

Exploring the implementation of the *TIME* Home Learning programme and learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds

The *TIME* programme in its ecosystem: How can provincial education departments support the implementation and success of *TIME*?

This brief was written for Wordworks by Magali von Blottnitz, with input from colleagues. It can be referenced as follows: von Blottnitz, M. (2024). Exploring the implementation of the *TIME* Home Learning programme and learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds, Brief 2, Wordworks: Cape Town.

This is the second in a series of learning briefs that explore the implementation of the *TIME* Home Learning programme and the learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds. This brief is based on interviews held in 2022 with the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) Head Office and district officials. It focuses on the role of provincial education departments in supporting the *TIME* programme. A more detailed report on this topic is available on request¹.

TIME, a programme incubated in 2020 with the support of the WCED

As a national education NGO headquartered in Cape Town, Wordworks has had a longstanding relationship with the WCED. The WCED has supported Wordworks' tutoring and parental programmes since 2009 and later adopted the Grade R Stellar classroom programme for language and emergent literacy which was designed by Wordworks.

The *TIME* programme (see Learning Brief 1) was born after a prototype version of it was submitted to the @Home Learning Forum, a multi-stakeholder forum set up in 2020 under the auspices of the WCED, to seek responses to the COVID-related school closures.



“When I was tasked by the @Home Learning Forum to quality assure *TIME*, I saw that it was excellent.

Almaret du Toit, CES
Foundation Phase at
WCED Head Office

The Forum tasked Chief Education Specialist (CES), Almaret du Toit, who heads the Foundation Phase team at WCED Head Office, with reviewing the quality of the *TIME* programme. A formal endorsement of *TIME* was published in February 2021.

How the WCED supports the *TIME* programme

Over the years, with extensive engagement between Wordworks and WCED, the department's support of the *TIME* programme has grown to cover some aspects of implementation.

Diagram 1: Dimensions of the WCED's support of the *TIME* programme

1	Inception stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catalysed the invention of the programme Endorsed the programme
2	Implementation stage	Logistics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Districts: key intermediaries in the distribution chain
3		Procurement and sponsorship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province-wide tentative procurement withdrawn due to delays Ad hoc sponsorship of packs
4		Support and promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various communication and promotion efforts Some subject advisors encourage schools to sign up and they then provide implementation support

- At a **logistical** level, districts became key intermediaries in the chain for the distribution of freshly printed term packs to the schools, from where they would reach parents. For most schools, materials packed by Wordworks are delivered to the relevant district offices for collection or further dissemination. For the rural schools situated far from their district office, districts organise their internal courier services to transport the packs to the relevant schools.
- Regarding **procurement**, the WCED attempted to procure packs for 100 schools, but later withdrew the procurement due to delays. In some limited cases, individual districts have allocated some funding to sponsor packs for selected schools.
- The WCED has also always supported the programme through various **communication** and **promotion** efforts. In some areas, subject advisors encourage the schools in their circuit to sign up for the programme and they then provide implementation **support**.

