



School is in

Bit by bit, corporate South Africa is working to change people's lives for the better. Jackie Cameron shines the spotlight on some inspired educational social investment

Principal Mogale Masenya is in charge of a school attended mostly by orphans. But this is not an orphanage: it is a mainstream high school in Diepsloot, one of Gauteng's most populous and most troubled suburbs.

It is a place where HIV/Aids has wiped out a generation, leaving many children to fend for themselves. Most of the 900 or so pupils registered for classes at Itirele-Zenzele Comprehensive High School do not have parents.

'About 70% of our pupils come from child-headed households. When we need to speak to someone about a pupil's progress, we speak to children,' says Masenya.

And he has cause to get in touch with guardians often. For starters, more than 60 teenagers on the school's books have simply disappeared since the beginning of the year.

'Most of those we lose go to look for work. We look for them. We see some in parking lots, helping drivers to park

their cars,' says Masenya of the school's high drop-out rate.

He explains these families of children survive on social grants. It is difficult to make a monthly government stipend of about R800 stretch beyond the bare necessities of food, shelter and clothing. School fees are out of reach. This means there is very little money for the school to work with.

The Department of Education provides textbooks and teachers. The rest of the budget is up to Masenya to figure out. He has dipped into his own pocket when he could, to buy learning resources to assist pupils who have the determination and potential to succeed. And he keeps tabs on how they are doing.

'In total, since I started as principal here in 2007, at least 34 of my pupils have made it to university. I want to increase that number,' he says. Also in Masenya's sights is improving the overall quality of education for all years so that his pupils

are better equipped for the world – not just with basic literacy and numeracy skills, but emotionally and socially.

Stepping in to help Masenya achieve his goals is One School At A Time. One of the founders of leading advertising agency Joe Public set up this non-profit organisation to play a role in improving education standards. The agency's chief creative officer Pepe Marais says it has become his and his colleagues' mission to grow their business in order to drive resources to assist with transforming South Africa's schools. ▶

Previous page Chess teaches children valuable life skills
Below One School At A Time provides matric learners with scientific calculators



BUSINESS CSI

Marais and his colleagues spend their own time and money on One School At A Time, as well as harnessing their business networks to encourage others to support its projects. They have arranged fundraising campaigns, such as sponsored runs, and used their creative expertise to develop highly effective advertising campaigns to draw more attention to what needs to be fixed and how people can help.

In an award-winning television advert, Soweto schoolgirl Lesego is shown in a real-life experiment that demonstrates how extra English tuition can dramatically improve language proficiency in just one week. Among its projects, One School At A Time is trying to raise funds to pay for English teachers. Part of Marais' plan is to encourage the teaching of English as a first language. This way, learners will have a better chance of understanding complex subjects for which resources are only available in English.

Masenyha shares this vision and would like his pupils to move away from thinking in only their home languages, which include isiZulu, Sepedi and Setswana. He explains his reasoning: 'English is international. We believe that it should be the language of learning and teaching for the lower grades. We want to hire teachers who have English as a home language so we can improve the literacy of our pupils.'

So far, big improvements have been made at Itirele-Zenzele with little money. Masenyha has worked with Marais and his team to develop a strategic plan and to outline a vision for success. Pupils who demonstrate agreed core values, such as working effectively as a team member or showing respect for the environment by picking up litter, are awarded certificates. Vegetables from a school garden are given out as prizes.

Itirele-Zenzele is the second school that One School At A Time has adopted. In 2008 it started working together with Forte Secondary School in Dobsonville, Soweto. At the time, roughly half of the pupils were passing matric exams – most of them barely. Since then, grades have improved steadily: in 2012 the school reported a 92% matric pass rate, with almost half of these learners achieving an average above 60%.

'The idea was to find solutions within one school, measure the impact and then take our solution to other schools,' says Marais. He says he is not aiming for the 'standard factory kind of education', but rather one that develops emotional maturity and social abilities and generally 'assists our youth to find true purpose to their lives'.

Others within South Africa's corporate landscape are thinking along similar lines: that hands-on work within the education system holds the key to economic and social improvement. Of course, this is

much harder than simply handing over money and requires new ways of thinking and doing things.

One company emphasising education in its corporate social investment (CSI) endeavours is Tsogo Sun. Shanda Paine, group CSI manager, highlights the flagship SunCares Sports Academy's rugby, soccer and swimming programmes, saying, 'Through the vehicle of sports, we are able to reach young people and to provide a platform for life-skills training.'

The academy helps children develop their sporting abilities by providing them ▶



Right Grade 11 Forte Secondary School learners work shadow at advertising agency Joe Public



Above Kids taking part in the SunCares soccer programme meet their hero, Lucas Radebe

with training sessions and equipment and facilitating opportunities to play competitively. In addition, it introduces children to top athletes and players 'who will hopefully become hero figures and mentors for the players,' says Paine.

Tsogo Sun is also investing in a project that is introducing chess to approximately 15 000 pupils and almost 400 teachers at under-resourced schools in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. 'Chess as a tool builds character, introduces essential life skills and provides basic strategic planning for life, career and business,' says Paine.

Tapping into its expertise in the arts, the group is also giving young learners the opportunity to develop their creative talents. The SunCares Arts Academy runs programmes providing a foundation in drama, dance, vocal training and voice projection and organises concerts and performing-arts holiday programmes. Besides the fun factor, learners improve their communication and collaborative skills and improve physical fitness.

Helmut Bertelsmann, head of non-profit organisation Funda Afrika, works with

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various large South African companies such as automotive production plants and banks, helping them deliver on their CSI objectives at more than 60 schools around the country. Education is Funda Afrika's focus. It works on subject-specific support, particularly in maths and science, using a range of approaches, including special software and games.

Real change, Bertelsmann emphasises, takes time. 'For meaningful school support, you have to be in it for the long haul. We favour programmes that train teachers as well as learners, but that obviously costs more.'

He produces a long list of participants who have reaped the benefits of Funda Afrika's programmes. Many of them have ▶



Above Sports programmes help to develop well-rounded individuals
Right The performing arts are a great way for children to learn collaborative skills

gone on to university and graduated with qualifications in engineering and other specialisations that suffer from a shortage of qualified graduates. But, he says, funders have to be prepared for some disappointments.

'Schools are intensely human organisms. You will have your conflicts and your disappointments. Success depends a lot on the leadership skills of those involved. You can turn around a school with one person in the right job at the right time,' notes Bertelsmann.

Pansy Mekwa, general manager for strategy at Total South Africa, agrees that the only way to make a meaningful,

sustainable difference is through years of involvement and effective monitoring. 'You either give money away and wash your hands of a situation, or you try to be an integral part of the community,' she says.

'Our CSI tends to be very long-term - usually more than three years - and our major projects have horizons of more than 10 years,' she says. 'We don't think CSI is static; it is about building relationships and working together with people who need our assistance.'

Total SA works across the economy, with CSI projects ranging from assisting government with farming-skills development and tree-planting programmes, to educating communities near game parks on the benefits of protecting wildlife. But, like other organisations, it places a heavy emphasis on educating young people - and not just so that they can pass exams.

Its Move-it, Moving Matters project is a prime example: it provides schools with exercise equipment to assist with learners' motor-skills development. It has also introduced road-safety programmes and has plans to arrange for the delivery of bicycles, scooters and skateboards to kids in areas where road-safety measures have been put in place.

Although the benefits of education programmes aren't always immediate or even tangible, Masenya sums up why education is a favoured CSI vehicle for so many companies: 'We believe that if we can change learners, we can make the country better. Money alone can't change the way people are living.' ■