IRR

South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

ACHIEVEMENT AND ENTERPRISE IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

JOHN KANE-BERMAN

South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

May 2018

Published by the South African Institute of Race Relations

2 Clamart Road, Richmond,
Johannesburg, 2092 South Africa

PO Box 291722, Melville, 2109 South Africa

Telephone: 011 482-7221

Fax: 011 482-7690

Email: sairr@sairr.org.za

www.sairr.org.za

© South African Institute of Race Relations

Members of the media are free to reprint or report information, either in whole or in part, contained in this publication on the strict understanding that the South African Institute of Race Relations is acknowledged.

Otherwise no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

While the Institute makes all reasonable efforts to publish accurate information and bona fide expressions of opinion, it does not give any warranties as to the accuracy and completeness of the information provided. The use of such information by any party shall be entirely at such party's own risk and the Institute accepts no liability arising out of such use.

Notes on terminology

Boys and girls studying in primary and secondary schools are sometimes referred to as "pupils", sometimes as "students", and sometimes as "learners" This paper uses the term "pupils". The term "secondary school" is normally used even though some schools call themselves "high schools". The term "public" school is used to describe schools that are sometimes described as "state" or "government" schools. The term "independent" school is used to denote schools that are sometimes known as "private" schools (or in some countries as "public" schools). The person in charge of a schools is sometimes referred to as the "principal", but sometimes as the "headmaster" or "headmistress".

The terms "African," "coloured", "Indian/Asian", and "white" are used where it is necessary or useful to differentiate in this way. Where it is unnecessary or impossible to differentiate between African, coloured, and Indian/Asian, the term "black" is used to avoid the term "non-white", which is used in some countries and by some newspapers but has generally fallen into disuse in South Africa as it is regarded as offensive.

Editor: John Kane-Berman

Cover design and Typesetting
by InkDesign

ACHIEVEMENT AND ENTERPRISE IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Synopsis 2

Part 1: South Africa 3

Introduction 3

The "distinguished dozen" 5

- The schools 5
- Physical features 5
- Fees 6
- Teachers 7
- Extra tuition 7
- Sadtu 8
- Pass rates 8
- Pupils 8
- Discipline 9
- Values 10
- Principals 10
- SGBs 10

Evaluation 11

Part 2: Africa 12

Background 12

Proposals 13

Reaction to the proposals 15

Details of the complaints 15

- Fees 15
- Public investment 15
- International law 16
- Equality of opportunities and non-discrimination 16
- Quality of education and regulation 16
- Education as a public good 16
- "Moving forward" 16
- Conclusion 17

Comment on these complaints 17

Liberia 19

Part 3: Conclusion 20

Appendix: The South African schools 21

Sources 35

Synopsis

On average, pupils in independent schools in South Africa achieve much better National Senior Certificate results (sometimes loosely known as "matriculation" results) than do their counterparts in public schools. This applies to the overall pass rate, as well as to the higher "bachelor" pass rate required for admission to university to study for a degree. Dissatisfaction with lower pass rates in public schools has generated demand for more independent schools, including low-fee independent schools.

Inevitably, however, the average figures for pass rates conceal the better performance of many public schools. These include not only suburban public schools that were previously open only to whites, but also public schools in townships, most of which are not permitted to charge fees on the grounds that the surrounding communities are too poor. One major consequence of this is that these no-fee schools are unable to employ additional teachers, whereas fee-charging suburban schools have the wherewithal to do so. Despite this disadvantage, some of the no-fee schools achieve bachelor pass rates significantly above the national average for public schools.

Part One of this paper is largely based on interviews with principals of both township and suburban schools. Eight of the interviews were with public schools, and four with independent schools, including a "special needs" school. All of the interviewees were asked to describe the "secrets of their success". While Part One of the paper extracts various themes from these interviews, the Appendix consists of more detailed notes based on the interviews at each school. Given their successes, the schools are described as the "distinguished dozen".

Part Two of the paper notes that independent schooling is growing not only in South Africa, but also in many other parts of the world, including Africa. Indeed, a report produced by two UN and two African agencies on the continent's development goals recommended greater private sector involvement in education. This *MDG 2014 Report* noted that foreign aid for Africa was likely to continue declining, and that if the continent was to meet its development goals, private investment would be needed.

These proposals have, however, been strongly attacked by a group of 30 or more lobby groups, including some in South Africa. Part Two of the paper highlights the major arguments in the *MDG 2014 Report*. It also itemises the key complaints by these lobby groups against that report. This part of the paper then evaluates these complaints. It also discusses the specific case of Liberia, recently in the news for its efforts to subcontract the running of some of its schools to private companies.

Part Three of the paper draws these various threads together. The Appendix then follows with the notes based on interviews with the "distinguished dozen" principals.

Part 1

SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

When National Senior Certificate (NSC) results are published at the end of each year after pupils have completed grade 12 of their schooling, South African newspapers are full of articles about both success and failure in the country's schooling system. Pupils who obtain seven or more distinctions get their photographs in the newspapers. Schools with good results take advertisements to proclaim them. But even improvements in the overall pass rate cannot disguise the fact that the great majority of South Africa's children are short-changed by the country's schooling system. Critics also point out that high pass rates are misleading, as candidates can obtain an NSC with as little as 30% in three subjects, and 40% in three others, one of which must be their home language.

The NSC pass rate in public (previously known as "government") schools is contrasted with that of independent (previously known as "private") schools. Thus in 2016, public schools recorded an overall NSC pass rate of 73%, while independent schools writing the NSC exam weighed in at 99%. There was also a wide discrepancy in "bachelor" passes – those good enough for university entrance. Such passes require an NSC with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning and teaching, as well as 50% in four or more subjects. In that same year, the bachelor rate in public schools was 27%, while that in independent schools was 88% – an enormous discrepancy. (These, and all other comparisons in this paper, exclude the small number of independent schools that sit the separate exams set by the Independent Examinations Board.)

The overall NSC results have a racial dimension as well. White pupils scored a 99% pass rate in 2016, Indians/Asians 93%, coloured pupils 85%, and Africans 69%. The great majority of white pupils are likely to be in independent or fee-charging public schools, nearly all Africans in no-fee schools, which are not permitted to charge fees.

The performance of pupils in public schools is poor by world standards, even though South Africa spends a relatively high proportion of GDP and of taxation on education.

No wonder then that the number of pupils in independent schools has risen by 130% in the past 16 years, to 590 000. This means it has more than doubled. By contrast, the number of pupils in public schools has risen by only 6%, to 12.34 million. The number of independent schools has grown from 971 in 2000 to 1 855 in 2016. Part of the reason for the growth in independent schooling has been the exodus of white pupils from public schools as the latter have admitted more and more black children. At the same time, however, more and more black children are themselves attending independent schools. The growth of a black middle class has made this possible, but so has the growth in the number of low-fee independent schools.

The official figure of 1 855 for independent schools is probably too low. There may well be double that number. Some of these are long-established church and other private schools, but their number includes more and more low-fee schools, most of them non-profit but some of them run as businesses. Among the latter category are both high-fee and no-fee schools run by listed companies, notably Advtech and Curro, who run 78 and 128 schools respectively. According to a well-known education expert, Jane Hofmeyr, "there are many other for-profit school chains at all fee levels". As we shall see in Part Two of this report, similar trends are to be found in many other countries in Africa and elsewhere.

Another important phenomenon in South Africa is the changing racial complexion of public schools previously built to serve only the white population and to be found in suburbs previously reserved for whites under the Group Areas Act. There were originally around 3 000 of these former “model C schools”. Some of them are now racially mixed, but some have become almost exclusively black.

Some of the suburbs where these schools are located started to become racially mixed even before the Act was repealed in 1991, but repeal has accelerated the desegregation process, as has the growth of the black middle class. Some suburbs, such as Greenside in Johannesburg, which previously had large Jewish populations, now have a great many Hindu and Muslim families living in them.

The change goes further. One can drive through previously exclusively white suburbs and see in the midst of them schools, whether public or independent, whose pupils are almost exclusively black. Many of the Muslim or Hindu children in these areas live there, but it appears that large numbers of the African children attending these schools commute from Soweto or other black townships. Some of them commute with parents who are domestic workers.

Black children – some of them dwarfed by the heavy schoolbags on their shoulders – are a common sight in the early mornings walking to schools that were previously open only to whites in suburbs that were previously reserved for whites. Some of these children may live nearby, but most are likely to be walking from bus stops or where they were dropped off by taxis. According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 1.3 million children travel more than an hour from home to school every day.

Such children generally belong to “wealthier” families, able to afford fees for suburban schools as well as the cost of commuting. Most suburban schools are located in relatively well-off areas and are therefore permitted to charge fees – although parents can and do apply for partial or complete exemption. By contrast, the great majority of township schools are prohibited from charging fees.

Unfortunately, the overall public school results, being averages, do not reflect the performance of successful public schools. Principals of some of these schools fiercely contest any notion that the education they offer is inferior to that of independent schools. They argue indeed that they provide as good an education as some of the best independent schools at a fraction of the cost.

Of course, independent schools would eventually cease to exist if they produced poor results, because fee-paying parents would withdraw their children. These schools are also able to choose whom to admit (as well as whom to employ as teachers).

So it is not surprising that their overall pass rate is so much higher than that of most public schools, which must admit all applicants who live within a specified radius of the school (currently 5km). The overall NSC pass rate of public schools cited above – 73% – is indeed misleading, for it conceals the above-average performance of many schools. How many is difficult to determine. A study for the Presidency in 2008 noted that one of the major problems in the country’s education system was that primary schools were not able to provide adequate reading, writing, and arithmetic skills to some 80% of the country’s pupils.

However, it also said that 34 black schools were among the top performers in producing higher grade maths passes, while another 573 were "moderately performing". Some of these success stories, such as Mbilwi and Dendron in Limpopo, have become quite well known. The IRR decided to discover some of the others, and to find out from them the secrets of their success. Although well aware of the success of many former model C schools, we also wished to visit successful township schools that were previously run by the Department of Bantu Education and received much lower state subsidies than did white, Indian/Asian, or coloured schools.

