

SCHOOL FEES EXEMPTION: A PANACEA OR FINANCIAL DISTRESS FOR SCHOOLS?

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ABSTRACT

The pre-1994 education system created huge imbalances among public schools in South Africa, in terms of resource allocation. Surprisingly, the pronouncement by the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, to declare some schools “no-fee schools”, generated a mixed-bag of reactions within the entire education fraternity, “No-fee schools spark row” (Govender, 2006:6). Some sections are giving this decision their full support, while others are arguing that “new regulations will lead to standards dropping” (Govender & Makwabe 2007:4). Notwithstanding these contrasting views, an overwhelming majority (78%) of the school principals expressed satisfaction with this decision. This article, therefore, intends to explore the possible impact of this decision on the school's overall performance as perceived by principals of South African public schools.

Keywords: school fees, exemptions, panacea, distress, policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lack of funds for education undermines the delivery of quality education in South Africa (Bisschoff, 1997:132). Furthermore, schools are forced to make changes, to ensure that the decrease in resources does not lower overall education standards. This places a big responsibility on the shoulders of the principal and the governing body to use these monies effectively to ensure that education remains affordable (Bisschoff, 1997). Unfortunately, public education in South Africa is marked by the massive inequalities that exist in the material conditions of public schools and the socio-economic status of the communities that these schools serve. The effects of apartheid on the physical conditions of schools, the supply of learner support materials, the availability of quality educators, and on the conditions in which learners and their communities live, will not be overcome easily or quickly. The government is, however, committed to the realisation of socio-economic rights as laid down in the constitution, its stated goals being equality in educational output between learners and the realisation of the right to free quality basic education (Wilson, 2003:2). Interestingly, Veriava (2003) states that there is an emerging scholarly debate on whether or not charging school fees is constitutional in terms of the Bill of Rights. Further, if it is unconstitutional, a question could then be asked as to whether a challenge to the state policy of allowing schools to charge fees be more likely to succeed as a violation of the right to equality (section 9) or the right to basic education (section 29 (1)(a)). While constitutional scholars continue to make vigorous arguments for and against the abolishment of school fees, the immediate consequences of not paying school fees for poor families are dire.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Most of the public schools in South Africa mainly generate their income from one source, which is (arguably) school fees. However, principals claim that the successful collection of this money has been, and still proves to be, a daunting and fruitless task, which ultimately impacts adversely on the overall performance of their schools. In light of this, the South African government has decided to introduce a “no-fee school policy”. However, this decision was not welcomed with open arms by everyone. This article, therefore, intends to explore the possible impact of this decision on the school's overall performance as perceived by public school principals in South Africa.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Questionnaire

The methodology used in this article, followed mainly a quantitative approach, in a form of a self-administered questionnaire, consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. After both verbal and telephonic discussion with these principals, it was agreed that the questionnaires be delivered in person to these principals. Services of 5 fieldworkers together with help from some teachers working at some of these schools were solicited. From this effort, a total number of eighty-five (n=85) questionnaires were given to these principals. These principals made up the convenient sampled population of this study. A total of (n=78) questionnaires were returned fully completed. The questionnaire items, over and above biographical data, focused on the following pertinent issues:

- Are you a private/independent or public school?
- Is it a primary or secondary school?
- Where is the school located?
- Are you a Section 21 school?
- What is your school's main source of income? Please state/mention.
- Do you have any other ways of generating income for your school?
- Since when did you embark on these extra income-generating exercise/s?
- Are you affected by the Minister of Education's decision to exempt qualifying parents from paying school fees?
- How has/will this decision affect your school's finances?
- How many learners are affected by the Minister's decision at your school?

3.2 Population and sampling

This population consisted of principals from all racial groups, representing both primary and secondary schools, found in and around the Greater Mangaung area (made up of Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba-Nchu) in the Free State Province. The conveniently selected sampling population consisted of 78 principals from local schools, consisting of (n=42) primary schools and (n=36) secondary schools, found within the Greater Mangaung area. About 44% of these schools are located within the semi-urban areas, mainly Botshabelo townships and Thaba-Nchu's "trust" areas ("trust" in this case refers to an area controlled by a chief/headman). The rationale for targeting and selecting principals was based on factors such as time constraints; accessibility and readily available financial data from the financial clerks of these schools. This route was encouraged and pursued after an unsuccessful attempt to solicit this information from responsible members of various governing bodies. All the respondents averaged 45 years of age, with 68% of them having over ten years experience as school principals.

