

## **An investigation into the basic safety and security status of schools' physical environments**

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*Safety at schools is beginning to receive attention in South Africa as articulated in various media reports. Schools as sites of teaching and learning can deliver their educational mandate only in safe and secure conditions, free from injuries, crime, and violence. Basic school safety and security features are therefore essential at schools. I argue for the safety and security of the school's physical environment as a sine qua non and a starting point for overall school safety. Because reported incidents of injuries, crime, and violence seem most prevalent in township schools, I investigated the safety status of their physical environments. This was done through the phenomenological observation of their physical environments. It was found that school environments displayed some measure of basic safety, though there was a need to focus more on features like ensuring proper maintenance and surveillance systems, as well as on functional safety and security systems and procedures. An important finding related to the lack of conscious efforts aimed at creating safe and secure environments. It is recommended that schools focus on the basic safety and security of their physical environments, inter alia, purposefully planned school-based maintenance, surveillance and collaboration with stakeholders, including outside agencies like law-enforcement.*

### **Problem statement and aim**

Effective teaching and learning can take place only in a safe and secure school environment. Indeed, every community wants such an environment for its children. Lundberg (1994) posits that school safety encompasses the total learning environment, including learners, classrooms, the school campus, educators, parents, and the community. This view expounds what school safety is or entails.

Squelch (2001:138) defines a safe school as one that is free from danger and possible harm, where non-educators, educators and learners can work, teach and learn without fear or ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation or violence. A safe school is therefore a healthy school, in that it is physically and psycho-socially safe. The Independent Project Trust (IPT, 1999:3) confirms this by stating that a secure school environment has a very low risk of physical, emotional and psychological injury to its occupants.

Other than would be expected, if media reports are anything to go by, schools are the most unsafe places in South Africa. Headlines like "School head gunned down" (Sunday World, 2005); "Thugs target high school" (Daily Sun, 2005); "Violence at schools the order of the day" (Cape Argus, 2005); and "Teacher shot, learner held hostage at Cape school" (SABC News, 2005) are becoming common in various media.

These reported incidents seem to present a picture of schools under a deluge of violence and crime. However, these incidents project only one aspect of the status of safety at schools. Other incidents of concern, apart from violence and crime, include injuries to learners, both physical and psychological, although not as regularly reported. For instance, in one incident, an 11-year-old learner died when a wall of a prefabricated classroom under construction collapsed, pinning him underneath and also injuring four girls (Anon., 2004:2).

Donson and Wyngaard (2003) report that of the 493 injuries recorded in the School Injury

and Surveillance System in 2002, 50.8% were due to intentional and 47.1% to unintentional injury with the highest number (35.6%) of injured being aged 11 to 13 years, followed by 32.6% aged 8 to 10 years, 15% aged less than eight years and nearly 8% being 14 years and older. Anon. (2005) reports from published research that bullying is rife at Free State schools and includes punching, excessive tickling, direct vandalism, persistent teasing, gossip, racist remarks, deliberate exclusion from activities, blackmailing and sexual assault. Eliason and Frank (2002) report that among other incidents theft of property, fighting, physical violence and vandalism, bullying and intimidation, gangsterism and rape were major problems in schools they surveyed.

What is common about these incidents is that they all seem to have occurred in and around school campuses and mostly during school hours, which highlights the vulnerability of schools to safety-threatening incidents. This includes the ease with which schools are accessed and intruded into by unsafe elements, sometimes with violent and criminal consequences, as well as how unsafe schools' physical environmental conditions are.

Township schools are especially vulnerable to unsafe conditions and threats of violence due to, among other things, poor resources and infrastructure, their location, especially in and around informal settlements, the types of their building and environmental design and the fact that, to a large extent, most media accounts of poor safety and security at schools relate to them.

In this research I sought to investigate the status of basic safety and security features of schools' physical environments as aspects of school safety. It is argued that taking care of the basic safety and security features of a school's physical environment is an essential step towards ensuring school safety and security. This is premised on the notion that a safe and secure physical environment would make it difficult for safety-threatening incidents to occur and would make it easy for the school to address issues that threaten the school's psycho-social safety, like bullying on playgrounds. With this research I therefore attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the basic safety and security features of schools' physical environments?
- What is the basic safety and security status of township schools' physical environments?
- How can schools ensure the basic safety and security of their physical environments?