The "distinguished dozen"

The schools

We decided to visit a total of 12 schools, both public and independent. Asked for a list of some of its best schools, the Gauteng Department of Education supplied the names of eight. Three of these were no-fee township schools with pass rates of between 97% and 100%. Two of these were visited, the third declining on the grounds that the principal was too busy. The names of five other schools were on the list. These were all suburban schools, of which four were visited. The two secondary suburban schools had pass rates of 99.6% and 100%. The two primary suburban schools obviously did not have NSC pass rates.

The two other no-fee public schools were chosen from a list of 35 schools published by the newspaper *City Press*. The list was headed "some of South Africa's top schools in all nine provinces". One of the two chosen had a pass rate of 97.5%, the other 100%.

The Independent Schools Association of South Africa (Isasa) supplied the names of two schools, both of them situated in suburbs rather than townships. The third independent school, located in a township, was chosen when the IRR researcher saw a sign at the entrance proclaiming "100% pass" in 2016. The fourth, located in a suburb, was chosen because it was one of many in a formerly white suburb that appear to have almost entirely black pupils. It turned out to be a "special needs" school.

One school insisted on anonymity. None of the others did, but it was decided to preserve anonymity for all of them. Although the department had supplied the IRR researcher with letters of introduction to some of the schools, others were happy to make appointments over the telephone without any such introductions. Their principals spoke freely. Invited to talk about their successes, they were keen to do so. There was little difference between principals of better-off schools and those of much poorer ones in their positive attitudes. But the IRR researcher gained the distinct impression that independent schools run by private investors were determined to keep low profiles.

Physical features

Perhaps the most obvious physical features the schools have in common, whether township or suburban, is that they are surrounded by security fences. Access by visitors, and sometimes also access by pupils, is controlled.

The most immediately striking and obvious difference between township and suburban schools is facilities, infrastructure, and appearance. The township schools visited had almost no sports facilities, whereas some of the suburban schools had swimming pools, numerous different kinds of sports fields, stands for spectators, and the like. Playgrounds in township schools seem to double as rudimentary sports fields. All the township schools visited by the IRR are located on sand roads, whereas the suburban schools are on tarred roads.

Years of investment in the infrastructure of suburban schools is apparent. One headmistress of a suburban school said it had “nothing lacking in infrastructure”. Her counterpart in a township school said that the school had a library which was well-stocked, but that it doubled as a staff room. The school had a computer room, but no computers. One of the other township schools said it was struggling to get laboratories, but in the meantime the teachers had to “improvise”.

This may help to explain why so many African parents send their children to established suburban schools. The principal of one such school said that parents were so desperate to get their children into good schools that they would often apply using fake addresses to qualify for the catchment area defined by the 5km radius.

It is immensely gratifying to see that black children have access to what was previously available almost exclusively to whites, but it is sad that some of them have to travel such long distances to gain such access. According to one of the principals interviewed, one group of independent schools has identified numerous vacant schools in Soweto but has been unsuccessful in its efforts to obtain access to these premises with a view to opening an independent school there.

Ironically, perhaps, one of the relatively new independent secondary schools visited made use of containers for all its classrooms, for its ablution facilities, and for its library. The headmistress of another new independent primary school emphasised that teaching was far more important than facilities, and that “if the school burnt down tomorrow I would still be able to continue teaching”. Said the headmaster of a no-fee township school, “With or without proper facilities, teachers can be successful.”

Virtually all the schools in fact stated that their teachers were critical to their success. We have “a great team of dedicated teachers”, said a township secondary school. Success necessitated “committed teachers who go the extra mile”, said another. One independent school expressed the fear that “if something good happens in Zim, some of my teachers will go back there”.

Fees

As already indicated, five of the public township schools visited were “no-fee” schools – schools in communities classified by the department as too poor to be allowed to charge fees. Such schools comprise some 88% of South Africa’s almost 24 000 public schools. Fees in the suburban public schools, which must be approved by parents in a “general meeting”, ranged from R13 825 a year to R31 500. Fees at the some of the best-known public schools (not part of the study) range from R40 040 upwards. A leading independent school in Johannesburg (not in the study either) charges R106 552 a year in its primary school and R134 963 in its secondary school. The independent township school that the IRR visited charges R1 000 in grade 12, but less in the lower grades. One of the independent schools visited by the IRR charges R480 a year, although the main finances of the school are provided by an extensive fundraising campaign directed at the private sector. The other independent school charges R21 800.

A sizeable minority of pupils in some of the public fee-charging schools are exempt from some or all of the fees, in accordance with formulas laid down by the department. Many of those who are exempt nevertheless pay something. Some of the principals of these schools are not convinced that parents of such pupils are genuinely unable to pay. They say that some of the richer parents do not pay anything, while parents who are domestic workers manage to pay up to R300 a month. Some of these schools complain that fee exemptions for some can necessitate putting up fees for others, but one principal firmly opposes this. Instead, he says, the school runs fundraising campaigns to supplement school funds.

Teachers

One of the most important differences between no-fee township schools and fee-charging suburban schools is that the latter are able to employ additional teachers. Such teachers are paid by their School Governing Bodies (SGBs) rather than by the department. In 2013 fee-charging public schools collected more than R12 billion in fees, which enabled them to employ 37 000 teachers across the country over and above those financed by the state.

One of the fee-paying suburban schools in our study had 36 departmental teachers and 26 paid by the SGB, while the other had 44 departmental and 11 SGB teachers. None of the township schools had additional teachers. One of the suburban primary schools had 21 departmental teachers and 15 employed by the SGB. The other such school had 13 departmental and 9 SGB teachers. Therefore, not only do pupils in suburban secondary schools have additional teachers, they enter such schools having had the benefit of additional teachers during their primary schooling.

Additional teachers, of course, reduce the pupil-to-teacher ratio. One of the suburban secondary schools that charges fees thus says that its SGB staff enable it to reduce class sizes from between 45 and 50 to between 30 and 32. By contrast, one of the no-fee secondary schools says it has as many as 50 pupils per class in some grades. One of the independent primaries holds its classes to a maximum of 32 pupils each. One of the public suburban primaries said that extra teachers were critical to its success: “Without them we would have to double up the size of classes.” The school was unable to get extra departmentally paid teachers this year. The department had said, “Some schools in Soweto have 70 pupils in the class, so what is your problem?” Classes that are too large, says one principal of a no-fee school, can lead to disciplinary problems.

Extra tuition

Nearly all the schools visited by the IRR provide extra tuition, for which teachers are seldom directly rewarded. One of the no-fee township schools, which says it is short of nine teachers, provides compulsory extra lessons during the week as well as on Saturdays. The school also aims to complete the NSC syllabus early, leaving plenty of time for revision. Another says that normal school hours are not sufficient to generate good results, so that it starts classes in accounting, maths, maths literacy, and life sciences for pupils in grade 12 before the school year starts. The pupils are exhorted not to allow the school’s results to drop.

Extra tuition, says the principal of a suburban fee-charging school with additional teachers, is critical to good results. Although it puts “extra pressure on staff members, who get no extra pay, it is part of our established culture”. Some of these teachers are rewarded by bonuses of up to R1 000 a year, for which the school raises extra funds. The principal of a no-fee school without the resources to do this said that she made a point of commending teachers in front of their colleagues “for each and every little thing that they do”. This was very important to them. Many of her teachers stayed after 4 pm, and “the whole community sees that they are here”.

Several principals, especially those of poorer schools, stressed the importance of obtaining parental support for extra tuition. The principal of one fee-charging suburban secondary school complained that some of her pupils were complacent and that there was not enough “buy in” from parents for such things as extra tuition. She expressed “huge admiration” for principals of no-fee schools who were able to get staff to provide extra lessons.

Sadtu

Views on the South African Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu) were mixed. One principal said that she and her staff were all members, and that Sadtu caused no problems. Another said that Sadtu caused problems everywhere, "even in the department": they wanted to "toyi-toyi without worrying what happens to pupils". All the teachers at this low-fee independent township school are appointed by its board of directors. It signs contracts with them which include the principle of "no work, no pay". It was not easy for them to misbehave, the headmaster said. Pupils came first and teachers' rights afterwards. He added that "as a private school we know we have to perform better as we are competing with no-fee schools".

Pass rates

With the exception of one suburban school whose overall NSC pass rate was 93%, and one township school whose rate was 95%, all eight of the secondary schools in the study achieved rates of between 98% and 100%. So there was little difference in the performance of township and suburban schools on this admittedly low criterion.

Bachelor passes tell a different story. In township schools the proportion of NSC candidates who achieved such passes ranged between 47% and 54%. The proportions for suburban schools ranged between 65% and 78%. The additional teachers employed in fee-paying suburban schools are the most obvious explanation for the better performance of those schools on this stricter criterion. Better facilities such as laboratories and libraries in such schools may further help to explain their superior performance.

Pupils

Most of the schools were almost entirely black in the broad sense. Some of the suburban schools have large numbers of Muslim and Hindu pupils. One principal said that the only whites in her school were a handful sent there by parents because they believed in racially mixed education. She would like to have more whites, but there was competition for them from other schools.

The most racially diverse school was one low-fee suburban secondary school whose pupils were 50% white, 30% African, 15% Indian/Asian, and 5% coloured. Some 40% of the children in one of the primary schools were white, while the school had large numbers of African pupils from elsewhere on the continent. "Our pupils come from every walk of life, rich and poor, black and white," says one principal, noting that some of his parents were middle class while the parents of some of his pupils were domestic workers. He adds that the fact that the school is not entirely black encourages white parents to apply there rather than to suburban schools that are now almost entirely black. Some pupils started at independent schools, but then switched to this public school because it was cheaper.

Some pupils at suburban schools who live in townships are dropped off in the morning by their parents, who may be working in the area, sometimes as domestic workers. Some schools provide after-school care services (though at a cost). In some cases children spend two hours commuting each way between their township homes and suburban schools. One of the principals told the IRR that some of her parents paid more for transport than in school fees.

Many of the children in township schools live in shacks, and many of the parents are either domestic workers or unemployed. In one area it is normal for pupils to stay with their grandmothers as HIV has claimed the lives of their parents. Some children commute from neighbouring farms on transport provided by the department. Some walk 2km to 3km to school. Others live by themselves in conditions of poverty, as their parents are away working. Some have been abandoned. Several of the schools provide meals. In some cases this is the first – or sometimes the only – meal of the day. One school tells its pupils to send their parents off to bed by 9 pm in the evening so that they can do their homework in the only space available, the kitchen table.

