

## School governing bodies — the principal's burden or the light of his/her life?

Jan Heystek

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002 South Africa  
jheystek@up.ac.za

In this article I focus on the relationship between principals and school governing bodies in South Africa. Although the school governing body represents many role players, this article will focus mainly on the role and function of parent representatives in the school governing body. Parents constitute the majority in the governing bodies and therefore have an important role to play in the effective functioning of their children's schools. The uncertainty about the exact functions of the principal and the governing body is the key to the argument. The legislated functions of the governing body do not provide enough clarity on its daily functioning and this sometimes makes it difficult for principals to manage schools effectively.

**Key words:** school governing body; trust and support; school management team; power relations; partnership

### Introduction and background

It is now eight years since the first school governing bodies (SGB) were elected for all the schools in South Africa. Legislation requires that all public schools must elect an SGB as part of their management and governance structure. The South African Schools Act, 1996 (section 16) describes governance and management in schools as two separate activities with two teams responsible for these activities. The professional management, i.e. the daily teaching and learning activities and the support activities needed in the school, is the responsibility of the principal and professional staff, whilst the school governing body is responsible for the governance of the school. Governance mainly focuses on policy and budgetary issues as described in the South African Schools Act of 1996. These functions and responsibilities will be explained later. School governing bodies are not supposed to be involved in professional management activities like decisions about learning material, teaching methods or class assessment. A staff member appointed and remunerated by the SGB falls exclusively under the jurisdiction of the principal as far as the professional activities in the school are concerned. An example of the intrusion in the professional area of the principal was where parents felt they had the right to pay a class visit as a form of professional assessment because the SGB was paying the salary of the educator concerned (Principal, Afrikaans medium school). In this specific case the parents felt that they were supporting the principal and were not aware that they were operating in forbidden territory.

The aim in this article is to look at the relationship between the principal and the parents in the school governing body. This relationship must be to the advantage of the school and community to ensure school improvement, including improved teaching and learning. This relationship will be explored in the light of two important stipulations in the SA Schools Act: focus on a relationship of mutual trust and support by the SGB and the school as complementing role players. The SGB must be in a position of trust towards the school (Republic of South Africa, 1996: section 16), whilst the principal must support the members of the SGB in their governance functions (section 19) and the SGB must support the educators in their professional functions (section 20). I will use two specific functions of the SGB, namely, their policy and budgetary functions to highlight possible problems and possible improvements in this relationship. The question discussed will be: What can be done to ensure a good relationship between principals and governing bodies? In the latter part of the article I will give attention linked to governance that may have an influence on the relationship of trust and support in the governance and management of schools. The article is written from the perspective of the principal.

To understand the relationship between the school governing body (SGB) and the principal, it is important to understand the composition of the SGB and the school management team (SMT). The professional management in the school is the responsibility of the principal and the SMT. The SMT is responsible for the management of teaching and learning activities, for example the specific teaching

methods, assessment policies and learning activities used and conducted in the classroom. Legislation does not recommend a specific number of members of the SMT since it is normally the number of educators appointed in promotional posts at a school. The SMT normally consists of the principal, the deputy principal and heads of departments or senior teachers in schools where there may be only one or two heads of departments. The SGB consists of the principal as *ex officio* ("by virtue of his office") member as stipulated in SASA art 23. The rest of the SGB consists of selected members from the stakeholders, namely, the educators in the school, non-educator staff, parents of learners at the school and learners in the eighth grade or higher in secondary schools (Republic of South Africa 1996: section 23).

As a member of both teams, the principal is the key player but is also in a difficult situation. Since he/she is a departmental official representing the government, he/she must do what the employer expects. On the other hand, the principal was appointed by the SGB because they believed that the principal will serve the community. The principal also often lives among the members of the school community, where he/she must try to balance the expectations of the government with the expectations from the parents, who expect that the principal will work to the advantage of the local community. This balancing act is important to keep the relationship of trust with the parental community intact. It is expected, even demanded, from the principal to stick to the instructions of the government because the Department pays his/her salary. At the same time the parental community, and especially the parental governors can expect that the principal must respect and act according to the expectations of the community. According to the principals in especially the multi-cultural schools and the city schools, this can create a divide between the parental governors (the community) and the professional staff (especially the principal). This places the principal in a difficult and stressful situation.

