

# iThemba gives Capricorn kids a chance

ZULFA PETERSEN

Giving children a better start in life is one of the main aims of the newly opened iThemba Pre-Primary School in Capricorn.

What used to be an empty cement pitch, where people played netball, has over the year been turned into a modern pre-primary school, which currently accommodates 50 children.

One of these pupils is three-year-old Wilfred Solomon, the son of Wendy and Willem Solomon.

"It has become such a pleasure walking him to school in the morning and because it is close to home, we do not have to travel long distances," Mrs Solomon told the Southern Mail.

Last year she found out about the new school when they saw posters advertised at the creche Wilfred attended.

"He started at iThemba at the beginning of the year and we have seen him change in a positive way over the past month," she said.

Wilfred has become more aware of his surroundings and was even remembering most of his colours, she said.

"He is happy at his new school. He was even singing a song in isiXhosa at home, and we don't even speak isiXhosa.

"I then heard the teacher singing the same song when I dropped him at school one day," Mrs Solomon said.

The iThemba School Project is an initiative by Lufthansa Global Telesales (GTS) in conjunction with the non-profit organisation Help Alliance, which is run by Lufthansa employees.

The project aims to provide education to disadvantaged children in Cape Town.

Veronica Nicholas, principal and teacher at iThemba, said the school was the first of its kind in the community.

"There are many crèches and day cares, but no pre-primary schools," she said.



■ Principal Veronica Nicholas with her pupils.

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■ **Above:** Lufthansa crew members play with the pupils at iThemba School.



■ **Left:** MEC for Education, Donald Grant talks at the official opening of the iThemba School in Capricorn, as the Lufthansa crew looks on.

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The iThemba school in Capricorn is the second of its kind in the city. The first was opened in Philippi in 2006.

Ms Nicholas said since the school opened, people have been coming in to see what they are doing and want to enrol their children.

"In the month that we have been operating, we have become so popular we now have a waiting list of parents wanting to enrol their children," she said.

With the high number of school drop-outs, said Ms Nicholas, a good start to a school career is essential.

She said the school aims to build on the children's social skills. They also teach "pre-maths" and "pre-language," which prepares them for Grade 1.

"This school is based in a poor community, where nearly 70% of the people are unemployed. With a good education we can help the next generation towards a better future," said Ms Nicholas.

She said when she first started at the school, many of the children had low self esteem, swore a lot or didn't say "please" or "thank-you".

"But within a month all this has changed. It has been amazing to see how these children have grown in such a short time and I am very proud of them," she said.

The school has two classes with 25 pupils each, one for three- to four-year-olds and another for four- to five-year-olds, and has two teachers and two teaching assistants a class.

"We plan to have a Grade R class next year and then also to hire an extra teacher and teaching assistant," she said.

Besides the teaching staff there is also a cook and a janitor at the school.

"The teaching assistants, the cook and the janitor all come from the community," said Ms Nicholas. "The janitor lives in a house built on the school premises."

Also at the launch of the school was Education MEC Donald Grant who said he was "blown away" at what he saw at iThemba.

"There is no feeder school in the community for the surrounding primary schools, and iThemba could not have come at a better time," he said. Mr Grant said that early childhood development and foundation phase learning was very important for all children.

"We need to make sure the majority of our pupils make it to Grade 12, because we have a lot of pupils dropping out in Grade 9 and are condemned to manual labour because they do not have the skills to go further," he said.

Birgit Thümecke, the managing director of Lufthansa GTS, said: "Many pupils, especially in the rural and poorer areas have very little interest in studying as the learning environment is conducive to neither teachers nor pupils."

She said it was important to have a good start in education and hoped that iThemba would help give a better future to the lives of their 50 pupils.