Discipline

Virtually all the principals interviewed emphasised the importance of discipline, including punctuality, wearing of school uniforms rather than branded clothing, and modest rather than fashionable hairstyles. Uniformity of dress was seen as helping to keep out intruders and ensure the safety of pupils and teachers. According to the principal of a no-fee township school, uniforms were "very, very, very important".

Among other things, uniforms ensured that all pupils "feel the same" when they were at school, even though they may come from different backgrounds. Said one principal of a suburban school: "Uniforms ensure that you cannot tell whose father is a doctor by the clothing of the pupil." Pupils should look in the mirror, he said, and ask themselves whether they "see somebody going to school or somebody going to a party". Another principal said that branded clothing tended to make pupils show off and become rebellious. Even in the no-fee schools, most of the boys appeared to be wearing ties. The IRR researcher was frequently greeted with the words "Good morning, sir."

One school prohibited the use of cellphones even during break. Pupils who broke the rule would have to pay a fine into a fund which would be used to buy such things as wheelchairs for a nearby hospice. This fund is administered by a pupil. Another school sent pupils home if they failed to arrive before the school gates were closed. Yet another confessed to not being strict enough in refusing latecomers admission to the school.

The principal of yet another school said that where pupils did not live up to the school's standards, they were required to contact their parents and report themselves. This applied even to very young children. Yet another principal said that pupils who misbehaved would sometimes "kneel and pray" to avoid having their parents called in. Yet another said that if a "tongue lashing" did not ensure good behaviour, parents would be summoned to a meeting. Pupils who persistently misbehaved and showed no remorse would be suspended for the remainder of the year and not allowed back until their parents had ensured that they would behave in future.

Several of the principals of no-fee public schools complained that they did not have powers to expel pupils who misbehaved badly. The principal of a no-fee secondary school offering commercial subjects said that she referred serious and repeated offences to her SGB, which had the power to suspend for a maximum of seven days. However, she said, expulsion was sometimes warranted, although the procedure was complicated as only the education department had the power to expel.

Independent schools have the power to expel delinquent pupils. Said the principal of one such school, "This is one of the key differences between private and public schools: the hands of the latter are tied when it comes to discipline, and expulsions are a long and challenging process for them." This principal, who runs a low-fee independent township school, said that he would expel where necessary.

Values

Principals spoke of values as well as discipline, however. One independent school supplemented the official "life orientation" syllabus with "value-based" tuition. Pupils were required also to commit themselves to kindness, punctuality, honesty, "looking good, working hard and never giving up, and admitting to and learning from mistakes". The school ensures that pupils gather in groups to discuss problems. A pupil who showed the IRR researcher around the school identified special open-air places where such discussions were held. Pupils are also required to go out twice a term to perform cleaning jobs at old-age homes, or read to the "oldies".

A group of a dozen pupils at a no-fee township school calling themselves the RADS (for "radically different species") put on a ten-minute display for the IRR researcher which indicated that they were brimming with pride in their school. "Everyone must enjoy working here and be able to laugh and cry together," said the headmistress.

One suburban principal said part of his job was to encourage "thinking outside the box". The school also arranged various kinds of activities, from debating to robotics to sport to music, so that all pupils would have a chance "to shine" by meeting a basic standard. However, these activities would also enable the "cream of the crop to rise higher". Said the principal of one of the no-fee schools, "The community is proud of the school and it knows about our discipline and good results. Last year we turned away 200 applicants. Everyone can pass given the right environment."

Principals

Principals of schools are their chief executives, and, as with any institution, the chief executive is the key to success. He or she sets the tone, motivates the teachers, ensures that the premises are tidy, secures the support of parents, and enforces disciplinary and other rules. The headmaster or headmistress is also accountable for its finances.

SGBs

The principal of one suburban public secondary school said that the school was a business and that money had to be used wisely. One of her strengths was that her SGB was "blessed with professionals", among them accountants, lawyers, and experts in human resources. By contrast, the principal of a no-fee public township school told the IRR that his SGB was not playing as active a role as it should. Unlike those at former model C schools, his SGB had no lawyers or accountants on it and some of its members were not really educated. A second township school said that its SGB was very active, but that some of the parents on it could not read or write and that pupils took advantage of this fact, "not respecting their parents". However, he said, part of the success of the school was that it was a "well-oiled machine".

The principal of a public suburban primary school said that although some of its parents were affluent residents of Soweto whose children commuted to the school, they themselves did not want to commute to SGB meetings at night and therefore played little part in the SGB. He thought it would be "difficult to uplift township schools – some of which have very good teachers – if affluent people send their children here" (to his school).

Evaluation

The success of some of the no-fee and low-fee township schools described above is inspiring. As already noted, their bachelor pass rate is between 47% and 54%. This is lower than the suburban pass rate of between 65% and 78% – understandably enough since the no-fee schools have no additional teachers, and many of their pupils are so poor that they rely on the school for their main meal of the day. Their bachelor rate of between 47% and 54% is nevertheless substantially higher than the overall national NSC bachelor pass rate of 27%.

Subject results are also sometimes higher. Unfortunately, the only comparative figures available are for 30% passes. But the important point is to compare the performance of pupils in some of our no-fee schools with national averages. Thus, in 2016, the countrywide pass rate in accounting was 69%, but three of our no-fee schools clocked up 89%, 95%, and 100% respectively. Against a national figure of 59% for maths, one school clocked up 88% and another 97%. Against a national figure for life sciences of 71%, one clocked up 94% and another 100%.

The starting-point of this research into successful public and independent schools, including those dedicated to serving poor communities, was our belief that there are among them some unacknowledged success stories. The results cited above vindicate this view. Although the sample is small, and although this is really only a pilot study, a number of proposals to replicate these successes suggest themselves.

The first is to ensure that all schools are headed by principals able and empowered to enforce discipline. The department should consider giving all public schools disciplinary powers, including the power of expulsion, subject to specified guidelines. The second is to ensure an adequate supply of suitably qualified teachers. The third is to strengthen SGBs. The fourth is to reconsider the "no fee" policy. This could be done by earmarking part of the child support grant of R350 per month per child up to the age of 18 for school fees. It would help to encourage greater parental involvement in the school, while at the same time providing at least some income for the hiring of additional teachers.

Since the principal of any school is so vitally important to its success, the department should be extremely wary of overriding the recommendations of SGBs and imposing unwanted principals upon them or upon parents in general.

Finally, the department should find ways to celebrate and publicise the success of some of its no-fee public schools serving poor communities, giving full credit to their principals and their teachers. Beyond that, it should of course concentrate its major efforts on helping other such schools to emulate the success of these few. Even though they have so much less in terms of human and other resources than suburban schools, their principals made no complaints about this. These admirable men and women displayed pride in their schools and determination to overcome whatever difficulties they faced.

Part 2

AFRICA

Background

South Africa is far from the only country experiencing rapid growth in schooling provided by institutions other than the state. In the US, for example, independent schools now account for more than 11% of total school enrolment. Another important American trend is the growth of "charter schools", in which private boards run government-owned schools under contract. Charter – sometimes called "contract" – schools are also to be found in countries that include Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, France, Japan, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela, Pakistan, Qatar, Singapore, and Tanzania. The UK has been experiencing growth in "academies" and "free schools", in which there is less official control than in typical state schools.

An even more striking phenomenon in a great many countries is the growth of private schools run as small businesses in poor areas, some of them even in shacks. According to James Tooley, professor of education policy at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, many of the people who run these schools unashamedly call themselves "proprietors". These schools all charge fees. Professor Tooley found numerous such schools in China, India, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya. Other countries with private schools include Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and Chile.

Numerous countries provide vouchers which entitle parents to buy education for their children from private institutions. Such countries include Sweden, the Czech Republic, Chile, Colombia, Bangladesh, Guatemala, and Pakistan.

According to the New York-based Africa-America Institute, even though more children are at school in Africa, they are not gaining basic skills while attending school. Private institutions are therefore increasingly stepping in. The institute said, "The rise in private schools should be not be seen as negative, but instead as a viable alternative to a failing public education system." According to other reports, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Egypt are among the African countries targeted by private investors in education.

One such investor, Investbridge Capital, said that there was growing interest from the Middle East and around the world to invest in education in Africa. According to a report by Caerus Capital, an additional 25 million children in Africa are expected to join private institutions in the next five years. One in four children from all sorts of backgrounds will then be enrolled in private schools. This will create an "enormous opportunity for investors: $16 billion–$18 billion over the next five years".

As we shall see below, not everyone welcomes private investment in education in Africa. In May 2016, the UN special rapporteur on the right to education denounced Liberia for outsourcing some of its public education to an American corporation. He said that this "violates Liberia's legal and moral obligations". A recent report by the Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights was critical of privatisation of schools in Kenya. Privatisation of education was growing "at an alarming rate" without corresponding monitoring and regulation by the state. The government was encouraging the growth of independent schools through the enactment of favourable policies. However, the increasing number of private actors in education was leading to sharp inequalities and segregation in Kenyan society.

Proposals

A few years ago a group of international and regional organisations published a report titled *Assessing Progress in Africa towards the Millennium Development Goals – Analysis of the Common African Position on the post-2015 Development Agenda (the MDG 2014 Report)*.The organisations in question were the United Nations Development Programme, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank Group, and the African Union (the UN et al).

The report dealt with the "millennium development goals" (MDGs) for the year 2015 agreed upon by members of the UN and various other international organisations at a "millennium summit" in 2000. Goals were set for the reduction of poverty and child mortality, the combating of various diseases, the improvement of maternal health, and various other social, economic, and environmental indicators. Among them was "to achieve universal primary education". This was known as MDG2. A set of "sustainable development goals" replaced the MDGs in 2016. The "common African position" was adopted in January 2014 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at a meeting of heads of state and governments of the African Union.

