

Cape Town, South Africa

Pinelands North Primary School

Why inclusivity is everything



WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
Overcoming
Adversity



TEMPLETON WORLD
CHARITY FOUNDATION



WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES

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Introduction

Pinelands North Primary School in Cape Town, South Africa, is recognised as one of the country's leading institutions when it comes to fostering inclusivity in education. When its Principal, Ann Morton, took up the role in 1997, South Africa was emerging from the shadow of Apartheid, and her school's student population was still predominantly white. Today Pinelands is a beacon of diversity.



Profile:



Country:
South Africa



Region:
Cape Town



School type:
Public School



Location area:
City



Student population:
301 to 500



Prize Category:
Overcoming Adversity

“With our country's history in consideration, the school dared to defy the historical narratives of what education should be and how human beings ought to be.”
– Stanley Chilambe, former Aftercare Assistant, Pinelands North Primary School



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Pinelands North's ethos centres on building relationships within the school's community. This means breaking down barriers and creating an inclusive environment that allows for a sense of belonging for families who don't fit a traditional and normative family structure. However, the school's history was once one where the student and staff population was exclusive.

The South African educational system has undergone many changes over the past few decades, in the wake of the apartheid era, during which policies created an unequal and unbalanced education for people of colour. More than twenty years ago, only white students and faculty members were involved in the structural framework of the institution.

"The children were culturally the same – Christian background, middle-class children, and staff," said Ann Morton, the school's Principal. Dr Rose-Anne Reynolds was the first student and eventually staff member of colour, which illustrated the lack of diversity within the school community and the need for internal reform.

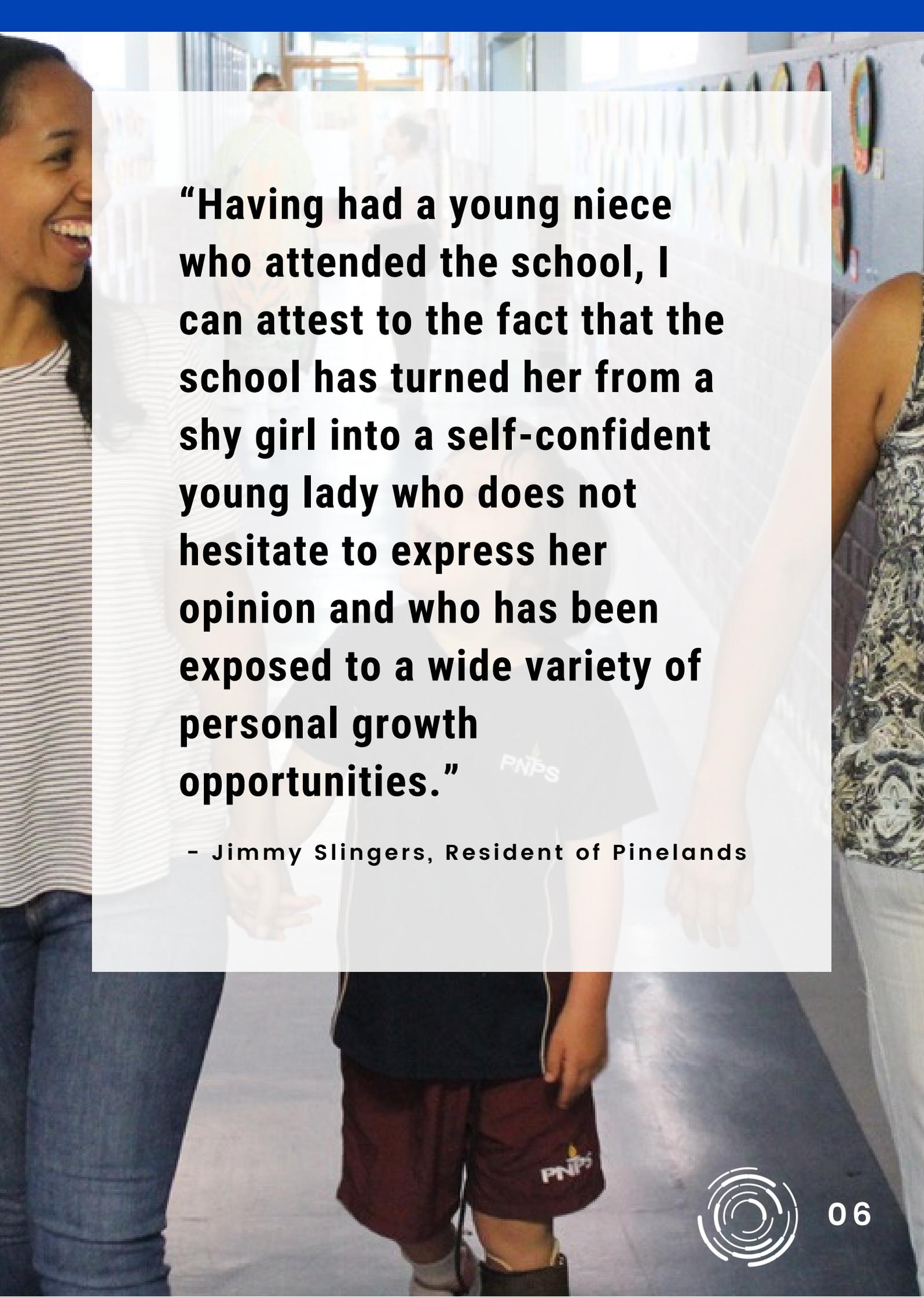
However, there was notable pushback when Ann Morton tried to direct the school to become more inclusive. In particular, the school saw an exodus of staff members who quit in protest of the proposed changes, arguing that they were alien to their upbringing and learned experiences. Some members felt uncomfortable in social situations, such as sitting in the staff room with other faculty members, which became another hurdle the school had to address.