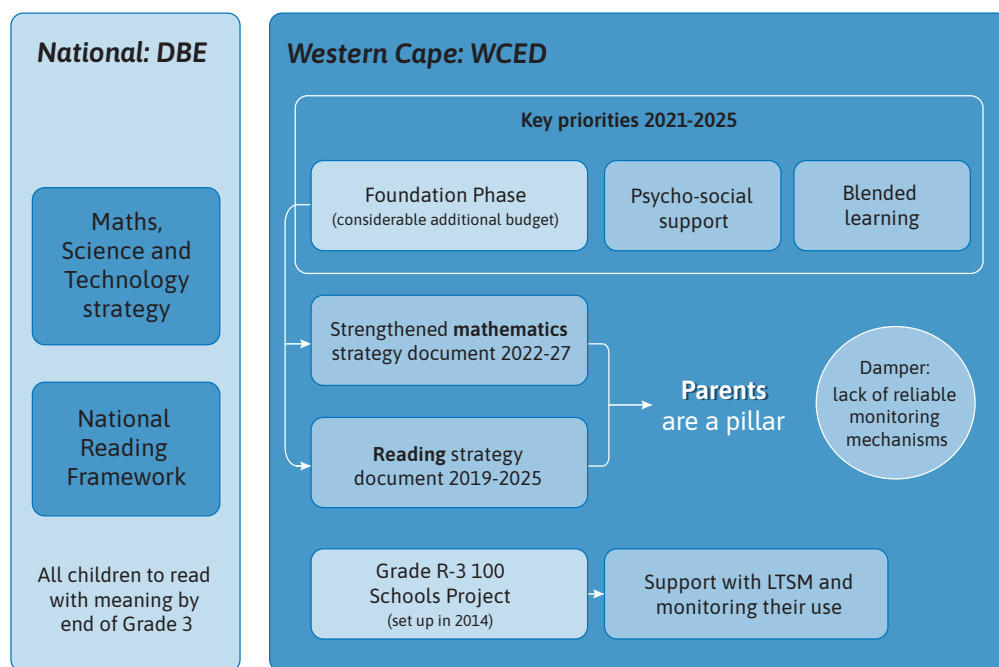
¹ To request the report please email info@wordworks.org.za

Strategic alignment between *TIME* and the *WCED*

The *TIME* programme aligns well with the national and provincial objectives and strategy, specifically the decision to prioritise Foundation Phase as one of the key priorities of the current leadership. The province's mathematics and reading strategy documents, which align with corresponding frameworks at national level, articulate the emphasis on early learning and the importance of laying solid foundations in Grade R.

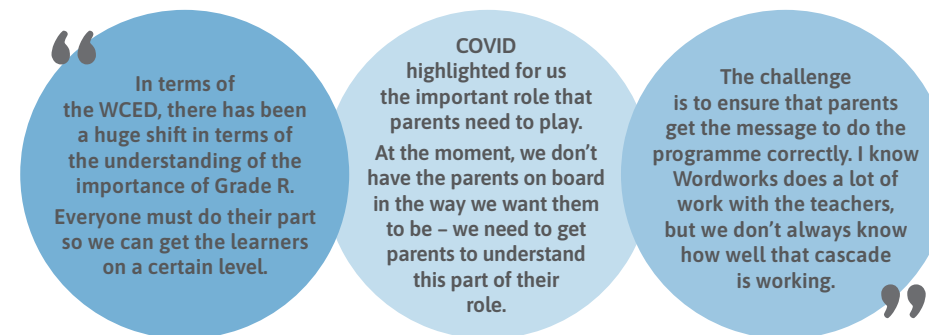
The Grade R–3 100 Schools Project of the *WCED*, which foresees the provision of support materials to 100 under-resourced schools, also provided a potential framework under which the department could procure *TIME* packs for a large number of learners.

Diagram 2: Aspects of the DBE's and *WCED*'s strategies with relevance to *TIME*



Although the province's reading and mathematics strategies formally recognise parents as a key pillar in their child's education, the department's parental strategy remains embryonic. In the absence of control or monitoring mechanisms, it is difficult for a highly formal structure such as the *WCED* to engage with the very informal home sector. In particular, despite a considerable budget being allocated to

Foundation Phase, this was spent primarily on Grade 1–3 classroom materials, with very little spent on Grade R and on resources for the homes.



Almareet du Toit, CES Foundation Phase at WCED Head Office

The role of Foundation Phase subject advisors

The *WCED*'s eight districts have an extensive network of subject advisors supporting teachers and facilitating the roll-out of provincial programmes. At the time of our interviews, there were 65 subject advisors focused on Foundation Phase, supported by Foundation Phase coordinators – as well as learning support advisors who have a particular focus on the well-being, health and special needs of specific learners.