It is, therefore, essential to indicate that due to the small size of the sample population, inferences and assertions made in this article will serve only as an indication of the current feeling among principals of public schools in this country, regarding the impact of the school fee exemption policy, without necessarily laying any claim to national representativity of the findings.

4. DISCUSSION

A report by Pillay (n.d.:23) states that in late 2001, township schools were said to charge between R100 and R500 a year while suburban schools charged R300 to R1 000 a month. In the Western Cape, annual primary school fees ranged from R50 at Vuyani Primary in Gugulethu to R500 at Garlandale Primary (Athlone), R3 600 at Sea Point Primary and R5 620 at Grove Primary (Claremont). High school fees ranged from R130 at Vuyiseka High (Philippi) to R1 200 at Livingstone High (Claremont), R6 800 at Camps Bay High and R9 600 at Wynberg Boys High. Primary schooling at Reddam House (Tokai), an independent school, cost R14 180 to R21 165 while secondary schooling cost R28 220 a year (DoE Survey, 2003).

According to Roithmayr (2002:1-7), nearly all public schools charge some amount for learners to attend. However, most schools do not collect much in the way of fees, and 55% of these schools are not able to raise more than R10 000 per year in total from fees. In contrast, public schools in the wealthiest communities are able to charge as much as R10 000 per learner; many good township schools charge as much as R6 700 per year, and good suburban schools as much as R15 480 per year.

Roithmayr (2002) further states that, historically, the practice of user fees can be traced, in part, to discriminatory practices adopted at the end of apartheid in an effort to retain white privilege in education. At the end of the 1980s, the old regime had begun to prepare the country's white public schools for transition to a new democratic government. As part of that process, the government asked parents to choose from three alternative models of integration and school funding. A vote for Model A schools would have made state schools completely private. Model A schools would have received a 45% subsidy, phased in over three years. Model B schools would have remained state schools, but could admit black students up to 50% of the school's maximum enrolment.

Most notably, a vote for Model C schools would have created so-called "state-aided schools." These schools would have received 75% of their budgets via state funding, and would have been responsible for supplying the remaining 25% of their operating budgets through user fees from parents and private voluntary donations. Model C schools, like Model B schools, could also admit black students capped at 50% of enrolment. Therefore, the biggest challenge and moral obligation for the new democratic South African government is to urgently embark on a process of redress, so as to get the previously disenfranchised schools on par with those schools that were previously advantaged in terms of resources. In an attempt to address this imperative, the South African Department of Education released its amendments to the legal framework governing fees and funding in public schools. The purpose of the amendments is to ensure that public schools are accessible to South Africa's poorest learners (Veriava and Wilson, 2003). These learners and their parents experience many difficulties with regard to paying school fees. Despite their legal entitlement to relief in terms of the Exemption from Payment of School Fees Regulations (1998), many learners are (still) denied access to education because their parents are unable to pay school fees.

In the budget speech, the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor recognised the very real problem of school fees: "the door of learning often closes in the face of parents who cannot pay school fees or the associated costs of schooling." The Minister noted: "poor parents' property is seized; school governing bodies refuse to assist parents who are entitled to a fee exemption" Mohlala (2006:1). It is further reported that the Minister's consideration of subsidy increases for richer schools in 2007 is welcomed, however, schools in the poorest quintiles (40%) will be fee-free and receive bigger subsidies. But in schools in the richer areas, fewer and fewer parents can pay the school fees (Quail, 2006:43). The South African Department of Education decided to divide schools into (i) no-fee schools; and (ii) fee-charging schools. All the schools in South Africa are divided into five categories, known as "quintile". Each category contains 20% of all learners (School fees, 2006:2).

The category in which a school belongs to is determined by (i) where the school is located; (ii) the wealth of the community (measured by household incomes, numbers of dependants and household education levels); and (iii) physical conditions at the school, for example, crowding (paragraph 101C of the Norms and Standards).

5. REFLECTIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL FEES ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The following media reports summed up not only the conditions prevailing in most of the South African public schools as a result of school fees, but also the contrasting views held on the effects of school fees, "principal recalls debt collectors" (Yende, 2006:10); "no-fee schools spark row (Govender, 2006:6); "wasted chances – no school fees, no promotion" (Musetha, 2006:15); "no more fees – poorest kids won't pay for schooling" (Daily Sun, 2006:2); "school subsidies welcome" (Quail, 2006:43).

