

## Chapter Four

### The Inquiry Context

*By showing institutions in the process of transformation, history alone makes it possible to abstract the structure which underlies the many manifestations and remains permanent throughout a succession of events.*

*Claude Levi-Strauss (quoted in Lortie 1975:1).*

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this research study I explore stakeholder understandings and implementation of the WSE policy in a school context where there is a readiness to receive and manage change. It is necessary therefore to understand not only the school context but also the broader context in which the school is located, that is, the Brits district and the North West provincial education department – as these contexts will undoubtedly influence policy implementation in the school context. The various provinces in the country vary vastly with regard to education provision for learners and the capacity for educational change (Fleisch 2002). There are also various expectations of provincial officials and district officials in implementing WSE policy at the school therefore it is important to capture the contexts in which officials operate, noting both factors that facilitate and hinder their daily activities.

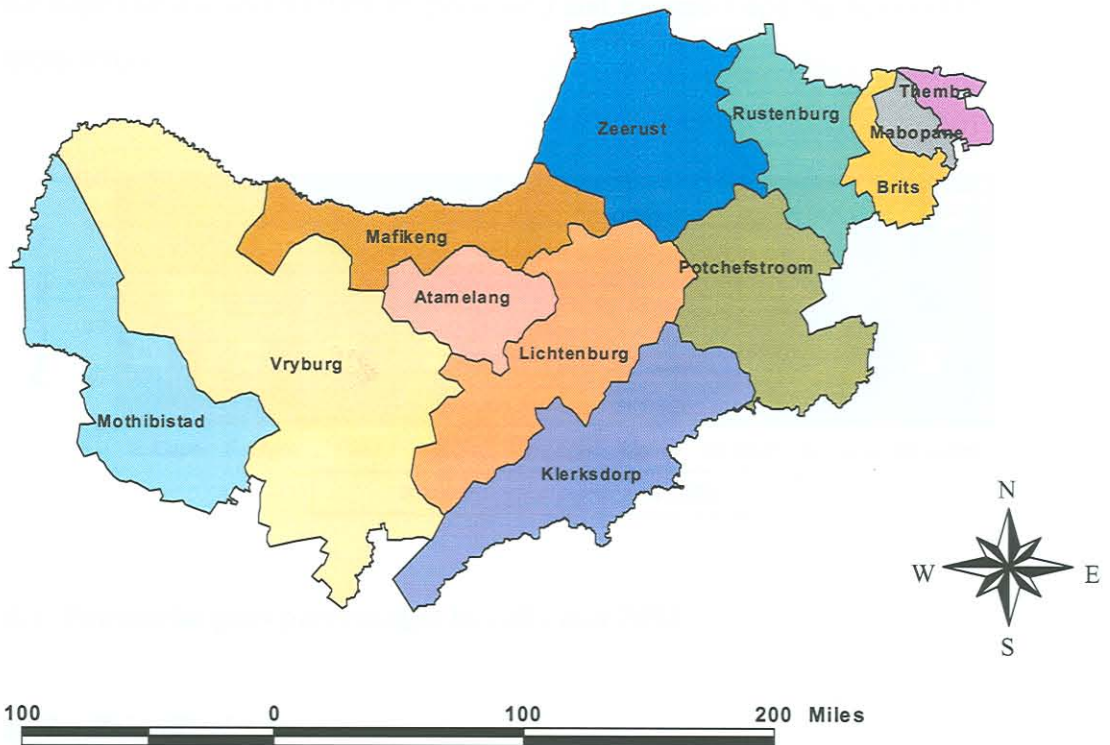
This chapter, which focuses on the inquiry context, comprises of two sections. In the *First Section* I provide a detailed background to the social context, that is, the province and the district in which the case study school is located. In *Section Two*, I trace the historical development of the case study school providing snapshots of critical incidents in the life of the school. This discussion culminates in a detailed description of the current culture and organisation of the school – culture and organisation of the school will also influence implementation of policy.

## Section One

### 4.1.1 The social context of *Wagpos High*

The case study school is located within the North West province, one of nine provinces in South Africa. The North West province is divided into 12 education districts<sup>18</sup> with Brits being the one in which the case study school is located (see map 4.1. below). An education district (synonymous with district office) in the South African context is described as an administrative and support unit which is hierarchically closest to schools (DoE 2001a).

**Education Districts in North West Province**

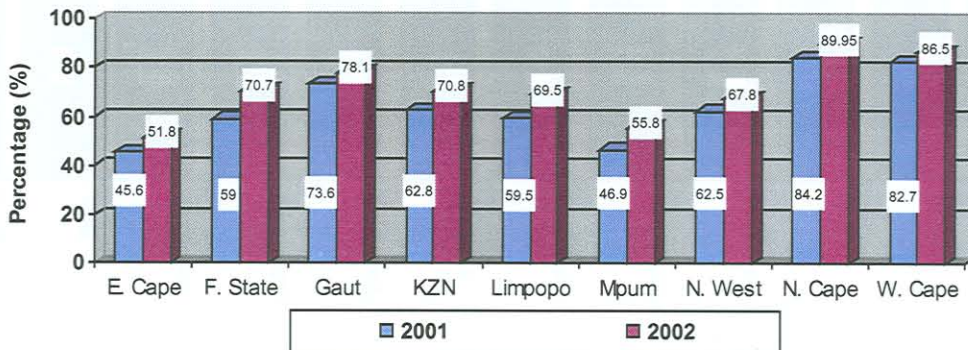


**Map 4.1: North West province showing the education districts**

<sup>18</sup> The other 11 districts are: Atamelang; Klerksdorp; Lichtenburg; Mabopane; Mafikeng; Mothibstad; Potchefstroom; Rustenburg; Temba; Vryburg and Zeerust.

The province has a total of 946 160 learners<sup>19</sup>, 31 376 educators and a total of 2 325 schools<sup>20</sup> (DoE 1999). The learner-to-educator ratio is 30.2 whilst the gross enrolment ratio (GER expressed as a percentage) defined as the number of learners enrolled in primary and secondary grades regardless of age, as a proportion of the appropriate age group in the population (7-year-olds to 18-year-olds) is 95 percent. The gender parity index (GPI)<sup>21</sup> is 1.01, which indicates that the females have a more or less similar level of access to education in the province.

The North West provincial pass percentage for Grade 12 examinations<sup>22</sup> over 2001 and 2002 is ranked fifth and seventh highest respectively when compared to other provinces. There has also been a slight improvement in 2002 as compared to the year 2001. The statistics for 2002 were 67,8 percent and 62,5 percent in 2001, showing an increase of 5,3 percent. The statistics for years 2001 and 2002 reflect that Northern Cape had the highest pass percentage (84,2% and 89,95% respectively) and Eastern Cape the lowest (45,6% and 51,8% respectively).



**Graph 4.1: Provincial pass percentages in 2001 and 2002**

### *Profile of the Brits district*

The Brits district consists of six circuits, namely; Letlhebele, Brits, Bakwena Bapo, Mothotlung, Hebron and Garunkuwa. The boundary of the Brits district stretches to

<sup>19</sup> This includes learners in pre-primary, Grade R/O and ELSN at ordinary public and independent schools.

<sup>20</sup> Public and independent schools only.

