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### ***School governance in a fragmented political and bureaucratic environment: Case studies from South Africa's Eastern Cape province***

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores governance dynamics in four case study schools in low-income communities in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. A main aim is to identify empirically the causal mechanisms through which horizontal, school-level governance might function as an 'institutional substitute' for weaknesses in the province's education bureaucracy. The case studies uncovered both vicious circles of capture, and virtuous spirals – with the latter characterised by shared developmental commitment among school leaders, teachers, parents and the community, strong enough to counter efforts at predation. The findings offer encouragement that non-hierarchical entry points for improving educational outcomes indeed have some potential to achieve gains.

**Keywords:** School governance, school leadership, political settlements, school principals, multistakeholder governance, education, South Africa, Eastern Cape

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This paper is one of a series in a research programme on the politics and governance of basic education in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> Research was undertaken at multiple levels – national, provincial (Western Cape and Eastern Cape), district, and school. Annex A describes the consolidated research framework used to guide the overall research programme. The focus of this paper is on the micro-level governance and political economy determinants of performance over time in schools within the Butterworth district in the Eastern Cape. Section I details the context, concepts, hypotheses and empirical methodology that guide this study. Sections II-V detail the school-level findings. Section VI assesses governance comparatively across the case study schools. Section VII suggests some policy implications.

## **I: Framework, hypotheses and methodology**

The past three decades have witnessed major gains the world over (including in South Africa) in enhancing the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary education; but gains in educational quality have been much harder to achieve (Pritchett, 2013). The reasons for the difficulties in improving educational outcomes are many. They include the difficult socio-economic context in which many children live; the lack of resources to provide teachers, facilities or schoolbooks; and shortfalls in teacher training. But there is also a more general underlying issue, namely the extent to which the human, financial and physical resources available for educating children are used effectively. What accounts for the disconnect between major gains in education quantity, but only modest progress in improving quality? This paper aims to shed light on this question via a micro-level focus on school-level politics and governance in four case study schools in the Eastern Cape.

### **Research questions and framework**

A major controversy worldwide in discussion of the governance of public school systems concerns the appropriate balance between hierarchical (top-down, bureaucratic) governance, and more 'horizontal' approaches which delegate resources and responsibility closer to the schools themselves. Certainly, a better performing public hierarchy is more desirable than a weakly-performing one. The allocation of scarce public funds across the system; the assignment of personnel to the places where they are most needed; building the capabilities of teachers and other employees who work within the system; monitoring and managing the results achieved by staff; the construction and management of infrastructure; the provision of furniture, textbooks and other teaching materials – these are quintessentially bureaucratic tasks, and a school system will surely work better when they are done well than when they are done badly.

As Kota, Hendricks, Matambo and Naidoo (2016) review and explore in depth, the performance of the Eastern Cape education bureaucracy is notoriously weak.

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<sup>1</sup> The South African research is in turn part of the University of Manchester-based and DFID-supported Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) global comparative research programme, which has supported studies on the politics and governance of basic education in three countries – Bangladesh, Ghana and South Africa.

Further, for reasons spelled out by Levy, Cameron, Hoadley and Naidoo (2016) in their synthesis of the overall research programme's findings, insofar as bureaucracies are embedded in politics, the prospects of improving the performance of the Eastern Cape's bureaucracy seem limited.

Do bureaucratic weaknesses doom Eastern Cape schools to poor performance? Or might horizontal governance function as an 'institutional substitute', with weaknesses in hierarchy offset, at least to some extent, by alternative (more horizontal and bottom-up) institutional arrangements? The main purpose of this paper is to explore, in the Eastern Cape context, the hypothesis that horizontal governance can be a partial institutional substitute for weaknesses in hierarchy.

There is a growing global literature on the strengths and limitations of horizontal governance in education.<sup>2</sup> On the surface the results seem inconclusive. Some studies show that horizontal governance adds value; others find that it does not. Viewed through the political economy lens laid out in Levy (2014) and in the overall ESID research programme, these mixed results are unsurprising: they illustrate the truism that 'context matters'. But policy analysis needs to go further. What shapes context (especially, for the purposes of the present paper, at the school level)? Given context, what is a 'good fit' – specifically, how might the preferred approach to micro-level education policymaking and implementation vary with context?

Our analysis takes as its conceptual point of departure the classic distinction between institutions (the 'rules of the game') and organisations (the players) – that is, between governance arrangements and stakeholder influences. As North (1990), North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) and Ostrom (2005) explore theoretically, governance arrangements and stakeholder dynamics are inter-dependent: The rules of the game set the parameters for the interactions among stakeholders; stakeholders, in turn, work to try and (re-)shape the rules of the game to their advantage. This paper explores how this interplay between institutions and stakeholders plays out at school level.

Table 1 (reproduced from Annex A) depicts how we characterise governance institutions. We focus on two dimensions:

- whether institutional arrangements are hierarchical (that is, organised around vertical relationships between 'principals' and 'agents'), or whether they are negotiated (that is, organised around horizontal 'principal-principal'/peer-to-peer arrangements); and
- whether they are based on impersonal rules of the game, which are applied impartially to all who have standing, or whether they are organised among personalised 'deals' among influential actors.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011); Kingdon and others (2014); Pritchett (2013).

The overall research programme uses this typology to characterise governance at multiple levels – nationally, at the provincial level, at local levels and (as in this paper) at the level of individual schools.

Table 1: A governance typology

Hierarchical	(i)	(ii)
Negotiated	(iii)	(iv)
	Personalised	Impersonal

Each of the four cells in the table comprises a distinctive ‘ideal type’ governance platform, involving distinctive incentives, distinctive constraints and risks, and distinctive frontier challenges. In practice any specific governance arrangement is likely to be a hybrid combination of the four ideal types defined by the cells, with the relative weight varying from setting to setting. One useful heuristic (which we use in Section VI) is to characterise any specific governance arrangement by allocating 100 points across the four cells.

In part, school-level governance is shaped by the formal rules of the game that are prescribed by higher levels. Of particular salience here is the South African Schools Act of 1996, which, as per Annex C, gives a central role at school level to school governing bodies (SGBs), in which parents have a majority of voting (i.e. formal) power. However, as is well known, formal, de jure governance need not translate directly into de facto governance. Indeed, as the case studies in this paper will illustrate, the gap between these can be wide indeed.

The gap between de jure and de facto governance potentially can help account for the inconclusive results in the literature as to whether horizontal governance adds value. A necessary condition for delegated, horizontal accountability to be effective is that there exists a coalition of ‘developmentally-oriented’ stakeholders engaged at or near the service provision front-line, with sufficient influence to be able to ‘trump’ predatory actors seeking to capture school-level resources (teaching and administrative positions; contracts; other discretionary resources) for private or political purposes.

This brings us to analysis of the stakeholders and their influence. Figure 1 details schematically the multiple causal mechanisms through which a variety of stakeholders potentially can influence school-level performance. The figure highlights the following causal mechanisms:

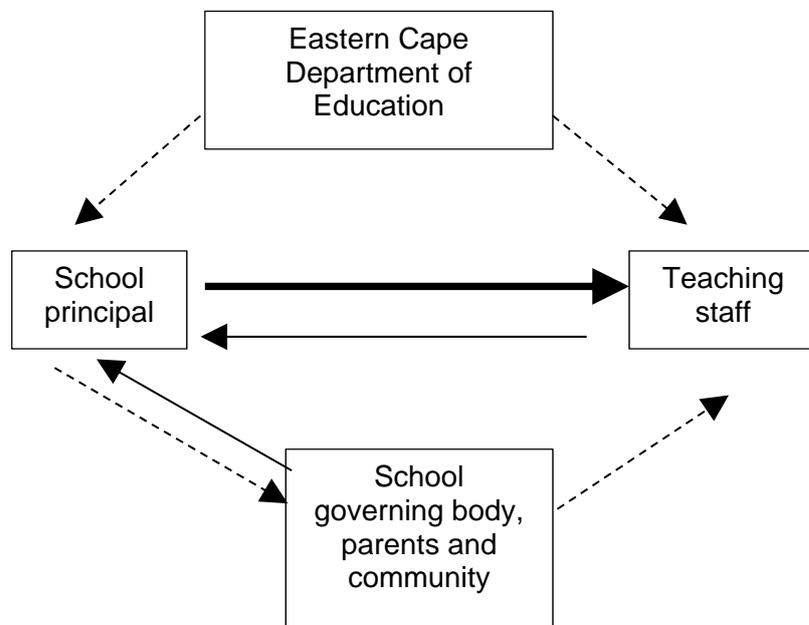
- *Causal mechanism (i)* – The role of hierarchical governance by the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE). As suggested by the dotted lines in the figure (and as was consistently found across all of the school-level case studies), the ECDoE’s influence at school level turned out to be very limited.
- *Causal mechanisms (ii) and (iii)* – between the school principal and the school’s teaching staff. A central finding of empirical research on the

determinants of school performance is that the quality of school leadership is an important proximate explanatory variable (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Louis et al., 2010). We broaden this hypothesis somewhat by considering also the possibility of a two-way relationship, with the organisational culture among the schools teacher cadre having a (relatively weaker) causal effect on the approach to management of the school principal. And:

- *Causal mechanisms (iva and b)* The role of bottom-up governance – specifically the extent to which (iva) SGBs, with the support of (ivb) parents and the local community more broadly, are able to provide offsetting governance support and oversight.
- *Causal mechanism (va and b)* Although not included explicitly in Figure 1, the school-level research also probed for the influence on school-level governance of the teachers' unions (SADTU and NAPTOSA) and political parties.

