sa Homeschooling and beyond
OCTOBER 2026



Is the Online Cambridge Curriculum Accepted by SA Universities?

Getting Your Child into ECD is the First Step Towards Academic Success

How Inscape is Expanding the Creative Education Ecosystem

Brainline: Why Experience Counts in Online Education

Cambridge: Why are homeschooling families choosing Cambridge?

Are ALL our Matriculants Getting a Fair Shot?

+

Why Elite Gymnastics in South Africa is for Wealthy Families

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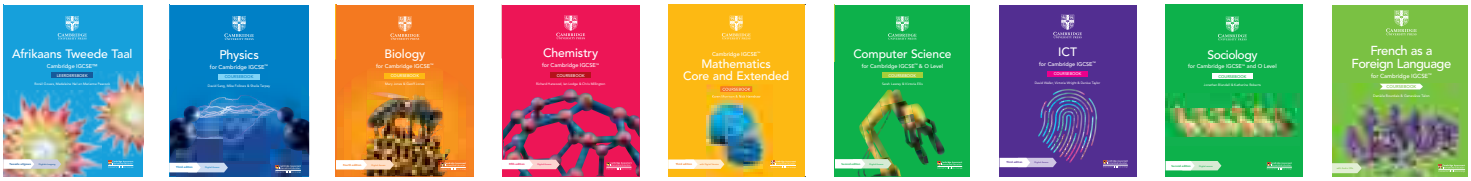
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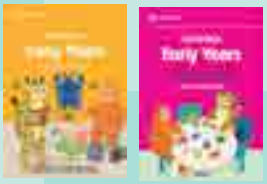
Core Textbooks (IGCSE)



Core Textbooks (CLS)



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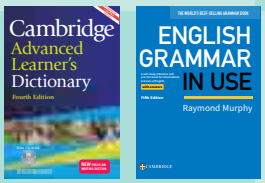


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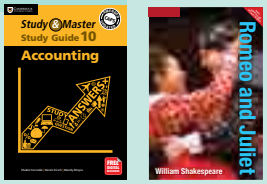




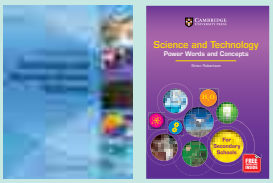
Dictionaries & Grammar



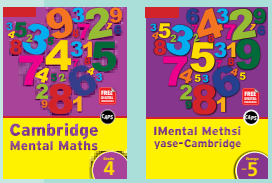
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Subject Dictionaries



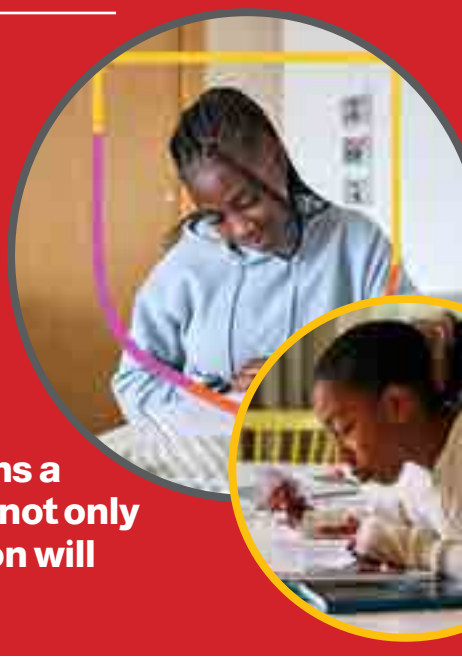
Mental Maths



ICT



Why are homeschooling families choosing Cambridge?



Choosing a learning pathway is one of the biggest decisions a homeschooling family will make. Parents are considering not only what their child will learn today, but whether that education will prepare them for further study, work and life.

Cambridge is part of the University of Cambridge and the world's largest provider of international education programmes for 3 to 19 year olds. Millions of learners in 160 countries follow Cambridge programmes, backed by more than 160 years' experience in assessment.

An international education from Cambridge builds deep subject knowledge, conceptual understanding and higher-level thinking skills. Learners are encouraged to think independently, apply what they know, solve problems and communicate their ideas clearly, becoming confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged.

For homeschooling families, flexibility matters. The Cambridge Pathway offers a clear journey from Cambridge Early Years to Cambridge IGCSETM and Cambridge International AS & A Level.

With more than 70 subjects at Cambridge IGCSETM and 55 at Cambridge International AS & A Level, learners can build a programme around their interests, strengths and ambitions. Clear syllabuses and fully aligned resources help parents see what their child needs to learn at each stage.

"An international education from Cambridge builds deep subject knowledge, conceptual understanding and higher-level thinking skills."

Recognition is equally important. Cambridge qualifications are globally recognised and trusted by top universities – 96% of Cambridge learners progress to university.

In South Africa, Cambridge International AS & A Levels are recognised by local universities through established admissions processes, while also opening doors to study abroad.

Families should check the entry and subject requirements of their chosen institution.



Cambridge offers more than a route to exams. It builds knowledge, skills and understanding for life, helping learners be ready for the world.

Find out more about accessing a Cambridge education as a homeschooling family:

SCAN QR CODE

Visit: cambridgeinternational.org





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Choosing a learning pathway is one of the biggest decisions a homeschooling family will make. Parents are considering not only what their child will learn today, but whether that education will prepare them for further study, work and life.

Inscape Education Group Expands Its Creative Education Ecosystem

As creativity becomes an increasingly important driver of economic growth, innovation and employment, Inscape Education Group is helping shape the next generation of creative professionals.





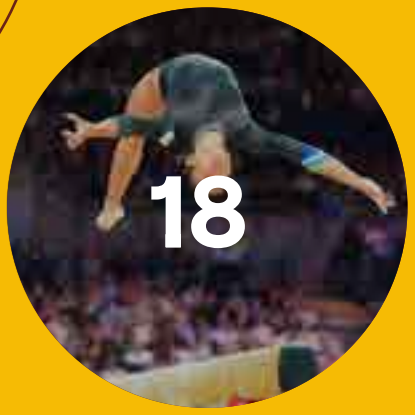
Matric Exams: Give Them A Fair Shot

On 13 October, more than 700,000 matriculants will sit down to write the most important exams of their young lives. For many, the challenge isn't whether they've studied enough. It is whether they'll have a pen with which to write, a meal in their stomach or a safe way to get to the exam venue.

