

## An Assessment of the Training Provided to School Governing Bodies: A Case Study of Three Schools in the Fort Beaufort Education District, Eastern Cape

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### Abstract

The study assessed the training provided to the school governing bodies by the Department of Education in the Fort Beaufort Education District of the Eastern Cape Province. The study focused on three schools. A qualitative approach was used in the study. Interviews were held with the principals, educator governors, parent governors, as well as two facilitators from the Fort Beaufort Education District. The findings suggest that the training provided to the school governing bodies in the Fort Beaufort Education District does not empower them (SGBs) adequately to perform their roles and responsibilities. There are a number of factors such as illiteracy, low level of education, language used during the training, lack of mentoring and monitoring and inappropriate training methods that contribute to the inadequacy of the training of school governing body members. Recommendations were provided to improve the training of school governors. It is important to train school governors effectively so as to enable them to perform their roles and responsibilities as required by the South African School Act, Act 84 of 1996.

**Keywords:** School Governing Body; Democratization; Assessment; School Governance; South African Schools Act, of 1996, Decentralization.

### 1. Introduction

With the advent of democracy in 1994, the process of decentralizing the education system began. This was in line with redressing the inequalities of the apartheid education system (Motala and Pampallis, 2001:8). The decentralization of the education system meant that governing powers were to be devolved to schools. The promulgation of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) gave powers to all schools in South Africa to elect school governing bodies (SGBs). SASA mandates the establishment of school governing bodies that allow stakeholders such as the state, parents, educators and learners (in secondary schools) to play an active role in taking decisions on behalf of the school (Van Wyk, 2004). SASA prescribes the roles of school governors such as drawing up policies for the school, managing the school's funds, adopting a code of conduct for learners, recommending the appointment of educators, to mention but a few.

An essential requirement for decentralized governance and management to succeed is that governors and managers must understand their own roles and functions and must have the ability to perform these functions (Caldwell, 2008).

The government recognizes that many school governors, particularly in rural and less advantaged urban areas, do not have the required skills and experience to exercise their powers and many have difficulty in fulfilling their functions. Section 19 of the South African Schools Act obliges the Head of Department in the province to provide training for governing bodies (Earley, 2003). Ndou (2012) notes that appropriate training of school governors is crucial to contemporary education, as children should not be exposed to a "second class" schooling system just because individuals responsible for administering and managing their schools are inadequately prepared to perform their duties.

### 2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the training provided to school governors by the provincial education department, there are still complaints from

some stakeholders that SGB members in Fort Beaufort Education District do not perform their duties and responsibilities effectively. The research problem was encapsulated by means of the following questions:

- To what extent is the training provided to SGB members by the provincial department of education empowering them to perform their duties and responsibilities effectively?
- What are the duties and responsibilities of school governing members?
- To what extent does the training provided to school governors accommodate their various respective training needs?
- How should school governors be trained, mentored and be monitored to perform their duties and responsibilities effectively?

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to do an assessment of the training sessions provided by the Department of Education to school governors in the Fort Beaufort Education district.

Training of SGB members is essential in building capacity for all members and ensuring successful school governance. Training also ensures that all members of the SGBs understand their roles and responsibilities within the school. According to Van Wyk (2004), it seems as if the ultimate success of the school governing bodies in many communities depends on the type and extent of training the government has undertaken to provide. Mthiyane (2006) suggests that the School Governing Bodies have to be properly trained to be aware of the Department of Education's vision, strategy goals, be focused and properly understand their roles as school governors.

In order to attain the general aim of the study, the following specific aims were addressed:

- To determine the necessity of the training provided to SGBs by the Department of Education.
- To establish whether the training provided to SGBs accommodates their (SGBs) various training needs.
- To establish whether the SGBs are adequately monitored and supported after the training sessions.
- To recommend proper ways of how SGBs should be trained, mentored and monitored to perform their functions efficiently and effectively.

