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## Leadership, stakeholders and learner performance in four Western Cape schools

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### Abstract

This paper explores some micro-level governance and political economy determinants of performance over time in four schools in low-income areas in the Cape Town metropolitan area. The findings are consistent with a pattern evident in many parts of the world – the reality of dysfunction beneath the surface of seemingly well-organized bureaucratic processes. They also are consistent with broader research which points to the weakness, in the specific Western Cape demographic profile which is the focus, of constructive input from school governing bodies, communities or other non-governmental actors. As a way forward, the paper proposes pragmatism and incrementalism – relatively modest tweaks capable of achieving seemingly small (but potentially far-reaching in their consequences) improvements in the functioning at school-level of both hierarchical and horizontal systems of governance.

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

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## Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed extraordinary gains the world over in enhancing access to education – but there has been much less progress in improving educational outcomes. To better understand and address this disconnect, the University of Manchester-based and DFID-supported Effective States and Inclusive Development global comparative research programme has supported a range of studies on the politics and governance of basic education in Bangladesh, Ghana and South Africa.

This paper is one of a series which explores the politics and governance of basic education in South Africa at national, provincial (Western Cape and Eastern Cape), district and school levels. Annex A provides an overview of the overall research design and hypotheses for the full set of papers. The focus of this paper is on some micro-level governance and political economy determinants of performance over time in four schools in the Cape Town metropolitan area. Sections I and II describe the paper’s analytical and empirical approach. Sections III-V detail the school-specific results. Section VI suggests some implications of the analysis.

## I: How context matters

The ESID programme builds on a framework laid out by Khan (2010) and Levy (2014) that frames context in terms of comparative analysis of ‘political settlements’. As Annex A details, two dimensions of governance arrangements are highlighted: whether they are hierarchical or negotiated; and whether they are based on impersonal rules applied impartially, or on personalised ‘deals’ among influential actors. Table 1 below summarises the resulting typology.

Table 1: A governance typology

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

Each of the four cells in Table 1 comprises a distinctive “ideal type” governance platform. 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 employ throughout this paper, is to characterise any specific governance arrangement by allocating 100 points across the four cells.

The typology in Table 1 is useful for the analysis of the ways in which context matters at both political and sectoral levels. Cameron and Levy (2016) and Kota, Hendricks, Matambo and Naidoo (2016 forthcoming) use the framework to characterise the divergent political contexts for education policymaking and implementation in South Africa’s Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces. As Table 2 summarises, they find that in the Western Cape governance is disproportionately impersonal and hierarchical, while in the Eastern Cape it is disproportionately personalised and negotiated.

Table 2: Patterns of governance in two South African provinces

Western Cape	
Hierarchical	15% 60-70%
Negotiated	5-10% 5-15%
	Personalised Impersonal
Eastern Cape	
Hierarchical	20% 10%
Negotiated	45% 25%
	Personalised Impersonal

Turning to sectoral context, there is a rich literature in the field of public administration (summarised in Annex A) as to how the preferred balance between more hierarchal and more horizontal patterns of governance might vary from one sector to another. Analysis of the relative merits of these two patterns of sectoral governance is, of course, only useful in political and institutional contexts where bureaucratic hierarchies work relatively well, thereby creating the realistic possibility of a choice between hierarchical and more horizontal patterns of governance. The Western Cape is thus a propitious setting for this line of inquiry.<sup>1</sup> Taking the example of education, does it necessarily follow that, even where the bureaucracy works well, an education system should be organised exclusively along hierarchical lines, all the way from the top levels of administration through to the school level? There is substantial controversy among education sector professionals as to the right answer to this question.

Building on the experience of some countries with strong and effective centralised systems of education (e.g. France, Russia, Japan), some practitioners argue that education should be tightly managed hierarchically – with strong, top-down control of recruitment, promotion, curriculum and the content (almost to the level of individual lessons) of classroom-level instruction. Others argue for greater flexibility at the school level, allowing for quick identification of localised problems, and development of appropriate context-specific solutions. (Pritchett, 2013; Sayed, 2002; Lauglo and Mclean, 1985; Prawda, 1993).

It is important to underscore that our focus in this paper is on the balance between hierarchical and horizontal patterns of governance at the level of schools, **not** the much broader, and also highly contentious, questions of centralisation versus

decentralisation in the intergovernmental assignment of responsibilities and fiscal resources – both in general, and specifically for the education sector.<sup>2</sup> Nor do we have any interest in addressing another set of contentious issues in education-sector governance – namely, the role of market-like mechanisms (vouchers, charter schools, private provision and the like) in the provision of education.<sup>3</sup> Our interest is squarely on the governance of a public education system – and on the relative merits, within that broader set of institutional arrangements, of more hierarchical relative to more horizontal governance at the school level.

The evidence base as to the effectiveness of efforts to strengthen school-level governance is sparse. Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011) review the results of a variety of randomised control trials and robust, ex-post impact evaluations, and report a mixed picture. Wills (2015) asserts that there is no evidence linking increased local management powers to increased learning in schools. She would concur that much of the international research supports the decentralisation of decision making to the school level in raising school outcomes, but insists that this increased autonomy be packaged with accountability measures. She cites Hanushek and Woessmann (2007:74) in arguing that “local autonomy without strong accountability may be worse than doing nothing”.

Contemporary South Africa (and, for reasons noted above, the Western Cape in particular) offers an excellent opportunity to contribute to this literature. The country’s 1996 constitution located control over the management and implementation of education (though not of policy and curriculum) at the provincial level. The 1996 South African Schools Act went further; it delegated far-reaching responsibilities (including over the recruitment of teachers and

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1 Note that this question cannot usefully be addressed empirically in the Eastern Cape, where, for the political and institutional reasons laid out in Kota et al. (2016 forthcoming), the scope for effective hierarchical governance of education is limited. The relevant questions there are those identified in H3-5 and explored in depth in Shumane and Levy (2016 forthcoming) – namely, whether there might be school-level governance arrangements that can serve as partial institutional substitutes for weak hierarchical governance.

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2 For a few contributions to the vast literature on the broader questions of education decentralisation, see Grindle (2004); McGinn and Welsh (1999); Elmore (1993).

3 Pritchett (2013) is a strong (implicit) advocate of these more market-like options. Ravitch (2010, 2013) offers a more chastened picture – as a former advocate sobered by the many unintended consequences of the American school reform movement. Russakoff (2015) provides an extraordinarily rich depiction of the uphill, contentious struggle to implement a hybrid agenda of school reform from 2010 to 2013 in Newark, NJ, USA.

principals) to school governing bodies (SGBs) in which parents were to have a majority of voting power.

What have been the interactions between hierarchical governance, school-level governance and educational outcomes in the Western Cape? We explore this question via in-depth longitudinal case studies of the interaction over time between school-level governance and performance in four Western Cape schools. Specifically, using 'process tracing' methodologies (on which more below) we explore the following hypotheses:<sup>4</sup>

- *H1*: Well-performing public bureaucracies can use top-down performance management systems to achieve substantial improvements in educational outcomes;
- *H2*: Successful outcomes require a 'zone of autonomy' for front-line practitioners and horizontal governance arrangements which delegate responsibility and oversight to participants close to the front-line of service provision.

