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Abstract
Governing bodies in South Africa are expected to have an important role in ensuring high quality education in schools as well as in the democratization of the post-apartheid South Africa. However, current legislation precludes governing bodies from involvement in the professional management of schools. Governing bodies are democratically elected and thus they comply with representative democratic expectations. The governing bodies are less successful in the participative democratic model because of factors such the literacy of parents, the expectations of parents, the negative perceptions of principals and parents and the availability of parents to attend governing body meetings. The Education Laws Amendment Bill of 2007 may provide an opportunity for some governing bodies with capable and committed members to be more involved in the governing body activities. Governing bodies may not be successful in supporting schools to improve the quality of the education provided. However, there are indications that governing bodies may play a positive role in the school and the community to build democratic foundations that will lead towards sustainable high-quality education for all children.

Keywords
centralization, decentralization, decision-making power, governance, governing body, leadership, management, power

Introduction
The governing of individual schools—school governance as it is known in South Africa—only began in the early 1990s. Since this coincided with the political transition to a post-apartheid South Africa, the policies and structures for school governance were influenced by the local political...
context as well as international trends. These trends related to the self-management of schools in which community involvement, decentralized decisions and decentralization of funds were the driving forces. This decentralization of decision making can be closely associated with a neo-liberal approach because neo-liberalism emphasizes decentralization of decision making, and less directly influences central government at local education settings (Olssen and Peters, 2005). This decentralization of decision making to the local school was also officially implemented in all schools in South Africa as a result of the promulgation of the South African Schools Act 1996.

There were already some of the first indications of self-governing schools in the mid 1970s (Caldwell, 2010). In their explanation of self-managing schools, Caldwell and Spinks (1998) indicate that decentralization of sources to the schools does not mean that the schools became autonomous (or independent or private). It is just that the local community is entrusted with these sources because the assumption is that the local level knows best what to do with funds and other sources allocated from the central or state (provincial) structures. This may be true when the local community is well-educated and has the necessary knowledgeable and trained educators and principals as well as parental community. The transition of school management cannot be conceptualized without considering the influence of the neo-liberal movement at the same time. Neo-liberal discourse denounces the social democratic approach and embraces the liberal democracy where the market and the individual take more responsibility for their own destination (Hursh 2007). Caldwell (2008) views the drive towards self managing schools in Europe, USA and Australia as a financially motivated approach to school management. The Education Reform Act 1988 in England firmly establishes the principles of decentralized decision making and self-managing schools with an emphasis on the financial implications for schools. These implications include that schools became more responsible for providing for their own financial needs with more administration for school managers.

Although there were expectations that self-managing schools would be able to provide better, improved education to the local community, three decades of research about the possible link between improved education results and self-managing schools has produced only limited evidence of this. Self-managing schools may have a positive influence on academic achievement if other factors such as centralized curriculum and examination coexist with the school autonomy (Caldwell, 2008). Although there are few international studies which show that academic improvement can be directly linked to governance (Hofman et al., 2002; Ranson et al., 2005), the expectation that school governance in South Africa may have a positive influence on the quality of education, still does not seem realistic. This aspect will be discussed in detail later in the article.

This article focuses on school governance in South Africa against the international phenomenon of self-managing schools. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the self-managing school system was operationalized in a different socio-economic, political and developmental system. The broad functions and responsibilities of the South African governing bodies are not dissimilar to comparable bodies in the UK, New Zealand and Australia in respect to drafting policies, budgeting, support and maintenance (Farrell and Law, 1999; Robinson et al., 2003) but the political and socio-economic diversity in communities and therefore in schools (see Table 1) are dissimilar from that in most western countries.

For the purposes of this article, high-quality education is seen as the best possible academic performance or examination results. Since we are managing our schools in a performance-driven culture, the criteria for quality are measurable evidence such as school leaving (matriculation) results as well as standardized mathematics and literacy tests at grade 3, 6 and 9 levels. Schools are also
ranked into five quintiles of 20 per cent of the schools per quintile with quintile 5 schools as the schools in the most affluent areas.