### **4. Methodology and Data Collection**

The study was qualitative in approach and used a case-study design. The qualitative methodology was used because it answers questions about the complex nature of a phenomenon often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomenon from the participant's point of view. The researchers wanted to understand the type of training offered to SGBs from those involved in the training – the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. Merriam (1998:23) points out that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is on someone else's mind. Since this cannot be directly observed or measured, the interviewer has to ask questions in such a way as to obtain meaningful information. Semi-structured interviews helped the researchers to get all the necessary data regarding the training. Semi-structured interviews with the SGBs ensured that the researchers understand the situation correctly from their perspective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). A purposive sampling method was used in this study. Three schools in the study were purposefully selected - a multicultural school, township school as well as an urban school. The reason for such a selection emanated from the belief that school governors in these schools come from different backgrounds. This is in connection to their socio-economic status and literacy levels which could have a bearing on the effective functioning of SGBs of these schools. This view is supported by Heystek (2004), who argues that South African parents have had different experiences with their participation in school activities.

The target population of this study was:

- Parent governors of the sampled schools. Two members from each school;
- Principals of the sampled schools because they are resource persons and ex-officio members on the school governing bodies;
- Departmental officials who serve as facilitators of these training sessions. Two departmental officials were targeted.

Data analysis was done according to Tesch's method of open coding in order to identify the main themes. This method, described in Creswell (2005), involves several steps used in the analysis of data; in this case the transcriptions of the interviews with the school governors and the departmental officials. Data from interviews, document analysis and the literature reviewed were collaborated to ensure triangulation. The document analysis included the training manuals

used by the facilitators and other relevant documents used during the training sessions. Punch as cited in Rangongo (2011) describes documents as rich sources of data because documentary evidence is compiled and retained. The researcher examined and analyzed the appropriateness and relevance of the content covered in the manual as well as aspects such the language used and the activities to test the SGB members' understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The training methods and strategies used during the training were also examined and analyzed. The key purpose for examining the training manuals provided by the Provincial Department of Education was to ensure validity and reliability by comparing the interview responses with the actual training manuals.

Information resulting from data analysis with the relevant literature was used to formulate recommendations for the effective and efficient training of school governors.

## **5. Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Babbie (2008) states that the key principle of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness. The study ensured credibility and trustworthiness through prolonged engagement with the subject matter through member-checking-returning to the informants to see whether they recognize the findings of the study. Creswell in Rangongo (2011) contends that member-checking should be used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate.

## **6. Ethical Measures**

According to Welman (2009), anyone involved in social research needs to be aware of the general agreements shared by researchers about what is proper and improper in the conduct of scientific inquiry. In this study permission was obtained from all participants. All parties were informed regarding the aims of the study, research methods, and nature of participation, confidentiality, and possible publication of the results (Creswell in Rangongo, 2011). Participants' anonymity as well as voluntary participation in the study was assured. Ethical standards also include honesty in reporting, an aspect that was adhered to in this study.

## **7. Research Findings**

The importance of training school governors for the effective and efficient management of the schools was highlighted in the introduction to this study and, in addition, various literature studies in education management over the last few years have consistently emphasized the importance of training school governors in ensuring successful school improvement (Van Wyk, 2004; Mthiyane, 2006; Maluleke, 2008; Khumalo in Rangongo, 2011; Holt and Murphy in Ndou, 2012).

The following research questions were addressed in the data analysis:

- What was the nature of training provided by the district officials?
- To what extent does the training provided to school governing bodies by the Department of Education accommodate the various training needs of the school governors?
- What monitoring and mentoring mechanisms are provided to school governors during and after the training?
- How should school governing bodies be trained, monitored and be empowered to perform their duties and responsibilities effectively?

### **7.1 Biographical Data**

Eight (8) participants (both school governing body members and the facilitators) were interviewed. At the time when the interviews were conducted, the school governing body members had served for more than two years in their respective role. Three of the school governing body members that were interviewed were females and the other three were males. Out of the six participants, three were parent governors. From the three parent governors, two of them had matriculation qualifications and the other one was below grade twelve. Gender representation at the schools was adequately balanced (three females and three males).

With the facilitators of the training sessions, one facilitator that the researchers interviewed was a male and a second one was a female. Both work for the Fort Beaufort District of Education as Education Development Officers. Both facilitators were highly qualified with adequate experience in education. The male facilitator had a Bachelor of Education (BEd Honours) and the female facilitator had a Masters (MEd) degree with the experience of three previous training sessions as a facilitator of school governing body training. The study purposefully attempted to strive for gender

representation when choosing the facilitators. This is informed by the belief that males and females tend to approach things differently.