In their 2014 report on MDG2, the UN et al said that Africa's initial standards of educational attainment were one of the worst in the world in the 1990s. "The educational system in Africa during this period was not comparable in structure and quality with other regions of the developing world." It was only in Africa (excluding North Africa) that net enrolment in primary education was less than 60%, while other regions were more than 80%, with Latin America and the Caribbean, east Asia and south-eastern Asia above 90%.

Since then, however, "compared to the rest of the world, Africa has achieved spectacular leaps in primary education enrolment". The continent was indeed "on track" to meet the primary school enrolment target. Some 25 countries had achieved net enrolment ratios of 80% or above, and only 11 had enrolment rates below 75%.

These achievements had been made possible through measures that strengthened educational infrastructure, increased participation, and such things as school feeding programmes and cash transfers. For example, between 1991 and 2012, primary enrolment increased from 25% to 65% in Burkina Faso, and in Niger from 24% to 66%.

Completion rates were improving too, although they were still the lowest in the world. Some 28% of countries for which data were available had a completion rate below 60%. Almost 22% of the region's primary-aged children were not in school, and a third of primary pupils dropped out without acquiring the minimum basic competencies in reading and mathematics. "The quality and the skills content of the educational program also calls for urgent attention."

Also improving in many countries was the ratio of girls to boys in primary school. Of the 49 African countries with data, 18 had achieved "gender parity" at the primary level of education. The ratios continued to deteriorate at secondary and tertiary levels, however.

Regardless of some of these "dramatic achievements in access to education and gender parity at the primary level", the gap between current achievement and the target by 2015 still "remained very high" in many African countries. Some 12 countries – Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Zambia – had completion rates of above 80%. However, several recorded completion rates of below 50% in primary school. These countries included Chad, Eritrea, Central African Republic, and Angola.

"To a large extent," said the report, "the education system in most African countries is not equipping students with the adequate and relevant skills to meet present and future social and economic demands."

One of the problems African countries face in improving their education systems is funding. The report notes that between 1992 and 1997 total aid plummeted by more than 20%. When the MDGs were adopted in 2000, total aid was around $60 billion a year. However, by 2005 it had doubled to approximately $120 billion a year. This had helped to achieve "spectacular progress" towards reaching MDGs, among them the "great strides" in access to education and "gender parity in primary and secondary education".

However, adds the report, "the post-2015 landscape will be substantially different" from when the MDG compact was drawn up. Millions of people in emerging markets and Africa had been lifted out of poverty, but "the global financial crisis has metamorphosed into a global recession". Overseas development aid (ODA) budgets are "under greater pressure from a tepid global economic environment and heavy fiscal burdens on several major donors". Donors also continued "to fall short of their aid commitments".

African countries therefore needed to mobilise additional sources to implement the post-2015 agenda. These included not only "better and smarter aid", but also "inclusive and innovative private sector resources". There was huge potential for "harnessing the private sector". Indeed, "the range of potential sources of financing, particularly from the private sector, and new forms of public-private partnerships are greater today than when the original MDGs were adopted".

In a section on priorities headed "speeding up private sector involvement in education" the report says the following:

> *"Africa must build a vibrant private sector that supports the development of a dynamic primary education system and the acquisition of new skills and capacities by the labour force. The private sector can potentially provide additional resources for the expansion and improvement of the quality of education, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels.*
>
> *"The potential areas of government intervention include: (i) providing incentives, access to credit, land and facilities as well as an appropriate supply of infrastructure to support investment in education; (ii) formulating sound private investment policy aimed at developing school management skills, particularly in countries with a vibrant private sector; and (iii) in weaker performing countries, establishing a liberal and attractive regulatory reform framework that is conducive to profitable returns on investment while setting in place quality control mechanisms to monitor private education outcomes."*

Reaction to the proposals

Following a meeting in Marrakesh (Morocco) in November 2014, a group of organisations endorsed a statement "solemnly" demanding that the report referred to above be "immediately withdrawn" so that the recommendations in support of privatisation in education could be reconsidered and replaced by alternatives in line with "human rights obligations". The signatories were the African Network Campaign on Education for All, Education International, ActionAid, and the Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Their "joint civil society statement" was endorsed by more than 30 organisations in various African countries. Among these organisations were three in South Africa; Equal Education Law Centre, Equal Education, and Section 27.

The statement said that the organisations listed believed that the report by the UN et al "makes unsubstantiated and shocking recommendations for increased private sector involvement in education". These were made despite evidence showing the risks of private sector involvement in education in relation to equity and quality, "which may lead states to breach international standards".

It noted that the authors of the report wished to attract the private sector not only in the form of "charities, communities, or diasporas", but investors and entrepreneurs – "so-called edu-preneurs" – who could "make profitable returns on investment". This "strong and unprecedented move" was a "very worrying and regrettable evolution" that "runs counter to the internal logic of the report" and also "goes against the realisation of human rights principles guaranteed in international law".

Details of the complaints

Fees

The complainants say that the MDG report recognises that the elimination of fees has been particularly important in expanding access to education in Africa. The complainants then argue that "it appears to be completely counter-productive to promote private education, which is largely fee-paying, and in particular the kind of private investment which is conducive to profitable returns".

They further say that it is a "waste of resources" for some development aid agencies, among them the World Bank and the British Department for International Development, to be supporting "fee-charging profit-making private school companies in Africa".

Public investment

According to the complainants, the MDG report says that significant improvements in educational participation have been made possible by "sustainable public investment". They accordingly argue that it is surprising that the MDG report does not seek sustainable and long-term increases in such investment, such as by calling on governments to commit 20% of their budgets or 6% of GDP to education. "Instead, it recommends private investment in education without providing evidence as to the positive and sustained impact of such policies, and without considering the impact on the realisation of the right to education, and on inequality and discrimination."

The promotion of privatisation, the complainants argue, is also to move against "all internationally accepted principles of education". It is also "potentially in violation of international law".

International law

The complainants argue that it is a “core obligation” of states under international law to directly provide quality education for all. As a matter of priority, states must build an efficient system of schools. “Pushing them” to use their scarce resources to support private providers of education – for example, via tax incentives – is likely to be a violation of this principle.

International standards, the complainants acknowledge, clearly state that although private providers of education should and must be allowed, private schools and investors should play a complementary role. However, “research shows that private investment in education generally replaces public education”. The complainants cite a warning by the UN special rapporteur on education to the effect that privatisation was supplanting public education instead of supplementing it, in violation of international standards.

Equality of opportunities and non-discrimination

The complainants argue that increased private sector participation in education is a strong driver of segregation and inequalities of opportunities. They cite reports to the effect that this is happening in Morocco, Ghana, Uganda, and Chile. They also quote a submission to a UN committee to the effect that privatisation is detrimental to access by girls. This is because, when the cost of education increases, parents generally give priority to boys.

Quality of education and regulation

A call in the MDG report for increased private sector participation on the grounds that it could improve quality is dismissed by the complainants as “a sweeping statement based on no evidence”. In many countries, they say, independent schools recruit unqualified teachers. In Morocco, they argue, after almost 15 years of a rapid increase in private investment in education, private schools have failed to train any teachers but rely extensively on teachers from the public sector, thereby weakening it.

Education as a public good

As a “public good”, education “must be protected against marketisation and commodification”. Despite this, the complainants argue, the MDG report explicitly calls for commercialisation in education. However, they say, profit-making in education is “unacceptable”. This is especially the case when it “takes advantage of the aspirations of the poorest parents for a better life”.

Referring to two of the signatories to the MDG report, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, the complainants say that it is “inexplicable and intolerable” that they support an additional “waste of resources” through profit-making education when education is already highly “resource constrained”.

“Moving forward”

The complainants argue that it is a major shortcoming of the MDG report to conclude that quality education is expensive and that therefore governments cannot provide it alone. “There are, in fact, many other sources of funding”. Some of these, the complainants note, are highlighted in the MDG report.

These other sources include the mobilisation of domestic resources, taxation in particular. This can be done via developing progressive tax regimes, closing loopholes that facilitate financial outflows, and strengthening enforcement. States also need to "prioritise" the right to education – and other economic and social rights – in their budgeting. Richer countries must be called upon to fulfil their "responsibility and obligation to provide financial and technical support for the realisation of economic and social rights".

Conclusion

The complainants say that research and experience are "unequivocal" in showing that it is only through a "strong, quality, public education system" that societies can be "just and prosperous". The MDG report, they conclude, does not give any evidence to support its endorsement of private investment in education. Instead, it "provides evidence that strong and sustained government investment in education is what is needed".

Comment on these complaints

Few of these arguments have much merit. First and foremost, in calling for richer countries to provide financial support, the complainants ignore one of the key arguments in the MDG report, which is that development aid flows have been declining and are unlikely to increase. This indeed is the very reason why the MDG report seeks to mobilise private investment in education. Without it, the implication is that most African countries will not achieve the MDG goal of universal primary education. Nor will they be able to increase completion rates in primary schooling. This is likely to widen inequality of opportunity, contrary to the wishes of the complainants.

Also contrary to what the complainants argue, mobilisation of private investment does not necessitate tax incentives. Businesses investing in education would qualify for the same tax treatment as any other businesses. They would not need any tax privileges. The costs of building schools would be for their own account, and therefore less of a burden on the taxpayer, who must finance public schools. If a country is "resource constrained", in the language of the complainants, that is all the more reason to seek to mobilise private investment, whether in education or anywhere else.

It is always easy to call for increases in education expenditure, as well as the prioritisation of other economic and social rights. In doing so, the complainants ignore the possibility that this might entail higher taxation or higher borrowing or larger budget deficits. These risk being detrimental to growth and therefore self-defeating, in that lower growth means a lower tax base.

With reference to "international law", the complainants appear to contradict themselves. On the one hand, they say that promotion of privatisation is "potentially" in violation of international law. On the other hand, they acknowledge that "international standards" require that private provision of education must be allowed, although evidently on condition that it plays a complementary rather than a supplementary role. This condition is difficult to measure and difficult to fulfil.

It is sometimes argued that independent schools in South Africa attract the best teachers and the ablest pupils, denuding public schools of both. Whether this is true or not would be extremely difficult to prove. The first part of this paper shows that fee-paying public schools can produce excellent results, and that the same applies to a number of no-fee public schools.