University Acceptance for Cambridge Online Students in South Africa and Abroad

With university application deadlines closing across the country and active debate about alternative curricula under the Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act, South African parents worry that an online Cambridge education won't secure public university entry.



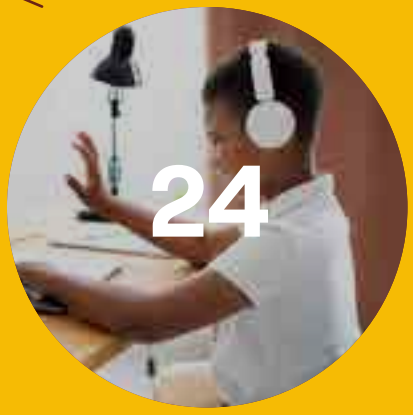


Why Wealth Trumps Talent in South African Gymnastics

South Africa celebrated historic milestones at the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games, where Naveen and Zelmé Daries secured top-15 finishes in the all-around final alongside two-time Olympian Caitlin Rooskrantz. Yet behind those scores lies an uncomfortable reality: elite gymnastics in South Africa is bankrolled almost entirely by parents, shutting out working-class talent.

Not All Online Schools Are Equal: Here's Why Experience Counts

Choosing the right education option for your child is never easy. As more parents explore online schooling as a flexible, reliable and accessible alternative, the number of providers has grown rapidly. Yet one factor remains important: experience.





Getting Children Into ECD Is The First Step Towards A Successful Education

South Africa needs more children inside the formal ECD system. It needs sustained investment in practitioners and the quality of children's daily experience. Getting children into ECD is the first step. Managing Director of Dibber International Preschools South Africa explains why.

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WHERE IT LEADS

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



Who can believe it's already October! As the allergies kick in and the changeable weather keeps us guessing on whether to cover up or leave the house in our swimwear, we have an opportunity to mull over many of the issues confronting us.

In this month's packed issue, we take on a concern that has been surfacing in the many Facebook and WhatsApp groups around the country. A number of online schools and curriculum providers make a great case for the Cambridge curriculum. However, many are finding that there is a knowledge gap on what it takes to get our online kids to meet South African university entrance requirements. We take a deep dive into what you need to consider and how best to direct your child's Cambridge journey to avoid disappointment.

As a parent of a high performance gymnastics champion, I decided to homeschool her to help balance her academic and training schedules. However, raising an elite gymnast is an expensive endeavour that also requires immense sacrifice. Yet, parents like myself, struggle to sustain the careers in the absence of support from government and corporate South Africa. We look further into the issues affecting gymnastics parents and why wealth, not talent, determines who gets to represent their country.

We also speak to why ECD is essential to a successful academic path for young children, and how difficult it is for matriculants in disadvantaged communities to pass.

Happy reading and as always, your best is good enough.

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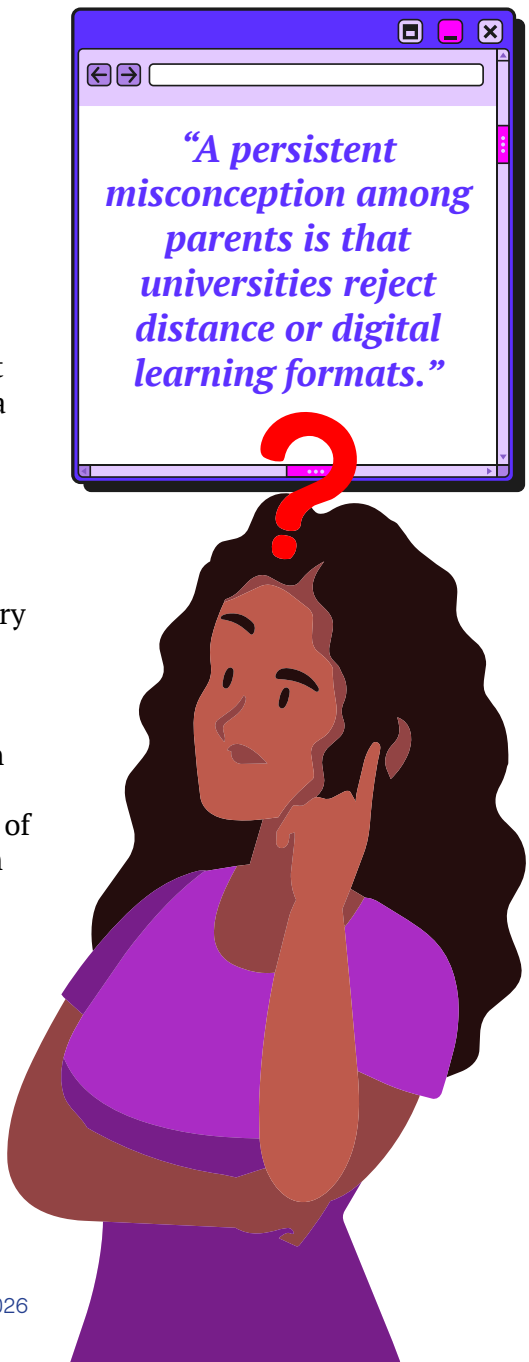
Do Cambridge Online Graduates Qualify For South African Public Universities?

With university application deadlines closing across the country and active debate about alternative curricula under the Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act, South African parents worry that an online Cambridge education won't secure public university entry.

A persistent misconception among many parents of online students is that universities reject distance or digital learning formats. This isn't true, particularly for Cambridge graduates. In South Africa, the Higher Education Act mandates that any student entering a bachelor degree programme at a public university must hold a matriculation endorsement or an official exemption.

Students who complete the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Levels or Advanced (A) Levels, are fully eligible for admission to South African public universities provided they get a Certificate of Matriculation Exemption from the Matriculation Board of Universities South Africa (USAf).

Cambridge students write standard invigilated examinations in person at registered Cambridge examination centres or British Council venues which means that their learning environment (whether an online provider, a home-education cooperative, or a private tutor) doesn't disqualify them from tertiary study.