In this paper, we explore the relative merits of *H1* and *H2* through the lens of governance<sup>5</sup> at the school level. More horizontal arrangements might be hypothesised to improve governance and performance at the school level through three distinct channels:

- *H3a*: By *empowering* developmentally-oriented local stakeholders – with a necessary condition for this to be effective being that these 'developmentally-oriented' stakeholders indeed have 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 purposes (Levy, 2014).

- *H3b*: By improving *motivation* – with the 'zone of autonomy' at the service provision front-line hypothesised to provide the opportunity for internal leaders to motivate their teams effectively. This is a classic argument for improving the effectiveness of schools, as well as other, 'street-level' bureaucracies which operate at a distance from organisational hierarchies. (See Wilson, 1989; Lipsky, 2010; and Annex A for further elaboration.)
- *H3c*: By creating scope for the utilisation of local-level *information* of a kind to which higher-level hierarchical authorities lack access – and thereby enhancing processes for the selection of good quality staff and leaders, and the efficacy of efforts to hold staff and leaders accountable for their performance (Sah and Stiglitz, 1986; North, 1990; Aghion and Tirole, 1997). (Note that these hypothesised informational benefits only become relevant if the 'trumping' condition in *H3a* is met.)

The education literature has explored the role of school principals from multiple perspectives. Some (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi, 2010) argue persuasively that strong instructional leadership is a key proximate explanatory variable in producing better outcomes. Others (Wimpelberg in Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993; Taylor et al., 2013; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008) explore the relationships between management practices and outcomes – but do not find a consistent set of relationships. Our focus in this paper, using the selection of principals as a lens through which to refract local governance dynamics, is on the broader multi-stakeholder context within which the principal is embedded. Figure 1 illustrates the key elements. These include:

- the school, embedded within a governance framework laid out by the provincial education department and its districts (the 'WCED');
- the principal as the primary agent tasked with the specific governance of the school within this framework;
- the relationship with teachers and a policy-mandated 'school management team' effecting specific governance within the school; and

<sup>4</sup> These are variants of *H4* and *H5b* and *H6* in Annex A.

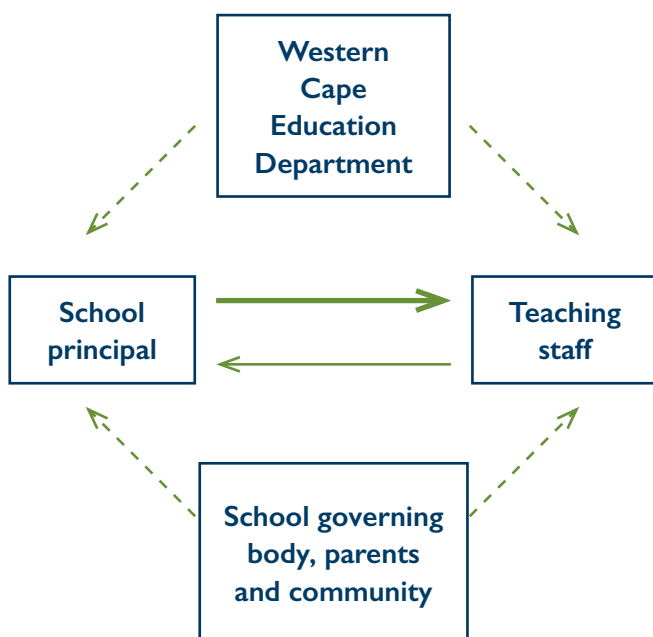
<sup>5</sup> Instructional issues, concerned with curriculum and pedagogy, fall entirely outside the scope of the present effort, but are central to the broader SPADE research effort with which the current research project is aligned.

- the school governing body (SGB), constituted by parents, teachers and the principal, facilitating local decision-making specifically in relation to finances and staff recruitment.

Although not included explicitly in Figure 1, the school-level research also probed the role and influence on school-level governance of the teachers' unions (SADTU and NAPTOSA) and political parties. In the Western Cape, at the school level, this was found to be negligible.

It is the relationship between the four central stakeholders represented in Figure 1, specifically in relation to principal selection, that is the focus in this paper in investigating the nature of school-level governance.

Figure 1: Governance interactions



## II: Research context and methodology

This section provides some background on our sample schools; on the principal selection process in the Western Cape; and on our research methodology. Each is considered in turn.

### The sample

Our school-specific analysis builds on a prior research programme (the SPADE initiative<sup>6</sup>), which studied a stratified sample of 14 Western Cape schools in relation to their *internal* governance dynamics and instructional regimes (Hoadley and Galant, 2015). For the present study we selected four schools from the SPADE sample. The schools fall within two of the Western Cape's eight educational districts. Though the sample is small, in-depth depiction of school-level governance within these schools may be suggestive of broader patterns that prevail in schools located within lower-income communities in the Western Cape. The present study thus provides a framework and direction for the exploration of the findings in a larger sample. The intention in the sampling is to explore positive possibilities, rather than to confirm findings of dysfunction reported widely.

The four schools that constitute our cases in this paper were initially selected for the SPADE research based on their performance on the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) systemic tests in the early 2000s. Two schools were selected as 'above average' performers within their socio-economic profile; both schools had achieved an overall mean for the period that was at least 5 percent above the predicted value, given their profile. These two schools were matched with two schools that had achieved 5 percent below the expected value.

Two matched pairs, each with a high- and low-performing school, were thus established, one set in a former mixed-race area ('coloured' in the South African vernacular), and the other located in a black township. Within each set are two differentially performing schools situated in the same community, about 2 km apart. Both communities can be described as urban, economically depressed, and affected by a range of social problems, such as

6 The SPADE (Schools Performing Above Demographic Expectations) project is interested in the factors that account for primary schools in disadvantaged communities performing above expectations. The focus of the SPADE project was on internal governance, pedagogy and home-school instructional practices and their contribution to differential performance.

violence, substance abuse, absent or young parents, and illiteracy. Each pair is thus similar in demographic composition and general functionality, but with different levels of academic performance.

The first matched pair is located in the settlement of Brandonville,<sup>7</sup> approximately 30 km outside the city of Cape Town. The broader community surrounding these schools originated in the late 1980s and is home to 25,364 residents, according to the 2001 national census. Of the total population, 82 percent are Afrikaans-speaking, 94 percent are 'coloured', and 44 percent of the working age population are unemployed (Census, 2001). In the early 1990s the community's population began to expand, necessitating the establishment of additional primary schools in the area, including School I and School A. Local principals were requested to select particular teachers for transfer to these schools. School I was established in 1993 and currently serves 1,321 learners, drawn from its immediate community. School A opened in 1995 and provides for 1,204 learners. The majority of School A's learners reside in the local community, and about 200 of the learners are isiXhosa-speaking. Both schools offer Afrikaans and English as mediums of instruction. The broader community continues to grow steadily with the construction of local housing projects.