The findings of the research report entitled "Relocation and Access to Schools" by Wilson and Veriava (2003:12) paints a clear picture of the current state of events in a number of communities, and their study focused on Sol Plaatjie. Wilson and Veriava (2003) found that those households in which children regularly attend school bear a significant financial burden in the context of already dire poverty. The median income in Sol Plaatjie is R640 per month. Between a third and a half of households in the settlement live in poverty, on an absolute measure of R490 per month. Around 20% live in what might be called "ultra-poverty" using an absolute measure of R245 per month. (for more information in this case, feel free to consult the article of Veriava in their communitylawcentre.org.za website). The unemployment rate in Sol Plaatjie is 41%.

Furthermore, the Sunday Sun of 29 October 2006 reported on the unfortunate case of the typical harsh realities attributable to charging school fees. The Limpopo education department has expressed shock and dismay over the sad story of a 10-year-old learner who was forced to repeat the same grade because her parent failed to pay her school fees. Puleng (not her true name) of Matshena village in Mutale, near the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa, was only promoted to grade 3 on October 16 after her mother raised the necessary R140. This means Puleng will sit for her grade 3 exams with other learners this week, although she spent the whole year in grade 2. Puleng's elder sister, Dineo (not her real name) says her younger sister repeated the class because Matshena Primary School principal refused to give out her report from the previous year. This situation occurred despite the principal knowing that Puleng was from a needy family. Many children, including Puleng, have been subjected to the same treatment by this principal after parents failed to pay school fees, which are now R70, including R10 for a farewell function.

In response, the chairperson of the school governing body, June (not her real name) says: "Parents agreed that no learner would get a report without paying the school funds." Similarly, Mohlala (2006:2) states that a mother who was slow to pay school fees ended up with a bill from lawyers that was more than her initial debt.

It is further argued that the fees system contributes to growing class inequalities in public education, given the continued racial inequalities in income that effectively maintain racial differences in education. While some of the more expensive schools have established bursaries for poor students, many have not (the state of the South African youth, nd:17). Table 1 indicates a summative illustration of discrepancies between rich and poor communities in this country, and how they impact on the school's budget in the end.

Table1: Comparative spending breakdown.

Item	Poor community	Rich community
Non-personnel transfer from Province	R196 000	R196 000
Teacher salaries (30 teachers @ R87 000/year)	R2 610 000	R2 610 000
School fees	R50 000	R2 500 000
Total	R2 856 000	R5 306 000

Adapted from: IDASA. 1999. Intergovernmental Fiscal Review – Education (Cape Town)

Clearly, a school located within a poor community stands little chance of attracting sufficient funds to its coffers, whilst the opposite is also true of the school within an affluent community. Redress surely requires legislative intervention if quality education opportunities are to be created and shared equitable to the two sets of children coming from two diverse socio-economic backgrounds. So, if school fees are the cause of this discomfort, then necessary steps need to be taken, without necessarily jeopardising or disadvantaging any other party unfairly.

6. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK – SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL ACT UNPACKED

Significant legislative and policy reform has occurred in the post-apartheid era to fulfil the state's constitutional obligation under section 29 and the equivalent provision in the interim Constitution. The purpose of such legislative reform is best described in the preamble to the South African School Act 84 of 1996 (ERP, 2006); the Norms and Standards for School Funding seeks to give effect to the funding provision for schools in terms of the School Act.

The funding aims at providing redress to the most underdeveloped and poorest schools and communities by directing that: (1) 60% of available recurrent non-personnel expenditure should go to 40% of the poorest schools, in each provincial education department, (2) providing guidelines for subsidies to independent schools that are paid according to the range of eligibility criteria and the range of school fees charged (Quarterly Review, 2001:69).

