



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Report on Rapid Evaluation on Implementation of the January Schools' re-opening campaign or programme. (Based on January 2023 campaign)

Executive summary

In each January, schools academic programme starts across the Limpopo Province. In this period, new learners and those already in schools go to different schools to start their academic year.

The Limpopo Department of Education deploy its top-level employees to different schools with the sole aim of investigating the schools' readiness with the key focus on providing both monitoring and support. The branch dealing with Governance matters develop a tool to be completed by monitors in different schools. This tool is meant to assist in capturing both best and poor performance to be able to gauge the improvement plans the soonest to avoid disturbances of the academic year.

There is also a desire by all other levels of government to support the schools' during this period. Politicians across all departments, legislature, councils and other formations such as businesses, social structures also visit the schools. For poor performing schools they mostly visit to motivate while in good performing school they go for encouragement.

The findings however indicate that most of the people, in most politicians do not use any tool when visiting the schools and as such their commitments to schools that need assistance are not possible to do follow-up. This group also do not even write on schools' journals or logbooks.

On the other hand, tools are not brought back to governance for the consolidation of a report to give evidence for decision making structures. Findings also get lost. Although the programme is good for the sector, its implementation desires for some improvements to make sure it benefits the sector.

1. Introduction

Often, evaluations in government are not conducted due to a host of reasons including lack of resources. However, there are times when **rapid evaluation** which is meant to take place at short period with specific target areas can assist in assessing both the implementation and impact of some programmes with the aim of bringing quick improvement plans (DPME Evaluation Guideline 2.2.20, 2019).

According to the National Evaluation Policy Framework (2019, Pp 38) Departments should plan for their evaluation as seen critical. It is in this regard that the IM & E is embarking on conducting this rapid evaluation with main focus on the 2022 January schools re-opening campaign/Programme.

The main function of the IM & E is to monitor and evaluate policies and programmes of the department with the focus of making sure such yield the impact that correspond with both the **inputs, activities** and the **outcomes**. The IM & E is therefore existing to assist all branches to improve their performance and ultimately the department as a whole to improve performance.

This report is based on Implementation Rapid Evaluation findings on the implementation of the Schools' re-opening campaign in January 2023. The evaluation was conducted across the Limpopo Province in its 10 education district in May/June 2023.

2. Methodology

Although done as quick as possible, Rapid evaluations should not be viewed as sub-evaluation compared to full scale evaluations. They both employ rigorous research techniques. This study focussed more on the implementation of the programme with more desire on identifying benefits to the sector.

2.1. Data collection

A tool based on Circular 209 of 2022 released in December 2022 was used as base for the development of evaluation tool. The desire was to complete the evaluation in 3-6 weeks. In this regard, the tools was used at Head Office (Governance), All district Directors and sampled schools in each district. The schools were randomly sampled from the list of visited schools as in governance tool.

All 10 Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) practitioners were briefed on how to conduct the evaluation through interviews with their district directors and sampled schools. A reporting template based on the tools was also developed and shared with all members. At Head Office, the evaluation tool was shared with Governance before evaluation was conducted. The tool was then sent to three key members of Governance as identified who then were expected to respond and send the tool back to evaluators. The M & E Practitioners tabled their finding in the Quarterly Departmental M & E Forum meeting on the 29th June 2023. Three districts out of seven did not present for different reasons.

- **Capricorn North:** The representative apologised as they were attending a different work-related event.
- **Capricorn South:** The district did not have the report but was represented.
- **Mogalakwena:** The representative apologise as being engaged in other work-related tasks.

2.2. Data analysis

Data collected was analysed thematically. The themes were created based on the questions on the evaluation tool. Follow-up questions were used to get clarifications by both evaluators during interaction with participants and when reports were tabled to make sure there is limited miss-representation.

3. Background

On 29th December 2022, the branch that deals with governance matters released Circular No 209 of 2022. This Circular was directed to all Director Generals, Chief Directors up to the level of the Senior Education Specialists.