### 7.1.1 Themes Covered In The Data Analysis

#### 7.1.1.1 Theme 1: The Nature of Training provided by the district officials.

This theme attempted to respond to some of the key research questions. The theme tried to establish whether the training was theoretical, practical or a combination of both. The theme emanated from the belief that the type of training provided (theoretical or practical) should be determined by the type of trainees. For instance, Knowles (2005) points out that, adults want to learn what they can apply in the present. Training must be focused in order to relate to their situation. If training is not focused it is deemed ineffective by the adults. Knowles (2005) also notes that adults are life-centered (task-centered, problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. They want to learn what will help them perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in everyday situations and those presented in the context of application to real-life.

This would also be determined by the training theories that facilitators were exposed to as trainers. In the training of SGB members, two training models or theories would be appropriate. The pedagogical model for training learners and the andragogical model for training adults. The latter should be the most widely used by the facilitators in the training sessions. This is because adults form the majority of SGB members on the SGB. According to Van Wyk (2007), regardless of school size, parents always hold a majority of 50% plus member representation. When educator governors and the principal are considered as well the parent governors, representation becomes even bigger. This is what one facilitator (female facilitator) had to say when asked about the nature of the training:

*"I think there is too much theory going on at the expense of practice. We lecture school governors and seldom provide them with practical activities. We obsess ourselves with covering everything in the training manuals, and that we are expected to do it in one day"*

The other facilitator (male facilitator) had this to say when the same question was posed to him:

*"To be honest we do not have the luxury of time to make the training practical. Due to our congested programmes as district officials we conduct the training over one day. This is also compounded by the fact that most school governors are employed or self-employed. I think as a facilitator I would like to see more practical activities being used because school governance as much as it is a theoretical matter, it is also practical. I think the practical approach would assist those who cannot grasp theoretical aspects properly".*

From the facilitators responses it became clear that there was an over reliance on the theoretical approach at the expense of the practical approach. This might mean that the training needs of some school governors were compromised or ignored in the training session. This might also have been caused by the pressure put on the facilitators in terms of content coverage in one day.

When asked to comment on whether the training was theoretical or practical, one school governor did not mince his words when he said:

*"The training is purely theoretical".*

When the same school governor was asked to state his views on whether the training should be theoretical or practical, he enthused:

*"I think a combination of theory and practical should be the best approach. This is caused by the fact that different people learn differently. A combination of both would ensure that everybody benefits from the training".*

Another school governor had this to say when asked about the nature of the training:

*"For me I think it was theoretical. Nothing practical was done, it was just big words from the beginning to the end".*

When asked to comment on the nature of the training, a school principal had this to say:

*"I think it should be a combination of theory and practice, because most school governors are old people who have*

*never been to school or they left school early. Maybe teachers and learners do not mind it being theoretical or practical, but I think parents do”.*

From the responses by the school governors it became clear that the fact that the training is mostly theoretical does not favour all the school governors. Some benefit whilst others feel left out in the training process. The views by school governors on the training are supportive of the views of the facilitators. These views by both facilitators and school governors are further supported by Mc Keachie (2002) who asserts that trainers should recognize that the richest resource for learning resides in adult learners themselves; emphasis in adult education should focus on experiential techniques that tap into the experience of learners such as group discussion, problem-solving, case study methods, simulation, exercises, games, and role play, instead of primarily transmittal techniques such as the lecture method. The use of a combination of the afore-mentioned strategies would have the greatest impact.

From the interviews with the facilitators, they made it clear about their awareness of these learning strategies, but they said because of time constraints they are unable to implement them. This actually compromises the quality of the training. The wish by the facilitators to have the training altered to suit trainees' needs was not considered at all.