There was therefore a need to get buy-in from the parents and families. “We have seen people slow to change,” said one teacher, reflecting on the fact that some parents questioned the value of their children intermixing with others from different backgrounds.

The school faculty had to be intentional in its approach and implemented marketing tools to show what inclusivity meant and how it would manifest within the school community. “In the face of criticism,” said Stanley Chilambe, a former aftercare assistant, “the management team has stood firmly on the principles of inclusivity and community building.”





“Having had a young niece who attended the school, I can attest to the fact that the school has turned her from a shy girl into a self-confident young lady who does not hesitate to express her opinion and who has been exposed to a wide variety of personal growth opportunities.”

- Jimmy Slingers, Resident of Pinelands



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

Pinelands North Primary School is nationally recognised for its inclusive approach to learning. The school takes great care in respecting the human rights of its students and faculty, which makes up a critical part of the school's culture. "We really are working on our human rights culture – every single time we have an additional child or staff member arrive at our school, we try to cover that particular person's human rights," said Ann Morton, the school Principal.

Over the years the school has used the best international practices to support learning across the wider school community. This has resulted in The Creative and Talented Programme, a support programme for students who have shown promise in their studies and other talents and provides them with an alternative curriculum to express themselves outside of the traditional classroom practices.

The school is greatly influenced by African philosophies, such as Ubuntu, and adheres to such practices by encouraging learners to care for each other. All pupils, male or female, wear the same uniforms – shorts and t-shirts, which are designed to be less traditional and more comfortable.

The school built gender-neutral bathrooms and everyone is addressed by their first name. From Grade 2, students are taught sign language. When the school accepted its first transgender pupil, it gave families guidance on gender identities and trained staff on how to guide parents to adapt to the school's new policies.



Their philosophy extends to animal welfare: students are encouraged to take care of animals and view them as part of the family. A programme was set up for pupils to volunteer to be “animal monitors” and help coach each other on how best to handle the animals under their care. Faculty arrange for school volunteers to feed the school’s animals on weekends and during school holidays, and the school site has become something of a rescue home for injured and lost animals.

Regarding Climate Change, the school puts the need to protect the environment high on its agenda. Learners must wear hats and sunscreen while outside and learn about water conservation and sustainable gardening, as well as recycling and the benefits of practising environmentally sound practices.

When it comes to emotional and mental welfare, the school also has an open-door policy that encourages community members and students alike to share their fears and anxieties. The school works closely with parents to ensure they are meeting the children’s needs, even if this means deviating from traditional educational practices. “We’re very grateful that the school set up a system for her,” said a mother, whose daughter was diagnosed with severe depression. “Otherwise, I think she would have failed the year – she was doing that badly.”

