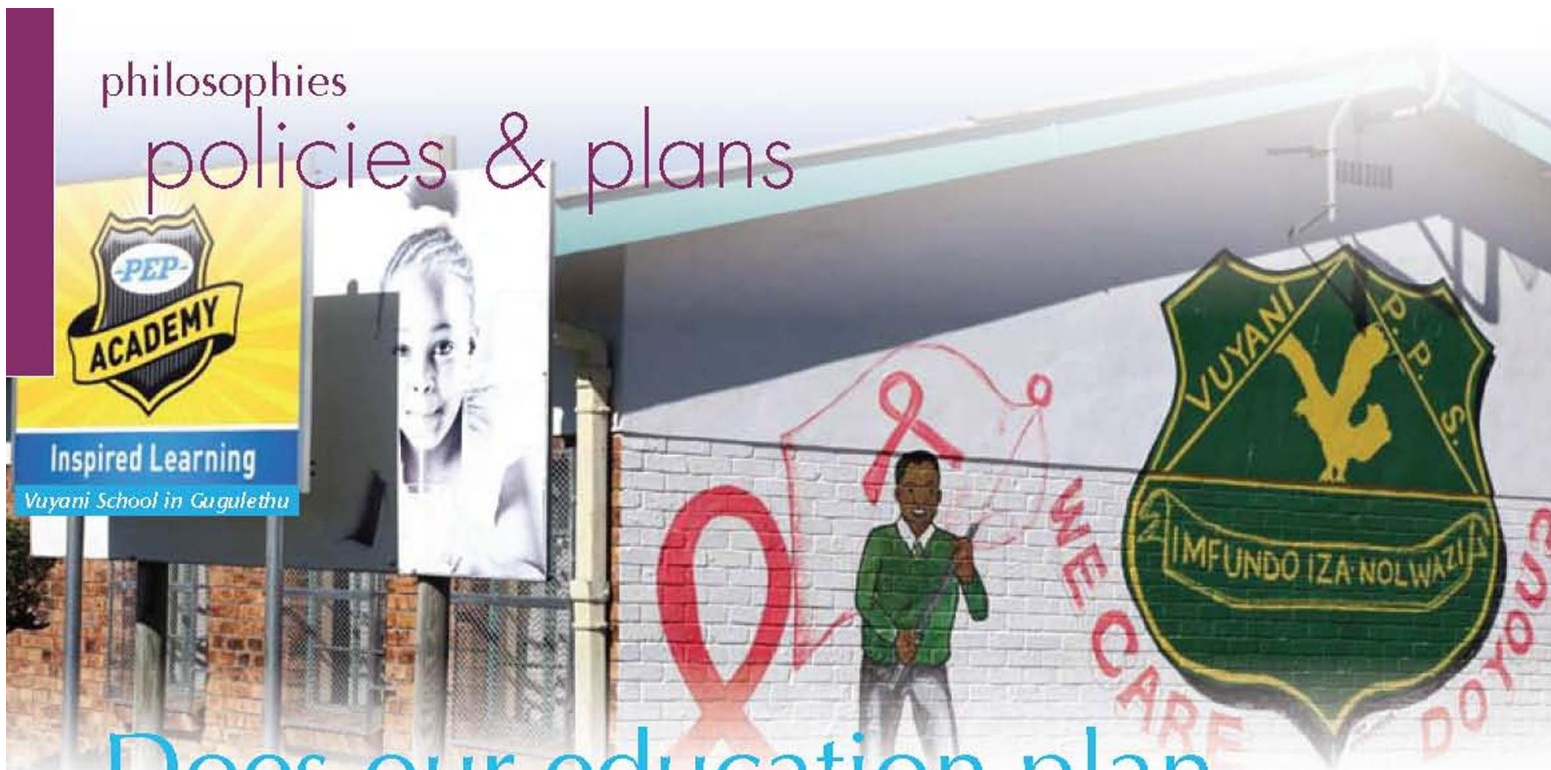




## philosophies policies & plans



# Does our education plan include learning academies?

**T**he 2011 Annual National Assessment (ANA) results report that Grade 3s in South Africa scored an average of 35% for literacy and 28% for numeracy; and Grade 6 learners scored an average of 28% for languages and 30% for maths. What has become evident in many schools is that the contact hours are simply not enough. Learners need more time than the time spent in the classroom.

The philosophy behind academies is to provide learners at primary school level with extra tuition and classes, focusing on the very necessary areas of literacy and numeracy. According to an HSRC (Human Sciences Research Council) study, designed together with the Western Cape Education Department and the Shuttleworth Foundation, one of the education system's biggest challenges is to improve the performance of learners who are far below par, specifically in mathematics and English.