Panyaza Lesufi, member of the executive committee for education in the Gauteng provincial government, recently reported that he had asked parents why they sent their children to independent schools, which were growing at a faster rate than public schools. "The most common answers have always been: better standards of education; better start in life; more chances in life; better chances for future career; better discipline; and smaller class sizes".

These parents are making obviously rational choices. But so are those who send their children to public suburban schools rather than to independent schools. They are looking for better education, irrespective of whether it is provided by public or independent schools. In fact, the real division in South Africa is not between public and independent schools but between good schools and bad ones.

The authors of the complaint against the MDG report state that "profit-making" in education is especially "unacceptable" when it "takes advantage of the aspirations of the poorest parents for a better life". This is a curious statement. It assumes that the poorest parents are incapable of judging whether or not sending their children to "profit-making" schools will or will not be to their advantage. The evidence in South Africa is that parents who send their children to independent schools are making rational choices, in that such schools on average produce better results than public schools. The studies of Professor Tooley have shown that the growth of profit-making schools in Africa and other developing countries is the result of dissatisfaction with schools run by governments.

One of the complaints made against the MDG report is that increased private sector participation will drive inequality of opportunity. This is a legitimate concern. But it cannot be addressed by discouraging private investment. The only way that it can be addressed is by a much more challenging and difficult task, which is to remedy all the defects of schools that perform poorly. This can be done not only by government itself, but also by subcontracting management of such schools to private operators, along the lines of charter schools in the US or contract schools in other countries.

Again, if governments wish to attract pupils to public schools and retain them there, the way to do so is to improve the performance of such schools. As we have seen in South Africa, many public schools produce excellent results. Some of them explicitly compete with independent schools, arguing that they offer excellent education at a lower cost. The challenge that this country faces is to bring public schools that perform poorly up to the standard of the better ones, including the better no-fee public schools identified in the first part of this report. The same arguments no doubt apply in various other countries.

From the point of view of results, whether a school is public or independent, or whether it is profit-making or not is not the issue. What matters is the quality of the education. The question in the end must be settled by choice. That is what a free society entails. Parents should be free to choose whatever school suits their needs and those of their children. If private investors wish to run schools, they should be free to do so.

Liberia

As noted above, one of the complainants against the MDG report is a South African organisation, Equal Education. It recently issued a statement "condemning" plans by the Liberian government to double the number of schools run by "private actors". According to a recent report in the British magazine *The Economist*, fewer than 40% of school-age children in that country attend primary school. However, the Liberian education ministry has entered into a pilot partnership scheme with the help of Ark, a British education group. Drawing on American charter schools and English academies, the ministry last year delegated the management of 93 public schools to 8 independent operators, three of which are private firms. Policymakers in Ghana, India, and Nigeria are evidently watching the Liberian scheme as they consider trying similar ideas.

Initial results of a study by two think tanks showed that pupils at the schools in question spent twice as much time learning as their counterparts in ordinary schools, and that they made roughly an additional seven months' progress in English and maths.

Equal Education denounced the Liberian scheme as an example of the "growing power of unaccountable private actors in education". This objection is misconceived. Private actors in education are accountable to the parents who send children to their schools. Equal Education also said that private, and especially for-profit, actors in the public education sector could increase "stratification" between schools and leave poor children behind in underperforming public schools. The organisation said it would continue to support efforts across the globe "to combat the marginalisation and exploitation of poor pupils and parents through private education companies".

Liberia is one of the very poorest countries in Africa. In 2015 its gross national income per head (measured in purchasing power parity) was $720. The figure for South Africa was $12 830. It is sad that a non-governmental organisation in this much richer country should be so hostile to attempts by a very much poorer country to enlist the private sector to help it overcome its massive educational backlogs.

As already noted in this paper, "leaving poor children behind in underperforming public schools" is a problem. The question is whether it can be solved by forcing all poor children to remain in underperforming public schools. Even if that were the solution, denying some the opportunity to go to better schools is to deny them the right to better themselves. It also entails restricting the right to education in which Equal Education purportedly believes. This is a cruel thing to do to these children in the name of "equality" in order to keep the private sector out of education.

Part 3

CONCLUSION

Opposition to private schooling, especially if it is run by private investors, is not confined to the proposals for greater privatisation in Africa set out in Part Two of this paper above. Equal Education has also attacked private investment in education in South Africa. The organisation thus recently denounced various local donors for "falling in line with international privatisation trends" by backing plans to introduce "collaboration schools" in the Western Cape. This pilot project, which began in 2016, now runs seven such schools, to which funders have committed more than R75 million. One of the objections voiced by Equal Education was that the relevant legislation did not introduce any measures to prevent "the undue influence of ideological convictions in the schools".

Various other organisations, academics, trade unionists, and politicians have also attacked independent schooling. Some of the attacks deplore the supposed "commodification" of education. Others assert that it is somehow wrong to allow "those with money to leave the public education system". The attacks appear to have grown as the number of low-cost private schools has been growing. Yet there would be no growth in the number of such schools without demand for them among parents willing to pay fees, even though they can get free education for their children in public schools.

As this paper has already argued, the best means of retaining pupils in public schools is to improve the quality of such schools, so making them more competitive. Many suburban public schools have long been able to compete with independent schools anyway. The challenge for South Africa's education authorities is to improve the quality of the thousands of township schools that are unable to produce results like those of the handful of top-quality no-fee township schools described in Part One of this report.

Although independent schools, especially those run by private operators or owned by private investors, are sometimes accused of contributing to "stratification" in education, the real distinction, as we have already noted, is not between public and independent schools but between good and bad schools, especially good and bad public schools.

From the point of view of the consumers of school education – pupils and their parents – it is immaterial whether a school is run by the state or by one or another kind of private organisation or investor. What counts is the quality of education provided, whether the focus is exclusively on academic results or also on sport and other activities. Few passengers know or care whether the aircraft they fly in are owned by the state or by private investors. They choose according to price, convenience, and the quality of the service. The same considerations should apply to schooling. In fact they already do.

More and more parents in South Africa and elsewhere are exercising choice in schooling. This is something to welcome and encourage, especially in South Africa, where apartheid ruled out such choice. The fact that the authors of the MDG 2014 report wish to encourage greater private investment in education in Africa is likewise something greatly to be welcomed.

Appendix

THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

SCHOOL A

Public secondary school Poortje (south of Johannesburg)

No fee

Pass rate of 98% in 2016, with 47% bachelor passes

Altogether 1 500 pupils

Key success factors. Good management and internal controls, punctuality, teacher commitment, plenty of extra tuition

Pupil profile. Some 98% live in the surrounding area, the rest on neighbouring farms. Some live in a shack settlement on the South Deep mine, where many of the parents work.

Discipline. Punctuality of both teachers and pupils is essential. So is good behaviour. School uniforms help to keep out intruders and ensure the safety of teachers and pupils. "But," says the headmaster, "we need powers to expel pupils."

Teaching. The school has 48 teachers, 16 of them looking after grade 12.

Teaching is not like manufacturing. Says the headmaster: "It's all in the heart." With or without proper facilities, teachers can be successful. Ten hours of extra lessons are provided for grades 10, 11, and 12 during the week with another five hours on Saturdays. The teachers do not get paid extra for this. Pupil attendance is compulsory and there is no opposition as it is "to their advantage". Parents and the SGB are all behind the extra tuition.

Although the education department requires the syllabus to be completed only by the fourth term in October, the school finishes it by June, leaving plenty of time for revision.

If teachers want freedom, they must produce good results and he will leave them alone, the headmaster says. Likewise if the school produces good results, pressure from the education department will be reduced. He needs another nine teachers. Class sizes are around 40, but sometimes up to 50.

Results. The pass rate has deteriorated. It was 99% in 2015, dropping to 98% last year. More seriously, the proportion of NSC passes that were of bachelor standard dropped from 70% to 47%. The headmaster says this was "not my expectation". He had no choice but to "progress" candidates from grade 11 to grade 12 as the education department wanted to "get them out of the system". Some pupils benefited from being thus "progressed", but the result was a heavier workload for grade 12 teachers and a deterioration in results as some of these "struggling pupils were not fit to be in matric". He needed more choice as to whether pupils should be made to repeat the year, while "progressing" should be scrapped.

In 2016, altogether 69% of pupils across the country achieved 30% or more in accounting in the NSC exams, but this school produced a pass rate of 89%. The national result in mathematics was 59%, but this school produced 88%.

Facilities. The school has no library, and there is no sport. It is struggling to get laboratories, and, in the meantime, teachers have to improvise. Text books and supplies of stationery are minimal. The school needs a hall. In addition to normal classrooms, it makes use of three caravans, which are about the same size as containers. However, it needs nine more caravans. There are one or two rudimentary playing fields doubling as playgrounds.

Fees. The school is not allowed to charge and parents would not pay anyway.

SCHOOL B

Public secondary school in Tshepisong (west of Johannesburg)

No fee
Pass rate of 100% in 2016, with 54% bachelor passes
Almost 1 300 pupils

Key success factors. "Great team of dedicated teachers", good managers, labour peace, "buy-in" from parents, school uniforms, no tolerance of late-coming, absenteeism, or bullying

Pupil profile. Many parents are domestic workers or work on the mines. Missing fathers are a problem. Some 40% of pupils live in shacks, and "we tell parents to go to sleep at 9 pm so that children can study at the kitchen table, which is often the only space available to them. They must use candles if they have no electricity." The school provides meals for pupils every day.

Discipline. The school brought in school uniforms in 2009 and is strict in requiring that they be worn. Uniforms are necessary to uphold discipline. Many pupils wear ties. Pupils are not allowed to wear "branded" clothes, as these make them "show off and become rowdy and rebellious". Pupils who arrive late are not allowed into the school because they are "not serious" if they come late.

This headmistress recently recommended to the provincial education department that two pupils be expelled for fighting, being rebellious, smoking dagga, and bringing a knife to school. Their mothers took them out of the school rather than see them expelled, as she had recommended. Said the headmistress: "Pupils must know that they will be suspended or expelled if they get out of hand. It is not right that they should try to rule over us." The SGB assists with disciplinary hearings by providing a presiding officer, while she presents the case.

