

# **The School Development and Support Project**

**Supporting the Department of Basic Education to improve teaching practices and learner results in disadvantaged, under-resourced and under-performing schools**

**Trends in Grade 3, 6 and 12 results  
2008 - 2012**

**Kariem, V; Langan, D and Velensky, K**

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## Introduction

Pearson Southern Africa's Maskew Miller Longman Foundation (renamed the Pearson Marang Education Trust in 2012) was established in 2007 as an independent Educational Trust to support best practices to improve teaching, learning and assessment outcomes in challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged contexts in South Africa. To do this, the Trust developed and implemented a School Support and Development Model with 10 primary schools and 6 high schools between 2008 and 2011<sup>1</sup>. These schools are located in Mpumalanga's Bohlabela District; KwaZulu-Natal's Umzinyathi District; the Eastern Cape's Libode and Qumbu Districts; and in the Western Cape's South and North Districts.

In a context of severe socio-economic inequality and an education department that is failing to enable the implementation of its own policies; to adequately resource the majority of its schools; and to provide the leadership, management or curriculum support and development that schools need – low expectations have been normalized. As a consequence, mediocrity and under-performance are anticipated from the majority of schools, and very poor learner results have become the national norm.

By contrast, this report demonstrates that even in the most disadvantaged contexts, the hope and drive necessary to expect, work towards and produce consistently improving results can be inspired. It provides a review of the encouraging impact of the Trust's school support and development model on schools in a range of challenging contexts. It does this by tracking trends in Grade 3, 6 and 12 results achieved by the project schools between 2008 and 2012. The primary school results were gathered through a pre-implementation baseline assessment in 2008; annual assessments during implementation from 2009 – 2011, and a post-implementation assessment in 2012. The high school results are based on the DBE's Grade 12 examinations.

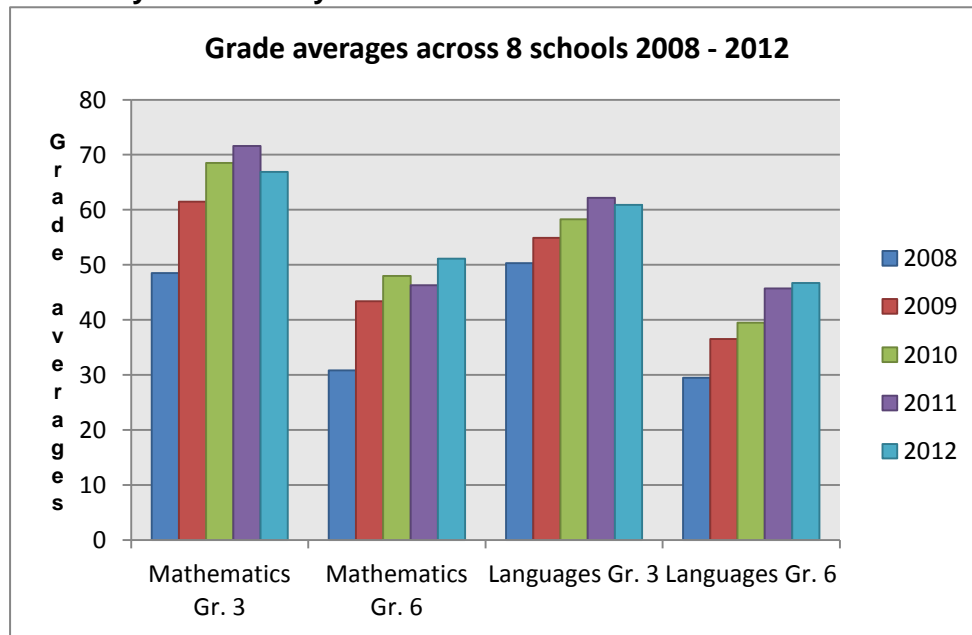
The report then identifies the key factors that have enabled under-performing schools to turn around and become achieving schools within three years, offers conclusions and recommends what the Department of Basic Education could do to achieve similar improvements in many more of the disadvantaged schools it is responsible for and accountable to.

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<sup>1</sup>For details about the project, see: Kariem and Langan (April 2009); Kariem, Langan and Mpofo (February 2010); Kariem and Langan (March 2011); and Langan, Kariem and Velensky (November 2011).

