

Prepared for Christel House International

**EDUCATION QUALITY, LIFE AT CHRISTEL HOUSE
SOUTH AFRICA AND SOCIAL MOBILITY FOR
LEARNERS**

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EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Dr Adam Cooper, Tarryn de Kock and Prof Crain Soudien



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Introduction

The contexts of education and inequality in South Africa

This research project explored the quality of education at CHSA, an independent school based in Ottery, Cape Town, and whether its learners were able to attain upward social mobility once completing their schooling. In South Africa, education quality continues to be a function of other societal inequalities. Children from poor homes generally attend under-resourced schools that prepare them for low-skilled, low-income jobs once they enter the world of work, if they are lucky enough to become employed (Bray et al, 2010; Sayed et al, 2017). Children whose parents can afford to send them to better schools stand more chance of receiving a good education which enables access to a wider variety of post-school opportunities, including a university education (Soudien, 2012; Ramadiro & Porteus, 2017). These inequalities were produced by colonial and apartheid regimes which created a set of racially based privileges to maintain a societal hierarchy that still persists to this day. Current policies and practices have been unable substantially to disrupt these historical injustices and even function to reinforce past divisions (Taylor, 2008; Ramadiro & Porteus, 2017).

What complicates the implementation of progressive education policies is a lack of structural transformation of the engineered inequality that was a primary feature of the country's apartheid past. Because of this, contemporary factors that are partially a result of this history and that plague the education system can be located both within and beyond the school walls (Bray et al, 2010). Working-class, predominantly Black parents work long hours and travel extended distances to work due to spatial planning that isolates them from wealthier urban centres. Some learners from these families also commute across neighbourhoods and socio-economic divides to attend schools elsewhere, as a means of accessing greater spatial and social mobility, and potentially better education (Fataar, 2015). This creates further cleavages in already struggling communities, as families of relatively better means end up diverting what resources they have away from local schools.

The result is that poverty and location continue to influence quality of education with a knock-on effect on opportunity, employment and social status (Fataar, 2015), such that in poor communities crime, violence and other social problems (resulting from this complex interplay of historical and contemporary dynamics) seep into schools (Cooper, 2017; Sayed et al, 2017). While it is true that schools in under-resourced neighbourhoods may suffer from mismanagement, teacher absenteeism and poor teacher content knowledge, these factors cannot be interpreted in isolation from the social contexts in which education is delivered and which function to reproduce the status quo (Hoffmann, Sayed & Badroodien, 2017). While the ground has been laid for transforming education in South Africa, ongoing friction between policy, resourcing and transformation has stunted the capacity for deep-rooted change to occur.

Christel House South Africa: Context and Background to the school

With this set of historically produced contexts in mind, Christel House South Africa (CHSA) provides a unique case-study for exploring how different factors may contribute to eradicating poverty and inequality. CHSA is a public benefit company that aims to improve the lives of children from poor neighbourhoods. The South African school (CHSA) was first opened in 2002, currently enrolling more than 1000 Cape Town children and youth in the school and College and Careers programmes, young people who reside in poor neighbourhoods like Langa, Hanover Park, Joe Slovo, Manenberg, Pook-Se-Bos and Delft. These children are given education, nutrition, health care, life skills and a nurturing environment at CHSA, a combination of inputs that are intended to enable social mobility, independence and young people who are to engage in all of the activities that comprise healthy forms of critical citizenship. The educational model is underpinned by the belief that a combination of adequate classroom instruction, an extensive character development programme, as well as social, academic and health related support can enable any child to become successful. CHSA has a 100% matric pass rate once re-takes are included in calculating success rates.

Learners are recruited from catchment areas for that are classified as being in the bottom two poverty quintiles. Children who attend CHSA are not exceptional in comparison to their peers and would be considered as having 'normal learning abilities'. Once enrolled in the school, students identified as having learning disabilities or other cognitive, emotional or physical challenges are provided with the necessary support to help them become successful in their academic aspirations and other endeavours. Christel House provides students with an extended academic day and year, as well as additional Mathematics and language instruction in comparison to regular public schools. When learners arrive at CHSA in grade R they are generally not first language English speakers and often have not been provided with good nutrition and health care. Students receive two meals and a snack every school day, they are assisted with medical and dental care and they are provided with psychological guidance and the expertise of social workers should the need arise. Students return home to their families in the evenings and Christel House provides a range of community support workshops that deal with issues like family planning, parenting skills, conflict resolution, substance abuse, nutrition and hygiene, all of which are intended to help parents and other members of learners' communities.

Learners are provided with College and Careers work from the age of five. Towards the end of their secondary schooling this work assists them in applying for tertiary studies, securing funding to aid with the next phase of their education and guidance in being prepared for job interviews. CHSA graduates who attend tertiary institutions are supported with their fees, often given stipends, and continue to be provided with access to medical services. Job placement and work integration are also included in the College and Careers programme. The research aimed to explore whether these measures resulted in a high-quality educational experience and upward mobility for learners once they completed their schooling.

The Human Sciences Research Council

The HSRC as a public institution is mandated to conduct social science research that makes a difference, in an integrative, collaborative and consultative manner, upholding the highest ethical standards as per the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA). The aim is to conduct research to address social problems and better understand the underlying factors continuing to drive inequality and poverty in South Africa. The objectives of the proposed study are in line with the HSRC mandate.

Methodology

The research was a collaborative process that involved regular 'check-ins' between the researchers and CHSA staff, allowing both parties to ask questions, share insights and discuss points of confusion. In order to establish the quality of education at CHSA and whether its learners become upwardly mobile, a three part research methodology was used, including:

1. A comparison of education quality between CHSA, comparable schools and provincial and national averages. A set of education quality indicators was established, as well as schools that made for an appropriate comparison.
2. Qualitative research was used to explore the quality of teaching and learning and the school culture. This included observations of classroom interactions at the school, as well as interviews with the school principals, teachers and current learners.
3. A short questionnaire and in-depth interviews with past learners explored whether this group was socially and economically better off than comparable peers.

The methods used for the three parts of the research are now described in more detail.

1. A comparison of education quality between CHSA and comparable schools.

A set of indicators was established and used to assess the quality of education at CHSA. These indicators included results on standardized tests, grade repetition rates, NSC passage rates, NSC Bachelor pass rates, pursuit of post-matric studies, subject choice and results from specific subjects. These indicators provided the researchers with important basic information regarding the quality of teaching and learning, illuminated by academic results of standardized tests, matric pass rates and bachelor pass rates.

These results were then compared to provincial and national averages, as well as a range of other schools, including those classified in different poverty quintiles. In South Africa, schools are classified according to poverty quintiles, with quintile 1 referring to the group of schools in each province that cater for the poorest 20% of learners, with quintile 2 schools educating the next poorest 20% of children (Republic of South Africa, 2004). Quintile 5 schools are attended by learners from the most affluent homes. The government allocates higher targets for support for schools classified in the poorer quintiles. Schools in each quintile are entitled to receive a minimum amount of funding per learner, to be paid by the provincial education departments (Republic of South Africa, 2004).

A comparison list or 'spectrum' of schools was then developed, comprised of a majority of urban commuter schools, some township schools and some wealthy ex-Model C schools, as well as some no-fee and some fee-paying schools of different fee ranges. This mix aided in developing an accurate snapshot of how CHSA fares in selected subjects relative to other schools.

2. Classroom and school-based observations, in-depth interviews with educators and focus groups with learners to explore the culture of teaching and learning and school climate

The researchers utilised a form of rapid ethnography, spending one week at the school observing classes and conducting interviews and focus groups. Observation is central to ethnographic research (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). The purpose of these observations was to assess classroom practices, such as learner participation and engagement, pedagogical strategies of educators and the general teaching and learning environment. This was a form of focused observation, excluding certain objects, activities or people from the analysis (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). The observations specifically focused on classroom climate, whether learners were comfortable at school, the types of pedagogical styles utilised by educators and the nature of the relationships between staff and learners. The time that teachers spent on various tasks was also observed. Beyond classroom practices, these observations also gave the researchers an opportunity to take in the broader school climate, interactions between educators and learners and to observe, in action, the additional extras offered at CHSA, such as medical and other health services.

Data collection began in October 2019 with observations. The researchers observed a variety of classes in the junior and high schools as well as day-to-day interactions in the school community, including break times. Notes were compiled according to a dedicated observation schedule and daily reflections were documented. Insights into teacher pedagogy, teacher-learner interactions, learner behaviour and relationships, as well as the flow of the

school day formed part of these findings. Findings also influenced the modification of research instruments to be used in the collection of interview and focus group data.

Learner focus groups were conducted in the period prior to the examination session of the school. Each researcher took four focus groups comprising learners in grades 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11. A full breakdown of data collected is provided in the table below.

PARTICIPANT GROUP	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	TYPE OF SESSION	INSTRUMENT
<i>Learners</i>	64 (8x8)	Focus group	Learner focus group schedule
<i>Teachers</i>	10	Interview	Staff interview schedule
<i>Support staff</i>	4	Interview	Staff interview schedule

A request was put to staff in the school to provide groups of learners where half were selected at random and half were top students in the respective classes. This was intended to provide a rounded sample of learners able to speak to their experiences from different positions. Information sheets and consent forms were sent home with learners prior to the focus groups for parental compliance. Assent forms were also provided to learners to complete during the focus group sessions. Focus groups took place in private rooms allocated by the school and the researchers explained the purpose of the study, as well as learners' rights, before starting the voice recording. While snacks were provided as a courtesy, learners were informed that no further immediate benefits would accrue to their participation in the research. Preliminary findings were discussed by the research team in order to begin the process of identifying emerging themes and patterns.

Teacher and support staff interviews followed the completion of learner focus groups. Each researcher took a number of interviews with staff from the junior and high schools as well as staff from the wellness centre. Staff were selected in order to give a sample that included as many teachers from different grades as possible in the junior school and a wide range of subject teachers in the high school. Beyond a desire for this 'spread' of teachers, educators were selected at random. These sessions were also conducted in private venues such as offices. Staff were provided with consent forms and the study was discussed with them before voice recording began. The full data collection period was completed by the end of November 2019.

Transcription took place concurrent to data collection. This was completed by research team members and subjected to quality checks. A number of recordings were processed through the transcription service Otter.AI and converted to completed documents. Thereafter they were quality checked and shared to the dedicated cloud facility. Preliminary themes were identified and data was coded using Excel. Quotes were drawn out from the data and sub-themes were identified that were further refined into those that comprise each theme in this report.

Research participants have been anonymised in this report. Every effort has been made to remove names, job titles and identifying information in order to protect the confidentiality of participants. Learners were also encouraged to protect the confidentiality of their peers considering the shared space of the focus group and the potential for personal information to emerge during these conversations.

One limitation of the research is that discussions about parents and alumni should be viewed as partial because we did not meet directly with parents or alumni. While parents have not been included in the original sample of the research, alumni and College & Careers staff will form part of the research conducted in Part 3. It is hoped that this will further flesh out the insights relating to Christel House students' experiences following their departure from the school.

All of the interviews with educators and focus groups with learners were confidential and the transcripts anonymised, protecting the identities of participants and enabling them to speak freely in the qualitative research process.

3. [A short questionnaire and a sample of in-depth interviews conducted with graduates who completed their matric at CHSA and are now participating in the world of work](#)

One of CHSA's core aims is to break the cycle of poverty and inequality so prevalent in marginalised Cape Town and South African communities, residential areas that were previously restricted to Black and Coloured people under apartheid. Evidence of this 'disruption' effect ultimately depends on the quality of life and social mobility attained by graduates from the school once they enter the world of work. Whether or not graduates are able to complete tertiary studies and the quality of the employment or work they attain was therefore the focus of the third piece of the research. In order to establish whether CHSA graduates are able to find 'rewarding' (in terms of the *financial, intellectual* and *subjective wellbeing* sense of the word) work, we conducted a short survey with as many of them as possible, followed by a series of in-depth interviews with a sample of approximately 12 graduates.