The second matched pair is located in Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha Township was established in 1983, built under the principle of racial segregation executed by the apartheid government. The government envisaged Khayelitsha (meaning 'new home') as a relocation point to accommodate all 'legal' black residents of the Cape Peninsula in one new, purpose-built and easily controlled township. The government classified people as legal if they had already lived in the area for ten years. Due to the immense influx of people, it is the second biggest black township in South Africa after Soweto in Johannesburg, with a population of

between 400,000 and 450,000 people. Khayelitsha is located approximately 35 km outside the city of Cape Town. Residents are 97 percent isiXhosa-speaking, 99 percent are black, and about 47 percent of the working age population are unemployed (Census, 2001). Khayelitsha is one of the fastest growing townships in South Africa. Around 60 percent of households are classified as shacks, predominantly constructed out of corrugated iron.

The two Khayelitsha Schools are located about 2 kilometres apart. School 2 was established in 2000. The staff was largely made up of teachers who were declared excess in other schools where student numbers had declined. In 2012 School 2 had 1,175 learners. The entire student body is isiXhosa-speaking and the school has had a good reputation in the local community. School B was started in a community centre in 1991, without the formal permission of the provincial education department. In 1993 it was formally opened by the provincial department, a principal formally appointed and teachers paid. In 2012 it had 1,124 learners, all of whom were isiXhosa-speaking and reside locally. Both schools offer isiXhosa (from Grade R to Grade 3) and English (from Grades 4 to 7) as mediums of instruction.

**Table 3: Systemic tests – percentage of cohort that meets the grade 3 proficiency standard**

	School I	School A	School 2	School B
<b>2002</b>	66	41	44	31
<b>2004</b>	60	39	54	33
<b>2006</b>	61	47	50	47
<b>2008</b>	61	53	55	45
<b>2011</b>	61	36	53	46
<b>2012</b>	62	36	33	44
<b>2013</b>	49	28	27	45

<sup>7</sup> The name of the area is a pseudonym, given that it is a relatively small area, which may render the schools recognisable. The information is, however, provided for the actual area.

Table 3 details the annual average (literacy and numeracy) scores obtained by each school for the Western Cape systemic tests between 2002 and 2013.<sup>8</sup> The SPADE research identified School 1 and School 2 as relatively high performers, and School A and School B as relatively low performers, relative to the median for their relevant demographic cohort. In practice, as the table suggests, the performance patterns turned out to be messier than those intended in the initial research design and school selection processes

As Table 4 highlights, there turned out to be a strong correlation between turnover in leadership and school-level performance over time. (To disguise identities, but facilitate narrative flow in subsequent sections, the table includes a pseudonym for each school’s principal during each period.) All four schools in our sample experienced a turnover in leadership (i.e. the school principal) over the period studied, with noteworthy consequences:

- In both of the hitherto better-performing schools (Schools 1 and 2) the change in principal resulted in subsequent performance declines.
- In the relatively low-performing School A, the change in principal was associated with a worsening of subsequent performance.
- (The interaction between performance and leadership in School B is complex; we postpone discussion until Section V.)

<sup>8</sup> The scores comprise the percentage of children who achieve a passing score, averaging across annual WCED, externally administered literacy and numeracy systemic tests.

Consistent with the above patterns, the analysis which follows focuses centrally on the interactions between leadership, leadership change, and trends in performance in each of the schools highlighted in Table 4.

### The principal selection process – de jure and de facto

The South African Schools Act of 1996 and the Employment of Educators Act of 1998 define an elaborate process for the appointment of principals. Table 5 characterises the official interview process, using the matrix introduced earlier, as entirely impersonal and rule-bound. Higher political and bureaucratic levels set the parameters for appointments, and provide some resources. Much of the actual decision-making is at the lower levels, in a negotiated form involving the SGB and the district office of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Through this hybrid process, the SGB is formally responsible for principal selection, while the provincial head of department is responsible for the actual appointment. We characterise this ‘ideal’ form in the table as 50 percent impersonal – hierarchical and 50 percent impersonal – negotiated.

Table 5: Governance of principal selection – the policy ‘ideal’

Appointment of principal x	
Hierarchical	50%
Negotiated	50%
	Personalised      Impersonal

Table 4: Governance episodes across 4 schools, 2002-2014

	Earlier period	Change in principal	Later period
School 1	Relatively strong performance <b>Smit</b>	2010	Declining performance <b>Jooste</b>
School A	Relatively weak performance <b>Arendse</b>	2006-2008	Continuing low-level equilibrium <b>Poole</b>
School 2	Relatively strong performance <b>Komape</b>	2007-2010; 2011	Declining performance <b>Various</b>
School B	Mixed performance <b>Somana</b>	2009-2011	Average performance <b>Rala</b>



The Western Cape process for appointing a principal formally involves the following steps:

- An interview panel is constituted, consisting of the SGB, a district official and a union representative. The district official and the union representative are intended to serve only as observers. The district official observing on the interview panel acts as advisor and representative of the WCED. The district official can call the SGB to order, but cannot make recommendations on their behalf. The SGB may co-opt additional members onto the interview committee, should they require additional expertise. Where the SGB in general lacks capacity, it is the district officer's role to provide support.
- The school management team<sup>9</sup> (SMT) defines criteria according to which the SGB assesses applicants.
- An advertisement is posted by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). The advertisement contains information relating to: i) key results areas and duties; ii) job description; and iii) job competencies and qualifications. Schools are able to add items to the job description of the principal (according to the school's needs); however, the addition cannot be inconsistent with higher-level selection criteria negotiated and agreed upon at the national level.
- The WCED accepts applications, and screens the applications for educators who have misconduct charges against them, those who have been fired and those who have retired due to poor health. It also indicates which applicants have the relevant qualifications. The applications are then put into a sealed envelope and sent to the school. This is done on the basis of a collective agreement with the unions to ensure no names are added or taken out of the envelope.
- The SGB sets a date when the envelope will be opened. Unions are invited to attend. An initial

screening takes place where the SGB shortlists five to six candidates. This list is sent to the WCED. Only established school principals and deputy principals are eligible to apply for principal posts. Currently equity and representation criteria are taken into account, but only at the early stages of the appointment process. At the shortlist stage, expertise, qualification and experience are the primary criteria for selection.

- The interview committee then conducts interviews. They may give assignments to candidates to complete, and they also make use of competency tests (paid for by the WCED if conducted by an external agency).
- Once the interviews are completed, the SGB provides a list of three candidates (in order of preference) to the provincial head of education. The provincial head of education makes their final selection from this list, although they are not compelled to select the SGB's most preferred candidate.

In practice, formal processes may or may not play out in the ways intended by those who write the formal rules. A variety of de facto alternatives are possible, including:

- A high quality de facto process that follows the de jure rules, with robust developmentally-oriented decision-making on the part of the SGB, aligned with the WCED, and resulting in the selection of a well-qualified and committed principal.
- A process that follows the de jure rules, but that de facto is captured by influential, non-developmental factions – resulting in the selection of a principal who lacks the commitment and/or skill to prioritise good educational outcomes.
- A contested process, in which conflict among stakeholders entrusted with decision-making responsibilities results in a failure to agree on a candidate. Or
- A process where decision-making is inconsistent with the formal rules laid out above – perhaps

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<sup>9</sup> The SMT consists of the heads of department, the deputy principals and the principal (or one fulfilling this role).

because school-level stakeholders act outside the formal structures (this could be for developmental or predatory reasons), or perhaps because WCED intervention supersedes the formal rules. (In these instances, a variety of alternative possible outcomes are possible, each paralleling those listed above).

