**South Africa Profile Summary**

South Africa is home to nearly 55 million people, with 19.7 million children under the age of 18 years.[[1]](#footnote-1) With a GNI per capita US$7,190, South Africa is ranked as a middle-income country and its economy is the second largest on the African continent. Indeed, the economy is very vibrant, but not for all. One in four working-age South Africans, some 5.5 million people, are unemployed. Youth unemployment is particularly high with 1 in 3 young people aged 15 to 24 years neither in employment nor in education or training.[[2]](#footnote-2) South Africa’s middle-income status masks extreme inequality in income and access to opportunity. The gap between rich and poor is vast. Deep poverty is widespread with the poorest 10 per cent of the population receiving less than 0.6 per cent of the country’s total income, while the richest 10 per cent receive more than half of the national income (57 per cent).[[3]](#footnote-3)

#### **Early Childhood Development Centres and Grade R**

Progress has been made in the provision of early ECD programmes.[[4]](#footnote-4) In 2001, less than one sixth of the 6.4 million children aged birth to seven years, including nearly half of the five to six year olds, were enrolled in 23 482 centres (of which 64 per cent were fully registered). In 2013/14, that there were 832 763 children enrolled in the 17 846 centres audited (55 per cent in fully registered centres, 12 per cent in conditionally registered centres and 33 per cent unregistered centres). A more in-depth analysis of the latter, shows that in 2013/14, more than half (51 per cent) of conditionally registered centres were in rural villages and the nearly one third (32 per cent) (largest proportion) of unregistered centres were located in townships.

Between 2001 and 2013/14 the spatial distribution of ECD centres remained largely the same and corresponds to the national population distribution figures and patterns. The urban/rural divide in 2001 was 60 per cent and 40 per cent while in 2013/14 it was 59 per cent and 41 per cent, which shows a marginal change over 12 years, with the majority of ECD centres being in urban areas. Similarly, early childhood development centres increased from 11 per cent in rural (including farms) in 2001 to 37 per cent in 2013/14.

There was a significant shift in the ECD centres sources funding between 2001 and 2013/14. In 2001, the primary sources of funding were fees and fundraising, while in 2013/14 the primary sources were fees and subsidies. This indicates that government subsidies have increasingly become significant source of funding for programmes in ECD centres. Despite this trends, many parents are deterred from enrolling their children at ECD facilities because of prohibitive costs. The sector is almost entirely self-funded by school fees and donations that are inadequate to build and operate “fit for purpose” facilities, whose average monthly fees per child range from R20 to R350. Government provides an operational subsidy of R15 a day per indigent pupil, a subsidy restricted to facilities that comply with the norms and standards on infrastructure. To qualify for a government operational subsidy, ECD facilities must comply with legislative requirements for adequate basic needs, building design and regulations, and accessibility for children with special needs. However, there is no identifiable government programme for financing the construction of new facilities, upgrading and maintaining existing facilities and improving access to adequately structured and equipped facilities. The sector relies on allocations of selected local councils and government departments to use some of their unspent funds to ­provide infrastructure.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The gender distribution remained fairly consistent and equal between boys and girls (2013/14 boys attending were 50.1 per cent and girls 49.9 per cent). The population group and language profiles of children in ECD centres were generally consistent with national population figures.

Lack of training remained consistent, with nearly one in four ECD centres practitioners (23 per cent) having no training in 2001, and the 2013/14 audit shows a slight difference. In 2013/14 more than one third (35 per cent) of principals/matrons and supervisors and two in five (40 per cent) of practitioners and assistant practitioners qualifications were below a grade 12 education level. Just more than half (51 per cent) of practitioners in registered early childhood development centres have no qualification that specialises in early childhood development.

#### The ECD centre attendance rate has stagnated since 2010 and was 33.5 per cent in 2015. The per cent of children minded by day mothers/child minders has increased somewhat from about 12 per cent in 2013 to just over 14 per cent in 2015.[[6]](#footnote-6)

One reason for the growth of the child minders is that the registration of new ECD centres is dependent on compliance with infrastructure requirements and the expansion of infrastructure are relatively slow and subject to costly investment and on-going maintenance. Without a rapid expansion and investment in infrastructure, the percentage of children attending ECD centres unlikely to change significantly in the future.

