

Guidelines for Schools

General Framework



Schools
Evaluation
Authority

Accountability • Quality • Respect

“When accountability knocks, who will answer?”

(Abelmann & Elmore, 1999)



GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS

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These guidelines have been written to ensure that school evaluations are conducted in a transparent, fair and credible manner. It is also hoped that the guidelines are user friendly for schools to use as a reference, ahead of the evaluation.

A Schools Evaluation Authority evaluation implores schools to ask themselves three key questions:

“How is our school doing?”
“How do we know?”
“What are we going to do next?”

Introduction & Legislative Mandate

The Schools Evaluation Authority (SEA) was established in 2018 (Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Act, no 4, 2018) and, in 2019, the Regulations on the Western Cape Schools Evaluation Authority were gazetted (Provincial Gazette Extraordinary 8079). The legislative mandate re-established the process of quality assurance in schools in the Western Cape.

The SEA has the following aims:

- i. Evaluate, and report on, school performance.
- ii. Drive the improvement of the quality of education in the province following a school evaluation, where a school is found to be ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’.
- iii. Formulate strategies to address the recommendations in the reports (relevant district offices).

It is against this backdrop that the SEA's primary functions are:

- i. Undertake school evaluations.
- ii. Quality assure evaluation reports.
- iii. Publish school evaluation reports.

Through clear steps and accountability towards targeted, rating-specific school support and improvement, the focus is on improving teaching and learning, in general, and on learner achievement, in particular. Evaluations focus specifically on the impact of schools in improving the educational experience and lives of Western Cape learners through learning and their successes and achievements. The school self-evaluation (internal) and SEA evaluation (external) are not an end in itself; evaluations, both internal and external, are worthwhile only if they lead to improvements in the educational experiences and outcomes for learners, and to the maintenance of the highest standards where these already exist.

1. The Merit of School Evaluations

Improving the quality of teaching and learning has been a key imperative of education policy in the Western Cape. The mantra “Quality education for every child in every classroom in every school in the province” has become the clarion call for schools to improve lives by raising standards.

Accountability is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Although SEA evaluations, which are wholly external in nature, hold schools, SMTs and teachers to account for their actions and for the quality of teaching and learning, evaluations also rely on SMTs and teachers to embrace an internal accountability ‘default setting’ of responsibility towards one another and their charges. Schools have a set of norms and values; it is through these that schools hold people accountable for their actions. Schools which hold themselves professionally accountable are successful schools.

The SEA appreciates that each school is different (context matters) and that different schools require different kinds of intervention. ‘Learner Achievement’ and the ‘Quality of Teaching & Learning’, however, cannot be compromised. In a seminal research article in 1999, Abelman & Elmore asked:

“When accountability knocks, will anyone answer?”

The SEA promotes reciprocal accountability as vital to all school improvement. If the SEA, through its evaluations and reporting, recommends incremental, or even radical performance improvement, post-evaluation support must provide the schools with additional capacity to produce the recommended improved performance. Change can be externally recommended but it is no secret that change must come from within the school.

The SEAs ‘Standards and sub-standards’ (indicators of excellence) allow schools to reflect – in a sense to *look at themselves in a mirror*. In addition, schools are encouraged to embark on a School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and to use this to draft a School Improvement Plan (SIP). The ‘Standards & Indicators’, SSE and SIP are not mutually exclusive indicators, or processes.

2. The Evaluation Process

The SEA places great emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning i.e. the curriculum. The SEA will ensure that all schools are held to high standards and are held accountable for their performance. Intent, implementation and impact with regards to the curriculum are key to school evaluations. The SEA is a force for improvement and will direct its resources intentionally to those areas that have the greatest impact on the provision of quality education.

