teach effectively. Similarly, judging from the views of their peers, subordinates, and superiors, many instructional leaders at school and district level are not competent to fulfil the demands of their positions. The latter problem arises partly from the weak education of these officials and partly from the promotion of inappropriate candidates. The view that nepotism and corruption is rife in awarding promotion posts is widespread among system-level interviewees. The evaluation concludes that significant blockages occur at key points in the implementation of the curriculum and proposes five main recommendations to address these blockages:

R1: Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Higher Education and Training, DHET, (South African Council for Educators) SACE, and universities should devise curriculum and practice standards to guide the education and work of teachers.

R2: DBE must review and apply merit-based appointment and promotion policies and processes for educators.

R3: DBE must work with universities, NGOs, and corporate partners to conduct research on effective in-service education and training for educators.

R4: DBE, in collaboration with Provincial Departments of Education, must develop an effective programme to achieve school functionality.

R5: DBE and Provincial Departments of Education should develop an effective programme to support school leaders and teachers in curriculum implementation.

The five recommendations cannot be seen in a purely technical sense. Their implementation must be located within and energised by a vision of school excellence, a culture of service, and a strong sense of individual and institutional agency propelled from the highest political levels. There is likely to be resistance to certain elements of the programme, and it will require clear and consistent political leadership over at least a decade, coupled with strong administrative protocols and practices, to follow the interventions through to achieving the capable state envisaged by the National Development Plan.



Executive Summary

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

In July 2009, the Minister of Basic Education appointed a Task Team to investigate the nature of the challenges experienced in the implementation of the school curriculum and to formulate a set of recommendations designed to improve implementation. The Task Team presented a set of recommendations for improving the design and implementation of the school curriculum. One of the outcomes was a re-packaged curriculum policy, the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (NCS).

1.2 Background to the intervention

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) took the recommendations of the Ministerial Task Team as a mandate for revision not only of the school curriculum, but also of the many support systems, including systemic testing, the provision of workbooks and teacher development. The first step in fulfilling this mandate was to develop a plan, the *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*.

New policies were issued at the same time as the *Action Plan*, most important of which is the NCS. The NCS was phased in as follows: Foundation Phase (FP) and Grade 10 in 2012, Intermediate Phase (IP) and Grade 11 in 2013, and Senior Phase (SP) and Grade 12 in 2014.

The recommendations of the Ministerial Task Team encompass much more than a redesign of the documents specifying what learners are expected to value, know, and be able to do. They encompass the eight key aspects of schooling around which the literature review for the evaluation was structured. The evaluation investigated all these elements in order to understand the role of each in facilitating or hampering delivery.

1.3 Background to the evaluation

Following an open tender process, the DPME appointed JET Education Services to undertake an implementation evaluation of the NCS. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) was signed on 4 March 2016 and the commissioned evaluation was titled *Implementation Evaluation of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R to 12 Focusing on the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)*.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) governing the evaluation specified that the method followed should focus on 24 case studies, consisting of 12 primary schools and 12 secondary schools sampled from all Quintile 1-3 schools (the poorest) in four provinces: Eastern Cape (EC), Gauteng (GP), Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) and Mpumalanga (MP). The case studies, based on a matched-pairs design, with an outlier, were supplemented by engaging with curriculum officials at national, provincial, and district levels.

3. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE/ DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Literature Review was structured according to seven themes:

3.1 Learner performance. The evidence is unequivocal that the South African school system is gaining ground in terms of improved scores and a narrowing equity gap. Yet, there is universal dissatisfaction with performance, particularly in schools serving the poor.

3.2 Curriculum design. An emerging consensus around curriculum design is that the design should be considered for minor revision, but that the overwhelming problem lies in implementation.

3.3 Learning and Teaching Support Materials. The research evidence indicates that the DBE workbook programme has proved successful in the production and delivery of books to schools and classrooms.

3.4 Summative and formative assessment. International research evidence indicates a major challenge to policy makers in finding a balance between the need for data on systemic progress and school accountability, with the need to grow the capacities of educators to use formative assessment to improve pedagogic quality.