I aimed to investigate the basic safety and security features of schools' physical environments through a literature review on school safety and to explore on the basis of the literature review and the empirical study, how basic safety and security features of schools' physical environments can be ensured.

## **Research design**

### **Literature review**

Squelch (2001:138) propounds that a safe school is characterised by the presence of certain physical aspects such as a secure wall, fencing and gates, buildings that are in a good state of repair and well-maintained school grounds. Included in these indicators of school safety are good discipline, a culture conducive to teaching and learning, professional teacher conduct, good governance and management practices, and an absence or low level of crime and violence. These aspects, according to section 20(1)(g) & Section 21(1)(a) of the South African Schools Act, are mostly in the domain of the School Governing Bodies' (SGBs') functions (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

Whilst school safety is the SGBs' responsibility, the school principal and educators are

obliged to ensure learner safety during school hours. This is premised on the educators' *in loco parentis* status, as well as on the educator's position of authority and duty of care towards the learner (Prinsloo, 2005:7; Botha, 1994:75). The role of both the SGB and of educators illustrates the importance of collaborative efforts regarding school safety. Vienings, Commys and Geyer (2001) put emphasis on the fact that for safety measures at a school to work, all stakeholders need to be involved so as to create ownership and pride. With this background, it becomes imperative to look at basic safety and security features of schools' physical environments.

### Basic safety and security features of schools' physical environments

Safe and secure school environments are a requirement by law. Sections 24(1) and 28(1) of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) provide that "everyone has a right to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being" and every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation. The Gauteng Schools Act (Gauteng Department of Education, 1997) stipulates that all learners or educators shall be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence at schools and centres of learning.

School safety is best described by what a safe school is. As alluded to earlier, a safe school is a school that is physically and psycho-socially safe. Regarding the school's physical environment, the most visible aspects of such features are the quality of the security and maintenance of school buildings and grounds. This implies a clean and safe environment that is conducive to education and has security of property, well-cared for facilities, furniture and equipment, clean toilets, water and green environment and absence of harassment (Squelch, 2001:138).

The safety of the school campus and buildings, according to Schiffbauer (2000:73), includes: ensuring that buildings are safe for use and that attention is given to hallways, stairways and verandas where learners walk to and from classes, and other areas at the school, unused classrooms and outbuildings used for storage, electrical fittings and other service amenities, like plumbing pipes, fencing, lighting at night and sportsfields (*cf.* Stephens, 1995; IPT, 1999; Vienings, Commys & Geyer, 2001; WCED, 2003; Squelch, 2001; Geyer & Roberts, undated). In this regard, Reid (2000) advocates the general appearance of buildings as an indicator of the school's tolerance for misbehaviour and, by implication, for safety-threatening situations, and argues that school buildings must be clean, comfortable and devoid of signs of vandalism, damage and graffiti. This implies that school buildings need to be in a clean condition and that damage and graffiti need to be repaired as soon as possible so as to prevent further damage through appearances portraying a non-caring attitude. Therefore creating and ensuring school building safety revolves around the physical maintenance of buildings, i.e. the repair, replacement and general upkeep of the buildings, allows for the continued use of space for its intended purpose, and serves as an additional manifestation of ownership and caring (Carter & Carter, 2001).

School grounds encompass shrubs, trees and grass; drainage, sidewalks, fencing and gates; and access to the school for transportation and emergency procedures (Henderson & Rowe, 1998:98). In essence, school grounds present a manifestation of the safety of the whole school campus. Safety in this sense implies that the school grounds must be free of any safety threats, both to property and people at the school. This also relates to securing school grounds and making the campus welcoming, which implies a healthy and friendly school climate that makes everybody feel safe and part of the school (*cf.* Curriculum Review, 1999). This entails ensuring

campus cleanliness and establishing a regular maintenance system, including removal of such eyesores as graffiti, repairing broken facilities like broken doors and windows (Mackin, 1997), as well as securing the playgrounds, creating safe vehicular routes and parking areas, designing safety-promoting landscaping, designing visible and understandable signage, and ensuring that there is adequate and effective exterior lighting.