The SEA will evaluate your school on **5 key areas** (also refer to Guidelines for Schools: Key Areas and 'Standards'/'Indicators'):

Key Area 1: Learner achievement

Key Area 2: Teaching & Learning

Key Area 3: Behaviour & safety

Key Area 4: Leadership & management

Key Area 5: Governance, parents & community

The **process of a SEA evaluation** is as follows:

- 2.1 The SEA's Chief Evaluator notifies the principal, SGB and District Director via email, and telephonically, that a school evaluation will be undertaken.
- 2.2 The written notification will provide the following information:
 - 2.2.1 The dates and times of the visit.
 - 2.2.2 The purpose and focus of the evaluation.
 - 2.2.3 The designation and names of the SEA Team leading the evaluation.
 - 2.2.4 The evaluation instrument as approved by the Chief Evaluator.
- 2.3 All Staff members are to be present at school (where reasonably practicable) for the duration of the evaluation.
- 2.4 The Lead Evaluator and Evaluators will visit a selection of classes and/or all classes to gauge the quality of teaching and learning and learner achievement. The focus is not on individual teachers' performance but rather on the quality of teaching and learning across the school.
- 2.5 Interviews, focus group meetings and other meetings will also be held.
- 2.6 The evaluation has three stages: (1) Gathering evidence (documents, direct observations, focus group interviews with learners, teachers, parents) (2) Deciding on ratings (3) Giving feedback each day (Day 2: it is required of the SMT, a member of the SGB, Circuit Manager to be present).
- 2.7 If the school has a donor-partner or operating partner, any of the representatives of aforementioned partners may attend the oral feedback meeting.
- 2.8 Any member of Staff may attend the oral feedback meeting.
- 2.9 A questionnaire must be completed by the school's stakeholders at the conclusion of the feedback session.
- 2.10 The Lead Evaluator prepares a draft written report based on the empirical findings and the interpretation of the data obtained during the evaluation.
- 2.11 The Lead Evaluator will provide a copy of the draft written report to the principal, SGB and the District Director, within 5 working days of the school evaluation visit, providing them with the opportunity to submit any additional evidence to the Lead Evaluator within 21 working days of receiving the report, specifically addressing any findings with which they disagree.
- 2.12 The Lead Evaluator must consider any additional evidence received and, if necessary, amend the draft report (in consultation with the Chief Evaluator).

- 2.13 The draft report must be submitted to the Chief Evaluator who will discuss and approve the draft report both prior to submitting it to the relevant parties and after the school has provided additional evidence, if applicable.
- 2.14 Once the draft report is approved by the Chief Evaluator, the report is deemed to be the final SEA report.
- 2.15 The final report must be provided to the principal, SGB, the District Director, the Head of Education and the provincial Minister of Education prior to public distribution or publication of the final report.
- 2.16 The Chief Evaluator publishes the final report on the SEA's website and the website of the WCED.
- 2.17 If any reports contain recommendations for improvement, the provincial Head of Department for Education will submit a biannual report to the provincial Minister of Education and the Chief Evaluator reporting on the measures to facilitate improvement until the measures for improvement have been implemented.

3. Terms and Conditions of the SEA evaluation

3.1 How are schools chosen?

- All public ordinary schools in the province will be evaluated. These include preparatory schools, primary schools, high schools and combined schools.
 - Special schools and subsidized independent schools may be evaluated.
 - The Chief Evaluator develops an annual programme that determines the annual itinerary of the Schools Evaluation Authority.
 - Schools are chosen based on:
 - District
 - Size
 - Type
 - Quintile
 - Systemic Results
 - NSC Results
- An even spread is preferred
- The provincial Minister of Education may request an evaluation of any school not on the itinerary.
 - Schools which underwent an evaluation may request a follow-up evaluation.
 - The Chief Evaluator may deploy an evaluation team to any school previously evaluated if it is beneficial to the school.

3.2 Notification of an evaluation

- The SEA gives schools **two days' notice** to prepare for the evaluation.
- Schools should appreciate that a school evaluation is 'school in a mirror' and not a 'window-dressing' exercise.

- Schools are to note that an evaluation may be unannounced (without notice) if the Chief Evaluator, or provincial Minister of Education deems that this is necessary for the effective performance of the functions of the SEA. In such cases the SEA will meet with the principal and SMT of the school to discuss reasons why the evaluation was unannounced as well as the purpose of the evaluation.
- The SEA confirms the actual dates with each school. These dates are unfortunately not negotiable.
- Deferment may be considered at the discretion of the Chief Evaluator and only under exceptional circumstances. In such cases the principal must liaise directly with the Chief Evaluator.