In formal assessment, the Matriculation Board does not review class attendance registers, online learning management systems or even lesson delivery styles. The board only evaluates physical, certified statements of results issued directly by the external examining board.

Official documentation from Cambridge International states that: "Cambridge qualifications are designed to meet rigorous international standards, and whether a student prepares in a traditional classroom, an online school, or at home, their performance is evaluated against the exact same global benchmark"

Online candidates write identical, externally moderated examination papers alongside

Text Earl Joseph

traditional school candidates under strict invigilation conditions so their academic certificates hold equal legal standing.

Once USAf verifies the examination results and issues an exemption certificate, all 26 public universities in South Africa recognise the applicant as legally eligible for bachelor degree consideration. Which means that a student holding a verified Cambridge matric exemption satisfies the baseline statutory admission criteria across every public campus in the Republic.

This is only the first hurdle though. To qualify for a complete or foreign conditional exemption, candidates must meet specific grade and subject distribution requirements.

Let's start with subject grading and grouping. USAf implements exemption regulations under Government Gazette rules (specifically Paragraph 13 and Paragraph 15), which group approved subjects into five distinct categories with specific required grades, so deciding on a subject grouping for matriculation exemption requires disciplined planning from the start of the IGCSE years.

The most common grading and grouping route followed by South African Cambridge students combines AS Levels with IGCSE subjects as follows:

1

Four AS Levels and One IGCSE:
The candidate must pass at least four subjects at Cambridge International AS Level with grades A to D, plus at least one subject at IGCSE or O Level with a grade from A to C.

2

Five AS Levels:
Alternatively, candidates may present five separate subjects passed at AS Level with grades A to D (or an acceptable passing grade according to specific USAf schedules).

3

The A Level Route:
Students who complete full A Levels require a minimum of two A Level passes (grades A to E) combined with three IGCSE passes (grades A to C), or three A Level passes plus one IGCSE pass.

Basic grouping categories and marks aren't enough though. Subject groups must also satisfy USAf combination requirements:

Group I (First Language): English Language at IGCSE (First Language English, grades A to C) or English Language/Literature in English at AS Level (gradesA to D). 1

Group II (Second Language): A recognised second language i.e. Afrikaans, French, German or isiZulu, taken at least at IGCSE level or AS Level. 2

Group III (Mathematical or Third Language): Mathematics, or a third approved language. 3

Group IV (Natural Sciences or Mathematics): Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Mathematics (if Mathematics was not selected to satisfy Group III) 4

Group V (Approved Humanities or Commercial Subjects): An approved subject like Accounting, History, Geography, Economics, Art & Design, or Computer Science. 5

The thing that most often prevents online students from qualifying for entrance is the strict two-sitting rule enforced by USAf. Under this statutory requirement, all four AS Level subjects used to claim exemption must be completed across no more than two examination sittings.



An examination sitting refers to an official exam series like the May/June or October/November session. If a student writes two AS subjects in October/November of one year, they must write their remaining two AS subjects in the following May/June or October/November series.

Spreading AS Level examinations across three or four separate sittings automatically forfeits standard exemption eligibility. Which may then require candidates to take supplementary papers or appeal to the specific university for special consideration.

What most parents and students need to understand is that earning a USAf exemption certificate does not guarantee a lecture room seat. Public higher education institutions in South Africa maintain absolute institutional autonomy over academic selections. Everything mentioned above only legitimises your application; it doesn't automatically get you into your preferred faculty or degree.

"An exemption certificate does not guarantee admission," cautions the Universities South Africa Matriculation Board in its official enrolment guidance. Discretion over specific faculty point scores and subject prerequisites remain the reserve of the institution.

Public universities translate Cambridge letter grades into internal Admission Point Scores (APS).

For instance, the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and Stellenbosch University publish annual international conversion tables.

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In these scoring frameworks, an AS Level grade A commonly converts to the highest scoring band (equivalent to an NSC Level 7 or 80% to 100%), while a B corresponds to Level 6 (70% to 79%). A Level grades are weighted higher and give students a competitive edge in point calculations.

Selective programmes impose strict subject prerequisites that go beyond generic exemption rules. For instance:

Engineering and Actuarial Science: Require high passes in AS or A Level Mathematics and Physics.

Health Sciences and Medicine: Require AS or A Level Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics, often with minimum grade A or B.

Commerce and Finance: Demand strong performance in AS Mathematics, with commercial subjects serving as helpful secondary credentials.

Parents also need to understand that institutional selection criteria does not mean that the Cambridge curriculum is invalid. It simply means that bodies like USAf represent an established legal framework with their own requirements to entry and Cambridge graduates need to meet those requirements.

While public universities are the focus of this article, Cambridge graduates with matric exemption can also pursue multiple distinct tertiary pathways:

1. The 26 public universities

From large research institutions like the University of Pretoria and Rhodes University to specialised comprehensive institutions,all public universities admit Cambridge graduates who hold USAf exemption (subject of course, to the requirements mentioned earlier). That said, high-demand faculties fill quickly so online learners should apply with predicted AS Level grades or mid-year statements of results before the annual closing dates between May and September.

2. Registered private higher education institutions

Should public institutions become inaccessible, South Africa's private tertiary sector is a much more flexible and broader ecosystem of accredited degrees, diplomas, and higher certificates. Institutions like Eduvos, Stadio Higher Education, The Independent Institute of Education (which operates Varsity College, Rosebank College, and Vega School), AFDA, and Boston Media House actively pursue Cambridge learners.

3. Vocational and technical training colleges

Students who complete IGCSE or AS levels who are looking for a more technical or practical qualification can also enrol in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Graduates can access National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) programmes, practical apprenticeships and engineering trade certificates which are recognised across local industry.

4. Specialised digital academies and professional bootcamps

For learners heading into software engineering, multimedia production, digital marketing or any other digitally oriented qualifications, alternative institutes like WeThinkCode and HyperionDev provide skills-first training models where entrance depends on practical aptitude assessments rather than traditional matric certificates.

