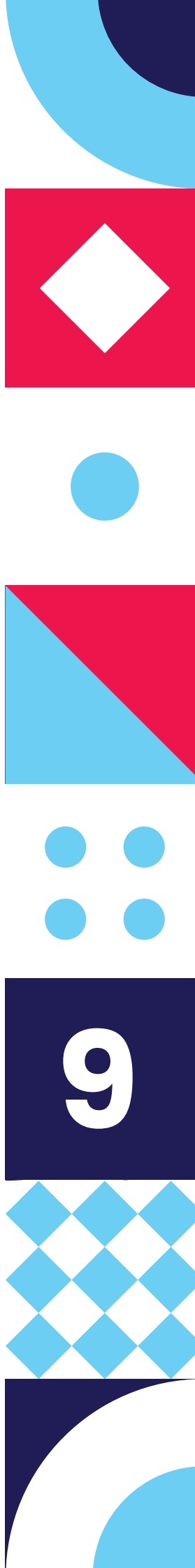




Advisory Note 9 • 24 February 2026

# A systemic approach to early grade reading: Institutionalising foundation phase reform in the Western Cape

Western Cape Education Department (WCED)



## Executive Summary

WCED's multi-year strategy to restore and accelerate reading outcomes in the Foundation Phase is anchored on three pillars: extended instructional time, baseline assessments, and reading fluency benchmarks. This extended narrative provides historical context, implementation details, systemic trends, and partnerships shaping the 2030 vision. It draws on lessons from Sobral, global best practices, and local innovations such as the Funda Wande partnership.

### 1. Context and Rationale

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions in schooling, leading to severe learning losses in early literacy and numeracy. WCED systemic evaluations from 2021–2024 show a 10.9% improvement in reading scores, yet gaps persist, especially among learners in lower quintile schools. The World Bank's 2024 sector report highlighted that many learners entering Grade 1 lack school readiness, reinforcing the urgency for structured interventions. Lessons from Sobral, Brazil, demonstrate that consistent instructional routines, benchmark-driven monitoring, and strong accountability systems can transform early learning outcomes.

### 2. Historical Timeline and Lessons Learned

- 2021: WCED prioritised Foundation Phase as a key priority. Since then, budget is ringfenced for Foundation Phase
- 2022: WCED piloted additional time allocation for Language and Mathematics in Terms 3–4, based on RESEP recommendations
- 2023–2024: National adoption of the model; WCED extended implementation following positive systemic trends.
- 2025: Continued implementation with strong school endorsement.
- 2026: Integration of baseline assessments and aspirational reading benchmarks to accelerate progress toward the 2030 goal.

### 3. Expanded Key Interventions

#### 3.1 Additional Time Allocation

Two hours per week for reading and one hour for Mathematics have been added to the Foundation Phase timetable, with an extra 30 minutes for Grade 3 FAL in isiXhosa LoLT schools. Time is drawn from Life Skills, which is taught in an integrated manner. Resources include Funda Wande teacher guides and Bala Wande numeracy kits. This measure addresses learning losses and strengthens foundational skills critical for later success.

#### 3.2 Baseline Assessments

Standardised baseline assessments will be conducted during the first 10 school days of 2026. These informal, integrated assessments establish learner starting points, enabling teachers to tailor instruction and identify gaps early. Data will be submitted to the provincial office and integrated into a dashboard for targeted interventions. Directorate Inclusive Education will follow up with screenings for Grade R and 1 learners requiring referrals.

### 3.3 Reading Fluency Benchmarks

WCED has implemented EGRA since 2017. Building on this, aspirational benchmarks per grade and term will be introduced in 2026, aiming for all learners to read with meaning by Grade 3 by 2030. Teachers will receive training on using benchmark data and strategies for supporting learners below target. Insights from Sobral inform the design of bi-weekly screenings and PLC-driven support structures.

## 4. Implementation Approach

Formal circulars have been issued on additional time, baselines, and benchmarks. Mediation sessions with SMTs and advisers ensure alignment. Subject advisers will undergo training early in 2026 to adopt coaching roles, supported by One World consultancy for global scaling expertise. Training will emphasize shifting from quality teaching to quality learning, with consistent routines across classrooms.

## 5. Partnerships and Resource Requirements

The Funda Wande partnership underpins structured literacy and numeracy interventions, providing teacher guides, learner books, and resource kits. These resources complement WCED's systemic efforts and align with international best practices.