Various factors influence government’s inability or reluctance to finance ECD infrastructure. National, provincial and local ­government are concurrently responsible for ECD, but their respective roles are unclear. This is partly because of policy ambiguities over which sphere of government is responsible for funding ECD and partly because legislation prohibits government from directly funding community and privately owned ECD ­facilities. As a result, there is no coherent framework for financing ECD infrastructure.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In this context, there is a need to invest in and expand non-centre based programmes that provides quality early learning and development programmes and or not dependent on the same type of infrastructure. Significant is the trend in day mothers/child minders, which take care of six or less children (as per the regulatory requirements), often in the younger age group (babies and toddlers).

Although not compulsory, Grade R (pre-school Grade O) has formed part of the Foundation Phase (Grade R to Grade 3) education policy since 1998.

Since 2010, there is a steady increase of the number of children attending Grade R in public schools,[[8]](#footnote-8) whilst the number of children in ECD centres attending Grade R declined over the same period.[[9]](#footnote-9) Overall, the total number of children in Grade R increased with nearly 900 000 since 2010. The scaling up of access to Grade R (from 316 086 children in 2003) is plausible.

## QUALITY AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION

Lack of quality education has been linked to increased risk of HIV, unemployment and social exclusion and is a key factor contributing to the intergenerational cycle of poverty in South Africa.

The Department of Basic Education recognizes that the heart of the education challenge in South Africa lies at the nexus of equity, efficiency and quality.[[10]](#footnote-10) The National Development Plan 2030 eloquently captures the essence of the challenge[[11]](#footnote-11):

“Despite many positive changes since 1994, the legacy of low-quality education (quality) in historically disadvantaged parts (equity) of the school system persists. This seriously hampers the education system’s ability to provide a way out of poverty for poor children. The grade promotion of learners who are not ready in the primary and early secondary phases leads to substantial dropout (efficiency) before the standardised matric examination”.

This is attributed to various internal inefficiencies within the education system. In 2014, grade repetition was fairly high at an average of 11.3 per cent for the system, rising to 17.3 per cent in grade 9, 21 per cent in grade 10 and 17.7 per cent in grade 11 respectively.[[12]](#footnote-12) In the absence of remediation, repetition rates increase from 8 per cent during primary school to 15 percent in secondary school. Repetition rates are higher amongst boys than amongst girls in both primary and secondary school.

The education system is largely able to retain learners during the compulsory years of schooling (Grades 1-9). However, according to DBE’s Action Plan to 2019[[13]](#footnote-13), this high enrolment ratio tends to conceal the fact that up to 15 per cent of learners do not complete Grade 9. This drop out increases significantly in Grades 10 (10.6 per cent) and 11 (13.4 per cent).[[14]](#footnote-14) Despite spending many years within the education system (described in the latter years of schooling as a queuing phenomenon), only 40 per cent of learners complete their final year of schooling, leaving 60 per cent with no qualification beyond Grade 9 level.[[15]](#footnote-15)

### Access challenges for children with disabilities and children affected by drought

South Africa has made significant progress in improving access to education.By 2002, 96 per cent of learners in the compulsory years of schooling (7-15 years) could be found in school; this rose to 99 per cent by 2014 with gender parity being reached.[[16]](#footnote-16) Participation remained consistently high across provinces and population groups. Attendance rates for 14-18 years olds increased from 88 per cent in 2002 to 91 per cent in 2014[[17]](#footnote-17) with notable gender parity albeit with provincial differences: Northern Cape reported a low of 84 per cent in 2014 versus a high of 95 per cent for Limpopo.

The participation of 16-18 year olds in an education institution however, has stagnated increasing only marginally from 82.6 per cent in 2002 to 86.1 per cent in 2014. Even though gender parity has been reached for further education and training (FET) participation rates (Grades 10-12), differences in access amongst population groups was prevalent, with more White children (92 per cent), followed by Black/African (87.1 per cent), Indian (76.8 per cent) and Coloured (73.7 per cent) attending school. Participation rates also varied amongst provinces with a low of 76 per cent in Northern Cape and a high of 93 per cent in Limpopo. [[18]](#footnote-18)

#### Children with disabilities

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has made significant strides in including children with disabilities within the schooling system. Learners with disabilities represent 4.8 per cent of the total population of children attending school.[[19]](#footnote-19) According to the 2014 General Household Survey (GHS), 93.4 per cent of 7-15 year old learners with disabilities could be found in schools, with no gender differences reported. This figure has remained constant since 2010. Concomitantly, there has been a decrease in the number of children with disabilities aged 7-15 years who are out of school from 36 465 in 2002 to approximately 22 952 in 2014. Participation rates are significantly lower in secondary schools with 54.1 per cent of 16-18 year olds with disabilities being found in schools. As with dropout rates, more females (59 per cent) with disabilities in this age group were attending education institution compared to males (50 per cent).

