

Strategy 2024 - 2028



Schools Evaluation Authority

Accountability • Quality • Respect

“When accountability knocks, who will answer?”

(Abelmann & Elmore, 1999)



STRATEGY 2024 – 2028

1. Introduction

Transforming lives by improving education in the Western Cape is a mammoth task. Bringing about equity and improving school quality is a key imperative of the educational landscape.

It is against this backdrop that the School Evaluation Authority's (SEA) vision is to improve schools in the Western Cape through strengthening school accountability. At the heart of the SEA's evaluation of schools are three key questions: 🌟 How are we doing? 🌟 How do we know? 🌟 What are we going to do now? Excellent schools focus these questions on learning. Learning is at the heart of an excellent school. Learning is its core business.

Pressure for increased school accountability is a distinctive hallmark of the SEA. In a seminal research article written in 1999, Abelman & Elmore ask the key question:

“When accountability knocks, will anyone answer?”

The SEA aims to transform lives by improving education for every learner, in every classroom, at every school in the Western Cape. The SEA is a force for improvement. The SEA acknowledges that each school is different, and that different schools need different kinds of intervention and levels of accountability.

We work with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). Although we are functionally linked to the WCED, we are independent of it. As a result, we aim to raise standards in schools through accountability: we support better education metrics, evaluation and quality assurance systems and help policymakers and practitioners use our reports, and data, for decision-making and accountability at all levels.

Although the South African 'model' of education delivery is based on a Head-Office/District Office/School modality, where a reciprocity of accountability should prevail, the school remains the basic unit for the delivery of quality education and as a result, must be the primary place where leaders and teachers are held to account. However, the SEA acknowledges that reciprocity of accountability in education in the province is vital for school improvement. When SEA evaluations recommend improvement, however incremental, there exists a responsibility, from the education ecosystem, to provide additional capacity to produce the improvement required.

The SEA evaluates public and subsidized independent schools in the province. The SEA is in the unique position to see what is happening in classrooms, and at schools, and must use the evidence gathered to identify trends and highlight issues that must be addressed. In essence, SEA evaluations are schools in a mirror. Evaluations must identify the right patch to fit the right hole. It also stands to reason that evaluations can ventilate good practice that other schools can learn from.

The SEA is a values-based, transparent and accountable authority where children and learners come first and where standards are judged (and findings reported to the public) without fear or favour. In addition, the SEA's policies, judgements and insights will be evidence-led. SEA Staff must act with integrity and impartiality. The SEA must be accessible and engaged to our different audiences in different contexts so that we can better understand their needs and always act in the best interests of our learners.

The SEA's role remains to improve lives by raising standards. It is born of a vision of improving schools through strengthening school accountability. Our children deserve a world-class education. It is incumbent on all schools to be the hope that delivers a world class education to our children.

2. 2018 – 2023: An evolving strategy

The SEA is a statutory body which exercises its powers under the ‘Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Act, 2018 (Act 4 of 2018)’, read with the ‘Regulations on the Western Cape Schools Evaluation Authority, Provincial Notice’ 47 dated 11 April 2019, independently of the WCED. Its independence provides assurance both to schools and to the wider parent community.

2.1 Historical context: the establishment of the SEA

2018

In the Transforming Schools Accountability (TSA) programme, Education Partnership Group (EPG) supported the WCED to develop and pilot a new school evaluation tool to ensure it was fit-for-purpose. In parallel, EPG supported the WCED to lay the foundations for establishing a new Schools Evaluation Authority (SEA) to independently evaluate schools and publish school evaluation reports informing parents and communities about the performance of schools in their area.

EPG supported the drafting of the Western Cape Education Amendment Bill, with provision for the new SEA. Working closely with Western Cape government officials, EPG and the WCED established and facilitated a Task Team to drive the launch and implementation of the new SEA. The Western Cape Education Amendment Bill was passed in November 2018 and the Task Team set about implementing the SEA.

2019

In the Collaboration Schools programme, EPG worked with school operators to reform the ‘school improvement planning’ process, shifting it from a compliance exercise to a meaningful roadmap for each school’s improvement journey.

In the TSA programme, the final school evaluation tool was approved for scaled use across the province. EPG worked closely with the WCED’s District Education Offices to develop process maps for post-evaluation support and consequences.

2020

School evaluations by the SEA began. In the TSA programme, the SEA recruited a Chief Evaluator and established an online portal where school evaluation reports were published.

2.2 Where are we now in terms of school evaluations?

The SEA has appointed its second Chief Evaluator for the next four years (November 2023 – November 2027).