When asked about some of the documents that were given out during the training session and their (documents) usefulness, an educator governor had this to say:

*“There was a lot of paper work given out. They were documents such as the copies of various school policies, a copy of the South African Constitution and a copy of a green book on how SGBs are supposed to work. I think all documents given out on that day were quite useful. The only challenge was that all documents were written in English and not all school governors can read and write in English”.*

Another parent governor that was interviewed provided a similar response to that of the educator governor. The parent governor said:

*“We were provided with a copy of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, a copy of a green thick book stating our roles and responsibilities and a copy of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Personally I did not find them that useful, because they were all written in English. The facilitators actually encouraged the principals to assist us to understand the contents of the documents”.*

When asked about the adequacy and appropriateness of the training manual, one facilitator had this to say:

*“I think the manual is appropriate because it deals and covers all the issues that SGB members need to know about. The only disadvantage, I think, is the availability of the training manual in one language only. It gives us problems when we train SGBs who cannot speak English”*

The other facilitator echoed the same sentiments, when he said:

*“I think the fact that the manual is written in English puts some school governors at a disadvantage”.*

When the researchers analyzed the training manuals as part of the document analysis, the following observation emerged:

- With regard to its content the training manual is adequate and appropriate for the training of school governing bodies.
- The document is available in English only, despite the fact that Afrikaans and IsiXhosa are the widely spoken languages in the province in general and in Fort Beaufort District in particular.
- The training manual is mainly content based and lacks activities on assessment. The assessment activities depend hugely on the facilitators' discretion and creativity.

From the above responses by the participants and the training manual analysis, it became clear that the provisioning of the supplementary documents by the trainers was a good initiative. However, the fact that these documents were written in English and that the training manual was mainly content based and lacked activities on assessment posed a challenge if not a barrier to effective training. The provisioning of any written material to a person in a language he or she cannot understand is problematic. It makes it difficult if not impossible for school governors to do self-reading of the documents in their own time. Such a situation has a great likelihood of creating school governors that are not on the same level of understanding of SGB matters. Those who understand English well are likely to be more informed than their counterparts who do not have a good command of the English language. This view is supported by

Van Wyk (2004) who asserts that the varying literacy levels among SGB members pose further challenges. Van Wyk (2004) further argues that educators in the SGB feel that other SGB members, an obvious reference to parent governors, lack confidence and are not sure of their duties, and educators feel that parent members are against them and feel inferior as they think educators are undermining them. The plan by the facilitators to request school principals to assist governors in the training session is a good initiative. However, the initiative has got its own challenges. Moate (1999), for instance notes that principals do not receive adequate management training although they are expected by law to provide advice to the school governing bodies.

When asked about the type of support that was offered by the principals and the educators during the training session, one school parent governor said:

*"They helped us in explaining in IsiXhosa and encouraged us to participate by asking things we did not understand".*

The sustainability of such help would vary from school to school. In schools where the unity between the school governing body and the principal is valued, such assistance is likely to materialize. The same cannot be said about schools where there is mistrust between the principal and the SGB.

#### 7.1.1.2 Theme 2: Training and Assessment Methods

The training and assessment methods are also an important aspect of the training because the use of inappropriate training and assessment methods might compromise the quality of the training. With regard to training methods that were used in the training session, one facilitator (female facilitator) had this to say:

*"We use lecture method, group work, question and answer as well as presentations. To conserve time we rely mainly on the lecture method and we can cover a lot of ground using this method. I try to limit group work and presentation because they consume a lot of time. I prefer the lecture method because it is quite useful for a big group. Remember we train more than five clusters from the district a day. That is approximately hundred and fifty school governors in one venue. One would love to use other methods more but time is the limiting factor"*

The other facilitator (male facilitator) concurred with the other one and had this to say:

*"For me there is no single one perfect training method. I think a variety of training methods is the way to go. But above all a trainer should be biased towards his target audience (group of trainees), because people learn differently. For practical purposes I use the lecture method because I want to cover everything by the end of the training day".*

From the responses provided by the facilitators it became obvious that the training methods used by the facilitators were not trainee-centered but were trainer centered. The number of the school governing body members in the training sessions as well as the allocated time for the training determined the choice of the training methods by the facilitators. The choice of training methods by the facilitators had a huge impact on the effectiveness of the training.