Clearly then, the safety of the school's physical environment necessitates a focus on two critical issues, namely, the safety of the buildings and the campus, as well as actions or procedures that promote safety. This can be translated into school-based safety activities and collaboration with agencies outside schools.

School-based activities relate to maintenance and surveillance of the physical environment, and to safety systems and procedures. Maintenance and surveillance centre on actions aimed at creating safe, secure and orderly schools. Maintenance of the features of the school's physical environment involves the repair, replacement and general upkeep of physical features as found in the school's buildings, grounds and safety systems (Szuba & Young, 2003:43). These writers make the point that maintenance is concerned with ensuring safe conditions for facility users, be they learners, educators, staff, parents or guests, and they identify four categories of maintenance, namely, emergency maintenance, routine maintenance, preventive maintenance and predictive maintenance.

Surveillance entails monitoring the whole-school environment, removing obstacles from the school grounds, e.g. solid walls, lack of windows, shrubs and trees, ensuring clear visibility of main entrance(s), locating parking areas so that they are visible, keeping unused buildings and doors securely locked, demarcating "out of bounds" areas, eliminating blind spots provided by doorways, fences, buildings and landscaping, and access control (Reid, 2000). The last involves determining who gains access to the school and its facilities, how and when, demarcating emergency routes/areas, establishing safety zones and emergency procedures, establishing authority and control over the school environment and establishing clear border definitions between the school and the surrounding neighbourhood (Reid, 2000).

Safety and security systems and procedures relate to service systems and procedures. Included in safety systems and procedures are, *inter alia*, systems for drainage and sanitation, waste disposal and management, electricity, alarm, fire, communications, emergencies and evacuations, visitation, vehicular drop-off and pick-up, leaving school campus during teaching and learning hours, access control, parking and vehicle control, mail, packages and delivery systems, and intrusion detection (*cf.* Szuba & Young, 2003.)

Systems and procedures also include, *inter alia*, monitoring, identifying damages and repairing safety systems, for example, alarm, fire, drainage and sanitation, electrical and communications, securing fire systems in appropriate locations, e.g. extinguishers, fire-hoses, sprinklers, establishing access control systems, that is, equipment control, access to facilities, usage of facilities over weekends and holidays, keeping repairs, maintenance and incidents registers, establishing emergency systems and procedures, enacting and simulating emergency drills, and establishing and monitoring supervision systems for playgrounds (Szuba & Young, 2003; Szachnowicz, 2003; Reid, 2000).

Actions or procedures promoting school safety include establishing school safety committees (SSC), designing and producing school safety policies (SSP), implementing the SSP and monitoring the implementation thereof (Stephens, 1995:17; IPT, 1999:3; Vienings, Commys & Geyer, 2001; Calabrese, 2000). This relates to making sure that the right people know

what the School Safety Plan (SSP) entails and what role each of them should play in carrying it out.

Collaboration with agencies from outside school includes collaborative relationships among school managers, educators, learners, parents, law enforcement officers and various social-service personnel (Bucher & Manning, 2003; Winter, 2001). Stephens (1995) goes further and advocates "developing a district-wide safe schools plan, complemented by one for each school". This draws benefits from parents, students, educators, law enforcers, the courts, probation and social service personnel and religious, corporate, and other community leaders representing the racial/ethnic balance of the community. In this way, collaboration with agencies from outside schools would enable schools' safety to be addressed on a holistic basis, covering a variety of safety-threatening conditions besetting schools, like crime, precisely because these incidents cannot be adequately addressed by school stakeholders alone.

The research identified the school's physical environment as the first consideration in this regard. This can be achieved by focusing on the basic safety and security features of schools' physical environment as point of departure, which implies focusing on schools' physical environments as well as actions and procedures aimed at promoting school safety and security, which indicates the enormity of promoting and maintaining school safety.

