

# Teachers take stand against corruption

TEACHERS at Thubelihle Intermediate School in Soweto contacted Corruption Watch at the beginning of the year to report appalling financial governance at their school. These are the findings of a three-month investigation.

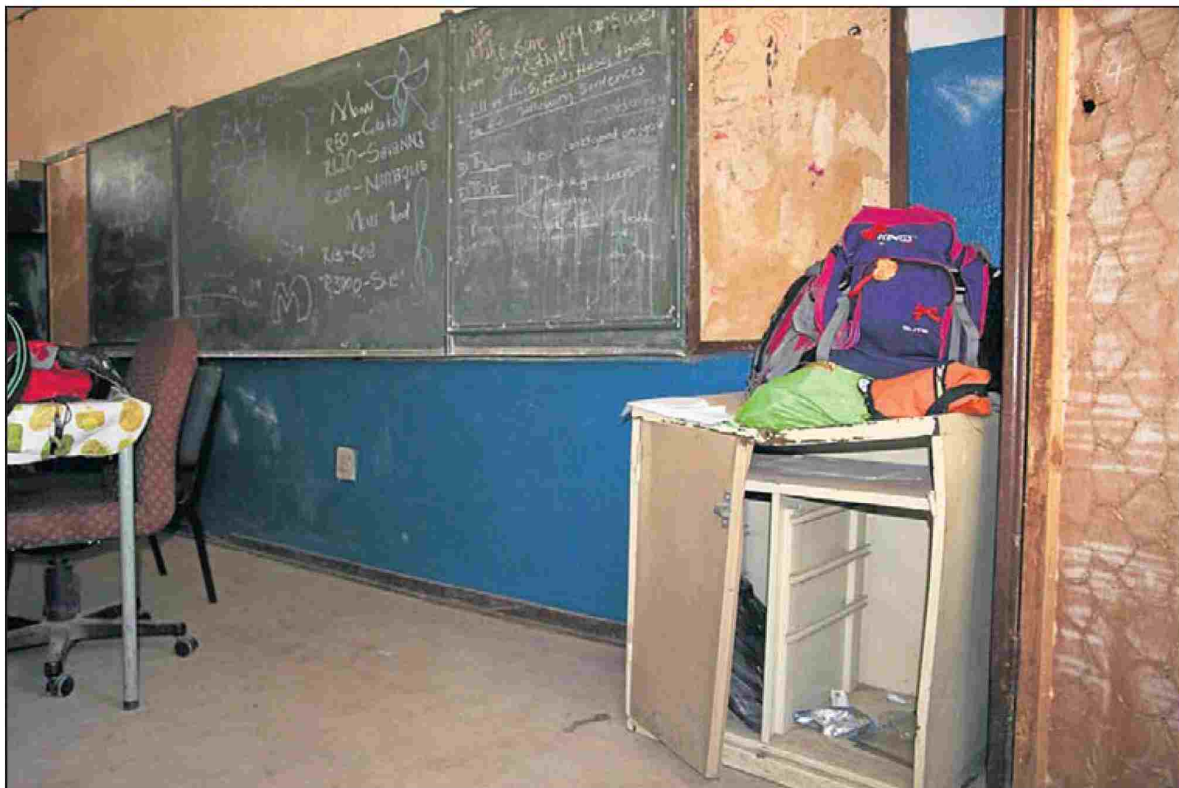
Over the next few weeks, Sowetan and Corruption Watch, a non-profit civil society organisation, will publish a series of articles of the investigation.

The campaign focuses on exposing abuse of power by principals, teachers and SGBs in public schools as well as the embezzlement of funds, irregularities in procurement and dysfunctional SGBs.

The teachers complained to Corruption

Watch about poor infrastructure, lack of learning material and appalling financial governance, which led them to question how the school's budget was being spent. As the only two custodians of the school's finances, and joint signatories of the school's cheque account, the teachers' attention turned to the principal Nonzwakazi Usiba and the former SGB chair, Isaac Ngwenya.