Understanding which of the above processes of principal selection played out in each of our schools – and why – is a central goal of the present paper. Since these processes do not play out in a vacuum, we also examine the processes of decision-making that prevailed within each of the school in the period preceding the selection of a new principal – as shaped by the organisational culture established by the 'period 1' principal.

### Research methodology

Our research method is what George and Bennett (2005) refer to as "process tracing". Process tracing focuses on a very specific set of decisions. It "attempts to trace the links between possible causes and observed outcomes" (p.4). Often used to test the hypotheses of a theory of causation, process tracing considers the sequence and values of intervening variables in a case "to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case" (p.6) The focus in gathering data, then, is on sequential processes within a particular historical case, not on correlations of data across cases. 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).

To learn about these decision processes, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of key informants in each of the schools. A total of 11 in-depth interviews were conducted across the four schools, lasting between two and 4.5 hours each. These interviews were supplementary to the in-depth knowledge the researchers already had of each of the schools as a result of prior rounds of interviews and engagement in the context of the earlier SPADE research. Detailed fieldnotes were kept by at least two interviewees on each occasion. These notes

were integrated and a comprehensive record of each interview constituted the data for analysis. Responses between different informants were triangulated, and contradictions in accounts were identified, and examined further in subsequent interviews.

The interviews aimed at identifying dominant and influential stakeholders in the school, and mapping stakeholders in relation to the achievement of developmental goals (in the case of the school, improved student learning). In considering 'multi-stakeholder governance', we considered those setting the goals of school management and overseeing performance and the recruitment and management of staff in the school (school management team [SMT]; school governing board [SGB]; district administration). As per H3, we were also interested in the existence of predatory and trumping coalitions and how these played out in the history of the schools. Section III focuses on these leadership dynamics in Schools 1 and 2, where performance initially was relatively strong. Section IV seeks to account for the consistently weak performance in School A, notwithstanding a shift in leadership. Section V explores some of the more paradoxical leadership dynamics that underpinned School B's performance patterns over time.

### III: Schools 1 and 2 – brittle strengths

While Schools 1 and 2 had been included in the initial SPADE sample on the basis of their exemplary performance, as Table 3 signals, both schools have seen their systemic test results decline radically subsequent to 2011. In both schools, a likely contributor to this decline was the replacement of an effective principal with a weak successor. The failure to appoint strong successors did not occur in a vacuum. Some of the reasons may be found in the ways in which, in the earlier period, the successful principals went about the tasks of school governance. So it is there that we begin.

#### Two high-performing principals in action

Both Schools 1 and 2's episodes of relatively strong performance were characterised by a disproportionate emphasis on hierarchical modes of governance. Further,

as Table 6 signals, in both the hierarchical pattern took a very specific form, in which the personalised and impersonal dimensions of hierarchy were wholly intertwined. Each case was characterised by a principal who personally was strongly committed to achieving strong performance in their school – and leveraged the impersonal-hierarchical framework of rules provided by the WCED as a way of safeguarding the educational mission of the school from efforts at capture.

**Table 6: 'Intertwined', predominantly hierarchical governance**

<b>Hierarchical</b>	60-70	
<b>Negotiated</b>	0-10	30
	<b>Personalised</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>

For School 1, interviewees attributed its steady and relatively good performance prior to 2013 to the principal at the time, Mr Smit, and his 'systems'. Smit was well-liked, respected, and extremely vigilant with respect to attendance and latecoming. He monitored teachers and "drove performance". Interviewees reported that:

"Mr Smit had a vision for the school .... He knew what was going on in the classes and knew the curriculum. Teachers also did not have to fill in forms all the time, compared to now".

Smit concentrated on two issues: the appointment of strong staff, particularly in management positions, and the establishment of strong bureaucratic systems in the school. He sought to promote expertise in those managing the school, and was described as unafraid of challenges to his own authority. He developed and relied on clear systems and principles, which had bite at the level of staff appointment and management, particularly in relation to teacher performance. He set up school-level processes to ensure rigorous appointment processes, co-opting the circuit (WCED) in this regard to support decisions taken in the school. He also established a strong SMT within the school, allowing for the establishment of rule setting. He also addressed staff underperformance. Teachers were dealt with individually, and where problems arose individual strategies were developed to deal with these. Smit

developed strong administrative procedures for all activities in the school, and a filing system that kept careful record of policies, decisions and processes. He also had a close relationship with the circuit office and with a professional network of teachers in the Brandonville area. According to interviewees, under Smit the SGB appeared to be entirely compliant with respect to the principal's directives.

In School 2, paralleling Mr Smit, Mrs Komape also laid down explicit rules and procedures for resolving disputes and making decisions. She used these to deal with a number of inherited disputes and contestations around teacher contract posts. She also inherited an SGB heavily involved in local politics and with strong influence over the former principal. Komape disciplined the SGB, thwarting a number of attempts by the SGB to capture school funds. In her words: "If you create a space for your SGB to mess with you, you will lose control as principal". Slowly the SGB was brought in line and cooperated with the rules laid down by Komape.

Mrs Komape actively pursued attempts to make processes transparent. She spent a great deal of energy educating other school actors in legitimate processes and rules. She put in place strict observation of school hours – for both students and teachers; instilling "a culture of diligence" in her words in the school. She took the same transparent, bureaucratically-driven approach to teacher underperformance. 'Progressive discipline' as recommended by the Department was followed. The tabling of a systematic record of the teachers' conduct, as well as regular meetings with the teachers ("the teachers were welcome to bring their union representatives to the meeting so that they didn't feel they were being victimised") provided a systematic basis on which to address underperformance and come to a mutual agreement on an improvement plan for the situation.

Mrs Komape acknowledged that there were risks associated with taking a strong developmental path: "You do not know what will happen tomorrow". She said it was always a possibility that unions or staff members could use parents

to initiate an investigation of “mismanagement of school funds” against a principal. It is for this reason that Mrs Komape used established bureaucratic processes to perform her role. As she put it, she did her tasks “according to the requirements of government circulars”. According to her, this limited the points where fault could be found. She considers herself lucky to have never experienced such intimidation.

Again paralleling Mr Smit, Mrs Komape drove a deliberate, merit-based staff appointment process in the school. She invested substantial time and effort in educating the SGB in interview processes, including assisting in preparing questions and suitable answers ahead of time, candidate scoring procedures and minute keeping. Her own records of appointment processes were impeccable, anticipating the possibility of contestation of an appointment. In these ways, she attempted to safeguard the process from capture. While unions were a real threat to rule-bound school-level governance, Mrs Komape argued that they could only have a negative effect if the space was created for them to capture the decision-making processes.

The recruitment of an HOD position offers a striking example of how Mrs Komape leveraged formal rules – including the backing of the WCED hierarchy – to prevail in the face of an attempt at the capture. The position drew the interest of a branch chairperson of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). The successful candidate would be required to teach music at the school. The branch chairperson was escorted to his interview by his vice chairperson. The union observer selected by the candidate to be part of the interview panel was the SADTU branch treasurer. In anticipation, the principal established one of the interview questions as requiring that the candidate play the melodica and ‘teach’ the panel a musical piece. It became evident that the branch chairperson had never been involved in music. He could neither play the instrument nor read the music piece. He ended up singing the piece incorrectly. Since the criteria and the questions were carefully established, the non-appointment of the SADTU candidate could not be contested.