3.3 Confidentiality and ethics

- During the pre-visit meeting, the Lead Evaluator will discuss the need for confidentiality.
- Discussions in focus group interviews and meetings are also deemed to be confidential.
- A written request for documentation by the SEA must provide assurance to the school that it will be stored safely and returned to the school (in the same condition as it was received) within 30 days of the completion of an evaluation.
- Evaluators may not name any individual in any report/s.
- Evaluators undertake to act in the best interests of the schools they work with and will take all reasonable steps to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed or distributed to any third party.
- Evaluators sign a 'Confidentiality Agreement' as part of their contractual obligation to the SEA.

3.4 Conduct of Lead Evaluators and Evaluators

- It is expected of evaluators to uphold and demonstrate the highest professional standards while conducting evaluations, in line with the SEA's values, framework, standards and indicators.
- The SEA evaluators will:
 - Be objective, impartial and inspect without fear or favour.
 - Base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence.
 - Declare all actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
 - Report honestly and clearly.
 - Ensure that all judgements are fair and reliable.
 - Act with integrity.
 - Be ambassadors for the SEA in how they interact with schools i.e. civil and respectful
 - Respect personal boundaries with adults and learners.
 - Respond timeously and appropriately to reasonable requests from all stakeholders.

3.5 Conduct of schools

- Schools are to be transparent and open with evaluators and embrace a positive, collegial working relationship with evaluators.
- The SEA expects schools to do the following:
 - Continue with 'business as usual' during evaluations.
 - Provide the evaluation team with a working space (e.g. office) in which they can work during the evaluation process.
 - Allow the evaluation team access to the wi-fi at the school.
 - Be courteous and professional and treat evaluators with respect.
 - Approach the evaluation with integrity.
 - Be open, transparent and honest.
 - Enable evaluators to observe the normal functioning of the school without window dressing.
 - Provide opportunities for evaluators to meet with learners, staff and parents.
 - Allow evaluators to observe teaching practices and talk to learners, teachers and parents without a member of the SMT being present.
 - Ensure the safety of the evaluators while at schools.
 - Bring any concerns about the evaluation or visit to the attention of the Lead Evaluator promptly and in a suitable manner.

3.6 Protocols for Focus Groups

3.6.1 Purpose of focus groups

- Evaluators must explore different perspectives and opinions in order to gather evidence during the evaluation.
- The qualitative information gathered will be used in writing the draft report.

3.6.2 Rules of engagement for focus groups

- The ground rules should be explained to all present.
- A time limit should be set.
- Decide which party may or may not record the meeting. If a decision is made to record the meeting it must be done so with the permission of the participants.
- Put cell phones on silent for the duration of the meeting.
- Matters discussed must remain strictly confidential.
- The focus group is a safe space of all participants.
- Everyone may participate freely in sharing views and/or opinions so that as much information as possible can be gathered.
- No individuals may be named during the meeting/s as general information is being gathered.
- Participants must listen actively, without interrupting any participant.

- The Chairperson of the meeting must redirect the meeting to the purpose of the meeting if any participants compromise the conversations/ views/opinions of other participants.
- Participants who compromise the spirit of the meeting, after being re-directed to the purpose of the meeting, will be asked to leave the meeting.

3.7 Post-evaluation support

- The SEA conducts evaluations independently of the Western Cape Education Department.
- In the case of schools which are rated 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' the District Director must deploy district resources to support the school post-evaluation.
- If any reports contain recommendations for improvement, the provincial Head of Department for Education will submit a biannual report to the provincial Minister of Education and the Chief Evaluator reporting on the measures to facilitate improvement until the measures for improvement have been implemented.
- Should a school need further support and/or intervention with implementing some of the recommendations, they are encouraged to reach out to their relevant Circuit Managers and/or District Directors.

4. Collecting evidence

The evaluators will gather and review evidence to determine the school's alignment with the standards and indicators for each area of evaluation.

- 4.1 Data collected will be qualitative and quantitative data.
- 4.2 Qualitative data (*in situ*): interviews, focus groups, informal discussions, observations.
- 4.3 Quantitative data: numerical data e.g. systemic tests, NSC results, SBA tests/assessments, checklists, surveys.
- 4.4 The evaluation team will not request excessive amounts of documents; however, it may request any document that allows it to make a reliable and authentic judgement.
- 4.5 It will not be possible for evaluators to scrutinize all documents on site in two days, such is the nature of the evaluation.
- 4.6 Evaluators will not check every individual policy as the evaluation is not a compliance exercise. Evaluators may request to see a particular policy if it is needed as part of a discussion for a particular standard and sub-standards.