Corruption Watch executive director, David Lewis, said: "... vigilant teachers, learners and parents could themselves ensure that school resources are spent for advancing education rather than for the private gratification of a few people."



SWINDLED: A forensic firm has unearthed a number of financial irregularities involving thousands of rands at Thubelihle Intermediate School in Soweto

PHOTOS: CORRUPTION WATCH

# AUDIT DIGS UP CHEQUE SCAM

Reports by Gcina Ntsaluba

AN AUDIT into the books of a Soweto school has uncovered a scam in which SGB members colluded with the principal to pay themselves hundreds of thousands of rands from the school's coffers.

The probe, which covered Thubelihle Intermediate School's financial years between 2009 and 2011 found that the school received just over R1.2-million from the Gauteng department of education and R367 000 from donors in Norway.

It also found that more than 90% of all the school's payments were paid out in cheques. Other findings were:

- The principal, Nonzwakazi Usiba,

made out and cashed 41 school cheques amounting to R134 487.56. A few of the cheques were against cheque requisitions stating "feeding for learners".

There were no corresponding invoices.

- Ten school cheques totalling R41 059.30 were made out to former SGB chair Isaac Ngwenya and no corresponding invoices were found.

● A number of fake invoices were found, against which cheques were made out by the school to unknown individuals. For example, the forensic firm found that the school paid R48 064.74 to a certain individual against an invoice from Solly's Packaging and Stationery Distributors,

which was supposedly for calculators, pens, and other stationery.

It is unclear whether the stationery in the fake invoice was ever delivered to the school. Solly's Packaging told the forensic firm that it did not issue the invoice to the school.

- In another fake invoice, purportedly from Heinemann Publishers, the school paid out R18 500.31 to an individual, and not the company. The report also discovered that a Heinemann Publishers letterhead was scanned and manipulated to reflect an "invoice".

● The school also made a number of other suspicious payments that the report says require further investigation. One example was a payment by the school of R6 000 to Star Grill and Buffet in Silverstar Casino in Krugersdorp, against a requisition for "deposit for learner farewell".



BROKEN DOWN: While cheques worth thousands of rands were being signed out, school furniture was not a priority

## I signed blindly, says school principal

IN RESPONSE to the forensic audit report findings, school head Nonzwakazi Usiba admitted to blindly co-signing cheques on presentation without verifying the payee.

Her attorney advised Corruption Watch that she "merely signs cheques that are due to service providers in accordance with invoices presumably at a less price".

Usiba also claims to have no knowledge of one of the individual beneficiaries, who cashed a school cheque signed by her with a value of R18 500. She signed the cheque on presentation of a fraudulent invoice, purportedly from a reputable textbook publisher.

When asked about cheques made out to herself, the principal admitted cashing school cheques for money she claims she used to buy groceries for pupils. No receipts were shown to Corruption Watch. According to Usiba's attorney, different outlets were used to buy the groceries and she could "not write many cheques in a day's spending".

The principal claims that the former SGB chair continued to act as a signatory on the school's account months after his term ended, "as the new SGB asked him to continue as things had to be paid and because there were so

many in-fights within the new school governing body".

The money received by the school from Norwegian donors, Usiba said, came with certain conditions, among which were to pay for a music teacher and a helper in the kitchen.

The former SGB chair, Isaac Ngwenya, said that he had been advised by his lawyer not to comment, after he had been given an opportunity to respond to the audit report findings.

The district office of the Gauteng education department has also weighed in, and contacted Corruption Watch, offering to assist in normalising the school. The organisation felt duty-bound to hand a copy of the forensic report to the district office to take swift action.

For their part, the teachers were delighted at the findings of the forensic report, saying they were thrilled that Corruption Watch had managed to find concrete proof of financial misconduct at the school. They could no longer sit and watch as their school "was going down to the dogs".

"Our learners have suffered enough over the years because of this principal, and it is high time we stand up as teachers and do something about it," said one teacher.