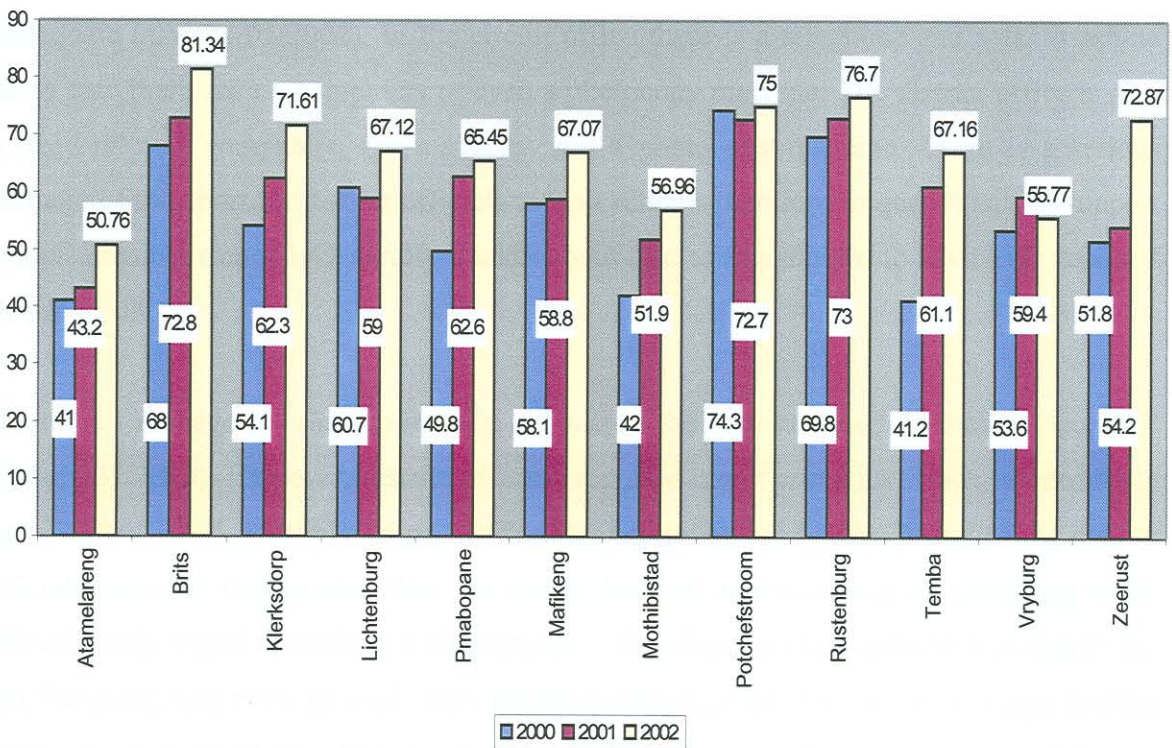
<sup>21</sup> GPI is defined as GER for females divided by GER for males. This indicator is used to indicate the level of access of females to education.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics from Department of Education Report on Senior Certificate Examination, 27 December 2002.

Mooiνοοi in the south west, Marikana Road along the north west border, Asem in the north, Garankuwa in the east, Klipgat in the north east and in the south it covers the area up to the border with Gauteng towards Krugersdorp.

*Student outputs*

The graph below reflects a performance comparison<sup>23</sup> of the 12 districts in the North West province for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002.



**Graph 4.2: District performance over three years**

The pass percentage in Brits improved significantly from 68 percent in 2000 to 72,8 percent in 2001 and to 81,34 percent in 2002. This places Brits as the top performing district in the province for 2002. The other two top performing districts are Potchefstroom (74.3% in 2000, 72.7% in 2001 and 75% in 2002) and Rustenburg (69.8% in 2000, 73% in 2001 and

<sup>23</sup> Performance is reflected in percentages (%). Also note that the x-axis shows the 12 districts in North West province and the y-axis shows performance in percentage.

76,7% in 2002). The Brits circuit has been registered as the best performing circuit for the past two years.

### **Education circuit and district office of Brits**

The Brits *circuit office* is located in Mclean Street, on the first floor of the Sieling Centre, whilst the *district office* is located in Van Velden Street, on the fourth floor of the City Council of Madibeng Building.

*Physical resources* in both the circuit and the district office have been reported to be inadequate (CM 24/05/2002). In the circuit office there is a telephone and a fax machine but to date there are no computers or even a photocopy machine. The district office is also in need of new computers, fax machines and a photocopy machine. There is a serious shortage of transport for district officials to visit schools therefore frequent visits to support schools are not arranged. Generally it takes about four to five months to have a car repaired for use again.

The circuit manager's *relationship with schools* in the district was described as "cordial" (CM 24/05/2002). However, district officials reported many problems which, according to them, were caused primarily by poorly functioning governing bodies. Many of the district officials were of the opinion that the severe lack of understanding of governing body officials with regard to dealing with protocol within the education context was due to the fact that governing body officials were not adequately trained. The district manager and his deputy were involved on a daily basis with negotiation and conflict management of diverse interests rather than being involved in playing an instructional or goal-setting role. District officials claimed that the greatest problem faced by the district was not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation, overload and incoherence resulting from the uncritical and uncoordinated acceptance of too many initiatives.

*Facilities* in the district are limited. The district library is located in central Brits. There are no teacher resource centres in the district – the nearest is in Pretoria. The district has also not been targeted for any national *projects* such as the District Development Project (DDP) or the Quality Learning Project (QLP) – which have been instituted mainly for uplifting education in districts.

### ***Schools in the Brits district***

The Brits district has 165 schools and a total learner enrolment of 81 155, that is, 51 312 learners are at primary schools and the remaining 29 361 learners are at secondary schools. The total number of educators in the Brits district is 2 728 (DoE 1999).

The *conditions at schools* were described as varying, that is, from being very good to very poor (CM 24/05/2002). Statistics obtained from the EMIS Database<sup>24</sup> at the National Ministry indicates that 63,03 percent of the schools have telephones, 19,39 percent have cell phones, 15,75 percent have fax machines and only 4,24 percent have internet facilities. Some schools were well resourced with textbooks and learner support materials whilst others did not receive any for the 2002 year from the department. Delays with regard to delivery of textbooks and learner support materials have been experienced in the province mainly because of logistical problems with the recruitment of contractors.

The EMIS statistics also reflect that the *physical infrastructure* of schools in the district also varied widely with only 75,15 percent of the schools being electrified, 2,42 percent wired but not supplied with power and the remaining utilising alternative sources of power. A total of 96,36 percent of the schools had toilet facilities but the kinds of facilities varied, that is, chemical toilets (1,25%), flush to septic tank (18,9%), flush to sewer (44%) and pit latrines (35,2%). Buildings are in a state of serious disrepair and neglect whilst in the more affluent areas the buildings are well maintained probably because of the higher school fees paid by learners attending these schools. District and circuit officials claimed that not much could be done about the infrastructure because amenities and physical facilities are not handled by the DoE but rather by the Department of Public Works on behalf of the DoE.