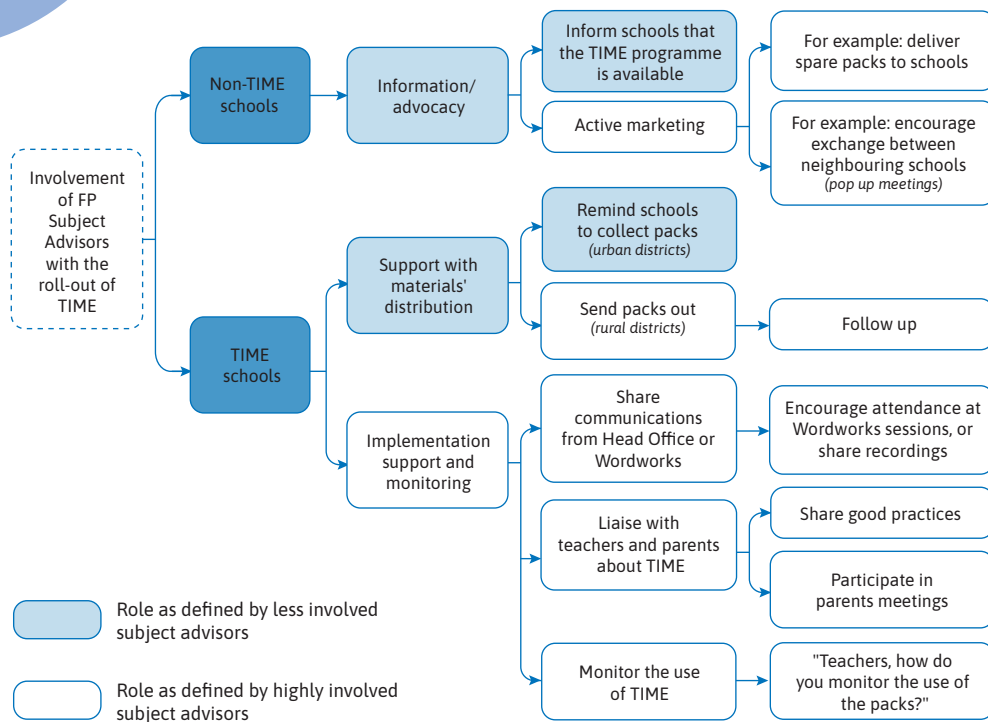
The role of subject advisors includes monitoring the implementation of programmes supported by the *WCED*. To what extent this includes the *TIME* programme, seems to be subject to interpretation.

Of the four subject advisors we interviewed, two appeared to be highly involved in the promotion of *TIME* as well as in providing support to the schools that have acquired the *TIME* materials. The other two subject advisors were less involved and were less aware of the details of the programme.

They understood their role as being limited to two tasks: informing non-*TIME* schools about the existence of the *TIME* programme, and providing logistical support to help *TIME* schools receive their *TIME* packs. These diverging understandings are represented in Diagram 3.

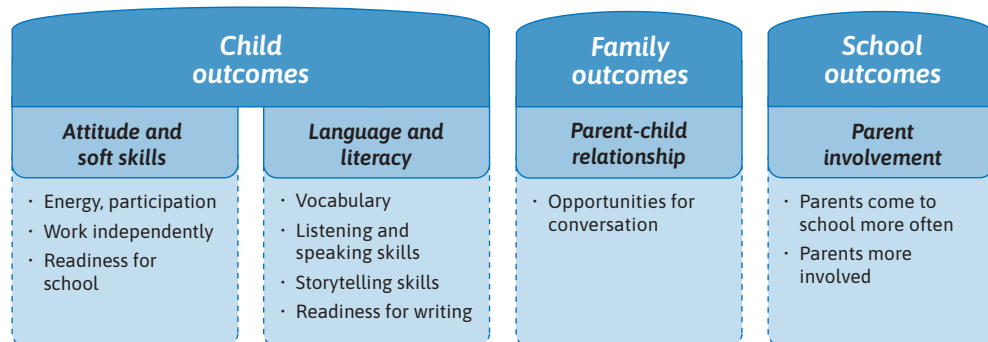


Diagram 3: How Foundation Phase subject advisors understand their role with regard to TIME