A 2015 Human Rights Watch[[20]](#footnote-20) study reported high levels of discrimination against children with disability in accessing education particularly in ordinary schools; failure to reasonably accommodate the learning needs of children with disability leading to such children not having access to the full range of subjects that children in mainstream schools access; failure to provide free education to learners in special schools and the requirement for learners with disabilities in ordinary schools to pay for class assistants as a condition for remaining in such schools; poor quality instruction due to lack of teacher training; and lack of preparation of children with disabilities for life after schooling.

#### Children affected by drought

The recent drought has also increased the challenges faced by some communities to facilitate access to education. For example, in a recent rapid assessment of the 5 most affected provinces, 51 per cent of the 136 key informants observed that children have stopped going to school since the drought started. The main reasons cited for children not going to school were lack of food (60 per cent), lack of hygiene and sanitation in school (55 per cent) and needing to work for the family (37 per cent). Caregivers also noted that the drought was leading to increased sources of personal stress for children. Boys were reportedly stressed since the drought due to not being able to go back to school (29 per cent), lack of water for personal hygiene and health (25 per cent), and lack of food (28 per cent). Since the drought, girls have also experiencing distress related to not being able to go back to school (27 per cent), lack of water for personal hygiene and health (40 per cent), and sexual violence (22 per cent).

### **Poor quality education linked to inequity**

#### *Learner performance in national and internationally benchmarked tests*

While significant improvements have been reported in the matric pass rates (final year of schooling) between 2009 (60.6 per cent) and 2013 (78 per cent), results dipped in 2014 (75.8 per cent) and 2015 (70.7 per cent) attributed to the introduction of the new progression policy.[[21]](#footnote-21) While the progression policy is an attempt to address inefficiency in the system, it comes at the expense of quality with knock on effects on access to further education and training and labour market access. These outcomes do not correlate with the substantive fiscal investment on education, currently at 6 per cent of GDP.

Findings in the past from international assessment tests in reading, literacy and numeracy (TIMSS, PIRLS, SACMEQ) have shown that South African children lack foundational skills. However, the 2011 TIMSS study reported an improvement in mathematics scores amongst Grade 9 learners to a score of 352 from a low of 285 in 2002 (500 is the benchmark average across all countries), especially amongst the most disadvantaged schools.

Since 2011, almost 7 million learners in South Africa write standardised tests in literacy and numeracy on an annual basis, known as the Annual National Assessments (ANA). By global standards, this is a significant achievement and provides a useful diagnostic of the health of the education system and an instrument to improve school and classroom practice. The results since 2011, however, have been a cause of concern.

In the 2014 ANA, literacy (56 per cent) and numeracy (56 per cent) levels amongst grade 3 learners remained low. Worryingly so, in the same year literacy and numeracy levels were progressively lower amongst Grade 6 (63 per cent, 43 per cent) and 9 (48 per cent, 11 per cent) learners respectively. Only 3 per cent of Grade 9 learners in the system achieved a 50 per cent pass mark in mathematics. Although the system has intimated improvements in results since the inception of ANA in 2011, year-on-year comparison is not possible with the current construction of ANA.

#### *Inequality of outcomes*

South Africa’s education system continues to reflect the inequality prevalent in the country and entrenches exclusion by provided poor quality education to those from poor and largely black communities.[[22]](#footnote-22) The system demonstrates a bimodal curve with the quality of education provided to those from advantaged communities (Quintiles 4 and 5: fee paying schools, largely catering to those from higher socio-economic groups, and mostly White) far outperforming those from disadvantaged communities (Quintiles 1-3: no-fee paying schools, largely catering to those from lower socio economic groups, and predominantly Black).