## **Section Two**

### **4.2.1 The historical context of *Wagpos High* (1928-2003)**

In this section I provide a description of the case study school, *Wagpos High*. This detailed portrait of the school is presented for three reasons. Firstly, since this is a single case study the burden is placed on the researcher to contextualise in rich detail the school environment

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<sup>24</sup> Statistics were gathered on the 25/04/2000.

in which the teachers, students, governing body officials, provincial and district officials of my study were immersed. Secondly, since the research is about WSE it is necessary that a vivid picture of the school is presented so that the reader is able to identify with the results of the evaluation. Thirdly, noting the cultural and organisational setting will provide the reader with insight into why the policy is implemented in the way that it eventually unfolds at the school.

I have traced the historical development of the school over its 75-year lifespan, noting critical events that have taken place during the different decades in the life of the school culminating in an account of the school in its present-day form. Data was collected mainly through interviews, documents such as school annual reports spanning eight decades, photographs, and a structured school observation questionnaire completed by one teacher as well as the researcher.

The resulting profile tells a story of the school. Everyone that appears in the photographs is one of the characters in the story of the life of this school. Some have been main characters in the story and have appeared in many photographs, others are in the background and many do not appear in the photographs at all.

*Wagpos* High is nestled comfortably in a valley at the foot of the Langeberg Mountains in the heart of rural Afrikanerdom in the North West province. The school is situated on a farm about 7km out of Brits town. The summers in the school area are extremely hot and dry whilst the cold winds during the winters often make the school grounds uninviting to be in. The school was first opened in 1928 at about the same time that the Hartebeespoort Dam and its system of canals were completed. The school was founded at Krokodilpoort – this was at the point of the eastern canal camp headquarters. Initially the dispersed smallish buildings of the canal camp were used and the bush-infested land around this area was cleaned by Mr Dirk Mostert, members of the first staff and a few boys, for the establishment of fields for cultivation and to lay the foundation for the Brits Agricultural Vocational school (Yearbook 1953). The school was originally founded by Union Education<sup>25</sup> to cater for “white people” in the area of agricultural training. In the apartheid era white farmers were highly subsidised and farming was considered to be a lucrative

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<sup>25</sup> South Africa was a union at this time and education was underpinned by racial differentiation. This period preceded South Africa becoming a republic.

career. Students attending such schools were also generously subsidised by the apartheid government.

Although the facility was originally mainly intended for the practical training of future farmers on the settlement, it also drew pupils from other parts of the Transvaal. At first the interest and enrolment was promising but with time it decreased and this could be ascribed mainly to the following factors: firstly, the course that started after Standard 6 was mainly practical and led, after two-and-a-half years to a diploma that was not readily recognised in public life; and secondly, the school received boys of needy parents and farming conditions were proving to be more difficult and unattractive (Yearbook 1953). The enrolment at agricultural vocational schools continuously decreased – also at Brits – until it was decided to hand these schools back to the provinces on 1 April 1938.

The Transvaal Education Department soon realised that the courses (subjects) at this school had to be improved to be at the same level as courses at similar schools in the province. Firstly, the two-year course was improved to lead to the Transvaal Junior Certificate but enrolment continued to be disappointing. Finally, in 1941, it became a four-year course that led to the Transvaal “Final” certificate as at other secondary schools (Yearbook 1953). Immediately there was renewed interest and increased enrolment as this was the only school of its kind in the province – now an agricultural high school. In the meantime the farming activities of the institution had to depend on itself for economic justification and development, a step in the right direction because from here onwards the farming division developed successfully.

It was soon apparent that the hostel and school could not satisfy the “new” need and further extensions were contemplated. The course offered at the school was further improved to satisfy the requirements of matriculation exemption for access to university. From 1 January 1949 the school became officially known as the Brits Agricultural High School.





#1 Photograph: (1950) “Aerial view of the school”.

The 1950s may be regarded as the era in which significant changes to the infrastructure of the school were accomplished. Extensions to the existing hostel were completed in the middle of 1949, and a new hostel to accommodate 60 boys was completed in 1957 (Yearbook 1957). In the same year a new classroom, modern library, the school hall and extensions to the dining hall were completed (Yearbook 1957). These expansions in infrastructure were accompanied by an increase in student intake and an increase in staff. In 1950 the student intake was 130 and staff was 11 (all male) but by the end of the 1950s student numbers had increased to 157 and staff numbers had swelled to 13 (academic staff remained an all-male team) (Yearbook 1951, 1961). Only the secretary and administrative support at the school were female; however, the hostels were administered largely by a female-dominated staff. Throughout this decade the school had to refuse admission to applicants owing to the fact that there was insufficient space in the hostels to accommodate all applicants. There were five other agricultural schools in the Transvaal that were not anywhere near full capacity, yet Hoerskool Brits Landbou continued to be inundated with applications for admission as it had a reputation for being an excellent school not only for academic results but also for instilling in the learners the “right” morals and values.

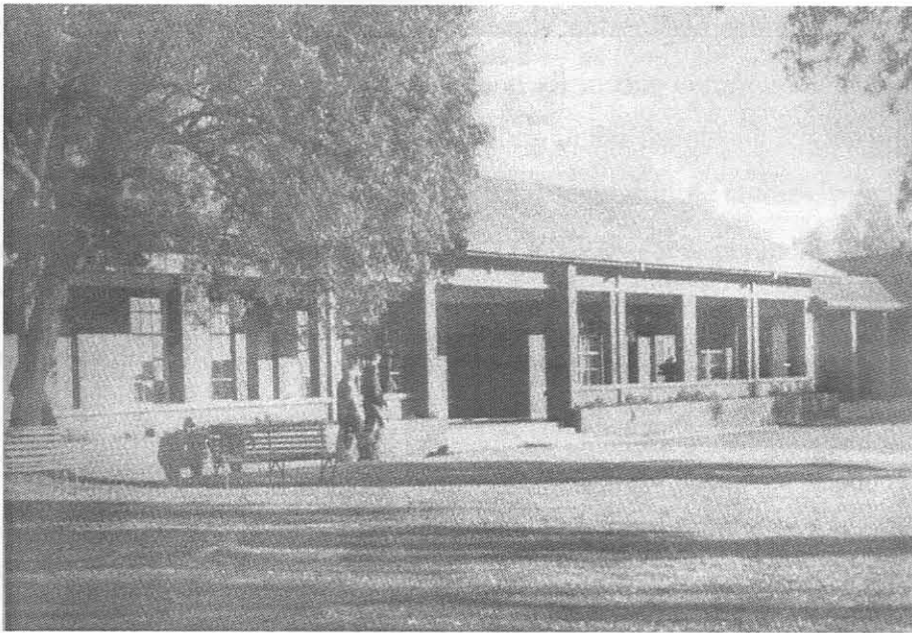


#2 Photograph: (1950) “Official opening of the hostel. Hostel rooms in the background”.