### Principal succession – things fall apart

In their efforts to achieve results, both Mr Smit and Mrs Komape relied on a combination of charismatic leadership and formal rules. But in neither case was the strengthened governance sustained once they exited. In both cases, things rapidly fell apart.

In 2009, Mr Smit retired from School I and Mr Jooste, who had been one of the deputy principals at School I, was appointed acting principal, and subsequently principal. There were strong indications across the interviews of discontent about Jooste’s appointment. At the time of the interviews, it was clear that the school had become split between those who supported and those who opposed Mr Jooste’s principalship. Several argued that he had not been the best candidate in the application pool for the principal position. Rather, as Table 7 illustrates, the outcome appears to have been the result of personalised dealmaking involving Mr Jooste, the SGB and circuit-level staff within the WCED.

**Table 7: Predominantly, personalised deal-driven governance**

Hierarchical	45	10
Negotiated	45	0
	<b>Personalised</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>

According to interviewees, three SGB members were actively courted by Mr Jooste while he was acting principal. He granted rights to one member to sell food on the school property, and supported another’s career progression in the school. In the interviews it was claimed that Jooste intimidated some members of the SGB and coopted others, such that they “would never go against the principal”.

In addition, Jooste could rely on a historically established professional network in the Brandonville area. Jakobs, the circuit manager, had been a principal at one of the primary schools in the Brandonville area prior to taking up the job as circuit manager, and he had been friends with Mr Jooste for years. One interviewee claimed that Jakobs persuaded the

SGB to appoint Jooste, another claimed that Jakobs influenced the interview process by “assisting” the interview committee to craft questions that would favour Jooste.

An HOD, as union observer, wrote a report on the appointment process, arguing that two of the external candidates were better qualified for the post. Knowledge of Mr Jooste within the tight teacher professional network in the Brandonville area also prompted the report: “We came together from [one of the more established primary schools in the Brandonville area]. I know his record. I know what he is like”. The report that was submitted by the HOD was never consulted, as this happened only in the case of a dispute, and none was formally declared in this appointment.

Interviews consistently described Mr Jooste’s leadership at School 1 once he became principal as “hands off”, taking no action in relation to increasing underperformance and absenteeism of teachers. He was reported to comply strictly with bureaucratic procedure, but without consultation and negotiation with other staff. Relying on the systems and good reputation of the school established by Smit, he was not perceived as contributing to developing the school. Rather, he undermined it by eliminating strong teachers who challenged anti-developmental practices within the school. He was reported to have coopted both the circuit and the SGB in supporting his decisions in the school. The negative consequences for the educational mission of the school were reflected in the declining test scores in Table 3 above.

School 2’s process of principal selection was even more fragmented than that of School 1, along lines suggested by Table 8. In 2007, following seven years of strong management, Mrs Komape was seconded to WCED district-level administration to provide governance support across a number of schools. As an interim measure, School 2’s SGB and principal made a decision for the school’s two deputy principals to alternate in performing principal responsibilities on a quarterly basis. The deputies were aligned with the two phases in the school – a female deputy in the foundation phase (Grades R to 3) and a male deputy in the intermediate phase one

(Grades 4 to 7). This was a temporary solution. In 2009, Komape was appointed formally at the district and vacated her position at the school.

**Table 8: Fragmented governance**

	Personalised	Impersonal
Hierarchical	10	30
Negotiated	60	0

Following Mrs Komape’s formal appointment, the SGB held an internal application process for appointing an ‘acting’ principal, and the female deputy principal was appointed for the rest of 2009. The appointment process resulted in divisions in the staff, based on vested interests of individuals in line for promotion in the different phases. If the deputy principal from the intermediate phase was appointed as principal, this would open up promotion posts (potentially a deputy and HOD position) in that phase. The same would apply if the foundation phase deputy were to be appointed. A new SGB was appointed in 2010 that supposedly favoured a male candidate.

The conflict between the acting principal and the other deputy mounted and came to a head when the acting principal (the female foundation phase deputy) reported the situation to the district office. In being called to the district office, she discovered that the male deputy had been compiling a case against her. The case was around alleged management of funds. The story given by the then acting principal (female deputy) was as follows:

“The school’s choir had the opportunity to travel to Joburg for a competition. The SMT went to the school’s book supplier and got 10 percent of their payment back for books. This was done ‘behind my back’. The SMT then used this money to buy air tickets for their travel.

“When I found out, I did not report this, even though I now see I should have. I was afraid that reporting them would have implications for their jobs (‘their bread’). I also felt that I would start a battle that I had no chance of winning.”

The district intervened in 2010, in order to address the conflict at the school and drive the appointment of a permanent principal. The acting female head applied for the post and the circuit manager, together with the SGB, managed the appointment process. After the interview process, the SGB declared a dispute, saying they had not been adequately trained to appoint the appropriate candidate. Some interviewees claimed that the SGB had been progressively captured by the male deputy. There were also claims that SADTU had become involved, and that the male deputy, one of the HODs, and the SADTU branch chairperson who had been an observer in this round, were influencing the SGB. The female deputy also stated that there were rumours at the time that the SMT had purchased a cell phone and groceries for the SGB chairperson, in order to receive information on the interviews.

During this process, conflict between the male deputy and the female head worsened, until finally they agreed to the appointment of a new acting principal, who stepped in for two years from 2010 to the end of 2011. The female deputy again applied for the job when it was advertised in 2011, but lost out to an external candidate, Mrs Madolo. In 2012, the new principal took over. From 2009 until 2012, then, a failed principal selection process resulted in School 2 experiencing troubled and disruptive governance and, as per Table 3, a collapse in its hitherto exemplary scores on systemic tests. As of the time of our interviews, there was little evidence that the new principal had been able to reverse the decline.

#### **IV: School A – persistent low-level equilibrium**

In School A, as the systemic test scores in Table 3 show, things went from bad to worse – with a leadership transition exacerbating rather than reversing an earlier period of relatively weak performance.

The roots of School A's weaknesses can be traced to the way in which it was started. Interviewees gave two reasons given for teachers coming to the school at its start-up. One was that there were promises of opportunities for promotion. The other

was that principals in neighbouring schools used the opportunity to rid themselves of teachers regarded as 'lazy' or as 'troublemakers'. As one interviewee put it, "The problem cases landed at [School A]".

Under the first principal, Arendse, there was a series of contestations around promotion posts at the school. Leaks from selection processes, suspicion around undue influence of the SGB, and relations of patronage were reported across the interviews. For example, in 1996 the appointment of an HOD was contested. The appointment process was carried out a second time and a different person was then appointed. Around 2005, a friend of Arendse was appointed into an HOD position. The process of shortlisting and interviews was undertaken without informing a potential candidate on the staff who had indicated interest in the position.