Between 2020 and 2023, 172 schools were evaluated, and reports published.

An accelerated evaluation cycle starts in 2024. A minimum target of 240 schools and a maximum target of 300 schools to be evaluated, and reports published, has been set.

Over the next four-year period, the intention is to evaluate 1 200 schools. Each school in the province should be evaluated at least once every five years.

In the Western Cape, school evaluations place a greater emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning as well as on learner achievement. It is the foundation of successful schools. What children learn, how they learn and the climate within which they learn are important. The SEA's strategy for the next four years will build on this as we raise our expectations of schools and elevate our ambitions, and hope, for our learners.

3. Guiding principles

The SEA's role involves making credible and professional judgements to rate the quality of Western Cape schools. It is a tremendous responsibility, as the findings have consequences for all those who work in schools and for the life chances of our province's learners.

The SEA is a force for magnification, progress, improvement and advancement through the transparent, respectful, focused, reasonable and responsible use of school evaluations and insights.

The work of the SEA must lead to improved standards in the quality of teaching and learning and in learner achievement. However, the SEA is not a school

improvement agency. Improvement must be the role of the school and the wider education ecosystem which supports the school.

Our evaluations are evidence-led and are carried out in accordance with frameworks developed by education sector specialists, both in South Africa and abroad. Our focused frameworks, and tools, are available on our website and include various documents which will give schools transparent insight into school evaluation processes.

In embracing our responsibilities as an evaluation authority, the SEA will not make unnecessary demands on schools. The SEA is acutely aware of the unintended consequences that notice of an evaluation may bring. The SEA seeks to evaluate fairly, without any burden of compliance on the schools it evaluates. As a result, SEA evaluations are focused primarily on quality. This approach is one which is right for the local context, addressing the overwhelming need for improvement in school standards and learner outcomes in the province.

SEA evaluations will be intentional in their focus. The SEA has a specific mandate; in carrying out this mandate, the SEA's resources will be deployed to prioritize the evaluation of the culture of teaching and learning and learner achievement. It is the very nature of this mandate which requires the SEA to turn the mirror on classroom practices. This is the SEA's most pressing priority.

The SEA recognizes the inequality in the education system. We recognize context. We recognize that some schools serve affluent communities and others serve indigent communities. However, the SEA will never accept the excuse that context is an excuse for poor performance. The SEA expects all schools to deliver quality teaching, with a supportive, hands-on principal and SMT.

SEA evaluations will allow for trend analysis too. SEA evaluations cannot be seen as isolated from the 'whole' when the whole exceeds the sum of its parts. The Chief Evaluator is required, by law, to report to the provincial Minister of Education who may, if necessary, table the SEA's Annual Report at a meeting of the provincial legislature. The SEA is in an ideal position to evaluate schools ('knee deep' in schools), identify trends and highlight issues that need to be addressed – and to also highlight examples of 'best practice' to share with other schools.

4. Our values

The SEA's work is about putting children and learners first so that they may reach their full potential.

The SEA has three values which guide the work that we do:

Accountability: The SEA is accountable for its work and accepts responsibility for its actions. SEA evaluators accept responsibility for honest and ethical conduct in carrying out their mandate. The SEA is a statutory body with regulatory functions and reports to the provincial Minister of Education (and the provincial Parliament) on how we spend taxpayers' money. The SEA also publishes an Annual Report of how effectively it is delivering its mandate – and strategy. Our approach to evaluations is constantly open to scrutiny.

Quality: Schools have distinctive characteristics and attributes. The SEA measures these against a set of standards and indicators. The SEA will always be honest about the difference between what is authentically excellent, or good, and what needs improvement. SEA evaluations are always evidence-led (our policies, frameworks, standards, indicators and insights are grounded in evidence).

Respect: The SEA will carry out its mandate with due regard to the rights of everyone it encounters during an evaluation. The SEA values every role player in the education ecosystem and will intentionally respect them all.