The two subject advisors who were highly involved, also shared the richest observations about the impact of TIME on the child, the family and the school. Their feedback is represented in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4: Subject advisors' feedback on observed outcomes of TIME at their schools



WCED's support of TIME programme: Constraints and opportunities

Despite the WCED's endorsement of the TIME programme, practical support was constrained by the following issues.

Funding and procurement

Wordworks had hoped that the WCED could allocate some of its Foundation Phase funds to enable the low-budget schools access to the TIME packs. However, despite some small-scale sponsorships, the funding priorities (namely, covering classroom needs before attending to resources for homes) and procurement delays prevented the success of large-scale procurement attempts.

Competing demands on capacity

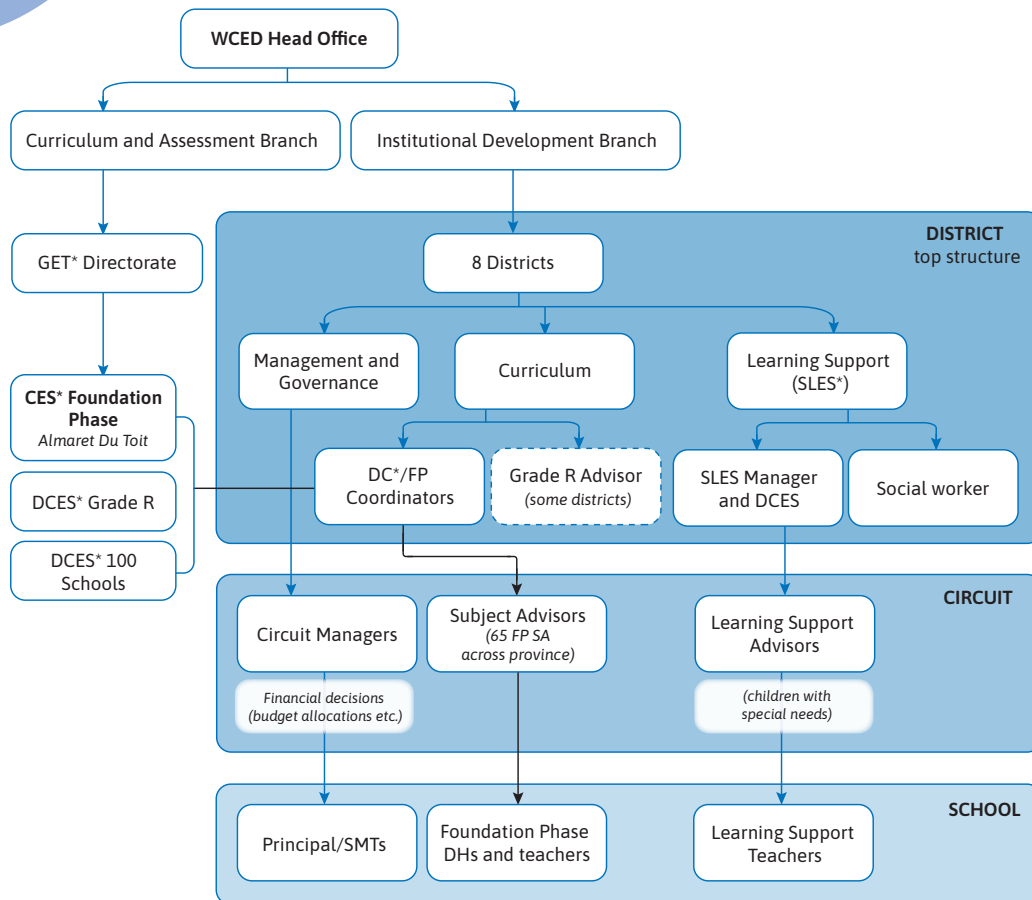
Despite the Western Cape's comparatively extensive network of subject advisors, those specialising in Foundation Phase face heavy demands on their time. They have to support 300 or more teachers each, and monitor a large number of different programmes, including Elit and R-maths; TIME; Life Skills workshops; synthetic phonics interventions like Jolly Phonics or Funda Wande's Bala Wande; as well as other programmes that extend beyond Foundation Phase.