More generally, interviewees claimed that the best person for the job was not always appointed. Arendse had strong personal connections to his management team. Appointments were made according to family and friendship networks. One member, who had a significant drinking problem, remained in his post despite this problem, as he was a rugby referee who supplied tickets to major games to Arendse. Attempted capture of the SGB by potential appointees to posts occurred regularly. Interviewees pointed out parents' vulnerability towards influence, given their low literacy levels and poverty. Suggestions that bribes could be paid (though no direct evidence or cases reported) were made. In sum, Arendse's approach to leadership was disproportionately personalised, anchored in horizontal dealmaking along the lines illustrated by Table 7. In Mr Arendse's case, these deals had little developmental purpose – but rather (paralleling the selection of Jooste as School 1 principal) were predominantly centred around individual objectives.

In 2006, after 12 years of tenure, Arendse, was removed following criminal charges brought against him. Following Arendse's removal, the WCED played a central role in the principal appointment process which followed. It appointed a circuit manager, Mr Damonse, to serve as acting principal. Further, because of the school's history of contested

appointments and a dysfunctional SGB, the WCED intervened to oversee the appointment of new deputies and a permanent principal. The WCED organised and chaired the interview process, including some parents in the process.

But the WCED's direct involvement did little to transform the prevailing culture in the school. Recall that School A, like School I, is in an area characterised by longstanding personalised ties between WCED circuit staff and school staff. Given these ties, the likelihood was high from the first that the new principal would be hired from within School A's existing staff. At the time of Arendse's removal, there were two deputies – Poole and Arendse's nephew. The latter died of a heart attack shortly after the aforementioned criminal investigations of his uncle. A strong relationship developed between Damonse and Poole, which had historical roots, but which strengthened during Damonse's acting headship, with Damonse mentoring Poole to take over. In sum, School A's process of principal selection was overwhelmingly personalised (even more so than the pattern depicted in Table 6), framed within hierarchical process.

Poole took over the school in 2008. He soon faced problems with the SGB and community over alleged misuse of school funds. An audit was held, and the main 'troublemakers' who had instigated the inquiry in the school left. The teachers involved in the incident were eventually charged with inciting and were fined. Two 'camps' have endured in the school, those for and those against the principal. In 2010 there was conflict between Poole and the community over the appointment of so-called "mommy teachers" – parents who were brought in to supervise classes, given the high teacher absentee rate. Parents blockaded the entrance to the school and demanded the removal of the principal. They demanded to know who approved the employment of temporary educators whom they believed to be unqualified. A new SGB was appointed in 2012, with careful oversight from the principal. From interviews it appears that the SGB currently functions to rubber stamp the principal's decisions.

Poole's management style is described at times as divisive, at other times as autocratic, but never as focused on issues of instruction. Teacher absenteeism

and large classes remain unaddressed as significant problems in the school. There is distrust between management and teachers. Of the teachers, the principal says: "They mainly come to earn a salary. This is their main driver".

### **V: Unexpected resilience – the case of School B**

Compared with the other Western Cape case study schools, School B is an outlier. Its patterns of governance have been participatory and personalised – along the lines illustrated in Table 7. But unlike the others instances of Table 7-style governance noted earlier, in the case of School B participatory governance turns out to have been a source of resilience.

The school began as a community centre with seven 'volunteer' teachers. It consisted of 10 rooms, no blackboards, and each teacher had a class of 160 learners. Mrs Somana began her tenure as the first principal of the school at this time. In 1993, the school was opened formally by the WCED, and they began providing teaching posts and funding.

Somana served as principal of School B for nearly 20 years. Interviewees repeatedly referenced her kind-hearted character towards students and their parents, and her positive impact on the community. Her management style was informal, and oriented towards a culture of 'looking after one's own'. Interviewees asserted that during her tenure as principal, the filling of promotion or senior posts (e.g. HOD, deputy principal) did not often follow bureaucratic procedure. In general, external candidates were not appointed. One interviewee put it thus in relation to an advertised HOD post:

"Some of the external applicants didn't attend their interview ... they assumed an internal candidate would receive it. Appointments are up to the SGB and external candidates don't usually receive posts."

Viewed through a lens of rule-boundedness as a desirable pattern of governance, School B's relatively low scores in the initial systemic tests are unsurprising.

Indeed, using the lens of the typology framework, School B's personalised and participatory governance patterns superficially are similar to the School A pattern. In School A, as we have seen, this pattern was associated with a persistent low-level equilibrium of mediocre performance. But what happened in School B once the initial systemic test results were released was very different and within two years the school showed significant improvement in its test scores.

These test score gains were attributed in the interviews to the instituting of a number of developmentally-oriented strategies: an afterschool programme; NGO involvement; home visits by Somana when learners had been absent; and support structures for orphans and vulnerable children (initiated by a parent). Although tentative, the data may suggest Somana's personalised leadership, embedded positively in the community, provided a 'floor' of sorts, constructively responsive at key moments.

Informality also had another consequence. In the later stages of Mrs Somana's tenure (2006–09) issues of financial mismanagement were brought to light. Teachers began to notice the poor condition of the school (e.g. no toilet paper, leaking taps, etc); some did not receive salaries; and the prospective grade R facility was at a standstill. Eventually a service provider and a number of teachers reported non-payment of funds to the WCED. The capturing of school funds threatened the school's developmental stability. In early 2010 the WCED launched a formal investigation. Department officials conducted an audit as well as a formal Whole School Evaluation. A few months later, Mrs Somana submitted a letter to the SGB and WCED for 'early retirement'. From the interviews it did not emerge clearly who had been implicated in the financial mismanagement.

In selecting a successor to Mrs Sambona, School B's legacy of strong community involvement and a developmentally-oriented SGB turned out to be a source of resilience. Following Somana's departure, the SGB requested the WCED's assistance in selecting an 'acting' principal so as not to negatively impact on the school's performance. Shortly thereafter, the department appointed a 'caretaker' principal – a 'coloured' man who was at

the time awaiting the outcome of his application for a permanent post elsewhere. An SGB member described the situation thus:

"He was a good guy. Things improved, but the teachers had a negative perception of him. They thought he wouldn't understand the challenges of the school. [The SGB] feared that his life was in danger. You see, he was good, but it was a cultural issue."

These serious threats in the broader school community led to the caretaker principal's departure; he took a permanent post at another school. The SGB decided to appoint one of the deputies as acting principal. After deliberation amongst parents and the SGB, the most senior or long-standing deputy, Mr Mayila, was appointed in January 2011.

Over the next few months, the permanent principal post was advertised publicly with clear criteria determined by the SGB, which focused on the development of the school. Because Mr Mayila, the acting principal at the time, was a candidate for the permanent position, a local high school principal oversaw the appointment process. Another internal staff member (an HOD) was considered for the post, as well as two external candidates, one male and one female. The primary stakeholders throughout the process were SGB members, the local high school principal, a union representative, and the circuit manager (the latter two as observers only). The process strictly followed the WCED's established policies. The appointment process was described as 'harmonious' and 'professional' with 'no discrepancies'. 'By the book' transparent processes (which closely approximated the principal selection 'ideal' of Table 5) allowed for the two most suitable (high scoring) candidates to be shortlisted. The WCED made the final decision and offered Mr Rala, an external candidate, the principalship.