5. Strategic Priorities

The SEA has a legislated mandated responsibility for external evaluations at schools in the Western Cape while schools are explicitly required to:

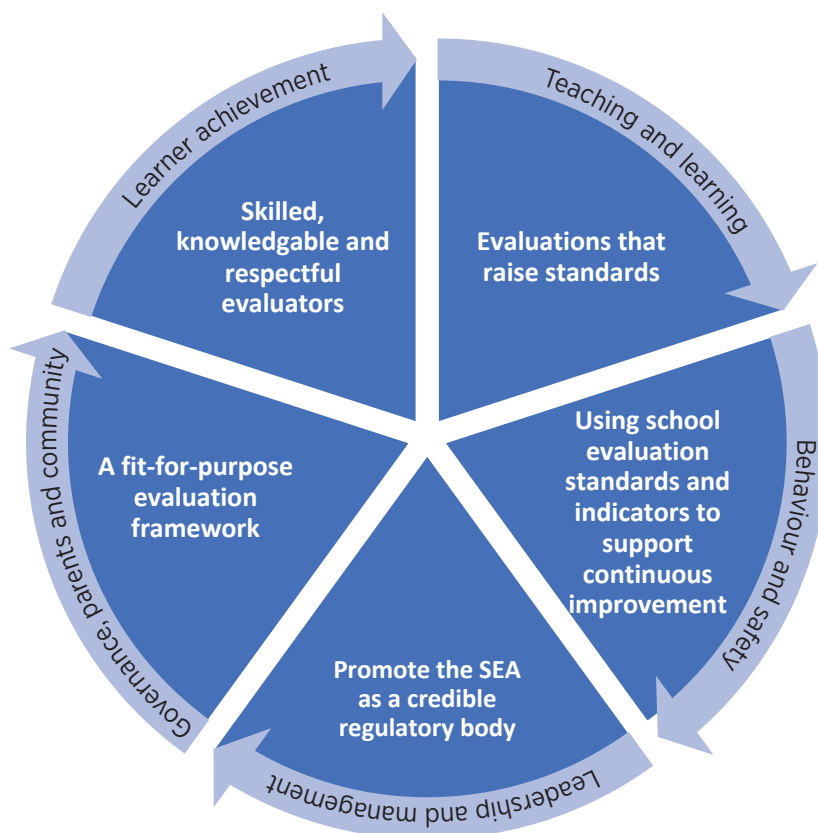
- Undertake a School Self-evaluation (SSE), which is a formative process that enables schools to review their performance and identify strengths and successes as well as potential areas for development.
- Develop a School Improvement Plan (SIP) which is an ongoing programme of self-review of improvement, especially with respect to the evaluation of information on learner achievement (Academic Performance Improvement Plan APIP).

Self-evaluation is neither a bureaucratic nor mechanistic process. It is a reflective professional process through which schools get to know themselves well and identify the best way forward for their learners. Self-evaluation is forward looking. It is about change and improvement, whether gradual or transformational, and is based on professional reflection, challenge and support. It involves taking considered decisions about actions which result in clear benefits for young people.

Schools set in place their own evaluation processes and, as part of an annual reporting cycle, provide regular accounts of learner achievement in relation to goals and targets, along with planned improvement actions. The intention is that all schools and the school community should be engaged in an ongoing, cyclical process of internal evaluation and inquiry that is directed at improving educational outcomes for all their learners.

Integrating internal and external evaluation for improvement, reiterates the value to schools of harmonizing their internal evaluation processes with the SEA's external evaluations. It supports schools to use their internal evaluation findings to engage with others in their school community and beyond. It is important for schools to realize that organizational conditions and capability influence engagement with the external evaluation.

To fulfill its mandate the SEA has identified FIVE strategic priorities:



Evaluations that raise standards

SEA evaluations will improve school quality in the Western Cape.

Our evaluation frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, assist schools, and evaluators, to focus on the right things. The entire evaluation process, centered around professional dialogue, helps school leaders to understand how they can improve. Ratings inform schools, parents and/or caregivers, governors, the WCED and provincial government about standards being achieved. Reports where schools were rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good' are used to highlight best practice, which, in turn, help other school leaders and the education support-system to target their school improvement efforts.

Skilled, knowledgeable and respectful evaluators

SEA evaluators have the highest levels of training and have excellent knowledge of the Western Cape's educational landscape at school level, especially the three knowledge systems of education, namely curriculum, instruction and assessment. SEA evaluators are brand ambassadors for the SEA as they go about their significant task of school evaluations, basing their findings, and recommendations, on real evidence. Evaluators will write reports that stand up to the highest levels of scrutiny – and ones where schools will have an opportunity to engage before being published.

SEA evaluators are selected for their skills and knowledge of the provincial education landscape, in particular, and of South African education policy in general.

The SEA continually upskills its evaluators to be relevant and knowledgeable of changing trends in education in the province, as well as programmes that are delivered in the classrooms of the Western Cape.

Onboarding of evaluators, especially those new to the SEA, must be of a very high quality so that evaluators can be confident in decisions that they make.

