

Case study 2

This Quintile 2 SHigh School is in the remote Tsolo District of the Eastern Cape, about an hour from Mthatha by tar road. It has a combination of older and newly built classroom that are reasonably well maintained.

The older Grade 10 classroom block



Poverty

The surrounding rural communities engage mainly in traditional cattle and goat farming and subsistence crop farming. Very few adults can find work in the nearby small town of Tsolo and unemployment is widespread. Families depend on limited 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.

Goats grazing near the school



Distance and time

Many learners have to walk long distances to get to school each day. The Department introduced a learner transport system in 2010, but it has not been a reliable service.

Hunger

The school does not have a feeding scheme although it does have many needy learners, particularly those that have to walk long distances to get to school. During the Winter School sessions for Grade 12 learners, the teachers provide food for the learners.

Traditional practices

After each holiday, many male learners do not return to school on time due to their involvement in initiation schooling.

Access to resources

The school has electricity, but gets its water from rainwater tanks, and has pit toilets. A nearby clinic provides access to basic medical care and a large hospital is under construction just outside Tsolo, but it is unlikely that any of the local families will be able to afford the costs of receiving care at the hospital.

Rainwater from a tank



Pit toilets in the centre



Maintenance

Although the school buildings were reasonably well maintained, the school had not been able to address all of its maintenance challenges.

Broken desks



The medium of instruction challenge

At this school, the medium of instruction situation is:

- 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

- Xhosa speaking teachers, who do not speak much English, try to teach learners who are not exposed to much English, through the medium of English. Up to 70% of their actual teaching is done in Xhosa.
- A few foreign English speaking teachers, who do not speak much Xhosa, try to teach learners, who are not exposed to much English, through the medium of English, featuring a variety of accents.

In 2008

This school was battling to meaningfully fulfil its leadership, management and administrative responsibilities. Its overall pass rates for Grades 10 and 11 were weak, while the Grade 12's were very good. However, the quality of the passes were disappointing:

- Grade 10 overall pass rate – 40%
- Grade 11 overall pass rate – 45%
- Grade 12 overall pass rate – 95%, with only 12 learners gaining a university exemptions.

To improve this situation, the school needed support with:

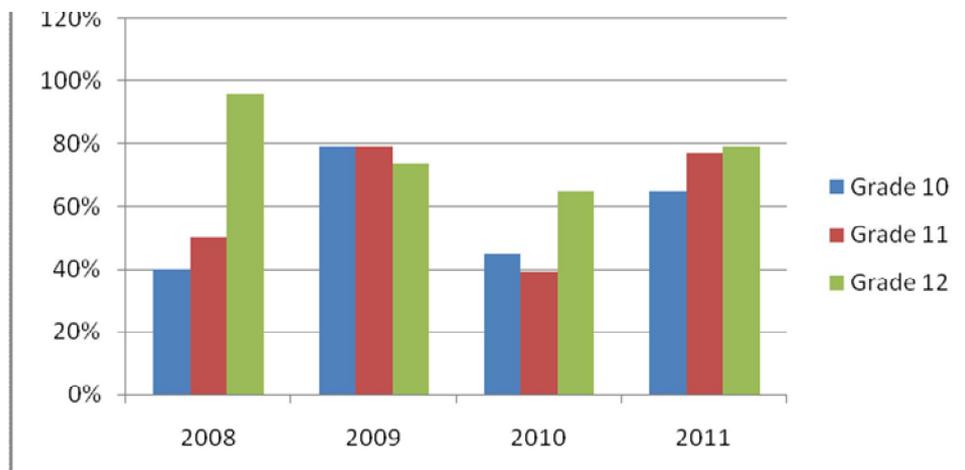
- Leadership, management and administration
- Curriculum planning and administration
- Teaching and learning resources
- Curriculum implementation

By the end of 2011

A) Learner results had begun to improve

In 2008, there was a large gap between the poor results achieved by the Grade 10 and 11 classes and the Grade 12s. The graph below illustrates how, over the project three years, results improved initially, dropped off, and then began to recover steadily across all 3 grades. By the end of 2011 the results across Grades 10 – 12 were much closer to each other than they had been in 2008. The number of learners achieving university exemptions remained more or less consistent over the project period.

Pass rates per year



The following factors help to explain why the schools' results did not improve any more than they did over the three years:

- 1) The socio-economic conditions in the local community remain unchanged and district support to the school had not improved.
- 2) 2010 included the serious disruptions of the extended Soccer World Cup mid-year school holiday and a teacher strike during the third term.
- 3) Overcrowding made classroom management, teaching and learning very challenging.
- 4) 2011 was seriously disrupted by the Eastern Cape Education Department's simultaneous termination of temporary teaching posts, learner transport and feeding scheme in the province- all of which undermined this school's functionality from the first term.
- 5) There is still some work to do to get the general levels of school functionality operating optimally in order to support curriculum implementation interventions.

B) But there were clear signs of improved leadership and management

Due to improved leadership, management and administrative practices and improved relations with the local community, the school had initiated a number of its own school improvement projects as clear indicators of its capacity to take control of its own destiny. These include:

- Employing past learners who have established a local building and carpentry business to convert an old classroom into a library and repair broken classroom furniture



- The renovation of four classrooms



- Securing the support of a media group to refurbish the school's previously under-utilized computer centre and to supply and install computers



Conclusions

These significant improvements are all the more meaningful given that the contextual and socio-economic conditions of the District, the school and its community remain unchanged.

Given the improvements celebrated in this case study; the school is approaching the general levels of functionality necessary to support curriculum implementation interventions. With continued commitment from the school staff and the local community; and with improved district support, there is every reason to believe that this school will go on to produce much improved learner results.