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**Figure 1: Governance interactions**



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In Sections II-V of this paper, we trace how each of these causal mechanisms played out in the case study schools, with variations in the ‘play of the game’ (that is, in the balance between developmental and predatory stakeholders) both across schools and over time within schools. Section VI assesses more broadly the relationship between the divergent observed patterns of stakeholder influence, the prevailing school-level governance arrangements, and performance.

### ***Empirical methodology and sample selection***

This sub-section lays out our methodological approach to assessing and evidencing the empirical relevance of each of the causal mechanisms delineated above. The

empirical point of departure was to select schools that were similar in their socio-economic contexts, but had different educational outcomes. The hypothesis to be explored was that these differences in outcomes could be explained by differences across the schools in their patterns of horizontal governance. The methodology comprised in-depth case studies of a small number of schools, rather than statistical analysis, with the aim of exploring the influence of the various causal mechanisms summarised in Figure 1 in accounting for variations in outcomes – both across schools, and over time within individual schools.

In selecting the sample of schools, a first step was to identify two matched pairs<sup>3</sup> of schools – geographically contiguous with one another, and thus with similar socio-economic profiles, with one relatively high-performing, and the other relatively weak. But it proved difficult to identify a robust indicator for school performance in the Eastern Cape that could be tracked over multiple years. In 2012, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) launched the Annual National Assessments (ANA), which assess student performance from grades 1 to 9. However, the ANA results are neither readily available nor yet viewed to be reliable.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, rather than using the school-level ANA results as the basis for assessing performance, we distinguished between the schools on the basis of reputation.

One indicator of reputation comprises feedback from senior district officials. Schools A1 and B1 were selected from a list of schools that were deemed by the official to be top performers as of 2015, and matched to two other schools (Schools A2 and B2) in the same (or similar) community. To the extent possible, the aim was that each pair would have the same essential characteristics: school wealth quintile classification; language of teaching and learning; community; and school fee status.

School enrolment figures comprised our second indicator of reputation. Barriers to entry into individual Eastern Cape public schools are limited, in part because the total number of students in the Eastern Cape is declining as a result of outmigration to the Western Cape and elsewhere. Parents prefer to enrol their children in schools that have a reputation for performance, or in schools they perceive to have a high performance standard. All else constant, we thus expect schools with a reputation of high performance will have high or increasing student enrolment. The converse is true when parents perceive school performance to be low. Table 2 details the

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<sup>3</sup> This 'matched pair' approach also was adopted in the Western Cape school-level case study – which had the advantage of the availability of robust standardised tests as a basis for school-level comparisons.

<sup>4</sup> School principals in the case study schools were reluctant to share their ANA results with the field researcher. More broadly, published ANA results have raised eyebrows in the academic community, due to the differences between self-reported school performance and independently moderated school performance. A significant discrepancy exists – especially for the Eastern Cape – between the results reported by schools and the verified results. For example, for the Eastern Cape as a whole, in 2013 the percentage of Grade 3 students with a score of 50 percent or more was self-reported for numeracy as 54.9 percent, but adjusted downward after external verification to 42.2 percent; for literacy, the self-reported score was 50.2 percent, and the adjusted score 27.0 percent.

Table 2: Trends in learner enrolment, 2008-15 (number of learners)

	School A1	School A2	School B1	School B2
2008	1048	650	611	1200
2009	1145	616	611	1031
2010	1022	639	521	777
2011	907	521	347	784
2012	950	455	433	758
2013	1030	489	464	720
2014	949	542	502	669
2015	1041	575	547	690

Source: Butterworth District Education Management Information System, 2015.

patterns of learner enrolment over time for our two matched pairs of schools. As will become evident in subsequent sections, the trends in enrolment track closely the perception of stakeholders interviewed as to the trends in performance in each school over time – adding to our confidence that enrolments offer a useful proxy for school-level performance, at least as perceived by the parent community.

The patterns of learner enrolment in Schools A1 and A2 are largely consistent with the information provided by district officials – high and stable in School A1 and low (and declining) in School A2.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, enrolments in Schools B1 and B2 were more unstable over the period covered in Table 2 – declining with a subsequent turnaround in School B1, and a precipitate decline with incipient signs of stability in School B2.

Our case studies explore the links between trends in performance, stakeholder engagement, and institutional arrangements in each school over time. We thus combine cross-section and time-series inquiry into school-level variations in performance and their governance drivers. For the across-schools analysis, variations in socio-economic contexts are controlled for through the matched-pair approach to sample selection. For the analysis of patterns within the same school over time, socio-economic conditions are controlled for by the fact that the socio-economic characteristics of a community change only little over the short-to medium-term. Insofar as the associations between governance and performance are similar in both the cross-sectional and time-series comparisons, it adds to confidence as to the robustness of the analysis.

A longitudinal focus on changes over time in patterns of governance and performance/reputation for the case study schools aligns well with the methodology for case study analysis laid out by George and Bennett (2005). Process tracing, they explain, focuses on a very specific set of decisions. It ‘attempts to trace the links between possible causes and observed outcomes’ (p.4). Process tracing considers

<sup>5</sup> School A2's capacity is large. In the mid-1990s, the school had a strong reputation, and close to 2,000 students. Then came more difficult times: by 2000, the number of students had fallen to about 1,000 and, as per the table, continued to fall subsequently.

the sequence and values of intervening variables in a case 'to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case' (p.6). The aim is to achieve 'high internal validity and good historical explanations of particular cases versus making generalizations that apply to broad populations' (p. 22).

Information about the schools was gathered, where available, from online sources, the district office and semi-structured interviews with immediate stakeholders (school principals, deputy principals, SGB chairpersons, school teachers with long tenure at each school and parents). At least three stakeholders from each school participated in the interviews. Where possible, individuals who were named in interviews and had left the school were also asked to participate. (See Annex B and C for details as to the positions of each person interviewed in each school, and their functions; detailed notes of each interview have been retained in the research project's records.)

Of course, with only four schools (each, as elaborated further below, with three distinct observations: earlier period; principal selection; later period), drawn from one geographic locale within a single district, the size of our sample is small. The results cannot be interpreted as representative of the Eastern Cape as a whole. We thus make no claims as to the relative importance across the province of each of the patterns observed in our cases; rather, our goal is to shed light on causal mechanisms.

### ***Some characteristics of the sample schools***

The four sample schools were all from a specific locality (which for reasons of confidentiality must remain anonymous) within the Butterworth District of the Eastern Cape. The district is the third largest in the province with (as per official statistics published in 2015) 381 schools, 82,573 learners (down from 106,803 in 2010), and 3,342 teachers (ECDoE, 2015). Over 98 percent of the population is Black African, with over 98 percent in the bottom three quintiles of South Africa's socio-economic distribution. Based on high school (matric) pass rates, the district is one of the weaker performers in the Eastern Cape (which is, in turn, the most poorly performing province in South Africa). Between 2011 and 2015, on average 54.1 percent of those who wrote the matric exam passed, as compared with an average pass rate of 61.4 percent for the Eastern Cape province. (South Africa's overall pass rate was 73.8 percent.)

As noted earlier, the quality of school leadership has been identified by education researchers as a key proximate determinant of school performance. Strikingly, as Table 3 details, all four schools experienced a change in school leadership over the periods studied. Insofar as school-level leadership matters for performance, this directs attention to the selection of a new principal as a critical juncture for careful process tracing analysis – both in accounting for performance, and in revealing the micro-dynamics of school-level governance. How did School A1 navigate principal selection in a way that helped sustain relatively strong performance? Why did School

A2's dysfunction reproduce itself? What were the relationships between governance dynamics, principal selection and the rollercoaster trends in performance of Schools B1 and B2?

Table 3: School performance periods (*including pseudonym principals' names*)

	Earlier period	Change in principal	Later period
School A1	Relatively strong – <i>Mrs Mbala</i>	2004 (smooth)	Relatively strong – <i>Mr Zondi</i>
School A2	Relatively weak performance – <i>Mrs Kunta</i>	2012-2013 (contested)	Relatively weak performance (possibly with some initial turnaround) – <i>Mr Makhatini</i>
School B1	Weak performance – <i>Mrs. Dinga</i>	2009-2011 (contested)	Improving performance – <i>Mr Nkosi</i>
School B2	Good reputation to 2008; then rapid decline – <i>Mr Kramer</i>	2010-2012 (contested)	Ongoing efforts at turnaround – <i>Mr Risha</i>

*Source:* (for this and all following tables) authors.