This article takes the view that the implementation of self-managing schools in South Africa is democratically or politically and financially driven rather than an instrument to provide and improve the quality education for all. Although a governing body is still the functionary of the school as the juristic person (Department of Education, 1996: section 15), governing bodies are under pressure to comply with all the duties and responsibilities of a performance-driven culture. This argument is premised on the values and aims of school governance as stated in the Preamble of the South African Schools Act 1996. The article also explores parental governors’ ability and experience to perform the duties as well as the socio-economic context of the parent community as determining factors in the performance of governing bodies.

The central question posed is: How do democratic principles and school funding pressurize governing bodies to provide high quality education to all children? The purpose of the article is therefore to analyse whether governing bodies are able to deliver on the expectations of the South African Schools Act 1996 to be an important role player in the democratization of the South African society and to assist in the improvement of quality education for all. The article reports on research using an interpretive methodology with a critical analysis of national policy with regard to school management and governance.

The article also provides the contextual background in which governing bodies function. While the political factor has strengthened the demand for democratic processes, the main function of the governing body is to support high quality education. Attention is given to the governing body’s role and functions with regard to the establishment of democracy and democratic principles as well as its possible role of providing quality education. The issue of sufficient funding and the governing body’s ability to manage funds will be highlighted in the last section of the article.

Contextualizing South African School’s Governance

Introduction of Self-managing Schools to South Africa

Decentralized school management was introduced at former white schools in 1990 in South Africa (Webber, 2002). This first manifestation of self-managing schools may be perceived as politically motivated because it was only the former white schools, which gained self-managing status. These schools had the right to appoint educators and non-educating staff as well as the ownership of the school buildings and facilities, and could determine learner enrolment and other related policies. They also introduced a school fee, which parents were expected to pay although the provincial departments continued to pay the educators’ salaries. During this time, the non-white schools did not have any form of self-management with limited involvement of parents, except for teacher and parent committees with no power related to the teaching and learning activities of schools. The parents and learners in these schools played an important role during the struggle against apartheid, which also encouraged the inclusion of parents and learners in the school governance model after 1994. After the 1994 elections and the promulgation of the South African Schools Act 1996 (SASA), all schools in South Africa elected school governing bodies. The 1996 Constitution also abolished all legal discrimination based on race, gender, language, religion and other. Therefore, I use the term ‘former white schools’ because these schools have enrolled learners from all the former racial groups since 1994.

Although the decision to decentralize the management of all public schools in South Africa had financial advantages for the central government, the primary reason for introducing governing
bodies was the political drive towards democratic participation (Christie, 2006; Grant Lewis and Naidoo, 2006; Sayed and Soudien, 2005; Woolman and Fleisch, 2008). Webber (2002), however, argues that a desire to have financially driven, self-managing schools may explain the inadequate attention paid to putting in place the people to govern the schools. It seems as if the potential to provide high-quality and sound governance structures was less important than granting parents some democratic participatory rights in schools.

**Socio-economic Context and School Governance**

A brief explanation about the population in South Africa and the related number of schools will also provide a perspective on the enormity of the task to have functioning governing bodies in all schools. The white population (as pre-1994 racial classifications) constitutes only 9.2 per cent of the total population (Statistics South Africa, 2010). In 1992, just before the dawn of the democratic South Africa, the white schools were only 13 per cent of the total number of schools (Webber 2002). In terms of the 2010 statistics for schools, the 13 per cent will mean that about 1903 out of 24,751 schools are former white schools (Department of Education, 2010).

These former white schools had, and in general still have better quality education and are still located in better socio-economic areas and have better educated parents than former non-white schools. This plays an important role in the ability of governing bodies to perform the expected functions. These schools are generally perceived to have been privileged by the apartheid system and generally have better school facilities than other schools. Furthermore, because these parents are able to pay substantial school fees (see Table 1), these schools have more financial resources. They also generally have better academic results in the matriculation (school-leaving) examination. Most of the former white schools, who have registered large numbers of learners from all race groups since 1994, can still call on competent parents to serve on the governing bodies. Although there is a large, growing African middle class, most of the parents from this group send their children to private schools or to the former white schools (Chaka, 2008; Chuenyane, 2010). Hence, African schools are unable to call on the money or skills from this group and are therefore still disadvantaged.