## 6. Data and Dashboard Integration

WCED is developing an app-based dashboard to consolidate baseline and benchmark data, track learner progress, monitor school support visits, and identify gaps. This system will enable data-driven decision-making at all levels, from classroom to provincial office, and integrate with existing EGRA dashboard (See sample in ANNEXURE 2).

## 7. Risks and Mitigation

Risks include variation in school readiness, timetable pressure, and resource disparities. Mitigation strategies involve standardised tools, adviser coaching, protected reading blocks, and prioritised resource distribution to all schools.

## 8. WCED Commitments and Requests

WCED commits to sustaining extended time allocations, implementing baselines, publishing annual reading briefs, and scaling coaching and materials with the ultimate goal that all 10-year-olds are able to read for meaning by 2030.

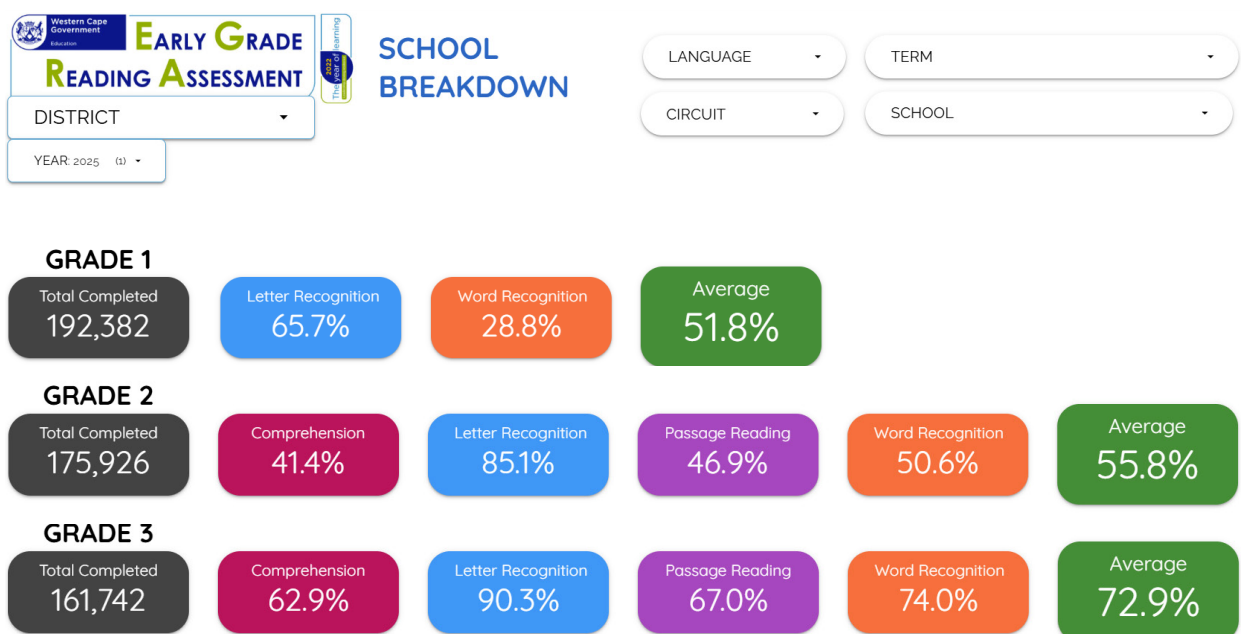
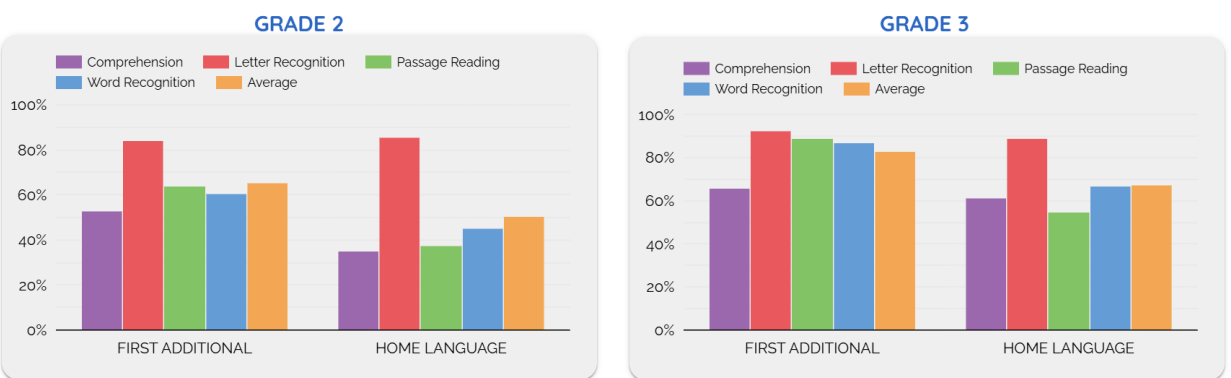
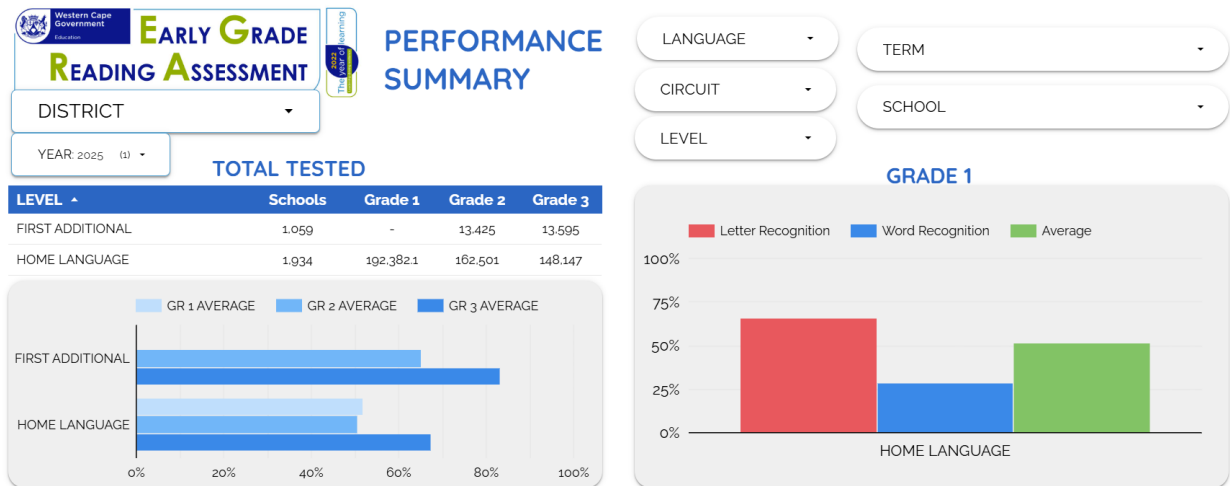
## 9. Annexure 1: MEC Statement