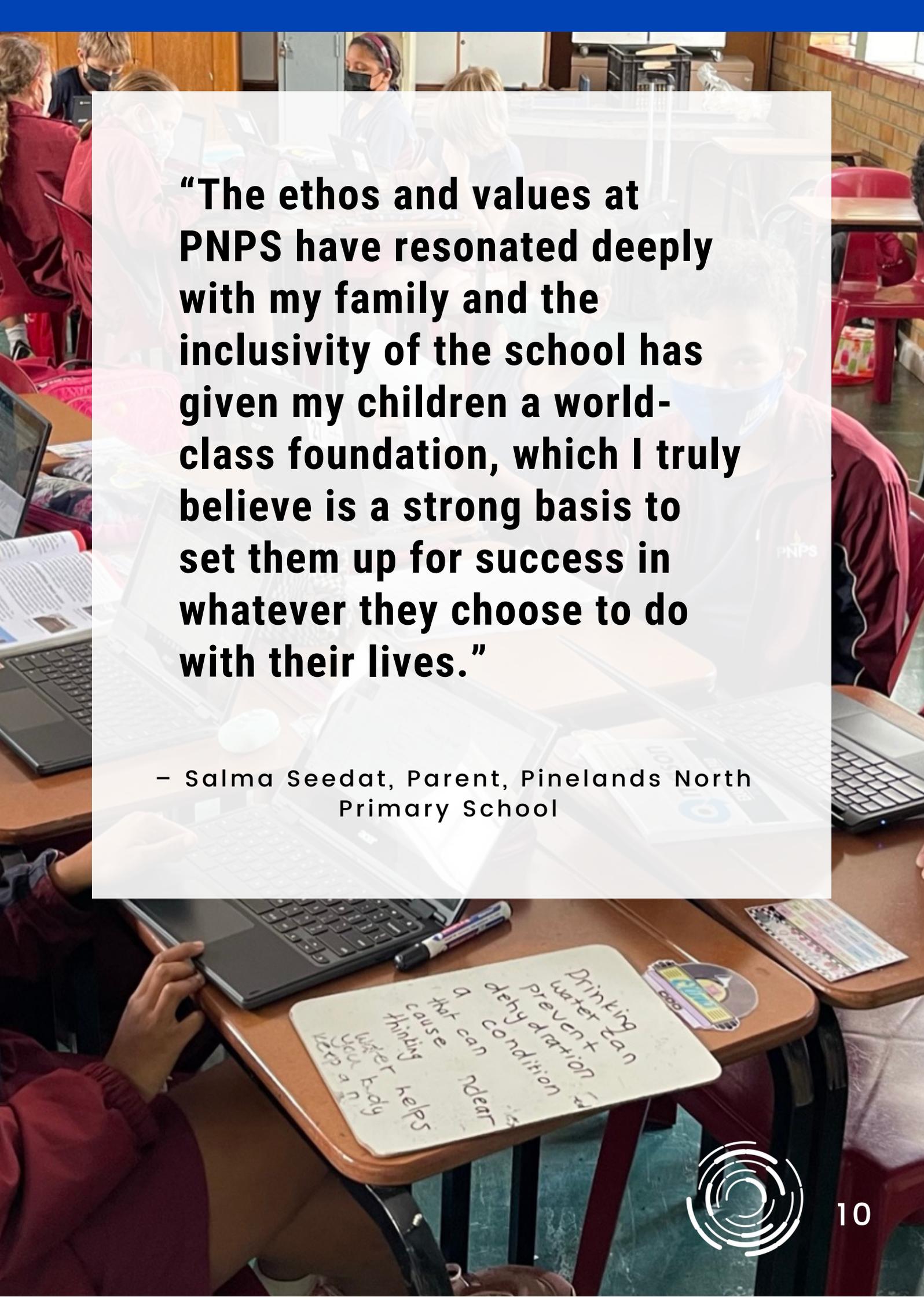
In this mother’s case, when the school learned about her child’s depression, the school took measures to set up online classes that would not only facilitate the daughter’s learning but provide a space where she should become comfortable socially and approach studies at her own pace. “Since then, she’s been thriving,” said the mother.