### **Empirical investigation**

The empirical research aimed to collect data on the status of basic safety features of schools' physical environments in terms of school buildings and grounds, as well as actions or measures aimed at promoting safety and security. For this purpose, the phenomenological approach was employed as it involves studying phenomena in their natural state (Hancock, 2002:4). Purposeful sampling was used, meaning that the sample was consciously selected to yield as much information-rich data as possible about the study phenomenon (*cf.* Merriam, 1998:61). For that reason, both primary and secondary schools located in the Sedibeng district's Vaal-Triangle townships were targeted. It was decided that data collection would include schools in the older parts of townships, including informal settlements, as well as schools in recently developed areas. This was facilitated by the fact that most township schools are located in zonal proximity and therefore access was easy and convenient.

The sample size of schools observed was not pre-determined, but was based on informational considerations (see Merriam, 1998:65). This, Strydom and Delpont (2002:336) refer to as sequential sampling, which means that data are gathered until a saturation point is reached. This decision was based on the researcher's own experience and knowledge of the township schools, having been an Institutional Development and Support Officer in the education department. Accordingly, at 23 primary schools and 12 secondary schools it was decided that since similarities indicating a saturation point were regularly beginning to emerge, data collected and continuously analysed were adequate for the purposes of the research.

Features of basic school safety were identified beforehand so as to ensure that observations and interviews focused on relevant aspects of schools' physical environments. On that basis, photographs and field notes of observed phenomena were taken. Photographs were used as a "good way of collecting observable data of phenomena which can be captured in a single or series of shots" (Hancock, 2002). Field notes were made with regard to observed features and comments from informal conversational interviews with school principals and/or designated school safety personnel (*cf.* Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella, 1999:285). Resulting from that, an analysis combining field notes and photographs yielded the following

categories of features:

- **Buildings:** Observations entailed cleanliness, maintenance, storage rooms and equipment. Focus was on the status of the buildings and equipment usage and storage, including maintenance.
- **Grounds:** Observations focused on the safety of school grounds and playgrounds, the security of the schools' perimeter fencing, the general layout of vegetation and shrubbery, the visibility or obscurity of such amenities as toilets, playgrounds, parking areas, as well as the safety and status of equipment.
- **Safety systems and procedures:** Focus was on the safety of systems such as electrical systems, sanitation systems, refuse-disposal systems and procedures for movement into and out of the school premises, and general access control.

Informal conversational interviews with school principals and/or their designated school safety personnel were conducted to provide insight into observed school safety phenomena (Greeff, 2002:297; Martella *et al.*, 1999:288). These informal conversations were unstructured and sought to gather data on school-based safety actions and/or procedures, namely, school safety committees and policies, emergency procedures, school *in situ* inspections, visitation procedures and signage.

### Data analysis

The constant comparative method was used in analysing data by repeatedly comparing data patterns from the photos and field notes to develop concepts, insights, and understanding from patterns in the data (*cf.* Vockel & Asher, 1995; Yoong & Pauleen, 2004). This process included data organisation and categorisation, which yielded an analysis of school buildings, grounds, safety and security activities and procedures as main categories of basic school safety features. Data emanating from constant comparison among photographs, field notes and responses from informal conversations with principals and school safety personnel were located into these categories to identify relationships between the categories in order to interpret and draw conclusions on the status of basic safety features of sampled schools.

### Findings

Observations focused on schools' physical environmental safety and security features. School buildings, grounds and systems were observed in this regard.

### School buildings

The first observation related to the age and building design of the schools. Old schools had open designs with rows of classrooms facing each other. Table 1 shows the number of schools observed in each category.

**Table 1** School types and design

School category	Old design	New design	Total
Primary	14	9	23
Secondary	5	7	12



Figure 1

In the old buildings (Figure 1), the main buildings comprise classrooms facing one another with outbuildings like toilet facilities. New schools, on the other hand, have most buildings attached to classrooms facing one another (Figure 2). All these buildings are joined with walls, so that all school activities take place in an enclosed area. The building design has a bearing on the accessibility of the school facilities. In the older buildings, it was found that access was easy and would need a stringent system of control, whilst in the new buildings access control was easy since visitation was channelled to the administration building. Therefore, new schools as against old schools displayed designs exuding a feeling of safety and security.