3.5 Initial teacher education. Younger teachers are more knowledgeable than their older peers, but much more needs to be done in equipping new teachers for the classroom.

3.6 Continuous professional development. There is a growing concern that the considerable resources spent on continuous professional development (CPD) are not succeeding in raising educator capacity.

3.7 Instructional leadership. All signs point to weak leadership at school and district levels.

3.8 Pedagogy is a topic about which there is a great deal of research, but few conclusive insights, except that a majority of South African teachers exhibit a poor grasp of the subjects for which they are responsible.

4. KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Curriculum design. Respondents at national, provincial, and district levels, almost without exception, agreed that CAPS is superior to any of its predecessors in terms of the guidance offered to teachers. At the same time, there was wide agreement that implementation is inefficient. Suggestions were made for reviewing CAPS with a view to refining the existing documents with respect to the number of assessment tasks, the breadth of content in some subjects, and providing more guidance for teachers in the area of assessment.

4.2 Time-management. The evaluation found that the majority of primary schools visited plan their timetables according to CAPS requirements, but most high schools do not, a number of them significantly so. Having a timetable which meets CAPS specifications is one thing, but adhering to the timetable is quite a different matter. At school level, fieldworkers observed how many classes were without teachers during the first period on the second day of the field visit and the last period on the first day. Only six of the 24 schools had, at most, one teacher not in class during one or both observation periods; on average, 18% of teachers were not in class during each of these times. In addition, in all the schools visited, frequent disruptions to the timetable occur for a variety of reasons: training, union meetings, memorial services, choir competitions, and the like. Under these circumstances, no curriculum is implementable.

Interviews conducted at system level indicate that district, provincial, and national officials are aware of this problem and complain about it frequently. Yet many officials do not accept responsibility for school functionality, although, in terms of their job specifications, they have not only the authority, but indeed the obligation, to intervene in these institutions.

4.3 Teacher knowledge. Three tests were constructed to measure the content knowledge of Grade 2 teachers in Mathematics and English and Grade 10 teachers in Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy and English. The tests consisted of typical problems encountered in the Intermediate or Senior Phase curricula, respectively. Of the 22 Grade 2 teachers tested in Mathematics and

English, only five achieved the modest benchmark of 60% in EFAL, and three achieved it in Mathematics. The picture for Grade 10 teachers is very similar: six of the 12 English teachers reached 70% on the same EFAL test administered to Grade 2 teachers; four of the 12 Mathematics teachers scored 70% on the Grade 10 Mathematics test; and three of 12 Mathematical Literacy teachers reached 60% on the same Mathematics test. These results suggest that between two-thirds and three-quarters of these Grade 2 teachers do not possess the subject knowledge required to teach English or Mathematics, while half the Grade 10 English teachers are not competent to teach English and two-thirds to three-quarters of Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy teachers have fundamental gaps in their knowledge repertoires. The small and unrepresentative nature of the sample precludes the findings from being at all representative of the South African teacher population. However, the test scores of teachers in the present study confirm the findings of other research studies of teacher content knowledge which have emerged in recent years.

4.4 Formative assessment. Section 4 of the CAPS documents for each subject in the respective phases is concerned with assessment, where formative assessment is seen as a key lever in the implementation of CAPS. The evidence is strong that the majority of school-level heads of department (HODs) are not exercising adequate instructional leadership regarding assessment in terms of checking teachers' assessment records, moderating test and exam papers, analysing test scores, and discussing the implications for pedagogy. Clearly, there is little coherence within most schools concerning the use of assessment to improve teaching and learning: while schools go through the motions of setting, administering, and marking tests and exams, their most important use is for promotion purposes, and their formative potential goes largely unrealised.

4.5 Support by subject advisors and school heads of department. There is wide agreement among curriculum officials at all three systemic levels that support for teachers is not optimally provided by districts and schools. Two issues were identified by respondents as problematic. First, there is a mismatch

between expectations of how subject advisors and HODs should support teachers and the resources available for them to meet these expectations. It is generally expected that subject advisors should visit schools and support teachers directly in their classrooms, but this is quite unrealistic, given the large numbers of schools allocated to each subject advisor. Similarly, HODs generally have full teaching loads, with little time available for working with teachers. It can be argued that greatly increasing the number of subject advisors and HODs is not feasible, nor even desirable. The alternative is to change the way these key instructional leaders work, so as to have maximum impact on the quality of classroom engagements.



