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Single-sex institutions lead field, girls smarter than boys in our survey

PREGA GOVENDER

SINGLE-sex schools are better than co-ed, girls are smarter than boys. Afrikaans schools do extraordinarily well and Gauteng has the most top state schools.

These are some of the dramatic findings of the Sunday Times Top 100 Schools survey, based on data provided by the Department of Education.

Combined, 25 all-girls' and 19 all-boys' schools make up 44% of the schools that cracked the Top 100 list.

The survey also found that girls are outstripping their male counterparts, with 9 259 having bagged an astounding 18 771 As, including more than 2 000 for maths alone in last year's matric exams. In comparison, the 8 062 boys produced only 11 194 As.

Last done in 1999, the survey placed 28 schools in Gauteng among the top 100, 24 in the Western Cape, 19 in KwaZulu-Natal and nine in the Eastern Cape and Free State.

Cape Town's Westerford High School was rated the top school in South Africa, followed by Westville Girls' High in Durban and Pretoria's Afrikaanse Hoër Meisieskool.

Mbilwi Secondary, a rural

Limpopo school, secured the eighth spot in the country and the honour of being the country's top science school.

In addition, the survey confirmed that former model C schools are still top performers, with 94 of them making the list out of roughly 6 000 high schools.

With the exception of Mbilwi Secondary and two other rural Limpopo schools — Harry Oppenheimer and Dendron Secondary — townships schools did not feature in the top 100 list.

Two other schools in the top 100 which were not former model C schools were Metropolitan-Raucall in Johannesburg — also the country's top maths school — and the Cape Academy of Mathematics, Science and Technology in Cape Town.

The matrics of 2008, on whom the survey is based, are the first graduates of the new outcomes-based curriculum introduced in stages, starting 12 years ago.

Schools in the top 100 were selected on the basis of five criteria, including their outstanding maths and science performances, which are critical government priorities.

Results highlighted by the survey include:

● 87% of pupils in these schools achieved a university entrance pass;

● Only 27 of the 17 420 pupils in the top 100 schools failed the exams; and

● Racial integration in particular Afrikaans-medium schools was extremely varied, ranging from 1% to 70%.

Although 32 Afrikaans schools and eight parallel-medium schools featured in the top 100, only 818 black matriculants were enrolled in these schools compared with 6 911 white pupils.

Paul Colditz, chief executive of the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools said Afrikaans schools were top performers because pupils were taught in their mother tongue from Grade R to matric.

"It may be a risky comment to make but generally you will find that the level of participation in the affairs of the school by Afrikaans-speaking parents is a little higher.

"There is also a little more concern about the education of their children," he said.

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Township schools hurt by migration

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A total of 11 654 pupils out of the 17 420 from the top 100 schools were white compared with 3 210 black, 1 220 coloured and 1 305 Indian pupils. Of the remaining 31 candidates, 21 were Asian, while the races of the other 10 were unknown.

The minister of basic education, Angie Motshekga, said she was proud of the achievements of the Afrikaans-medium schools, adding that she was ready to consult with their management teams "to learn and adapt some of their systems" to help struggling schools.

Motshekga commended the Sunday Times on the project, adding it would help the department to provide adequate support to schools.

Helen Perry, a visiting researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand, who was commissioned by the Sunday Times to conduct the survey, ranked the schools according to an index which included a combination of the matric pass rate; the percentage of pupils with a university entrance pass; the average number of A symbols; and the number of maths and science candidates achieving over 50% as a percentage of all candidates at the school. Only schools with 50 matric pupils or more were considered.

Perry said a major constraint of the survey was basing the index solely on the school's academic results.

"The ranking of the best schools is always controversial since an enormous proportion of school outcomes are determined by social class, families' access to resources and the quality of the school environment."

Although she was expecting criticism mainly of the "constraints of the index", she was satisfied that Westerford High met all the criteria to be considered the top state school.

The Sunday Times revived the Top 100 Schools survey to give readers the information necessary to make "the single most important decision parents

will make — where to educate their children", said Sunday Times editor Mondli Makhanya.

"We also want to celebrate schools that have achieved excellence, demonstrate why they performed so well, and highlight the top schools as role models for others to learn from."

All matrics at Westerford High passed matric last year, with 166 of its 168 candidates qualifying for university admission.

The school produced 575 subject distinctions, 19 pupils with seven, nine with six and 18 with five.

Westerford principal Rob le Roux said being top was "an amazing honour".

"But there are so many other schools that could be No 1 as well. We don't profess to be the best school in the country, although it's lovely to have that accolade."

Commenting on the reason why township schools do not feature on the list, Motshekga said they would await a research report to "indicate the kind of support" the department would give.

But Limpopo's top three schools, Mbilwi, Harry Oppenheimer and Dendron, proved that inadequately resourced schools can still excel.

At Mbilwi, 187 of the school's 201 candidates qualified for university admission and the school produced 309 subject distinctions.

Wits University professor of education policy Brahm Fleisch said a lack of grounding in literacy and numeracy was a problem that "disproportionately" affected black pupils.

"The overwhelming majority of South Africa's children are set up for failure in the secondary schools, as they are simply not adequately prepared," he said.

Speaking in his personal capacity, Professor Crain Soudien, acting deputy vice-chancellor at the University of Cape Town, said the migration of black middle-class pupils from township to former model C schools left historically disadvantaged schools poorer.

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TOP 10 PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Prov.	School
1 WC	WESTERFORD HIGH SCHOOL
2 KZ	WESTVILLE GIRLS' HIGH
3 GA	AFRIKAANSE HOËR MEISIESKOOI
4 KZ	WESTVILLE BOYS' HIGH
5 WC	RUSTENBURG GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL
6 WC	SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL
7 GA	RAUCALL SECONDARY SCHOOL
8 LP	MBILWI SECONDARY
9 WC	RONDEBOSCH BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL
10 KZ	DURBAN GIRLS' HIGH

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Rondebosch Boys' High School earned a place in the Top 10 Public Schools List.