Teaching. All 47 teachers are members of Sadtu. They are highly motivated and committed. Normal school hours, from 8 am to 2:30 pm, are insufficient to produce good results. "So we run extra classes in the mornings between 7 am and 8 am, and then between 3 pm and 4:30 pm in the afternoon. We start classes in accounting, maths, maths literacy, and life sciences for pupils in grade 12 three or four days before the school year starts. We also run compulsory Saturday classes throughout the year."

Teachers get no extra pay for all this extra work. Parents pay R50 a month towards teacher transport on Saturdays. The school also runs more tests than the department requires. "And we tell grade 12 pupils they must not allow the school's results to drop." The extra tuition was arranged after calling a meeting of parents to ask for their support. There are no sports coaches on the staff.

There are 50 pupils per class in grades 8 and 9, between 35 and 40 in grade 10, and between 22 and 42 in grade 12 – where there are five classes divided according to specialisation.

Results. Pass rates between 2012 and 2016 ranged from 98% to 100%. In 2016, the school got 95% in accounting, against the NSC national figure of 69%. Maths and life sciences results were similarly much higher than the national figures.

Facilities. The school library is well stocked but it is not well used, and doubles as a staff room. The school has a computer lab, but no computers, so the lab is used as a normal classroom. It needs four more classrooms. A dusty playground appears to double as a sports field. The classrooms are built around quadrangles, and the school has a pleasing appearance.

Tailpiece. "The community is proud of the school and it knows about our discipline and good results. Last year we turned away up to 200 applicants. Everyone can pass given the right environment."

SCHOOL C

Public primary school east of Johannesburg

Fees for grades 1 to 7 are R13 825 a year

Pass rate of 98% in 2016

A few more than 1 000 pupils

Key success factors. Trainee teachers help in the classroom, 15 teachers over and above those paid by the department, absence of racial incidents, good management, good teachers, "fantastic culture"

Pupil profile. Parents are mainly middle class, but the parents or grandparents of some pupils work as domestic workers. Their children commute with them. Some parents work in Asian shops in the neighbourhood. About a quarter of the school's complement spend the afternoon in the school's after-care centre, which charges R7 700 per pupil. Although English is the language of the school, about 20% of the pupils do not have it as their home language, necessitating English enrichment classes.

"Our pupils come from every walk of life, rich and poor, black and white," says the principal. Around 40% of the pupils are white, 40% South African Africans, and the remainder coloured as well as Nigerian, Ethiopian, and from elsewhere in Africa.

Racial comments are not common, and attitudes tend to come from home rather than from pupils. "If there are problems, we call in both sets of parents and deal with them at once."

Pupils go on from this school to secondary schools in the neighbourhood and farther away.

The principal believes that the fact that the school is not entirely black encourages parents to apply there rather than to schools which are almost entirely black. The school has three applicants for each place available in grade 1 next year. Some of the school's pupils start at independent schools and then switch to this school because it is cheaper.

Teaching. The school has 41 teachers, of whom 26 are paid by the department, and another 15 by the SGB. It also has 24 trainee or student teachers who assist with non-teaching work in the classroom and get paid a stipend of R4 500 a month. The normal class size is 40, which is about double that of a nearby independent school.

Fees. Some 80% of the children have their fees paid by parents. Of the remaining 20%, nearly all pay something towards fees. Part of the school's attraction is that it is much cheaper than good independent schools.

Fund-raising. The school has one big drive a year, raising about R400 000.

Facilities. These include numerous sports fields.

SCHOOL D

Public high school in northern suburbs of Johannesburg

Fees R31 500 a year
Pass rate of 100% in 2016, with 78% bachelor passes
Altogether nearly 1 000 pupils

Key success factors. A school is a business and money must be used wisely, nothing lacking in infrastructure, excellent teachers, children as "happy as Larry", results as good as independent schools but at a much lower cost

Pupil profile. The school previously had plenty of white pupils, but now there are many more Muslims and Hindus in the school and in the neighbourhood. Only about 7% or 8% of the pupils (about 72 of them) are white, and "many are sent here because their parents believe in this kind of school", the principal stated. The school would like to push the number of whites higher, but "monastic" (single-sex) schools elsewhere in the city present strong competition with this co-educational school and they have more whites in them. Whites in the area have also sent their children to private schools.

Many Indian pupils live in the neighbourhood, but some of the Africans commute from Soweto. Many of the parents are domestics, but some have their own businesses here. "Some of our children are complacent, and teachers squeeze 'blood out of a stone' to get good results out of them." There is not enough "buy-in" from parents for such things as extra tuition.

There are "dogfights" among schools for "quality pupils". This school has had 1 000 applicants for about a fifth of that number of places in grade 8 next year, but "we do not want the school to get too big and we will resist if the department pushes us to admit more than we feel appropriate". The principal says that parents are desperate to get their children into good schools, and will often apply using fake addresses.

As whites moved out of various Johannesburg suburbs, some of the schools there had to start busing in pupils to survive.

Teaching. The department pays 36 teachers, and the SGB finances another 26. Extra staff reduce class sizes from 45–50 to 30–32.

Fees. Around 20% of pupils qualify for fee exemptions, and "these are always a threat to our finances". Even parents who have "reasonable" incomes apply for exemption from fees. But the fact that fees at the school are lower than those of other public schools in the northern suburbs is a great advantage.

SGB. The SGB is "blessed with professionals", among them accountants, people with a legal background, or expertise in human resources. Many schools have only "glorified bookkeepers". The annual meeting of parents must approve the budget as well as the accounts and also ratify the appointment of outside auditors.

Tailpiece. The principal expressed "huge admiration" for principals of no-fee schools who were able to get staff to provide extra lessons.

SCHOOL E

Public primary school in Johannesburg's northern suburbs

Fees around R20 500 a year
Altogether around 530 pupils

Key success factors. "All pupils must be given a chance to shine, but the cream of the crop must be allowed to rise", decentralised management

Pupil profile. The number of whites has dropped to 2 or 3 per grade out of 60 or 70 of all races in the grade. The area was previously mainly Jewish, but a nearby synagogue has closed and two mosques have been built. Muslims started moving in many years ago, and there has also been a steady increase in the number of Africans over time. Indians, but not Africans, are buying houses in the area. Whites have moved out of the area or to independent schools. However, their perception that independent schools are better is wrong. Africans who send their children here from Soweto tend to be the more affluent families there. Some of the pupils' parents live in back rooms in the neighbourhood, where the "madam" will sometimes help with homework.

Ethos. The job of the principal is to provide an enabling environment which also keeps distractions to a minimum. However, "fun days" using robotics, speech, music, sport, drama, chess and other things must be arranged in which all pupils have a chance to "shine" by meeting a basic standard, while the best are encouraged to rise higher. This also helps to encourage experimentation and "thinking outside the box".

Teaching. The department pays 13 teachers, and the SGB employs another nine. These extra teachers are critical to the success of the school. Some of them earn less than the department pays. "Without them we would have to double up the size of classes. Financial constraints meant that we had to forgo extra teachers we were planning to employ this year and we were not able to get extra teachers paid by the department." When asked for the extra teachers, the department had retorted, "Some schools in Soweto have 70 pupils in the class, so what's your problem?"

Teachers fall under the authority of heads of department rather than of the principal. Those who do not perform are sooner or later weeded out by their own colleagues. The school employs SGB teachers on probation, transferring them to departmental employment only once they have proved themselves.

Fees. There is a fixed formula according to which parents can apply for exemption from fees, taking into account family income and the number of children. "About a quarter of our pupils have some sort of exemption. But the more parents do not pay fees the more the school is under pressure to put up fees for the others. Out of a budget of R10 million this year, we will lose about R760 000 as a result of fee exemptions. Some of the parents who are domestic workers and are on full exemptions nevertheless pay up to R300 a month in fees, while some of the richer parents do not pay anything."

SGB. "Even though some of our parents are more affluent residents of Soweto whose children commute here, these parents do not join the SGB as they do not want to commute for meetings at night. It will be difficult to uplift township schools – some of which have very good teachers – if affluent people send their children here."

SCHOOL F

Independent secondary non-profit school north-east of Johannesburg

No fees charged

Pass rate of 93% in 2016, with 76% bachelor passes

Altogether 155 pupils in all grades in 2017

Key success factors. Ability to choose both pupils and teachers, good relationship with parents, own "life orientation" syllabus, school a small community, community work in neighbourhood

Pupil profile. The school takes in pupils from half a dozen feeder primary schools in nearby Alexandra township. They are tested in maths and English and then the best performers are taken on a weekend camp where their "interpersonal skills" and resilience are also assessed. Of some 900 potential pupils for 2018 about 100 were taken on the camp, following which 50 will be admitted to grade 8 classes in 2018, 25 in each class. After the 50 have been informed by letter of their admission, teachers do home visits to establish relationships with parents and to ensure that there is somewhere for their children to study. If there isn't, they will do their homework at the school.

Most of the children live in Alex, and most of the parents are unemployed. Some of the families live in shacks. The pupils receive fruit from the school during the morning tea break and a lunch later, which for many of them is their main meal.

Teaching. The school has 17 teachers, along with 11 interns. It struggles to find good maths and science teachers and has employed Zimbabweans. The headmistress fears that if "something good happens in Zim[babwe]" some of her teachers "will go back there". She interviews and selects teachers, who are then paid by the Leap head office in Cape Town, which runs several similar Leap Science and Maths Schools there, in Johannesburg, and elsewhere.

The school follows the official "life orientation" syllabus to the letter but then also supplements it with "value-based" tuition and a code of conduct. Values to which everyone is required to commit include kindness, punctuality, honesty, "looking good, working hard and never giving up, and admitting and learning from mistakes". As part of life orientation, pupils gather in groups to share and discuss common problems. Twice a term they go out to perform cleaning jobs at old-age homes, or read to the "oldies" or massage them.

Discipline. Pupils must wear uniforms, and "boys have to be boys" with short hair. Girls are not allowed to wear earrings or "extensions" to their hair. When some pupils wanted to wear such extensions, she called in parents, who said they were not willing to pay for them and that was the end of the matter. They pointed out that they struggled to pay the required annual contribution of R480 per pupil, so "where would we get money for hair extensions?" Pupils who misbehave will "kneel or pray" to avoid having their parents called in.