Titled **Monitoring and support for 2023 School Readiness and back to school campaign**, the circular was meant to guide departmental officials on how to conduct monitoring and support for 2023 school readiness and back to school campaign. Paragraph 3 also indicated that the campaign will assist in identifying challenges that may adversely impact on effective delivery of education and strive to address them promptly. Also important is for the officials encourage all compulsory school going learners to register in public schools.

Under the theme **Schooling My Future My Life**, the 2023 back to school campaign targets schools' communities and other leaders of community who were to visit selected schools from the 9th of January 2023 with the main focus on matters of learner admission, planning and reporting, facility infrastructure, school Safety matters etc.

This rapid evaluation focused on key issues as stated in the circular to make sure all is done accordingly and also to evaluate impact/results of the whole process/exercise.

The target audience or participants were chosen from all districts and this evaluation was conducted by the M & E Practitioners in all districts and focused on schools sampled for the 2023 campaign by governance and just randomly sampling them. The study was conducted from May 2023 with the reports tabled during the Departmental M & E Forum on 29th June 2023.

4. The Rapid Evaluation tool Used

Instruction: Please Mark by X or tic in the boxes provided:

4.3. January 2023 Schools readiness programme monitoring for programme Managers (Governance) for January 2023

(To be facilitated by M & E practitioners at Head Office)

Participants: Mr Rasethaba, Mr Mmako and Dr Mulaudzi

No.	Question	Response guide			
		Yes		NO	
a	Is the concept document developed?	Yes		NO	
b	When is the concept document shared in the year?	1 st quarter	2 nd quarter	3 rd quarter	4 th quarter
c	Except for Departmental Official the department has limited control on other politicians visiting the schools?	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
d	From which level (Position or rank) are monitors identified: (Except for Politicians)	Circuit level	District level	Head Office	All of the above
e	Monitors get induction on monitoring tool prior actual monitoring.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
f	All monitors received the tool before going to schools	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
f	How long in advance of actual monitoring do monitoring tools get circulated to monitors?	A day before	A week before	A month before	Never before
g	Do you develop a deployment plan?/ Monitoring Schedule or plan?	Yes		No	
h	Do you set a date for report back to Governance Head Office?	Yes		No	
i	What kind of a report do you expect from monitors?	Completed, signed and stamped tool	A tool & summarised report	A summarized report	A verbal report
j	Do all monitors submit on the set date?	Yes		No	
	If Yes, does the above include political leaders?)	Yes		No	
k	Kindly outline the steps you take upon receipt of reports, as part of corrective mechanism for identified challenges.				
l	When are schools declared ready or not at the beginning of the academic year?	In Jan	In Feb	In Mar	Never done
m	To what extent can you confirm that you have a prioritized database of findings that need to be improved?	Strongly confirm	Confirm	Don't confirm	Strongly don't confirm

n	Is the report ever summarised and presented as an item in the EMC?	Yes		No	
o	How useful do you find the EMC recommendations?	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Never received any
p	If not useful, what do you think are the gaps?				
q	What interventions can be done?				
r	Do you develop improvement plan?	Yes		No	
s	Do you have monitoring tool for improvement plan implementation by specific sectors.	Yes		No	
t	What do you think should be improved in 2024 campaign?	On tool		On Monitors	

Note: Keep Means of Verification ready for Verification

**4.4. Questions for Districts Directors for January 2023 campaign only
(Facilitated by Districts M & E Practitioners)**

Participants: District Directors

1. How effective to teaching and learning are the January visits and why?
2. Are you aware of the content of the used tool?
3. If so how easy is it to complete response to questions?
4. How do you prepare for these visits so that they do not disturb learners and teachers?
5. Do you get reports after the visits indicating identified gaps?
6. If so do you develop improvement plans for your district(s)?
7. If you were to improve this programme what would be your improvement suggestions?
8. How many politicians visited your schools?
9. Name schools they have visited?
10. What did they commit to do on identified gaps?
11. What are the plans to do the follow-up on the commitments made?
12. Did H/O release districts specific reports on findings and interventions following the campaign?