## Primary school results

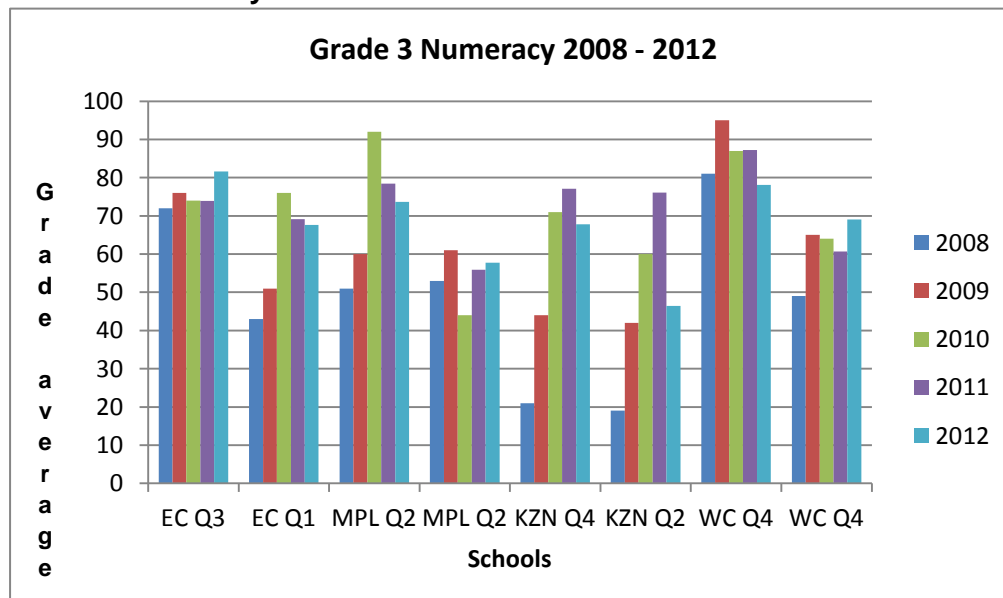
### Numeracy and Literacy trends



Although the Grade 3 scores<sup>2</sup> dropped off very slightly in 2012, a year after direct support to the schools ended, the overall trend since 2009 has been consistent improvement.

### Grade averages per school

#### Grade 3 Numeracy

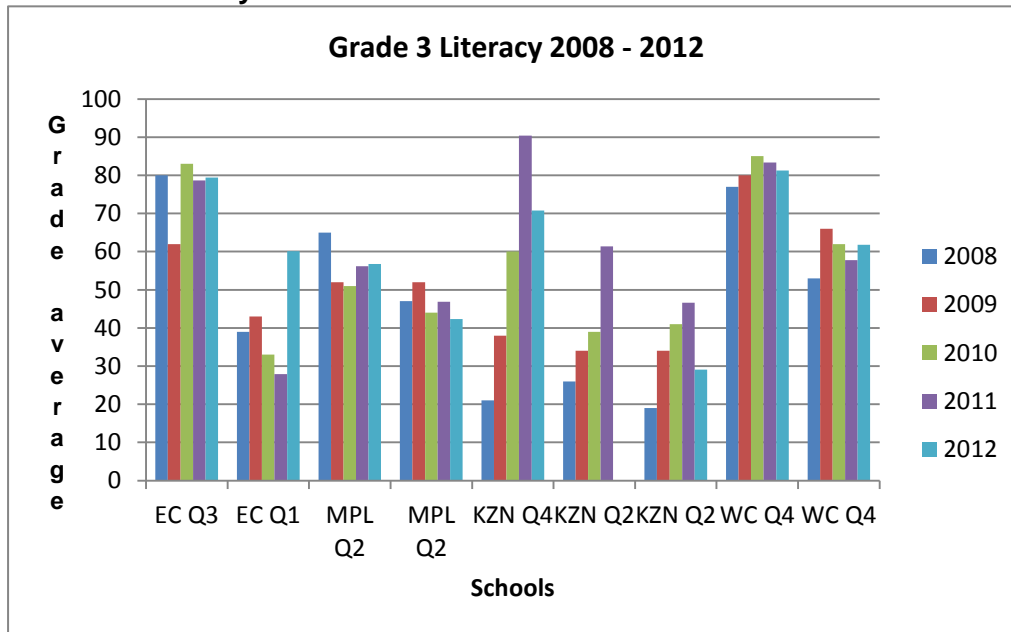


<sup>2</sup> The scores reviewed in this section were achieved on assessments designed by the Trust. For a detailed discussion of these, see: Kariem, Langan and Mpofu, October 2009. For the evaluation of the instruments, see the external evaluation report: Jet Education Services, June 2011. For an evaluation of the school support and development project, see: Taylor, N. April 2012.