If anyone is late for school or absent the parents are telephoned or visited. They are required to take responsibility for their children, not just dump it on grandmothers or others.

Fees. Although the school charges no formal fees, parents are asked to pay R480 a year as a "community contribution". They all pay for grade 8 as they want to get their children into the school, but after that the school struggles to get payment.

Finances. The head office does fundraising for all these schools, although the department provides a subsidy of about R1m a year depending on grade 12 results. Much of the money in the extensive fundraising programme comes from corporates and charitable foundations and trusts. Tax relief is offered, as are black economic empowerment points.

Facilities. All of the classrooms, as well as the library, are containers. A pupil who proudly showed the IRR researcher around the school took him to two areas where classes or the whole school meet to discuss problems and how they might be solved. Unbeknown to the pupil, the headmistress had told the IRR how important these meetings were.

SGB. The school has no governing body of its own, the headmistress reporting to the board in Cape Town. However, parents are called to a meeting once a term to share ideas. About 100 of them attended the last such meeting.

SCHOOL G

Independent special needs primary or foundation school in a Johannesburg suburb

Fees are R1 600 a month
Virtually all the 90 pupils in grade 7 in 2016 went on to secondary education
Altogether 171 pupils in 2017 in grades 1 to 7

Key success factors. "Fabulous facilities", specially qualified teachers, major success in fundraising

Pupil profile. Although there are "lots" of other special needs schools, this one caters for underprivileged children. These include autistic children, those with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), children brain-damaged in accidents, those who face emotional and other barriers to learning, dyslexics, those who have been traumatised, those with Tourette Syndrome, angry and aggressive children, children with Down's Syndrome, abused children, and "any child who falls through the cracks". They need much more support than ordinary children, and there is a maximum of 20 in a class. Some of the pupils in the school are sent there by orphanages and/or places of safety. Others are in some form of child care.

Virtually all the children are African, with a handful of others. The pupils come from nearby lower-middle-class suburbs, but also from Orange Farm, Soweto, Alexandra, and Thokoza. Many come from poor communities.

Many parents are in denial about their children's disabilities, and leave them in ordinary schools. Some of them are unable to identify their children's problems. Some problems are identified by teachers in ordinary schools.

"All our kids know they are here for a reason. Whereas they may be teased or laughed at in mainstream schools or labelled as 'dummies', they are all accepted here by their peers," according to a senior official of the school.

Teaching. Teachers, of whom there are 22, need special-needs qualifications. They face additional challenges, because working here "is not just another job". With the permission of parents, teachers sometimes medicate the children.

Curriculum. The school follows a departmental curriculum. Although some disabilities can never be outgrown, the overall aim is to "close the gap" so that the school's pupils can progress in life by being employable and able to sustain themselves.

Associated institutions. The foundation school is one of three grouped in the Sparrow Schools Educational Trust. Many of its pupils go on to its associated Combined Technical Skills School. The third associated institution is a Further Education and Training (FET) college, recently awarded a prize as the second best in the country.

The high school has been selected as one of the government's 20 pilot projects for a new technical skills programme. The FET college says it is the first in South Africa "for marginalised youth with learning disabilities". Last year, 60% of the graduates of the FET college moved into secure employment.

Results. Very few of the disabled children drop out along the way. Nearly all the 90 pupils completing grade 7 at the end of 2016 went on to the combined school, or to other specialised schools.

Fees and finance. Fees bring in about 30% of income, while a government subsidy contributes 10% per child. The remaining 60% per child needs to be funded. The trust is registered as a welfare and public benefit organisation with tax privileges. It has a fundraising budget this year of R25 million. Profits from a wholly owned subsidiary running the FET college are ploughed back into the other two institutions.

SCHOOL H

Public secondary school south-east of Johannesburg

No-fee

Pass rate of 95% in 2016, with 35% bachelor passes

Around 900 pupils

Key success factors. "Well-oiled machine", committed teachers who go the extra mile, new principal who saw himself as a "new broom" when appointed a few years ago and tightened up the implementation of policies, improvement in the overall pass rate

Pupil profile. Most parents are not working, and many stay with grandmothers, which is very normal in this area thanks to HIV. Some are "abandoned kids". "Clever principals" go to primary schools to recruit highflyers, but this is no longer possible with the department's new on-line admission system and our policy is to not try and do that, says the principal.

Teaching. The school has 32 teachers, of whom some are temporary. But classes are too big – sometimes leading to disciplinary problems. Some of the teachers are required to help with homework.

Discipline. Pupils must be in class waiting for their teachers. They must also wear uniforms. But this principal admits to being frustrated because discipline is not strict enough, and latecomers are sometimes let in even though latecoming should not be allowed.

SGB. The SGB has nine members, not all of whom are active. Unlike SGBs at former model C schools, this SGB has no lawyers or accountants on it, and some of its members are not really educated. The SGB must help encourage attendance at extra classes on Saturdays and in the evenings, although crime in the evenings is a problem, so that arrangements must be made to accompany pupils home at night. However, the SGB is not playing as active a role as it should.

Results. The pass rate has improved from 57% in 2010, and since 2013 it has been above 90%. This principal attributes the improvements to his appointment as a "new broom". Some of the school's graduates are doing well at university, including both Wits and Johannesburg. The overall pass rate in 2014 was 97%. A total of 80 pupils passed, 40 of them (50%) with bachelor passes and 36 with diploma passes, the remainder getting senior certificates only. In 2015, bachelor passes accounted for 35% of all passes, and, in 2016, a similar proportion. So the high of 50% bachelor passes in 2014 has dropped substantially in the last two years.

The subject results for 2016 show that this school obtained a pass rate of 97% in accounting, against the national NSC figure of 69%. In physical science its pupils achieved 100% against the national figure of 62%, in life sciences 91% against 71%. In maths, however, its pupils achieved only 53% against a national figure of 59%.

Facilities. Very basic, classrooms, an office building, a few dusty fields doubling as playgrounds and playing fields.

SCHOOL I

Independent secondary school south-east of Johannesburg

Fees range from R100 to R1 000 depending on grade
Pass rate of 100% in 2016, with 45% bachelor passes
Altogether 734 pupils

Key success factors. Teachers have contracts which require performance, parents are expected to help ensure excellence and enforce discipline, "as a private school we know we have to perform better and we are competing with no-fee schools"

Pupil profile. Most pupils come from surrounding townships, but only 30% of parents are working. About a third of pupils have their fees paid out of child support grants. There has, however, been growth in the number of professional parents who are managers or teachers elsewhere. There is no restriction in admission policy, but pupils must come and apply with their parents.

Teaching. The school has 26 teachers, whom it appoints after interviewing them. It signs contracts with these teachers which include the principle of "no work no pay." Pupils come first and teachers' "rights" afterwards. Said the headmaster of the school: "It is not easy for my teachers to misbehave. Sadtu also finds it difficult to interfere in a private school." However, on one occasion Sadtu had sent a busload full of people to force the school to close when it tried to continue teaching. Sadtu – "which is a problem everywhere, even in the department" – never supported independent schools "and they want to toyi-toyi without worrying what happens to pupils".

Extra classes are sometimes held on Sundays. The school also runs Easter, winter, and spring classes, the only real vacation being at Christmas.

Discipline. The country is "losing the main aim of a school when pupils fight for the kind of hairstyle for dancing in nightclubs instead of being neat". Uniforms help to maintain discipline. Parents are informed that pupils will not be allowed to write exams if not in full uniform. Timekeeping and attendance are essential.

The South African constitution gives rights where there should be privileges. Parents must know what a school is for. Says the headmaster: "We hold a meeting in the first weekend in January when parents are told everything about the school. They are also told to check their children's books every day. If a 'tongue lashing' does not ensure good behaviour, we bring in the pupils' parents. If they do not co-operate in ensuring better behaviour, we will suspend the pupil until the following year, especially if he shows no remorse. We may also expel where necessary. This is one of the key differences between private and public schools: the hands of the latter are tied when it comes to discipline, and expulsions are a long and challenging process for them."

Discipline is extremely important. Good schools should not be judged by results only. There must be no hooliganism or drugs or fighting. Nor must pupils behave as if they are in a "mall". But they must be treated with dignity: for example, the school is erecting shady areas in which pupils can wait to be fetched by their parents.

Fees. Grades 8 and 9 pay R100 a year, grades 10 and 11 pay R400, and grade 12 pays R1 000. The school is heavily dependent on a subsidy from the department of education based on numbers and performance. The department is very co-operative.

Curriculum. The school follows the official curriculum, but it focuses on commercial subjects designed to prepare children both for university and for further education and training colleges. An adjoining sister school offers more scientific and general subjects.

Governance. There is no SGB, but the school is controlled by a board of directors, which also controls the sister school. Ownership of the premises is vested in a non-profit organisation.

Results. Since 2010 the overall pass rate has been 100%. In 2016 the proportion of candidates achieving bachelor passes was 45%, the rest all being diploma passes. There were no passes at only senior certificate level; the headmaster regards this as a good achievement which must be maintained.

Subject results for 2016 show that this independent school in a poor area achieved 100% in accounting against the national figure of 69%, and 95% in maths literacy against a national figure of 59%. It also achieved 82% in business studies and 98% in English as first additional language.

Tailpiece. The managing director of this school says that there are another 15 independent schools in the surrounding area, and five in townships further afield. They are growing "all the time" as people flock to Gauteng from other provinces. Public schools cannot cope with the influx, so the education department has no choice but to accommodate independent schools.

SCHOOL J

Commercial high school in North West province

No fee

Pass rate in 2016 was 98 percent, with 50% bachelor passes

More than 1 200 pupils

Key success factors. Very active SGB, stress on motivation of teachers, enthusiastic pupils, "everyone must enjoy working here and be able to laugh and cry together", insistence on uniforms

Pupil profile. Many live in shacks or RDP houses, some live on farms. Most parents are not working. Families are large. Some pupils live alone. The level of poverty is very high, and sometimes teachers help pupils to buy uniforms. Some walk 2km-3km to school. Buses, paid for by the provincial education department, pick pupils up as far as 55km away in areas where there are no high schools. The school sometimes buys soap for "pathetic" homes that do not have any.

