

Overview

Briefly

Vision Afrika Primary School is a pre-primary and foundation phase private school in Kayamandi. We teach in English, in small classes, with qualified teachers who follow the CAPS curriculum. Extended teaching hours ensures quality teaching as well as a safe environment for learners' after-school activities.

The school plans to add additional grades and take in more learners.

Why?

Government schools in Kayamandi cannot cope with the area's growing demand for education. This demand is difficult to predict; it stems in part from parents placing children from neighbouring provinces with family in the Western Cape. Government primary schools in Kayamandi are at capacity, and almost 800 children from Kayamandi go to schools outside the area.

Vision Afrika, on encouragement of the Western Cape Education Department, established the Vision Afrika primary school to partially address the substantial needs for both another primary school in Kayamandi and new English language schools in Stellenbosch.

The Future

While Vision Afrika Primary School now caters for Foundation Phase learners, there are reasons for the school to expand and take in more foundation phase learners, as well as learners through to Grade 7.

Building plans to extend the school are for the school's present location on land owned by the Greater Stellenbosch Development Trust and made available to Vision Afrika. This expansion would allow for student numbers to increase to more than 800 learners and for the school becoming a feeder school for a high school in the Adam Tas Corridor. It is one of several alternatives to extend quality education in the region.

Finances

The Western Cape Education Department and parents (through fees) provide a percentage of the income required for the school to operate. The school also needs donations to cover costs. To grow sustainably, the parent payment and WCED contribution should increase over time. Parent fees are R5 500 per year; the WCED contribution is less than 40% of costs. As the school grows, we will have greater efficiencies.

We postponed the April launch of a bursary scheme supported by many small contributors. We still plan to scale this support system over the next three years.

We have tentative support to fund the planned extension of the school and also a new secondary school substantially. We have discussed the present and future needs at length with many stakeholders, including parents. To go forward, we need to align with the Western Cape Education Department.

Vision Afrika Primary School

Report on remote learning during lockdown

A majority of learners completed homework on IXL during the lockdown. The lowest response per class was 63% (Grade 1). The average for the school is 72%, with 83% the highest. The teachers can see remotely who completed a lesson and how well each child performed.

The teachers gave homework two to three times per week. They could have done so every day, but are sensitive about the cost of it to the parents. Few of the houses in Kayamandi have computers and reliable internet access. Thus, with few exceptions, the learners complete lessons on the mobile phones of parents and use a fair amount of data. The reasons given by parents for learners not completing the homework are the cost of data; parents at work with the phone; no smartphone; phone stolen (in one case when the child had completed some work and then stopped); and also having technology inexperience.

Once we understood the problem, we were confident that we would get free data fast and that we would then be able to extend the interaction beyond only IXL. The parents and learners use "cellular data" to log with mobile phones into the IXL program, an online system. Vision Afrika has its login and setup and uses typical service provider WiFi data. It is technically possible for a data network to provide free data when parents or learners log into the IXL site.

However, for reasons technical and administrative, the open data is not yet available, though we still hope to get it.

The teachers have also send homework via WhatsApp, for children to complete at home. I include images of children at work selected from those send to teachers by parents. (The teachers did not ask for pictures; the parents were grateful and proud.)

Going forward

We are encouraged that so many children completed home lessons remotely during the lockdown and also that the teachers were able to teach remotely.

We have to build on this demonstrated capability. We cannot be sure that there will not be further lockdown periods either nationally or for specific areas. More pertinent, we can expect that teaching, in general, will change more rapidly in times to come and that we must keep pace with these developments.

Going forward, I suggest we explore at least three positives:

- Parents were generally grateful that the teachers of Vision Africa continued teaching in the lockdown. Anecdotal evidence is that they were impressed that their children could do school lessons remotely and are now more engaged with the children's education. The teachers also gained more respect from parents. We should find reasons to give at least some home lessons when the school opens. We should think about ways to keep parents engaged.
- We could use educational and office tools to enable our learners to join in educational play with learners from other schools. It will be complicated, but it is an exciting possibility to explore. It could include video and art and music.
- We must find a long-term solution for data costs to parents when children do lesson remotely. We should also explore whether we could host tech days, perhaps twice a year over weekends.