Grade averages:

- Improved over 2008 results in all 8 schools by the end of 2011 (the last year of programme implementation)
- Were sustained at significantly better than 2008 levels in 7 of the 8 schools in 2012 ( a year after implementation ended)
- Have improved significantly in 5 schools
- Have improved most significantly in the worst performing schools of 2008

**Grade 3 Literacy**



Literacy grade averages:

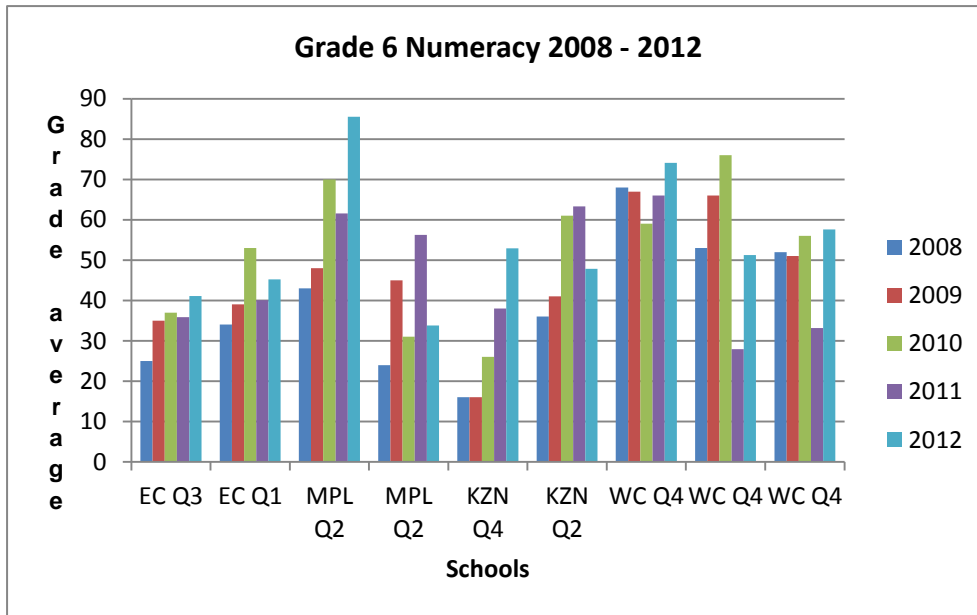
- Improved over 2008 results in 5 of the 9 language streams by the end of 2011
- Were sustained at better than 2008 results in 5 schools in 2012
- Improved most significantly in the worst performing streams of 2008<sup>3</sup>

**Grade 6 Numeracy**

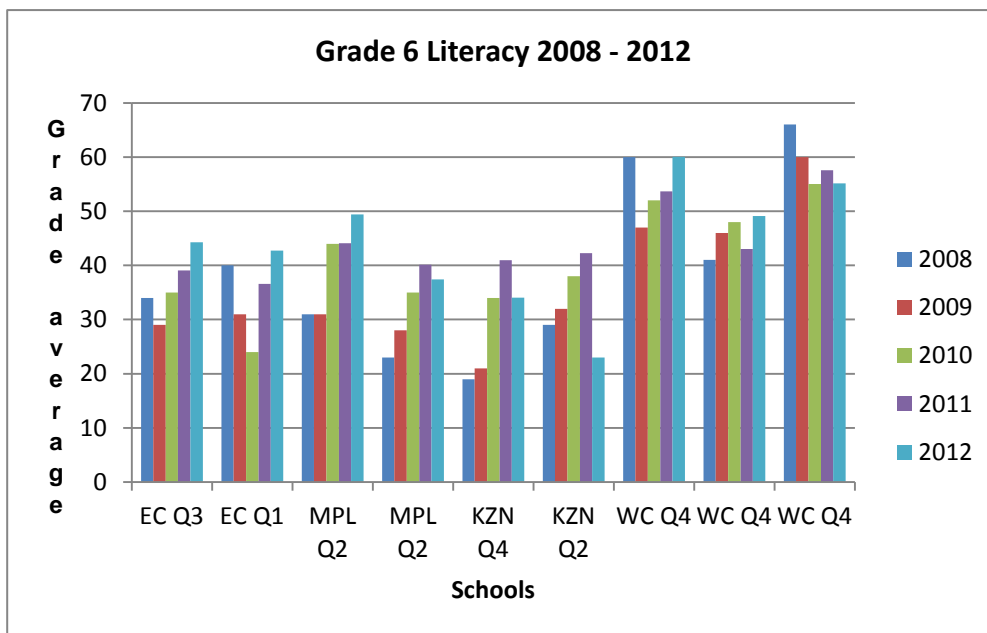
As per the graph overleaf, Numeracy grade averages:

- Improved over 2008 results in 6 of the 9 schools by 2011
- Improved in 8 of the 9 by 2012
- Improved the most significantly in the 6 poorest performing schools of 2008

<sup>3</sup>Note that one of the most improved streams in 2011 did not write the assessment in 2012 because it was scheduled too close to the school’s first experience of the DBE’s ANA assessment.