Sections II-V provide 'thick' narrative descriptions of stakeholder interactions over time in each school, and the relationship between the observed patterns of interaction and school performance (as measured by our enrolment proxy). The narratives focus especially on the ways in which the teacher cadre was governed, the ways in which new principals were selected, and the ways in which the SGB, parents and the community engage with the school. Incorporated into these sections are qualitative tables (Tables 4-6), which, based on the narratives, provide qualitative summary judgements of the pattern of influence on governance of each of the various stakeholders identified in Figure 1, for distinct sub-episodes within the case study schools. Section VI builds on the narratives to distinguish more broadly among some divergent pattern of school-level governance, and their relationship to performance.

## **II: A sustained high-performer – School A1**

School A1 is the only school in the sample with consistent, relatively strong performance over the long term – as evidenced by sustained high enrolments, its identification by the ECDoE Butterworth district office as a good performer, plus (as this section will detail) reports from interviewees of consistently robust internal processes. It thus offers especially clear insight into the kinds of 'good fit' institutional arrangements that facilitate relatively strong performance, notwithstanding the Eastern Cape's fragmented broader political and institutional arrangements. .

Table 4 introduces the qualitative overview that we use to summarise how the stakeholder influences and causal mechanisms laid out in the previous section influence performance in each of the case study schools. As Table 4 highlights, sustained leadership by the school principal has been central to the good performance of School A. (The basis for this judgement comprises feedback from

interviewees, as reported in the narrative which follows.) A performance-driven vision was put in place by the school's first principal, Mrs Mbala (a pseudonym, as are all names throughout this paper), who led the school from its founding in the early 1980s until her retirement in 2003. Mr Zondi, the current principal, who replaced Mrs Mbala upon her retirement in 2003, has sustained this vision.

Table 4: Stakeholder engagement – high- and low-performing equilibria

<i>The influence on governance of.....</i>	A high-performing equilibrium	A low-performing equilibrium
	<i>School A1</i>	<i>School A2</i>
(i) Eastern Cape Department of Education	+	-
(ii) Principal	+++++	-/+
(iii) Teachers	++++	0
(iva) School governing body	+++	---
(ivb) Parents and broader community	++	-
(va) Political parties	0	--
(vb) Unions	0	-

+++++ = very positive; +++ = positive; + = marginally positive

0 = passive/neutral

- = marginally negative; --- = negative; ----- = very negative

n/a = no relevant information available

Succession from Mrs Mbala to Mr Zondi was smooth – indeed, as per Table 3, it was the only smooth principal succession process in any of the case study schools. Mr Zondi, a relatively junior post-level 1 educator was the first male educator in the school when he joined in 1992. He was mentored by Mrs Mbala, and committed himself to many school projects. This made him the favoured candidate to replace Mrs Mbala, even prior to the interviews for the position.

Both principals successfully inculcated School A's vision among teaching staff. They systematically promoted transparency between staff members and with other stakeholders, consistently followed formal processes when it came to appointing staff and the SGB, and systematically fostered a sense of community. The result is that, as one interviewee put it, 'the teachers all felt like family', with explicit rules governing professional conduct. All behaviour that escapes the borders of this conduct is addressed by school leadership.

The principal takes a leading role in the appointment processes in the school. When new senior positions become available, he carefully follows the formal processes laid out by the ECDoE, and calls a staff meeting and encourages all eligible staff members to apply. Interviews suggest that those who apply are given a fair chance, with (again, in stark contrast to the other case study schools) no informal lobbying

efforts by staff to try and capture senior posts. An interviewee described how new staff are inducted into the school's organisational culture:

The principal will call newly appointed staff to a meeting and introduce them to everyone. At this meeting the principal will welcome the new staff member to the team and inform them on school culture .... he will often say 'Mr or Ms so and so, at this school we are a family and if we have problems we deal with them openly. If there is unrest, we will know it is you because it has never happened before'.

Beyond the appointments process, two examples volunteered by interviewees illustrate how the school handles personnel challenges that could compromise performance:

- To curb teacher absenteeism, the school requires all teachers to report to their senior (head of department, deputy principal or principal) before they take the day off and explain the reasons for the absence. Teachers are required to submit doctor's notes, report family emergencies and in cases where they have '...taken their car in for service, they must provide a copy of the receipt'.
- The case of a staff member who was battling alcoholism, which greatly affected his work initially, was addressed by the principal and school management team. Seeing little improvement, the SGB stepped in and finally approached the family and asked them to intervene. They forwarded the case to the district office; following this, he was treated as a 'displaced educator' by the department of education. After some time, his family found another school for him to transfer to.

Complementing this strong internal culture is a distinctive pattern of engagement with external stakeholders. Other than the teachers and principals themselves, the SGB is the most important player in school governance. As Table 4 signals, the school has very strong norms in place as to the role and functioning of the SGB, including (according to the SGB interviewee):

- SGB members are elected at an open meeting. The meeting chair ensures that there are more candidates than positions; each candidate is required to make the case to parents for voting for them;
- At the first SGB meeting, and as part of school policy, the principal 'adamantly discourages party or union politics from infiltrating school processes'.
- Parent members of the SGB sit on the school's finance and procurement committees, give input into how resources are used, and are responsible for reporting on resource use to the school community as a whole.

Beyond the SGB, the school also maintains strong networks externally – with parents, with the broader community, with non-governmental organisations, and

other departments of government beyond the ECDoE. Examples include the following:

- Parents have always shown overwhelming support for the school, and attend parents meetings in large numbers – ‘the school often needs to hire more chairs to accommodate them all’.
- The school has an extensive extramural programme, which is credited by staff as the reason for the school’s high enrolment figures (soccer and netball; boy scouts and girl guides; gymnastics, choir). The school’s gymnastics team recently competed in Australia; its under-12 soccer team competed in a national soccer tournament.
- The school participates in corporate-sponsored competitions that enable them to gain more resources – for example, two recycling competitions, which the school won, and which generated funding to maintain the school building.
- Staff are required to support extramural programmes – this serves as a team building activity.
- Government departments (health, social development, police, traffic) and a variety of NGOs (e.g. the Love Life Trust, Soul Buddies) all offer programmes to students.

The relationship between the school and the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) is something of a delicate balance. The principal maintains good relationships with the district office – and thereby manages to ensure its support for the school, while keeping it at arm’s length from involvement in governance at school level and thus keeping its influence modest. Key aspects/illustrations of this relationship identified by interviewees include:

- The school is something of a showcase for the district; it was, for example, shown as a model school to the national minister of basic education in the course of a 2011 visit to the district.
- To maintain its teacher complement, and be responsive to parental demand, the school has kept its student numbers high. The ECDoE has accommodated this demand by providing portable classrooms.
- Textbook delivery has been reliable – but in large part because the school management team (SMT) is pro-active. ‘The SMT chooses which school books to order and the best companies to order the books from, and when to order the books, in order that they may arrive on time’.
- At the same time, ‘the school does not just sit back and wait for the government to provide; it is able to fundraise.... As an example, the school was promised 16 laptop computers if it had a secure storage room. The school raised the funds to provide the room, but the laptops have not yet been delivered..... Most of the things that the school has been able to acquire are a result of the efforts of school’s leadership: ‘the department is yet to provide for the school.

- A national policy states that pregnant teens attending school should be allowed to take tests and exams at home and schools should ensure this happens. The principal reportedly spoke to the staff and the district office and suggested that this would create perverse incentive for young teens and decided not to implement it at the school.

Unions and political parties are kept at a careful distance from School A1's governance. School staff belong to two unions – SADTU and NAPTOSA – at a ratio of about 50:50. Teachers from the different unions co-operate: 'When SADTU teachers attend a meeting, they will provide information to all staff members' (and vice versa for NAPTOSA). While keeping politics at a distance, the school allows all political parties to use its classrooms for meetings, as it believes that 'the childrens' parents belong to different political parties, so the school must assist them all'.

### **III: Mired in a toxic governance culture – School A2**

The contrast between School A1 and School A2 is stark, as a comparison of the second and third columns of Table 4 highlights. School A2 has long been a fixture in the Butterworth area. Prior to the mid-1990s, the school had a strong reputation, and close to 2,000 students. Then came more difficult times: by 2000, the number of students had fallen to about 1,000; it then declined further to a low of 455 in 2012. Little information could be obtained from interviews about the earlier period; the focus here is on the period subsequent to 2009 – when the school has been characterised by polarised contestation among competing factions within the SGB, among staff, and spreading into the broader community.

The current principal, Mr Zondi, offered a vivid picture of what he found when he began his tenure at the school in 2013:

- Infrastructure was poor and deteriorating. The building was not taken care of. There were no sports grounds, no computer lab, no staff room, and no offices for the principal and deputy principal.
- Classrooms were poorly stocked. Chalkboards were falling; students did not have enough desks and chairs; there was no storeroom for textbooks (which meant they would get lost).
- Vandalism had been a big problem at the school. Some students were involved in local gangs and substance abuse; many young girls would get pregnant and stay away from school.

Underlying this dysfunction was a passive parent community, and a politicised SGB. In part, the absence of parental engagement was because of the demographic profile of the school. The new principal reported that when he began at the school in 2013, over half of the students were orphans. But:

'The community did not neglect the school from out of the blue; they saw that the teachers appeared to not care .... This is when they decided to take their

children out of a school where the students were ill-disciplined to one where there were firm rules' (School A2 is located within two kilometres of School A1).