A large number of the South African population are not sufficiently functionally literate to meet the requirements of reading and drafting policies. Only 40.3 per cent of people older than 20 years of age have completed primary education and another 30.8 per cent have completed some secondary education (Statistics South Africa, 2010). There is, therefore, a strong likelihood that many of the parent members of the governing body, even with the assumed training, do not have the necessary literacy level to read legislation, draft policies and manage budgets. Even those few, who have passed grade 12, may not have sufficient literacy levels to read, understand and interpret legislation to perform the functions allocated to them.

The limited literacy rate of parents does not preclude them from being capable governing body members. There are numerous examples where parents who have limited literacy or governing experience play a positive role in school governance and contribute to the improvement of education (Heystek and Pashiardis, 2007; Prew, 2009). Consequently, the competence of parents in these areas should not be used as an excuse to limit parent involvement. While principals or teachers may be aware that parents are probably unable to ask questions about their performance as professionals, they should acknowledge that parents, regardless of their level of education, want the best education for their children and expect teachers to perform and deliver results. Parents can play an important role if they are well-trained and afforded sufficient opportunity to play a role.
Functionality of the Governing Bodies

Arguably, the governing body’s composition, functions and above all ability to perform the functions is fundamental in the assessment of the effectiveness of school governance in South Africa. The composition of the governing body as stipulated in SASA, section 24, emphasizes not only the democratic process but also the importance of parents as role players in the improvement of schools. The principal, in his or her official capacity, must be a member. The following constituencies elect their own members on specific allocated times and dates for each school every three years: (1) parents of learners at the school; (2) educators at the school; (3) members of staff at the school who are non-educators; and (4) learners in the eighth grade or higher at the school. A parent must be the chairperson of the school governing body (SGB) and the parent members must have one member more in the SGB than all the other groups together, thus giving them the majority in the SGB.

In contrast with the composition of the governing body, the requirements or distinction between governance and management is not as clear. Article 16 in SASA (1996) indicates specifically that governance is the responsibility of the governing body and management is the professional activities managed by the principal and teachers. Although this distinction between governance and management was supposed to be a clear divide, it is a contested area between principals and parental governors. There are frequent references (Grant Lewis and Naidoo, 2006; Mncube, 2009) to possible interference from parents (the governing body) in the professional management of schools but parents also proclaim that principals do not allow them to be involved or to participate (Ngidi, 2004; Tsotetsi et al., 2008).

The provincial heads of departments (HOD) are responsible for the training of the governing bodies, so as to assist and empower them with their functionality. The HOD must provide funding for the training and appoint trainers. The provincially provided training is not always the highest quality, with the result that principals need to carry the burden of the training. Principals have the responsibility to assist and support the governing bodies in performing their functions (Department of Education, 1996: section 19). The relationship between the principal and governing body determines how much effort the principal will put into the training of the governing body (Mncube, 2009; Ngidi, 2004). Since only a small number of schools actually have really competent parental governors, most governing bodies find it difficult to get parental support schools to improve quality of education. The numerical dominance of the parental governors in spite of their limited competence makes the notion of decentralizing decision making in the interests of promoting high quality education at school level problematic.

In spite of these potential limitations of the governors, the preamble of SASA indicates that the purpose of the Act is to correct past injustices, to instil democratic principles in schools and, therefore, also in broader society in order to provide progressively high quality education for all.

Governing Bodies for a Democratic Dispensation

Democratic Values and Quality Education

The democratic aims, values and rights as stipulated in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution are closely associated with the political transformation from a political system of separateness and inequality to an inclusive democracy with equity and quality as cornerstones. The governance structure of the school governing bodies is therefore a direct result of the all-inclusive democracy and the negotiated 1996 Constitution. According to Grant Lewis and Naidoo (2004), the South
African Constitution adopts a representative but also a participative democracy not only for the country but also for the school governance.

The Preamble of the South African Schools Act 1996 transports the Constitutional values and aims into the Schools Act as well as for school governance and management. For the purpose of the article, I will emphasize two themes from the Preamble (SASA, 1996: 1).

Quality education aims and values:
Provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and capabilities and contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society.

