



Cape Town, South Africa

West End Primary

**Challenging students to dream
beyond their circumstances**



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Overcoming
Adversity



TEMPLETON WORLD
CHARITY FOUNDATION



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES**

Table of Contents

02	—	Introduction
03	—	School Profile
04	—	Context and Challenge
06	—	Expertise and Approach
10	—	Outcomes and Results
11	—	Key Steps
14	—	Advice and Guidance



Introduction

West End Primary in Mitchells Plain, South Africa, is situated in the heart of the Cape Flats in the Western Cape. This area is renowned for the challenging circumstances of the community due to poverty, unemployment, gangs, and substance abuse.



Profile:

**Country:**

South Africa

**Region:**

Mitchells Plain, Cape Town

**School type:**

Public school

**Location area:**

Town

**Student population:**

1501 to 2000

**Prize Category:**

Overcoming Adversity

“A child is a product of their environment, and we really take that to heart when developing the infrastructure.”

**– Clive Arries,
Principal, West End
Primary**



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

West End Primary opened in 1981 and, having always taught students of colour, has felt the weight of the country's struggle against the legacy of Apartheid. One of the school's teachers, for example, was arrested and incarcerated on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela.

Most of the school's students come from families that were directly impacted by Apartheid and, to this day, the legacy of that period continues to affect the community that the school is serving. "We are born with this weight on our shoulders," said Tamsyn De Klerk, a Team Leader at the school. "We take the time and dedicate it to uplifting our young girls and boys, giving [them] a place to feel safe."

The area in which the school is situated is confronted by gang violence, destitution, drugs, and socially fraught community relations. The school, therefore, has taken it upon itself to initiate projects that seek to support and uplift students who need support both in and outside the school premises.



“It’s very evident what these programmes are doing for our kids: it’s restoring hope, it’s restoring lives. It might sound dramatic but it’s true.”

**- Tamsyn De Klerk, Team Leader,
West End Primary**

Suffix

Suffixes are like prefixes, except that they are added to the end of a root word.

colourful	reckless
slowly	wooden
walked	forward

Continuous tenses

Present continuous tense

I am eating.

Past continuous tense

I was eating.

Future continuous tense

I shall be eating.



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

Being aware of the daily challenging environment the students live in, the school looks at a holistic development for their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Faculty assess students individually and place them in programmes that bring out their potential and that will go on to help nurture their talents.

When it comes to recruiting staff, the school focuses on teachers for their strength of character. “If you don’t share value practices in this school or learn from each other,” says Arries, “you are going to find it hard to be functional in our team set-up.” However, the school leaves room for staff and students to fail, asserting that there is always something to be gained. “Failure is never valued as a negative thing,” Arries said. The school staff also hold fewer faculty meetings, using WhatsApp groups instead, so as to be more efficient and to better focus their efforts on catering to the students and utilising WhatsApp groups to communicate with other teachers.

Teachers have a strong rapport with students, due to their own experiences of living in the community and use those shared experiences to build a connection and act as mentors. “We want to raise strong, independent learners,” De Klerk says. “It is unfortunate and sad but it’s the truth: our kids are coming from homes where they don’t have very strong role models.” From this idea, the school launched the Guardian Project in 2021, which paired students with a member of the faculty to act as a source of guidance and support.



“We can see the difference in our learners – confident learners are starting to develop from this project as well as their voice,” said Rozalia Kleynhans, another Team Leader at the school. “They are starting to speak more and come out and share what they were unable to share before.”

More than focusing on children’s academics, the school has implemented several programmes and activities aimed at strengthening children’s “hearts”, exposing students to a range of experiences that nurture their talents in other areas besides academics.

The staff found that they could do this best through extra-curricular activities. Over the course of its history, the school has produced several learners who have excelled in sports (receiving provincial and national colours) and academic achievements, become published authors and gained leadership skills. These achievements helped improve learners’ self-esteem, which led to improved attitudes towards their studies.

The school initiated the “Box of Hope” project, which had parents, staff, and community members donate much-needed food items to impoverished learners and families. This was to make sure learners were taken care of, not only at school but at home too. In the programme’s first iteration, in 2019, the school handed out 60 parcels of food and, due to its success, the school hopes to expand the initiative. Teachers also brought in clothes, toys, toiletries, and money for learners to go on educational excursions.