An absent parent community and, it would seem, the absence of strong leadership from the principal from the mid-1990s onwards manifested in (again in stark contrast to School A1, as per Table 4) a dysfunctional SGB. This is illustrated vividly in the process that resulted in Mr Zondi's appointment. The post was advertised in 2012, following the retirement of Mr Zondi's predecessor. Mr Banda, the school deputy principal, serving as the acting principal at this time, applied. Controversy struck after the first interviews, when the SGB could not agree as to who would be their preferred candidate to recommend for the appointment. As a result, interviews were held two more times – there were strong supporters of Mr Banda and one SGB member who was adamantly opposed to his promotion.

Local-level politics appear to have been the reason Mr Banda did not receive the post. Mrs Peter, an SGB member who was against Mr Banda's appointment, was also an ANC councillor in the community. Mr Banda had previously been an ANC councillor in the same community and later changed his political affiliations to Congress of the People – a political party that broke away from the ANC during the 2008/9 political cycle. In her assessment of the candidates, Mrs Peter awarded Mr. Banda very low scores to drag down his average (2 out of 20) while other SGB members gave him significantly higher scores (between 14 and 17 out of 20) for the same questions. Immediately following the interviews, the district official who was present (in his formal role as observer) did not allow the SGB to discuss the candidates; instead, he tallied the scores and ranked candidates according to the arithmetical average. Believing he was unfairly treated, Mr Banda wrote a letter of complaint to the district office, but did not receive a response. The losing faction did not readily accept defeat. After Mr Zondi was appointed, parents and some SGB members staged protests for three weeks outside the school, preventing him from gaining access to the school.

Beyond the principal selection process, interviews offered further insight into the ways in which the SGB is a site for some of the ongoing political infighting over school resources:

- The two-term SGB member acknowledged that she knew little either about the school's history, or its current level of performance;
- The SGB is directly involved in decision-making on spending. Relative to other schools, an unusually high proportion of the budget is allocated for building maintenance – a budgetary line item, which, with the permission of the circuit office, can straightforwardly be diverted to other 'essential' uses. (Of all the schools studied, this school had the least well-maintained physical infrastructure.)
- SGB members are centrally involved in the appointment of teachers. According to one interviewee, in the selection of teachers for eight posts that

became available subsequent to 2013, 'unions, local political structures and teachers within the school all tried to influence who would be appointed by the school'.

- As of the time of interviews, the mid-2015 SGB elections appeared to be becoming politicised:
  - - According to one interviewee, 'within the community, organisations will mobilise from within parents' structures in order for them to have a role in school processes'.
    - Against the backdrop of many unsubstantiated rumours, there was an unusually well-attended parents' meeting to discuss school finances.
    - Mrs Peters (who exited the SGB in 2012) apparently was mobilising parents to vote for her candidacy.

Mr Zondi, who is new to the Butterworth area, appears to be trying hard to turn around the school's toxic culture and reputation – both by reaching out to the community, and (as discussed further in Section VI) by trying to begin to introduce a more rule-bound culture into the school. The district office finally intervened (after repeated requests) to signal its support for him. And he has managed to build a strong collegial relationship with the veteran teacher who was denied the principalship. But, insofar as the school continues to be enmeshed in community politics, it remains too soon to tell whether a sustained turnaround can be achieved.

#### **IV: Two downward spirals – Schools B1 and B2**

We turn now to the two remaining case study schools, School B1 and School B2. As with School A2, both became trapped in cycles of decline. School B1's toxic governance culture dates back to the 1990s – but, by contrast to our research into School A2, the School B1 interviewees were able to shed valuable light onto the origins of the downward governance spiral. School B2's dysfunctional governance emerged more recently. However, by contrast to School A2 (and as will be discussed in Section V), both Schools B1 and B2 have been able to reverse these downward spirals.

Table 5 summarises the patterns of stakeholder influence which prevailed in Schools B1 and B2 in the periods immediately prior to and during the downward spirals. As the table signals (and the narratives will detail), one striking difference between the schools is in the role played by each school's longstanding principal. In School B1 this role was deeply destructive over a long period of time. By contrast, in School B2 the principal's role was seemingly positive until just before the end of his tenure; indeed, for much of the relevant period, School B2 enjoyed a good reputation in the community.

This one difference aside, as the narratives below detail, there were some striking similarities in the patterns of governance across the two schools. Specifically:

Table 5: Two downward spirals – stakeholder roles

<i>The influence on governance of.....</i>	A long, slow decline	A rapid downward spiral
	<i>School B1</i>	<i>School B2</i>
(i) Eastern Cape Department of Education	--	<b>0</b>
(ii) Principal	-----	<b>++++/0</b>
(iii) Teachers	---	<b>+++/- -----</b>
(iva) School governing body	<b>+/0</b>	<b>+/0</b>
(ivb) Parents & broader community	<b>0</b>	<b>+/0</b>
(va) Political parties	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
(vb) Unions	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>

Key: See Table 4.

- In both schools, the tone and mode of operation set by the principal was personalised, rather than bound by impersonal rules.
- In both schools, teaching staff played a central role in the downward spiral – integral to a long, slow decline in the case of School B1, and as instigators of a sudden, precipitous collapse of governance in School B2.
- In neither school did the ECDoE intervene in an effort to reverse the downward spiral; in School B1 it may even have abetted the decline.
- While parents in School B2 (but not B1) had a history of being generally supportive of the school's achievements, in neither school was the SGB active in the governance of the school in the periods prior to, or during, the downward spiral.
- In neither school did our interviews uncover evidence that either political parties or teacher unions contributed to the downward spiral, though we were alert to the possibility. (But we cannot rule out that hidden organisational allegiances and rivalries comprise a beneath-the-surface explanation for some of the patterns which are described below.)

### **School B1**

Mrs Dinga, the principal who set in motion School B1's long decline, was appointed about a decade after the school's 1978 start-up. She remained in the post of principal for almost 25 years. But from the latter-1990s onwards, Mrs Dinga was, for much of the time, an absentee principal. According to an interviewee who had a long-time association with the school, 'she would be absent for periods of about two to three months'. This continued for about a decade (!!!).

Mrs Dinga would produce doctor's notes and apply for sick leave, but her colleagues in school management believed that there was another reason for her absence.

Interviewees reported that she had purchased a home in East London (a town 100 kilometres away from Butterworth) and this increased the cost of attending work, hence her absence from school. The school went into a downward spiral. The number of students fell from close to 1,000 in the early 1990s, to a low of 341 in 2011, the year in which a new principal was finally appointed.

The principal's behaviour set the tone more broadly for the behaviour of school staff. Teachers took advantage of her absence to tend to other business during school hours – some attended school only for specific periods when they were scheduled to teach, and others stayed away completely. In the instances Mrs Dinga attended school, it is reported that some would not curb their behaviour; Mrs Dinga would remain in her office, not attending to what was happening around her, and ignored by staff.

Attendance by students was sporadic: 'Students would arrive at the school just to be marked for attendance – by the time the break came, you would see many of the students walking around the community in their uniforms'. Disregard for the school spilled out into the broader community. According to interviewees, the community did not seem to have any respect for school property, and the school was vandalised frequently: 'It became a night-time destination for local misfits'. Around the early 2000s, vandalism reached an all-time high, with the school losing much of its furniture. This occasioned some publicity from the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) and a visit to the school by the then MEC of education in the Eastern Cape, but there was no follow-up.

While the SGB and the deputy principal made some effort to turn things around, Mrs Dinga showed blatant disregard for their efforts. The current head of the SGB (whose first term on the SGB was in 2001-04, when Mrs Dinga was principal) stated that: æMrs. Dinga would even comment and say that she was not certain if I was appointed to antagonise her .... we just did not see eye-to-eye'.

(He was not re-elected in 2004, but midway through the 2004-07 term he returned as a co-opted member.) The SGB would submit reports to the district office, expecting them to address the issue, but nothing materialised. In one episode, Mrs Dinga was reported to have forged the SGB chairperson's signature when she wanted to appoint an educator to the school. The district office failed to address this transgression.

One interviewee suggested that the reason for not sanctioning Mrs Dinga's behaviour was that 'some district officials are cowards'. (Another interviewee volunteered that Mrs Dinga's parents lived in the same location where the ECDoE district office was situated.) Finally, in 2009, the parents and the SGB took measures into their own hands. (More on that action, and the subsequent turnaround, later in the paper.)

## **School B2**

In stark contrast to School B1, prior to 2008 School B2 had a reputation of being a 'good' school. This reputation was shaped in large part by its longstanding principal, Mr Kramer, who was appointed to the position in 1990, three years after the school's founding. Mr Kramer enjoyed a high profile in the community. An interviewee explained:

Mr Kramer lived in the local community and had been a church leader as well. He was able to hear what his students got up to, and would deal with them when they returned to school or when they met at church .... He always availed the school and its resources to the Butterworth community at large. He would negotiate days with the municipal office when students could go into town and clear the litter. He encouraged the school's drum majorettes to perform whenever there were celebrations in town .... He supported the school choir, which gained quite a reputation in Butterworth'.