Democratic aims and values:
Democracy has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation. This country requires a new national system for schools, which will redress past injustices in educational provision, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, and provides a governance and funding structure for schools in partnership with the State.

Representative Democracy

The most important indicator of democratic values and a representative democracy is the tri-annual elections of the different representatives for all the constituencies in the governing body. This serves as a potential empowerment for most parents and communities because they have an official role and function in their own schools, which they did not have prior to 1994. The scale and potential involvement of parents and other role players suggests the potential power governing bodies have to establish democracy and participation in the South African school system and beyond. Although people are frequently given the opportunity to participate in the democratic process of governing body elections, a three-year term does not make provision for parents with limited governance experience to develop their potential. It should also be noted that since a parent may only be a governing body member while he/she has a child at the school, it is frequently the case that parent governors do not serve more than one term. This policy places a potential constraint on governing bodies and their potential influence on sustainable high quality education for all. Just as some parents gain some experience and skills, the next governing body is elected and the training and gaining experience process has to start all over again.

For the potential power to become authentic power, representative and participative democracy must provide the governing bodies with tools, procedures and structures to enhance quality education in most schools. The actualization of the potential power will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of the article.

If the democracy implies participative democracy, it is doubtful if the governance of schools is actually true democracy. Although the parents are in the majority there are specific factors preventing their active and positive participation in the democratic deliberation (Adams and Waghid, 2005). The parental literacy levels, their experience of management as well as their time and availability to attend meetings are some of the problems, which may limit their active participation and contribution to discussions at governing body meetings (Heystek, 2006; Mncube, 2009).
Participative democracy

Among the responsibilities allocated by SASA in sections 5–9, 20, 21 and 37–42 are developing a vision for the school, formulation of language, religion, admission policy, funding of schools, maintenance and improvement of school facilities and property, budget management as well making recommendations concerning the appointment of teachers and the principal. These responsibilities involve only limited participative democratic power and have little direct impact on professional teaching or classroom learning and consequently on the quality of education. All the visions, policies and budgets must be drafted within the strict constraints of all legislation and the Constitution. Therefore their responsibilities could be more accurately defined as administrative functions rather than democratic and educational power tools to enhance quality education.

Participative democracy is further jeopardized by the level of participation of the parents in actual governing activities. An important question to be asked is: Whose responsibility is it to draft policies, budgets or update or manage them? Is it the parents’ responsibility or can the principal or teacher on the governing body also do it? The legislation might create the impression that parents must do the actual work because they are the majority and provide the chair of the governing body. One example is the management of the school funds. It is the governing body’s responsibility to draft and manage the budget, which includes the budget income and expenditure. There have been court cases where the legislation has been interpreted as precluding principals from being involved in the daily and active management of the school fees because money comes from parents. It is especially true of schools in the higher income areas with higher socio-economic status, officially known as quintile 4 and 5 schools (see discussion below) because at these schools’ parents pay high school fees. It is especially prevalent in schools in lower socio-economic status areas, known as the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools that have less competent parents, which require principals to make decisions about their own or teacher’s involvement in the governing body functions. In many cases the lack of trust and cooperation between parents and principal, the question of ‘whose job is it?’ that accentuates the potential tension that may arise between principals and governing body parents in many schools. Parents either do not participate in the discussions or work because they are unable to, or they feel inferior, but there is limited evidence of participative and deliberative democracy (Brown and Duku, 2008; Bush and Heystek, 2003; Joubert, 2009). Similar problems of mismanagement of funds or inappropriate funding allocation or not spending the funds may occur as mentioned in the OECD report of 2004, when less competent people are responsible for managing the budget. This tension intensifies the pressure on individual governing bodies and also on governance to achieve the aims of democratization and improve quality education.