5. International universities and colleges

One primary motivation for families choosing Cambridge online schooling is global mobility. Cambridge qualifications function as an international passport given it's accepted by more than 2,200 higher education institutions across 160 countries. Here are three of the most popular target countries:

United Kingdom: Applications flow directly through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). British universities treat A Levels as their native benchmark and AS Levels contribute directly to UCAS tariff points for entry into bachelor degree programmes.

United States and Canada: Over 800 North American colleges and universities, including all Ivy League institutions, recognise Cambridge qualifications. High grades in A Level subjects generally qualify students for up to a full year of undergraduate course credit so learners may skip introductory general education classes.

Europe, Australia, and New Zealand: Public universities in Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Australia have clear equivalence tables for Cambridge candidates. Many European universities with English-taught degree programmes admit Cambridge graduates directly based on specified subject combinations.

For a smooth transition from online schooling to campus life, families should follow this clear sequence

1. Verify that your child's chosen subjects cover all five USAf subject groups, especially essential second language and mathematics requirements.
2. Schedule AS Level examinations across a maximum of two consecutive exam series to protect exemption eligibility.
3. Book exam slots well in advance at an accredited Cambridge school or local British Council venue.
4. Complete the USAf online assessment prior to university application on the Matriculation Board website to review subject eligibility.
5. Submit certified copies of Cambridge statements of results and identification documents (birth certificates, IDs or passports) to USAf to secure a provisional exemption letter.
6. Apply directly to tertiary institutions and submit faculty applications accompanied by your provisional exemption letter and school performance reports before closing dates.



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INSCAPE

Inscape Education Group Expands Its Creative Education Ecosystem



As creativity becomes an increasingly important driver of economic growth, innovation and employment, Inscape Education Group is helping shape the next generation of creative professionals.

The recent acquisitions of Villioti Fashion Institute and Campus of Performing Arts (COPA) mark significant milestones in Inscape's Vision 2031 strategy, which seeks to build one of Africa's leading specialist creative education ecosystems.

Why the Creative Economy Matters

The creative economy is no longer a niche sector. According to research from the South African Cultural Observatory, South Africa's cultural and creative industries contribute nearly 4% to national GDP and support approximately 1.4 million livelihoods.

From fashion, design and architecture to music, digital media and creative entrepreneurship, these industries are creating opportunities for people who can combine creativity with innovation, technology and business thinking.

As employers increasingly value creativity, problem-solving, communication and adaptability, creative education plays an essential role in preparing graduates for the future of work.

Strengthening Specialist Creative Education

Founded in 1981, Inscape has spent more than four decades preparing graduates for careers in creative industries. As the institution approaches its fiftieth anniversary in 2031, it continues to evolve in response to the needs of students,industry and society.

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CREATING GRADUATES FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S GROWING CREATIVE ECONOMY

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The acquisition of Villioti Fashion Institute brought one of South Africa's respected specialist fashion institutions into the group. Founded by renowned designer Spero Villioti, the institute has built a strong reputation for fashion education grounded in craftsmanship, industry expertise and creative excellence.

The acquisition of COPA further expanded the group's capabilities, adding specialist expertise in music performance, production and music business. For more than two decades, COPA has developed musicians, performers and creative professionals for South Africa's entertainment industry. Importantly, both institutions retain their distinctive identities while benefiting from the support, systems and shared opportunities available within the wider Inscape Education Group.

A Richer Creative Learning Community

Together, Inscape, Villioti and COPA create a multidisciplinary creative education ecosystem spanning:

- The built environment
- Interior Design and Decorating
- Graphic and Digital Design
- User Experience Design
- Marketing and Entrepreneurship
- Fashion Design and Fashion Business
- Music Performance and Production
- Music Business and Entertainment Studies

This broader ecosystem creates opportunities for collaboration across disciplines, industry engagement and entrepreneurial thinking, reflecting the increasingly interconnected nature of the creative economy.

"South Africa's cultural and creative industries contribute nearly 4% to national GDP and support approximately 1.4 million livelihoods."

Looking Ahead

The acquisitions of Villioti Fashion Institute and COPA are about more than growth. They are about creating more opportunities for students to learn, collaborate and build meaningful careers in the industries they are passionate about. Through Vision 2031, Inscape is building an educational ecosystem that equips graduates to be work-ready, life-ready, society-ready and challenge-ready, while contributing meaningfully to Africa's growing creative economy.

As the world continues to change, employers are looking for people who can think differently, solve problems, communicate effectively and bring new ideas to life. These are the skills that creative education develops. By bringing together expertise in design, architecture, fashion, music, entrepreneurship and digital innovation, Inscape Education Group is helping students turn their creative potential into real-world opportunities.

Ready to Build Your Future?

Whether your passion lies in designing spaces, creating brands, launching businesses, producing music, shaping fashion, or solving real-world challenges through creativity, there has never been a more exciting time to enter the creative economy.

Explore the possibilities at Inscape, Villioti Fashion Institute and COPA, and discover how a creative education can become the foundation for a meaningful, future-focused career. Visit www.inscape.ac.za, www.villiotifashioninstitute.co.za, or www.copasa.co.za to learn more about our qualifications, campuses, upcoming Open Days and application process.

Keep Living Your Homeschool Dream

Whether you're just starting out on your homeschooling journey or have been homeschooling for years, there's one thing you share with most homeschool families: you want the freedom to educate your children in a way that works for your family.

Maybe you want the freedom to slow things down when your child needs it, spend a morning outside in nature instead of behind a desk, follow an unexpected interest, or simply create an education that fits your family.

But things have changed…words like assessments, portfolios, and requirements have started creeping into the conversation and, in many settings, becoming a focus.

For many homeschooling families, that can leave a nagging question: Do I now have to change the way we homeschool?

At Homeschool South Africa, we believe the answer is "no."

Our goal is to help families continue living their homeschool dream while navigating the practical day to day and regulatory aspects of homeschooling.

Through our Free Range Schooling resources, families can continue using the curriculum, philosophy or approach that works for them, while building a record of their child's learning journey. A science experiment, a piece of writing, a nature study, baking a cake, building something or learning through everyday life can all tell part of that story.