A number of older schools (7 observed) had unsightly buildings. Some had walls with cracks, broken doors and exposed foundations. The state of the grounds between classrooms was unkempt and poorly maintained (Figures 1 and 3). However, all newer primary schools had neat and secure buildings. Electrical cabling was properly secured and functioning. All buildings had window panes and fully functional doors. Classrooms were mostly enclosed within secure walling and neat paving. These schools took additional measures to secure doors and windows with iron-mesh wire (Figure 3). These schools gave a clear impression of safe and secure buildings. This could be attributed to the fact that these schools are relatively new, as well as the pride taken in them by the schools and their immediate communities.

It was observed, however, that all schools were engaged in renovating and securing their buildings. Some were doing so from their own funds, whilst others were being renovated by the Department of Public Works. In particular, three old schools had neat buildings and well-kept lawns and shrubbery (Figure 4).

### School grounds

Almost all schools (31 schools) had new perimeter fencing like iron and concrete palisades (*cf.* Figure 5). This included secure and strong gate materials. All schools' gates observed were kept



Figure 2

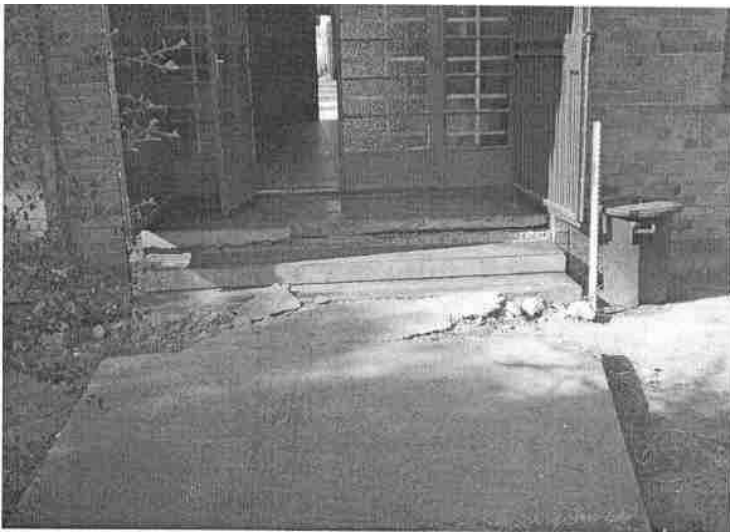


Figure 3





Figure 4

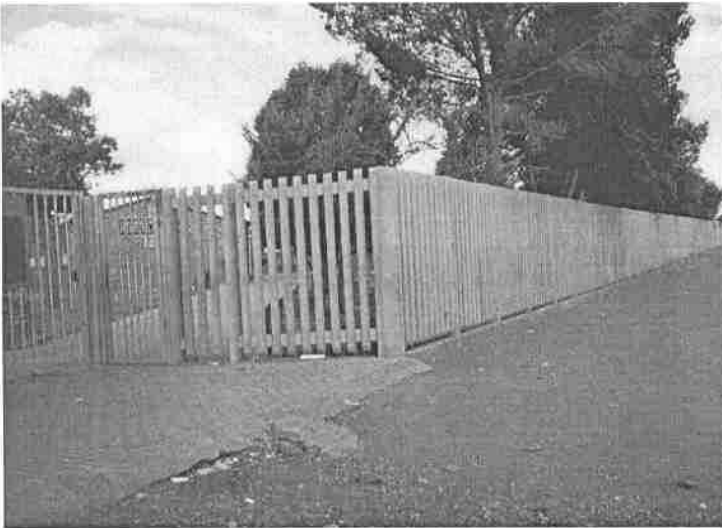


Figure 5

locked during school hours, reportedly as a directive from the Department of Education. However, some schools (3 schools) had old rickety gates (Figure 6) that could not be properly secured or locked. In two schools, the perimeter fencing was old and with gaping holes in some sections.



Figure 6

A disturbing trend observed was whilst gates were closed, in most schools, they were not properly secured. Locks were unlocked and dangling from the attachment holes. The reason given for this was the shortage or lack of support staff who could be in charge of the gates. Added to this trend, in the light of school intrusions as reported in the media, was the observation and discovery of the ease with which most schools were accessed. In most of these schools, though gates were usually closed and "locked", once access to the school was gained, it was easy to walk and go directly to the classrooms.