### Grade 6 Literacy



Literacy averages:

- Improved over 2008 scores in 6 of the 9 streams by 2011
- Remained above 2008 scores in 6 streams in 2012
- Improved most significantly in 4 of the 6 poorest performing classes of 2008

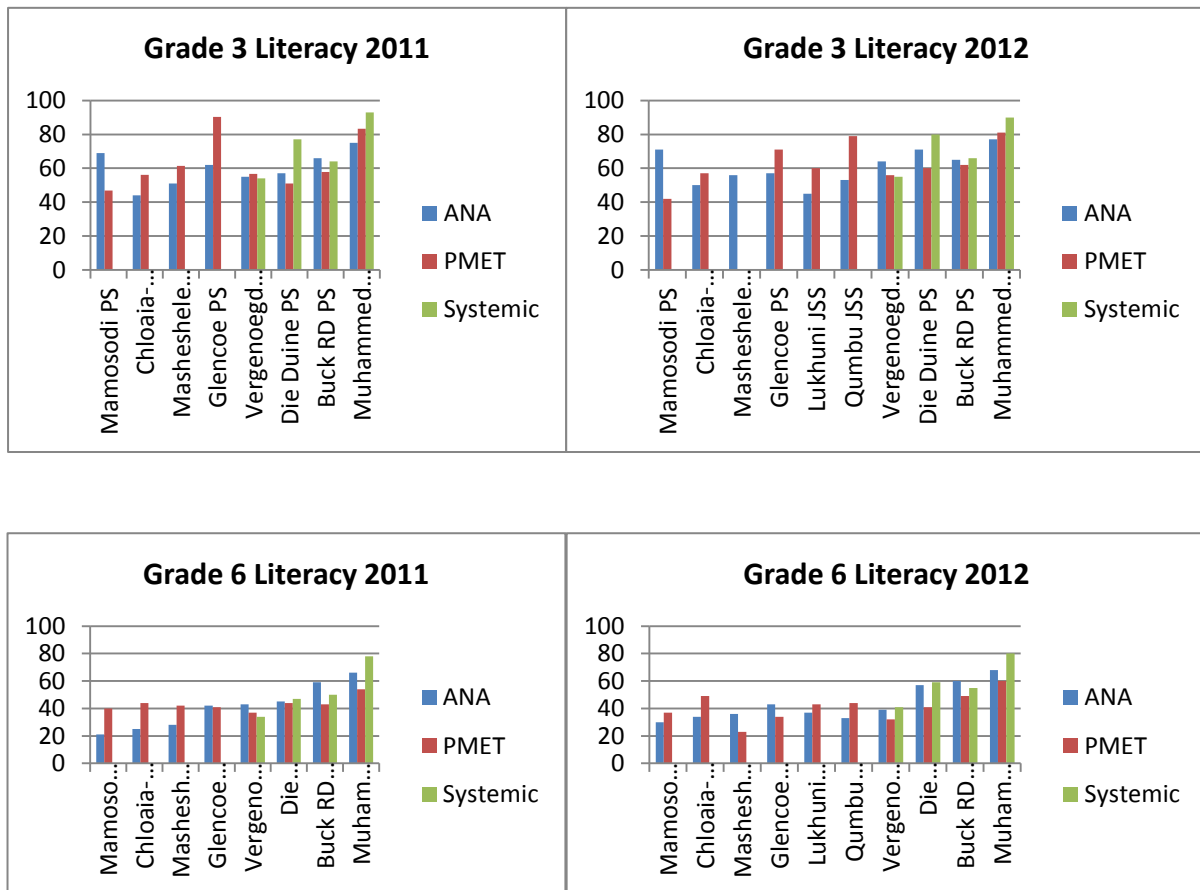
## Project results VS ANA and Systemic Assessment results

This section compares the Trust's (PMET) grade 3 and 6 Literacy and Numeracy results with those achieved by project schools on the DBE's Annual National Assessments (ANAs) and the WCED's Systemic Assessments in 2011 and 2012<sup>4</sup>. The intention is to determine whether improvements achieved on PMET assessments are consistent with DBE and WCED assessment results for each school.

### Literacy

As indicated on the graphs below, apart from a few interesting exceptions one way and the other, the results are fairly similar across all three assessment instruments at both Grade 3 and 6 levels. This suggests that most learners experienced all three assessment instruments as more or less equally challenging.

It is however interesting to note is that a number of the more disadvantaged schools scored better on the PMET assessments than on the ANAs; while the better resourced Western Cape Schools either scored more evenly across all three assessments, or scored better on both the Systemic and ANAs than on the PMET assessments.