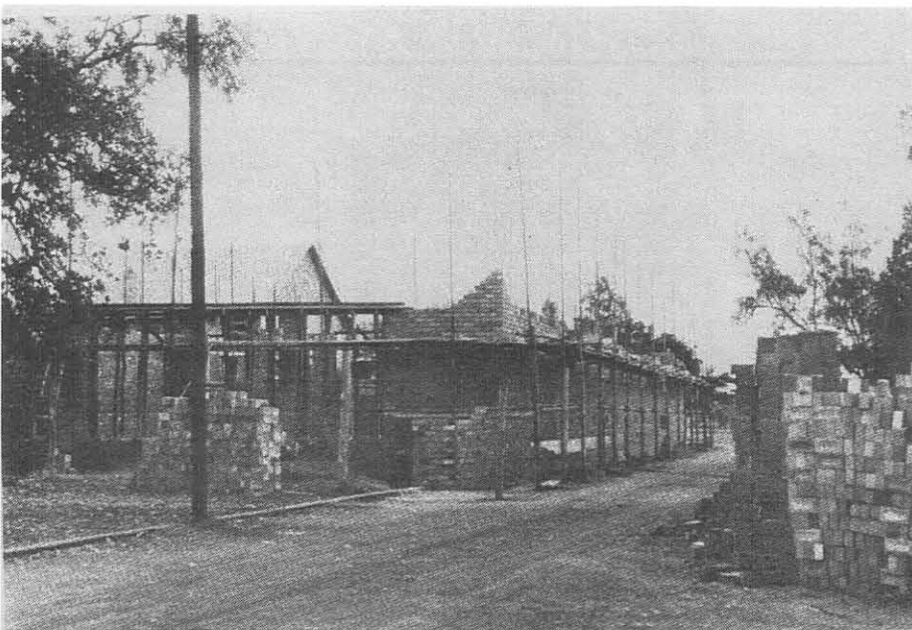
#4 Photograph: (1953) “New hostel with modern facilities for staff and students”.



#3 Photograph: (1950) “Guests on the field at the official opening of the hostel. Standing on the far right is Mr du Preez, the principal”.



#4 Photograph: (1953) “New hostel with modern facilities for staff and students”.



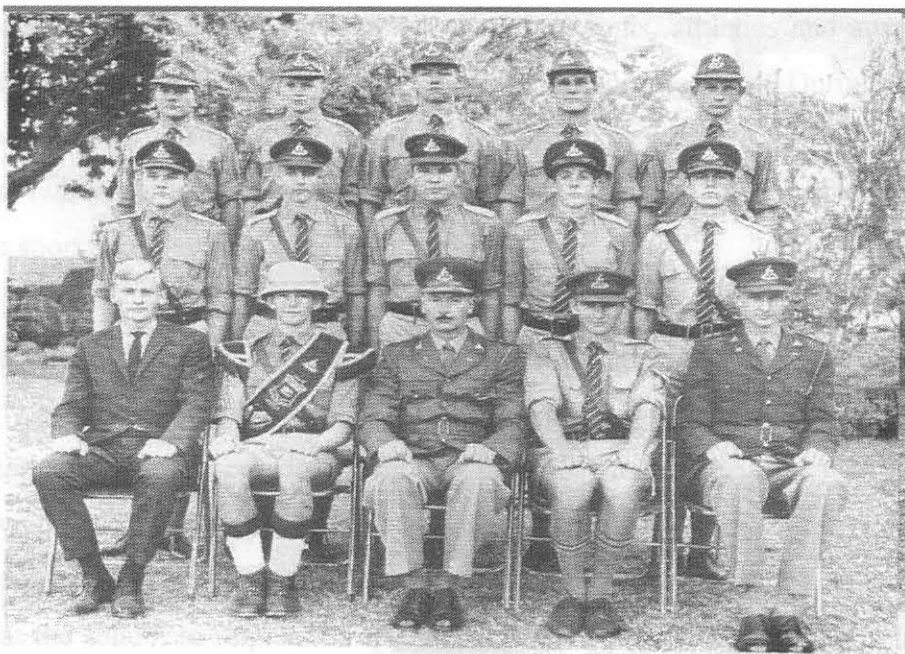
#5 Photograph: (1957) “School hall being built”.

#6 Photograph: (1957) “Cadet officers”.

<sup>28</sup> Christian National Education continued in South Africa up until 1994 when the African National Congress took over power in South Africa. Christian National Education is based on the reports of C. F. van der Merwe (1997).

The powerful Christian National Education<sup>26</sup> philosophy was practiced religiously within the confines of the school community. The deeply entrenched morals and values of the Afrikaner nation were inculcated among one and all in this community. During this time the Christian Student Movement gained momentum under the strong leadership of Mr JHL Scheepers who encouraged the young men to attend regular bible studies, practice a healthy God-loving approach to life and to embrace “God” as their personal “*sagligmaker en verlosser*”. Contact with other Christian Student Movements was encouraged and followers engaged in regular collaborative programmes and activities.

The 1950s also ushered in the introduction of cadet training at white schools. The Hoerskool Landbou Brits was no exception. The youth were trained in advance on how to conduct themselves in true military style in preparation for compulsory military training that each and every white male had to undergo on completion of school. Cadet training was a means of preparing the youth both mentally and physically for what was to be expected when they eventually got to the army training camps. It was also a means of ensuring that there would always be a constant supply of trained individuals to continue feeding the ideology of apartheid and to ensure that there would not be any reason to jeopardise the balance of power in the country.



#6 Photograph: (1957) “Cadet officers”.

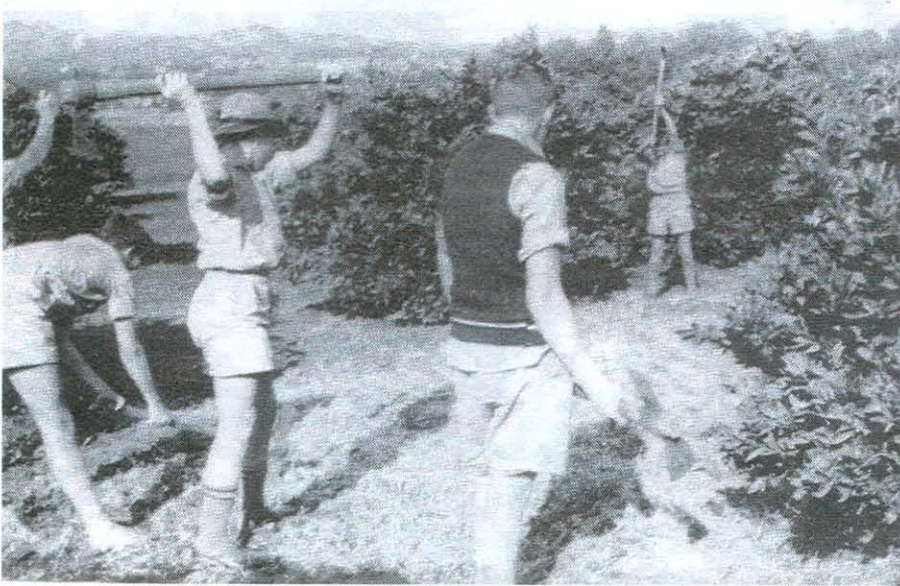
<sup>26</sup> Christian National Education continued in South Africa up until 1994 when the African National Congress took over power in South Africa. Christian National Education is based on the tenets of Christian philosophy.



