

Case study 1

This Quintile 1 Primary School is in the remote 'mud school District' of Libode in the Eastern Cape.



The remote, deep rural Libode District landscape

A remote rural environment

The school, on the top of a grassy hill, is two and a half hours from Mthatha. Almost two hours of the trip is on gravel roads that are difficult to negotiate by car during the rain season. A few of the teachers drive bakkies that provide the transport for the other teachers each day. Some of the teachers live in Mthatha, and have to spend nearly five hours of every day on the journey to and from school. The other teachers and all of the learners live in the surrounding rural communities. Many of the learners have to walk for more than an hour to get to school each day.

Widespread poverty

The surrounding rural communities engage mainly in traditional cattle farming and subsistence crop farming. They also depend on small incomes from family members who are migrant workers, and on state pensions and child grants. Poverty is widespread and many of the adults are illiterate. The teachers routinely contribute towards buying shoes, jerseys and windbreakers for the learners during the winter months. All of the learners are fed by the school's feeding scheme, when it is operating, with many learners receiving their only meal each day at school.



The old outdoor feeding scheme

Poor nutrition

After each holiday, many children exhibit signs of malnutrition, and each term, it takes about three weeks on the feeding scheme before some of the learners are able to concentrate properly during lessons. Also, many male learners do not return to school on time due to their involvement in family work or some form of initiation schooling. A mobile clinic visits the school occasionally to check on the learners' health.

Poor facilities

The school was first connected to the electricity grid at the end of 2009. There is electricity in the staff room where the administrative clerk works, but not in the classrooms. Rainwater tanks provide the school's water and the pit toilets do not require water for flushing.

These mud classrooms accommodated the Foundation Phase learners



Outside view



Inside views



The Intermediate Phase classrooms

The medium of instruction challenge

- English is more like a foreign language than an additional language in this remote area
- Officials, teachers and learners are all uncomfortable, even visibly anxious, about using English; and show frustration when trying to express themselves through the medium of English
- In the Foundation Phase, Xhosa speaking teachers teach Xhosa speaking learners through their home language
- From Grade 4 onwards, Xhosa speaking teachers (who do not speak much English) try to teach learners (who are seldom exposed to English), through the medium of English. It is probably realistic to estimate that about 70% of English medium teaching is done in Xhosa.

In 2008

This school was battling to meaningfully fulfil the leadership, management and administrative requirements related to curriculum policies. In addition, its Literacy and Numeracy results were poor to average, ranging between:

- 25 and 45% in Grade 3
- 25 and 40% in Grade 6

To improve on these results, the school needed support with:

- Leadership and management
- Curriculum planning and administration
- Teaching and learning resources
- Curriculum implementation

By the end of 2010

A) There were clear signs of improved leadership and management

Due to improved leadership and management practices and cooperation with the Department of Education and the local community, the school had initiated a number of its own new projects as clear indicators of its capacity to take control of its own destiny.

4 new classrooms were built to replace the mud classrooms





The new classrooms completed and furnished

An indoor feeding scheme kitchen was also built



Outside view

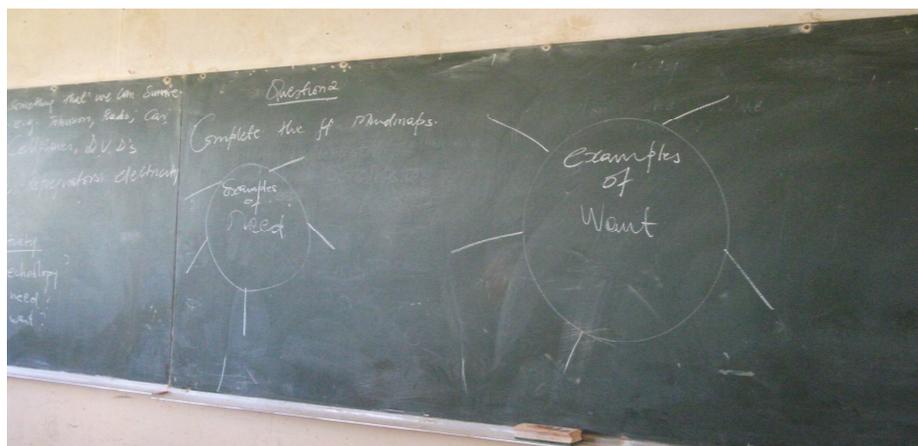
Inside view

B) Signs of improved curriculum implementation

Daily use of textbooks and workbooks for reading and writing ...