If we accept that in-school instructional leadership is an important element in any attempt to improve teacher competence and effectiveness on a system-wide basis, then HODs would be central to such an effort. It follows that subject advisors should focus their efforts on working with HODs to strengthen their capacity and build instructional leadership systems.

4.6 Promotion practices. Partly responsible for the weak instructional leadership exerted by HODs and subject advisors is the appointment of inappropriate candidates to these and other promotion posts. The view that nepotism, bribery, and the buying and selling of posts are rife in the awarding of promotion posts is widespread among system-level interviewees. These

perceptions are associated with a widespread culture characterised by lack of respect of educators for their leaders and a feeling of helplessness. Curriculum delivery is a process which is highly dependent on the expertise and motivation of educators, whether situated at classroom, school, district, provincial, or national level. A system which does not carefully select and continuously educate this cadre of instructional leaders cannot optimise learning; a system which allows these processes to be abused on a wide scale is turning a blind eye to the destruction of its own best intentions.

4.7 Presence and use of Learning and Teaching Support Materials.

Teachers and their HODs reported a dearth of learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) at schools throughout the sample. These reported shortages are puzzling in the light of large budget allocations for LTSM in the majority of provinces. Whatever the reasons for the reported shortage of books, the classroom observations show that in nearly two-fifths of the 96 classes observed, no LTSM of any kind were used. Something of an exception is provided by the DBE workbooks. All educators interviewed in all primary schools agreed that the books were available, and that generally there are sufficient numbers for each child to own one. Furthermore, they were the most widely used books in the 61 primary classrooms observed, where DBE workbooks were used in half the lessons.

4.8 Learner writing. At both primary and high school level, the high variation in quantity of writing produced by schools in the same district shows weak instructional leadership with respect to writing emanating from the district. Interestingly, in most schools, a relatively high correlation between the quantities of writing produced by learners of different teachers indicates a degree of leadership in this regard. The relative neglect of certain types of writing on important topics may also be related to teacher knowledge weaknesses. In this regard, the paucity in Mathematics exercise books of writing in Euclidean Geometry is noticeable, while the low quantity of extended writing in EFAL probably reflects weaknesses on the part of teachers.

4.9 Pedagogy. On the question of pedagogy, it is evident that teachers manage time and learner behaviour relatively efficiently in their classes. However, learners are not set sufficient quantities of individual tasks to engage them fully, while teacher explanations of concepts and procedures generally lack clarity and detail. Furthermore, while teachers ask a large number of questions and spread them around the class, they do not make the most of opportunities afforded by learners' questions and responses to correct misconceptions and build on existing knowledge: such techniques lie at the heart of formative assessment.

4.10 Continuing professional development.

Despite the enthusiasm with which senior managers described various intervention programmes in Literacy and Mathematics, there was unanimity at national level that current approaches to educator development (CPD) are not working; one senior manager added that poor quality initial teacher education (ITE) was part of the problem. Similarly, for six of the 16 provincial level respondents, the CPD offered by provinces and districts is working only to a limited extent. The view that workshop training is ineffective is widespread among district level subject advisors and was expressed at least once in each of the four districts visited.

No in-school CPD was provided at all at half (12/24) of the sample schools, while in the remainder, the activities were generally confined to attending staff meetings, joint planning sessions, or end-of-year moderation. While these activities provide fertile opportunities for CPD, this potential is weakly exploited, at best.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The extent to which the goals of CAPS have or have not been achieved is examined through the lens of six evaluation criteria: effectiveness, appropriateness, equity, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

5.1 Effectiveness The criterion of effectiveness assesses the extent to which an intervention achieves its intended objectives and outcomes and identifies key factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of these. The short answer to the question "Is CAPS being effective?" is that it is too soon to say. It is likely that the interventions which have been rolled out since 2011 – including the workbooks, promulgation of CAPS, and an increased focus on continuous professional development – are reinforcing the performance improvements which began showing in 2011. However, there is also widespread agreement that the system continues to underperform.