To ensure the functionality of a governing body, principals must make practical decisions when less competent parent governors find it difficult to perform the expected functions as discussed above. What tends to happen in quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools, is that the principal or a teacher on the governing body drafts policies and the budget. Since they are members of the governing body, it can be said that the governing body is performing these functions. If there is a well-established level of trust between the principal and the parents, these schools can be managed and governed successfully in this way irrespective of who is actually drafting or changing policies (Heystek, 2006). However, as Maile (2002) cautions, the principal and the remainder of the governing body need to work together closely. Otherwise, there could be accusations that the principals are too autocratic or that they do not allow parents to participate (Department of Education, 2004; Chaka, 2008, Mncube, 2009). The key question is whether less competent and/or semi-literate parents can...
entrust the principal to act in the interests of the school. It may result in a power struggle with democracy and quality education ultimately being compromised.

**Governing Body Involvement in Schools to Support High-quality Education**

The pressure on governing bodies to improve the quality of education for all is considerable because many schools have very low academic achievement levels. The standard of South African education is well below par, when compared with that of other countries. South Africa was ranked last in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) (1999) report from all the participating countries, which includes several similar developing countries.

It may be argued that governing bodies and specifically the majority of parents may be able to do something to improve the quality of the education, if that is considered one of the important aims of the self-managing principles (Caldwell, 2010). Two specific functions mentioned in SASA Section 20(1), which may be powerful for governing bodies to improve the quality of education are to:

(a) promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school;
(b) support the principal, educators and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions.

These specific functions for governing bodies seem like empowerment but as with the concepts management and governance, there is no agreement on what governing bodies can do to support and promote the best interests of the school (Heystek, 2010).

Until 2006, legislation and common practice (Grant Lewis and Naidoo, 2006) excluded governing bodies, especially parents, from any active involvement in the professional management of the school. The incapacity or non-performance of principals or educators was a professional issue and governing bodies were therefore not supposed to or expected to be involved in any claims or acquisitions against non-performing teachers or principals.

It seems as if the Education Laws Amendment Act (ELAA) 2007 (Department of Education, 2007) may change the potential involvement of governing bodies in the professional management of schools. ELAA highlights the importance of governing bodies especially in underperforming schools. It also concurs with the Ministerial Review Committee (2003) that governing bodies could become more accountable for the quality of education in a school, irrespective of the diverse abilities and availabilities of governing bodies.

The Education Laws Amendment Act 2007, Clause 9, added the following after SASA Section 20 e:

(eA) the governing body of a public school must adhere to any actions taken by the Head of Department in terms of Section 16 of the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998), to address the incapacity of a principal or educator to carry out his or her duties effectively.

ELAA 2007 (Section 56B (1–5)) further indicates that a provincial Head of Department (HoD) may take action against principals, educators and governing bodies if the quality of education at a school is unacceptable. These actions specifically refer to underperforming schools as mentioned in Section 58B and C, which is predominantly in the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools. However, Section 58B and C are
directly linked with Section 16 because Section 16A refers to Section 58, which stipulates that principals from underperforming schools must provide the provincial HoD as well as the governing body with a report on the situation as well as plans for school improvement. (Section 16A (1) (ii and iii, emphasis added)

The implication of Section 58B in ELAA 2007 is that governing bodies may be or must be required to be involved in supporting principals and schools even before the judgment of incapacity is made by the HoD because they could lose their power to govern the school. The HoD’s may take action against a governing body even though the governing body does not have any direct involvement in the professional management of the school because they are traditionally not involved in the academic management of schools. Even if it was not the intention of the government to involve parents more directly, an unintended consequence of ELAA 2007 may be to give the governing bodies greater responsibility for ensuring high quality education in schools.

Before the publication of ELAA (2007), the two functions mentioned in Section 20(a) and (e) did not appear to include much parental involvement in professional activities in schools. But, Section 16Ac states that principals must table their plans for school improvement at governing body meetings. If Sections 20(a) and (e) are read with Section 16Ac, it can be argued that parents potentially are being given more power to sustain or improve quality education. Section 16Ac requires the governing body, and therefore specifically the parents, to be more involved and responsible for the academic quality of the school. Therefore, the specification in ELAA 2007 that parents should be held accountable for the quality of education could imply that parents have the right to deeper involvement in the professional activities of schools. For example: Is it intrusion in the professional matters of the school or is it the parent’s right and responsibility, to request a principal to explain why there are no steps taken against a teacher who is frequently late or absent or not prepared for class? Another example: What are the parents’ responsibilities when a principal, for whatever reason, does not or cannot implement the improvement plans tabled at the governing body meeting? The need to table improvement plans at a governing body meeting implies that the governing body can discuss them, make suggestions and hold the principal and educators to their plans. However, it must be realized that few governing bodies will be in a position to recognize the possible shift in power implied in this legislation. Few of the members will be able to read, and interpret the legislation to their own advantage and to the advantage of education in general. This legislation may therefore unintentionally lead to the disempowerment of most governing bodies.