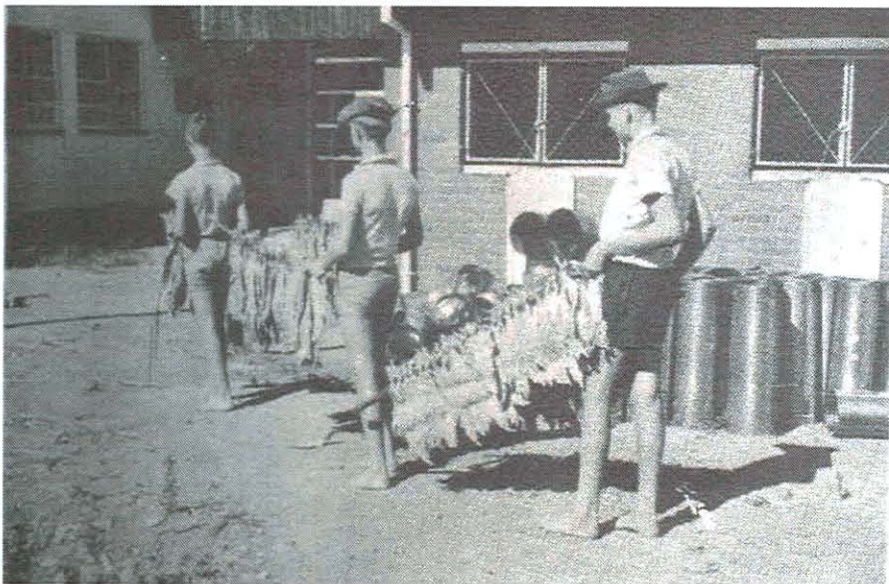
#7 Photograph: (1951) “The cadet orchestra”.

Despite the small numbers of learners, the school continued to be recognised by parents and the education department as an outstanding school both on the sportsfield and academically (Yearbook 1951). The school participated in rugby, tennis, athletics and swimming, and also boasted a successful debating team, choir and shooting team. During 1951 a new school stadium was constructed and the new rugby field was laid with grass (Yearbook 1951). Just two years later, a second rugby field was laid out. This in itself reflected the love of the sport by all at the school.

Throughout this decade the farms performed well even though there were times when they were poorly capacitated (Yearbook 1953). Tobacco planting was practiced on the farms – a practice started by the pioneers in the country in 1850. Magaliesberg tobacco soon became well known in the country because of its unique ability to burn, its strong aroma and addictive taste. Over the years improved cultivation and harvesting techniques were practiced at the school to improve crop yield. The school sold the tobacco in leaf form to the producers in the area. Tobacco remained the main income generator in the school (Yearbook 1968).



#8 Photograph: (1961) “Students working on the orange farms”.



#9 Photograph: (1968) “Tobacco leaves being carefully carried by learners”.

The year 1953 marked the 25th anniversary of the school, which was commemorated in true Afrikaner style by a number of programmes and activities. A special edition of the regular yearbook was launched, which apart from providing news on the happenings of that year, provided a window into the life of the school over its 25 years of existence. This decade drew to a close with the school receiving honours in the inter-school athletics meeting and the Afrikaans Language Festival of 1959.



#10 Photograph: (1953) “Cover of special edition of the school yearbook – 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school”.

The 1960s were also seen as a decade, which was marked by many memorable events both in the life of the school and that of the country. The year of 1961 will be remembered as the year in which South Africa became a republic. This year was also an exceptional year for the school, whose learners, fondly known as the “Lanties”, made their mark by winning the floating trophy in the schools choir competition. Apart from this, this decade will be remembered for the severe droughts that were experienced in the province. These droughts seriously affected the crops on the school farms and the balance sheets reflected an all-time low in the income from the fields. The then principal, Mr du Preez, wrote in the 1964 school yearbook:

*Laat ons maar net elke dag ons plig getrou doen. Hy sal verder vir ons sorg. (du Preez, 1964 Yearbook).*

*Let us just do our duty diligently each day. He (God) will provide for our future/or for the rest. (English translation).*

When the rains finally arrived the Hartebeespoort Dam could not contain the raging waters resulting in the dam bursting its banks.

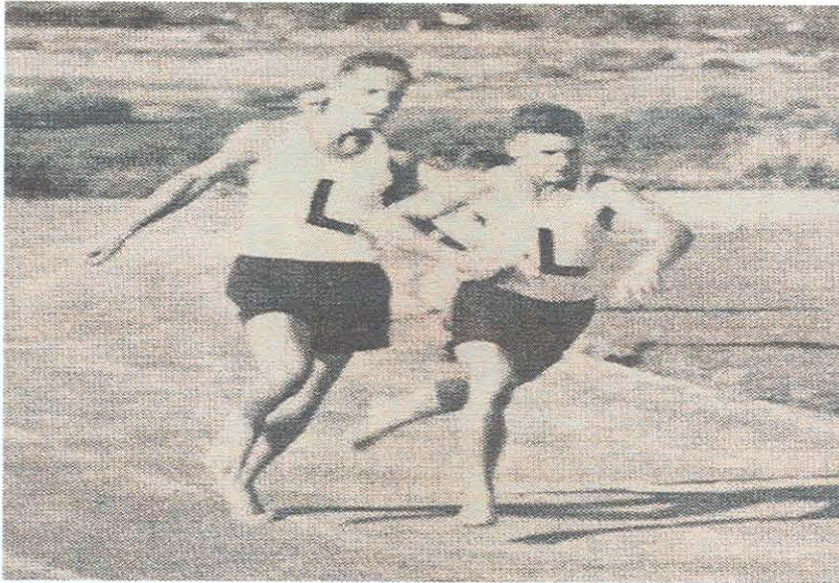


#11 Photograph: (1967) “Hartebeespoort Dam floods”.

The year 1966 was marked by the schools’ participation in the country’s celebrations of five years of being a Republic. This was also the year in which Mr du Preez, the principal for 23 years, bade farewell to the school. In the following year Mr P Bredenkamp took over the reins to steer the school.

The school, under the new leadership of Mr Bredenkamp, continued to strengthen its interaction with neighbouring schools, especially with the Hoerskool Huishoudskool in terms of establishing a co-educational school choir group. As yet another decade in the life of the school drew to a close – the changes, some evident and others more subtle, could be seen. By this time there had been a meteoric rise in the learner population to 230 accompanied by an increase in the staff compliment which was up to 15 full-time teachers and one part-time music teacher. The school also enjoyed resounding success on the academic front by securing a 100 percent matriculation pass rate for four years in succession during this decade.





#12 Photograph: (1957) “Lanties on the sportsfield”.

After several years of existing as an agricultural school, technical subjects were then introduced into the school in 1973. This introduction signalled that there was a need for the name of the school to be changed. The then principal forwarded two names for consideration, that is, *Wagpos* and Transmagalies. *Wagpos* gained greater support among the staff and community and so the school became known as such. The name has strong significance in that a “wagpos” when translated loosely into English means a guard post – usually constructed as a high pillar with a room on top which is occupied by a guard at all times. This was used in the old days of war and is still a common feature at prisons and high security areas.



#13 Photograph: (2002) “Entrance to *Wagpos* High”.



#14 Photograph: (2002) “*Wagpos* emblem”.

Over the years the school continued to churn out students who mostly continued with a technical or agricultural career. The culture of the institution was widely recognised as being dominated by “Afrikaner philosophies”. In keeping with these philosophies students generally did not display any overt defiance and resistance throughout the era when other schools were engaged in the “march to freedom”. During this era the apartheid government relinquished its tight control on the right of individuals to disagree with its agenda: the toy-toying down streets seemed to attract more diverse representatives than just the African township youth who immortalised themselves by laying down their lives for the cause of their education in Soweto in 1976. Academics and lay people, religious leaders of different faiths and racial groups; students and teachers; newly released activists and ardent community voices were attempting to forge synergy with the various forces of resistance to apartheid (Samuel 1998).