Shortly before commencing part three of the research, South Africa went into a state of lockdown due to the Corona virus pandemic. Despite this considerable impediment to the study, we managed to conduct the research, without a great deal of disturbance to the process. An online survey was created on the redcap platform, with efforts made to recruit alumni through WhatsApp and Facebook groups of former learners. The survey was conducted electronically. Electronic surveys have proven to be cheaper and response rates greater than paper based methods (Simsek & Veiga, 2000). We tried to recruit as many former

learners as possible to participate, with approximately R30 of cell phone airtime offered as compensation for time taken to complete the survey (which took approximately 15 minutes to complete). Between 2009 and 2019, the total number of matriculants that graduated from CHSA was 412, with 109 participating in the survey. This sample size results in a margin of error of 8.1%, meaning that with a 95% confidence interval, we can say the results for the sample will be no more than 8.1% higher or lower than the results for the population. In other words and in relation to this study, 95% of the time, the results for the sample will not be more than 8.1% higher or lower than results for the entire population of CHSA alumni.

Questions included past and present neighbourhoods of residence, highest educational qualifications, employment, income and how alumni give back to their communities. The full questionnaire is included as appendix A.

The survey was supplemented with 12 in-depth interviews with former learners that have managed to gain upward social mobility, measured by their self-reported income. While income is a crude indicator of social mobility, it does have a number of definitive implications for people's material and subjective wellbeing, which the qualitative research could then flesh out for greater contextual understanding. Assessing social mobility is an inexact science, as each generation is confronted with a different set of challenges and historical contexts change. Learners in this study are also coming from a very low base, as they originate from low-income homes in poor communities. We have therefore tried to make some tentative generalisations about CHSA and their social mobility, rather than claiming to have unearthed all of the answers.

Participants for the qualitative research were also recruited by asking the high and junior school principals for former learners that they believed showed great potential. Interviews were conducted on Zoom and lasted approximately one hour. The discussions focused on alumni's perceptions of CHSA, in retrospect, their educational career post-CHSA and their employment histories.

Research ethics

The research was approved by the HSRC's ethics committee, a team of HSRC and non-HSRC researchers who reviewed whether the planned research adhered to the highest ethical guidelines, ensuring that no participants would be harmed by the process.

Research Findings

PART 1: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION QUALITY

The comparative approach to education quality based on school results is divided into four parts:

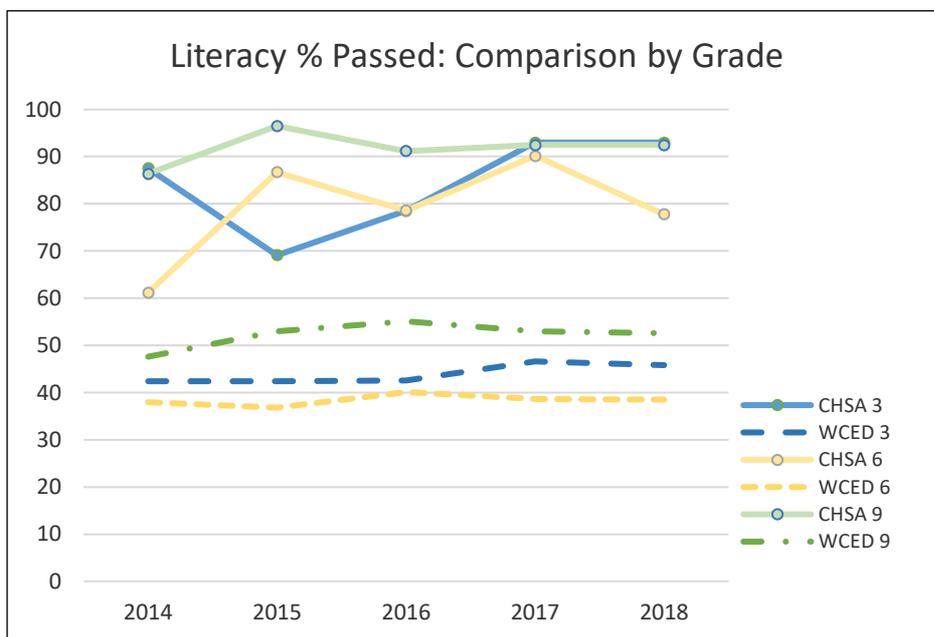
- a) Systemic tests: literacy and numeracy for grades 3, 6 and 9; CHSA in comparison to Western Cape Education Department

- b) National Senior Certificate (Grade 12): comparison between CHSA and Provincial results
- c) National Senior Certificate (Grade 12): CHSA versus a spectrum of other schools

a) Systemic tests: literacy and numeracy for grades 3, 6 and 9, comparison with WCED

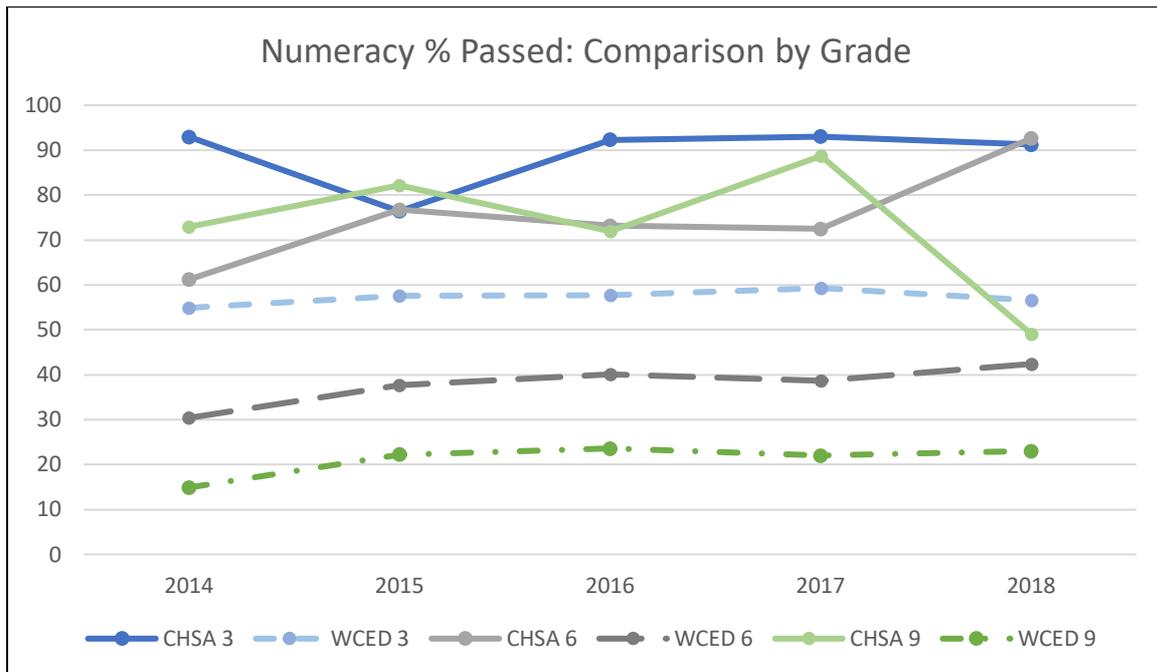
This section compares how Christel House SA fares in systemic tests relative to the public school wealth quintiles 1 to 5, as well as in comparison to provincial averages as a whole.

Literacy



- Between 2014 and 2018: WCED literacy rates for Grade 3 hovered between 40% and 50%, were just below 40% for Grade 6 and just above 50% for Grade 9.
- CHSA Grade 3 literacy results ranged from approximately 90% (2014) to 70% (2015) and back up to 90% for 2017 and 2018.
- With 2014 Grade 6 as the exception (60%), CHSA Grade 6 and 9 pass rates for literacy are consistently above 80%.

Numeracy



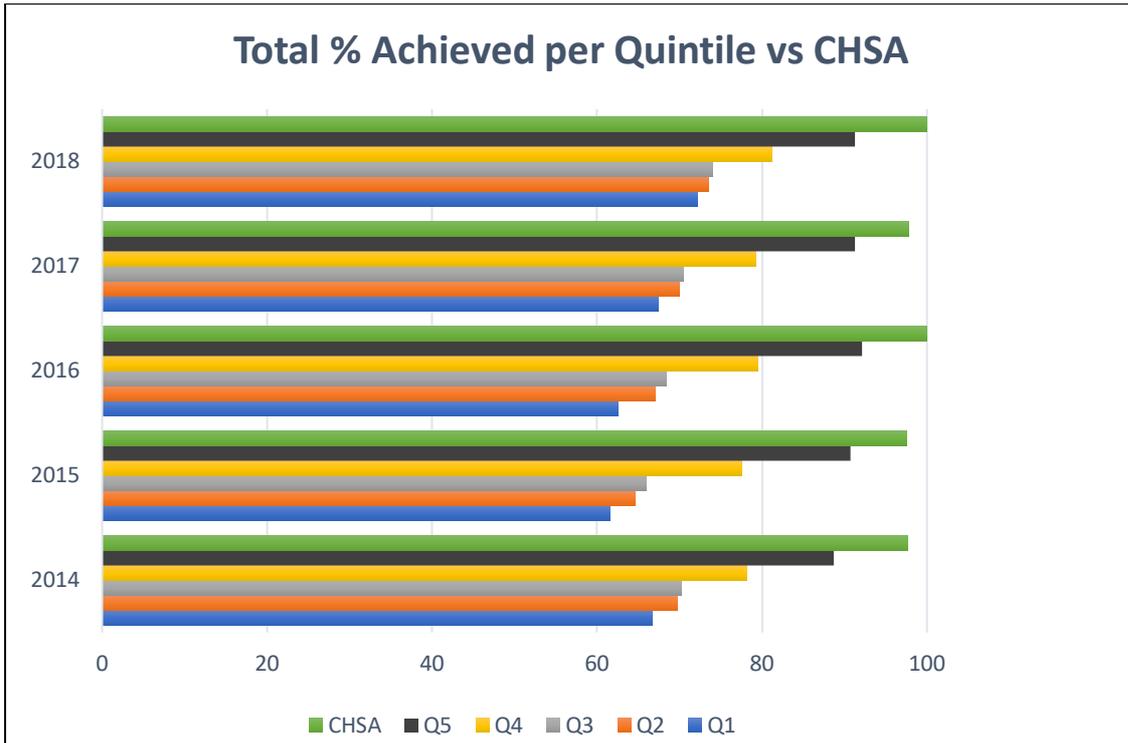
- CHSA numeracy results are consistently >60%, with grade 3 regularly around 90%.
- Grade 9 numeracy performance is consistently above 70% with a dip in 2018
- Provincial numeracy pass rate summary:
Grade 3: 50-60%
Grade 6: 30-40%
Grade 9: 15-25%

Literacy and numeracy results conclusion:

- **CHSA literacy and numeracy pass rates are usually at least 30% higher than WCED averages.**
- **In both literacy and numeracy then, CHSA performs consistently better than WCED averages.**