## VI: Patterns and implications

Relative to other provinces in South Africa, public schools in the Western Cape are well-governed, and generally show better results. As Cameron and Levy



(2016) detail, by and large the WCED hierarchy delivers effectively on the things hierarchies are expected to deliver. However, there are continuing challenges to improvement, including the hugely difficult socio-economic setting faced by many children in the Western Cape; a delayed effective curriculum regime and continuing weaknesses in teachers' instructional capacity.

Might there also be some 'micro-governance' reasons? In this final section, we draw on our school-level case studies to reflect more broadly on the ways in which de facto hierarchical and horizontal governance arrangements might help explain why the effort to improve outcomes continues to be enormously challenging.

### Hierarchical governance

The WCED's well-functioning hierarchy is an important asset. Getting textbooks delivered; ensuring that teaching posts are filled with teachers who meet a minimum set of criteria; ensuring an optimal balance between personnel and non-personnel expenditure; tracking how schools use resources (including trends in performance); getting funding to the right places at the right times; pro-actively trying to fill leadership positions with the right people for the job – in contrast to many other departments of education in South Africa and elsewhere, the WCED does all of these things well. These are important strengths.

The focus of our research, though, has been on narrower micro-governance concerns. Our interest has been to understand (along lines suggested by Figure 1) both the potential benefits and the limits of a relatively well-performing hierarchy on governance at school-level. We have focused especially on the position of principal – both how principals choose to exercise their authority, and the processes of principal selection.

Our case studies identified three distinct ways through which principals exercise their authority – each with different implications as to the influence of hierarchy on school performance:

i Developmentally-oriented governance through top-down leadership, underpinned by rules – illustrated

by the leadership styles of Smit in School 1 and Somana in School 2.

Both principals gave strong emphasis to putting in place a framework of rule-boundedness within their schools. In doing so, both benefited hugely from confidence that the rules would indeed be enforced at higher levels of the WCED's bureaucratic ladder. Both used this platform of credible rules as a key buttress against pressures to act in ways that were inconsistent with the school's educational mission.

ii "Isomorphic mimicry" – the use of leadership authority to establish a seemingly desirable form (in this case hierarchical governance), but without the substance (accountability for performance) which the form is intended to deliver.

As recent work has explored globally, this pre-occupation with form, rather than the pursuit of concrete development results, is especially prevalent where "entities are highly dependent on getting greater legitimacy from external constituencies in which 'best practices' are highly defined" (Andrews, 2013; Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2012). In our case studies, School 1 under Jooste, and School A under Poole provide two examples of low-level equilibria of rule-following mediocrity along these lines.

iii Participatory leadership – in which a principal governs the school by actively fostering a sense of participation and teamwork, underpinned by shared commitment to a framework of rules which supports co-operative decision-making.

While none of the schools in our sample provided an unequivocal example of 'good practice' along these lines, the participatory approach through which School B was governed (though without formal rules) provided a partial illustration.

Note that both (i) and (ii) are wholly consistent with institutional arrangements where schools are embedded within strong organisational hierarchies. Only (iii) requires for its effectiveness the presence of a 'zone of autonomy' at school level, which (as per sub-hypothesis 3b in Section 1) principals potentially can use to motivate teachers.

The process of principal selection offers one seemingly straightforward way of improving the overall quality of school leadership. Here our case studies are sobering (although it is important to qualify what follows by noting both that our sample size is too small to serve as a basis for generalisation and that, as detailed below in our final sub-section, a variety of recent initiatives are under way within the WCED to improve principal selection). In three of the four cases in this paper (School B was the exception), the process of principal selection turned out to be retrogressive. In both of the initially high-performing schools (Schools 1 and 2), leadership transitions resulted in a clear subsequent decline in performance. In a third (School A), a change in leadership did nothing to disrupt a low-performance equilibrium. Though the specifics of why principal selection was so difficult varied across School 1, 2 and A, the case studies suggest three underlying patterns.

First, a key driver fuelling contestation in all three cases was the presence of in-house candidates for principal (i.e. from the incumbent deputy principals). In the culture prevailing in the schools, length of service and the occupation of a particular post are regarded as a natural conduit to promotion. Over 55 percent of principals nationally are promoted from within schools (Wills, 2015). Further, when an internal candidate is promoted, it opens up a whole set of potential promotion posts below this position. In School 1, the presence of a well-networked internal candidate resulted in complaints (which were never formally followed through on) that better-qualified external candidates were passed over. In School 2, contestation for the top position between two competing deputies resulted in the process dragging on for almost four years.

Second, in two of the cases (both cases were in the Brandonville area, where, as noted, there were close linkages between school staff and officials in the WCED circuit office), the relevant WCED officials appear to have abetted an insider-driven and only partially competitive process. In one case, interviewees suggested that the circuit staff-person steered the SGB interview process towards a preferred, insider candidate. In the other, the circuit staff actively mentored an internal candidate, and then took direct leadership of the interview process, which resulted in the mentee's selection.

Third, in neither School 1 nor the 2007-10 contestation in School 2 did the SGB function as an impartial judge and overseer, with the best interests of the school at heart. Instead, the SGB became a focal point for lobbying by insider candidates, with multiple allegations from interviewees of efforts by candidates and their supporters to informally influence the SGB decision processes.

### Horizontal governance

As the evidence on principal selection signals, in three of our four case study schools (School B again being the exception), the patterns we observed provided little evidence that horizontal governance played a positive role. On the contrary, in these three schools, SGBs (school governing bodies) more often were sites for political contestation and personalised favour than they were part of the solution (though we feel it necessary to note that, contrary to a familiar narrative, we found very little evidence that contestation and the pursuit of favour were driven by teachers unions).<sup>10</sup> On occasion, developmentally-oriented principals turned to non-governmental organisations outside their immediate communities for support, but mostly the involvement of these outside organisations was quite superficial. Consistent with H3a earlier, in Schools 1, 2 and A, any positive potential of horizontal governance was confounded by the strength of predatory influence networks. In such circumstances, neither the motivational (H3b) nor the informational (H3c) rationales for horizontal governance arrangements can have much, if any, positive effect.

While we recognise that our sample is small, and thus that our findings could be an artifact of sample selection, broader research (for the specific Western Cape demographic profile which is our focus) suggests that the pattern of the principal driving school performance, with relatively limited constructive input from the SGB, communities, or other non-

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<sup>10</sup> Although more present as a potential agent in the Khayelitsha context than in the other area studied, in none of our sample schools were unions found to be instrumental in contributing to or preying on school resources. In one case, School 2, attempted capture of the appointment process of an HOD was thwarted by commitment to official procedure.

governmental actors is a more general one (Hoadley, Christie and Ward, 2009). In relatively affluent and stable communities with high social capital, negotiated governance could indeed be prevalent, and associated with strong performance. (Indeed, in such settings this may be the normatively preferred mode of governance). However, where social capital is weaker and conflict over resources is acute, the absence of strong hierarchical governance could render a school especially vulnerable to predation. These patterns accord with recent work on management in resilient schools in South Africa: performance is driven from within, without reliance or support from external agents (Chikoko Naicker and Mthiyane, 2015).