Unsurprisingly, throughout this time of turbulence in the country, activities at *Wagpos* continued with no disruptions. It was “business as usual” at *Wagpos*. Debates and discussions over the turmoil in the education system continued in the *Wagpos* staff room but rarely left these boundaries to make way to the classrooms. *Wagpos* and many others alike were a symbol to many of the separatist ideologies of their contribution to the advancement of their island community.

The early 1980s signalled the imminent release of political prisoners and the possibility of dismantling of the apartheid government. Waves of panic swept through the country and the *Wagpos* community also sent out “silent” signals – as reflected by this article which appeared in the 1987 school yearbook.

*Jong is ek  
maar sterk in my geloof  
dat die rooi bloed  
van die boerseun  
die vlam van vryheid en reg  
onuitblusbaar sal laat brand  
in hierdie groot en wye land.*

*Mara du Plessis*



#15 Photograph: (1987) “Picture and caption that appeared in the yearbook”.

During this time many right-wing extremists took their children out of *Wagpos* and kept them on their farms in anticipation of political unrest. As soon as the hype and tension was over these learners returned to school. This period was described by teachers as a “quiet waiting period” and since nothing drastic happened life at *Wagpos* returned to “normal”.

In 1993 the school became co-educational with the entry of the first group of girls. As part of the movement towards reconciliation politics in the reconstitution era after the democratic elections in 1994, the restrictions on admissions of students of other race groups were relaxed in all schools. The majority of the schools engaged in serious transformation campaigns to attract the “cream of the crop” from the black populations. This included the drive to have students bussed in to the former model C schools from neighbouring township schools. Amidst this fervour to transform schools it was surprising that the student population at *Wagpos* remained completely white. Such was the situation until 1998 when the first black student was enrolled into the school. To date not a single student of colour has matriculated at this school and statistics reflect that presently there are only three black students on the admissions register of the school. Transformation at the school has not only been extremely slow with the learner population but to date remains non-existent for the teaching staff, all of whom are white.

The principal and staff are adamant that there have been several campaigns to recruit students of colour but this has proved to be unsuccessful especially when students are informed at the orientation event that they would be expected to work on the farms. According to most teachers there is a perception among black families that this kind of education will keep black students in poverty as this kind of education is likened strongly to the “Bantu Education<sup>27</sup>” that was forced onto black people in the apartheid era. As a result many of the students prefer to opt out of agricultural and technical training and focus on the more “academic” subjects, which are believed to pave the way for a white collar career on completion of studies. Obviously, this is more appealing to the masses of previously oppressed black people.

There are high expectations for radical and fundamental change at *Wagpos* from department officials. It seems that these expectations may turn to disappointment and alienation of the school if there is a failure to effect change. My belief is that the failure of department officials to understand the prevailing conditions at *Wagpos* is related to the fact that they “tend to overlook or ignore the continuities inherited from the past, or else to ‘telescope’ the past in order to draw simple and finished conclusions to particular problems that need to be resolved” (Mc Culloch 1998).

The school boasts an experienced teaching staff of 32 in total, 20 of whom are male and 12 are female. At least six of the teachers were themselves students at the school and have returned to teach there. Two of the teachers had very proudly informed me that their children had matriculated at *Wagpos* as well. At least four of the teachers including the principal reside on the school premises. The impression one gets is that this is a very close-knit community of teachers, students and parents.

Six of the total staff comprises the school management team. A total of 28 of the educators are remunerated by the Department of Education whilst the remaining four have been employed by the school governing body and are remunerated from the school fees. All the staff are professionally qualified and have a range of teaching experience. Four of the staff members have less than 10 years of experience, six have between 10 to 15 years, 14 have between 15 and 20 years and six have more than 20 years of experience. The principal has a

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<sup>27</sup> The Bantu Education Act of 1953 led to an education for blacks, especially Africans, characterised by under spending, lack of facilities, overcrowded classrooms and unqualified or poorly qualified teachers.

secretary and there are several personnel (employed on a half-day basis) who provide administrative support and backup for the principal and teachers.

*Wagpos* has had to deal with the various complexities confronting teachers within the context of the rapidly changing educational scenario. These complexities included having to deal simultaneously with macro-educational policy changes (such as the introduction of a new outcomes-based education curriculum) and the practical implementation constraints within the school. The attitudes of the teachers varied and can be related in many ways to their own deeply entrenched Afrikaner philosophies. The majority appear to be unconsciously or (perhaps?) consciously subscribing to ritualised practices, fermented during the apartheid era. The possibility of enacting transformatory visions of education is often thwarted by these constraints.

Learners come from areas that may be described as being of average socio-economic status (mainly middle and working class families). The academic standard of the majority of the learners on entry to the school is described as being average or below average. *Wagpos* obtained an overwhelming 100 percent pass rate in 2001<sup>28</sup> and 92,5 percent pass-rate in 2002. The internal examinations also yielded an impressive 95 percent pass rate in 2001 and 90,2 percent pass rate in 2002 (see table below)<sup>29</sup>.

Grade	No. of learners		No. failed		% failed		% passed	
	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002
Grade 8	139	125	0	12	0	9.6	100	90.4
Grade 9	123	134	0	5	0	3.8	100	96.2
Grade 10	149	125	16	16	10.7	12.8	89.3	87.2
Grade 11	114	134	10	17	8.8	14.2	91.2	85.8
<b>Total number</b>	525	504	26	50				
<b>Total %</b>					5.0	9.8	95.0	90.2

**Table 4.1: Pass rate for internal examinations for 2001 and 2002**

The school has policies for remedial intervention regarding major learning difficulties that learners may experience. Such interventions include the use of an educational psychologist

<sup>28</sup> <http://intranet.nwpg/departments/deptedu/rep>

<sup>29</sup> School logbook

who visits the school on a weekly basis, special additional classes for learners who are hostel based and a full-time school counsellor. Of the school learner population of 621, 507 are male and 114 female. The entire school population is white with the exception of two black females and one black male. In the grounds of the school during informal times you will find students most frequently separated by gender – boys seem to stay with boys and, likewise, girls with girls.

The average student-teacher ratio is 32:1. There are sufficient classrooms to house all the learners, though some pre-fabricated classrooms have been erected. Classrooms are not crowded, and in all classrooms there are enough desks. There is a hall and assemblies are held there.

The normal school day at *Wagpos* begins at 07:00 and ends at 13:00. Extracurricular activities are pursued on a daily basis till at least 17:00 on most days. On Monday afternoons, learners work on the farms in small groups, taking part in different activities on a rotational basis. Activities include cleaning the stables, moving hay from the fields to the storage areas, milking cows, preparing compost, bagging compost, working within the nursery and on the farm, and repairing irrigation equipment. The pictures below depict learners at work on the school farms.



#16 Photograph: (2002) “Learners working in the nursery, potting plants which are sold to the public”.



#17 Photograph: (2002) “Learners at work on the compost heap”.



#18 Photograph: (2002) “Learners hard at work cleaning out animal droppings from the pen”.



#19 Photograph: (2002) “Hay gathered from the fields and being transported to the storage area”.