Based on data from PIRLS on Grade 5 reading assessment and dividing schools based on their medium of instruction (English or Afrikaans vs. African language), researchers are able to show that the former far outperformed the latter in terms of learning outcomes.[[23]](#footnote-23) Similar findings are reported in SACMEQ III for reading and mathematics based on socio-economic status.[[24]](#footnote-24) This pattern is replicated in TIMSS, ANA and the NSC.[[25]](#footnote-25) Van der Berg et al.[[26]](#footnote-26), using the SACMEQ III data also show that rural children and poor children in South Africa perform worse that children from other African countries living under similar circumstances, despite better access to resources, better qualified teachers and lower learner: educator ratios in South Africa.

A panel study using two rounds of TIMSS data showed that inequalities in performance early on in secondary school (Grade 8) is strongly predictive of making it to matric, passing matric and achievement in matric mathematics.[[27]](#footnote-27) More recently data from the ANAs has been used to show that primary school outcomes (Grade 4) strongly mirror Grade 12 outcomes showing the endurance of disadvantage that children suffer early on in their educational trajectory and making the case for intervention early on.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In South Africa increasing the quality of education is a priority so that at least all children have two years of pre-education and all children in grade three can read (NDP 2030). Quality of education is determined by a complex and expansive interplay of factors that have been extensively analysed and prioritised by the South African government (through the National Development Plan and the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the DBE, in particular.

Determinants of quality education is articulated in the DBE’s sector plan entitled: Action Plan to 2019: Towards Schooling 2030 that identifies 13 goals focused on improving learner enrolment and attainment (largely based on ANA and the NSC and emphasizing ECD), followed by 14 goals on how learner enrolment and attainment will be improved. These determinants to improve the quality of education are as follows:

• recruiting high quality graduates into the profession;

• increasing availability and better utilisation of teachers to avoid large class sizes;

• improving the professionalization of the workforce, improving teachers’ subject and pedagogical content knowledge, and better use of ICT;

• ensuring that the workforce is health and enjoys job satisfaction;

• improving effective curriculum coverage;

• increasing provision of LTSM;

• increasing access to a range ICT amongst learners;

• ensuring basic annual management processes (business processes) to improve school functionality;

• strengthening parent and community participation in school governance including through better use of ICT;

• ensuring the availability and transparent and effective use of school funding;

• improving physical infrastructure and the school environment;

• addressing poverty, health and social barriers to teaching and learning including promoting sport and culture;

• strengthening inclusive education; and

• providing quality district-based support and oversight.

Within these 14 goals, DBE has flagged five determinants for prioritisation, namely ECD, teacher capacity, LTSM, school management and district support, together with assessment and e-Education as innovation priorities. These priorities resonate with both the NDP and MTSF with both also emphasizing the importance of addressing infrastructure backlogs and promoting mutual accountability between schools and communities.

#### *Weak teacher capacities, limited time on task*

Despite a high level of teacher qualifications (97% have qualification of matric plus a 3 year teaching diploma),[[29]](#footnote-29) albeit a disproportionately lower distribution of better qualified and more experienced teachers to Q1-3 schools, teacher subject knowledge[[30]](#footnote-30) and pedagogical skills[[31]](#footnote-31),[[32]](#footnote-32) remains low. The 2011 School Monitoring Survey reported that teachers spend on average 39 hours a year on professional development, although half of teachers in the survey spent 12 hours or fewer each year.[[33]](#footnote-33) A third of this time is spent on external training that has largely focused on orientation on the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements. Going forward the focus of training must be on strengthening subject knowledge and teaching methodology of an adequate benchmarked standard and quality, together with self-initiated professional development through professional learning communities, that are still in their infancy save for a few best practice examples, and through accelerated use of digital resources.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In particular, given the very low levels of reading for meaning in home language reported in the foundation phase and very poor oral reading fluency in English Second Language in the intermediate phase, a strong focus in the foundation phase must be on acquiring reading skills with comprehension. Similar deficiencies exist in mathematics. This work must extend to the nine African languages together with the requisite curricular tools required, and be supported by a primary school teacher training course that teaches all foundation phase educators how to effectively teach reading and numeracy in African languages and in English given ‘*the hierarchical nature of skills acquisition*’. [[35]](#footnote-35)