5. Evaluation Standards and Rating Scale

- 5.1 The SEA's ratings have the benefit of offering clear, easy-to-understand findings to schools and the public on the five key areas evaluated.
- 5.2 SEA evaluators will adjudicate the 'Overall Quality/Effectiveness' of schools besides the five key areas for evaluation (**Learner Achievement; Teaching & Learning; Behaviour & Safety; Leadership & Management; Governance, Parents & Community**).
- 5.3 Some of the essential elements that evaluators will consider when adjudicating the 'Overall Quality/Effectiveness' of schools (taking all five areas for evaluation into account) are as follows:
- What it is like to attend the school.
 - The quality of education provided to learners.
 - Evaluators will consider the extent to which education at the school meets the diverse needs of the learners through a holistic approach; the educational standards at the school; the quality of leadership and management; the financial resources made available at the school and whether they are managed economically, efficiently and effectively; the extent to which the school develops internal processes for self-evaluation in terms of its SIP; the safety, conduct and attendance of learners and staff at the school; the social and cultural development of learners at the school; the performance management and development of educators at the school; the relationship between parents, the community and the school; school governance.
- 5.4 There is a **4-point rating scale** used for evaluation findings:
1 = Inadequate 2 = Requires improvement 3 = Good 4 = Outstanding
- 5.5 When a school is evaluated it is given a rating for its overall quality, a rating for each of the five key areas of school performance and a rating for each of the standards and sub-standards (indicators of quality and excellence).
- 5.6 The standards and sub-standards set out the expectations for schools and, although not all schools may meet the standards now, schools are expected to work towards doing so in future.
- 5.7 The standards are sign-posts for a school's development and improvement.
- 5.8 Below is an explanation of the **overall ratings**:

Outstanding	The quality of education is 'outstanding' in terms of 'Learner Achievement' and 'Teaching & Learning'. The remaining three key judgements are likely to be 'outstanding' too. In exceptional circumstances, one of the other key judgements may be 'good', as long as there is convincing evidence that the school is improving this area sustainably, with evidence, and working towards 'outstanding'. This means meeting each and every one of the 'good' criteria but not meeting the 'outstanding' rating for that key judgement.
Good	The quality of education is 'good' in terms of 'Learner Achievement' and 'Teaching & Learning'. The remaining three key judgements are likely to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. In exceptional circumstances, one of the other key judgements may 'require improvement', as long as there is convincing evidence that the school is improving this area sustainably, with evidence, and working towards 'good'.
Requires Improvement	The quality of education 'requires improvement' in terms of 'Learner Achievement' and 'Teaching & Learning'. Other than in exceptional circumstances, it is likely that when the school is judged as 'requires improvement' in any of these two key judgements, the school's overall effectiveness will also require improvement.
Inadequate	The quality of education is 'inadequate' in terms of 'Learner Achievement' and 'Teaching & Learning'. Other than in exceptional circumstances, it is likely that when the school is judged as 'inadequate' in any of these two key judgements, the school's overall effectiveness will also be 'inadequate'.

*Note: there is no 'average' rating, or half-ratings. A school must achieve a rating of **OUTSTANDING** in **Learner Achievement** and **Teaching & Learning** to be rated an 'Outstanding' school.*

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The SEA supports school improvement and aims to improve our learners' lives by raising standards in our schools.
- 6.2 Accountability is essential for quality education provisioning.
- 6.3 Schools are encouraged to embrace the evaluation as evaluations allow schools to see themselves in a mirror.
- 6.4 Schools are encouraged to share feedback (questionnaire) with the SEA after the visit so that the SEA can refine and develop its own processes that best suit the needs of public schools in the Western Cape.
- 6.5 Our children deserve a world-class education. Evaluations, and actioning improvement, must be a **force for improvement** for every child in every classroom in every school in the province.

Schools Evaluation Authority
The Waldorf, 80 Burg Street,
Cape Town, 8001
tel: +27 21 483 6441



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