According to SASA section 23(9), the number of parents in the SGB must be one more than the combined total of other members in the SGB. This majority may create the impression with parents that they are the most important group in the SGB and that they have the greatest interest in the school. They may get the impression that they can "run" the school (Principal group; principals in Soshanguve; CfBT, 2004). This attitude contradicts the trust that is supposed to be the foundation for the working relationship between principals and the SGB. The concept of "running" the school is quite common, indicating that the parents want to take charge, make the decisions and wield power in the school. Although their interference in professional activities is specifically prohibited by the regulations and rules of the governing bodies of public schools (Republic of South Africa, 1997: section 43), this does not prevent parents from intervening in the professional activities of the school.

For many schools in South Africa, especially the previously black schools, the involvement of parents at governance level is new. The limited training of the main role-players in the management and governance of schools, coupled with their uncertainty regarding their func-

tions and duties, makes it sometimes difficult for principals and parental SGB members to work together harmoniously.

Although many principals have long years of experience, the participative and democratic management approach is also new for most of them, with the result that not even their experience can prepare them for this changed situation. It is a new experience to the principals to have to share their power with other people. They suddenly have to cope with many individuals who may become involved in this power relationship, while at the same time they are expected to work together in a relationship of trust (Principal group; CfBT, 2004).

### Research design

I have been involved in research on the function of the SGB and the involvement of parents as partners in school activities for the last number of years (Heystek & Mavhivha, 1996; Heystek & Louw, 1999; Heystek, 1999; Heystek & Paquette, 1999; Heystek, 2001; Heystek, Smit & Sayed, 2002; Heystek, 2003; Heystek & Bush, 2003). I have also been a member of an SGB for the past five years, initially at a primary and currently at a secondary school.

I used qualitative methods in most of the work because I wanted to get detailed descriptions of the actual situations in schools. It was important to have in-depth interviews with the principals to ensure that I understood the situation correctly from their perspective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). Although I serve on a governing body, which gave me some insight into the relationship between parental governors and the principal, it was important for me to stay objective in the data gathering and analysis phase. I am aware of researcher bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003:453) and therefore made sure that I only reflected what the principals told me and did not tell my own story as I experienced it in the SGB. I used inductive analysis methods to ensure that all perspectives and issues arising from the data could be included in the report (De Vos, 2003:330).

The data and conclusions used in this article are derived from three research projects. The first project involved interviews with the principal or deputy principal in six secondary schools in the Tshwane (Pretoria) area during 2002. Secondary schools were selected for this research project because they also have learner representatives as members of the SGB. The different types of schools are important because the communities in which they are situated play a role in the availability of parents and their ability to comply with the legislative expectations regarding policy and budgetary functions. The six schools were selected according to purposeful and convenient sampling to represent the following categories in secondary schools in the Tshwane area and in the country:

- A black rural school. These schools often have limited resources.
- An average township school in Soshanguve. This school is situated in an area where the majority of inhabitants are black.
- A former Afrikaans medium model C school, now a dual medium school (Afrikaans and English are used in the same classroom), in a poor socio-economic suburb.
- A former Afrikaans medium model C school, now a dual medium school, in a middle class suburb.
- A former English medium model C school. It is still an English medium school but has a high percentage of black learners.
- A former Afrikaans medium model C school in a middle class suburb. In this school there are only a few black learners and they receive their instruction through the medium of Afrikaans.

The same criteria were used for the selection of schools and principals in the other two projects. The purpose of the interviews was to determine the nature of the working relationship between the principal and the parent SGB members.

In the second research project in 2002, 12 principals were selected to participate in a focus group interview combined with a working session to determine the most important duties of principals (referred to as the principals group in the rest of the article). The data gathered from this session are a reflection of group consensus about issues related to the topic and are not the opinion of individual principals.

The relationship with the SGB was the major focus of the session because during the interview it became clear that the principals experienced problems in their relationship with the SGBs, especially with the parent members.

The sample was selected in such a way as to ensure a group that would be representative of the different types of schools in the country, mentioned in the paragraph above. For this purpose, the head offices of the three major teachers' unions, namely, the South African Teachers' Union (SATU), the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), and the National Association of Professional Teachers' Organisations of South Africa (NAPTOSA) were contacted for names of possible candidates. The criteria were: they must be experienced principals who are deemed successful by the union and their colleagues in general. Telephone calls were followed up with e-mail messages explaining the purpose of the work session. Parents were not included in the data collection phase because the focus of the research projects was the principal's perspective. Interviews with parents would also have been problematic, as some of the parents do not understand English and I cannot speak any of the indigenous (African) languages.