Section 39 of SASA provides that a school may only charge school fees when a majority of parents attending the annual budget meeting adopts a resolution to do so. It also provides that parents must determine the amount of fees to be charged at this meeting along with criteria to exempt those parents who are unable to pay fees. Regulation 3(1)(a), as read with 5(3), set the parameters that schools must adhere to when determining an exemption policy: A school must fully exempt parents whose income is less than ten times the annual school fee, and partially exempt those whose income is less than 30 times, but more than 10 times, the annual school fees. Regulation 4(1)(a) obliges the school governing body to notify parents in writing of the amount charged by the school and of the criteria and procedures for exemptions. Regulation 5(2) obliges the school governing body to take into consideration certain factors when considering an application for an exemption including, among others, the parents' total annual necessary expenses, their assets and liabilities, number of dependants, standard of living and any other information relevant to the granting or denial of an exemption (Campher, Du Preez, Grobler, Loock and Shaba (2003:53-54) and Bisschoff (1997:128). In terms of Section 40 of SASA, a school can only sue parents for non-payment of fees where it has correctly determined its fees and exemption policy and where parents have not applied for an exemption but have failed to pay the fees set by the school (Veriava, 2003:15).

It is essential that school governing bodies understand how to apply and comply with this Act for an exemption in a 'fee-charging' school, as stipulated by law, to avoid similar cases such as the one of Sorsa and Sorsa versus Simonstown School (for more information on this case, feel free to consult the article of Veriava in their communitylawcentre.org.za website). According to the South African School Act of 1996, if annual school fees are determined in terms of section 39 of the Act, the following categories will be applicable for purposes of exemption of a parent from payment of such school fees –

- a) if the combined annual gross income of the parents is less than ten times the annual school fees per learner, the parent qualifies for full exemption (Pretorius & Veriava, 2006:7) provides illustrative examples

Example 1: A **single parent** has one child in one school. This learner's annual school fees are R2500 and the additional school expenses over the year come to R20. The parent's gross income for that year is R25 200.

- $\left[E = \frac{F + Tfy_0}{(Y + y_0)} \right] \div [I] \geq [10\%]$
- $\left[E = \frac{2500 + 20 + 0}{(1 + 0)} \right] \div [25200] \geq [10\%]$
- $\left[E = \frac{2520}{1} \right] \div [25200] \geq [10\%]$
- $\frac{2520}{25200} \geq [10\%]$
- $0,1 > 10\%$
- $0.1 \times 100 > 10\%$
- $10\% = 10\%$

The parent qualifies for a full exemption, as the left hand side of the equation is equal to 10%.

Example 2: **Two parents** have one learner in the current school, whose annual school fees are R2500 and where the additional expenses are R20. They also have another learner in another school, whose annual school fees are R1 000. Parent A earns R8 000 a year and parent B earns R9 600 a year, so together they earn R17 600. They ask for the second learner's fees to be taken into account.

- $\left[E = \frac{F + Tfy_0}{(Y + y_0)} \right] \div [I] \geq [10\%]$
- $\left[E = \frac{2500 + 20 + 1000 \times 1}{(1 + 1)} \right] \div [17600] \geq [10\%]$
- $\left[E = \frac{3520}{2} \right] \div [17600] \geq [10\%]$
- $\frac{17600}{17600} \geq [10\%]$
- $0,1 > 10\%$
- $0.1 \times 100 > 10\%$
- $10\% = 10\%$

The parent qualifies for a full exemption, as the left hand side of the equation is equal to 10%.

- b) if the combined annual gross income of the parents is less than thirty times but more than ten times the annual school fees per learner, the parent qualifies for partial exemption; for example (SASA, 2006:8):

- $$\left[E = \frac{F + Ifyo}{(Y + yo)} \right] \div [I] \geq [10\%]$$

- $$\left[E = \frac{2500 + 20 + 0}{(1 + 0)} \right] \div [30000] \geq [10\%]$$

- $$\left[E = \frac{2520}{1} \right] \div [30000] \geq [10\%]$$

- $$\frac{2520}{30000} \geq [10\%]$$

- 0,84 > 10%
- 0.84 x 100 > 10%
- 8.4% = 10%

Since 8,4% is less than 10%, the parent qualifies for partial exemption. See Table 2 below for the exempted amount. As the parent's expenditure on education divided by their income is 8,4%, the table shows that they qualify for an exemption of 91%. So, 91% of the annual school fee of R2500 is R2275. The parent only has to pay the remaining non-exempted portion of the fees or 9%, 9% of R2 500 being R225. The parent only has to pay R225 instead of R2 500 in school fees for that learner in that year.

- c) if the combined annual gross income of the parents is more than thirty times the annual school fees per learner, the parent does not qualify for exemption.