Teachers using a wider variety of teaching and learning strategies

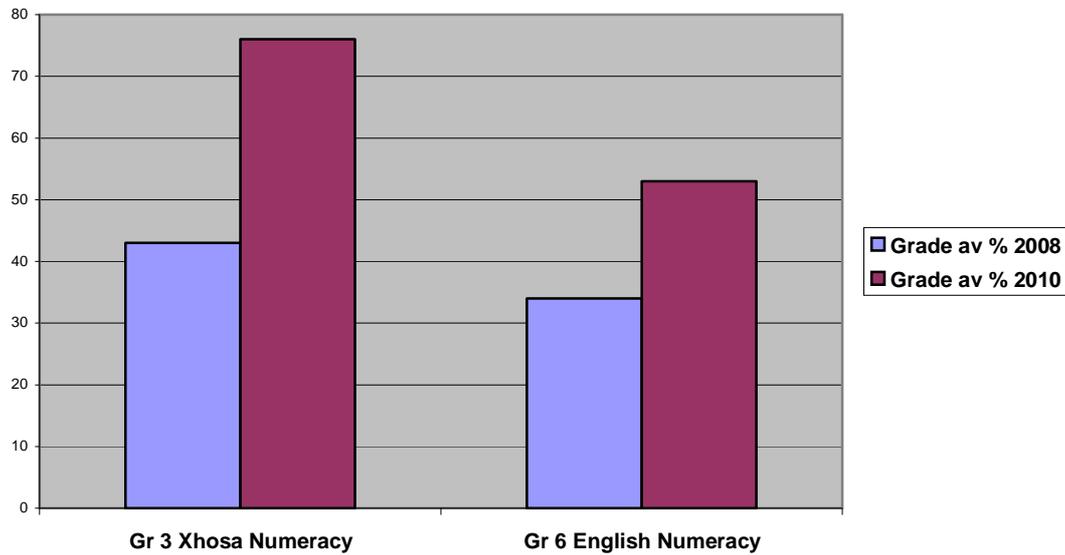


C) There were also clear signs of improved learner results

Learner results improved dramatically:

- The Grade 3 Xhosa Numeracy average improved from 43% to 76%
- The Grade 6 English Numeracy average from 34% - 53%

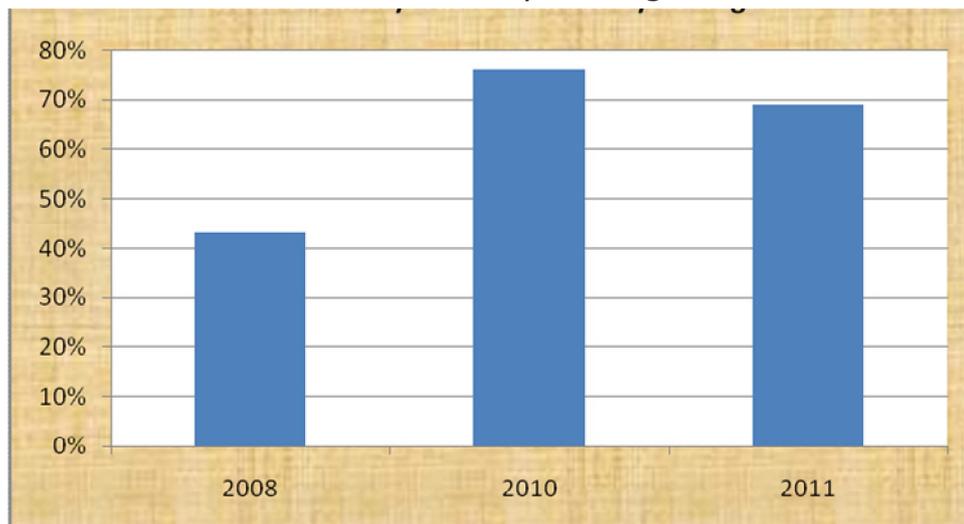
Grade average improvements



By the end of 2011

Although the school was still struggling to improve its Literacy results, it was maintaining much improved Numeracy results as illustrated below.

Xhosa Numeracy Averages



Conclusion

Maintaining the kinds of improvements this school has made in just three years is all the more meaningful given that the contextual and socio-economic conditions of the District, the school and its community have not improved.

It would appear that the factors that contributed most towards the improved results at this school were:

- Strengthening leadership and management through coaching and mentoring.
- Ensuring that every teacher and learner had teaching and learning materials for every subject.
- A focus on regular and systematic use of teaching and learning materials by both teachers and learners.
- Ongoing, classroom observation and practical support with how to use the teacher and learner materials meaningfully to fulfil curriculum requirements.

Part of the school's battle to improve on its English Literacy results has to do with its remote location and the fact that English is seldom used in the local community. This means that English medium instruction is still a major challenge at the school.