Homeschool South Africa is, however, about more than planning, keeping portfolios, completing journals and assessments. Sometimes you simply need someone to talk to. Someone who understands homeschooling and can help you work out where you're going next.
You need someone to tell you that you are doing a great job, and that your kids are going to be fine! That's where we support you with consults and a Free Range Schooling community.

Homeschooling was never meant to be about ticking boxes - it is about living your dream, within the community, which grows your children into becoming all they were created to be.

It's about your family, your children and the freedom to educate them in a way that works for you.

"Our goal is to help families continue living their homeschool dream while navigating the practical day to day and regulatory aspects of homeschooling."



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Why Wealth Trumps Talent in South African Gymnastics

South Africa celebrated historic milestones at the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games, where Naveen and Zelmé Daries secured top-15 finishes in the all-around final alongside two-time Olympian Caitlin Rooskrantz. Yet behind those scores lies an uncomfortable reality: elite gymnastics in South Africa is bankrolled almost entirely by parents, shutting out working-class talent.

TEXT Earl Joseph

Women's artistic gymnastics in South Africa delivered one of its finest collective international displays at the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games, but the celebration masked an ongoing structural crisis. Inside the SEC Arena, 24-year-old Olympian Naveen Daries placed 10th in the individual all-around final with a combined score of 49.100. Her 21-year-old sister, Zelmé Daries, stepped in as reserve after two-time Olympian Caitlin Rooskrantz withdrew due to illness, scoring 48.250 to finish 13th overall. Together with Rooskrantz's qualifying score of 47.700, the trio had already steered South Africa to fifth place in the team competition.

Speaking to the Daily Maverick about sharing the international stage, Zelmé Daries captured the emotion of their breakthrough: "It means my hard work has paid off and everything I've been through was not for nothing.

And sharing it with my sister is just icing on the cake." Naveen echoed that sentiment, noting: "I'm very proud of Zelmé… I feel very blessed to be competing alongside her because I know she's come a long way."

Yet behind these podium-level achievements sits an unsustainable funding model: the national talent pipeline is governed not by raw ability, but by the financial wealth of an athlete's parents.

The Daries sisters and Rooskrantz all emerged from the Johannesburg Gymnastics Centre in Newlands under veteran national coach Ilse Pelser.

Their success reflects private family stamina rather than institutional backing. Without state subsidies or corporate investment, the sport remains an exclusive preserve for households that can absorb hundreds of thousands of rands in training, equipment, and travel fees.

Government funding for gymnastics is distributed through annual institutional allocations from the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) to Gymnastics South Africa, but the money is spread paper-thin across the country. Official departmental transfer reports show that Gymnastics South Africa receives an annual baseline grant of roughly R2-million. That allocation must cover national administration, governance, compliance, coaching education, and nine distinct gymnastics disciplines across all nine provincial structures.

Once that baseline grant is apportioned among Women's Artistic, Men's Artistic, Rhythmic, Trampoline, Tumbling, Acrobatic, Aerobic, Parkour, and Gymnastics for All, the direct financial support reaching high-performance women's artistic gymnasts is negligible.

While the National Lotteries Commission has funded community hubs to introduce basic physical movement in public schools, lottery grants do not cover the high-specification, imported equipment needed to train elite artistic gymnasts.

The state has also made clear that it cannot underwrite international competition travel for individual athletes. In an official media statement explaining the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture funding framework, Sports Minister Gayton McKenzie reminded the public that international participation is not an automatic state entitlement: "To represent one's country in a sport is a great honour and a privilege, and it is one federations must continue to realise for as many of our future stars as we can – but it is not a right, and to treat it as a right would be irresponsible and unrealistic." McKenzie stated that federations must generate their own commercial revenue, confirming that the state cannot finance every overseas tour.



The South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) supports elite athletes through its Operation Excellence (OPEX) programme, but the scheme operates as a finishing school for established contenders rather than a developmental incubator. Relaunched in partnership with the Bidvest Group, OPEX provides tiered assistance to prospective Olympic and Paralympic medallists. Athletes in Tier 1 and Tier 2 receive monthly living stipends, medical aid support, and capped international travel contributions.

Senior competitors such as Caitlin Rooskrantz and Naveen Daries have qualified for OPEX support in the build-up to the Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Olympic Games, as reported by the Daily Maverick report on South African Olympic gymnastics. However, OPEX is capped at fewer than 50 athletes across all sporting codes nationwide.

In women's artistic gymnastics, that restriction means only one or two senior athletes receive support in any given Olympic cycle. OPEX provides zero assistance to junior gymnasts competing at Levels 7 through 10, where athletes spend six to eight years mastering complex elements. Before an athlete can reach the international rankings required for SASCOC consideration, their family must self-fund nearly a decade of high-intensity preparation.



Corporate South Africa provides almost no commercial sponsorship to artistic gymnastics because the sport lacks regular television broadcast exposure. Commercial marketing spend in South African sport gravitates heavily toward male-dominated codes like rugby, cricket, and football, where weekly television broadcasts guarantee continuous brand visibility. Without regular broadcast agreements, corporate brands treat gymnastics as a low-return marketing expense.

Gymnastics South Africa established the Gymnastics Foundation South Africa in 2018 as a non-profit vehicle to attract philanthropic donations,but public contributions remain small.

Speaking on the search for commercial backing, Gymnastics South Africa CEO Anne Vermaak emphasised the need for private capital during the Gymnastics South Africa corporate partnership discussion:

"Government, through the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture has played a significant role in the success of Gymnastics South Africa over the past few years. However, we do need the private sector to get involved now. With the help of corporate sponsorships, we will be able to realise our dream of rolling out our programmes to all schools in the country."

The commercial vacuum forces coaches and gym owners to shoulder enormous personal. burdens

National coach Ilse Pelser, who guided the Daries sisters and Rooskrantz through their historic Glasgow campaign, explained the frustration to *gsport*: "All we need is one corporate sponsor to take us under their wing and walk this journey with us. More coverage would mean more interest from sponsors and I believe it's the only way we will continue on this very successful trajectory."

"Talented gymnasts routinely retire around age 13 or 14, just as they reach Level 7 or Level 8, because their families can no longer afford escalating club fees and national travel invoices."