For most pupils the meal provided by the school is the only one they get each day, and they sometimes take leftovers home. Only 20% have eaten before they come to school. Meals are cooked by seven women who start work at 6am and are paid only a "thank-you stipend". Detailed menus are laid down by the department for each day to ensure sufficient starch and protein, along with fruit and vegetables. For August 2017, the department deposited R97 000 into a separate bank account to finance the nutrition programme. The amount varies monthly.

Teaching. The school is entitled to 41 teachers. When this principal was appointed, in 2010, there was "disharmony" among teachers. This was the first challenge she had to deal with, relying on God's help as she is a very "prayerful" person. No cliques among teachers are allowed, and gossip is not tolerated either. The principal believes that motivation of teachers is her "strong point". She does not dictate to them, but makes sure that she commends teachers in front of their colleagues "for each and every little thing that they do". This is very important to them. They conduct extra classes without payment and without being asked to do so by the principal. Many teachers stay after 4pm, and "the whole community sees that they are here". She tells pupils that the teachers are giving extra time, and that they must themselves therefore come to extra classes.

Discipline. If there are serious and repeated offences, the case is referred to the SGB, which has the power to suspend for a maximum of seven days, but not to expel. She herself does not have the power to suspend. Sometimes expulsion is warranted, but the procedure is "complicated" because only the department can expel. The principal believes that the school should have powers to expel, with the SGB ensuring that there is no bias in decisions.

After dealing with the problem of disharmony among teachers at the school, the principal on her appointment addressed the question of uniforms. These are "very, very, very important". Children come from different backgrounds, but uniforms "make them all feel the same". They also help to ensure discipline. Shirts must be tucked in. Pupils must know how to present themselves. "We specify ordinary black school shoes, not fashionable shoes." Sometimes even poor pupils will want to come to school with a "tackie" costing R1 800 and then sit next to somebody who does not have any shoes – in which case "we give them two weeks to obtain shoes". Sometimes teachers will help to pay for these.

The school does not allow pupils to wear hair “extensions” or “dreadlocks”. These are expensive and sometimes pupils may be tempted to start stealing to have their hair done. There must be no hair down pupils’ backs. Long hair must instead be neatly tied. Dreadlocks are now a “no no”. These are no longer controversial, but the principal said she had had to fight to stop them, as well as fashionable T-shirts and caps. The school has an occasional “cap day” or “tackie day”, but on these days some of the pupils with nothing to wear stay at home. She won her battle on these matters, but is still fighting to stop pupils from coming to school in fashionable short trousers which enable their socks to be seen.

Fees. When the SGB presents its budget, parents are asked to contribute, but they cannot be forced. Fewer than 50% volunteer to pay R30 a term or R120 a year.

SGB. The SGB is very active. However, some of the parents on the SGB cannot read or write and pupils take advantage of this, not respecting their parents.

Results. The pass rate in 2013 was 94%, in 2014 it was 100%, in 2015 it was 87%, and in 2016 it was 98%. Such comparative subject results as are available show that this school achieved 81% in accounting in 2016 against a national figure of 69%, and 100% in mathematical literacy against a national figure of 71%. It scored 98% in business studies, 95% in economics and 100% in English as a first additional language. However, its performance in life sciences was only 42% against a national figure of 59%.

Tailpiece. At the end of the IRR’s interview with the principal, a group of about ten pupils trooped into her office to do a presentation about some of their activities, including one dealing with teenage pregnancy. They called themselves the RADS (for “radically different species”) and were clearly very proud of their school.

SCHOOL K

Public high school in town south-east of Johannesburg

Fees R14 000 a year
Pass rate of 99.6% in 2016, 65% of them bachelor
Altogether 1 180 pupils in 2017

Key success factors. Very highly qualified teachers, learning culture plus very strict discipline, extra tuition, rewards as well as demerits, “holistic” approach encouraging extramural activities as well as tuition, “rainbow school”

Pupil profile. “Very diverse backgrounds and culture,” according to the headmaster. Pupils are 30% African, 5% coloured, 15% Indian, and 50% white. Demographics of the area have changed in the last 3 to 4 years, and “whites are not having many children any more”. But there has been no defection of white pupils from the school. Parents include shop managers and general workers in a nearby mall, as well as people working in a nearby industrial area. Some parents live quite far away in black townships, but their children qualify for the school because they work nearby. The school has no racial incidents of any kind.

Pupils performing well are sometimes rewarded by a few items from the school tuck shop. But the top ten performers are sometimes taken at the school’s expense on an outing to Gold Reef City or Sun City.

Teaching. Even though they are a scarce commodity in South Africa, the school has “very highly qualified teachers”. The provincial department pays for 44, while the SGB employs another 11. All applicants for posts are interviewed by the same panel. The department has never turned down any of the school’s recommendations for appointment, while the SGB teachers are appointed by the school itself. The pupil-teacher ratio is 35 to 1.

Extra tuition in the afternoons and on Saturdays is critical to good results. “It puts lots of extra pressure on staff members,” but they get no extra pay. New teachers ask no questions about this – “it is part of our established culture”. However, teachers are all assessed for their year’s work and can be rewarded by bonuses or honoraria of between R500 and R1 000, for which fundraising is necessary as the money cannot be taken out of school fees. These extra payments cost around R700 000 a year.

Discipline. Rules include a prohibition on the use of cellphones, even during break, although they may be used to ring parents when school is over. Anyone wanting to make a call can pay R5 to use a telephone in the school’s reception area. Misdemeanours involve fines which are recycled into welfare work, such as buying wheelchairs for a hospice. “Peer pressure on school pupils in South Africa is huge, but uniforms ensure that you cannot tell whose father is a doctor by the clothing of the pupil”. The headmaster sometimes tells pupils to “look in the mirror and ask whether they see somebody going to school or somebody going to a party”.

Fees and fundraising. The fee of R14 000 is paid by 90% of parents, but exemptions cost about R1.6 million last year. This cannot be recovered by putting up the fees of those who do pay, so it necessitates fundraising. The target this year for fundraising is R500 000, including such things as golf days – for which, on one occasion, a black parent donated R20 000.

Teachers are involved in fundraising, while donations are also sought, and the tuck shop runs at a profit. The school’s budget this year is R17 million. Both the budget and the school’s audited financial statements must be approved at an AGM of parents. Parents must also approve special projects, which may not be paid for by increasing fees. Some schools are “highly overpriced”.

SCHOOL L

Independent primary school in Johannesburg with private investors

Fees R21 000 in 2018
Pupil attrition rate of 2%
Almost 600 pupils

Key success factors. Specialised teachers, exclusive focus on academics, parental involvement

Pupil profile. School goes from grade R to grade 5, and will add grades 6 and 7 in the next two years. About 70% of the children are Africans, 25% Indians/Muslims, and 5% white. Most of the African children live in a nearby black township, but some commute two or more hours each way from as far afield as Soweto, leaving home each day at 5 am in order to get to school when it starts at 7.45am. Some stay on for after-care at an extra charge of R450 a month, although there are not many of these. Some parents pay more for transport than in school fees. No meals are provided, and the children must bring their own food from home.

Parents are generally low and middle income. Some are domestic workers, but others may be doctors or chief executives.

Teaching. The school has 37 staff, of whom 32 are teachers. The ratio of Africans to whites is 60%/40%. There are 128 pupils in each grade, with four classes of 32 each per grade. Teachers are all specialists. In most primary schools, one teacher gives lessons in all subjects. In this school, teachers teach only their own subject. The headmistress sits in on all 16 classes every week for about half an hour in each, and then provides written feedback to the teacher, with whom she also has a half-hour meeting to discuss performance. Teachers have regular professional development training as well. Pay rises and bonuses are given for superior performance.

The school seeks to identify below-standard performance among its pupils early. Once a month parents are given reports on their children's performance, and teachers are also required to telephone parents every month. When children perform below requirements, their parents are called in and provided with packs for them to take home and help their children to bring them up to standard. Where necessary, the parents are trained how to use the packs. Last year, 32 pupils were placed on this system, of whom all eventually made the grade, except one who had to be held down for a year. Longer-than-normal school hours, referred to as "an extended school day", provide the time for extra tuition, so that homework is not required. Depending on grade, tuition ends between 3pm and 4pm four days a week.

Discipline. Where pupils do not live up to the school's standards, they are required to contact their parents and report themselves.

Fees and funding. No one is exempt from paying fees. The R21 000 fee is set at what the government pays towards school education. Stationery costs an additional R420 a year. The fees cover teaching only. The school occupies rented premises, whose cost is the responsibility of a board covering this and other schools in the group. The objective is to move from rented to owned accommodation when the locality has proved to be viable.

Facilities. The school concentrates on academic work and has no sports fields (although physical education is part of the curriculum). Nor does it have any equipment such as overhead projectors or "smartboards". These are regarded as unnecessary. "If the school burnt down tomorrow, we would be able to continue teaching."

Policy. The school aims to show that South Africa can educate children privately at low cost. "Value for money" is vital. The headmistress intends to put her own children into the school when they are old enough. She repeatedly emphasised that teaching was the key, not equipment.

**John Kane-Berman is a policy fellow at the Institute of Race Relations, a think tank promoting political and economic freedom.*

SOURCES

John Kane-Berman: *Levelling the Educational Playing Field*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 2014

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Union, African Development Bank Group, UN Development Programme: *Assessing Progress in Africa Toward the Millennium Development Goals – Analysis of the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*

Joint Civil Society Statement on the African Development Bank and Others' Report, Assessing Progress in Africa Toward the Millennium Development Goals, Marrakesh, 28 November 2014

South African Institute of Race Relations: *South Africa Survey* 2017 and 2018 (forthcoming), IRR, Johannesburg

Articles in various newspapers

Various press releases

Interviews with schools as set out in the Appendix

Note: The writer thanks Alfred Nkungu and Thuthukani Ndebele for providing information for this report, and Carol Archibald for proofreading it. The co-operation of the Gauteng Department of Education is also acknowledged. The school principals interviewed are also thanked for their enthusiastic participation via interviews with the writer.

South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

2 Clamart Road, Richmond, Johannesburg, 2092 South Africa

P O Box 291722, Melville, 2109 South Africa

t. 011 482 7221

info@irr.org.za | www.irr.org.za