As per Table 2 earlier, enrolments in the school were high (above 1,200 students) up to 2008. But after 2008, enrolment dropped off precipitously – falling below 800 in 2010, and then continuing a slow decline into 2014. This collapse in enrolments was set in motion by the emergence of conflict among the teaching staff.

Prior to 2008, relations among staff seemed positive. According to interviewees, staff would have birthday celebrations each month for their colleagues and would travel to East London for strategic planning sessions to assess the school's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers had a buddy system and would help one another when they felt overwhelmed. But one interviewee reported that when the troubles began around 2008, 'some of these (activities) were thrown out like they never existed'.

The staff conflicts erupted over appointment decisions – initially over who would succeed two heads of department (HODs) who retired in 2008, and then over who would succeed Mr Kramer, following his death in 2010. The senior phase HOD position was hotly contested. The first time the interviews were conducted, a teacher disputed the process and that meant that a second session had to be scheduled. The second interview session did not even take place, as some teachers (in support of the candidate who filed a dispute) decided to stage a protest to prevent the interviews from progressing. The Eastern Cape Department of Education responded by freezing the post.

Appointing a new HOD for the foundation phase was equally challenging. In this case, though, opposition to the outcome did not surface until after the appointment had been made. Mr Kramer had encouraged all qualifying teachers to apply, regardless of years of service at the school – and, to the dismay of some of the teaching staff, the appointment went to a teacher who had only joined the school four years earlier. The backlash from some staff was large. The new HOD (one of the interviewees for this study) reports that in the years immediately following her

appointment, she had to work very hard to achieve stability. While some teachers were supportive, others showed blatant disregard for her position, and would often not submit required work to her.

Then, in 2010, Mr Kramer died unexpectedly. As a stopgap measure, the SGB appointed the school's deputy principal, Mr Mavundla as acting principal. But, again, things unravelled. How this unravelling eventually was turned around is the subject of the next section. For now, the focus is on the dysfunctional dynamics surrounding the appointment of a new principal.

According to our interviewees, Mr Mavundla did not perform well. Said one: 'He was more concerned with being liked by the staff'. Under Mr Mavundla's leadership, school rules were relaxed significantly. Staff wanted to 'come and go' as they pleased. This was the genesis of the school's subsequent teacher absenteeism problem; even those teachers who attended school would often miss their classes.

After noting the decline in performance, the SGB decided that they could not appoint Mr Mavundla and encouraged a more junior staff member who had a reputation as a hardworking teacher at the school, Mr Risha, to apply for the position. (One interviewee believes Mr Mavundla lost the post after he shirked on his responsibility as principal and did not speak at a former SGB member's funeral; this was not well received by the SGB.) Some teachers at the school were in support of reforms and supported Mr Risha's appointment, while others fervently believed that Mr Mavundla deserved the post, as the most senior educator in the school.

Tension rose. The initial spark of controversy came after the principal interviews. A group of teachers in support of Mr Mavundla's appointment discovered that he would not receive the post. After meeting with a circuit official during school hours, these teachers proceeded to Butterworth district office in an attempt to dispute the process. A few weeks later, the ECDoE head of Butterworth district and some of his colleagues came to the school with the intention of announcing the outcome of the principal selection process. The teachers were called into the staffroom and as the district head started speaking, some teachers interrupted, protesting the outcome of the interviews. The team from the district office decided to leave, and the protesting teachers followed the officials to the district office. Subsequently, the protesting educators were fined by the ECDoE and deductions were made to their monthly salaries. Mr Risha took up his position as principal in 2012. Since then, as Section VI will detail, the school has witnessed the beginnings of a turnaround, orchestrated by a close partnership between Mr Risha and the SGB.

Why did a school with a long, proud history slide so rapidly into destructive conflict? And why, in both the 2008 and 2010 conflicts, did the SGB seem taken by surprise and (at least initially) overwhelmed by the events that unfolded? One background factor surely was the weakness of the ECDoE. Another possibility (which we cannot rule out, but did not uncover in the course of interviews) may have been that political conflicts external to the school found their way within the school walls. But, based on

the accounts provided by interviewees, we are inclined (in the absence of evidence to the contrary) to give more emphasis to internal school-level dynamics.

As of 2008, community engagement appears to us to have taken the form more of basking in the reflected glory of the school's achievements than of active engagement. Beyond a cheerleading role, in practice the SGB's role in school governance was a passive one. Here is a description from one interviewee of how the SGB operated during Mr. Kramer's tenure:

'Those parents who were on the SGB did not want to step down. SGB members were actively involved in school programmes and were supportive of the school .... There never was any reason to report to the SGB, because they were always involved .... SGB members would even attend school extramural activities'.

When the school's leader, Mr Kramer, suddenly lost his ability to control events, the weaknesses of the other pillars of governance (the ECDoE and the SGB) were starkly exposed.

## **V: Turnarounds via participatory governance**

In recent years, both Schools B1 and B2 have (to varying degrees) turned around their downward spirals of decline. As this section details, the specifics of how the turnarounds were effected are different across the two schools. Even so, as Table 6 summarises (and the narratives which follow will detail) there are some striking similarities in the influence of the various stakeholders.

The similarities in the causal mechanisms of turnarounds include:

- In both schools, the SGBs were the key actors in setting the turnaround in motion – initially via their roles in supporting a committed and competent school principal, and subsequently via their ongoing support for that principal.
- In both schools, the new principal and the SGBs reached out to the broader community (including parents) to support the turnaround.
- In both schools, a central (and ongoing) challenge was to turn around the pre-existing organisational culture among staff. School B1 aimed to do so by building a stronger sense of community; School B2 by introducing a more rule-bound culture.
- In neither school did the ECDoE play more than a marginal role in supporting the turnaround – but in neither, once the turnaround was set in motion, was its role a negative one.
- There was some indication of involvement by elected officials and by the teachers' union, SADTU; according to interviewees, their roles were positive, but largely on the margin.

Table 6: Stakeholder engagement in two turnaround schools

<i>The influence on governance of.....</i>	School B1	School B2
(i) Eastern Cape Department of Education	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
(ii) Principal	<b>++++</b>	<b>++(+)</b>
(iii) Teachers	<b>0/+</b>	<b>- - -/0</b>
(iva) School governing body	<b>+++++</b>	<b>+++</b>
(ivb) Parents and broader community	<b>++++</b>	<b>++</b>
(va) Political parties	<b>+</b>	<b>n/a</b>
(vb) Unions	<b>0</b>	<b>+</b>

Key: See Table 4.

### **School B1**

In 2009, frustration at the principal's continuing absence finally boiled over. A group of parents and some SGB members met, and jointly reached the view that MrsDinga should not continue as school principal. At the group's urging, the SGB took their decision to the ECDoE district office, which did not respond well. 'The district office did not accept this', said one interviewee. In response, as a last resort, the parent community staged a protest, preventing the principal from accessing the school, and thus forcing the district to respond. She was not dismissed by the SGB; rather, the district office kept her on as a displaced teacher, reporting to the district office, until her retirement in 2010.

Between 2009 and the end of 2010, the deputy principal (who was close to retirement) served as the acting principal. When, finally, the principal post formally became available, the deputy/acting principal encouraged Mr Nkosi, a relatively junior post-level 1 teacher at the school who had proven his commitment by taking on some of Mrs Dinga's responsibilities during the period of her absence, to apply for the position. The SGB supported this recommendation as they had witnessed Mr Nkosi's work over the grim period in the school's history, including his efforts to improve the severed relations between the school, the SGB and the local community. While the teachers in the school belong to SADTU, the newly appointed principal was reported to belong to the rival union, NAPTOSA. Said the head of the SGB: 'I would be misleading you if I noted any role played by unions'.

Together with the SGB and the support of the local community, the principal has been successful in implementing turnaround policies that have supported school performance. Many of the staff members who took liberties under Mrs Dinga's leadership retired from the school; only four teachers (who welcomed the changes) remain at the school from this period. School B1 filled many of the vacant posts through the redeployment process – the district office provided the school with a list of educators that would be joining the staff. The school remained with three

vacancies which were filled in collaboration with the SGB. A new SGB subcommittee was selected for each interview and SGB members were expected to report to the team after the interview.

According to interviewees, measures taken to turn the school around included the following:

- The SGB and new principal held a meeting with the community, requesting parents to enrol at the school, as conditions were sure to improve. The local ANC councillor assisted in organising the parents.
- A 'school times policy' was introduced, with school-level stakeholders agreeing on setting new class times, assigning essential non-teaching duties to staff and agreeing on the school start time.
- A protocol was established so that the principal would be informed in advance when teachers planned to attend department-mandated workshops, and would in turn inform the SGB chairperson.
- The SGB volunteered to perform functions of non-teaching staff (such as cleaning and security) together with the teachers and students.
- With the help of their ward councillor, the school was able to gain funds from a local business towards renovating school premises. In the interim, until a new fence was put up, a community organisation provided security services.
- As an additional step in improving its physical environment, and building on a connection provided by the ECDoE district office, the school joined the eco-schools project.