Minister Maynier's statement (3 Dec 2025) emphasizes extended time, baseline assessments, benchmarks, and the structured numeracy pilot with Funda Wande partnership. The statement underscores WCED's commitment to foundational learning as a provincial priority.

## 10. References

WCED Curriculum GET Minutes 0010–0012/2025; DBE Circular S5 of 2023; WCED Systemic Reports (2021–2024); World Bank Sector Report (2024); Sobral visit learnings; Funda Wande partnership details.

## 11. Annexure 2: Snapshot of existing WCED EGRA Dashboard

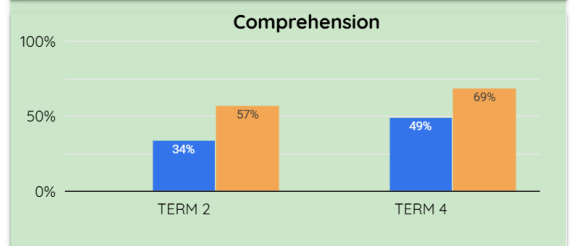
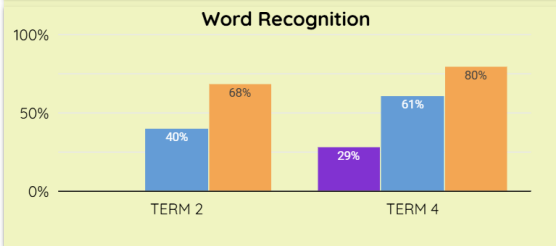
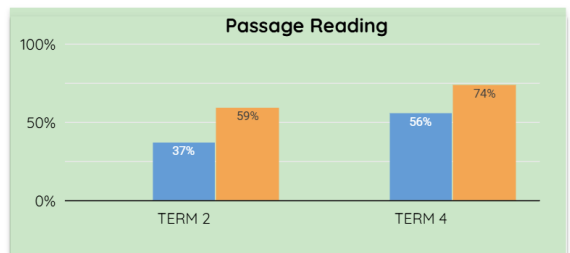
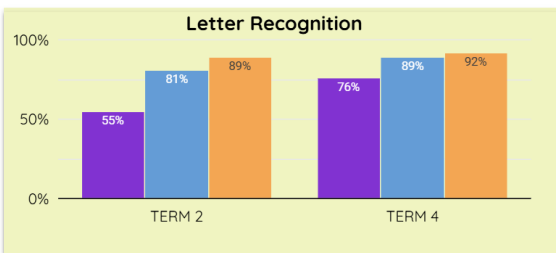
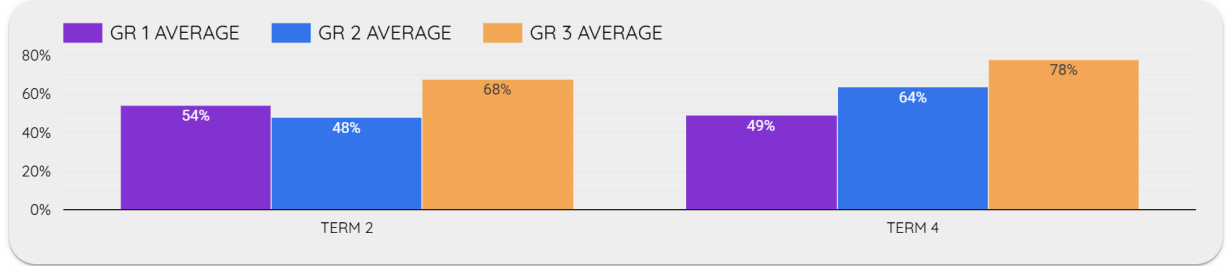


Western Cape Government Education  
**EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT**  
 DISTRICT  
 YEAR: 2025 (t) ▾

**TERM COMPARISON**

LANGUAGE ▾ CIRCUIT ▾  
 LEVEL ▾ SCHOOL ▾

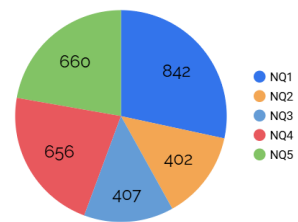
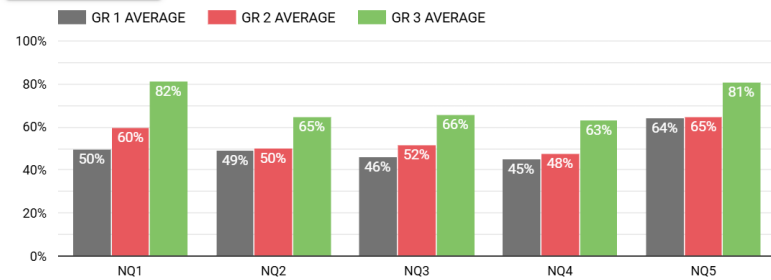
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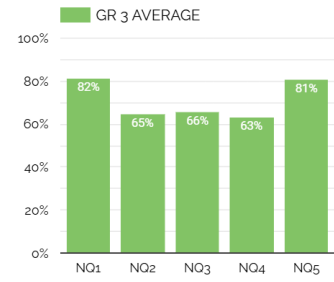
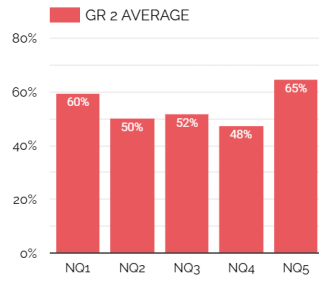
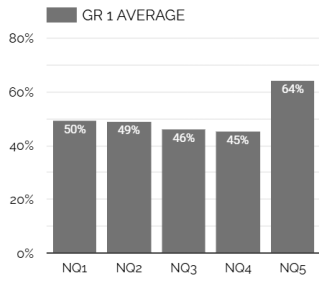


Western Cape Government Education  
**EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT**  
 DISTRICT  
 YEAR: 2025 (t) ▾

LANGUAGE ▾ TERM ▾  
 LEVEL ▾ CIRCUIT ▾

A-Z ☰ ⋮





### District EGRA Dashboards

[Cape Winelands Education District](#)

[Eden, Central & Karoo Education District](#)

[Metro Central Education District](#)

[Metro East Education District](#)

[Metro North Education District](#)

[Metro South Education District](#)

[Overberg Education District](#)

[West Coast Education District](#)