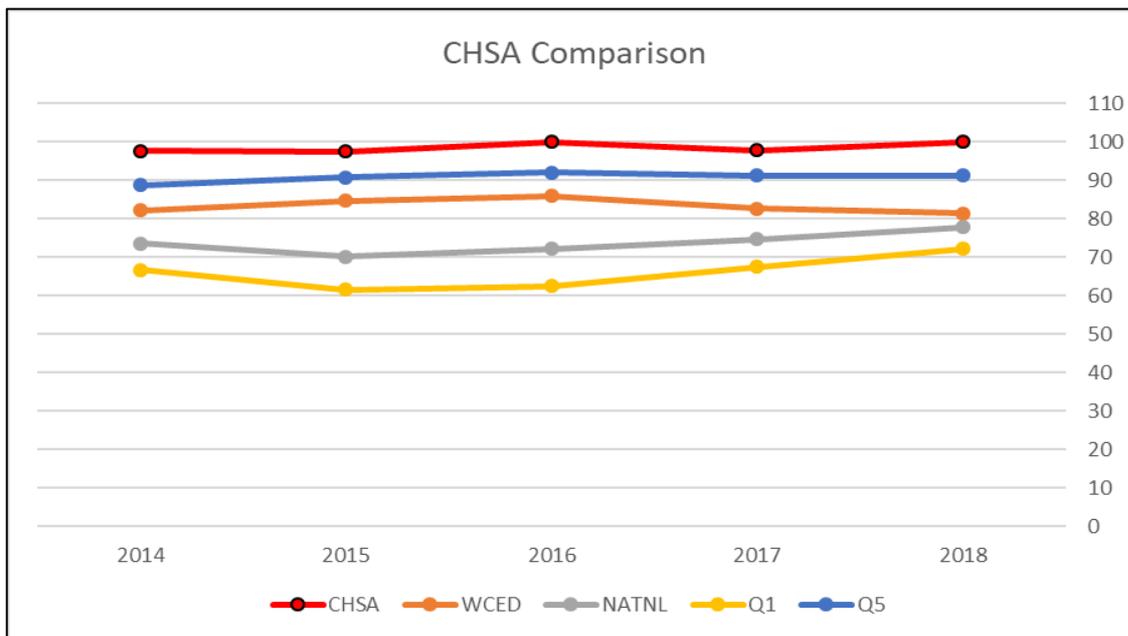
b) National Senior Certificate (Grade 12): comparison between CHSA and provincial results

This section compares performance in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exam, the exit exam sat by Grade 12 learners annually. We compare performance between the school, the province, as well as wealth quintiles.

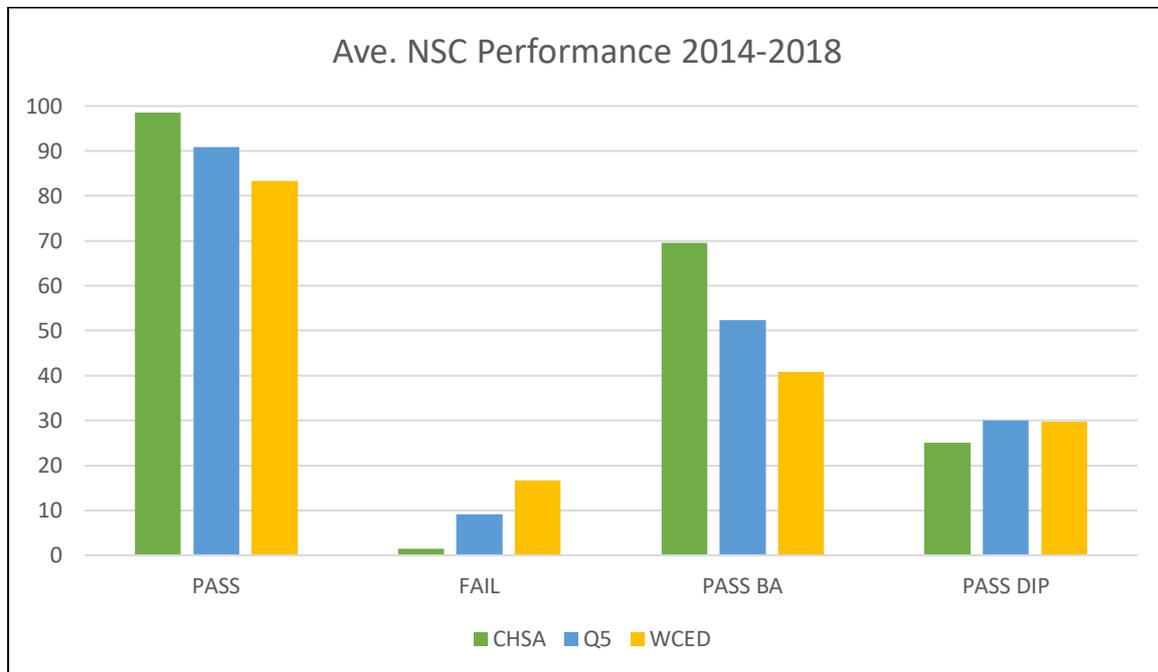


- CHSA’s general NSC performance consistently exceeds Quintile 5.
- Quintile 5 consistently outperforms its nearest comparison (Quintile 4) by an average of 10% more passes achieved.

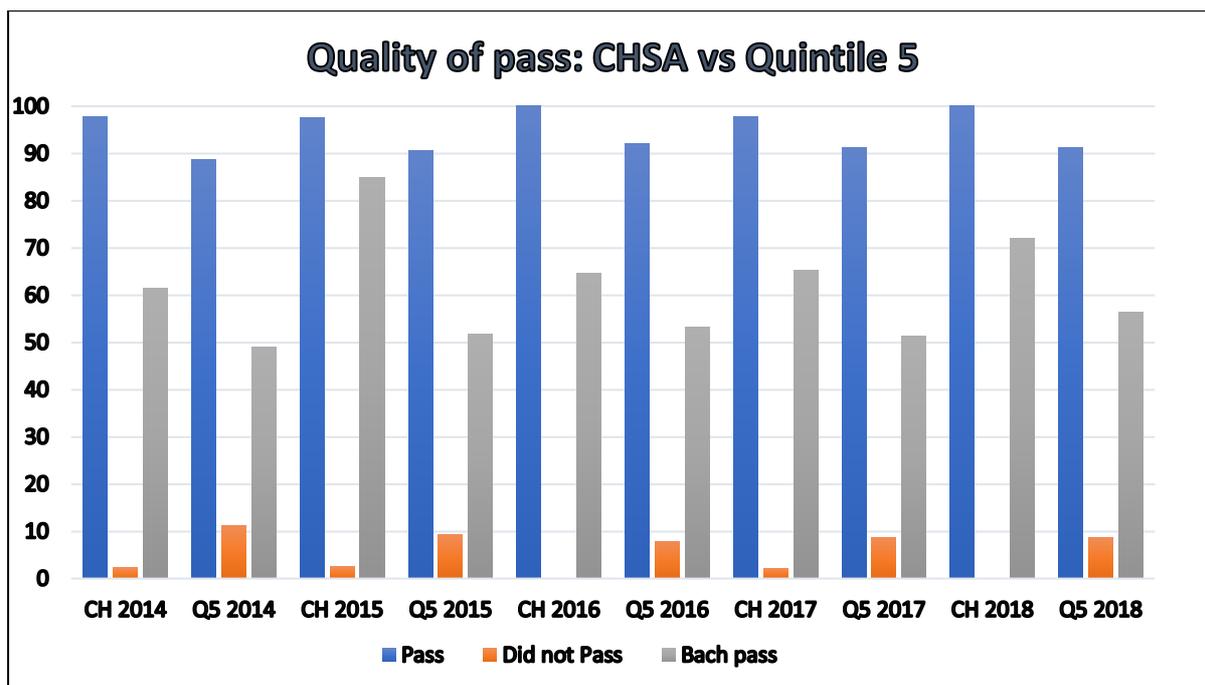
The following graphic representation compares CHSA NSC pass rates with provincial and national averages, as well as provincial averages for Quintiles 1 and 5. It is followed by a chart describing the pass rates for CHSA compared to WCED, including the number of Bachelor passes.



The chart above describes average performance in the NSC totalled over five years. It is clear that CHSA outperforms the provincial department but also does far better than Q5 in delivering an increased number of Bachelor passes. The following graph disaggregates this by year for the school compared to the quintile.



The graph above describes performance in the NSC between 2014 and 2018. 'BA' and 'DIP' signify two of the overall passing modalities used in the NSC. A BA or 'Bachelors pass' enables the learner to apply for a university degree course, while a Diploma (DIP) pass allows the learner to apply for a diploma course at a university or other tertiary institution.



CHSA’s general NSC performance consistently exceeds Quintile 5 (the wealthiest quintile) schools. Most CHSA matriculants pass with a bachelors or diploma pass in the NSC, with an average cumulative percentage at 85% for CHSA and 70% for the WCED.

c) National Senior Certificate (Grade 12): CHSA and a spectrum of other schools

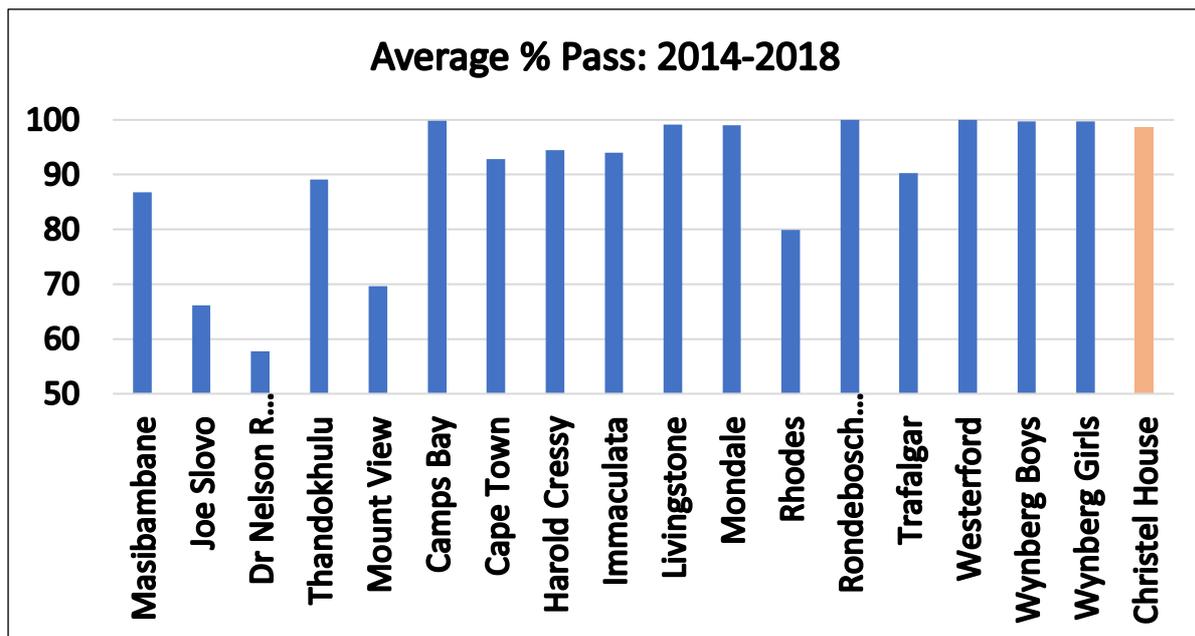
CHSA is uniquely positioned within the education system relative to other public and private schools. The school’s endowments locate it within the same ‘ballpark’ as Q5 schools, including some wealthier and more established ex-Model C schools. However, learner demographics are closer in comparison to Quintile 1-3 schools in terms of location and socio-economic status (characterised by the school’s no-fee policy).

It would be factually inaccurate to situate CHSA among Q1-3 schools only, for a number of reasons. The first is described above – the level of investment made by the school surpasses what is offered to comparative schools in Q1-3. Secondly, the additional support services provided by the school (such as healthcare and nutrition) far outstrips what schools in Q1-3 could provide their learners. These services also act as a deterrent against some of the institutional ‘shocks’ experienced by Q1-3 schools as a result of the socio-economic challenges they attempt to resolve. Hunger, illness, home and community dynamics – these dramatically impact the quality of teaching and learning in poor schools. While CHSA still faces challenges in these areas, the availability of resources to offset the worst of these challenges renders learners much better off than they would be at other schools.

In addition, whereas many other schools are able to select learners based on academic results, CHSA learners are selected for primary school based on need and then simply move through the system into high school. CHSA also fits the profile of a ‘commuter school’ where learners are not drawn from the immediate surrounds and commute to access education.