By 2015, the number of pupils in the school had risen to 547, up from a low of 341 in 2011. Indeed, the turnaround was sufficiently advanced that School B1 was recommended for this study by a district official in the ECDoE as an example of a 'better performing' school in Butterworth town.

## **School B2**

The factionalised contestation that had turned School B2 upside down from 2008 onwards did not end when Mr Risha (the principal selected by the SGB against the wishes of some teachers) began his tenure in 2012. Mr Risha initially struggled to stabilise the school. Some educators deliberately stayed away from staff meetings, and even stated that, in their eyes, he was not their principal.

An interviewee described two cases of post-2012 teacher underperformance. The educators' offences included late-coming, absenteeism and disregarding school procedure when disciplinary action was taken against them. With the support of the SGB, school management wrote formal letters of warning to the teachers, but these went unread. Said one interviewee: 'We would leave them on their desks in the staff room, they would not take them .... if we gave it to them personally, they would not read it'.

The SGB decided to intervene, involving parents in a discussion of the teachers' performance. Parents were outraged and staged protests outside the school, looking to prevent the teachers from coming into the school. The school was advised by the ECDoE district office to submit a petition which detailed the dissatisfaction of the school management and parents with the teachers' performance. One teacher subsequently was redeployed to another school; the other teacher remains on the redeployment list.

With advice and support from his SGB, Mr Risha determinedly worked to transform school culture. Staff had worked with each other for a long period of time, and school processes had become personalised. In response, Mr Risha applied formal rules for everything. One interviewee notes that in staff meetings he would recite department procedure in an effort to curb teacher underperformance. A 'no work, no pay' policy was implemented. After some time, the effects on salaries became visible and teachers began to cooperate.

To counteract a pattern where class attendance by some teachers had become sporadic, Mr Risha implemented what is known as a period register. The school appointed class monitors, who were also responsible for monitoring which teachers should be attending each of their periods. These students have been given the right to remind educators when they have forgotten about attending a specific session. Additionally, with the support of the SGB, the school hired a security guard stationed at the school gate. Teachers are expected to sign in in the mornings (adding their time of arrival). Teachers are expected to sign out of school in the principal's office at the end of each day.

The role of SADTU in this turnaround is worthy of note. SADTU is the only union represented in the school; 18 of the school's 23 teachers are members; three staff members have, at different times, served as local SADTU chairpersons. According to one interviewee, SADTU's role was a constructive one:

'During the tumultuous period, the principal would approach the unions and ask them to speak to their members. The unions did not show preference to any side when teachers were contesting posts, rather they tried to show support to the school'.

Another interviewee remarked, jokingly, that 'when SADTU are looking for leaders, they look to the school'.

Overall, through the application of department-mandated rules and regulations, calm is reported to have returned to the school. But it was clear from the interviews that the turnaround efforts remain a work-in-progress. One interviewee described the evolution of School B2's climate as follows:

'In 2011/2012, teachers were segregated into groups according to their alliance [those for or against the principal's appointment] and each group

occupied a different staff room .... Some teachers would not even greet the SGB when they came to the school .... Things are fast on the mend and working relations between staff members have improved. Teachers appear to be congregating in one staffroom now, and even attend school extra-mural matches together’.

## **VI: School-level governance institutions – a comparative assessment**

In this section, we turn from a school-by-school exploration of the causal mechanisms through which stakeholders exerted their influence (positive or negative; strongly or weakly) on school-level outcomes to a more systematic comparative analysis of the ‘rules of the game’. We use the analytical framework summarised in Figure 1 to characterise and contrast the institutional arrangements prevailing in our case study schools (across schools and over time) – with the goal of assessing the hypothesis that, as a platform for performance, horizontal governance can be a partial substitute for weaknesses in hierarchy.

The school-level findings underscore the weaknesses of hierarchy in Eastern Cape education (Kota et al., 2017). Across all the schools, beyond the most basic tasks, such as ensuring that teachers are paid, the ECDoE is most notable for its absence. In three of the four schools (A2, B1 and B2) conflicts arose, and were addressed – or exacerbated – by school-level stakeholders; higher levels of the education bureaucracy seemed to have exceedingly limited power to help resolve them.

Strikingly, despite an effort to probe, we also did not find that either teachers’ unions (including SADTU) or political parties exerted a decisive influence on school-level governance. It is, of course, plausible, that political economy factors have played a more decisive role than our case studies were able to uncover. The ‘usual suspects’ include patronage ANC politics, and anti-developmental interventions (including the sale of posts) by SADTU. While we cannot dismiss the relevance of these forces, our school-level observations have persuaded us that other, hyper-local governance dynamics play a more important role in accounting for educational outcomes than is usually acknowledged in discussions of the governance of education. In this, our findings build on Nick Taylor’s observation, (quoted in Jansen, 2015) that:

‘When I entered NEEDU, I thought SADTU was a huge problem .... But the more I got into the data ... I began to realize that there is a bigger problem. The biggest problem is the poor management in many parts of the system. Where management is weak, unions do what they do....’

A corollary of our case study findings of relatively limited influence on the part of the ECDoE, unions and political parties is that school-level drivers of governance (over time, across all four case study schools) are shaped by interactions among the principal, teachers, school governing bodies (SGBs), plus parents and the broader community. Three distinct patterns of school-level governance are especially noteworthy.

A first pattern, illustrated heuristically in Table 7, is predominantly personalised and (within the school) hierarchical: the principal is dominant, and shapes school culture and expectations. As our findings underscore, hierarchical need not imply developmental – whether the school uses its resources to pursue educational or more private/predatory goals depends almost wholly on the preferences of the principal. Indeed, as per the narrative in Section IV, governance in School B1 under Mrs Dinga was personalised, hierarchical and predatory. In School B2, by contrast, Mr Kramer, whose approach to governance also was personalised and hierarchical, had long been perceived as an effective principal.

Table 7: Personalised, hierarchical governance

<i>Hierarchical</i>	80-100	0
<i>Negotiated</i>	0-20	0
	<i>Personalised</i>	<i>Impersonal</i> <i>School-level rules</i>

There is a further way in which personalised hierarchy is potentially capricious: insofar as the goals of a school are personality dependent, they potentially are volatile and can readily be reversed once the principal leaves (or loses authority for some other reason). School B2 illustrates this: its successful governance was dependent on Mr Kramer's personal authority; when that was lost, things fell apart. (As Hoadley et al. [2016] detail, this governance pattern of strong performance under a charismatic principal, which was reversed once that principal left, was also evident in the two early-period successful schools analysed in the case studies of Western Cape schools.)

In our second and third patterns of governance, illustrated heuristically in Tables 8 and 9, authority is distributed among multiple stakeholders. These patterns thus address more directly the question of whether and how horizontal governance might serve as an institutional substitute for weaknesses in hierarchy. Our case studies signal that, as with hierarchy, distributed governance can be associated with either positive or negative outcomes. School A2's pattern of governance was along the lines characterised in Table 8 – personalised and fragmented; it also was predatory. The (early period) principal, teachers, SGB and some community insiders colluded with one another, via informal/personalised rules, to capture school revenues for private purposes. The school seemed largely trapped in a low-level equilibrium.

Table 8: Personalised, fragmented governance

<i>Hierarchical</i>	5-40%	0%
<i>Negotiated</i>	60-95%	0%
	<i>Personalized</i>	<i>Impersonal</i>

In School A1, governance also was horizontal, with authority distributed among multiple stakeholders (with the principal as *primus inter pares*) – but, in this instance, the orientation was performance-oriented. Consistent with the pattern illustrated in Table 9, the focus was on building a shared commitment among the teacher cadre to a developmental culture within the school, on nurturing inclusive relationships externally with parent, community and bureaucratic stakeholders – and anchored (in the case of School A1, though not necessarily in all instances of collaborative governance) in the transparent and consistent application of a rule-bound culture. These allegiances provided, in turn, a relatively robust platform for resisting patronage and other predatory pressures. (Note Table 9's distinction between hierarchical-impersonal rules from outside the school – i.e. the ECDoE – and those established within, and by the school community itself; for School A1, the latter were the more salient rules.) It is, of course, plausible that collaborative governance could be associated with mediocre performance. Nonetheless, the experience of School A1 offers some cause for optimism that horizontal governance can, under some conditions, serve as an institutional substitute, offering a platform for improved performance, even where hierarchy is weak. We discuss this further in the final section.

Table 9: Collaborative governance

<i>Hierarchical</i>	10-20%	30%	5-10%
<i>Negotiated</i>	15-30%	15-30%	0%
	<i>Personalised</i>	<i>Impersonal: School-level rules</i>	<i>Impersonal: Department- level rules</i>

One final point vis-à-vis horizontal governance: it is tempting to view the Table 8 pattern of personalised, fragmented governance as especially toxic. But the School B1 case study points to a more nuanced conclusion. The way in which School B1 turned itself around was via a bottom-up (Table 8-like) challenge by the SGB, parents and communities to the pre-existing hierarchical, personalised and predatory (Table 7-style) governance arrangements. Bottom-up-induced chaos cannot, of course, provide a sustainable basis for school governance – but it can sometimes be (and was) a crucial step in unlocking a pre-existing predatory equilibrium.

