



LINDSAY EDMONDS

Helping hand: Justin Nkinda, mathematics teacher at the Leap School in Mowbray, helps, from left, Sonia Bebeza, Nomfundo Valashiya and Zonke Malotana with a maths problem.



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No time to waste: pupils at the Leap School in Mowbray use a school computer during their break.

Pupils make the leap from township education

LAST year, only six matric pupils from Langa earned exemptions and none were in maths or science.

Now 75 high school pupils from Langa who have joined Leap Science and Maths School in Mowbray are staking their claim to new territory in the classroom, proving they can succeed in mathematics and science.

The Leap school opened in January after more than 10 years of tutoring, hard work and dreaming by its principal, John Gilmour, and teachers in Langa.

The school receives funding from the Shuttleworth and Zenex

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foundations and has a partnership with Bishops. The students use the prestigious boys' school's world-class academic facilities in the afternoon as part of their host's outreach programme.

The challenges at Leap are plentiful and the 10 enthusiastic teachers say their pupils arrived without a basic educational foundation.

"We are trying to show that it is possible to make the quantum leap from

township education to tertiary education," Gilmour explains.

A tertiary education is the goal set for every Leap student, having ideally passed matric with an exemption, and maths and science on higher grade.

The energy at Leap is almost tangible as the pupils have embraced the new high expectations and demanding workload.

In class they eagerly raise their hands to ask questions or express opinions.

Lessons begin at 8.15am and end at 5.15pm and optional school is held on Saturdays. Last Saturday,

three-quarters of the student body arrived.

While working on a geometry problem, 17-year-old Nodumo Kuse explains that her five noisy siblings made her go to school.

"I come on Saturdays because I want to do my homework here. I used to skip days but here I can't do that and don't want to."

Nodumo dreams of being a movie star, but says she would be happy going to university and becoming a bank manager.

Nzwana Nkolwana, 16, and Shepard Gugu, 14, used to attend the same school in Langa and say they are now made fun of

for wanting to be at school.

"They think we are mad," said Shepard, who wants to be a doctor.

"They say we are prisoners. I tell them it's hard. When you work hard, good things come in future. I am working on my future," said Nzwana.

Giving the students individual attention is important, says Justin Nkinda, a maths teacher who divides his time between a government school in Langa and Leap.

Nkinda's classes at Leap have fewer than 20 students and at the public school as many as 64.

"We have seen progress

in solving questions and in the pupils' confidence," he said. "I give questions I can't even think of giving in the townships."

Pupils pay around R200 to Leap a year but the fees go back to their former high schools. It is part of the responsibility to the community, which is fostered by the school.

Students take maths, physical science, English, Xhosa and computers along with a daily life orientation session.

For the last two periods of the day the pupils are bused to Bishops, where a few Bishops pupils sometimes tutor them.