5.2 Appropriateness. The relevance of an intervention is a measure of the extent to which it is suited to the priorities of the target group. We prefer the term appropriateness, which is used in conjunction with relevance, but also addresses the tailoring of interventions to local needs, priorities and skills. Under present circumstances, it seems that CAPS is unlikely to achieve its ambitious goals in the near future. But in this respect, CAPS is no different from any other curriculum which is likely to suffer the same fate under current conditions of poor time management and weak educator knowledge.





5.3 Equity. Equity refers to fairness and justice. As an evaluation criterion, it is used to consider the extent to which the implementation of CAPS is fair and does not exacerbate existing inequalities. The South African school system is manifestly inequitable, with children from more affluent homes out-performing their rural and township counterparts by at least two years of schooling by the end of Grade 5. The conclusion of the implementation evaluation is that this is not the fault of the curriculum, but of systemic non-curriculum causes and, in particular, weak educator knowledge capacity, very weak time-management practices, and a less than excellent ITE system. At the same time, scores on the TIMSS tests indicate that there has been a small improvement in the equity gap since 2011.

5.4 Efficiency. Efficiency is a measure of the extent to which the ratio of inputs — such as funding and human resources — required to achieve the desired outputs and outcomes are economical and productive. The evaluation found the implementation of CAPS in the majority of schools in the sample is grossly inefficient, with part-days and whole days wasted on non-timetable activities. HODs claim to undertake many monitoring activities, but much of this activity is ‘going through the motions’, completing monitoring forms and other forms of ‘evidence’, while having little impact on teaching and learning. Similarly, subject advisors can spend a whole day travelling, paying superficial visits to at most two or three of the scores of schools in their charge.

5.5 Likely impact. Impact refers to the long-term effects produced by the intervention, whether directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. No curriculum is likely to have a significant impact on the inequity gap exhibited by the South African school system in the short term, and the gap is only likely to be narrowed significantly under sustained implementation.

5.6 Sustainability. Sustainability is concerned with the continuation of benefits from the intervention after major development assistance has ceased. The evaluation found that the curriculum has experienced a period of consolidation since 2009. However, in the area of human resource management, some provinces and even the national department have undergone frequent changes of leadership and extended periods of senior officials in acting positions, a situation not conducive to sustainable systems change, according to the criteria recommended by the NDP.

Blockages to curriculum implementation

The conclusions of the evaluation are that significant blockages to the implementation of the NCS occur at five key points in the curriculum cycle: the initial education of teachers (ITE), the appointment of inappropriate candidates to promotion posts, ineffective in-service training (CPD), the poor use of time in schools, and ineffective instructional leadership practices exercised by subject advisors and school leaders.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Five recommendations are aimed at unblocking the inhibitions to curriculum implementation identified by the evaluation.

R1: DBE, Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), South African Council for Educators (SACE), and universities should devise curriculum and practice standards to guide the education and work of teachers.

R2: DBE must review and apply merit-based appointment and promotion policies and processes for educators.

R3: DBE must work with universities, NGOs, and corporate partners to conduct research on effective in-service education and training for educators.



R4: DBE, in collaboration with Provincial Departments of Education, must develop an effective programme to achieve school functionality.

R5: DBE and Provincial Departments of Education should develop an effective programme to support school leaders and teachers in curriculum implementation.

The recommendations cannot be seen in a purely technical sense. Their implementation must be located within and energised by a vision of school excellence, a culture of service, and a strong sense of individual and institutional agency propelled from the highest political levels. There is likely to be resistance, both political and administrative, to certain elements of the programme, and it will require clear and consistent political leadership over at least a decade, coupled with strong administrative protocols and practices, to follow the interventions through to achieving the capable state envisaged by the NDP (NPC, 2012).

Each recommendation is accompanied by a number of sub-recommendations aimed at operationalising the recommendation.



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