When asked to explain how they ensured that their preferred training methods accommodated the various training needs of school governors, one facilitator had this to say:

*"To be honest I do not think the lecture method accommodates everyone. It might be suitable for teachers and learners but I have doubts if it accommodates all parent governors. Remember some school governors are educated and others are not".*

The other facilitator had this to say:

*"It is difficult to accommodate everybody, because of time and the content to be covered. I believe those who miss some information during the training will get it from their colleagues and their principals. It is therefore a huge challenge to be accommodative of everyone".*

This is contrary to what Silberman and Auerbach in Knowles (2005) have postulated. According to them, there are individual differences in the background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals, creating a greater need for self-individualization of learning and teaching strategies.

When the researcher specifically asked how the facilitators accommodated the various literacy levels of school governors, one facilitator had this to say:

*"It is a difficult question to answer, because there are educated and uneducated school governors in one room during the training sessions. The language becomes a problem. To accommodate everyone I speak English and ask principals to explain later to their respective school governors".*

The other facilitator had this to say when the same question was posed to her:

*"To be frank with you there is not much room during the training sessions to cater for various literacy levels. Sometimes I tried to get out of my own way and explain things in IsiXhosa, because the IsiXhosa-speakers are the majority. But I noticed that, that was not well received by the non-IsiXhosa-speakers. This situation sometimes caused a rift among school governors in the training. It is impractical to accommodate all literacy levels".*

From what the facilitators said, it became clear that the various school governors' literacy levels were not taken into account when they were trained. For instance the dominance of the English language as the medium of training disadvantaged those who could not express themselves in English. Equally so the use of another language other than English did not go down well with those who could not speak such a language. The widely spoken languages in the Fort Beaufort District are Afrikaans, English and IsiXhosa, with IsiXhosa the most widely spoken of the three languages. The approach by the facilitators to ask the principals to explain to the school governors is consistent with the South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996. The approach by the facilitators is also supported by Maluleke (2008), who argues that it is also the responsibility of the principals to guide and even train the governing body members on their roles and responsibilities. Moate (1996) argues further that principals should facilitate, support and assist the SGB in the execution of its statutory functions even though principals are often too busy to attend to the training of SGB members concerning their roles and responsibilities.

When asked about the assessment activities and a follow-up training, one school governor had this to say:

*"Yes we were orally assessed after some activities during the training. This was done to test understanding, but there was nothing written. There was no follow up training, except for the principal explaining to us in our first SGB meeting after the training".*

From the response by the school governor, it became clear that the trainers did not attach much significance on the assessment aspect during and after the training sessions. Oral assessment alone could be inadequate because it tends to be advantageous to dominant speakers whilst disadvantaging non-dominant speakers. Dominance and non-dominance of speakers in this instance would include the fluency of speakers in the language of training.

When the same question on assessment was posed to the facilitator, the facilitator said:

*"I do not use many assessment methods, except to ask questions orally. Obviously as a qualified educator myself I do not think my assessment methods are highly effective. Maybe they are effective for learners, teachers and principals but I doubt if they are effective for all parent governors".*

This response by the facilitator reveals the facilitators' lack of emphasis on the appropriate assessment methods by the facilitators. This has the potential of interfering with the quality of the training. From the facilitators' responses it became clear that the facilitators either did not have enough time to assess school governors or they simply did not know how to assess them. The danger of using inappropriate assessment methods is further revealed by Knowles (2005), who notes that adult learners' motivation can be blocked by training and education that ignores adult learning principles. This refers to assessment strategies as well.

### 7.1.1.3 Theme 3: Mentoring and Monitoring Mechanism

When asked about the mentoring and monitoring mechanisms, one facilitator had this to say:

*"Though the South African Schools Act stipulates that we must do some follow-up training, we seldom do it. Most of the monitoring and mentoring is left to the principals to fulfill. The belief is that the principals are the ones who can observe how the SGBs perform and know where in their abilities further development is required. I cannot say whether the mentoring and monitoring strategy by the principals works. There is no common strategy from the Department of Education to test whether the monitoring and mentoring mechanisms work. We rely on the principals reports on these two issues".*

The other facilitator had this to say on the issue of mentoring and monitoring:

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*"I think the monitoring and mentoring by the principals, work for some schools whilst challenges are experienced in other schools. It depends on the co-operation between the principals and their respective SGBs"*