The third project was undertaken from January 2003 till June 2004. My project continued as part of a bigger research project conducted for the Gauteng Department of Education and the Mathew Goniwe School for Leadership and Governance. This project included questionnaires to all the principals in Gauteng as well as interviews with representatives of the different role players in the SGB, namely, the principal, a parent, an educator, a non-educator, and a learner. Thirty schools in Gauteng, in four districts, were purposefully selected according to the criteria mentioned above to present all the different types of schools in Gauteng and the country. In this case, interviews were also conducted with parental governors. Only the data gathered during the interviews and not the data from the questionnaires will be used here. This research project was sponsored by the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) in the UK.

### School governing bodies — burden and/or light of the principal's life?

Although the emphasis in this article is on problematic issues in school governance and management, there are many schools with a good working relationship and where trust and support ensure effective education. On the other hand, the relationship between school principals and the SGBs of public schools in South Africa is not always very good (Heystek & Bush, 2003:10). This was confirmed by the principals group. One of them remarked:

I would rather do the work myself, than to wait and expect that the School Governing Body must do it and I know that nothing will happen.

In this group there was definitely the expectation that the parents are supposed to play a leading role in the budget and in drafting policies. This is an interpretation from this group and from other principals. The South African Schools Act (section 20 and 21) allocates functions to the SGB (all the role players included — my interpretation) and does not stipulate a specific representative in the SGB to be responsible for performing the functions. Each SGB must determine which person (parent or parents or educators or principal or teams) must do the actual work for example, to be responsible for the first draft for a new policy.

Power play and domination are normally part of any teamwork and interpersonal interaction (Moon, Butcher & Bird, 2000:57; 62). An SGB is not different. These power plays may be conscious or unconscious but they do happen, e.g. a principal trying to dominate the rest of the SGB or the chairperson of the SGB trying to dominate the principal on behalf of the parents. This power play may have a detrimental effect on the relationship of trust and mutual support.

There are many examples of a poor relationship between principals and school governing bodies. They vary from a simple misunderstanding or minor difference to some of the following as reported in the media:

- A principal and the governing body officially accusing each other of misconduct (Rapport, 2001:7).
- Principals who are angry about the "tin pot tyrants" (the parents in the governing body) who want to make all the decisions in the school. This might even have contributed to the suicide of a principal (Sunday Tribune, 2001:3).
- A principal who was chased out of the school grounds by angry parents for disbanding a governing body election, as the community believed it was a fair election (Natal Witness, 2001:1).

The importance of a good working relationship between the principal and the SGB has also been emphasised by the Task Team on Education Management development. This Task Team conceded that the relationship between principals and the SGB is not always straightforward and that frequent communication between policy makers and principals is essential to ensure an effective relationship (Department of Education, 1996:13-14). The Task Team also indicated that the list of SGB duties in schools "is a tall order by any standard" (Department of Education, 1996:41). The expectations of the Task Team, even before the election of the first SGB, indicated that the establishment of a proper relationship with the parents in the SGB would be a difficult task for principals.

I want to link the relationship of trust with the specific functions expected of an SGB. All the functions of the SGB are stipulated in the SA Schools Act sections 20 and 21. In this article, however, I want to focus on their responsibility for school policies and for the school's budget (Republic of South Africa, 1996:sections 20, 21 and chapter 4). These two functions may require more specialised skills and knowledge from principals as well as parents. The competency and literacy level of parent members of the SGB may place restrictions on the functioning of the SGB.

In my view, the performance of these two functions may influence the relationship of trust and the expected support from the different role players. The discussion will shed some light on how easily the trust can change into distrust and what is perceived as support, by one of the role players, may become a burden on the other party in the governance process.

According to the principals group, most principals were used to a situation in the school where they were in charge and had virtually all power. This was especially true regarding the school's finances and, to a lesser extent, regarding the policies, general management and governance of the school. In the new governance structure that was introduced after 1996, parents have a far greater say — if not the final say — about finances, and principals must now consider the inputs of all the other role players in the management of "their" school. In the past, no real distinction was made between the management and governance of the school and there were no officially mandated role players to "support" the principal. The involvement of the parents in the governance and management is not always experienced as *support* by the principals (therefore the italics, because it expresses the feelings of the principals).