## **VII: Clouds with silver linings**

This final section builds on the empirical results to suggest some policy implications. In seeking to learn how governance plays out in practice, this study has given priority to case-study depth over statistical breadth. While we have confidence in the accuracy of our individual school-level narratives, as with all 'small-n' research designs, it is important to be aware of inevitable limitations in the broader applicability (the 'external validity') of the research. With only four schools, drawn from a single district, the size of our sample is small. We make no claims as to the relative importance across the province of each of the patterns observed in the cases.

Further, across the province there are almost surely additional patterns of school-level governance interaction other than the ones which we have observed. Rather, consistent with the methodological strengths of small-n case studies, using process tracing methodologies, our goal has been to identify causal mechanisms and refine hypotheses – to understand better the potential and limitations of horizontal governance as an institutional substitute in settings where (as with the ECDoE) hierarchy is weak.

School-level performance emerges in our analysis as an outcome of strategic interactions among the school principal, the teaching staff, the SGB and the broader community. Insofar as horizontal governance is prevalent, its effect on performance depends on the relative strength of developmentally-oriented stakeholders and stakeholders seeking to capture school-level resources for private or political purposes. A priori, the strategic interactions among stakeholders could result in a variety of potential outcomes, including:

- a low-level equilibrium of capture, centred around the principal and teaching staff in the short term, with the collusion of the SGB and the broader community, and reproduced via a captured process of principal selection;
- a high-performing equilibrium, with the parties converging on performance-oriented governance, with sufficient mutual commitment to effectively counter any efforts at predation by one or another party; or
- a disequilibrium, driven by determined efforts on the part of one or other of the actors to disrupt the pre-existing relationships.

As Section VI summarised, our case studies uncovered evidence of both vicious circles and virtuous spirals – with governance arrangements shaped (for good or ill) by interactions along the stakeholders. To emphasise (to set the stage for the discussion of policy implications) the positive, our illustrations of virtuous spirals comprised:

- Sustained, mutually-supportive participatory governance (in School A1) – nurtured by an inclusively-oriented principal in the earlier period, providing a platform for seamless succession by another inclusively-oriented principal, and continuing into the present;
- Activism (in School B1) by the SGB and broader community to turn around a prior period of dysfunction – forcing out a predatory principal in one school and (in both that school and in School B2) actively collaborating with a new principal to transform school culture by putting in place and consistently enforcing new school-level rules of conduct; and:
- Some effort in all the schools (varying in intensity and effectiveness) by developmentally-oriented principals to enlist the SGB and community in support of the consolidation of a more performance-oriented, rule-bound internal culture.

Given the broader weakness of top-down governance in the Eastern Cape, these findings are consistent with the hypothesis presented at the outset of this paper, that, in settings where top-down governance is weak, horizontal governance sometimes can serve as a (partial) institutional substitute.

What policy implications follow from our analysis? One natural response might be to advocate for improvements in the capacity of the ECDoE. However, for reasons explored in depth in Grindle (2013), Levy (2014), Levy and Kpundeh (2004), Levy et al. (2016) and other sources referenced in Annex A, a fundamental lesson from decades of efforts to improve public sector performance is that 'politics is trumps'. Bureaucracies are embedded within political processes; their functioning is part of the political game. In the absence of patterns of political contestation that are supportive of bureaucratic improvement (or, at the very least do not operate in ways that are directly antithetical to such improvement) there is very little prospect of achieving more than very modest improvements in bureaucratic capabilities. As Kota et al. (2016) detail, the Eastern Cape's political economy functions in ways that consistently undermine efforts to improve the ECDoE's capabilities. If school-level governance is to improve, the impetus will need to come from somewhere other than better hierarchy.

This brings us to the policy potential of the school-level horizontal governance 'silver lining'. In contrast to many other settings (see, for example, Grindle [2004] for a discussion of Latin America; also Kingdon et al. [2014]), the 1996 South African Schools Act has provided the country with an institutional framework that delegates significant authority to school governing bodies in which the majority of positions are held by parents. What has been lacking, however, have been systematic efforts to support SGBs to take on this putative developmental role. On the contrary, the South African education discourse has focused almost exclusively on the failures of school-level governance, and has been pre-occupied with the exploration of options to recentralise authority.<sup>6</sup> In our view, the results in this paper point in a very different direction.

Might there be ways of intervening to support SGBs that improve the odds that they will support developmental outcomes, rather than being part of some low-level, predatory equilibrium? There have been systematic evaluations of efforts to improve horizontal governance in other developing countries. Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011) offer rich detail on dozens of carefully evaluated horizontal reforms the world over, including reforms to improve school-based management, to enhance information transparency, and to make teachers more accountable for performance. They find considerable variations in impact; some interventions turn out to make a significant positive difference, others have been ineffective. Mansuri and Rao (2011) report a similar pattern of variation.

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<sup>6</sup> For a recent example, see the proposals along these lines, summarised in Republic of South Africa, Department of Basic Education (2016).

Viewed from the perspective of the analysis and findings in this paper, these mixed results are not surprising. The influence of horizontal governance on performance (for good or ill) depends on the relative influence of developmental and predatory stakeholders. It follows that, while it could perhaps be somewhat helpful to strengthen the capacities of individual SGBs, the crucial task for initiatives aimed at strengthening horizontal governance is their effect in empowering developmental actors within SGBs, parents and the broader community.

Initiatives to empower actors who potentially can play a developmental role in horizontal governance could come from public agencies or from non-governmental organisations. Following good practice elsewhere (as laid out in Pritchett, 2013) key for both effectiveness and scale is that they work 'wholesale' – helping to build networks that link SGBs with one another as a way of sharing learning as to 'good practices', and potentially providing mutual support in the face of predatory pressures. Complementary efforts within the broader research programme of which this paper is a part explore in further detail how this might be achieved.

We are not proposing that support for SGBs is a magic bullet. But we believe that our findings offer encouragement that a non-hierarchical entry point for improving educational outcomes indeed has some potential to achieve gains. Perhaps it is time to complement ongoing efforts to strengthen hierarchy with something different.

## **Annex A: Framework and hypotheses**

This annex describes the common conceptual framework used in this and other research papers in the series on the politics and governance of basic education in South Africa. [In addition to the present paper, the series currently comprises Cameron and Naidoo (2016); Cameron and Levy (2016); Hoadley et al. (2016); and Kota et al. (2017).] The conceptual framework is based on a broader 'political settlements' framework, which is being used to guide the overall Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) research programme, implemented under the leadership of The University of Manchester, of which the South African education series is a part. Among the core conceptual inputs into the ESID framework are contributions by Khan (2010), Levy (2014; 2015), North et al. (2009), and World Bank (2004).

### **The framework**

Table A1 below illustrates the framework. It characterises governance arrangements across two dimensions:

- whether they are hierarchical (that is, organised around vertical relationships between 'principals' and 'agents'), or whether they are negotiated (that is, organised around horizontal 'principal-principal'/peer-to-peer arrangements); and
- whether they are based on impersonal rules of the game, which are applied impartially to all who have standing, or whether they are organised among personalised 'deals' among influential actors.

Each of the four cells in Table A1 comprises a distinctive 'ideal type' governance platform, involving distinctive incentives, distinctive constraints and risks, and distinctive frontier challenges – both generally and (as in this study) in how education is governed. In practice, any specific governance arrangement is likely to be a hybrid combination of the four ideal types defined by the cells, with the relative weight varying from setting to setting. One useful heuristic (used in all the papers in the South African series) is to characterise any specific governance arrangement by allocating 100 points across the four cells.

Table A1: A governance typology

Hierarchical	(i)	(ii)
Negotiated	(iii)	(iv)
	Personalised	Impersonal

The Table A1 typology can be used to characterise governance at multiple levels – nationally, at the provincial level, at local levels, and at the level of front-line service provision units. There is no one-to-one relationship between the categories in the framework and a familiar (and sometimes contentious) distinction between centralised and decentralised systems – and it is important not to conflate these very different discourses. (For example, negotiated agreements among stakeholders can

be systematically incorporated into centralised systems. Conversely, decentralised systems can be organised hierarchically at subnational levels.)

The South African education study includes one paper at the national level, two at provincial levels (using the cases of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces); two at district levels; and two at the level of individual schools. As each paper details, the specific interpretation of the cells varies from level to level. Further, within each level (and using the 100 points allocation) the relative weights across cells vary according to the specific case being studied.

### **Hypotheses on how institutional and political context matters**

Levy and Walton (2013) suggest specific, researchable hypotheses that follow from the framework and can be used for a multi-level analysis of the governance and politics of service provision. 'Good fit', they hypothesise, can be framed in terms of the alignment between the governance arrangements which prevail at a higher level, and the arrangements which prevail at levels beneath that:

- H1A: where the higher- and lower-level institutional arrangements are aligned, we can say we have a 'good fit' – and thus potentially the best feasible outcome.
- H1B: where they are misaligned, we can say we have a 'poor fit' – there exists the possibility of improving the development outcome by realigning the lower-level institutional arrangements to align better with the higher-level institutions/political settlement.