13. Your overall view on impact of the campaign:.....

4.5. Questions for sampled Schools' principals

Sampled schools From List by Governance

(To be facilitated by M & E Practitioners in districts)

Districts	Schools
1. Capricorn North	Ramongwana Primary Mahlalaohle Secondary
2. Capricorn South	Laerskool Pietersburg Primary Derek Kobe Secondary
3. Mogalakwena	Polile Primary Lemetja Secondary
4. Mopani East	Sebelaola Primary Mokoto Secondary
5. Mopani West	Motupakgomo Primary Phusela Secondary
6. Sekhukhune East	Baropodi Primary Fetakgomo Secondary
7. Sekhukhune South	Matshipe Primary Hututu Secondary
8. Vhembe East	Tshisahulu Primary Thengwe Secondary
9. Vhembe West	Beitbridge Primary Lwamondo Secondary
10. Waterberg	Groenvlei Sec School-Thabazimbi Phagameng Secondary

1. Did you know about the visits you received in January 2023?
2. Who visited your school (Politician or Official)?
3. Where your SGB and other community leaders available?
4. What are the challenges they found in your school?
5. How did they commit to assist in dealing with the challenges?
6. What ways are you going to use to do follow-up to get your assistance as promised?
7. Show us the monitoring tool they signed, you signed and leave with you.
8. What are the benefits or limitations of the visits you received in January 2023?
9. What ideas did you receive from the visitors which are effective? Mention names of visitors where possible.
10. Do you receive any report after the visits in January? Consider also past visits.
11. How do these visits assist the school in terms of provisioning of identified resource shortages?
12. If you were to decide would you encourage these visits every January and why?

13. Any last comment on the programme you have?.....
.....
.....

Note to M & E Practitioners: Should the name of school be spelt wrongly please feel free to correct it and attach the school's stamp on tool used in a school.

Name of school representative:.....

Signature:.....

Stamp with date of evaluation

4. Findings

The findings are based on the key deliveries as stated on the Departmental monitoring tool developed by the branch dealing with governance. These findings are according to different themes based on questions on the evaluation tool and the responses of the participants.

4.1. Findings from Programme Management (Governance)

Theme 1: Development of concept document and policies guiding the programme.

There is no clarity on the Policy guiding the campaign but there is general agreement that the schools need monitoring and support from Circuit, District and Head Office for the smooth running of education in the Province. Also is a fact that the existence of the department is mainly for the curriculum delivery and management which needs constant monitoring and support.

There is however the concept document developed to guide the processes. This is shared during the first quarter of the year in January. This concept document, just like to tool is shared selected monitors from the Head Office. Other monitors, mainly politicians do not get induction on the tool and the education department has little or no control on the visits to different schools. Only monitors from the department receive the tool to use in different schools. This is done a week before the visits hence leave no good time for monitors to understand the tool.

Theme 2: Induction for all monitors on the monitoring tool

Monitors from the department are provided with the tool but they are never inducted. They therefore use the tool as they understand it. However, the tool has been made easy to comprehend. As for the politicians they visit any school of their choice without the tool.

However, it is believed that they do good work in encouraging learning and teaching in different school. They also make commitments to assist the schools which in most of the time are never followed up.

Theme 3: Monitors report back to governance.

The departmental monitors are expected to bring back to governance the completed, signed off and stamped tools. The expectation is that Governance will then consolidate report to be tabled for decision making and improvement of the campaign/programme. However, these tools and at times some reports brought to Governance are seldom engaged. The campaign then begins in the next cycle of schools re-opening with few, or no interventions put into the place to improve it. Politicians on the other hand do not even complete the schools' journals and logbooks which make it difficult to trace their commitments and valuable suggestions for improvement of teaching and learning.

Theme 4: The tabling of the report for decision making and follow-up on commitments.

