

NORTH/SOUTH SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AND FORT BEAUFORT DISTRICT, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA.

HISTORICAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT:

The Fort Beaufort District is a vast rural area which includes a small number of small towns, the most prominent of which are Fort Beaufort, Alice, Adelaide, Bedford, Seymour and Middledrift) and many 'locations', the vast majority of which are only accessible by gravel/dirt roads.

The District boundary is a fairly new arrangement having been established as recently as the year 2000. During the apartheid era which formally ended in 1994 the majority of the schools in this district would have been located in the former homeland/bantustan known as the Ciskei. A smaller number will have been located in areas adjacent to the homeland in 'South Africa.' Under the apartheid or segregationist regime schools in South Africa would cater separately for either white, coloured, Indian or black children. With a few exceptions, schools in the homelands served the black population only.

The level of resourcing per school differed according to the colour of the students. The most poorly resourced schools were the schools which catered for black children in the former homeland areas. The most privileged schools were those schools which catered only for the white population. Some of these were known as Model C schools which amongst other things, meant they were able to manage their own budgets.

All the schools in the Fort Beaufort District, as elsewhere in South Africa, are now 'open schools' i.e. they admit children of different colour and ethnicity. However, as a consequence of mainly socio-economic factors (82% of the population in the Fort Beaufort area is unemployed) the majority of the children continue to attend their local neighbourhood school which suggests that very little has changed in terms of school rolls since the end of apartheid in 1994.

All the former black homeland schools are characterised by a lack of resources (furniture, classroom equipment, teaching and learning resource materials, computers and stationery). It is rare to find a library or specialist equipment in these schools. School infrastructure is generally poor.

Until recently all schools needed to charge parents a fee to supplement school budgets. In the former homeland areas these fees tend to be very small sums of money, and parents who cannot afford to pay (of whom there are many) are not refused access to their local school. The former white schools usually set a fee which is beyond the means of most of black families. In the poorest areas this is no longer a requirement as the schools have received an

additional allocation in their budgets to compensate for the inability of the parents to pay the fees.

In South African schools serving the non white populations, the majority of teachers are either under qualified or possess no qualifications at all. There are therefore major challenges around the standard of teaching and the performance of students in the schools. There are also issues around the quality of school leadership and management and school governance (many governors are illiterate). There are also significant issues around the level of support the schools receive from their district office (positive interventions around school improvement are non existent) so schools have tended to regress or at best stand still.

As with Oxfordshire schools, Fort Beaufort District operates a school cluster system so secondary and feeder primary schools in Witney for example will be partnered as a group with a cluster/community in the Fort Beaufort district.