Table 2: Calculating exemptions from school fees

Levels of fee exemptions				
<i>Number of learners</i>				
	1 learner	2 learners	3 learners	4 learners
2.0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2.5%	0%	0%	0%	14%
3.0%	0%	7%	22%	33%
3.5%	7%	26%	38%	47%
4.0%	25%	40%	50%	57%
4.5%	39%	51%	59%	65%
5.0%	50%	60%	67%	71%
5.5%	59%	67%	73%	77%
6.0%	67%	73%	78%	81%
6.5%	73%	78%	82%	85%
7.0%	79%	83%	86%	88%
7.5%	83%	87%	89%	90%
8.0%	88%	90%	92%	93%
8.5%	91%	93%	94%	95%
9.0%	94%	96%	96%	97%
9.5%	97%	98%	98%	98%
10%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Adapted from: School fees (2006:10)

It is worth noting that the Norms and Standards provide details on the exemption procedures. Parents wishing to qualify for an exemption must apply in writing, or in person if desired. When submitting an application, they must provide evidence of income, assets and liabilities, and other information requested by the school governing bodies (Roithmayr, 2002:5). Furthermore, governing bodies must render a decision within twenty-one days of the application, and if the governing body denies a request for exemption, the parents have the right to appeal.

7. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section provides a detailed summary of views expressed by the schools' principals regarding the impact of the exemption of school fees on their schools' overall performance.

Table 3: Type and location of schools

Type of school	Are you a public school?		Location of school	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	urban	semi-urban
Black schools	100	-	56%	44%
Primary	40	-	32%	26%
Secondary	60	-	24%	18%
White schools	100	-	100%	-
Primary	70	-	100%	-
Secondary	30	-	100%	-

The composition of schools clearly indicates that quite a sizeable number of schools are located in semi-urban areas, and this automatically brings to mind the type of learners, and material conditions, these schools might be operating under especially compared to those found within the more affluent urban areas. The type of challenges school principals are faced with between these two types of environments is surely bound to bring a very interesting dimensions to the debate regarding school fees.

Table 4: What is your school's main source of income?

School type	School fees (%)		Extra source (%)		Collection strategy working (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Black schools	100	0	12	88	100	0
White schools	100	0	45	55	50	50
Coloured schools	100	0	15	85	5	95

Interestingly, most schools across racial divide indicate that their main source of income is school fees, with mainly affluent former white schools having an extra source of income to augment their school fees. Another difference between black township schools and affluent white schools seem to center around the collection or strategies applied to collect these funds, and the success rate seems to be higher in affluent white schools than in black town schools. One principal remarked that, “We apply various strategies such as cultural day; valentine's day; casual day, and raffling, etc. to generate extra income, support for these endeavours is forever disappointing, so we depend primarily on the school funds for everything the school may require”. In addition, another principal argues that “even corporate businesses are reluctant to sponsor township schools, they prefer town or suburban schools, because those kids' parents own or manage those companies, it is not easy to run a township school, and yet you are expected to deliver at the end of the day”.

Table 5: Is your school affected by the Minister’s school fee exemption rule?

Type of school	Yes (%)	No (%)	Uncertain (%)
Black schools:	100	0	0
White schools:	86	12	2
Coloured schools:	100	0	0

Clearly, majority of the public schools are directly affected by the “no-fee policy”, irrespective of race or colour. “We are now facing a challenge of mixed-classes, as more and more blacks come to our predominantly white schools, and some of these children are not from well-to-do families. Special arrangements must now be made to accommodate them, without compromising quality and standards”, as one white principal remarked. Surely, the developments are likely to increase as more black parents send their children to former white schools for a perceived better education. However, the ever-contentious issue for most of these parents becomes the high school fess charged by these schools.

Table 6: How will this decision affect your school's finances?

Type of school	Good (%)	Badly (%)	No impact (%)	Uncertain (%)
Black schools	96	2	0	2
White schools	40	38	0	22
Coloured schools	99	0	0	1
Total / mean	78	14	0	8

A massive number (78%) of school principals applauded the government on this decision, and the following remarks clearly demonstrate this: "apartheid has disadvantaged and compromised a black child's education, and it was time our democratic government started to seriously attend to these issues, as a matter of urgency"; "everything we did depended on the money we had, and if parents are unable to afford the school fee, that puts a huge strain to the normal functioning of a school"; "it is long overdue, principals of township schools have been subjected to unfair criticism in as far as their school performance is concerned, and yet, scales in terms of resources were never equal"; "our schools' finances have always given us a headache, it has been headache number one for principals, and this decision comes as a relief for township schools, and we need to congratulate the government with this bold decision"; the material conditions of our schools have been undesirable for decades, and this has put pressure on our schools to deliver without even basic teaching and learning material, and development funds hardly assisted us".