The tools and reports are never tabled for decision making. The programme just continues time and again with not full reports scrutinised.

Theme 5: How the programme implementation can be improved.

The Programme managers share the views that the programme can be improved in different ways. These include the following:

- The whole programme should be coordinated from the Limpopo Education Department. This include the one to be tabled at the Cabinet for Premier, MEC's and for Members of the Provincial Legislature.
- If planned on time politicians may be granted time to select local schools, they always support and prioritise them but with the help of their administrators who will administer the tool.
- All monitors should be inducted on time to understand both the tool and the other procedures.
- It also must be emphasised that all monitors should sign the journal of logbooks in schools for ease reference.
- There is a need for a policy to be developed and clear guidelines on the running of this programme beyond just a circular.
- All completed tools and reports should be consolidated by Governance, Table at EMC meeting for further decision making on following commitments and improvement of the whole programme.

4.2. Responses by the District Directors

These are the participants whose schools were visited by both officials and politicians and in most of the visits they are expected to attend. However, in many occasions they delegate when the visits come in same day and time. A total of six out of 10 District Directors participated and reports sent to IM & E. Analysing the report the following observations were made:

Theme 1: Effectiveness of the Jan 23 visits to schools

All the participants agree that the programme is very important to **“assess schools’ readiness on the re-opening week as a way of providing support”** and it **“exposes weaknesses at the beginning of the year”** and it makes schools to prepare. They all agree that schools get their attendance registers, curriculum management plans, functionality of SGB ready for the year. While acknowledging importance of these visits, they raised the following concerns:

- Not all monitors complete and share the monitoring tool.
- The tools, commitments and findings are not shared with the districts. This reduces the opportunity to improve for the better hence year after the other findings remain the same.
- Officials accompanying the Politician also to not complete the tools and not even record commitments by their principals.

Unless the supra mentioned matters are attended to, the intervention will serve only one purpose, **alerting schools and their communities that it is again schools re-opening period** with less or no improvements on challenges.

Theme 2: Awareness on the tool from Governance

All District Directors were informed of the visits to their schools. The information was circulated to all by Institutional Governance directorate. The virtual meeting was arranged in some districts for this purpose. However, all of the participants believe it will assist if the tool is circulated on time to provide room for induction for sll role players.

Theme 3: Support from Political leadership.

It is appreciated by all schools sampled that they see their political leadership providing positive support. This encourages learners who did not work well to improve and encourages those who achieved to make sure they continue their academic journey with courage. Schools indicated that they will be happy if the promises and commitments made by their political leaders were followed so as to make sure schools are benefiting.

Theme 4: Mechanism to follow-up on commitments for further assistance

All participants agree that commitments are made during this intervention. However, following them up remains a challenge. Therefore, the visits remain “ceremonial” event that do not benefit the schools, learners and the sector. However, two participants

indicated that it becomes easy for them to follow on commitments from their local politicians such as the Local and Executive Mayors.

Summary

The schools' re-opening intervention is generally a good programme that only needs some implementation improvement. These include induction on the used tool, induction on importance of the programme to give monitors rigour, improve on capturing of commitments and guidance for improvement and establishment of improvement plans by the Institutional Governance that will then be monitored.

4.6. Findings from the sampled schools

A total of ten schools were purposefully sampled. It became purposeful as the schools targeted were to be from the different socio-economic backgrounds. The target was for both schools in semi-to urban areas and those in rural villages. The number of schools was dictated through the implementation of principles of rapid evaluation that although rigorous it has to be conducted in short period (2- 12 Weeks) as it has to bring findings for quick solution to the identified challenges. This evaluation was conducted in two weeks.

Theme 1: Comment on knowledge of the visit and number of visitors

All the schools indicated that they were informed of the visits for the intervention. They received messages on different platforms. Contrary, there are two who are arguing that schools are made aware because the department does not want to be disappointed as they know schools are visited by both administrative and political leaders but not with intention to get schools ready. However, the fact that all are made aware is commendable as part of transparency.

