UNIT ONE

How responsive are schools to the socio-economic challenges in South Africa today?

Tool 1: Check threats to quality education

It is important for principals and the management team to keep a check on problems that may threaten and compromise your ability to offer quality education at your school. Regular reflection on critical indicators can help you to identify key aspects that need to be managed early on, before they become a crisis.

Purpose

To understand what threatens the quality of education in your school so that you can take informed action to remedy the situation.

What to do

The list below gives some of the most commonly experienced problems that can undermine the ability of your school to offer quality education. Read through the list and tick each problem according to this rating.

1	2	3	4	5
This is not a problem for us	This problem only affects a small part of our school	We have this problem but we are coping with it	This is a growing problem	This is a big problem

TOOL

Name of our school _____

Date of assessment _____

	1	2	3	4	5
Problems that threaten quality education					
Teachers					
1. Many teachers get ill and do not attend school regularly					
2. There is no quick replacement for teachers who are off sick					
3. There is high absenteeism among teachers					
4. Many teachers are unmotivated and tired					
5. Many teachers are struggling with illness and death in their family					
6. Many teachers are not qualified for their teaching post					

	1	2	3	4	5
Problems that threaten quality education					
Teachers					
7. Many teachers do not receive ongoing training and development to keep up to date on current developments in teaching and learning					
8. Some teachers cannot cope with the workload					
Learners					
9. The school struggles with learner absenteeism					
10. A growing number of learners are demotivated and tired					
11. A growing number of learners come to school hungry					
12. A growing number of learners have emotional problems					
13. A growing number of learners experience illness and death in their families					
14. A growing number of learners have learning difficulties					
15. A growing number of learners can't cope with the workload and fall behind					
School environment					
16. There is a growing incidence of violence in the school					
17. Many students complain that they feel unsafe at school					
18. Many learners are victims of bullying					
19. There is a growing problem of drug abuse at school					
20. We are struggling with a growing problem of sexual abuse at school					
Facilities and resources					
21. Classes are overcrowded					
22. We are losing books and learning materials because classrooms are not well oganised					
23. It is a struggle to collect school fees					
24. We do not have a budget to pay for substitution for absent teachers					
25. The maintenance of the school grounds is poor					
26. We do not have water on tap					
27. Our toilet facilities are inadequate					

(Based on a checklist, *Understand what Threatens Quality Education in your School, Develop an HIV & AIDS Plan for your School*. A Guide for School Governing Bodies and Management Teams, DoE, 2003)

Tool 2: Check barriers to learning

The children who come to your school often have to cope with the socio-economic challenges that are prevalent in the community in which they live. Many of them will not be able to communicate the level of their distress but they will show physical, emotional and mental symptoms of stress. A child who is traumatised is unable to concentrate and to learn. It is the SMT's responsibility to identify the vulnerable children in your school so that the appropriate support can be provided to enable them to participate fully in learning.

Purpose

1. To help you and your management team to identify learner behaviours that are symptomatic of vulnerability.
2. Find out the reasons why children are vulnerable.
3. Identify the number of vulnerable learners in your school to assist you in planning support interventions.

What to do

Read the following list of behaviours and tick the ones that you have noticed in the children who attend your school.

TOOL

Behaviours that are common to children who are vulnerable	Tick ✓ the behaviours you have noticed in your school
1. Often comes late for school	
2. Unable to concentrate and pay attention in class	
3. Does not wear school uniforms and warm clothes in winter or comes to school with no shoes	
4. Takes anti-retroviral medicines	
5. Is often sick	
6. Does not attend classes regularly and is often absent	
7. Sleeps in class	
8. Is disruptive in class	
9. Bullies and is aggressive towards others	
10. Is sad and cries easily	
11. Does not participate in class	
12. Seems to be weak and sometimes feels faint	
13. Looks unwashed and untidy	
14. Does not have friends and stands around alone on the playground	
15. Performance on tests and assessment activities drops suddenly	
Add any other behaviours you have noticed	

What to do

Read the following list of reasons why children may be vulnerable and tick those that apply to children who come to your school.

TOOL

Reasons why children may be vulnerable	Tick ✓ the behaviours you have noticed in your school
1. Parents/care givers have died	
2. One parent has died	
3. Parents are unemployed	
4. Show signs of poor nutrition	
5. Parents are poor and cannot afford to buy school uniforms and proper clothes	
6. Come from child headed households	
7. The child looks after sick parents and/or caregivers	
8. Cannot afford to pay school fees	
9. Come from households that depend on an old-age pension	
10. Show signs of abuse	
11. Feel unsafe and secure	
12. Are very poor and come from informal settlements where there is no privacy	
13. Are neglected by their parents and/or caregivers	
14. Are HIV positive	
15. Live with HIV positive parents and/or caregivers	
16. Have to travel along dangerous roads	
17. Live in areas where there are dangerous gangs	
18. Come from households where there is alcohol and drug abuse	
Add any other reasons	

(Adapted from Soul City, *Supporting Vulnerable Children, A Guide for School Governing Bodies, 2006*)

Date_____

We estimate that the percentage of vulnerable children in our school is _____%

Tool 3: How responsive is your school?

Ongoing critical reflection on actions is a powerful method of improving your management practice.

Purpose

This is a reflection tool that encourages you and your management team to reflect critically on any actions that you are currently taking to respond to the social challenges that are affecting learners and teachers in your school.

What to do

1. Ask a member of your management team to draft an initial response to the questions below.
2. Use the draft as a stimulus for a team discussion.
3. Record your final points in the comments block below.
4. File the completed responses for reference when you reach the planning stage in Unit 8.

TOOL

Date_____

Questions	Comments
1. What support are you currently providing for children affected by socio-economic issues such as HIV and AIDS, poverty and violence?	
2. What prevents you from providing adequate support to these learners?	
3. How effective is the support you are providing to these learners?	
4. How are you supporting teachers who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS?	
5. What prevents you from supporting these teachers?	
6. How effective is the support you are providing to these teachers?	

Comment