#### *Class size*

Despite learner-educator ratios (32:1) now achieving acceptable levels[[36]](#footnote-36), some schools still experience large classes, especially in the foundation phase where foundational skills must be taught[[37]](#footnote-37), due to amongst others, teacher vacancies, substantial growth in enrolment (linked to populate growth and a larger age cohort working its way through the system) and poor management of teacher time in schools. The latter is linked to inefficient teacher utilisation (poor post-provisioning at national and provincial levels) and timetabling (limited administrative leadership at school level).[[38]](#footnote-38) Bringing in teaching assistants could be one policy option to consider in allowing teachers focused attention with groups of learners falling behind in reading acquisition.[[39]](#footnote-39)

#### *Curriculum coverage*

Bold steps were taken during the past five years to ensure more structure in the curriculum and to reduce the administrative burden on teachers through the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). However, curriculum coverage remains low with 53% nationally covering a basic minimum level of effort of seven maths exercises a month at Grade 9 and six language exercises per month at Grade 6, with significant provincial variation.[[40]](#footnote-40) This is closely aligned to issues around time on task, poor instructional leadership (schools principals largely focusing on administration and not on curriculum leadership) and curriculum oversight and monitoring offered through district support.

However, the perverse consequence of the introduction of pace setting and the monitoring thereof has meant that meeting timeframes is increasingly being prioritised at the expense of depth and actual learning, and in particular in meeting the different learning abilities of children through curriculum differentiation. This is especially relevant in the case of the mainstreaming of inclusive education with a progressive shift away from special schools to inclusion of learners with disabilities into ordinary schools. In other words, while curriculum is being covered, increasing numbers of children with and without disabilities are falling behind.

#### *Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM)*

To support curriculum implementation, between 2011 and 2013, 117 million workbooks, textbooks and study guides were distributed by the national department across the system, over and above what provinces provide. A number of studies (TIMSS, School Monitoring Survey and the GHS) have shown a rapidly increasing availability of texts in classrooms to support teaching and learning. However, gaps do remain especially in Q1-3 schools serving poorer performing and disadvantaged learners. Workbooks have been internationally benchmarked. However, provision needs to be supported by mediation, to ensure optimal use of materials. Workbooks also offer a potential tool to monitor curriculum coverage.

#### *School Management*

It is common cause within the education system that school management is a critical lever for overall functionality of the school and for learning outcomes. The School Monitoring Survey reported that in 2011, only 52 per cent of schools had the 11 key building blocks required for effective school management with 88 per cent of schools reporting the presence of a School Improvement Plan. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the introduction of ANA has enabled school principals to hold educators accountable for education outcomes by identifying which teachers require support and which can serve as lead teachers. Empowering school principals to better use ANA results to inform classroom practice is critical to strengthening teacher development and improving education outcomes. Aligned to this is ensuring the national roll out of competency assessments for principal appointments, a robust performance management system that is cascaded across the system, and strengthened national training for school managers.

#### *District Level Support*

The NDP recognises that school level deficiencies are a reflection of district level deficiencies and that significant capacity strengthening and accountability is required at this level of the system on amongst others, “curriculum management, project management, data analysis and monitoring, planning, reporting, accounting and problem solving”. This is borne out by the fact that the 2011 School Monitoring Survey reported that although 88% of schools surveyed were visited at least twice by district officials, only 50% of school principals rated the support provided by districts as satisfactory. Support to primary schools and particularly the foundation phase was much lower. Strengthening the capacity of districts to make use of existing data available via amongst others, EMIS, SA SAMS, NSC results, and ANA results will go a long way in targeting support to the challenges faced by schools. Increasing support to primary schools is also of critical importance.

#### *Accountability and Measurement*

The Department’s innovation priorities around assessment and E-Education, together with the focus of the NDP on accountability are cross-cutting issues and interlinked with the determinants discussed above.

The NDP makes a clarion call for the establishment of an “education accountability chain, with lines of responsibility from state to classroom”. It advocates for a results oriented framework that is underpinned by publicly available performance indicators for each school. It recommends that districts must be accountable to schools for the frequency, quality and nature of support they provide to schools; and that schools in-turn must be accountable to education authorities and to school communities for their performance on key indicators. Parents are expected to account for the ‘behaviour, attitude, attendance and work ethic’ of their children. In addition, while children hold the right to receive quality basic education, they equally bear responsibility to participate optimally in the education experience and to create demand for quality education. Poor school management and weak school discipline – and two of the three key factors (the other being fewer highly qualified and more experiences teachers) as to why schools in poor communities continue to underperform.