The school’s female teachers started a club called H.E.R.D, which refers to the unity of belonging to a social pack that tries to overcome challenges as a collective.



The initiative also helps young girls speak against the oppression of women's voices in society and aims to create a safe space where their concerns and ambitions can be heard and nurtured. "As a female, coming from the same community, many of our teachers are from the community," said Tamsyn De Klerk. "So, we have a deep-rooted understanding and knowledge. We know the struggles, so we had to come up with something that we could put together to help our young females."

The club has encouraged female students to have agency over their own lives and encourages them to rise above their current circumstances. Besides tackling the deeper, heartfelt issues, the club aims to educate young girls on hygiene, career paths, finding their talents, and personal grooming, while showing that social expectations can be ignored.

Due to the high pregnancy rate in the community and the taboo of discussing sex, West End Primary collaborated on another programme called Love Life which works closely with the community clinic and tackles the long-held stigma around sex education. Besides teaching different health issues and life skills, the project ultimately aims to heal and bring hope to girls who felt abandoned by members of their own community and be in a place where they feel welcome.



“More than academics, we want to look after our child’s heart. We want to encourage girls and boys that, regardless of your circumstances, regardless of where you come from, regardless of your home situation, regardless of the street that you live on, there is a place for you to come and we can teach you things.”

**- Tamsyn De Klerk, Team Leader,
West End Primary**



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

Whilst education remains a high priority, the school works hard to address any student distress and to go the extra mile to create a safe environment. All the projects serve both the learners and the wider community because they consider the whole environment. The students have been highly receptive as a result. “There is a light in them,” says Ziyaad Noordien, a teacher at West End Primary. In fact, due to its policy of finding non-disciplinary or non-punitive solutions, the school hasn’t expelled a single learner in the last twelve years.

The student's and community's stance towards race and identity has also changed as a result of the school's focus on diversity and inclusivity. “The image of the race doesn't exist in our community anymore,” Principal Arries says, speaking on the importance of the school's efforts to change the value systems in the community through education and effort.



Key Steps



IDENTIFY COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

The school faculty initially came together to identify the biggest problems facing its learners and their wider community. Listing the issues by order of priority, the school decided to tackle hunger and malnutrition first. In the school's mind, a hungry child cannot give their best academically. The school also noted that many of its students come from broken homes and experience a great deal of social adversity. This led to designing social welfare programmes that would serve the emotional and mental well-being of its students. Finally, the school found that sport acted as a form of escape and therefore encouraged the students to be more involved in extra-curricular activities.





PRESENTING IDEAS

Once the school established its focal point, the faculty began to discuss how to bring these projects forward. The school had to make sure that the best people acted as spearheads for the initiatives. All the ideas were presented to the staff and people were free to join the various teams. The school established different committees for different projects because the faculty understood and accepted that all members of the faculty and teachers were skilled in different ways and should use those talents where applicable. The school then documented and presented its final ideas to the school board before presenting the projects to learners and the community.

Because West End Primary is a non-fee school, the school had to consistently come up with creative ways to get funds to support and keep these programmes active. The school found that parents and the community play a pivotal role in the progression of all school projects, so it was important that it found ways to involve them.





IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS

In the final step, the school focuses on feedback and evaluation. After presenting the project to learners and the community, the school began to implement its programmes and incorporate feedback about how impactful and effective the measures were. In the school's mind, the only practical way to see if an idea is viable is to actively run it and evaluate it, and from there see where improvements can be made. The school also used this to create job opportunities for community members who could help the staff facilitate and manage projects.



Advice and Guidance

Get the local community's buy-in – it's vital to build that relationship and establish a solid foundation of trust for this kind of initiative to work. Another way of doing this is involving the wider community, such as parents, families, and local partners in the projects themselves and keeping them updated on the initiatives so they can have a say in how it's shaped. The school believes that a strong foundation is built hand-in-hand with parents and families. With the involvement and contribution of parents, a school is sure to prosper and, by enriching and empowering parents, a school will fortify and improve on its foundations. The school warns that the gap between the parents and their children's education cannot be bridged properly when there are social difficulties in the local community. It's only through strong community collaboration that adversity can be overcome.

More information

 **[West End Primary School](#)**

 **[@westendps](#)**

**Learn more about their work by
watching their event at 2022's T4 World
Education Week: [watch here](#)**