#20 Photograph: (2002) “Learners repairing irrigation equipment”.

One of the distinguishing features of the school is the two enormous rugby fields that one encounters on arrival at the school. The school participates in regular inter-school rugby and athletics and has excelled in these two codes of sport. Other codes of sport that the school engages in include cricket, netball, softball, golf, swimming and shooting.





#21 Photograph: (2002) “Rugby fields at *Wagpos*”.



#22 Photograph: (2002) “Learners involved in tennis training”.

Learners are also exposed to the dramatic arts and talent is showcased through many school plays and concerts held throughout the year. The teachers at *Wagpos* also staged a play for all to enjoy during 2002.

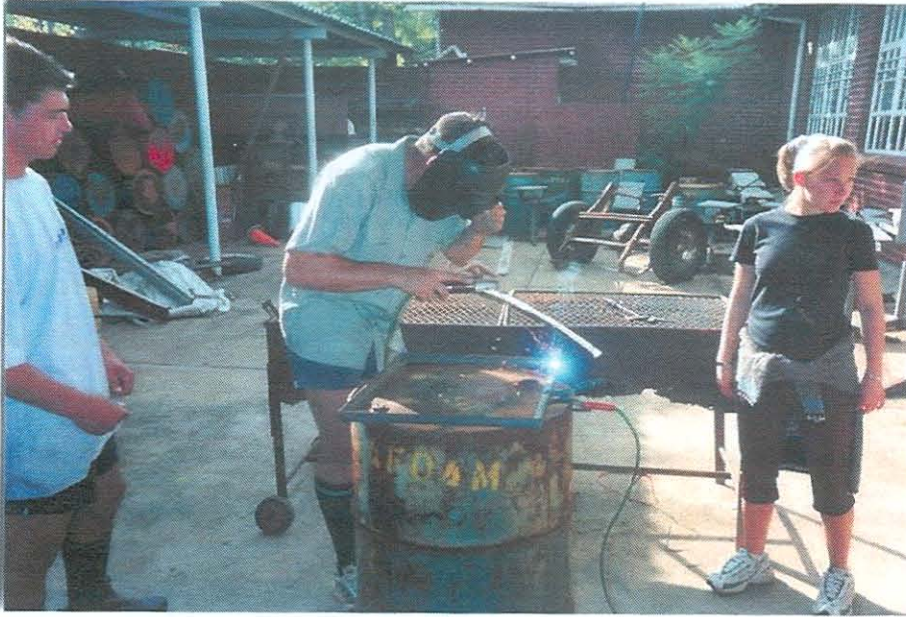


#23 Photograph: (2002) “School concert”.

In addition to the basic subjects that are offered at all schools, *Wagpos* also offers specialised technical and agricultural subjects. Animal Husbandry, which is offered at the school, is extremely popular among the learners. The picture below depicts a group of learners actively engaged in a practical session of establishing the extent of gestation of calves.



#24 Photograph: (2002) “Female learner engaged in a practical session to establish the gestation period of the unborn calf”.



#25 Photograph: (2002) “Learner welding iron to make a drinking basin for animals”.

There are a few teaching aids in the school: overhead projectors, televisions and computers. There are science laboratories with equipment in stock although some of the equipment is old and needs to be replaced. There is, however, an inadequate stock of chemicals for routine experiments. There is a school library with very few books in it; most of them are tattered and in very poor condition and rather dated. Reference books and books that can be used for research purposes are extremely few and very outdated.

Facilities at the school had been upgraded especially for the use of the hostel students who are frequently required to conduct research for various projects. At present there is a total of 24 computers, all of which are equipped with internet facilities. The nearest public library is based in Brits town making it virtually impossible for hostel-based learners to gain access to these facilities. Learners from *Wagpos* have had the opportunity to attend other inter-governmental initiatives such as the Aids Awareness Campaign and the Afrikaans week held at the University of Pretoria.

Teachers, however, do not have many facilities at their disposal. The nearest teacher resource centre is in Pretoria.

There is a school uniform – white blouses and green skirts (or green pants in winter) for girls, green pants, green shirts for Grades 8 to 10, white shirts for Grade 10 to 12, and ties

for boys, green jerseys and blazers – 100 percent of the students come to school in their uniforms. The timetable, developed by the principal and the Heads of Department, runs on a seven-day cycle, with 35 minute periods. Teachers' free periods average eight to ten per cycle, with Heads of Department having between 14 to 18 periods per cycle free.

Problems have been experienced at the school as regards the discipline of learners despite Inside the school buildings, the entrance boasts several framed awards on the walls for athletic successes in inter-school competitions. The staff room is a long room, with tables (covered with tablecloths) and chairs running along all the sides. Teachers tend to sit in the same places every day. The notice board has some outdated notices of courses and workshops being offered by in-service projects, current and old notices about sports fixtures, and notices from the Department of Education dated about six to eight months earlier. Current community activities are also displayed on the notice board.

Each institution's unique culture is influenced by its own particular history. The school received a state subsidy up until 1994 after which this was terminated. At present the main source of income is from school fees and hostel fees. School fees for the 2003 year are R2300-00, having increased slightly from R2000-00 in 2002. Hostel fees have also increased from R5760-00 in 2001, to R7080-00. However, hostel fees at *Wagpos* are comparatively cheaper than urban schools probably because crops harvested from the school gardens are utilised by the learners occupying the hostels. Also, additional income is generated through the sale of milk and crops harvested on the farm.

The school takes responsibility for the consequences of its decisions through a structured and highly effective system of governance and problem solving that calls for the participation of parents and learners. The school has an officially elected governing body, which provides the school with strategic leadership predominantly in the area of farming methodology and financial management. The school governing body meets on a quarterly basis and occasionally on an ad hoc basis when there are urgent matters to discuss. Members of the governing body are dedicated and tend to concentrate mainly on the financial management of the school. Very little pedagogical support is obtained from the school governing body. Most of the governing body members are themselves owners of smallholdings or are engaged in moderate or large-scale farming in and around the area. Of particular significance is the fact that there is no recognised parents association designed to help the school in fundraising activities, but parents do assist on an ad-hoc basis. The school has described its link with the local community as "strong". When parents meetings

are held, they are generally attended by many parents. The school does have a functional Learner Representative Council, which makes a significant contribution towards the ethos of the school.

Problems have been experienced at the school as regards the discipline of learners despite the existence of a clearly defined discipline policy. The phenomenon of deviant adolescent behaviour, including bullying, refusal to attend school and other forms of juvenile delinquency, has surfaced in alarmingly high proportions. Many teachers are of the opinion that learners with problems are sent to schools such as *Wagpos*, which have hostel facilities. Generally the academically outstanding learners pursue their high school career in Pretoria where the opportunities are greater. *Wagpos* does, however, have a few “shining stars”.

Each institution’s unique culture is influenced by its own particular biographical history, social context, resource availability, ideological leanings and curriculum practices. Thus cultural ethos at *Wagpos* is established as a consequence of the many intersecting influences. The first thing that I observed about the prevailing organisational culture at *Wagpos* is the powerful role of centralised authority within the school. Staff meetings are held daily at the start of each day. The principal draws up the agenda, and the meetings usually relate to the nitty-gritty of running the school. The principal is seen as the leader who has the best ideas on any problem encountered. In fact most solutions are proposed (imposed?) by him and accepted – without any challenge. Very seldom do other members of the management team (almost all of whom are male) make contributions in meetings. Consultation with the staff about decisions is mostly so that the staff can rubber stamp the decisions which have already been made. This has a dampening effect on the institutional culture and the individuals within it: it reduces them, that is, the teachers to powerless observers of a centralised process. Furthermore, it reinforces the notion that authority vests in seniority and that no one should deviate from this.