In an interview with Olympics.com, Pelser admitted that despite producing Olympic gymnasts and Commonwealth medal winners, she has felt "disillusioned by the lack of return on the investment the athletes have made." International success has simply not unlocked corporate financial support.

Because institutional and corporate backing is absent, parents act as the primary financial underwriters of South African gymnastics, spending upwards of R1-million to guide a child from early development to senior competition.

Artistic gymnastics requires specialised indoor facilities with sprung floors, foam training pits, asymmetric bars, beams, and vaults. To cover commercial property leases, insurance, and professional coaching salaries, private clubs must charge market-related tuition fees.

Recreational fees start at roughly R600 a month for two or three hours of weekly training. However, an artistic gymnast on the elite pathway trains between 20 and 30 hours per week across five or six days. At competitive facilities like the Johannesburg Gymnastics Centre, monthly coaching and conditioning fees range between R3,000 and R7,000.

Equipment adds a separate layer of ongoing expenditure. Competition leotards decorated with rhinestones cost between R2,000 and R8,000 each, with gymnasts requiring distinct leotards for club, provincial, and national trials. Leather handgrips, wrist supports, strapping tape, and chalk cost several thousand rands each season. Regular consultations with physiotherapists and biokineticists to manage spinal stress fractures and joint wear add thousands more to the monthly household tally.

Competition travel remains the heaviest single expense. Attending the annual South African National Gym Games costs a family between R15,000 and R45,000 for transport, hotel accommodation, meals, provincial tracksuits, and entry fees. When gymnasts qualify for international events such as the Commonwealth Games, African Championships, or FIG World Cups, a single overseas tour costs between R50,000 and R100,000 per gymnast, because families must also subsidise the travel costs of accompanying judges and coaches.

South Africa's reliance on parental self-funding reduces the national talent pool to a tiny demographic fraction, excluding gifted working-class children. When household affluence serves as an unwritten entry requirement, hundreds of agile, powerful young athletes in under-resourced public schools are filtered out of the sport before their abilities can be identified.

Even for athletes who break through, staying in the sport demands extraordinary family sacrifices. Caitlin Rooskrantz made history by qualifying for both Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024,

winning South Africa's first international artistic gymnastics gold medal on uneven bars in Hungary in 2019 and a bronze at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Her father passed away when she was eight years old, leaving her mother, Veda Rooskrantz, to raise her as a single parent and navigate years of financial strain to keep her daughter competing.

Speaking to Olympics.com, Rooskrantz highlighted how representation intersects with socio-economic barriers: "Representation matters especially in a sport like gymnastics which was predominantly known to be a white sport and in a country like South Africa. We are the rainbow nation and to have a team full of people of colour is very inspiring to the young girls to see that gymnastics isn't what you think it would be and that everyone can do it."

For every family that manages to keep an athlete in the gym, many more are forced to walk away. Talented gymnasts routinely retire around age 13 or 14, just as they reach Level 7 or Level 8, because their families can no longer afford escalating club fees and national travel invoices. The result is a fragile national team with minimal bench depth, leaving South Africa.

Democratising the gymnastics pipeline requires moving away from private household funding toward structured institutional support. The Department of Basic Education, municipal sports departments, and provincial confederations must build dedicated regional gymnastics halls in accessible municipal precincts.

Equipping municipal centres with international-standard apparatus would allow public school pupils to train under accredited coaches without paying private club rates. Corporate South Africa must look beyond traditional stadium sports.

Companies allocating funds under corporate social investment (CSI) charters should partner with Gymnastics South Africa to sponsor regional training centres and underwrite travel grants for national championships. As coach Ilse Pelser noted, securing even one sustained corporate partnership would transform the sport's high-performance pipeline.

Finally, Gymnastics South Africa and provincial sports bodies should establish an equitable travel endowment fund supported by corporate donors and lottery revenue. When selection for national and international competition is determined strictly by gymnastic merit rather than parental bank balances, South Africa will unlock the full potential of its athletic talent.



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"In 2009, Brainline became the first online education provider recognised by the IEB (Independent Examinations Board), and this recognition continues to guide its curriculum delivery."



With nearly four decades of innovation behind it, Brainline has continued to refine its approach to online schooling. Today, its 39-year track record in digital education and online schooling is complemented by a 91.7% matric pass rate.

For parents considering online schooling or homeschooling, knowing that they are placing their child's education in experienced hands can provide valuable peace of mind. As one parent, Santie Fourie, shared: "Huge thanks to Brainline for their incredible support throughout my daughter's online school journey! Your team's dedication and expertise made all the difference."