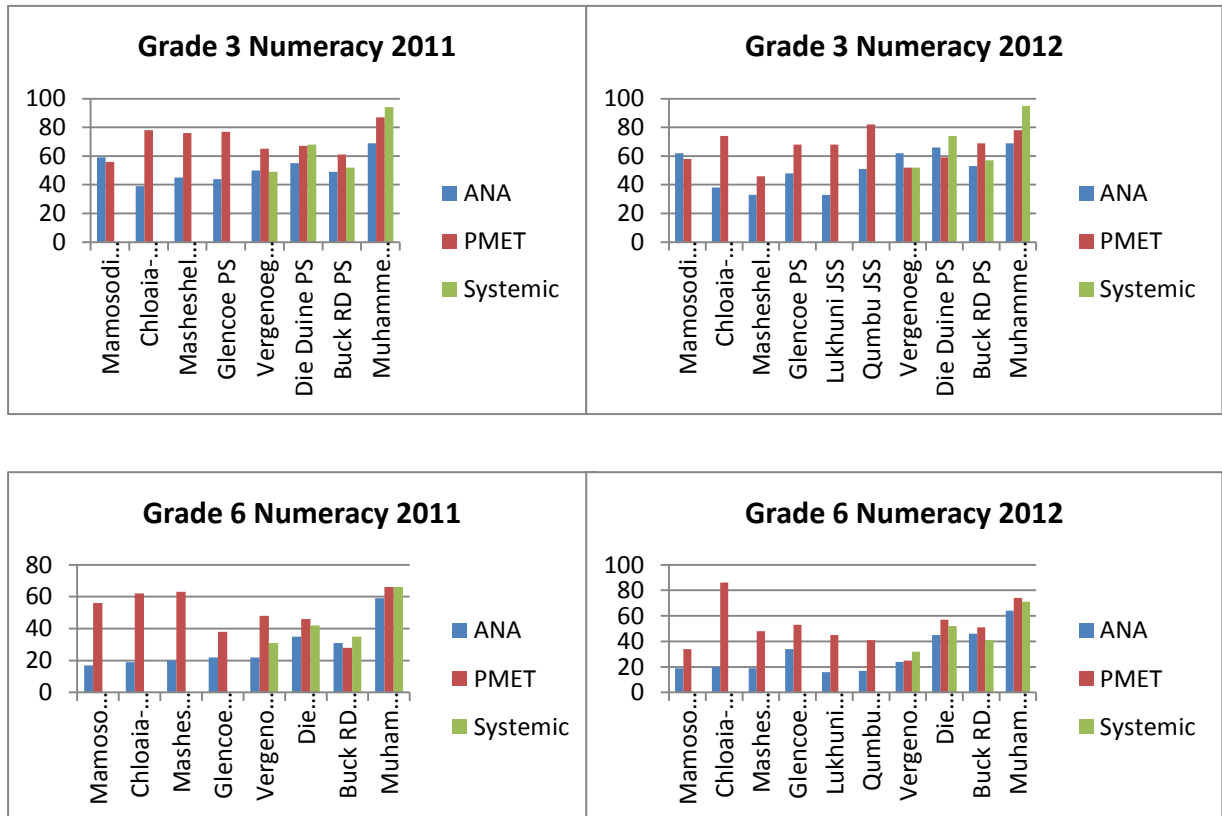


<sup>4</sup> These comparisons exclude two Eastern Cape schools that did not write the ANAs in 2011, and include two additional Western Cape Schools that had joined the project by 2011.

## Numeracy

The following graphs illustrate that:

- Most of the more disadvantaged schools scored far better on the PMET assessments for both grades 3 and 6 than on the ANAs;
- As for Literacy, the more advantaged Western Cape schools scored more evenly on all three assessment instruments in both grades.



The trends for both Literacy and Numeracy in the more advantaged Western Cape schools, that have also been exposed to provincial and national assessments for some years now, suggest that all three assessment instruments are more or less consistent. The fact that most of the less advantaged schools scored better on the PMET assessments than on the ANAs, is therefore unlikely to suggest that the PMET assessments are less challenging. Instead, these differences are more likely to be attributable to:

- A lack of familiarity with the ANA assessments first introduced to these schools in 2011
- Varying degrees of 'coaching' or 'teaching to' the more familiar PMET assessments introduced in 2008.

## Highlights of Primary School trends

There is clear evidence of significant improvement in both Literacy and Numeracy in most project schools since 2008. Importantly, most schools have also been able to maintain or even improve on their achievements independently a year after project support ended. It is also encouraging to note that the improved results achieved on PMET assessments are fairly closely mirrored in both the DBE's ANAs and the WCED's Systemic Assessments.



