

Alarm bells: Stricter vetting needed as 3% of educators face criminal allegations

By [Ashleigh Laurent](#) 5 Jun 2025

New data from TPN, a leading provider of background screening for schools, reveals alarming trends that underscore the urgency of stronger compliance with regulatory checks. With the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development advocating for greater public access to the National Register for Sex Offenders (NRSO), recent developments have intensified the national conversation on vetting practices in South African schools.



Image source: user6702303 from [Freepik](#)

Between March 2024 and February 2025, 2.95% of school staff screened through TPN's systems were flagged for possible illicit activity. While this figure reflects a marginal decrease from the 3.08% recorded the previous year, it still translates to 1 in every 34 school-based individuals having a criminal record. This includes not just educators, but also grounds staff, temporary hires, coaches, and others in contact with minors.

Convictions paint a concerning picture

TPN's screening covers criminal records, the National Child Protection Register, and the NRSO, aligning with the statutory obligations outlined in the Children's Act and Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act (SORMAA). Of those flagged:

- 1.22% had criminal records related specifically to abuse and crimes of a sexual nature, a troubling statistic, though improved from 2.63% in 2022.
- 43.9% of those with criminal records were convicted of violent and serious crimes, including assault (23.17%), drug trafficking (12.2%), housebreaking (3.66%), and murder (2.44%).
- Theft emerged as the most prevalent crime, accounting for 18.29% of all convictions.

While there were no recorded convictions or pending trials for rape or child neglect between 2023 and 2025, over 1.06% of school employees screened are currently awaiting trial - a reminder that pre-employment checks must extend beyond convictions.



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Charges still to be tested in court

TPN also tracks Case Awaiting Trial (CAT) indicators, revealing that 1.06% of school staff screened in the 2024–2025 period are facing legal proceedings. While these individuals have not yet been found guilty, the nature of the allegations still raises cause for concern.

The five most common illicit activities that are awaiting a trial are:

1. Road Traffic Act violations – 30.56%
2. Assault – 19.44%
3. Theft – 15%
4. Reckless or negligent driving – 5.56%
5. Malicious damage to property – 2.78%

Legal and ethical responsibilities for employers and educators

Despite ongoing delays in making the NRSO fully accessible due to confidentiality provisions in SORMAA the Department has committed to a phased release of the register. Phase one will prioritise access for schools and institutions working with children, while a second phase is expected to expand access to general employers, all within strict legal safeguards.

In the meantime, the legal obligations for schools remain unchanged. Schools, particularly principals and heads, are required by law to vet all staff for inclusion on Part B of the National Child Protection Register at the NRSO. Failure to comply could result in criminal or civil liability and long-term reputational damage.



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Educators registering with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) must produce a police clearance certificate less than six months old. The SACE Code of Professional Ethics sets the standard for educator conduct and outlines disciplinary procedures for misconduct, including review by a “fit-to-teach” committee.

SORMAA also places an onus on employees to disclose past convictions, especially those involving sexual offences, regardless of when or where the incident occurred. Failing to disclose this can result in fines or imprisonment of up to 7 years.

“An employee (working with vulnerable persons) in the employ of an employer, who is or was convicted of sexual offence against vulnerable persons, irrespective of whether or not such offence was committed or

allegedly committed during the course of his or her employment, must without delay disclose such conviction or finding to his or her employer.” - SORMAA

Prevention starts with proactive vetting

TPN's data reveals that improved screening is yielding results: the rate of sexual offence-related conviction has declined, indicating schools are taking action to remove high-risk individuals. However, even a small percentage translates into dozens, if not hundreds, of adults with concerning backgrounds working in proximity to children.

As the push for full public access to offender registers continues, vigilance and compliance remain the most effective tools at a school's disposal. The protection of children cannot be compromised.

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