Measurement is a reliable accountability mechanism within the education system. DBE is engaging national and international experts on how to refocus ANA to attain the dual objectives of (1) producing performance information that is comparable over time and across provinces, and (2) changing school and classroom practices to improve performance. Some of the recommendations for the former is to limit the grades being tested to 3, 6 and 9, limit the sample size to ensure rigour and reliability, administer and mark the tests independently, ensure that tests are secure to avoid ‘teaching to the test’, and introducing anchor items. Recommendations for the latter are to ensure that guides are available for how districts, schools, teachers and parents can use the ANA results to improve performance. The importance of standardised testing cannot be overemphasized as the current system of school based assessment is weak as has been demonstrated relative to the performance in standardised testing via ANA and the NSC, leading to poor subject choices and ultimately poor learning outcomes. Taylor et al (2015) have shown this to be the case in historically black schools where mathematical ability and performance was unrelated to the decision to take mathematics as a subject in Grade 12.

#### *Innovation*

The use of ICT in society is now ubiquitous. It has the potential to enable teaching and learning and to better enable administration of the schooling system. Although ICT uptake in schools has improved over time, South Africa remains behind other developing countries. A policy gap exists in the DBE’s approach towards the use of ICT and any recommended strategies must be premised on clear links between the use of ICT and learning outcomes, for which the evidence is equivocal. Furthermore, while public-private partnerships have enabled small scale projects from which invaluable lessons have and can be learnt, lessons from elsewhere indicate that system-wide intervention is required to ensure scale and cost-effectiveness. The use of ICT for administration needs to shift away from compliance and a bottom up approach, to feeding information back into the system to better enable school administration and learner performance.

#### *Infrastructure*

Schooling is also still affected by a backlog of absent and/or poor quality infrastructure (with only 46 per cent of schools complying with the 2013 regulations on availability of water, toilets, electricity and a minimum number of classrooms. Note that if the minimum number of classrooms is excluded from the calculation then 84 per cent of schools comply with water, toilets and electricity).[[41]](#footnote-41)

### Unsafe and unsupportive school environment

A plethora of social and health concerns are also prevalent bearing in mind that schools reflect the socio-economic challenges of local communities. Two of the three million single and double orphans in the country can be found in schools. In delivering on *all* children’s right to basic education, schools are confronted with amongst others, learners who are at risk for and/or living with or affected by HIV; lack of and/or inappropriate and poorly maintained infrastructure, violence and alcohol and drug use and abuse, declining but nevertheless high levels of teenage pregnancy; exposure to violence, corporal punishment[[42]](#footnote-42), bullying, sexual harassment and abuse; low levels of physical activity; stunting, and, overweight and obese children, all of which create environment which is not safe and not facilitative of learning.[[43]](#footnote-43) All of these social ills in a context of poverty, stigma, discrimination, lack of information and/or misinformation, intersect with poor quality education and either singularly or collectively impact on children’s ability to stay in school and to perform optimally.

The government of South Africa has fully embraced the fact that effective learning and teaching is underpinned by adequate psychosocial wellbeing and psychosocial support services as well as the school health programmes are being considered as critical components to learning. Government has been implementing a basket of pro-poor interventions including the child support grant, family strengthening and parenting programmes, no-fee paying schools (for approximately 86 per cent of schools and 73 per cent of learners), fee exemptions, instituting a feeding programme that offers a hot cooked meal to 9 million learners on a daily basis; educating learners about HIV and offering school health services; and offering opportunities for positive youth development through life skills programmes, social cohesion programmes, peer education programmes, music for development and sport for development as cost-effective tool for youth education, life-long learning and healthy living.[[44]](#footnote-44)

#### School Health and WASH

As of 2016, 11497 of 23909 have flush toilets. However, 9201 schools have only basic pit latrines with 68 schools having no facilities. While most schools reported having some sort of water supply, 7,626 schools report unreliable water supply and 169 schools had no water supply.[[45]](#footnote-45) In response to the crisis in infrastructure backlogs, in 2009 the Department of Basic Education set up the Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) and is now in the process of setting up an infrastructure branch dedicated to dealing with infrastructure backlogs. However, progress in dealing with the infrastructure backlog has been uneven and slow.