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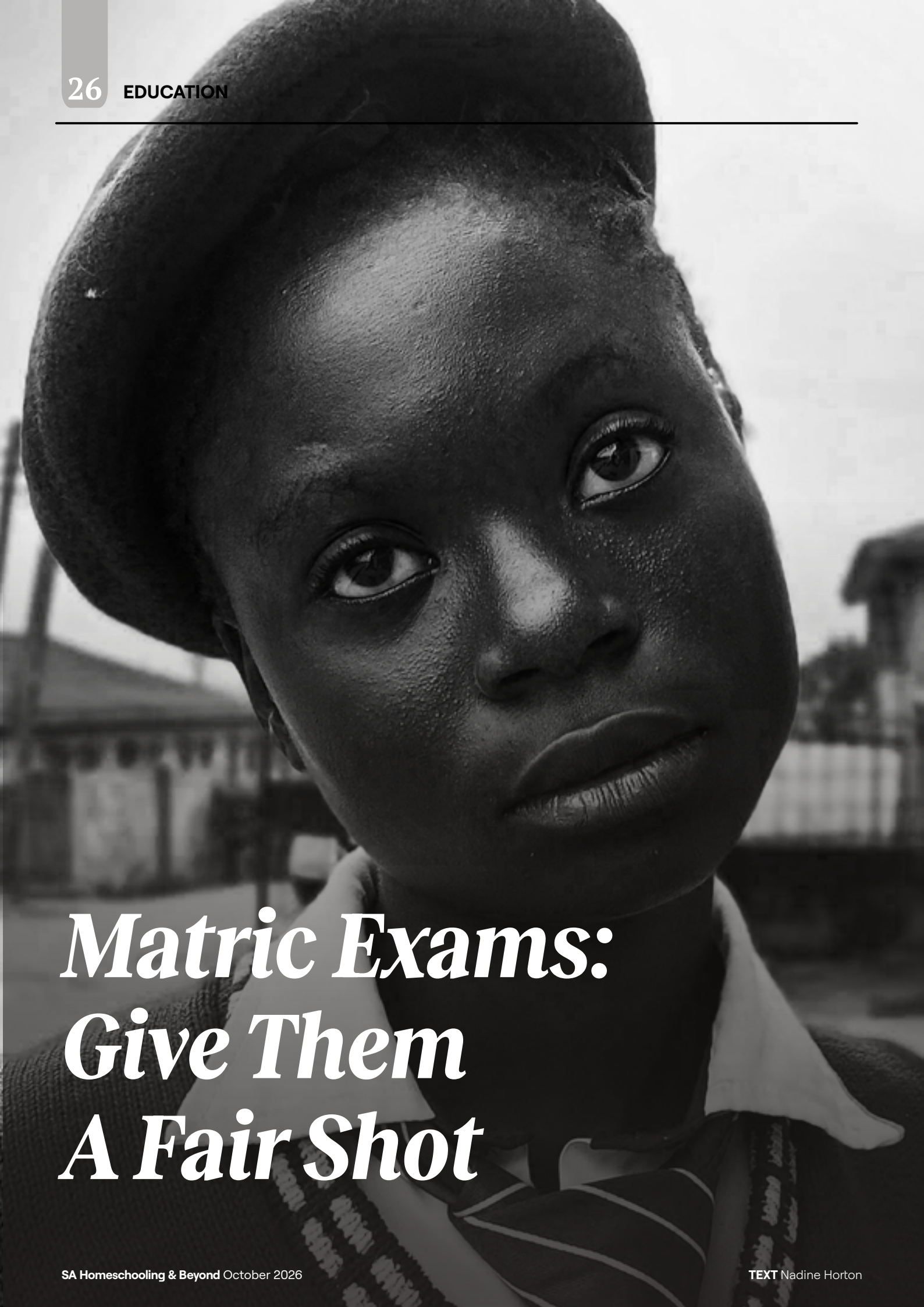
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Matric Exams: Give Them A Fair Shot

TEXT Nadine Horton

On 13 October, more than 700,000 matriculants will sit down to write the most important exams of their young lives. For many, the challenge isn't whether they've studied enough. It is whether they'll have a pen with which to write, a meal in their stomach or a safe way to get to the exam venue.

According to the Zero Dropout Campaign, four in ten students who begin Grade 1 will never matriculate or achieve an alternative qualification. Of the 1.2 million learners who started school in 2014, only about 778,000 reached Grade 12 in 2025. The reasons are rarely academic alone.

> ***"More than 2.7 million children live in households unable to meet their nutritional needs while sixty-two per cent of children under 17 live in poverty."***

More than 2.7 million children live in households unable to meet their nutritional needs while sixty-two per cent of children under 17 live in poverty. Nearly 2,000 of the country's more than 22,000 schools don't offer economics at Grade 10, and more than 900 lack physical science, subjects that are gateways to careers in engineering, finance and science. Overcrowded classrooms, ageing facilities and a shortage of teachers compound the problem.

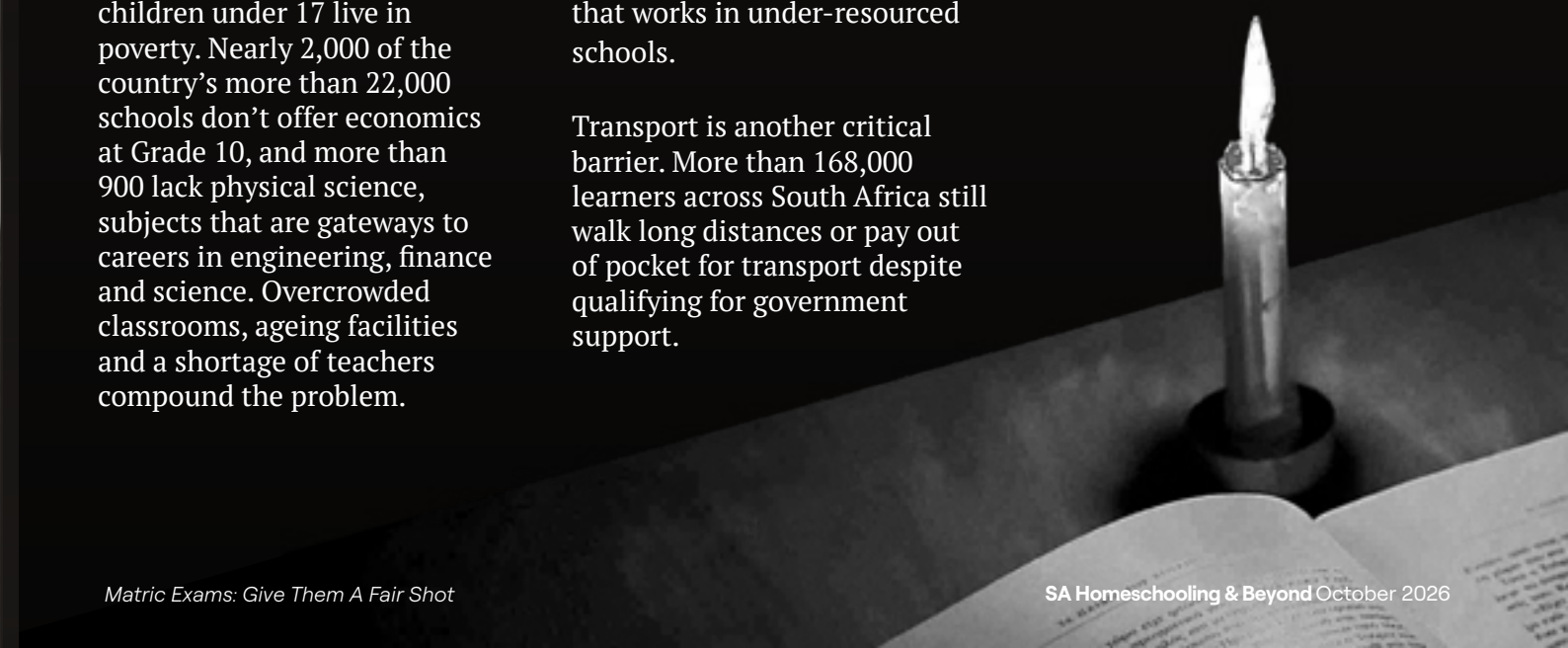
Horton knows the difference that practical support can make. Earlier this year, Encounter Hope provided 1,500 stationery bags to learners at Lotus Fairview Secondary School. But the organisation's work goes beyond material aid. Through assemblies and small groups, teams minister to learners, reminding them that they are seen and valued.

