

Replicating apartheid

Poverty and dysfunctional schools mean that the previously disadvantaged are still disadvantaged

Leanne Jansen



ANALYSIS

THE differences in the matric results of white and black children reveal just how grim is the pall that apartheid continues to cast over the life chances of South Africa's pupils.

Data from the Basic Education Department shows that the proportion of black 22- to 25-year-olds who by last year had a matric certificate to their name (48.4%), was far lower than the proportion of white youths (87.9%).

This was despite the 12.3% increase, since 2002, in the proportion of black African 22- to 25-year-olds who had passed matric.

The proportion of coloured 22- to 25-year-olds who by last year had a matric certificate to their name was lowest of all, at 47.6%.

Of all the white pupils who wrote matric last year, 98.3% passed. But of all the black African pupils who wrote matric last year, 72.7% passed, according to research by Ntsizwa Vilakazi, a researcher with the department.

Looking at figures on the number of children attaining matric exemption last year, 66.7% of white matrics passed well enough to study towards a degree at university, and another 29.2% qualified to study towards a diploma. But just 23.8% of black matrics qualified to study towards a degree at university.

Vilakazi's research was released earlier this year, at a conference hosted by the Research on Socio-Economic Policy unit of Stellenbosch University, and funded by the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development – a partnership between the South African Presidency and the EU.

His data shows that the number of black children making it from Grade 10, and passing matric, is far lower than for white children.

Dividing the number of Grade 12 passes by the Grade 10 enrolment two years earlier equals the throughput rate.

The throughput rate of black African pupils has steadily climbed from 28.4% in 2008, to 37.1% in 2013.

But back in 2008 the throughput rate for white pupils was already more than double that for black pupils, at 73.4%.

Turning to

POLICY OPTIONS

STELLENBOSCH University education researcher Nic Spaull recommends the following to alleviate the problems:

- A national reading campaign with the slogan: 'Every child must read fluently in the language of learning and teaching of the school by the end of Grade 3 (age 9)!' It should be well advertised and must involve everyone from parents to the president.
- Improve what teachers know, and how they teach it. Research has consistently shown that South Africa's teachers lack the basic content knowledge and pedagogical skill to

teach the subjects that they are teaching. The department needs to experiment with and evaluate alternatives for teacher training – especially in maths and English.

In the short term options that showed some promise were highly specified scripted lesson plans for teachers, and eye tests for children.

- Audit the qualifications and skills of all district officials and curriculum advisers in the country.

Many curriculum advisers – meant to help teachers with subject expertise – were not appointed on merit. Some had only matric.

how pupils of different races perform in specific subjects, the department figures show that 83% of white matrics scored above 40% for maths, and 76% of white matrics scored above 40% for physical science.

A much smaller number of black matrics (28.5%) scored above 40% for maths, and just 31.7% scored above 40% for physical science.

A whopping 98.7% of white matrics scored above 40% for maths literacy, compared with 54% of black matrics.

Root of problem

Nic Spaull, an education researcher with Stellenbosch University, explains that the strong legacy of apartheid, and the correlation between education and wealth, has meant that, generally speaking, poorer pupils fare worse at school.

The vast majority of schools which served black pupils have remained dysfunctional and unable to teach pupils to properly read, write and calculate. In the new South African Child Gauge report, Spaull explains that by Grade 3, children in the poorest 60% of schools are already three years worth of learning behind their wealthier peers.

This gap grows, and by the time children are in Grade 9, they are five years worth of learning behind their wealthier peers.

Research has consistently shown that most South African pupils acquire learning deficits in the early grades, and that those backlogs are the root cause of underperformance in later years.

Poor quality education helps drive an inter-generational cycle of poverty. Children inherit the social

standing of their parents – no matter their own abilities or effort, argues Spaull.

"The latest available Saceq data of 2007 highlighted huge geographic inequalities in the country: 41% of rural Grade 6 learners were functionally illiterate, compared with only 13% of urban learners in the same grade," Spaull says.

"Learners who cannot read fluently by the end of Grade 4 cannot engage with the rest of the curriculum in meaningful ways. This is primarily because in Grades 1 to 3 the curriculum focuses on 'learning to read', whereas from Grade 4 onwards it focuses on 'reading to learn'."

This is why educationists emphasise that matric begins in Grade 1.

Labour market

Most black children continue to receive a low-quality education, which condemns them to the underclass of society, where poverty and unemployment are the norm, Spaull argues.

"An unequal education system feeds into and perpetuates an unequal labour market. Those children who attend dysfunctional schools and do not attain any higher qualifications are the first ones to fill the ranks of the unemployed and those in low-status jobs."

"This is in stark contrast with the situation of wealthy children who attend functional (usually fee-charging) schools, attain higher qualifications and occupy the upper end of the labour market."

The tragedy, Spaull says, is that these two systems continue to reproduce themselves post-apartheid.

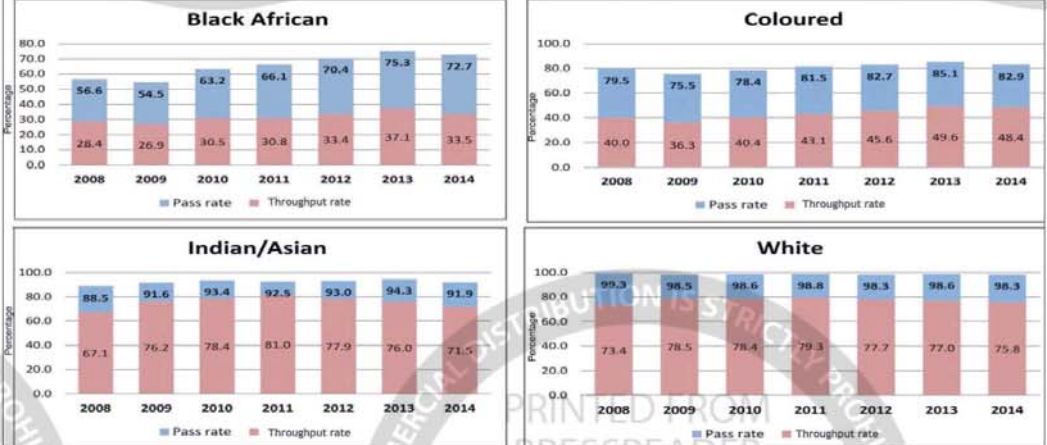
There are still two very different and clearly differentiable education systems that are attended by the rich and the poor respectively.