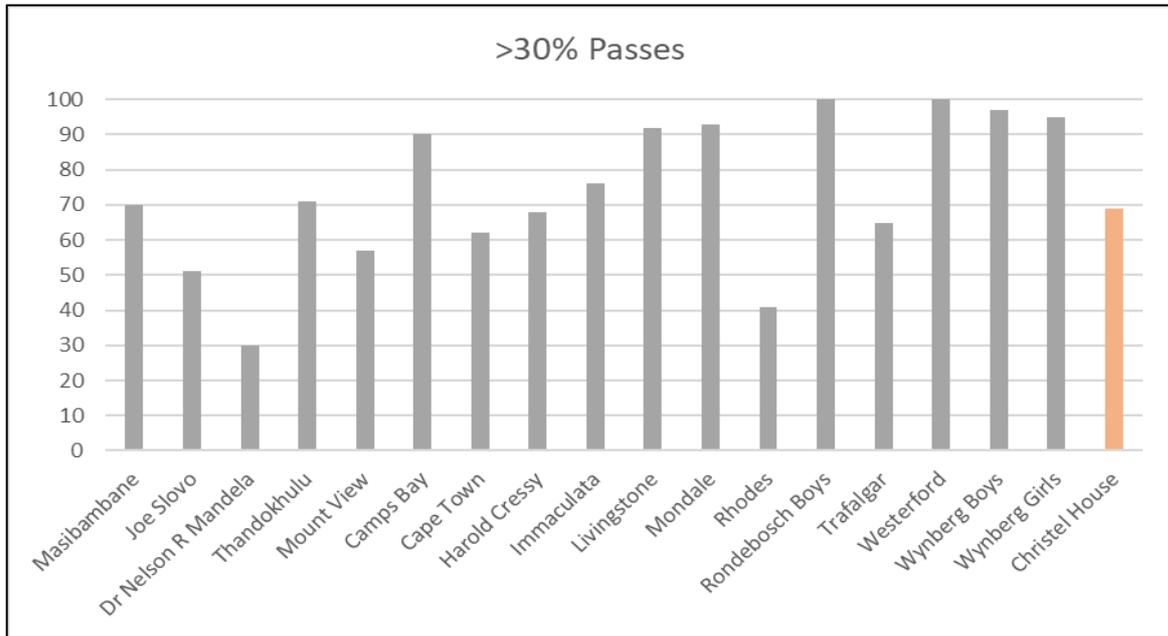
Some ex-Model C schools are also commuter schools but these are classified as the latter in the comparison. For these reasons we developed a comparison list or 'spectrum' comprised of a majority of urban commuter schools, some township schools and some wealthy ex-Model C schools, as well as some no-fee and some fee-paying schools of different fee ranges. This mix aided in developing an accurate snapshot of how CHSA fares in selected subjects relative to other schools.

Snapshot of average percentage of learners who passed Grade 12 at a particular school, averaged over five years:



- CHSA results were far better than the township schools, better than established commuter schools and only worse than elite ex-Model C schools included in the sample.

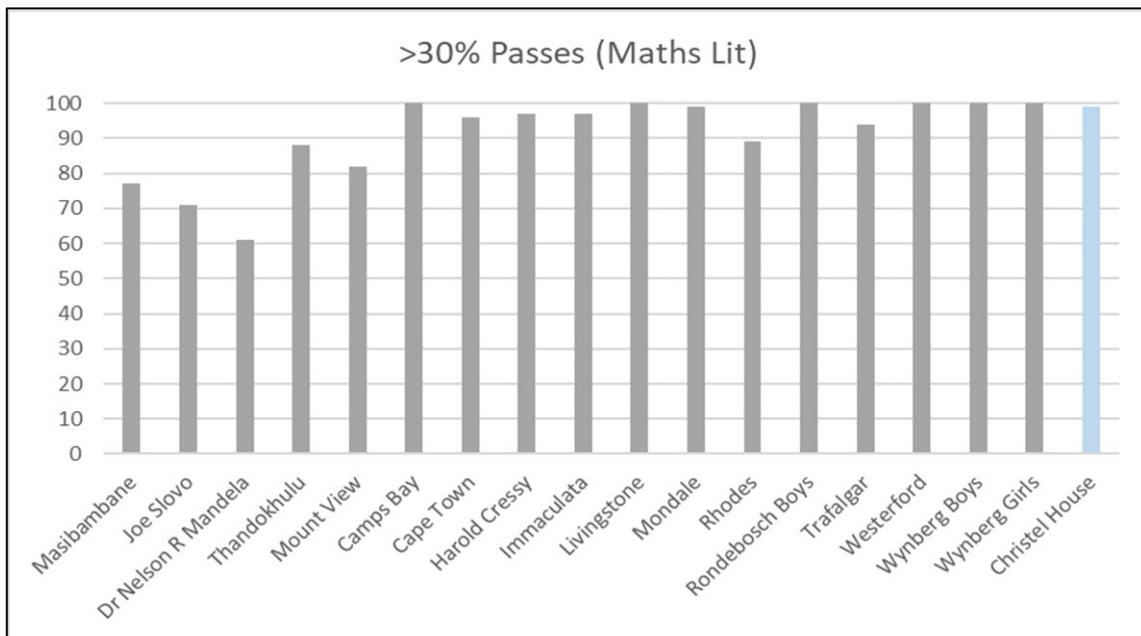
SUBJECT COMPARISON: Grade 12 MATHEMATICS



This graph demonstrates that Christel House fares similarly to other commuter schools e.g. Trafalgar, Thandokhulu, Immaculata, Cressy and Cape Town HS and less well than ex-Model C schools such as Westerford and the Wynberg schools.

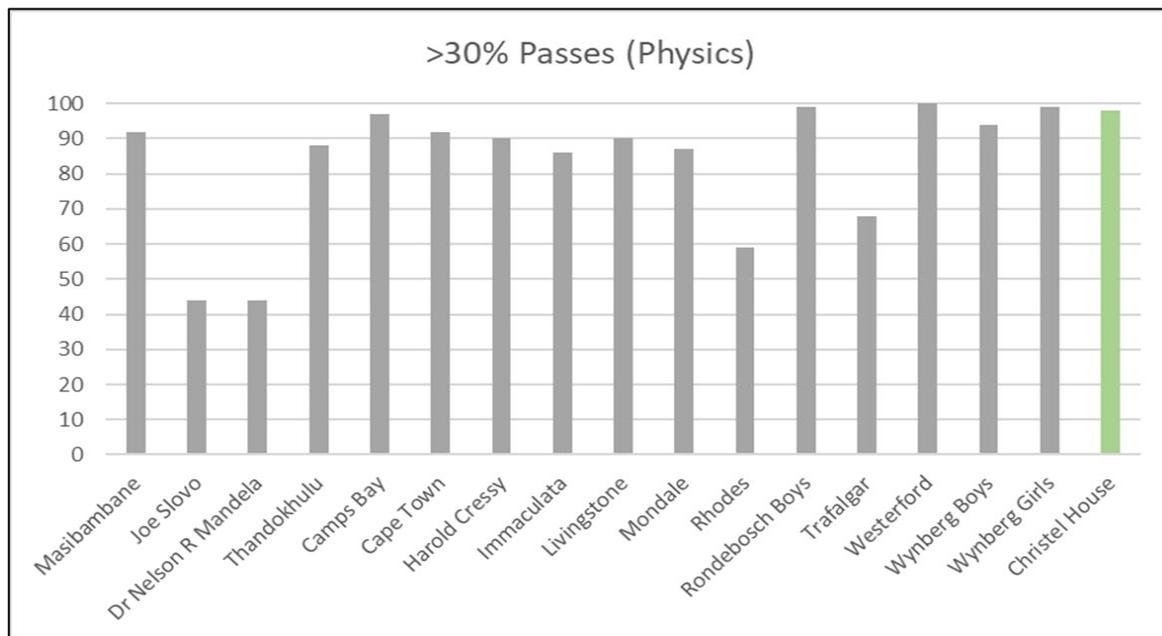
However, it doesn't do as well as schools such as Mondale in Mitchell's Plain, or Livingstone, and in fact is one percentage point lower than Masibambane, an exceptional township Q1 school. CHSA fares slightly better than other township schools such as Joe Slovo and Nelson Mandela, as well as commuter school Rhodes High.

SUBJECT COMPARISON: Grade 12 Maths literacy



There is less variance in Maths Literacy performance (as expected due to the subject content and pitching). CHSA, like a number of other schools in the comparison, scores close to 100% of learners achieving above 30%. Some poorer schools do less well in Maths Literacy.

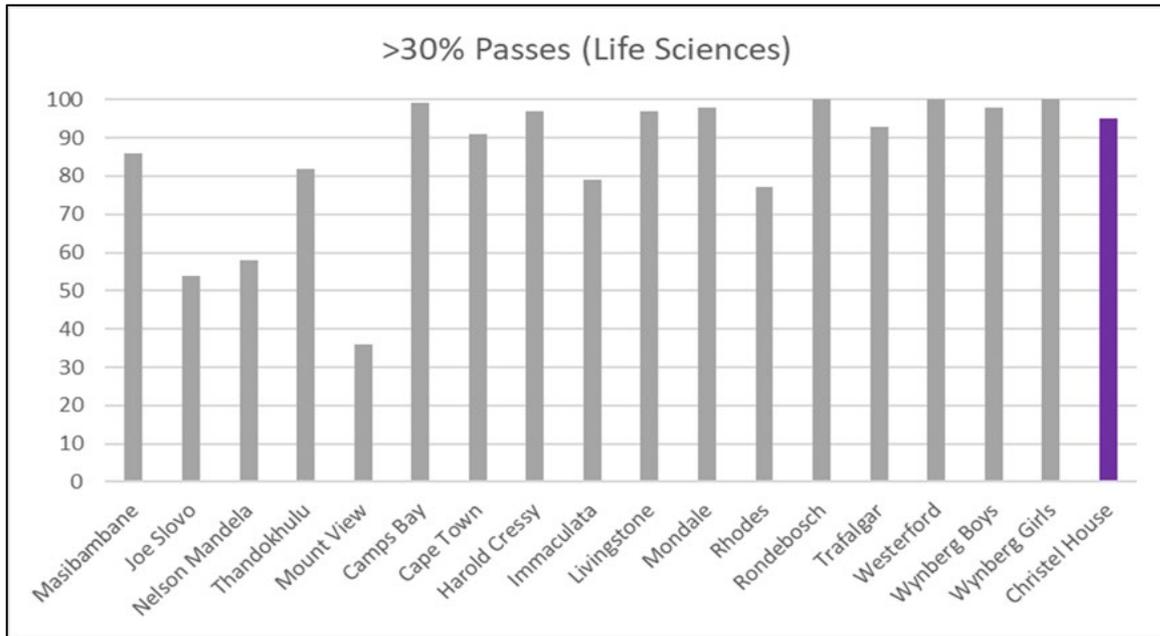
SUBJECT COMPARISON: Physics



Christel House scores in the upper range on Physics, however only a small cohort take this subject.