"While one learner may be worrying about whether they have studied enough, another may also be wondering whether there will be food at home, whether they have electricity to study at night, whether they can afford transport, or whether there is even a quiet and safe place where they can concentrate," says Nadine Horton, Operations Manager at Encounter Hope, an NGO that works in under-resourced schools.

Transport is another critical barrier. More than 168,000 learners across South Africa still walk long distances or pay out of pocket for transport despite qualifying for government support.

"You don't need to have a huge budget or run a large organisation to make a difference. Speak to a school in your community and ask what their matric learners genuinely need. And to the students, your circumstances today do not determine what you are capable of becoming. Ask for help when you need it. Take it one day, one subject and one exam at a time," Horton concludes.

Encounter Hope is the community outreach and humanitarian arm of Encounter Church. We feed families, warm the cold, and restore dignity to those who are so often overlooked, because every act of kindness matters.





Getting Children Into ECD Is The First Step Towards A Successful Education

South Africa needs more children inside the formal ECD system. It needs sustained investment in practitioners and the quality of children's daily experience. Getting children into ECD is the first step. Managing Director of Dibber International Preschools South Africa explains why.

> *"The lesson for South Africa is not to copy another country's model, but to recognise that expanding access and deliberately improving the quality of what happens inside ECD programmes can happen together."*

South Africa is making important progress in bringing more young children into the early childhood development system. This is seen in the Department of Basic Education's Bana Pele drive, which has accelerated registration, increased government investment, and brought more ECD programming into the regulatory framework.

That progress is positive. What it leads to next is the question: once a child is through the door, what kind of early learning experience are we giving them?

The scale of the formalisation effort is significant. Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube said in February that the Bana Pele Mass Registration Drive had closed 2025 with more than 13,000 registered ECD centres after reaching its original target of 10,000 three months early. The 2026 Budget subsequently allocated an additional R12.8 billion to the ECD grant over three years.

TEXT Ursula Assis

The Department describes registration as the first step toward giving children access to quality learning and development and good nutrition. That distinction matters.

Registration creates the foundation. What happens after that determines the child's experience.

South Africa still has an access problem. DataDrive2030 estimated in September that nearly 30% of the country's four-year-olds are not enrolled in an Early Learning Programme. Reaching those children is still urgent. But access and quality have to move forward together.

The latest Thrive by Five data reported by DataDrive2030 shows that 42% of children attending Early Learning Programmes start school with the expected learning foundations in place. Among children from the poorest households, that figure is 34%.



Those outcomes cannot be attributed to ECD programmes alone. Health, nutrition, home circumstances and many other factors influence children's development. But the figures remind us that enrollment, on its own, cannot measure success.

There are useful lessons elsewhere. In New Jersey in the United States, a fragmented preschool system serving some of the state's poorest communities was strengthened through common quality standards, better-qualified educators, smaller classes and continuous classroom improvement.

Classroom quality scores rose steadily in the years that followed, while longitudinal research found that children who attended the programme continued to show gains in literacy, mathematics and science into later schooling, with substantially lower rates of grade repetition.

The lesson for South Africa is not to copy another country's model, but to recognise that expanding access and deliberately improving the quality of what happens inside ECD programmes can happen together.

So what should quality look like? The most useful place to start is with the experience of the individual child. Is there an adult who knows that child well enough to notice when they have withdrawn, when they need reassurance or when they are ready for more challenges? Does the child feel secure enough to ask questions, make mistakes and try again? These things are harder to count than registrations, classroom sizes or pieces of equipment.



South African work on ECD quality already points in this direction. DataDrive2030's updated Learning Programme Quality Assessment was informed by data from 1,433 early learning programmes across all nine provinces. It looks at five areas of quality, including teaching strategies, the learning programme and, importantly, relationships and interactions between adults and children. That corresponds with what we see in early childhood classrooms.

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A beautiful building does not automatically create a good preschool experience. Nor does a room filled with expensive resources. They can help, but young children experience an ECD programme largely through people.

They experience the educator who gets down to their level when they are overwhelmed. The person who notices what has caught their attention and asks another question. The adult who gives them a little longer to work something out instead of stepping in with the answer.

We should consider the whole child. Social, emotional, physical and cognitive development do not happen in isolation from one another. A child building a block tower may be solving a problem and practising coordination while also negotiating with another child, managing frustration and learning what to do when the whole thing falls over.

South Africa needs a definition of quality that can travel across very different circumstances and communities and still mean something. If we are serious about that, practitioner development has to sit alongside registration and infrastructure. The Department of Basic Education itself identifies practitioner training and support as one of the key areas for strengthening the quality of ECD services.

Buildings matter. Resources matter. But neither can replace a skilled adult who knows how to engage a young child, extend their thinking and respond appropriately to what they need. This is the work that needs to follow registration.

As more programmes enter the formal system, they need a realistic path from compliance towards continually improving practice. That means developing educators, observing what happens inside classrooms and using evidence to understand where support is needed.

South Africa has a real opportunity now. We should continue bringing programmes into the regulatory system and reaching children who remain excluded. Investment in nutrition, safety and early learning must continue.



But alongside the registrations, funding and compliance requirements, one question should remain difficult to ignore: What does this place feel like to the child who walks into it every morning? That question will not appear on every registration form, but it belongs in any serious definition of quality. Making those places genuinely good for the children inside them is the work that comes next.