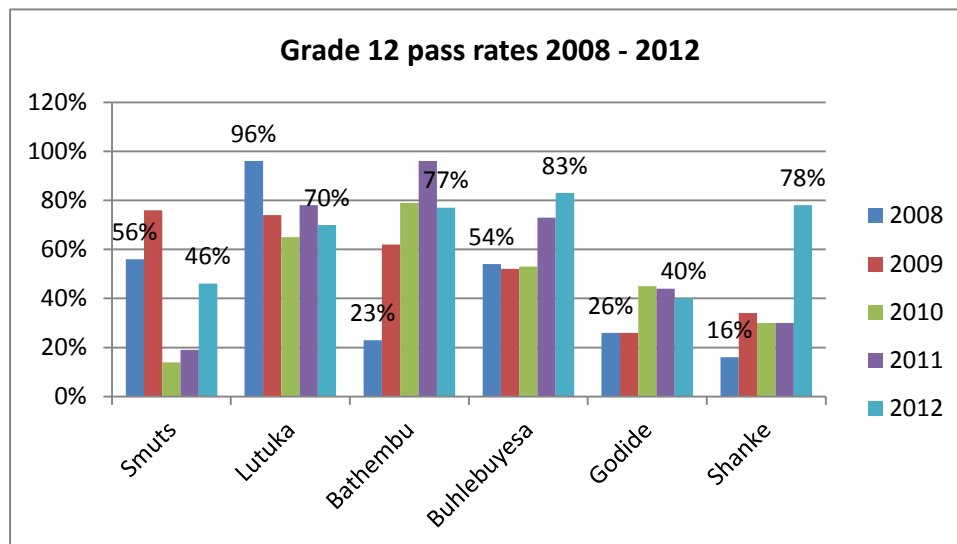
## High school results

In our 2011 high schools report<sup>5</sup>, we explain why working to support disadvantaged high schools is far more challenging than primary schools and that as a result, achieving the sorts of improvements described in the report so far is likely to take at least twice as long.

In spite of this, the 2011 report demonstrates that within three years, significant progress had been made towards improving leadership, management and basic overall school functionality at all 6 high schools, and that the combined impact of these had begun to impact positively on learner results. However, while overall pass rates had improved significantly in 4 of the 6 schools, there was still much room for improvement. In particular, the quality of Grade 12 passes was a concern, with the majority of learners that passed only achieving averages in the 30 - 50% range.

Based on the DBE's Grade 12 examination results for 2008 – 2012, this section provides a brief overview of the encouraging progress made by the high schools one year after project support was ended.

### Improving pass rates



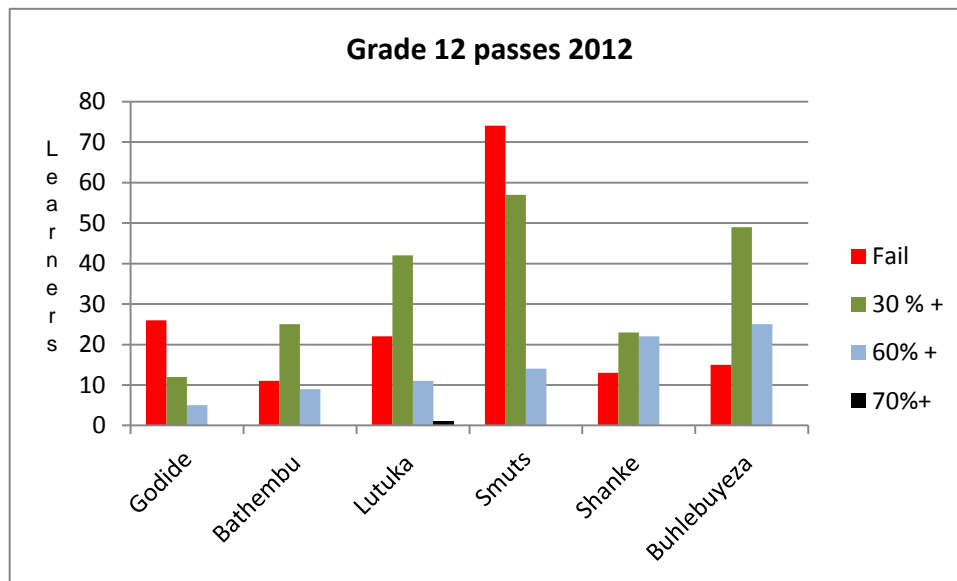
In 2008, the pass rates were poor in 5 of the 6 schools. In 3 of these they were below 30%, in 2 they were around 50%. Only 1 school achieved an impressive 96% pass rate. However, without exception, the principals were all embarrassed about the quality of what they called 'worthless passes' achieved, with the majority scoring averages of around 40%, and the high achievers scoring at around 50%.

Since then, the trend of significant improvement over 2008 pass rates has been maintained in 4 of the 6 schools, in spite of 2 dropping slightly off their already good 2011 achievements.

In the remaining 2 schools, the misleadingly high 2008 and 2009 pass rates plummeted initially, but have recovered steadily on the back of the project's focus on improving the quality of passes in all FET phase grades, rather than the exclusive focus on quantity in Grade 12.