From the facilitators responses it became clear that despite what the South African Schools Act; Act 84 of 1996 stipulates about the monitoring mechanism, the monitoring aspect is left to chance by the facilitators. The lack of a clear monitoring and mentoring mechanism has the potential of affecting the quality of the training negatively. To expect the principals alone to mentor and monitor the school governors could pose some serious challenges and problems. According to Middlewood as quoted in Mthiyane (2004), devising a staff development plan is crucial to the task of managing staff development. The researcher argues that, the development of the SGB members is crucial for the overall development of the institution. Mthiyane (2004), further argues that approaches to staff development could be linked to staff development. These staff development approaches are approaches such as: training, induction, and mentoring, performance management and Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS). Unlike in other countries such as England where a newly appointed governor is provided with a mentor, the same cannot be said about the Fort Beaufort District. This shows that the issue of mentoring is not taken seriously. According to Early (2003), the mentor is someone to whom the school governors can count on for advice on the hundred and one points which confront them.

The over reliance by the Department of Education on the principals on the issue of the SGB monitoring could prove to be problematic at times. In some schools there is a lack of collaboration between the principals and the SGB. In such schools the mentoring and monitoring process might suffer. The fact that principals are too busy with school management could compromise the monitoring and mentoring tasks delegated to them by the Department of Education. From the facilitators' responses it became clear that the training of SGBs is seen as a once-off event with no significance attached to aspects such monitoring and mentoring.

## **8. Summary of the Findings and Conclusions**

### *8.1 Nature of the training*

All participants interview found the training to be purely theoretical, except for one activity during the training which required participants to work in small groups. The theoretical nature of the training was not accommodative of the training needs of all the school governors, especially the training needs of the parent governors.

### *8.2 Training methods used during the training sessions*

The training methods used by the facilitators in the training sessions were not considerate of the various participants training needs. The lecture method dominated over the other methods. Group method which is appropriate for adult learning and training was rarely used. No single training method is entirely accommodative of all the school governors' training needs.

### *8.3 Accommodation of literacy levels of various school governors.*

The training manuals and all the documents handed out in training sessions were written in English. This created the impression that the training was meant for school governors that were conversant with English. The parent component of the SGB was left struggling with the comprehension of the English language.

### *8.4 Assessment methods used during the training sessions*

All participants interviewed agreed that there was no assessment strategy in place, except for the oral questions that were asked by the facilitators during the training sessions. The fact that little significance was attached to the assessment aspect during the training sessions meant that most school governors left the training not knowing which issues of the training to master. The lack of assessment activities also meant that the principle of maximum participation was highly compromised during the training.

### *8.5 Monitoring and mentoring mechanisms*

School governors were not monitored or mentored after the training session. These two important tasks were delegated



to the principals of the schools to execute by the facilitators. The researcher found that monitoring and mentoring is not done in Fort Beaufort Education District because principals may not have time to do it.

## 9. Recommendations for Effective Training of School Governors

- The training methods used by the facilitators of the school governing bodies' training sessions should be tailor-made to suit the various training needs of school governors. The fact that the majority of school governors are from the parent component should be considered as well. A discussion with the school governors about their preferred training methods should be convened as well.
- The training assessments should cater for the diverse training needs of school governors. Multiple assessment methods should be used. The issue of multiple assessments could include examples such as: peer assessment, group assessment, oral assessment, written assessment and so forth.
- The facilitators of the training sessions of school governing bodies should be exposed to theories on adult learning and training. A specialized training session for the facilitators should be conducted and the facilitators should be tested after the training.
- The language of training should accommodate all the participants. The training manuals should be made available in the other widely spoken languages in the Fort Beaufort District. This would create user-friendly training manuals.
- The duration of the training should be extended by at least another day. This would allow sufficient time for the other elements of the training session.
- The creation of a specialized training session within the training session for the office-bearers. These are office-bearers such as the chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary as well as the treasurer.
- The development of a district monitoring and mentoring plan to be put in place. This would assist with the monitoring and mentoring aspects.
- The Fort Beaufort District of Education to develop an appraisal system for school governing bodies. This would ensure that school governors take their duties and responsibilities seriously.

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