If the SEA mandate is to be a success, it is essential that its evaluators are focused, self-regulated, engaged and motivated. Evaluators must know their roles and responsibilities well and act with integrity and objectivity in all that they do. SEA evaluators are to be aware of their own unconscious bias.

The accelerated evaluation cycle, an ambitious programme of evaluation delivery, will require a growing team of evaluators. Over the coming years, the evaluation team will be expanded so that all schools can be evaluated at least once every five years.

The SEA recognizes the value of a diverse workforce and will actively pursue the employment of evaluators from diverse backgrounds.

Using school evaluation standards and indicators to support continuous improvement.

The school evaluation standards and indicators identify practices that contribute to quality education. These practices should be viewed holistically, not used in isolation or as a checklist. Schools are encouraged to use them as a trustworthy reference when trying to make sense of data and to answer the question “How good are our practices?” Use them too when investigating the relationship between different – and, sometimes, apparently unconnected – aspects of your school’s performance.

The quality standards and indicators are a guide in a process and not a set of recipes for success. They must sit alongside professional expertise and other sources of guidance, for example on the curriculum, on learning, on the craft of teaching and on the leadership of change, to contribute to a common search for quality and the factors involved in achieving it in any class or school.

Performance in schools is increasingly judged based on effective learning outcomes. Information is critical to knowing whether the school system in the Western Cape is delivering good performance and to providing feedback for improvement.

The SEA will share insights about the education our children receive through our evaluations and research (analysis). Our insights will inform practitioners, policymakers and decision-makers and lead to improvement across the entire system.

We will build understanding of the quality of subject/phase teaching our children receive by writing reports based on evidence from a variety of sources during an evaluation. We may even write subject reports which indicate the quality of teaching at subject level.

As a result, teaching practice, and learning outcomes, will improve because District support (post-evaluation support) teams use our recommendations to collaborate with the schools towards implementing school improvement.

The SEA’s evaluation standards and indicators are key to building a stronger provincial education system.

A fit-for-purpose evaluation framework.

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. 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 evaluation framework which has been developed, and implemented, focuses on five key areas:

Key Area 1: Learner achievement

Key Area 2: Teaching and Learning

Key Area 3: Behaviour and safety

Key Area 4: Leadership and management

Key Area 5: Governance, parents and community

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

- Data collected will be qualitative and quantitative data.
- Classroom observations will be the norm.
- Qualitative data (*in situ*): interviews, focus groups, informal discussions, observations.
- Quantitative data: numerical data e.g., systemic tests, NSC results, SBA tests/assessments, checklists, surveys.
- 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.
- It will not be possible for evaluators to scrutinize all documents on site in two days, such is the nature of the evaluation.

The evaluation process is essential for school development and ongoing sustainability. The evaluation framework emphasizes the process of engagement and outcomes and seeks to describe, through reporting, the realities of schooling in the province so that our province's schools become places of high-quality teaching and learning.

Promote the SEA as a credible, accessible and engaged regulatory body.

Ethical conduct is a crucial component of any organization's success – and key to building trust.

The SEA values its ethical principles above all else. Our ethical principles consider values, standards and regulations that dictate how our evaluators conduct themselves at work and how evaluations are undertaken at schools. The SEA intends to develop trust through its emphasis on its credibility, accessibility and engagement.

It is crucial to build a better understanding of the SEA. We will engage constructively with all role players so that they have a full understanding of how we operate. We will be open and accessible to different audiences in varying contexts, understanding their needs and always acting in the best interests of our children and learners.

As a result, schools and communities-at-large will appreciate that the SEA works in the best interests of children and learners. The SEA recognizes that schools, and school communities, must be satisfied with the service that the SEA provides.

6. Conclusion

The primary purpose of school evaluation is to achieve equity and excellence in outcomes for all learners.

Schools and their communities need to continuously evaluate the impact of their actions, and daily interactions, on learner outcomes. Strong leadership is required for this to happen. Their systems, processes and resources should support purposeful data gathering, collaborative inquiry and decision making and align closely with the school's vision, mission, values, strategic direction, goals, equity and excellence priorities.

Using a range of quality achievement data, leaders, teachers and SGBs in highly effective schools collaboratively monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement strategies. Data is used to drive improvement. They are responsive to findings, making changes as necessary, and successful strategies are embedded into school practice so that all learners benefit.

Periodic external evaluation supports this cycle of continuous improvement by bringing an external lens to bear on achievement, the extent to which conditions support improvement, and future next steps.

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