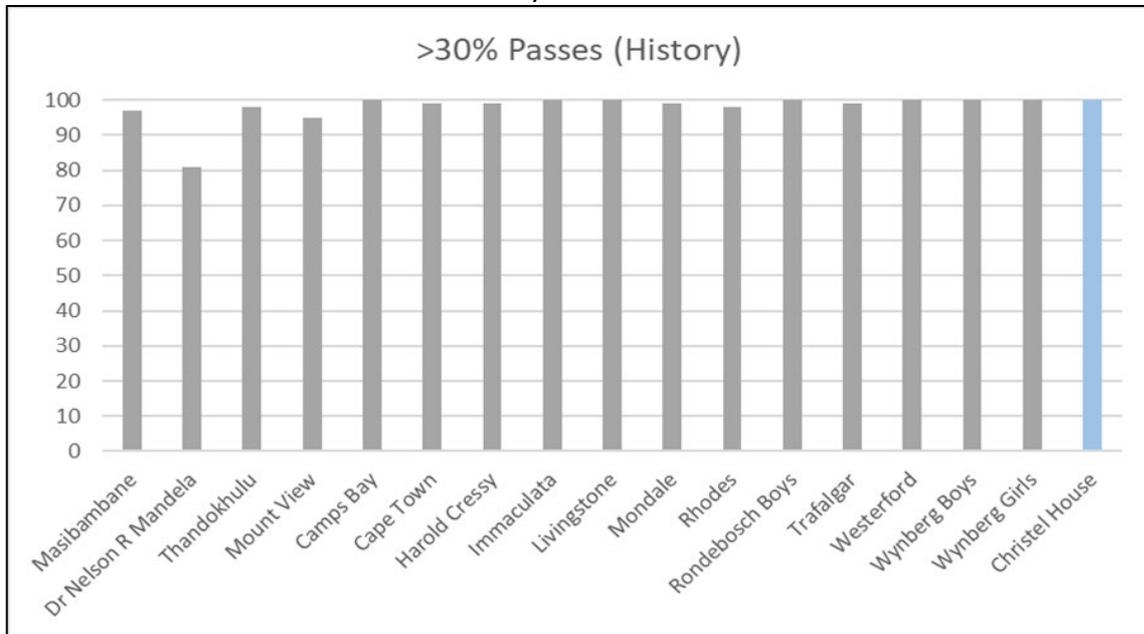
CHSA performs at a level similar to ex-Model C schools as well as commuter schools, despite only a few learners taking this subject.

SUBJECT COMPARISON: Grade 12 Life Sciences



- CHSA scores in the same decile as ex-Model C schools, entrenched commuter schools like Trafalgar and Harold Cressy, and Mondale.
- Schools like Immaculata and Rhodes fare quite averagely compared to poorer Quintile 5 schools AND poor Quintile 1 schools like Masibambane.

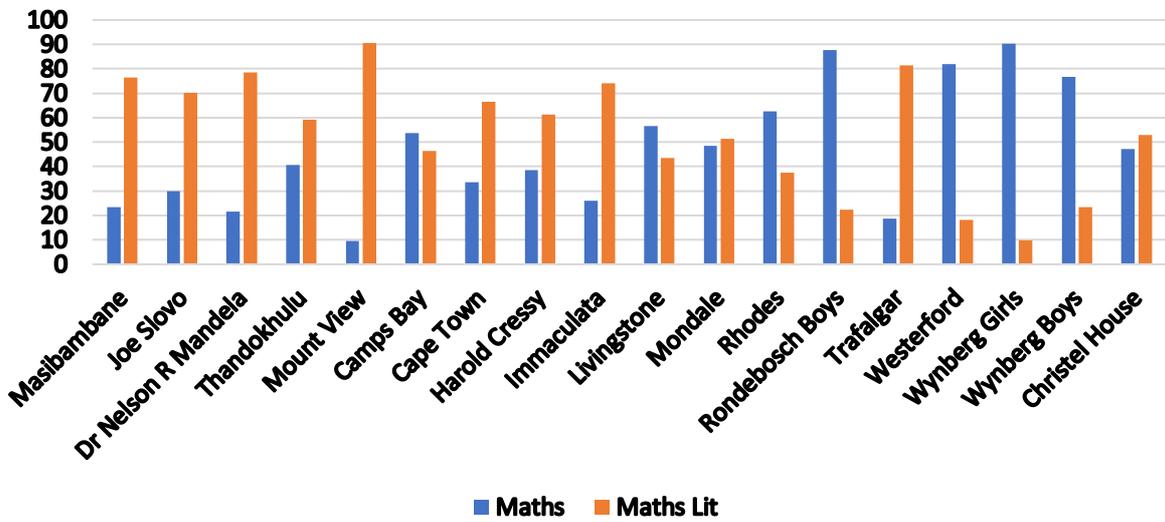
SUBJECT COMPARISON: Grade 12 History



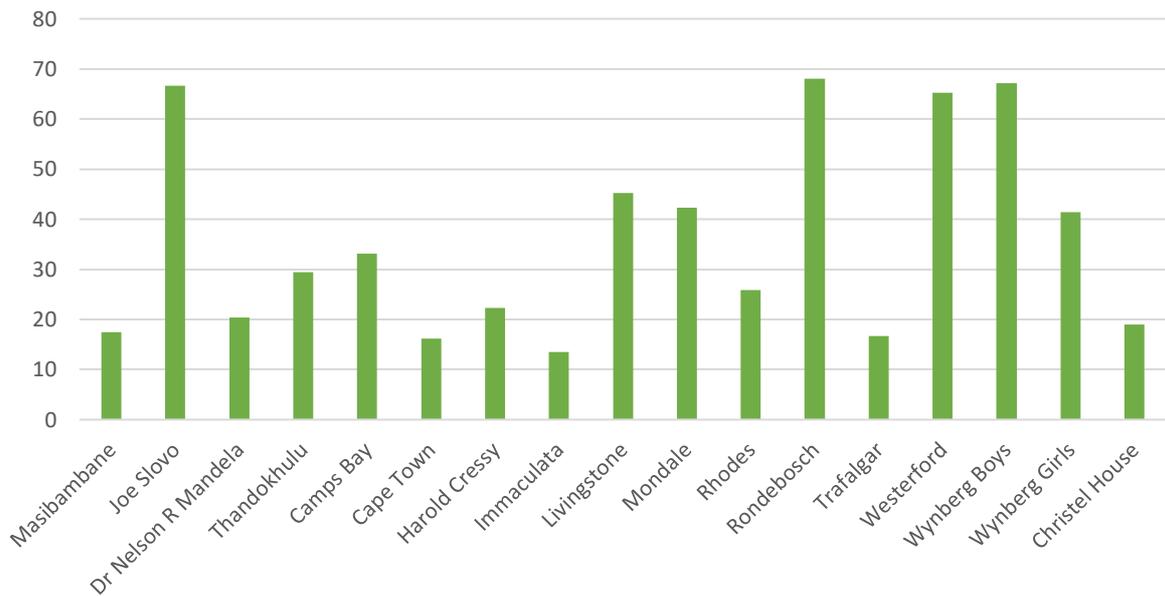
A hypothesis has emerged that 'study subjects' have a smaller performance range than other subjects because students are able to rote-learn content. History results support this.

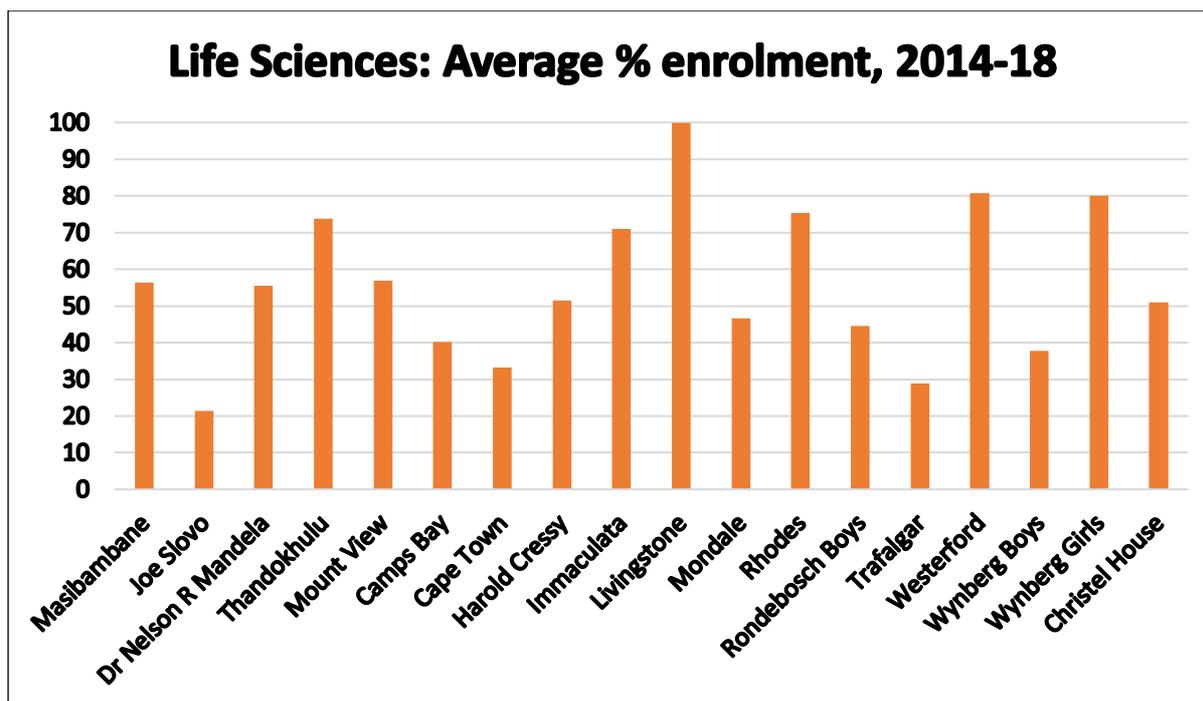
The analysis of enrolment in STEM subjects provides more nuanced insights into the prospects for social mobility for CHSA learners. Included are the ratio of Mathematics to Maths Lit enrolments, enrolments in Physics and Life Sciences.

Mathematics v Maths Lit: Average % enrolment, 2014-18



Physics: Average % enrolment, 2014-18





STEM analysis

- The ratio of Mathematics to Maths Lit enrolments is closer to trends in other commuter and working-class schools.
- Learner enrolments in Physics at CHSA are particularly low compared to established commuter schools and ex-Model C schools.
- While some of the increased enrolment can be attributed to schools that are dedicated STEM/Dinaledi schools (e.g. Livingstone), but low STEM subject enrolment limits options and funding opportunities for tertiary studies and, potentially, social mobility.

NSC highlights

- Overall, CHSA performs only slightly less well in Grade 12, in comparison to much wealthier Quintile 5 schools and better than many commuter schools with entrenched academic records.
- More information is needed in the school comparison on subjects such as English (HL) performance. This would help us understand the impact of literacy on performance in subjects requiring specialised content knowledge, such as Mathematics or Physics.
- STEM subject analysis showed that fewer CHSA learners choose pure Mathematics and Physics, which has implications for their career options and pathways.

The results from the first part of the research therefore indicated that resources invested in learners led to a good grounding in literacy and numeracy. This and the strong results-based culture have produced excellent pass rates throughout the primary and high schools, almost on a par with former Model C schools and surpassing quintile 5 schools on average. This is possibly at the expense of not enrolling large numbers of learners in difficult STEM subjects that could potentially lead to lucrative future careers. Higher enrolment in these subjects

would risk increased failure rates. These results are better understood through the second piece of research which explored, in more depth, the reasons for these academic results, using qualitative interviews with learners and educators and a series of observations of classroom interactions.

PART 2: QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF CHSA AS A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Four main themes emerged from the qualitative research at the school, with educators and learners, namely a) teaching and learning, b) school culture and practices, c) the home-school nexus and d) organizational culture of Christel House. Each of these themes is discussed in further detail below.

Theme 1: Teaching and Learning

Interviews with educators and learners provided a rich picture of classroom life. Sub-themes in this section relate to the school being described as a space with **greater degrees of freedom** to engage with **learners as both cognitive and emotional beings** and to **transcend the divide between everyday and school knowledges**. Divisions and attempts to overcome them were observed in descriptions of **language and cultural groups** that occupy the school space, with both clear progress made to create an inclusive, multi-cultural environment and stubborn challenges remaining. The last sub-theme that emerged in this first section of the research was **academic pressure, study techniques and examination strategies**.