<sup>5</sup>See Kariem, Langhan and Velensky, May 2012

## Improved quality of passes

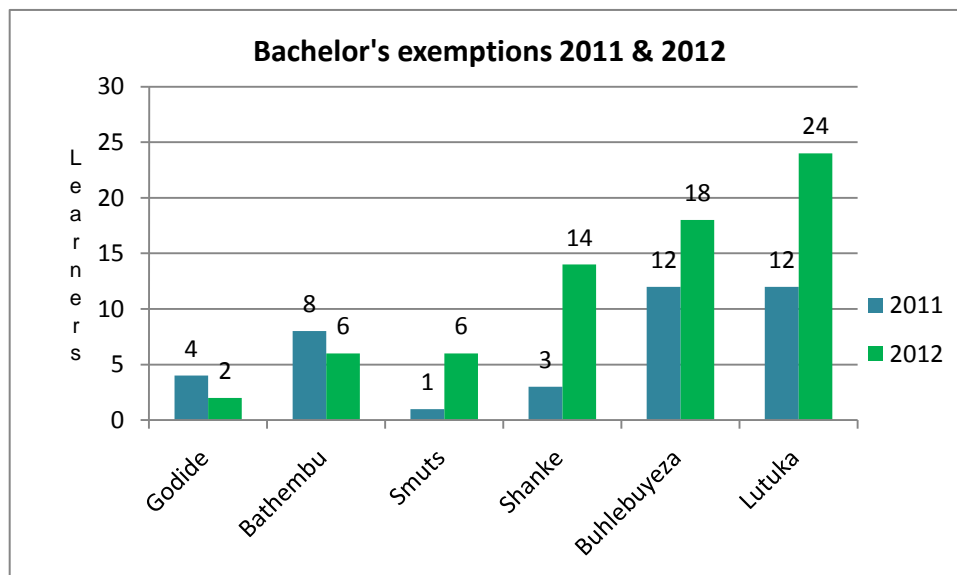


The 2012 results still include far too many failures and learners scoring at about the 30 – 40% range. This is particularly the case at Smuts Ndamase, which is probably the most under-resourced of the project schools. In addition, overcrowding has become a significant challenge because it is the only high school in the area; and 10 of its teachers are temporary. The latter has meant that the school has had to manage without most of its teachers for up to 2 terms of each year since 2011, while the Eastern Cape Education Department continues to battle to find a way to pay temporary teachers.

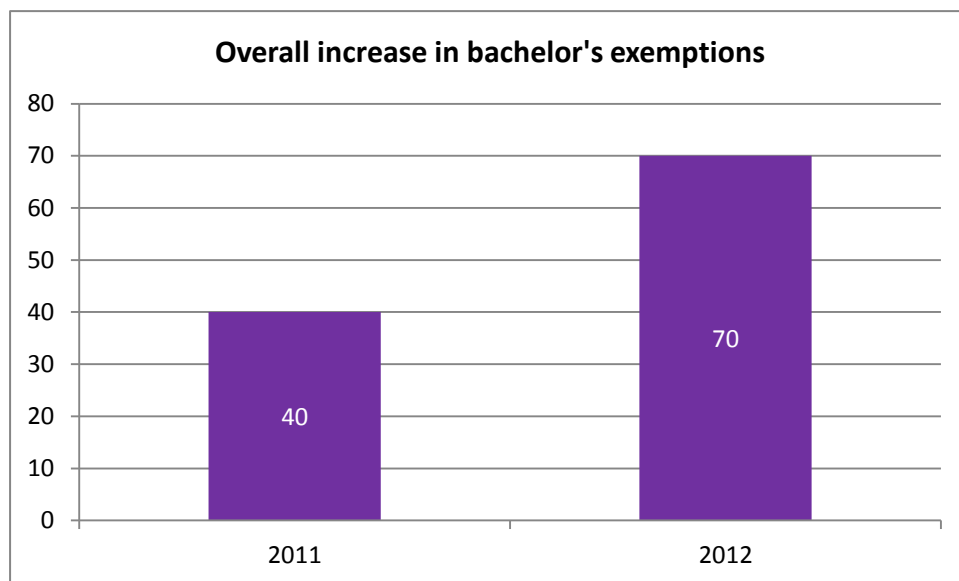
However, despite these kinds of challenges, there are also two very encouraging trends. First, compared to 2008, there has been a significant increase in the number of learners scoring above 60%, with 1 learner at Lutuka excelling to achieve an average of over 70%. Similarly, at the level of individual subjects, 4 learners at Smuts Ndamase scored over 80% for IsiXhosa home language.

Second, as a result of the improved quality of passes, there has also been a steady increase in the number of bachelor's exemptions as illustrated below.

## Increase in bachelor's exemptions



While 2 of the schools achieved fewer exemptions in 2012 than in 2011, the trend in the other 4 schools is extremely positive. Overall, the number of exemptions across the six schools has improved considerably since 2008, and almost doubled between 2011 and 2012 as illustrated below.



### Highlights of high school trends

Although not as impressive as the primary schools' achievements, there is nevertheless clear evidence of improvements in Grade 12 pass rates, the quality of passes and the number of bachelor's exemptions since 2008. As for the primary schools, most high schools have also been able to maintain or even improve on their achievements independently a year after project support ended.

### Reasons for the improved results

Given that there have been no other sustained interventions at any of the project schools since 2008, there can be little doubt that the improvements summarized in this report can be attributed to the combined impact of following elements of the Trust's school support and development model.

