

The Collaboration Schools model appears to be on the right track, but its effectiveness depends on fully functioning partnerships and sound management.

The Western Cape sees an increase of around 18 000 learners in its schools each year. Unfortunately, the budget we are allocated simply cannot keep up with demand. This makes it increasingly difficult to deliver on our mission to ensure quality education for every learner, in every classroom, in every school in the province.

When I was approached early in my first term of office to test a model for schools similar to the academy schools in the United Kingdom, it offered the possibility of delivering better education quality at schools in partnership with private donors and operating partners who govern and manage the schools.

We started the pilot programme with five schools. The model was developed by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) with the assistance of Ark Schools UK (*see page 74*), who established a Pilot Support Office to manage the Public School Partnerships pilot project. Co-operative partnerships have proved vital in implementing the model, and we appreciate the support of all parties involved in the project.

Key to the implementation of the model was establishing a mechanism within the law that would allow us to operate this type of school. We did that. The next important step was the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between the WCED and the PSP funding group. The signing of Service Level Agreements between the Head of the WCED and each School Operating Partner (SOP), of each Collaboration School, is important to ensure accountability for all parties. Collaboration Schools remain public schools. In the traditional Collaboration model, i.e. when starting a new school, the School Governing Body appoints all teachers, and the operating partner comprises 50% of the SGB – since the partners are also

held accountable for education outcomes.

Not every school has worked out as planned, and there is always work to be done to improve each school's performance. But the signs so far have been encouraging.

In the WCED's annual Systemic Testing for Grades 3, 6 and 9, Collaboration Schools have on average showed increases in performance above the provincial average – an encouraging sign of improvement at these schools.

Overall, I think PSP is on the right track. Some lessons learnt are that we need more operating partners with the right attitude and experience to manage tough schools. It is definitely more difficult in a Turnaround School, where some teachers are employed by the School Governing Body and others by the Department, and requires ongoing management and close co-operation between the SOP and the Department. I think it is important that there should be a person in the Department who actively manages the process, as there are many issues that need to be dealt with, from financial to people management; and if these are not dealt with speedily, they can fester and cause further problems later on.

A very exciting 'spin-off' has been that, because we have developed a framework and legislation for these schools, a number of schools – which were not part of the initial group – want to adopt the model, with one having already done so.

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