During the pandemic, Pinelands North’s governing body quickly implemented a fund to assist families who were struggling financially. They also had all staff participate in bereavement and trauma training and opened an online school for students who could no longer attend in person. “The social and emotional wellbeing of learners and staff was also a huge area of priority,” said Dr Claire Draper. “Our learning support department provided counselling for families that were affected by COVID-19, either through personal loss or financial difficulties.”

When vaccinations were approved for both students and faculty, the school encouraged its community to get vaccinated and even held a day where learners had the opportunity to get vaccinated along with their families. The faculty continually improved and adapted the ways they could prepare the school community for the ongoing, pandemic-related changes and to make sure everyone was safe.





“The ethos and values at PNPS have resonated deeply with my family and the inclusivity of the school has given my children a world-class foundation, which I truly believe is a strong basis to set them up for success in whatever they choose to do with their lives.”

– Salma Seedat, Parent, Pinelands North Primary School

Drinking water can prevent dehydration a condition that can cause thinking water helps your body keep a n y



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

Pinelands became hailed as one of the best schools in the country for its high-quality education and range of initiatives and social programmes. Its commitment to celebrating and welcoming different gender identities, sexual orientations, races, religions, and other markers of identity allowed students to feel part of a safe environment. Pinelands North also spread its inclusive ethos and supported other schools to encourage transformation within the local area.

At Pinelands North, children are allowed to learn at their own pace and in a way that suits their circumstances. The school has also hired staff to help students and faculty with mental health. They also have occupational therapists, a counsellor, and a language therapist who collaborate with staff and observe children in their classroom environment to better attend to their needs.

The school's commitment to inclusivity and diversity was also reflected in its choice of staff. All the school's leaders are women. The school's staff development programme equipped staff to support and help overcome class barriers, which in turn carried itself over to the parent community. All staff became trained in bereavement and trauma to support their pupils and their families during COVID and which helped support needier families in times of crisis. A Radar Team was established when the COVID pandemic started and continues to operate today, supporting staff, pupils, and the community at large.



Key Steps



THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVITY

Pinelands North began to think about human rights and the opportunities denied to many children as far back as 1998, when it took its first step in creating an inclusive ethos, where all persons were welcome and part of a whole community. At the time, this led to a staff exodus, but the school used this to bring in the right people in the right positions to bring about the right changes.



IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

In the past twenty years, Pinelands North Primary School has refined inclusive practice to provide support for gender non-conforming individuals, for teaching staff, for children who need facilitators to help them learn, for student teachers, individuals with autism, and for other schools who wanted to change their social policies.



The school also increased the variety of animals to support children's mental health and created safe spaces around the school to increase mindfulness and increase wellbeing.

The school continues to include subjects in the curriculum that create diverse opportunities for all children to play and learn skills for the future. The school addresses overcoming adversity in many areas, such as the Creative and Talented Programme, Social Sciences, Languages, and in-learning support. Staff are trained in diversity, inclusive practices and Narrative Therapy to assist children to overcome adversity in the context of South Africa's overall history and socio-economic issues.

Students' emotional well-being is also constantly monitored to ensure that they are confident, happy and well cared for.



DEVELOPMENT

Finally, Pinelands North Primary developed an online school, carrying out extensive professional development to train staff in different innovative teaching methods and styles.



Staff are set to implement their new skills and be guided by the EdTech coach in the 2022 academic year. In 2023 the school intends to introduce One to One devices to assist faculty in creating content that is relevant and engaging for students as well as online school pupils.

Every day, one of the school's highest priorities is the children's and staff's safety. Pinelands North Primary School recognises that inequality is entrenched in South African society and works hard to overcome unconscious bias through education. Every policy it implements is reviewed and used as a lens to decide what should be changed and what should be kept. This allows the school to overcome and stem any possible future adversity.



Advice and Guidance

The school encourages institutions to be inclusive in all their practices and to make concrete steps towards building a school infrastructure that reflects the diversity of the wider community. It is important to build trust with the relevant stakeholders such as students, teachers, and parents about the school's direction, and to embrace and promote diversity to help learners overcome some of the societal issues that impact them directly. Finally, the institution should be firm in its decision-making process once the relevant parties have been consulted, in the same way, Pinelands North Primary School faced a wave of opposition when it first started developing its inclusion programme.

More information

 <https://www.pnps.co.za/>

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