Yet, for all of these evident weaknesses in horizontal accountability, our research cautions against focusing on hierarchical performance measures to the exclusion of the development of more sustained, horizontal relations between stakeholders at the school and community level. Consistent with H3b and H3c in Section I, the ability of any bureaucracy to exert strong control at the micro level is inevitably limited. Our results point to the real danger that surface compliance, or 'isomorphic mimicry', can mask underperformance, making the necessity and means for intervening in a school more opaque. And even where performance is good, insofar as it is dependent on top-down leadership from an incumbent principal, as our case studies of Schools 1 and 2 suggest, the risk of performance reversal is especially acute at moments of succession from one principal to another.

Against this backdrop, the patterns we observed in School B are striking. Though tentative, School B possibly indicates the potential of strong school-communities ties to support developmentally-oriented decision-making in the school. This relationship, between the school and community, as a 'floor' or support for enhanced decision-making has been raised by Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009), though they argue that it derives from a support for, rather than direct action in, decision-making processes in the first instance.

### Some policy implications

The evidence from our case studies raises a troubling dilemma. On the one hand, our results are consistent

with a pattern that is evident in many parts of the world (Pritchett, 2013) – the reality of dysfunction beneath the surface of seemingly well-organised bureaucratic processes. The difference between a high-performing bureaucracy and 'isomorphic mimicry' can be difficult to discern. On the other hand, our results also are consistent with broader research which suggests that, for the specific Western Cape demographic profile which is our focus, the absence of constructive input from the SGB, communities, or other non-governmental actors is the norm, rather than the exception (Lewis and Naidoo, 2004; Karlsson, 2002).

Given these findings, one temptation for policymakers (at least in settings such as the Western Cape, where bureaucratic quality is relatively strong) is to try and 'double down' – to eliminate performance shortfalls by the introduction of seemingly more and more robust tools of top-down performance management. Our cases suggest the limitations of this.

What, then, is to be done? We propose pragmatism and incrementalism – forswearing grand visions in favour of relatively modest tweaks capable of achieving seemingly small (but potentially far-reaching in their consequences) improvements in the functioning of both hierarchical and horizontal systems of governance.

Our case studies suggest that the developmental returns may be especially high from an intensified focus on the selection of school principals. In the episodes of principal selection examined in our case study schools, neither hierarchical action by the WCED nor participatory engagement by SGBs was able systematically to assure the recruitment and placement of good principals. A better balance between hierarchical and horizontal governance is needed – one which is better able to leverage the strengths of each, while limiting (as per H3a) the risks of local capture or (as per H3c) of isomorphic mimicry in the face of the inevitable limitations of higher levels of the bureaucracy in accessing local-level information.

Part of the solution may lie in the WCED's recent intensification of efforts in this area. Post-2009, as

Cameron and Levy (2016) detail, the WCED has used a variety of managerial tools in an effort to influence principal selection in ways that could shake loose low-level equilibria. These have included:

- A de facto policy that when vacancies for principal arose in poorly performing schools, the winning candidate should not be a deputy principal from the same school.
- The use of early retirement options and other inducements (e.g. lateral transfers) to encourage principals in poorly performing school to vacate their positions.
- The introduction of written psychometric competency assessment tests for candidates for principal, with the costs of testing borne by the WCED. While, given the rules governing labour relations, these could not formally be required, since these tests (and their financing) have been made available, all SGBs have made use of them.
- A review of the selection process in poorly performing schools – and interventions (including from the highest levels of the bureaucracy) where questions arose as to the likely performance of the selected candidate.

Our case studies suggest that in settings such as the Western Cape where a platform of capable bureaucracy is in place, pragmatic managerial interventions along these lines have the potential to yield substantial improvements in the process of principal selection.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the ongoing intensified focus on putting in place strong, developmentally-oriented school leaders, renewed focus on the structure of the relationship between SGB, principal and district (circuit), and what functions they should serve would be helpful.

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<sup>11</sup> Note that in settings where bureaucracies are weak and/or captured (which Kota et al. [2016 forthcoming] suggest is the case in the Eastern Cape), initiatives to strengthen the authority of the bureaucracy in appointing school principals may simply shift the basis of contestation over capture to different terrain, with very uncertain consequences in terms of overall impact.

Excluding SGBs entirely from the processes of principal selection may not be an ideal solution. As our case study of School B (and our school-level case studies in the Eastern Cape) suggest, some involvement of SGBs can help limit the risks of capture, while maintaining a floor of support for developmental decision-making. But the current structure of the relationship evidently is not working well; and there also is a need for systemic support to enable SGBs to better play their developmental role.

In our view, rather than viewing the interaction between hierarchical and horizontal governance as zero-sum, the task for practitioners is to find ways to make more effective the 'both/and' balance, with an emphasis on impersonal forms of decision-making, as reflected in Table 5. Our cases have shown that effective hierarchical modes have the potential to create the conditions for fostering local initiative and developmental practice by the school to augment the work of the state. There is also a strong suggestion that informational and other inputs from developmentally-oriented local stakeholders have the potential to contribute to the principal selection process – as long as the door is not opened for predatory capture. Finding a better balance is a fundamental challenge for practitioners – but one which, if addressed successfully, appears from our case studies to offer real opportunity for achieving quite substantial short- to medium-term gains in educational outcomes.

### 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 this paper, the series currently comprises: Cameron and Naidoo, 2016; Cameron and Levy, 2016; Shumane and Levy, 2016 forthcoming; Kota, Naidoo, Matambo and Hendricks, 2016 forthcoming.) 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, Wallis, Webb and Weingast, 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 governance frameworks. (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 & 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 forthcoming).

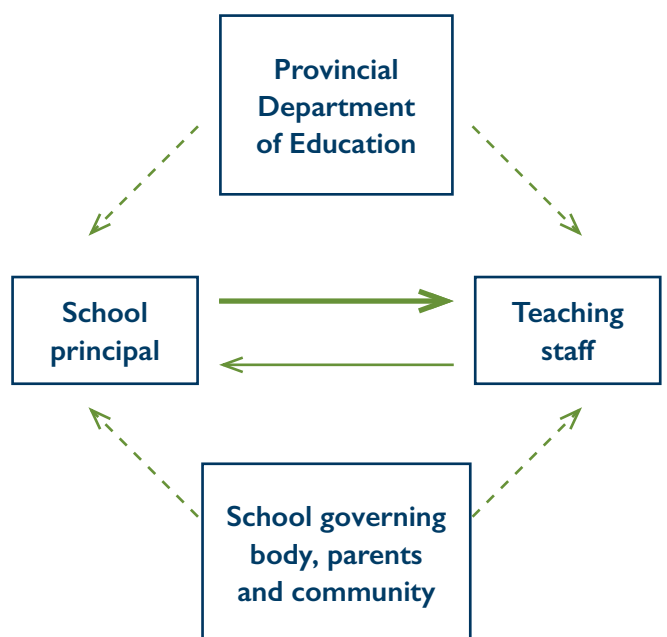
Of course, the goal of the South African education research project is not an assessment of 'goodness-of-fit' per se, but an analysis of the ways in which diverse governance arrangements influence educational outcomes. This brings us to the analysis of school-level governance – both the 'goodness-of-fit' 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 for the Western Cape in this paper, and for the Eastern Cape in Shumane and Levy (2016 forthcoming).

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 century, educational reformers the world over have pressed for decentralising control over

resources and decision-making closer to the school-level. 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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