### Approach

An approach that emphasized:

- The Batho Pele principles and focused on the values, attitudes and practices embodied in post-1994 curriculum and whole school evaluation policy documents
- Developing trusting and accountable partnership relationships with schools
- Developing a thorough understanding of each school's challenges through a 6-month baseline study
- Understanding the expectations of the curriculum and related policy documents
- A needs-driven approach focused on curriculum implementation and related whole school support and development

- Collaborative identification and prioritization of each school's needs related to the above
- Practical school-based support directed at enabling schools to understand their roles and responsibilities and to comply meaningfully with policy expectations
- Promoting the regular, systematic use of teachers' guides and textbooks as a first stage in enabling effective curriculum implementation

### **Nature of the support**

In response to the clear need for enabling support and development in all of the disadvantaged schools, the model focused on supportive capacity building interventions. The interventions took the form of regular, ongoing cycles of supportive, practical, hands-on training, coaching and monitoring<sup>6</sup> in four key areas:

1. Leadership, management and administrative roles and responsibilities, with the emphasis on how to implement them practically to support curriculum implementation
2. Personal development to become better leaders, managers and teachers
3. Understanding curriculum requirements, how to plan to achieve them, how to plan lessons, how to teach and assess effectively and how to implement each practically
4. The systematic use of approved teacher's guides, textbooks, workbooks and study guides<sup>7</sup> as a first stage of enabling effective curriculum implementation. This because these materials:
  - Embody curriculum requirements
  - Provide explicit, detailed, on-the-job, do-it-yourself teacher training and guidance
  - Deliver the curriculum into the classroom through officially approved:
    - Lesson plans
    - Content
    - Learning, self-study and assessment activities
  - Provide teachers with:
    - A range of teaching, learning and assessment methods and techniques
    - The language for teaching through the medium of instruction
    - Guidance for conceptual progression from grade to grade across phases

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<sup>6</sup>The purpose of monitoring was to determine the extent to which participants were able to effectively implement policy requirements, and to identify areas in which they needed further training and coaching support.

<sup>7</sup> The project donated to each school: teacher's guides for every teacher and textbooks, workbooks and supplementary reading materials for every learner, for every learning area, in every grade.

- Pacing guidelines for curriculum coverage

### **The schools' responses to the support**

During the three years of implementation, these interventions resulted in the following new practices to varying degrees at all of the schools:

- Improved leadership, management and overall basic school functionality
- More accountable principals, SMTs, HODs and administrators
- Improved curriculum planning and preparation, LTSM use and teaching, learning and assessment practices that led to:
  - More attention to lesson planning, preparation and implementation
  - More regular and systematic use of LTSMs
  - Evidence of a focused effort to pace and meaningfully cover the curriculum
  - More teaching through the medium of instruction
  - Exposing learners to a broader range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies
  - More structured conceptual explanations
  - Providing greater stimulation for weaker learners
  - Allowing learners to participate more actively and independently
  - Requiring learners to do more regular written work
- The cumulative effect of these improvements led to the improved results discussed in this report, which are supported by the following other improvements:
  - Significantly fewer learners scoring zero for almost all activity types
  - Significantly more learners scoring above 50%
  - Most of the worst performing schools in 2008 consistently achieving the greatest improvements
  - Levelling out of the results of worst and best performing schools

### **Conclusions**

While the improvements described in this report are important achievements in themselves, they are all the more significant in the context of consistently disastrous national learner results, because:

- They were achieved within only 3 years
- Most of the schools have been able to maintain or continue improving their results independently a year after project support ended

This report confirms that, given the right kind of support and development, under-performing schools in disadvantaged and under-resourced contexts can become better achieving schools within 3 years. To achieve this on a provincial scale, district officials need to be equipped to provide this kind of support and development to the schools they are responsible for and accountable to.

### **Recommendations**

The Department of Basic Education could enable the kinds of improvements described in this report in most of its disadvantaged schools by addressing just three issues comprehensively. These are, ensuring that:

1. At the beginning of each school year, every teacher and learner has all of the teacher's guides, textbooks, workbooks and study guides they need in order to fulfil curriculum requirements.
2. District officials are properly re-oriented to their respective roles and responsibilities; and to the values, attitudes and practices outlined and embodied in the Constitution, the Batho Pele principles and all school related policies.
3. District officials are properly trained and supported in how to practically enable schools to:
  - Understand all school policy related requirements<sup>8</sup>
  - Explain, demonstrate and enable the practical implementation of all school related policy requirements
  - Use LTSMs effectively as a first stage in delivering the intended curriculum in classrooms
  - Monitor compliance with policy requirements only after enabling meaningful practical implementation

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<sup>8</sup>The provision of capacity building support for district officials will be the key to enabling disadvantaged schools to achieve and sustain the required improvements.

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