The management style is one, which focuses on administrative efficiency, with the emphasis on paperwork being done timeously. Teachers’ record books are handed in to the principal regularly and he scans them and returns them with minimal comment. He usually visits teachers’ classes when there have been problems or complaints, but otherwise his attitude is one of leaving the teachers to get on with their work. His excellent administrative skills result in the relatively smooth run school.

The relationship between the staff continues to intrigue me. The women teachers have their “corner” in the staff room where they generally converge whilst the men have their own territory. Relationships between the teachers tend to be fairly relaxed. Many are on first-name terms with one another. There are some definite staff cliques. Young teachers find it very difficult to express their views about anything controversial and male teachers tend to be more dominant than females.

Teachers tend to arrive in the staff room soon after the break bell has rung and to leave often immediately after the end of break. Tea breaks are short and do not leave much time for discussions. However, staff room chatter tends to be mainly about problematic students within school life. For the rest, conversations relate to life outside the school, weekend activities, topical discussions and general gossip. There are frequent murmurings about the unreasonable expectations on teachers. Many teachers express their frustrations and there is a tendency to identify problems and issues without the commitment to finding solutions to them.

Despite this, there is a strong sense of motivation at the school. One manifestation of this is that much is happening at the school after hours. In this regard, the first and second terms were the busiest because of sporting activities and meetings. Another manifestation is that there is an extremely low rate of absenteeism – there is seldom a day when even one teacher is absent.

The attitude of staff towards learners was also something that I observed with much fascination. Teachers were generally patient with learners and both parties practised mutual trust and understanding.

There is no staff development programme at school, but some teachers are engaged in studying for postgraduate Bachelor of Education or Master of Education degrees. A few teachers voluntarily attend non-formal courses offered by in-service projects. Professional development thus depends entirely on the commitment of individual teachers. There is a strong positive orientation to change and improve as individuals and as a school community.

What is clear is that the world in which *Wagpos* operates is manifestly complex, uncertain, paradoxical and chaotic. Staff have found themselves concentrating on one initiative and then find themselves sideswiped by another. Competing mandates pull them in different directions, for example, implementation of the development appraisal policy commenced at the school but after a few months several problems were identified with the practical implementation of this initiative, which was then suspended. Despite this, the principal continues to conduct formal appraisal of all teachers at the school using his own system and timetable. Staff have described themselves as “living on the edge of chaos”. What is acknowledged is that the source of that chaos is not all a natural or spontaneous effect of contingent events, but that part of it also has a clear and identifiable political basis.

Like all historically Afrikaans schools, *Wagpos* has a long legacy of compliance with political and bureaucratic authority. Therefore it is not surprising that when the department identified *Wagpos* for the evaluation, the school accepted and was prepared to continue with the process even though other schools in the province did not allow the evaluation teams to enter their schools. *Wagpos* was at the time the only school in the province where the evaluation took place. This can be viewed in two ways: that co-operation with the department is important but being critically engaged with the department over unresolved issues (i.e. WSE and DAS policies) is also important. The school’s response to the department’s evaluation does not differ much from the historical ways of complying with political authority.

There is a deep-seated culture of *beleefdheid*, in which there is a strong institutional aversion to conflict and disagreement (Jansen 2001a). There is usually a push for consensus (usually accepting only that what the staff is used to over the years) and the school tends to adopt those practices they are used to. In so doing, opportunities for achieving transformation are further eroded.

### 4.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have placed the school in its social and changing historical context, from the 1920s through to the present. In this retrospective account I have highlighted the fascinating dynamics and punctuated these with photographic evidence to better situate the reader in the particular timeframes.

*Wagpos* is part of a larger contextual network of institutions – part of a circuit, district and province – and is influenced by community organisations and teacher unions, among other formal and informal organisations. Effecting change within *Wagpos* may be difficult especially if the innovation being introduced is not supported by these organisations. Clearly, the parent community plays a significant role in contributing to the ethos of *Wagpos*. Although the school is considered to be a forerunner in education activities the school usually contacts the district office when authority is required on particular issues. As Fullan (1991) indicates, schools cannot redesign themselves without assistance and support

The role of the district is crucial. Individual schools can become highly innovative for short periods of time without the district, but they cannot stay innovative without the district action to establish the conditions for continuous and long term improvement (p209).

Cultural ethos within the ambit of a school is highly volatile. Sirotnik (1998:186-7) argues that roles, expectations, rituals, regularities, beliefs and motives shift in context, that is, within organisations which are seen as *cultural ecologies*. These ideas might combine to facilitate or inhibit innovation and change. The ecology of the social system might react to deliberate interventions, whether from the inside or out. The historical portrait of *Wagpos* reveals a school, which at its inception embraced the Christian National Education philosophy, and to date continues to practice the Christian philosophy. A deep culture of compliance to political and bureaucratic authority exists – relatively intact over the years. *Wagpos* has maintained a “patterned way of behaviour”. It is not ironical then that *Wagpos* responded positively to implement both WSE and DAS – despite the controversy facing the WSE policy.

Within this context, where hierarchical authority structure is alive and well, values, goals and understandings about what is required when a new reform is introduced are passed from the principal down to the teachers who do not resist as the principal is seen as a figure of authority. But the introduction of new reforms may unearth previously hidden differences on fundamental issues among teachers and impact on policy implementation – only time will tell. Will teachers at *Wagpos* who are being bombarded by an unrelenting plethora of changes over a short period of time, find it possible to keep up their energy, enthusiasm and, ultimately, willingness for change? Goodwill and faith in process may not



be sufficient as unexplored assumptions and differences in understandings can fuel and frustrate the change process.

In this rather densely packed chapter I have also sketched how the school has put processes in place to stimulate change and how they have tried to manage change over the years. Changes in school culture cannot be imposed upon the school (Sarason 1996). Change occurs because those who will be affected by it are able to decide for themselves the future that they will work towards. *Wagpos* and many other similar schools are Neanderthals whose cultures evolved in one set of climatic and ecological context. They are generally unable to rapidly adjust or adapt to the requirements of a new order. But despite the monumental difficulties experienced this conservative “white” school has displayed a positive orientation towards change under the new “black” ANC government. The teachers in particular, although appearing to prefer that which is “familiar”, continue in their quests to grow and develop as individuals, sometimes having to overcome the strong forces of continuity which coalesce to prevent significant changes in the school’s structures and culture.

In these turbulent times *Wagpos* continues to negotiate change with strong determination towards achieving excellence – “volhard<sup>30</sup>” – aligned to the motto of the school. While they continue in their attempts to achieve “deep change”, there will be a lot of trial and error, even with collaborative planning, constant assessment and the considerable wealth of experience of the staff. In the next chapter I will turn to explain how the various stakeholders, including the principal and staff at *Wagpos*, understand the WSE policy in the school context.

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<sup>30</sup> “Volhard” is the school motto which means to strive with determination.