"Although the top part of the education system and the labour market are no longer racially homogenous (white), they are largely split along class lines. Those parents who can afford to pay school fees and send their children to well-functioning government or independent schools ensure that their children can get access to the top part of the labour market. Those parents who cannot afford school fees are excluded from these schools, often in informal ways. As it currently stands the dualistic South African education system is not an engine of social mobility but rather one of the key

Preparation for matric should begin in Grade 1, when proper learning techniques should be taught, experts say.

Pass rate and throughput rate

Throughput rate is the number of matric passes divided by the grade 10 enrolments two years earlier



Source: Department of Basic Education

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

● THERE are 3.3 million young South Africans who are 'Not in Employment, Education or Training (Neets)'. Their ranks are swelled by school and university drop-outs. According to the South African Child Gauge report, published by UCT's Children's Institute, little is known about what these young people do with their time. They are dependent on the earnings of other members of the household, and on child or old-age, grants.

● Of 100 pupils who started school in 2003, 49 made it to matric, 37 passed, and 14 qualified to go to university. Not all who qualified are enrolled, and only half of those who are enrolled will eventually graduate.

mechanisms through which an unequal society is replicating itself."

Government efforts

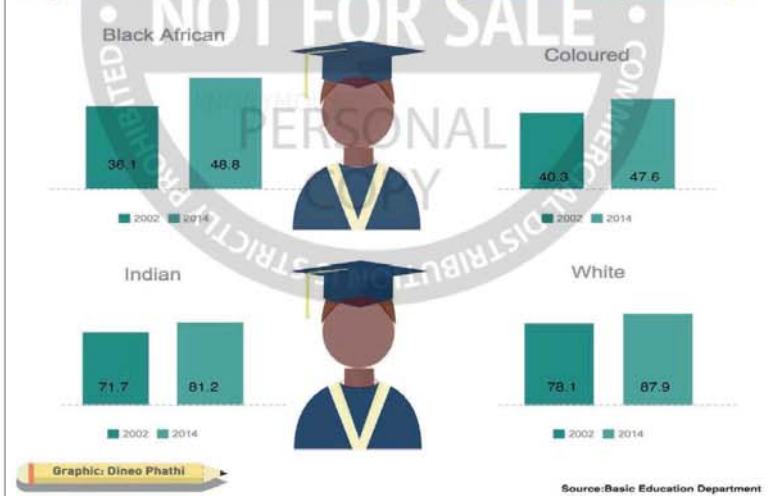
Asked what the policy interventions were which the department believed were best able to arrest the factors that inhibited quality education in formerly black schools, Basic Education spokesman Elijah Mhlanga said the co-ordination and collaboration between different government departments, entities and stakeholders must be strengthened.

"The next phase of early childhood development implementation will be characterised by improved quality, improved efficiency and inclusivity."

To improve the quality of Grade R teaching, the department will:

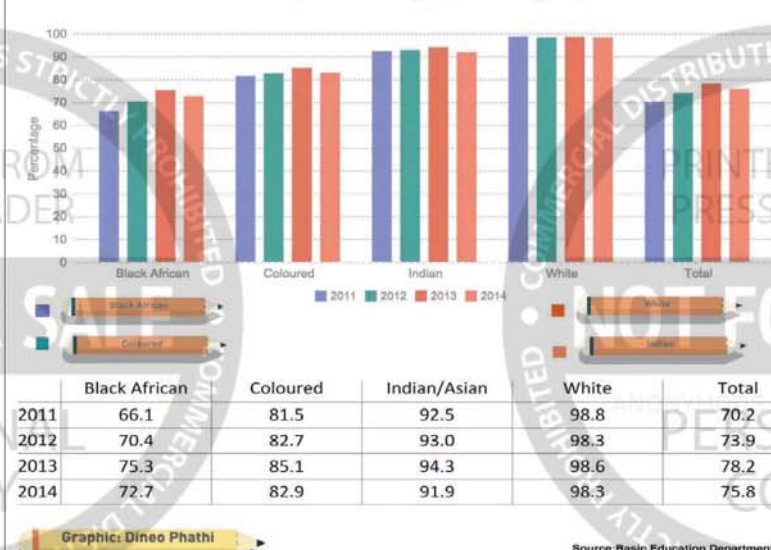
- Provide a curriculum resource pack to all public schools offering Grade R.
- Provide all Grade R pupils at public schools with workbooks.
- Appoint suitably qualified Grade R teachers.
- Upgrade the qualifications of Grade R practitioners (unqualified) towards the minimum of a National Diploma in Grade R teaching.
- Stipulate standards to guide Grade R practitioners, teachers and schools on the minimum elements for providing a quality Grade R programme.
- More closely monitor support in provinces and districts and at schools.

Proportion of 22 to 25-year-olds who completed matric (percentage)



Graphic: Dineo Phathi

Matric pass rates by population group



Graphic: Dineo Phathi