“We've done crazy things”: greater degrees of classroom freedom

CHSA teachers and leadership experienced greater degrees of freedom and independence to experiment than is generally the case in the public schooling system:

We almost have the freedom of independence. And we don't have these restrictions on 'this is how you do things' that we've grown so much further than teachers and principals at public schools.

CHSA was described as different to the public system, which was perceived as inhibitive, constrictive and prescriptive, placing limits on teacher practices and school development. An example was given of CHSA educators bridging the foundation and intermediate phases, which was the result of necessity due to a staffing crisis, yet the school's flexibility enabled this to become an immensely useful learning experience for the staff:

We've done crazy things... bridging courses with grade threes and fours because one year we had a teacher who fell ill and she actually crashed. There was a problem with our grade threes coming to grade four and generally grade fours have a problem anyway because they start a new phase. So for the first 15 minutes of the day, we would do what I called a bridging course.... we would split that class and a teacher would receive them and do either maths or English for 30 minutes at the start of every day. We do things that I don't think WCED would like.

A staffing challenge was turned into a learning experience; integrating groups of grade threes and fours helped learners become accustomed to the expectations of grade four prior to arrival, preparing them for the educational and psychological transition that would occur the following year. The most important parts of the curriculum, namely literacy and numeracy, were taught jointly. Creative changes may not be possible or desirable for leadership at public schools, however at CHSA experimentation was embraced, leading to progress and a multi-faceted educational experience.

Many of the creative practices involved perceiving learners as more than ‘developing minds’ that require ‘knowledge to be poured into them’. They are viewed as socio-emotional-cognitive beings that are expected to cope with constant transitions. Similarly:

We don't actually do week one of the CAPS curriculum every term because we do [need to] get our kids back to school, so we do a procedural learning week...They come in on a high and we have to like, just get them back. ...So at least at least four weeks in the year or maybe even eight that we just not doing what we are technically supposed to be doing according to CAPS... We try to do maths and English all the time. But for us, it's more important that our kids are calm, peaceful.

Freedom and independence at CHSA does not only involve experimenting with teaching methods, it requires an understanding of learners as holistic, emotional beings that move between very different home and school contexts. Flexibility in the organisation of time and space at CHSA enabled learners to be sensitively reinserted into the school context after breaks in the academic programme, facilitating productive learning. One way of dealing with the frantic, hurried nature that inevitably characterises educational environments involves a sound knowledge of when to slow the system down, in order, ironically, to enhance its productivity.

***“I’m gonna get a hug. I’m going to run around with Mr. Roscoe. I get food. And then I learn English”*: learning as a socio-emotional-cognitive activity**

As one of the previous vignettes illustrated, the fluid and adaptable approach to classroom management meant that learners were understood to be socio-emotional-cognitive beings:

R: They are loved and cared for. Isn't that easy? Don't you know that (laughs)?

I: what does that look like on a daily basis?

R: it looks like I belong. I can be happy. I'm gonna get a hug not a hiding from a teacher. I'm getting a whole lot of cool activities to do to keep me engaged. I'm going to run around with Mr. Roscoe on the playground and it's going to be loads of fun. I get food. And then I learn English. Our children are happy...We bring in our grade R's for extra lessons for eight weeks also, only boys. So we do language immersion and character immersion with them. Because we know the boys...They don't communicate.

And:

That's difficult for teachers who initially come to Christel House. Because another child is in your space. They want to hug you they want to touch you, they want to ask you questions about your family...

CHSA's learning philosophy incorporates an understanding of learners as requiring emotional and nutritional nurturance in order for healthy cognitive development and cultural transitions to occur. A holistic approach to learning includes physical exertion to catalyse effective academic work and physical contact, which is often discouraged in the public system due to fears of inappropriate transgressions. This is buttressed with teachers' willingness to work extended days and hours and to tailor specific supportive mechanisms for individuals and groups that require additional time and care, such as boy children in grade R. The relationship between teaching, learning and knowledge acquisition resulted in the learners being primarily perceived as people that needs to be loved and cared for. Awareness of learners' emotional dispositions helped to avoid classroom conflict:

We don't break down kids, we pull them up, even if they're in the darkest day. It's the behaviour that we have a problem with. It's not the child. You know, we've learned how to defuse the situation because a lot of it comes from home. If a girl comes into my class early in the morning... She's unable to sit still. She will shout across the classroom. Do I meet her at that same level where I shout back at her or do I take one side outside send her over to social services? Send Danielle a WhatsApp... Let's defuse the situation where she had been on medication, she needs about at least 40 minutes for it to set in. So we support one another. So Danielle will say I'll keep her till twenty to nine. By the time she comes over, she's a different child. We must support one another in the interest of the child.

CHSA educators deal with the myriad emotional issues many learners arrive with at school through a sophisticated understanding of these children's psychological makeup and by utilising the support offered from a dedicated and well-resourced social services department. Educators have the emotional resources to avoid becoming embroiled in hostile confrontations with learners, interactions that may degenerate into conflict and, ultimately, prevent teaching and learning for individuals and whole classes. Support from Social Services at CHSA generally allowed educators not to "have to be the teacher, the nurse, the social worker, a counsellor or therapist," with a healthy balance being struck.

"Where does popcorn come from?" balancing school and life knowledges

At CHSA curriculum knowledge and life knowledge were enmeshed, used to explain unfamiliar food and snacks that learners eat at school, as well as what may be considered basic skills that exist in middle-class homes, such as how to use a toilet:

You explain how your brain works and needs to have the food, because mommy, daddy, granny, whoever sees to them has never taken the time out to explain this is why we eat... Popcorn sometimes they will be like, I don't know that... then you know you have to like explain what it is. I like to do a little lesson with them. Bring the mielies from the packet and then I'll show them the end-product, make some popcorn for them. Banana and orange, I'll open it, let them feel it, let them mess with it, let them experience that, smell it, whatever and then the next time, we hope that it'll go easier...

They do struggle with keeping their hands out of the bowls. And it's really sad because for me that is, I was raised like that, my hands don't go into my plate.. It's a constant, constant battle, going to the bathroom, in the first two terms, it's a total pain. We have to actually walk them to the bathroom. This is how you use the toilet...the water, toilet paper. It's very sad. They're being robbed because they've been thrown into a community where nobody cares.

The total learning package CHSA children receive transcends 'academic' learning to include cultural practices and objects/tools that are often unfamiliar to them in their particular circumstances. Innovative teaching practices compelled this educator to incorporate popcorn into the lesson plan, such that learners may simultaneously learn about maize production, as well as the everyday objects that constitute the snacks provided by the school. The teaching and learning elements of this quotation show a remarkable willingness to find creative yet practical solutions to make the school environment familiar to these learners. However, a mild sense of judgement is apparent towards families that apparently don't bother to explain the purpose and value of nutrition, who don't educate their children about the correct use of utensils, or how to use a toilet proficiently. It is clearly time-consuming, not to mention emotionally distressing, for educators to be forced to teach learners about this diverse range of artefacts, however, their unfamiliarity with these objects and practices is due to learners' socio-economic status and random cultural norms and mores, rather than cultural deficiencies.

“We fighting the language, fighting the myths, and beliefs” : language and cultural divisions

The research indicated that a good deal of progress has been made in relation to overcoming group divisions and facilitating a healthy learning environment, but that some work remains. Early challenges when the school first opened included “*getting kids to coexist...getting them to not use the K word*”. Despite progress made in the resolution of conflict and the establishment of a healthy learning space at the school, divisions between groups of learners still emerged:

I do feel it [there being no Black teachers in the high school] makes a huge difference, not that learners complain. You pick up 1 or 2 things when a child passes a remark...How can we expect the learners to collaborate and believe in diversity if there is not diversity in the staff? So it's a bit of a contradiction.

The lack of Black African teaching staff, particularly in the high school, did not go unnoticed by learners, despite the educator above saying that learners did not complain about this issue. Besides the issue of tension or 'potential tension' between groups at the school, language and culture were again mentioned in educators' perceptions of barriers to academic success:

Our children need more guidance, they need more support, they need more motivation. Our children struggle because they come with a backlog. They haven't been exposed to many things that the kid at the Model C school has been exposed to. We struggle a lot with language barriers. So it's overcoming the language barrier before you can actually get to the (school subject erased). Yeah. And that's why they struggle. So when they're reading a question and especially with our isiXhosa learners

and formerly, WCED used to give those kids extra 5%. Because of the cultural background. They have lots of myths and beliefs. No, it isn't that way. It's the gods that are creating lightning... That's what my grandmother says. And there's a demon that comes out and if I'm not flat on the ground, it's going to get me.... So it's a long process, but we fighting the language, fighting the myths, and beliefs.

Learners' linguistic and cultural resources were at times interpreted as a barrier to effective teaching and learning. This educator interpreted the linguistic resources at learners' disposal as the main problem, as a "backlog". Neither is it clear why religion or the belief in the supernatural is necessarily incompatible with a scientific worldview. Many educators at South African schools believe in the existence of a godly presence, yet it is learners' cultural beliefs that are interpreted as part of the reason for their struggles to accumulate school knowledge. A useful way of responding to the learners beliefs around lightning storms could be to reconcile this with possible scientific bases for myths about nature, and what this tells us about how our ancestors made sense of the world. This is one of the key ways curricula can be adapted to reflect, critique and take seriously the knowledge learners come to school with, in order to promote both the acquisition of powerful cultural capitals and the use of resources learners bring to the classroom. In the research it was clear that educators admirably went to great lengths to make classroom knowledge relevant and to ensure learners understood material, but it was also clear, on occasion, that educators could try more extensively to use learners' cultural capital as a resource for learning.

"You'll see around exam time our clinic is full with psychosomatic illnesses": academic pressure, study techniques and examination strategies

It was apparent that a large amount of pressure was exerted on educators and learners to produce excellent results:

You'll see around exam time our clinic is full, with psychosomatic, stomach ache head ache.. but there is nothing physically wrong with them. It's psychosomatic illnesses. It's all linked to stress and anxiety...That is as a result of the pressure in the school.

The pressurised environment of the school influenced learners' anxiety levels, compounded by the stress-dominated environments in which they lived. These combined to exert extremely high levels of anxiety and contribute to the kinds of psychosomatic problems described in the quotation above. A fair amount of stress is probably necessary to expose learners to the challenges they will experience once they have completed their studies, but greater support for their overall wellbeing is also needed. Learners also mentioned the school's highly pressurised environment: *"The pressure is a little bit too much. Some of us can't handle that. All they're about is your academics, your marks must be high..."*

The school's academic focus created a great deal of stress for learners, many of whom feared that they would not succeed and that they would disappoint educators. Further support for learners to help them deal with these pressures would be helpful.

Research confirmed the school's positive educational culture, the warmth and care shown to learners, and the innovative and interesting strategies used to keep learners engaged and

active in their own learning. Class observations provided numerous examples of learners feeling free to be curious, to have a laugh with their teachers and access support and thorough coverage of the learning materials. The school's commitment to child-centred learning is deep and woven through the school's fibre. It was also evident that the use of learners' own knowledge and cultural repertoires would be an invaluable educational resource if appropriately deployed. Teaching learners that the resources imbued in their lived experiences were worthwhile sources of learning and discovery could only improve their confidence in the educational journey. This approach could also help to bridge the linguistic and cultural divisions that still exist at the school. Finally, a strong target-driven culture that prioritises excellent results, competition and focusing on assessment/evaluations/examinations, helps to generate academic excellence, at the expense of immense pressure and psychological stress for both educators and learners.

Theme 2: School Culture and Practices

Moving out of the classroom and into the broader school space, we begin with some of the school's innovative practices before **engaging with the Christel House mission**, which was integral to most aspects of school life. The mission informed the **character development programme** and some educators' beliefs that learners were over-protected or lacked independence. **School leadership** played a big role in the way the school functioned, the satisfaction of staff and the ways in which conflict was resolved. **Relationships between social services, college and careers and the junior and high schools** also had a substantial bearing on the institution as a whole.