Theme 2: Presents of school's community e.g. SGB's

Only two schools indicated that their school communities were represented by the members of the SGB. Four indicated they did not extend a hand to the community members. Although they did not, some believe the SGB's need to be invited so that they become part of the decisions coming out of this intervention. The districts and officials also agree that it has never been in their minds to extend the invitation. This however, alienated this important stakeholder of the school who also have room to make decision for their children. This community may reject some of the decisions taken to solve identified challenges.

Theme 3: Challenges and interventions committed and ways to follow-up

Two schools indicated that they managed to record commitment and concerns raised which include commitments to improve on placement of learners, scholar transport and overcrowding where some of the challenges were solved urgently. However, it is

surprising to find that two of the six schools did not capture any commitment and register any concern. This is an indication that many schools are not getting induction on this intervention so that they maximise the visits to their advantage and get ready with challenges they can share with top leaders and politicians visiting schools. One participant indicated that the Department on its own will not like to be exposed should they have challenges and principals get afraid of consequences. This however needs more exploration.

Declaration: The challenge as evaluators we realise is that the M & E practitioners on their own also represent the districts and when conducting evaluation there is possibilities of some levels of being bias and not probe further than the questions.

Theme 4: MoV of the completed tool left at the school or any trace.

The Institutional Governance tool indicates that monitors should make copies of completed tools and leave them at schools while they will submit one to programme management. Three schools had the completed tools shown which on the other hand seem not to reach the Head Office. Three never found the tool even though they were visited by different monitors from the LDoE and other points. This suggest that even the departmental monitors did not stick to the reques by Institutional Governance In numbers.

Implications: The visits to different schools still serve just as reminder to schools that it is January, the information that can be delivered in many ways that will be less costly. If for example all management personnel was sent out to schools in its numbers, then all came back and claim for fuel and other issues they qualify for. Provincially when including visits by legislature and executive suggests more loss for no impact. However, few returned the tool for the consolidation of a report to table at decision making for improvement. Institutional Governance will coordinate the next visits with similar gaps and as such this good intervention is wasteful, fruitless and impactless.

Theme 5: Support to the visits- Should they continue.

All participants support the intervention but suggest that it needs to have improved implementation plan and be conducted for value.

Theme 6: Any suggestion on how campaign can be improved.

The following suggestions are shared:

- All monitors to complete their tools and where need be sign in schools' journals.
- Monitors to be inducted on the importance of the intervention and understanding of the tool.
- The tool to be made available in Quarter 3 before schools close for end of year holidays. At beginning of the year Head Office may be dealing only with identification of schools.
- Schools themselves also inducted in registering and doing follow-up on commitments.

5. Final recommendation based on findings.

Generally, all participants encourage the running of the programme as they believe in encourages readiness in schools and also the schools' communities. However, they all agree that it is not well coordinated. In three out of 20 schools they believe the only problem is the arrival of visitors at times in huge entourages of people not seen to be doing anything to contribute on the programme.

Five out of the six districts that participated also encourage the existence of the programme. They also however do not know what happens after the visits. They are on the other hand able only to follow-up on commitments made by their local politicians such as local mayor and district mayors. They have a challenge with other political leaders from other departments.

Some schools believe that they welcome periodical visits with purpose such as capacity building, improvement on infrastructure and other challenges faces in schools.

In general, the programme is supported by all, but it needs a lot of improvement so that it gives benefits to the factor. Unattendance to challenges indicated has potential to lead to:

- The Programme can be rendered wasteful as there are state funds involved in its implementation e.g. Travelling, accommodation bookings, time etc.
- The Programme will not be able to serve its good intentions, "raising alarm to all to be ready for education year and encourage school readiness".
- The opportunities of closing the gaps will be missed if the programme is not monitored and at times evaluated periodically.

NB: This is a rapid evaluation and as such provides room for further probe on some of the indicated gaps through full scale evaluation or research.

Compiled by Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate

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2019/23