Conversely, some principals, no matter how small percentage they represent, argued that this decision is likely to have a rippling effect for some schools, especially in as far as paying parents are concerned, "the increasing number of exemptions has reduced school income and put greater pressure on a few parents who do pay escalating fees. Let's hope that budgets are realistic and the provinces receive additional funds" (Quail, 2006:43). "The minister's decision will only have a good impact on township schools if the money from the government is paid timeously throughout the year, and our school programmes are not being interrupted" said one principal.

Table 7: How many learners are affected by this decision at your school?

Type of school	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Coloured (%)
Primary school	95	35	78
Secondary school	70	10	62

Clearly, the impact of the no-fee policy will affect different schools differently, with primary schools dominating. It stands to reason that both black and coloured schools are the most affected by non-payment of school fees, and the no-fee school policy will come as a huge relief for these schools.

8. NO-FEE POLICY: AN INTERVENTION MEASURE FOR NEEDY SCHOOLS

It is reported that over five million school children across the country will benefit from the no-fee schools policy (Daily Sun, 2006:1). In her reaction to an article which stated that, the Department of Education would not be able to implement no-fee schools in 2006, Minister Pandor strongly affirmed that government remained committed to implementing no-fee schools in 2006 (Media Statement, 2006).

Table 8: No-fee schools in 2007

Province	Number of learners	Number of schools
Eastern Cape	1 224 711	3 825
Free State	298 184	1 304
Gauteng	383 674	421
Kwazulu-Natal	1 173 503	3 341
Limpopo	1 015 524	2 557
Mpumalanga	404 432	938
Northern Cape	102 244	335
North West	267 042	728
Western Cape	132 560	407
Total	5 001 874	13 856

Source: RSA (2006:12)

As of January 2006, the country's nine provinces began drafting their lists of schools and pupils set to qualify for relief from payment of school fees. Table 7 provides a full list of no-fee schools per province, as published in the Government Gazette, and is indicative of the commitment of the government to honour its promise on no-fee school policy. The no-fee policy empowers the education minister to absolve certain schools from charging fees, based on the poverty levels of the area they serve. The department is also developing a scheme which will allow schools in richer areas to receive subsidies if they enroll non-fee paying pupils.

9. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The South African School Act requires the Minister of Education to make regulations about the equitable criteria and procedures for exemption of parents who are unable to pay school fees (section 39(4)) (DoE, 1998). It is required of governing bodies to notify all parents in writing about the equitable criteria and procedures for exemption, as decided on by the parents at a general meeting at which the budget is considered. Since fee revenue is determined both by the fee level and by the number of fee payers, the national norms relating to exemption are designed to assist parent bodies to make appropriate and equitable decisions about the fee level and the exemption thresholds (DoE, Norms & Standards, 1996).

School fees have, for a very long time, been a thorn in the flesh of most principals in this country. Much of their time has been spent devising strategies of coercing parents to honour their financial obligations to the school, even if it sometimes means using methods that contravene the law. What is undisputable is the fact that most of these schools are not functioning the way they are supposed to, and this is (arguably) not because of their own doing. The quality of education delivered by the poorly resourced schools will undoubtedly come under severe scrutiny. Basic teaching and learning material, such as textbooks, chalk, stationery, and cleaning materials, etc. can hardly be afforded by most of these schools, requirements that surely make a huge impact on the overall performance of their schools. Clearly some measure of intervention was inevitable, the no-fee schools Act cannot, therefore, be in any way malicious. Instead, it attempts to address gross abnormalities and socio-economic imbalances that stem from the legacy of apartheid.

The Act comes as a reprieve for this poverty stricken sector of our society, as well as to eliminate constant headaches for school governing bodies regarding fruitless attempts of trying to collect school fees from parents. Surely, this Act is a definite panacea for most of these impoverished schools, the only concern being timeous allocation of these funds to schools by the Department of Education, as well as the modalities of implementation by the school governing bodies, for reporting and accountability purposes.

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