"WhatsApp at one in the morning": innovative practices

CHSA has pioneered a number of innovative practices which could be disseminated across the wider educational system, stimulating learning and development for other schools and contributing to the work of the education department more broadly. These practices include the use of additional personnel in the classroom and in the broader school, contributing to the key services the school provides. Teaching assistants in the foundation phase formed an essential part of initial language acquisition, as Afrikaans and isiXhosa speaking learners were immersed in an environment that used English as the primary form of communication.

Observations of a grade R class illuminated that after only eight months of participation in an English environment, learners were functional and comfortable in this medium. Teaching assistants played a range of vital roles, including translation for learners who had linguistic and generally learning difficulties, as well as providing individual attention for the particular challenges each learner faced. This promoted cultural familiarity for learners that may initially feel alienated in an unfamiliar environment.

CHSA provides smaller classes than is found in the public-school system, supported by two educators in a class, meaning that a highly personalized and intimate learning environment is created at the most crucial time, when foundational literacy and numeracy skills need to be acquired. Classroom assistants could perform a range of functions that take stress away from educators, helping with bureaucratic tasks and behavioural issues, freeing up educators to focus purely on teaching and learning. In a country with very high rates of unemployment, work as a teaching assistant could therefore fulfil a number of urgent needs that are mutually beneficial. CHSA could share the lessons it has learned from using teaching assistants in

classrooms, helping the broader education system. This practice could also be extended, utilizing teaching assistants in other crucial developmental phases in the educational journey, such as pure mathematics in the FET phase.

The work of teaching assistants is supported by the Social Services department at CHSA. On a number of occasions efficient coordination between teaching and support staff enabled learning and other challenges to be dealt with effectively. At times in this report we are critical of the use of social workers' time, however the presence of dedicated social workers and counsellors demonstrated a range of invaluable benefits and a unique, holistic educational context that provided care for some of the most marginalized young people in South African society. Social Services provided learners with excellent nutrition, particularly for very young learners who arrive malnourished, eyecare for learners with sight difficulties (the considerable number of learners with spectacles did not go unnoticed) and support for learners with concentration problems and dental issues. These health services are often perceived as extraneous to the core business of teaching and learning, but they are actually fundamental 'deal breakers' that can prevent academic success. Pioneering a full range of health-related services is one of the most admirable achievements of this school, demonstrating that success in literacy, numeracy and matric results requires more than, for example, time on task in curriculum delivery and good teacher content knowledge.

The College and Careers programme begins very early in the lives of CHSA learners, communicating to the children that thinking about one's life-course, aspirations and the values that are integral to personal success, need to become part of an educational journey from the outset. What anthropologists have called the 'capacity to aspire' is a crucial part of making sure aspirations have the opportunity to come to fruition, something which the CHSA model builds into its programme. The range of extra-mural and curriculum-based activities, including trombone playing, robotics and the use of technology in and outside the classroom, support career development endeavours, showing learners that the realization of their dreams is aided by the everyday practices the school provides. The work of the College and Careers department, including the support and tracking of learners' post-school, was therefore reinforced by the school's operations across multiple domains. While each of these innovative practices and supports, including classroom assistants, Support Services and College and Careers, provides a unique set of services that aid learners in their development, it is their combination that provides learners with a package that importantly leaves no base uncovered, ensuring that young people from extremely difficult circumstances are given every opportunity for success. It may be argued that the Christel House model is expensive, prohibiting mainstream take-up, however, many of the services provided at the school are fairly inexpensive and could be adapted to the mainstream system, with CHSA as the pioneer, leading the spread of these practices across the education system.

Besides departments designed to support academic provisions, some of the most innovative educational practices at CHSA involved the use of WhatsApp groups, which extended beyond the classroom walls to include teacher and parent groups:

We have WhatsApp chat groups with our children. So some of them message me and many teachers until twelve, one in the morning asking questions or asking for help.

The dedication of educators who are constantly available for learners' academic support is clear from this example, as is the capacity to use technology to extend the classroom in both time and space, supporting learners who desire or require additional support. WhatsApp groups allowed educators to share videos of themselves solving problems that were troubling learners the night before examinations, but they also created learning communities that are deeply caring for their participants, recreating traditional learner-educator relationships. The creative practices that were observed at CHSA therefore enabled the school to transcend the regular kind of school and classroom communities that one finds in the state system, illustrating an alternative way that education may be 'done'. These practices do not only refer to the technical ways in which pedagogy is enacted, but to the reimagined interactions and boundaries the school produced within and outside of its community.

“Christel House is essentially a charity:” interpreting the mission

While we observed many highly innovative and admirable practices at CHSA, there are a number of areas we think the school could reflect on in its ambitions to learn and grow. For example, in many of the interviews with educators the notion of “the mission” emerged as central to the school’s culture and practices. The mission states that CH aims to:

Transform lives by providing impoverished children with an independent education, nutrition, health care, life skills and a nurturing environment, and by empowering their families and communities through outreach services. In so doing, Christel House enables its graduates to break the cycle of poverty and become self-sufficient, productive members of society.¹

Keeping this description of the mission in mind, consider the following reflection by a member of staff:

The level of appreciation was not the same [at my previous school]. In fact, that's one of the things which drew me here was that, that purposeful... teachers in our environment feel more appreciated...Because of this mission. We don't speak about the mission as much as we used to, but this is an absolutely mission-driven organisation... In this organisation, when people open their mouths and they have a conversation, they talk about how they can make the lives of some of these kids better.... They showed me around.. And I've never in my life, seen kids who was so grateful. I know when you are in the school, sometimes you can't see it. I mean, [a] mother always says her children is not grateful... if you scratch underneath the stories of teachers, the deep spiritual mindset... Christel House is essentially a charity...I don't think the people in this organisation works here for the money... You'll find [a teacher] pulling up his car at this informal settlement, Freedom Park, and he opens his boot and he dishes out soup to the people of Freedom Park...some teachers work with these children as if they are their own and they are, because they could have been...

At CHSA, learners express gratitude, exert agency and confidence, ask questions and engaging in dialogue. Yet, many of the educators said that CHSA learners felt entitled and took the school for granted, particularly in comparison to “backfill” learners that enter the school in

¹ Christel House South Africa, 2013 Annual Report.

the later grades. This paradox is possibly explained by the educator saying that “mother always says her children are not grateful”, a comment that also highlights the fact that many CHSA educators perceived learners as similar to their own biological children. Learners in focus groups said “*the teachers care for you like their own children*” and “*they treat us like we are their children, compared to my schoolteachers in my old school*”, illustrating teachers’ care and learners’ appreciation for this generosity.

Returning to the educator quote, Christel House personnel were portrayed as spiritual beings, with the institution described as analogous to a charity. Christel House educators are extremely generous with their time and other resources and the care they demonstrate for learners is all-encompassing, genuine and heartfelt. Educators exude values that include social justice, empathy and equality, as one educator said, “*we’re also part of social change and social justice*”. Christel House should be commended in these values becoming the bedrock of a unique educational institution. However, we would also like to highlight some complexities that emerge with these sentiments and the practices to which they are aligned. The word “charity” is not used in the mission, however, another respondent underlined this notion saying that “*they went to homes and orphanages in the first year.*”

Initial attempts to recruit children without parents, from orphanages and homes, indicates that some of the original intentions included educators acting as pseudo parents and the charitable intentions of the organization. We interpret these descriptions of Christel House as being a charitable organization (if not a formal ‘charity’) due to the focus on giving and providing services to the impoverished, as well as the organisation’s origin as a philanthropic enterprise.

Two of the conventional difficulties with **charity** are that the recipients experience dependency and the ‘giver’ can easily exert condescension². It would be grossly unfair to say that these phenomena characterize CHSA, but very light traces of their presence are certainly observable in the school. The dependency of the recipients, in this case learners, was referred to repeatedly in discussions about the College and Careers department in relation to the struggles learners experience in attempts to achieve independence. The slightly moralizing descriptions of learners’ and their home circumstances, depictions of the attitudes and actions of parents and views on cultural practices that learners brought to the school indicated, at times, an air of condescension from some educators.

The interpretation of the mission as analogous to charity has subtle differences to the notion of social development, in which people contribute to their own wellbeing and opportunities (Midgley, 1995). These subtle differences in interpretations of the mission become more pronounced when exploring how learners were expected to behave and understand the CHSA educational system, as becomes clear in discussions on character development.

² John Stuart Mill observed this in Victorian charitable organisations in the 1860s in London

“Our kids have been over-coddled:” independence, entitlement and character building

Linked to the mission and running alongside the core academic curriculum, is the character development programme. Educators try to infuse the core curriculum with aspects of character development and parts of the school day are dedicated exclusively to this purpose. Some educators felt that learners did not internalize the values associated with the character development programme, in their everyday words, actions and attitudes:

If you get everything for free you don't have to work for certain things... it creates a sense of entitlement. It's not what the model was designed for but it's a backlash of the model. CH for me does too much. I find it difficult to understand if a learner missed the bus, but then why couldn't you have taken public transport? How are they going to cope outside of Christel House after grade 12? So our kids have been over-coogled. So kids might have a good certificate, but when it, when they are left on their own. Then their weaknesses show.

This staff member felt that the “model”- presumably providing learners with a range of excellent services- resulted in them simply being ‘given’ gifts that created a sense of entitlement, dependency and reliance, resulting in their failure to take responsibility for important components of their education, such as arriving on time for transportation services. This resonates with some of the issues raised around the mission and the complexity of “charity”, alluded to in the previous section, with some educators believing that learners are simply provided with handouts and that they are not expected to contribute, reciprocally, increasing dependency.

Some learners felt that their contribution to the school community is “*to know your academics, it's like giving back to what's been given you, for free*”, while many learners in focus groups showed great appreciation for their school, saying that:

Miss they also take us on outings, like on surf walks, they take us wherever it's nice. They also give us snacks, miss. I would like to stay here forever.

And:

Miss I think Christel House is heaven. Here you get everything. The school protects you, it just shields you from the outside world. I would say that Christel House is the best school, it's a great school actually, because they give everything free, food, uniforms, transport, everything. And there's also hospitality – there's also a clinic here, miss.

And:

INTERVIEWER: What's the worst day?

The last day of school. Because we have to leave school for two weeks

Focus groups with learners confirmed that they were incredibly appreciative and positive about CHSA, indicating that staff genuinely care for them like their own children, that they have fun and enjoy time at school and that they are partially protected at school from the social problems that exist in their communities. Problems like learners ‘missing the bus’ therefore need to be analysed and addressed independently from beliefs that learners don’t appreciate their schooling. Reasons for tardiness should be sought out whilst taking learners’

difficult home circumstances into account, searching for the most educational solutions to address these kinds of issues.

These quotations indicate that providing learners with school uniforms, paying their fees, feeding them and giving them access to a range of other services does not necessarily cause them to feel entitled to “miss the bus”. Learners may miss busses for many reasons, some of which are in their control and others which are not.

The reasons why learners may possibly lack independence need to be explored in more detail separately, but it is unlikely that they are simply as a result of “their lives being too easy”, as some educators implied. The supposed ‘lack of independence’ was countered by another staff member, who said that her own children were even less independent and unlike CHSA learners had never even taken public transport.

Resentment harboured by a minority of staff towards the learners may be related to educators from poor backgrounds who have struggled and obtained social mobility without the help of a ‘Christel House’. Some educators felt a degree of resentment about what is ‘given’ to CHSA learners, when they incur large expenses in supporting their own children. It was also apparent that a staff development process is needed that explores notions of social justice and stratification, historical forms of oppression that affect groups and understanding the fact that individuals may overcome difficult circumstances, but this does not mean that poverty can simply be overcome by “hard work and pulling oneself up.”

