

Why biometric vetting should be standard practice in the education sector

 ByPine Pienaar

12 Mar 2019

The spate of incidents, in recent years, involving offenders posing risk to the safety of learners across various schools in South Africa calls for some serious action to be taken.



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For what is meant to be a safe environment for learners, sexual and physical assault of learners seems to be on the increase, as recently [reported](#) in the KZN province. This reality is no doubt causing much distress to parents/guardians and the broader education sector across the country. In fact, the South African Council for Educators (SACE), this year [implemented](#) a new policy that requires all educators registering with the Council for the first time, and those updating their details, to produce a Police Clearance Certificate.

While the introduction of this policy is welcomed as a measure aimed to root out wrongdoers who may be potential threats to learners and others, and offers schools, parents and students more assurance that learners will be protected, more vetting can – and should - be done.

The Gauteng Education MEC, Panyaza Lesufi, recently stated that stronger measures need to be put in place to stop the abuse of children at schools and proposed the process of educators being vetted. I commend such a suggestion and encourage the education sector to investigate the process of biometric services as part of this.

The use of biometric solutions, such as fingerprint capturing and facial recognition, offers an easy, accurate and timely way of verifying who the applicant or individual is. Biometrics can provide an understanding of an individual's background, previous conviction status, if they are truthful and can be trusted and with that, clarity on if the person is who they claim to be.



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Within the education sector, such services should, however, go beyond educators and be carried out on any individual being employed to work in a school or with children, for example: external education, recreational and sport franchises, as well as transportation companies. Investing in such a process not only protects and empowers the education system in making more informed decisions when it comes to the applicants they hire, but offers the education system, educators and parents some peace of mind.

It is with this in mind, along with the current challenges being experienced, that considerations around utilising biometric methods for the purpose of vetting within the education realm should become a standard protocol. Biometric services that make use of the South African Police Service Automated Fingerprint Identification System (SAPS AFIS), for the purpose of previous conviction background checking as an example, are available locally and should be investigated.

Our children are vulnerable and need to be protected. It is their right and a basic human need. Neglecting this could result in an ill-informed hiring decision which could pose risk, unknowingly, to children and institutes alike. It should be considered as due diligence to be safe instead of sorry.

ABOUT PINE PIENAAR

Pine Pienaar is the Managing Director of Afiswitch, a role he stepped into in 2008, with the purpose of further entrenching his decades worth of biometric and AFIS experience into Afiswitch's service offering to the market.

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