Schools observed did not have security systems like alarms and surveillance equipment. Some schools (nine secondary and four primary schools observed) had installed alarm systems, but could not maintain them, due to lack of funds. Alarm systems were provided in computer laboratories provided by the Department through the Gauteng Online project. The lack of these systems was attributed to lack of financial resources. In this case, principals felt it was the responsibility of the state/department to provide these kinds of security features owing to their costliness. However, some schools (one secondary and three primary schools) were subscribed to crime response companies, which conducted regular patrols in schools, especially at night.

All schools observed were characterised by school grounds that were small in size. Consequently, sports facilities in most of these schools were of a poor standard and were generally not well maintained. Most had generally unkempt school grounds, with tall grass and weeds.

Three primary schools and two secondary schools, in particular, had tall grass and weeds on the grounds (see Figure 7). Two secondary schools' tennis and netball courts were so neglected that they would have to be totally overhauled.



Figure 7



Figure 8

It was observed that signage in most township schools was, sadly, poor. Whilst there were signs posted in some schools (Figure 8), in most schools (30 schools observed) these were too old and damaged. Significantly, the only signs observed announced that schools were gun-free zones and that unauthorised persons would be prosecuted. However, these were old and the latter signs dated back to the pre-1994 era (observed in three secondary schools). These were also in English and Afrikaans, thus displaying detachment from the dominant community languages. This raises the question of their significance and impact on school visitors and their targeted population. In fact, a chance conversation with learners at a primary school revealed that learners were largely ignorant of such signs or did not understand them.

### Safety systems and procedures

Emanating from informal interviews, it was found that there were generally no formal safety systems and procedures as exposed in the literature review. For instance, maintenance work was found to be largely emergency, routine and *ad hoc*.

A common safety threat identified on school grounds, especially in older schools, was the poor level of maintenance and storage of broken and damaged facilities. These ranged from broken fences, exposed electrical wiring (due to the theft of electrical cables), damaged verandas, broken window panes, damaged gates, broken and blocked toilets and damaged furniture lying around the school grounds.



Figure 9

Another common threat to the safety of learners on almost all township school grounds related to open refuse dumps, some of which were also used as sites for burning rubbish. These were mostly unguarded and not fenced (Figure 9). A closer scrutiny of burning debris (observed in three primary and two secondary schools) could not determine the kind of refuse

burned on those sites. It was actually a variety of materials, from plastic to paper, bricks and tins, which could pose a danger for learners, especially younger learners in the primary schools.

Equipment for emergencies like fire extinguishers and hoses were seen at only one school. This school had recently been renovated by the Department. Whilst other schools had fire extinguishers and fire hoses, the former were stored in offices or storerooms together with a variety of other equipment while the fire hoses were non-existent, not working or faulty.

It was found that most schools had safety committees and that safety policies were developed. However, these were more a response to departmental requirements, than conscientious efforts at establishing school safety and security. This, however, engendered safety awareness. One principal actually "confessed" that the seriousness of formalised safety procedures was motivated by this requirement.

Astounding, from informal conversations at all schools was the realisation that schools did not have emergency procedures. Since these are supposedly contained in safety policies, this attested to the non-implementation of these policies. For instance, answers to evacuation modes during emergencies, post-emergency and trauma procedures, and responses to threats or false alarms were clearly indicative of the fact that these were not in place. Eleven principals indicated that these situations were handled as they occurred. Another primary school principal related an incident when they did not know how to handle a situation where a gun-wielding parent confronted his step-child in class because access to the classrooms was not controlled. A secondary school principal related an incident where a learner

*... went beserk and produced a (toy) gun, threatening to shoot a classmate. I simply did not know what to do, the gun looked real. There was panic ... educators crying, some running, learners screaming ... it was total chaos ... however, we learned from that incident, although I still do not know how we would deal with the same situation if it occurred again. We are not policemen.*

In schools where safety policies detailed activities relating to *in situ* safety inspections and emergency procedures, it was clear that these were not known by people at the school, both staff and learners, and also, there were no drills to prepare them for such eventualities. There was a distinct sense that safety inspections were carried out as the need arose or as a reaction to certain occurrences.