For the South African national- and provincial-level education studies, H1A and B translate into the following:

- H2: At South Africa's national level, there has been a misalignment between the (higher-level) background political arrangements (which predominantly fit into the 'negotiated' cells of Figure A1) and the predominantly impersonal-hierarchical logic used as the basis for national-level education sector policymaking. The result has been 'poor fit', and ineffective governance arrangements. See Cameron and Naidoo (2016).
- H3: There are vast differences in the provincial-level political settlements in the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape:
  - - The Western Cape political settlement provides a relatively strong basis for 'impersonal-hierarchical' governance of the province's basic education bureaucracy. See Cameron and Levy (2016). By contrast:
    - In the Eastern Cape, the political settlement is disproportionately personalised and negotiated, so 'impersonal-hierarchical' governance arrangements are unlikely to be effective. See Kota et al. (2016).

Of course, the goal of the South African education research project is not an assessment of 'goodness-of-fit' per se, but an analysis of the ways in which diverse governance arrangements influence educational outcomes. This brings us to the analysis of school-level governance – both the 'goodness-of-fit' of school-level arrangements with those that prevail at higher levels, and the implications for performance in individual schools.

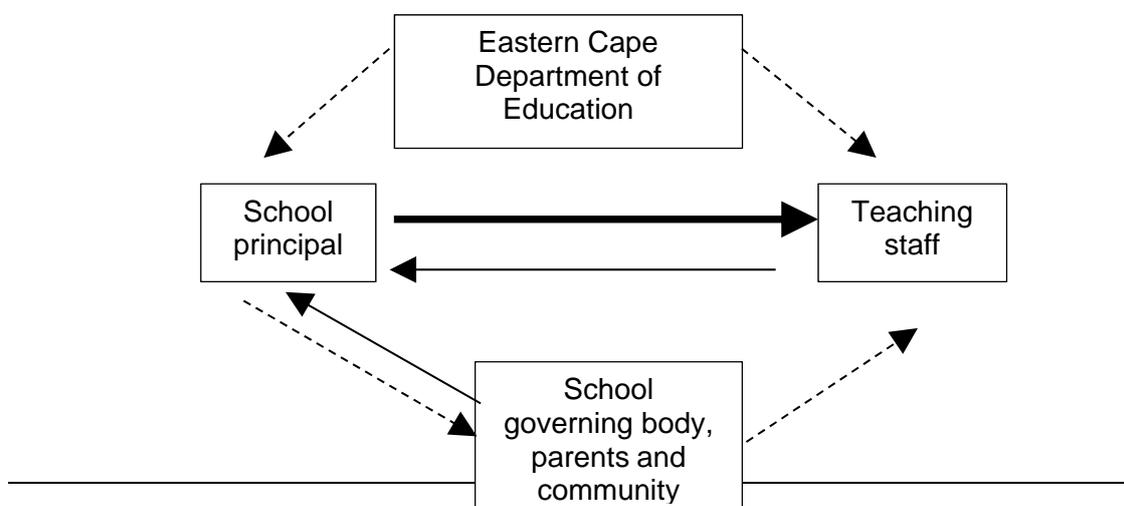
Figure A1 summarises school-level governance for South Africa's public schools in terms of the interaction between four sets of actors: top-down hierarchical governance via the public bureaucracy; leadership by the school principal; the teacher cadre; and 'horizontal' participatory governance by school governing bodies (SGBs) and other community, union and political actors. Applying the general formulations of H1A and B to the school-level yields the following hypotheses:

- H4: Where public bureaucracies perform relatively well (e.g. the Western Cape), substantial improvements in educational outcomes can be obtained by using top-down performance management systems.
- H5a: Horizontal governance arrangements can serve as partial institutional substitutes – providing accountability from peer-to-peer networks when top-down, hierarchical accountability is weak. And
- H5b: A necessary condition for delegated, horizontal accountability to be effective is that there exists a coalition of 'developmentally-oriented' stakeholders engaged at/near the service provision front-line with sufficient influence to be able to 'trump' predatory actors seeking to capture school-level resources (teaching and administrative positions; contracts; other discretionary resources) for private or political purposes.

These hypotheses are explored in depth at school level in the present paper, and for the Western Cape in in Hoadley et al. (2016).

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Figure A1: School-level governance interactions



### **Hypotheses on how sectoral context matters**

Along with exploring how political and institutional context can affect school-level performance, the school-level research also provides the opportunity to explore a further, complementary set of hypotheses – namely, how sectoral context affects the ‘good fit’ alignment between governance arrangements and sectoral performance. The 2004 World Development Report, following Wilson (1989) and Israel (1987), distinguished among sectors according to the heterogeneity and monitorability of their production activities. Top-down hierarchical governance, they argue, is most effective where production can be standardised, and where the monitorability of outputs and/or outcomes is straightforward. By contrast, where what is produced is more heterogeneous, and outputs/outcomes are less readily monitorable, more flexibility needs to be accorded to front-line production units, with a correspondingly greater role for horizontal (‘principal-principal’/peer-to-peer) governance arrangements. Wilson captures this contrast in terms of a distinction between ‘production’ and ‘craft’ organisations.

There is substantial controversy among education sector professionals as to what should be the appropriate balance between hierarchical and horizontal governance systems. For over a quarter of a century, educational reformers the world over have pressed for decentralising control over resources and decision-making closer to the school-level.<sup>7</sup> Grindle (2004) provides a detailed analysis of the politics of education sector change in Latin America. Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011) review carefully the micro-level evidence as to the impact of informational and participatory reforms. Pritchett (2013) argues forcefully that, while vertical arrangements continue to be ubiquitous (and on occasion can be effective), all too often they lead education systems down dead ends – expanding ‘schooling’ rapidly, but with almost no concomitant gains in ‘learning’. Put differently, this controversy can be framed by contrasting H4 above with:

- *H6*: Education is a ‘craft’ activity, so successful outcomes require a ‘zone of autonomy’ for front-line practitioners, peer-to-peer learning, and horizontal governance arrangements which delegate responsibility and oversight to participants close to the front-line of service provision.

In the Western Cape (as per H3) impersonal-hierarchical bureaucratic arrangements are hypothesised to function relatively well. Thus the Western Cape provincial and school-level studies provide a good platform for assessing how (even given a broadly supportive political and institutional environment) sectoral context matters – and thus the relative merits of H4 and H6.

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<sup>7</sup> Grindle (2004) provides a detailed analysis of the politics of education sector change in Latin America, Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011) review carefully the micro-level evidence as to the impact of informational and participatory reforms.

## **Annex B: Interviewees**

The following people were interviewed in each school. (To protect anonymity, names are not provided, and gender has sometimes been altered.)

### **Interviewees for School A1:**

- Former SGB member, she was first served on the SGB from 2003 to 2006 and again from 2009 to 2012.
- Senior teacher, appointed in 1987.
- Deputy principal at School A1 since 2005, she was first appointed in 1984 as the head of department (HOD).

### **Interviewees for School A2:**

- School principal; appointed to this position in 2013
- SGB treasurer serving her second term on the SGB; was initially appointed onto the SGB in 2009
- School deputy principal; he joined the staff in 1994 and was appointed deputy principal in 2003

### **Interviewees for School B1:**

- Deputy principal from 1983 until her retirement in 2011.
- Current chair of school governing body (SGB); has served four terms on SGB, beginning in 2001, with one break in between.
- SGB member and parent, has had children at school since 2002; been on SGB since 2012.

### **Interviewees for School B2:**

- Head of department (HOD) at the school; she joined the school in 2004, and was appointed foundation phase head in 2008;
- Deputy principal at the school; he joined the school in 1990 as an HOD.
- Treasurer of the SGB; she has served on the SGB since 2009.

## **Stakeholder mapping**

### **Immediate school stakeholders**

**Principal** – School leader

**School management team** – consists of the principal, the deputy(ies) and the heads of department

**School staff** – teaching and administrative staff employed by the school (and in some cases the SGB)

**School governing body** – mandatory members include the school principal, parents with children at the school (the parent body makes up 50 percent plus one person on the SGB), teachers and non-teaching school staff).

**Parent body** – parents (or guardians) of children attending the school

### **The hierarchy**

**Eastern Cape Department of Education** – is responsible for administering public schooling in the province from Grades 1 to 12

**ECDoE district office** – exercises the authority of the ECDoE in all day-to-day administrative and professional dealings with schools.

**ECDoE circuit office** – interacts with school to implement education policy effectively  
Department of Basic Education, 2014

**Unions** – the two largest teacher unions are the South African Democratic Teacher's Unions (SADTU) and the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA)

### **Role of school principal**

- Leading the learning school
- Shaping the direction and development of the school
- Managing quality and securing accountability
- Developing and empowering self and others
- Managing the school as an organisation
- Working with and for the immediate school community as well as the broader community
- Managing human resources in the school
- Management and advocacy of extra-curricular activities

Government Gazette, 2014

### **Role of the SGB**

- Develop a school mission statement
- Adopt a code of conduct for learners at the school and determine the admission and language policy
- Recommend teachers to the ECDoE for appointment or employ additional teachers
- Supplement resources provided by the state in order to improve the quality of education offered by the school
- Support school staff as they perform their professional tasks
- Oversee the maintenance of school property and buildings

South African Schools Act of 1996

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