The following two situations may serve as examples of what may and does, in fact, happen which will influence support levels and relationships of trust in the school-governing set-up:

- In a school where parents have limited skills, knowledge or experience and even lower levels of literacy, they may find it difficult or impossible to assume responsibility for drafting and managing the budget. Is it now the responsibility of the principal, as *ex officio* member of the SGB and according to the SA Schools Act section 19(2), to support the parents by drafting and managing the budget? The principals group had the following comment about this kind of situation.

*This is not support; it is doing the job for them — so why do we need the SGB? Sometimes they will just criticise us about the budget and accuse us of mismanaging the funds, instead of supporting us.*

If the parents are unable to draft the budget, either the principal, one of the educators, or the administrative clerk will have to do it, after

which the principal must present and discuss the budget and its implications with the parental governors as well as with all the parents during a parent meeting. If the parents trust the principal and the educators, they will accept the budget and the management thereof. However, if the parents do not trust the principal — as often happens — it may lead to constant conflict because the parents may feel disempowered (Principal, Soshanguwe school). If the parents know they do not have the skills to manage the budget, they will also realise that they have no option but to trust the principal with the details. When they discuss the monthly budget management with the principal, they will have to trust that he/she is honest with the figures that are submitted to them. This kind of relationship will succeed as long as their relationship is marked by mutual goodwill and trust. A lack of trust will however disturb this relationship and the support from the parents may become a burden in the governance process. The meetings may develop in a power struggle and the aim may change from "working together for the benefit of the school" to a power struggle between parents and principal. This is definitely not to the advantage of the school. The following is an example of what can happen when there is a lack of trust between the parents and the principal:

The parents in my colleague's school did not trust him with the school fund. They were not able to manage it but they also did not trust the principal. The principal bought a new car (like any citizen has the right to do) but the parents immediately decided, without any proof or investigation, that the principal had used the school fees to buy the new car. The parents encouraged the learners to chase the principal away from the school. The accused principal had to run for his life because the children wanted to stone him (Principal, rural school).

- The parents may have all the required skills and knowledge to manage the budget and set new policies. Here the principal may feel that he/she is left in the dark or sidelined in the decision-making process because the parents are business orientated and know everything about business management. The parents may want to manage the school as a business and neglect to keep the principal, the professional staff, and the educational purposes of the school in mind. In such a situation, the principal may be the one to feel threatened and disempowered, and this will inevitably damage the relationship of trust. These parents believe they know what is best for the school and they *support* the school by deciding what is necessary.

*They (the parents) want to decide how many paint brushes we must buy and did not accept the explanation of the educators. The SGB chair said it is wasting the valuable money if we want to buy 200 brushes instead of 100. They cannot understand the situation in the school when the different grades want to use the brushes and it is not possible to share the brushes or work a time table so that the times do not clash* (Principal, primary school, CfBT project).

This principal had just recovered from a heart attack and he was of the opinion that the stressful relationship between himself and the parental governors was one of the main reasons for his illness. This SGB (the parents) is intruding on the professional management of the school but they believe they are *supporting* the over-worked principal.

The principal of an Afrikaans medium school made the following comment:

*The parents (in the SGB) thinks [sic] they own you and the school and can tell you how to manage the school just because they pay a large amount for the school fee.*

Although these two examples may reflect the extremes of the continuum of relationships between the principal and the parental governors, these situations are common in many schools. The result is a malfunctioning or dysfunctional school where the ideal of a self-managing school cannot be achieved. The other side of the coin is however also true — there are many examples of an excellent relationship of trust between the parents and the principal of their school (CfBT, 2004:17).

### Trust and support — concluding discussion and policy implications

According to section 19(2) of the Schools Act, 1996, the principal has to assist the SGB in the performance of its functions and in section 20(1e) it is stated that the SGB should support the principal and educators in the performance of their professional functions. Sometimes this leads to different perceptions by principals and parental governors regarding the specific support action of their mutual support roles. Parents on the SGB may well think they are supporting the principal by "taking over" some of his responsibilities, such as discussing problems that occur in the class directly with the educator concerned. They may just want to help because they feel the principal is very busy and has too much to do, but in their eagerness to support, they are overstepping the professional line of responsibility. These parents may feel they are relieving the principal of extra problems and stress, but actually, they are a burden to the principal (Principal, middle class school). If such situations are not handled with great care, they can easily lead to permanent friction or conflict between the principal and parental governors.