Another observation related to the demarcation of areas in the schools. Whilst in some schools certain areas were fenced to prevent unsupervised access, in most schools learners could be observed playing all over the school grounds. In 31 schools observed, there were no areas demarcated as out of bounds for learners. The safety threat observed related to the areas that were obscured or out of sight to educators or staff. This included areas alongside barbed wire fencing, and in six primary schools, boy learners could be observed playing alongside these fences. In one primary school, learners were climbing fencing poles, which could have resulted in serious injuries. In five secondary schools, boys could be seen hiding behind the toilets, while some were smoking. A safety officer remarked

*This is a regular occurrence; there is no one to guard this area ... all educators are in classes. In any case, these boys should be in class.*

A safety threat, which seemed unattended to, related to the areas surrounding the schools. In most schools, especially those neighbouring informal settlements (five secondary and seven primary schools observed), these areas were often used as rubbish dumps by the community and thus constituted a safety and health hazard for schools. Learners could often be seen rummaging in these dumps, especially after school and on their way home. It was reported that these were not necessarily learners from the schools observed.

Most schools had procedures for visitation, with all visitors to the school required to report to the main office building. However, in 15 schools visited, especially the older school types, it was easy to move around the school once entry at the gate was gained. This raises a real concern in terms of intruders who may have unlawful intentions once inside the school. For instance, once inside the school, the researcher was accompanied in only eight schools, whilst in the rest he roamed around freely without being accompanied.

It was interesting to learn that despite the less than adequate security devices at some schools, they had not experienced many incidents of burglaries, especially at schools located in the newer parts of the townships. This was attributed to the engagement of the immediate community in school security, as well as the community's use of school grounds for projects like vegetable gardens and church services. One principal in fact remarked that

*we do not have a night watch or security personnel, but since the last one was fired, there has been no burglary into our school,*

thus attributing this to community involvement. However, at other schools (13 schools), burglaries were reported and theft of computer equipment and electrical fittings and circuit-breaker boxes were common. The theft of circuit breakers occurred mostly at schools near informal settlements and was ascribed to building contractors in the area.

## Conclusion

Observations undertaken at schools indicated differing levels of safety and security in their physical environments. In terms of school-based activities, schools that were observed displayed inadequate maintenance and surveillance systems. For instance, whilst building designs of the new schools facilitate safety, it was clear that there were no conscious school-based efforts aimed at all-time safety. On the other hand, old schools displayed lax surveillance, particularly regarding access control. The maintenance factor was found to be aimed at attracting learners to schools, rather than at ensuring the safety of the school environment. It was therefore clear that schools generally did not have formalised surveillance and access control systems and that systems and procedures aimed at emergencies were not enacted.

It was clear that schools have a much bigger task of ensuring all-time school safety and security. From the investigation, it was clear that school safety is seen as a departmental responsibility and it was also obvious that community involvement and collaboration with external agencies, like the police service and NGOs, were not vigorously pursued. This was also evidenced by the fact that whilst schools have safety policies and safety committees, these are not implemented and are not functional. It is clear that these are not a product of collaborative endeavours, but are rather instituted as a deadline requirement for the Department.

It can therefore be concluded that the physical environments of schools need more attention in terms of ensuring that the basic features of safety and security are put in place. In this way, schools would be in a position to engage in overall school safety and security in terms of school environments as entities comprising both physical and social aspects.

Schools should take safety and security as a matter of priority. Comprehensive school safety and security policies and plans should be compiled and implementation should be carried out. These policies should consider both school-based safety activities and collaboration with agencies outside the schools themselves. Among others, the following issues should be considered:

- SGBs should lead the establishment and development of school safety committees and policies in an inclusive manner that involves all relevant stakeholders. Such policies should detail the unique nature of each school and pay attention to, *inter alia*, emergency

and evacuation procedures, post-incident resettlement, first aid and procedures for reporting criminal and violent crimes. These should be prominent features of school mission statements. This should facilitate the inclusion of safety measures in the school development planning processes so as to ensure that safety measures are budgeted for and implemented.

- School principals should be charged with the responsibility of basic school safety and should have, as their daily responsibilities, action plans detailing maintenance surveillance schedules. The maintenance and repair of school facilities, like fences, electrical wiring, doors, gates and school grounds in general should form part of schools' daily operations. Personnel employed to do maintenance work should have schedules relating to these functions and should receive basic training for doing so.

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