Learners from eight schools in the Metropole-South Education Management Development Centre (EMDC), a district stretching from the Cape Flats to the small coastal towns on the Peninsula, participated in the study. Four schools were in a control group, while the other four received 20 hours of extra teaching after school. In analysing the results the findings showed a larger increase over time in the performance of learners who more regularly attended mathematics tuition sessions compared to those who did not attend as regularly. In terms of English tuition, the improvement in project-school learners' performance generally exceeded those of control-school learners.

One such successful initiative is the PEP academies, of which two more have been opened this year in the Western



Academies boost literacy skills

Cape: Vuyani School in Gugulethu and Zimasa School in Langa, bringing the total number of PEP academies nationally to 10. Grade 4 is one of the most difficult school years when children switch lessons from their mother tongue (Grade 3) to English language tuition (Grade 4) and from four to nine learning areas. As children are taught in a language that is unfamiliar to them, building a strong learning foundation at this stage is critical. One programme addressing this challenge is the PEP Academy, a Department of Education approved learning model that provides supplementary education after school.

Dr Cas Prinsloo, chief research specialist in Education, Science and Skills Development at the HSRC, points out that the school environment plays an important role in learners' motivation, such as facilities, infrastructure, workloads, remuneration, capacity, learning support material, technology, assistance/assistants, and discipline, to name a few. For provincial and district offices such interventions pertain to policies and programmes, security, resource provisioning, large-scale logistics, and overall management.

to page 12





Extra lesson academies

"Does our education plan include learning academies?" from page 10

## The results say it all

The PEP Academy results summary for 2008 to 2011 indicates:

- Average percentage point improvement in literacy scores: 24%;
- Average percentage point improvement in numeracy scores: 13%.

The pass rate reported for learners in 2011 show:

- Average pass rates in English Grade 4: 90%
- Average pass rates mathematics: 88%

The academies, which were first opened in 2008, have provided 6 400 learners with extra tuition in literacy and numeracy – the building blocks of education – as well as specialised training for 80 teachers. As a free supplementary education initiative, the PEP Academy is not a mere corporate social investment (although it is PEP's flagship) whereby money is given to some worthy cause. Rather, the PEP Academy has been designed to meet specific and important needs because, in four years, it has consistently notched up impressive results and proves how vital this intervention is. Moreover, while the PEP Academy is a testimony to good corporate effort, the initiative has even greater merit because, working as it does within the existing education system, it can also be supported by any businesses wishing to adopt the model as their own.

PEP managing director, Leon Lourens, says: "Most of the academy learners are children of people who cannot afford school fees at all or any additional education. We are not only helping to promote good results and an enthusiasm for school but we're helping to keep kids at school and off the streets by providing a safe and caring environment for them with this supplementary education initiative. It ticks a lot of social ills boxes and we are really proud to be able to contribute something worthwhile – something that can be measured and tracked and something that is making a positive difference."

When the initiative was launched in 2008, the Department of Education (DoE) endorsed it fully and stated that, rather than throwing money at an arbitrary corporate social investment project, PEP had identified a real need and was investing in addressing that need.

The PEP Academy is run by social investment agency, Social Innovations. The curriculum runs in all 10 schools from 14:30 until 16:30 on three afternoons a week and all the children are given a snack (eg a sandwich, a piece of fruit and a fruit juice) before their lessons start.



Learners in numeracy class

## Grade 5 reading programme pilot

To help sustain the learning gained in Grade 4, a custom-made library-based programme has been launched in two Bloemfontein schools where the PEP Academy runs already. The "Reading Alive" programme aims to inspire a love of reading while further building the reading competence of Grade 5 learners. If successful, the pilot will be extended to all PEP academies nationally. The library contains 50 books with teacher guides and learner workbooks and the aim is that all learners will have read and worked through all 50 books during the year.

## Parents' attitudes

Last month, PEP ran an informal survey using its free messaging service, PEPTxt, to find out more about parents' attitudes towards education. In answer to the question about what will help keep their children at school, the overall response was that support, encouragement, involvement and engagement were crucial. Nearly 200 respondents commented on this issue, for example: "encourage them to do better and be more understanding instead of judgemental" and "give full support, help with homework or assignments and participate in school meetings".

Several parents also said they should listen to their children more and try to support them in whatever they desire so that they could "be free to learn more".

Commenting on the PEPTxt survey responses, Leon Lourens said it was heartening to hear that parents believe it's important to help enthuse and encourage children about their schoolwork. "This can only have a positive impact on the child's success at school and help make them more confident learners."

The full report, *Extra classes, extra marks?* report on the Plus Time Project points out that crucial teaching time, teacher capacity, and learning materials should in no way be compromised in the Foundation Phase. No learner should be allowed to come through the Foundation Phase if they are not able to read and write fluently. The one bar that also needs to be raised, is the volume of opportunity and exposure learners get to practising reading, writing, speaking and numeracy skills. The report can be downloaded from [http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Research\\_Publication-7299.phtml](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Research_Publication-7299.phtml). ●