For adolescent girls, access to basic facilities for menstrual hygiene management is critically important for health, safety and dignity. Estimated 30 per cent of girls from poorer communities where access to sanitary resources is difficult do not attend school during menstruation. Many schools in South Africa have inadequate sanitation in general, in terms of facilities, infrastructure and management, let alone facilities to ensure that teenage girls are able to hygienically and safely manage their menstruations during menstruation.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The health, social and educational consequences of a lack of water and sanitation are well established. Diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections that are associated with lack of water and sanitation, are amongst the top five causes of under-five mortality in South Africa. At the global level, improved sanitation and hygiene in schools has been linked to improvements in children’s educational performance, reduction in absenteeism, especially for girls, and better attendance and retention rates amongst teachers.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The Government of South Africa is currently implementing two programmes to improve health and nutrition of children attending schools - the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and the Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP) within the overall framework of the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Programme (CSTL) – a SADC initiated programme adopted by Education Ministers in 2008 aimed to facilitate schools becoming inclusive centres of learning, care and support and address social and health barriers to learning. UNICEF’s technical and financial support to the Government has been critical in adapting the UNICEF Child Friendly Schools framework and integrating it with the CSTL programme in South Africa.

South Africa's schools are divided into five categories or "quintiles", according to their poverty ranking. The poorest schools are included in quintile 1 and the least poor in quintile 5. Within the CSTL, the Department of Education currently feeds over 9 million learners in Quintile 1-3 primary and secondary (no fee) schools a hot, cooked meal on a daily basis. The ISHP is a partnership programme between the Departments of Basic Education (DBE) and Health (DoH) and Social Development (DSD) that addresses health barriers to teaching and learning.

#### *Violence in schools*

Violence contributes to poor academic outcomes and often high rates of drop out. Studies have shown that learners experience different types of violence at school. In 2012, 22 per cent of high school learners were found to have been threatened with violence or had been the victim of an assault, robbery and/or sexual assault at school in the past year.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Alcohol, drugs and weapons are easily accessible for many learners: one in seven learners reported easy access to alcohol, one in ten reported easy access to drugs, nearly a tenth asserted that it would be easy for them to obtain a firearm at school, and one in five learners claimed having easy access to knives or other weapons at their school. The ease of access to weapons and substances was facilitated by personal knowledge of individuals who were involved in various drug-related activities at school: nearly a quarter of the sample knew people who had brought weapons to school with them, one in six knew people at school who were involved in criminal activities, and nearly a tenth knew people at their school who sold or dealt in drugs[[49]](#footnote-49). Given the proximity of young people to potential offenders, one can expect their risk of violence to be enhanced. These statistics highlight the importance of safe communities and safe home environments as prerequisites for safe schools.

Although cyber violence is not confined to any particular physical environment, such as schools, the 2012 National School Violence Survey highlighted the relationship between online violence and offline, or more traditional, forms of violence (that is, physical violence). This suggests that cyber violence is just one part of a broader spectrum of violence affecting learners in South Africa. One in five leaners had experienced some form of cyber bullying or violence in the past year. While concerning, these figures show that cyber violence is not the epidemic that many believe it to be – it is still less prevalent than other forms of school violence.[[50]](#footnote-50) The percentage of learners who experienced corporal punishment at school in 2015 has decreased nationally since 2011 and 11.3 per cent of learners reportedly experienced corporal punishment at school in 2015.[[51]](#footnote-51) Corporal punishment was more prevalent at schools in eThekhwini (13.2 per cent) and Mangaung (11.8 per cent) whilst this sort of punishment was less likely to be found in Ekurhuleni (1.1 per cent) and the City of Cape Town (1.3 per cent).

1. Statistics South Africa (2015) *Mid-year Population Estimates 2015.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Calculations based on data from Statistics South Africa (2014) *General Household Survey 2014.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town (2015) *South African Child Gauge 2015*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Government of South Africa did two national audits on early childhood development provisioning through centres/partial care facilities, with the first one in 2001 under the lead of the Department of Education and the second audit in 2013/14 under the lead of the Department of Social Development. Although these two audits are only partially comparable, interesting observations can be made when similar variables are compared. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-10-22-the-urgent-need-for-proper-early-childhood-development-infrastructure> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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