The act of getting parents more involved does not include lay educationists, the parents, in professional teaching activities such as the selection of teaching methodology or the explicit selection of the curriculum and teaching support materials and text books. This argument is in line with organizational management principles (Starling, 2008), which implies possible actions by the employer in the spirit of the Employment of Educators Act 1998 against non-conforming educators. This claim may be valid because the governing body is already deeply involved in the appointment of teachers since it interviews educators and then makes recommendations to the HOD. Education is unique in this organizational context because the parents, who are the majority in the governing body, are not employed by the government to do this work and are also lay educationists. However, since they play an important role in the recommendation of the teacher to be appointed, they may therefore lay claim to the right to take action against non-performing teachers. Thus, the 2007 Amendment Act seems to confirm the involvement of governing bodies in more professional activities of schools in keeping with their function of promoting high quality education (SASA 20(1a)). The existing parental role in sustainable quality education begins with the
recommendation of teachers for the appointment of motivated, sufficiently trained and most suitable educators for the local school. It is therefore not beyond expectations that the governing body could become involved in taking responsibility for the public misconduct of teachers.

For the purpose of this article, public misconduct will be limited to issues that children are aware of in the school and parents may know about through their children’s experience or by having seen or heard evidence about it in the community. This view of public misconduct is in line with what Rossouw (2004) identifies as less serious misconduct, which can normally be dealt with by the principal in the school. Examples of these kinds of misconduct are listed in Section 18 of the Employment of Educators Act 76 1998 and include conduct such as continual late coming, not being in class when required to be there, lack of appropriate lesson preparation, drunkenness, abuse of authority, unacceptable disciplinary actions towards children, parents or the broader community. These kinds of misconduct are a common phenomenon in many schools. These types of misconduct can all be addressed by the governing body as part of their function to support the principal and teachers in meeting their professional teaching responsibilities as indicated by SASA, Section20 (a) and (e).

This reading of ELAA 2007 and the support of governing bodies towards high quality education (SASA, Section 20) may empower a few governing bodies with competent governors but most governing bodies and specifically under-performing schools may not benefit from it. It may seem like decentralization and therefore a participative democratic step, but because only a few governing bodies and schools may benefit, it is not actually a step towards quality education for all. The reality of managing and governing a school requires that schools have sufficient funds not only to maintain but to improve the quality of education.

School Fees: An Additional Pressure on School Governing Bodies

School governance may face more pressure to improve the quality of education because decentralization of funds to governing bodies is a cornerstone of self-managing school principles. In the South African context, the school funding formula determines that government appointed teachers’ salaries and benefits are still directly paid by the provincial departments of education. However, since 1996 schools may require parents to pay an additional compulsory school fee. The governing bodies may decide on the allocation and spending of the school fees, which can range from appointment of additional teachers or support and administrative staff to additional facilities, infrastructural improvement and additional learning material including computers.

This school fee system in the 1996 legislation was inherited from white schools before 1994, but is also consistent with neo-liberal ideas in which the state becomes less directly involved in school financial and governance issues as well as the decentralized decision making powers. Table 1 provides an indication of the diverse incomes for schools according to the former racial classification. The Gauteng province provides a useful illustration of the arrangements for school fees in South Africa. Although it is the smallest province, it is the business centre of South Africa and the most densely populated province in the country with only a small rural area. It is also one of the top two out of the nine provinces in terms of academic achievement. The Ex-Department of Education and Training was schools for (African) black learners while the schools built by the Gauteng Department of Education after 1994 are also predominantly located in communities occupied by members of the African population. Most of these schools are quintile 1, 2 or 3 schools and declared as no fee schools.
It was virtually impossible for most governing bodies to improve the quality of education at their schools with the limited income (between R103 and R389 in the former black schools) they were able to collect from their parents. It is understandable that the amount of school fees per child per year as determined by each schools governing body, will differ significantly. These differences are a result of income differences between the white and black communities that still prevail.