As the functions and duties of the SGB are stipulated in the SA Schools Act (1996) and in provincial policies and regulations, one would think it should be clear to all what the SGB may and must do, as well as what the responsibilities of the principal and the school management team (SMT) are. These prescriptions are, however, not always interpreted similarly in practice. In the school, the management and governance functions and duties are often not delineated clearly, and the resultant uncertainty about each party's exact functions often creates friction between principals and SGB members. As a result, there is a tendency in every school to work along its own interpretation of the legislation and to try to make the relationship work.

As indicated earlier, the principal must support the SGB. What does this support mean and how does the principal do this? What is expected of him/her from the side of the Department of Education, and what do the parental governors expect from him? On the other hand — how does the SGB support the professional function of the educators and the principals? When are they supporting and when are they overstepping the line and meddling in the professional management function of the educators? This matter must be clarified and delineated in the daily governance and management of the school. The support that is offered must occur in a relationship of trust because parents and educators are intended to work towards the improvement of teaching and learning in the school. Establishing a lasting relationship is complicated since it must be renewed or re-established every three years when the new SGB is elected or sometimes even more frequently when there is a new principal in the school.

The issue here is not to take the decision-making power away from the parental governors, but rather to make their governance more effective so as to improve the schools. Is it sensible to sacrifice school effectiveness merely for the sake of concurring with democratic principles about the inclusion of all role players in the governance of their schools? Should the principal overrule the members of the SGB if they are not effective and do not deliver what is expected from them? Perhaps not. It may be, in the end, far more meaningful to build and maintain a relationship of trust between parents and the school and assist the department to improve and increase the training capacity of the SGB over the three-year period to improve effective teaching and learning. There may, however, be two approaches. Either throw the SGB in at the deep end, and make them swim or sink, or guide and support them with great care in this precarious situation, by means of training provided by the Department of Education and their specific school principals.

### Self-managing schools

Government's approach in involving the local community in the governance of the school is in line with the principles of decentralised management within self-managing schools. The local level of management (school or the district) must have the power to make decisions

because they know the local situation best (Caldwell & Spinks, 1998: 5; Cotton, 1992:2-6).

In line with the principles of "real decision-making power to the local level" and "local knows better", the principal of the school, the parents in the SGB and the local district officials should make decisions together. This however implies that the members of the SGB must have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their expected functions. They know the local situation better than decision-making authorities somewhere high up in a hierarchy, far away from the local school and community. In a real democratic fashion and using decentralised decision making, let the local decision-making authorities decide about the functions that the SGB must perform — for example, who should draft the policies and budgets — the principal or the parental governors?

To make sure this decentralised management system functions effectively, there may be some prerequisites. Firstly, it is the responsibility of the local district manager to make decisions about the ability of a specific SGB to perform their expected functions. Secondly, the departmental officials should train and develop the SGB and equip them to perform their expected functions. These district officials must have the knowledge and skills to assess the situation at each school and to make a meaningful decision together with the principal and parents. The district officials should also know the school and community well, which implies that they should not have too many schools as their responsibility. To render the above possible, it is essential to appoint only the best district officials and not merely anyone who is available; also not make the district officials responsible for too many schools which they cannot serve.

### Training parental governors

The department does not make provision for training other than the limited initial training soon after the election of the SGB (according to the Tshwane principals). The type, frequency and methods of training for SGBs differ vastly between districts in Gauteng. The large number of elected SGB members that drop out and are replaced by new, untrained parental governors is of great concern to the department, because these replacements do not receive any kind of training (CfBT).

A critical question is whether the departmental officials who are responsible for training the SGB are in fact adhering to the requirement of the SA Schools Act section 19 that they should provide continuous training. This obviously includes the principals who are also departmental officials. Are these principals properly trained and orientated so that they are able to support the SGB and accept the new management approach for the schools? Are the principals therefore responsible for the training of the SGB — not only as *ex officio* members, but also especially as departmental officials? From the interviews that were conducted it was clear that such training does not take place continuously, as is prescribed in the SA Schools Act. School principals are only to a limited extent involved in any activities that could be described as training of the rest of the SGB. Normally no extra training is offered after initial training has been delivered by the departmental officials; not even when principals request it because after a while there are many new parental governors as many parental governors had resigned soon after they had been elected (CfBT and principals group).