The structures of the districts

Parents are a pillar of the WCED's reading and maths strategy. However, the districts' internal structures are not geared to enabling the mobilisation of parents in a holistic way. As Diagram 5 shows, districts are organised in three 'components': Management and Governance, Curriculum, and Learning Support. The Curriculum section of the districts, namely the subject advisors, appear to be the most appropriate group to support the dissemination and use of the TIME learning resources, but some advisors see their role as limited to the confines of the classroom. The Learning Support section has a clear mandate to engage with caregivers, but these professionals tend to focus on learners with special needs. The Management and Governance section of districts, which would need to support school management teams in securing funding for the TIME packs, is not always able to do so due to lack of awareness of the benefits of this resource.



Diagram 5: Structures of the WCED that play or could play a role in supporting TIME



But within these constraints, opportunities were identified in 2022 for more synergies between the WCED's operations and the TIME programme, as set out below.

• District involvement

- › Districts could set goals and targets around TIME, or adopt TIME as one of their term focuses.
- › TIME-related observations could be added to the various **monitoring tools** used by WCED officials on their visits to schools.
- › TIME could be included in some of the **school-community meetings or forums** which districts have with parents and community role-players.

- › Wordworks may need to collaborate with districts to deepen the subject advisors' awareness of TIME.

• Support and incentives for teachers

- › Subject advisors could use TIME toolkits to engage with teachers on their mediation of the programme.
- › Districts could organise face-to-face workshops with DHs.
- › Professional learning communities among and within TIME schools could help to share best practices.
- › The classroom assistants could be equipped to support teachers with the mediation of the TIME programme.
- › Teachers who meet the criteria could get certified and claim 15 SACE professional development points.

• Marketing and communication

- › Public events could be held to create visibility for TIME.
- › Awareness campaigns for communities could promote involvement with the programme.
- › If TIME parents could qualify for a certification, this could motivate them to sustain their engagement with the TIME activities.
- › Tapping into local radio stations, newspapers and other neighbourhood networks could help to promote TIME in targeted communities.

Apart from the opportunities listed under "District involvement", most of these opportunities were actioned in 2023.

Implications for other provinces

What the experience in the Western Cape has made clear, is that embedding the offering of TIME in the existing structures of the education department is a difficult undertaking, which requires intentionality, time and dedicated resources.

Rolling out the TIME programme in other provinces will require a sound understanding of the strategies, structures and processes of that provincial education department. Diagram 6 shows some areas and questions that will need to guide due diligence in fact-finding the systemic context in which TIME can be rolled out.



Diagram 6: Elements to investigate before rolling out TIME in a new province

	Key areas of investigation	Example of questions
1	Strategic planning cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeframe for revision of current orientations
2	Current strategic orientations (on paper and in action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place of Foundation Phase? Place of Grade R and 1? Place of parental involvement?
3	Existing programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any third-party programmes supported in Foundation Phase? Room for trilateral agreement?
4	Department structures (Head Office and districts)	What human resources for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy Logistical support, etc.
5	Procurement processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeframes Requirements

With a sound understanding of these five areas, it will be possible to design a process for roll-out in new provinces. This process would need to be iterative and comprehensive and would require the support of a managing agency embedded in that province. Diagram 7 outlines a possible iterative process for roll-out.

Diagram 7: The iterative process of preparing for roll-out in a new province