To address these income inequalities, the National Norms for School Funding (Department of Education, 2006) divided schools into five quintiles, and state funds are allocated to the schools according to their poverty level (quintile 5 schools are schools in the most affluent areas). Each quintile accommodates 20 per cent of the total number of schools. All schools in quintile 1, 2 and 3 have also been declared as no-fee paying schools. This means that the parents are no longer obliged to pay school fees (Department of Education, 2006), but the schools in quintile 4 and 5 still can and do collect compulsory school fees from parents. Tables 1 and 2 indicate that prior to the no-fee policy, the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools had on average between R103 and R389 per child per year. Further, most of these schools also only succeeded in collecting less than 50 per cent of the possible fees from parents. After the 2006 no-fee school policy, the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools have more funds because the R738 allocation (Department of Education, 2006) per child per year is substantially more than the R389 per child under the school fee system. The quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools still have limited funds; especially when compared to the R4022 in the former white schools in Gauteng.

To be able to provide sufficient funding to the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools, the government has to allow the quintile 4 and 5 schools to collect school fees because this decreases the burden on the state and makes it possible to provide funds to the lower quintile schools. However, it is questionable whether the funds allocated to the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools are sufficient for their governing bodies to provide quality education if the R389 is compared with the R4022. The difference in available funds remains substantial.

The no-fee school policy may release the pressure on most governing bodies to raise funds, but there are questions about the parental governors’ abilities of the no-fee schools to manage and govern the large amounts of money they receive. The skills and experience of many parents in the quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools to manage funds may render them less capable of providing the necessary infrastructure and equipment for high-quality education. The quintile 4 and 5 schools not only have more funds and more competent governing body members but are able to allocate their school fee funds according to their school’s needs. This means, for example, that they can appoint extra teaching and non-teaching staff, an important factor in providing quality education. The quintile 1 to 3 schools have to allocate their budgets according to the strict financial guidelines from the Department of Education and may not, for example, appoint extra staff from their budget.

Instead of being a source of empowerment to be able to improve quality education, additional funding brings additional pressure because it is expected that the additional funding for quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools will be able to improve their education quality. If these governing bodies are not able to improve the quality of education, there will be doubts about the ability of governing bodies to be an important role player in achieving sustainable high-quality education for all.

**Conclusion**

Although the tri-annual elections may not provide sufficient time for parental governors to develop their potential or give them sufficient time to play an important role in providing high-quality education, it is a strong democratic and representative message. This democratic message is important
in a multi-party democracy: since 1948 the government has been dominated by one party. This strong one party democracy, initially the National Party and currently the African National Congress, may slip into an African phenomenon of a one party dominance, which does not allow active democratic participation. The limited training and exposure to representative and participative democracy may be sufficient to ensure a flourishing multi-party democracy, which may be the actual bottom line for the provision of high quality education for all.

It is not realistic to expect that most governing bodies will be able to make a sustainable and positive contribution to the quality of education in the short to medium term. However, if governing bodies receive appropriate training and they are given more power to support schools, they could contribute to quality education for all, especially with regard to teachers’ meeting their professional obligations. At this stage, only the few hundred schools really benefit from the powers accorded to governing bodies. Social justice for all children is still not a reality.

School governing bodies at different schools are experiencing diverse pressures in their efforts to achieve the aims of quality education as well as democratic representivity and participation. Parental governors’ competence to support their school may be the most significant stumbling block to achieving this quest.

The majority of governing bodies are far from being able to support schools to improve the quality of the education. However, even although their official responsibilities and functions may be changed to accommodate the specific context of schools and parental abilities, they could play an important role.

References


**Biographical Note**

Jan Heystek is a professor in educational management, leadership and governance at the University of Stellenbosch. His research focuses on school leadership and governance in schools with the school governing bodies as the central point of analysis. With the focus on governance he was the leading author and editor of two text books about human resource management and people leadership.