The actual training that members of the SGB receive also needs attention. If the parents do not have the ability or have only a limited ability to perform the expected functions stipulated in SASA, why should one "force" them to do the impossible simply because it is stated in the legislation? Depending on the ability level of the parents, it is sometimes just not worth the effort, time or money to try and train them to manage the budget or formulate policies for the school. A change in legislation may help to improve the relationship between the principal and governing body.

The same time, effort and money could rather be spent on building a sound relationship between the principal, the parents and the rest of the professional staff so that they will trust one another and understand one another's responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses.

They should rather be encouraged to support and not fight one another. It is far better to prevent conflict than to resolve it and this might be achieved by focusing on team building and relationship training, rather than on conflict management. Conflict management implies a negative approach of expecting that there will be conflict and then focusing on how to manage it. Time and money could be saved and the situation in a community be improved if the emphasis is on good relationships and conflict management had a much lower or even no priority. This must be the motto and aim of SGB training. Relationships built on trust can do more for effective governance than all the technical and generalised training where all the schools receive the same training — regardless of whether they need it or not.

A possibility in these situations is to keep training the parental SGB members. Put the emphasis on relationship building but include the technical skills. Once the SGB with limited technical skills demonstrate that they have mastered the required skills and knowledge, involve them in the rest of the SGB functions. Also develop the principals by equipping them with the necessary team-building and leadership skills.

### The functions of school governing bodies

What does it mean when the SA Schools Act states that the SGB is responsible for certain functions, such as formulating policy (section 20 and 21) or managing the budget (chapter 4)? In the light of decentralised management and participative and democratic processes — does it mean that the SGB will take full responsibility for the specific functions? What if the parents are not able to perform these functions or if the principal does not allow them to perform them? In the Tswana interviews one principal said that he was doing everything for the parents because he believed they expected it from him. After more detailed enquiry, it became clear that he preferred to believe the parents incapable of doing the work because he wanted to keep the control and power in the school. Another principal mentioned that he did not mind doing the work, but added that he would then want it to be his official responsibility. He was willing to include the parents in the governance structure.

The principals also mentioned that parents who were not able to perform these functions were just hampering effective management and governance in the school. They always questioned the actions and work of the principal regarding the governance functions they could any way not perform. To make the principal responsible for the initial drafting of documents could perhaps be seen as taking these powers away from an SGB as they are not able to perform the expected functions. It is however not a matter of taking away the decision-making power, only of moving the initial responsibility. For the rest, the SGB parents still retain all their initial decision-making power and responsibility. The author is once again of the opinion that the issue that needs attention is the building of a relationship of trust between the two partners, namely, the parents, and the principal with his/her professional staff.

### Conclusion and recommendation

The picture painted by the principals is not positive. The principals were not able to indicate that the parental support had any possible advantage for the schools. It is especially indicative from the CfBT interviews that there are a limited number of schools where the support and positive results can be attributed to the initiatives of the SGB. Another indicator of the limited interest and possible influence of parents is the election of the parental members for the SGB. The general trend from the CfBT interviews was that there were fewer parents available to be elected and there were fewer parents participating in the election.

Give the main responsibility to the principal and let him/her use the parents as sounding boards. The parents can be critically involved,

as critical friends, because they know what they want for their children, but at the end of the day, it is the principal who must account for the success or failure of the school. It is the principal that can lose his/her work and not the parents who initiated a certain policy or direction for the school.

In conclusion, the question can be asked: Why do we want to support the professional, the principal and his/her SMT? They are professionals and are supposed to know best about the main activity of the school, namely, learning and teaching. We do not send a "support team" to the local doctor or even to the local clinic or hospital. We trust them because they are professionals. There are professional bodies that assure the quality of their work whilst individuals can also ensure that the highest professional service is rendered.

Why, then, do we need "support teams" for the professionals in our schools? Is it because we do not believe they are professionals and we do not trust them? If that is the case, then the solution may be at another place or level, like better training for the teachers and strengthening the professional body, the South African Council for Educators (SACE). But whether the "support team" really contributes to improved standards of teaching and learning needs to be debated.

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