With this in mind, it seems as though the character development programme needs to be extended. Character development is clearly related to more than individual personality traits but is embedded in a complex set of historical processes related to class, race and gender, as well as ideas about social justice. It may be worthwhile to explore ways of bringing this into the programme. As one educator said:

And that's where the character program comes in. We make them aware of the social ills, what you must look for, what not to look for, you know, give them the language that this is not right. The ‘I Wills’ is very important, I will not be a victim of my society, things like that.

The character development programme was closely related to social ethics and developing an understanding of the society in which learners live, meaning that it is more than a programme for individual development, but part of a broader educational agenda that the school hopes to instill. Viewed in this way, character development is intimately related to “the mission” and ideas about what constitutes a just society. One suggestion in terms of amendments to the character building programme is to reconceptualize it without practices like the “I wills”- reciting preconceived ideas generated by educators- to a more socially embedded set of activities that explore character in context. This could include critical debates about what is expected of learners, the Christel House model and what a socially just society looks like.

A complicated relationship therefore existed between the mission, the character development programme and the ways in which it is envisioned these should play out for working-class children transplanted into what is essentially a middle-class environment, with

middle-class educators. In the same way as an educator absent through illness became an opportunity to find educational solutions to transitions between phases, understanding some of the paradoxes of a highly unequal society and its effects on individuals is an educational opportunity that can become integral to how character development in context is understood and grappled with for both educators and learners.

***“Everybody’s a leader at Christel House”*: collective leadership and support**

It was clear from the interviews that the school utilised a collective approach to leadership and that all of the teaching staff took responsibility, both to lead in various spheres of school life and for the learners’ overall wellbeing:

I believe everybody’s a leader at Christel House. So, they all had lead sections. So whether it be transport or, student life programme, Or the IT, everybody’s involved in something in the school, the Food Committee and so on, around the assemblies, and then that’s part of your KPA discussion. I always tell the grade three and six teachers “You did hard work”. But if the grade or one, two and three teachers didn’t do their bit, really, your job is harder or the same for the other parts of the school.

Leadership was distributed across the staff body with each person taking responsibility for an aspect of the school, meaning that the work was evenly shared and the entire team contributed. Leadership therefore operated as a largely flat structure, in practice. The group collectively took responsibility for the results and for the performance of learners, for the career development programme and the character development work. In this way the school did function much like a family that took joint responsibility for the wellbeing of each other. This element of school culture extended to the resolution of conflict:

We have a great principal that we can depend on. We have deputy principals and HODs that are, they are very approachable, there’s not, there’s no fear of going to them and having the fear of, Oh, this is going to come out and it’s gonna be bad for me and I’m going to be in so much trouble and whatever. If you feel that you can’t speak to (the principal) you go to the Deputy, or you go to the HODs... they will never make you feel like you are a bad apple.

This quotation indicates that leadership was approachable and wanted matters of concern to be brought to their attention. They also had the experience and foresight to realise that it was sometimes not possible or appropriate for all matters to be brought directly to their attention and therefore encouraged the entire leadership team to act as points of contact in the conflict resolution process. Importantly, fear of retribution for raising points of contention or conflict did not exist amongst staff.

“We have too many silos:” relationships between social services, college and careers and the schools

At times it appeared as if communication between the junior/ high school and the Social Services and College and Careers departments could be improved. We are aware that some of the issues mentioned in this section between various divisions within the school have

already been flagged and their resolution is under way. The high school principal said that: “I am actually very excited that we've identified it... and we know we're ready to move it. And we didn't, we didn't look the other way.”

Part of the problem between Social Services and the high school seemed to be that the high school felt that Social Services was not effectively assisting sufficient numbers of their learners. A critique of Social Services from the high school was that staff did not spend sufficient time in the classrooms. When asked about this issue a member of the Social Services team explained that:

Admissions takes up like 70% of [our] time. Yesterday I was asked 'do [we] know every single child in high school'? No I don't. I absolutely do not know every single child in the high school. Because I don't have the time to know every single child in the high school. Where do I get to know every single child in high school when I'm on the road three days a week, when I'm out of office three days a week? I'm already doing more than, it's 180 home visits for partial scholarships; this year for admissions I think 250 home visits.

Admissions appears to be a serious job at CHSA, as it is for CHI: accepting learners who are most in need of support is part of the strategy to gain resources for the school and an integral component of the mission. Competent, unbiased staff who are able to conduct these tasks efficiently are clearly needed to ensure that this part of the school's work runs smoothly. However, social workers have a valuable skill-set that is not being optimised by requiring them to do the bulk of labour for admissions and rearranging that process might maximise the value they can bring to other facets of school wellness. While the social workers did not necessarily want to be as extensively involved in admissions as is currently the case, one of the Foundation Phase teachers certainly wanted to participate, as she felt that some learners were cognitively ill-prepared and suited to CHSA. Roles and responsibilities between social services and educators may need to be revisited, as staff from both sides expressed resentment about how these currently operate.

Some educators expressed similar views about the College and Careers department, stating that educators were more likely to hear about former learners' struggles and often were compelled to 'take action', like helping with broken laptops or delivering food to alumni. Educators get to know learners most intimately during these young people's time at CHSA, meaning that the relationships forged during school endure to the period when some former learners enter tertiary institutions. Information about their struggles and the different kinds of support that are needed are therefore more likely to reach educators popular with learners, rather than College and Careers staff that may play a comparably procedural role in the lives of these children.

The Christel House school culture is therefore co-constructed between staff and learners. The school's intention to support impoverished learners and facilitate social mobility has culminated in a dedicated teaching staff that generously give of their time and resources. However, at times interpretations of the mission seeped into the character development programme and other aspects of school life, portraying learners as ungrateful recipients of charity, young people could overcome hardship with changed attitudes. A more complex understanding of inequality and power relations in a society with a troubled history,

integrated with the character development programme, would be useful. Strong, democratic and creative leadership was invaluable to the school, as were the support functions of Social Services and College and Careers. Further work defining roles and responsibilities and making sure communication flows more efficiently would help improve relations and practices between different parts of the school.

Theme 3: The home-school nexus

Learners encountered friction as they journeyed between the school, with its unique practices and community, and their home environments. The home-school relationship at Christel House is more germane in comparison to other schools, because learners' home circumstances are the condition for their admission to the school. Interactions between these two domains offer valuable insights into how learners navigate them in tandem and how they try to use their schooling towards realising future aspirations. This section is separated into three sub-themes. The first, **what to do about poverty?** describes the paradoxical messages learners receive: the desire to eradicate poverty coexists with being made aware that it is a precondition for their attending the school. An integral component of this poverty is made up of parents or caregivers. **Relationships with parents** illuminates how learners feel that the school is both respectful towards their parents whilst sometimes not fully understanding their conditions, particularly in relation to expectations regarding parental contributions to the school. **Perceptions of social mobility** considers the ways that the school's commitment to upliftment interacts with the aspirations of learners and their families, the realities of life outside Christel House, and the pressures that learners have to deal with as they become more independent.

"If you see where our kids come from": what to do about poverty?

Difficult conditions at home and in the communities that learners live constitute the preconditions for access to Christel House. Learners come from impoverished backgrounds and they have to contend with the effects of poverty on their communities. This compounds the academic challenges they face at school. Staff at Christel House were remarkably attuned to this reality, sensitive to how these conditions affect learners in particular ways:

If you see where our kids come from... you will have so much more appreciation for what they're actually doing in the school, and how they perform in the school. On paper none of these kids should be functioning human beings. They experience daily trauma, even if it's not in their house.

There was an awareness that the school was 'a protective factor' and served as a buffer for the learners, but that this rubbed up against the fact that learners regularly returned home to challenging circumstances. In a sense it was as though the protective space of the school was 'undone' by the home environment:

Yeah, a lot of children are neglected. We've got a little boy that comes every day for some peanut butter sachets that he takes home because of the poverty at home. And I feel so sorry for him because it seems like he's the carer who is going home to see my family has something to eat. You can see he is neglected, you can see his clothing is not smelling well. But he is just so caring and well mannered. And I wish I could change the circumstances but unfortunately you can't, and what I've noticed at this school,

children are looked after very well. And they go back to their circumstances and that is the difficult part.

Educators recognised that learners' families were sources of care and support on which the school relied. In turn, some staff members questioned how best they could support those learners who desperately needed intervention, particularly considering that the school had to hand over serious cases to government social services for resolution. Despite difficulties in supporting all learners across a range of circumstances, there was a sense that the school provided safety and an escape from the challenges prevalent in learners' communities. Learners appreciated the school's efforts, as teachers worked to transcend unforgiving neighbourhood and home circumstances through their practices and the creation of a warm and positive institutional culture. To an extent, this included a belief that the school's efforts could erase learners' impoverishment for the duration of the school day:

And you see them coming here and they can't speak English, and they're very poor. As soon as you give them their uniforms it's like it gives them dignity...

Learners circumstances are not solely constituted by poverty, but also by healthy attributes and support mechanisms linked to their families, communities, cultural practices and social worlds. A paradox emerged whereby learners were believed to be more than their poverty, could transcend their poverty and not 'act poor', while at the same time being expected to demonstrate poverty not only to access the school but to attract donors.

The awareness that their poverty is what keeps donors contributing to the school makes learners conscious of what is at stake and communicates to them that the precarity they experience at home is necessarily a feature of their lives, if they desire for their school experience to continue. It stands to reason that learners want to present an image that encourages donors to support their school. A mixed message is then conveyed by the school if it intends to teach them that their poverty does not make them different, set them apart in any way or prevent them from succeeding. A complex set of messages was therefore communicated to learners about themselves and their home environments, at times reinforcing a deficit-based perspective about the resources they come to school with on a daily basis.

"I wouldn't want to be called to my child's school to sweep your stoep and wash your windows": relationships with parents

There was no doubt for learners that their parents were generally respected and well-received at the school. Learners were appreciative of how parents were treated and spoken to, and that parents were involved in decision-making around things such as medical treatment. Where learners did feel the school could improve was in relation to issues like summoning parents to the school without proper appreciation for the burden this placed on parents financially and in terms of their time:

Learner 1: They (parents) don't really want to come because when they come they must come with their own transport.

Learner 2: And sometimes the school makes them come to fetch the reports in the middle of the month where there's no money. Taxi fare is expensive...

And:

Sometimes the school will call your parents in for nonsense. Like the other day, the girls they were playing with water, I think it was last year, the school could have reprimanded the girls themselves, from Langa it's very expensive for our parents to come here. And the parents came and they were here for 5 minutes and then they had to leave again.

The financial and time related costs of travelling to the school were preventative for many parents who may want to be more involved. Our observations also presented a case of a parent left to wait for a long period of time to see teachers. While this was a bone of contention for learners, for teachers there was a related frustration with parents who were deemed unreliable. The fact that parents do not pay fees and that parental involvement can be uneven, led some teachers to believe that they did not contribute to their children's education:

They just wasteful. They waste because they just get get get. And now we allowing the parents to get away with it. And it's not work, I can understand when a parent cannot do that [stay away from work]...I looked at the cars when we had our valedictory. Lovely vehicles.

And:

Yeah, so the challenges of teaching at CH, and parental involvement is not great. Parents, social services may say they have programs with parents but parental involvement at CH for me, according to the role of the parent, is minimal.

Educators were often quite negative about the attitudes of parents and their overall involvement and contributions to the school. These perspectives were contrasted with learners, for whom the issue of 'hours' remained contentious':

I'd say the perks of Matric, you won't receive it because your mother hasn't done the hours, so Matric jacket you have to pay for, the Matric fleece, the Matric ball you have to pay for it, like there's stuff you pay for if your mother hasn't done the hours to get you to Matric.

Learners felt it was unfair to be held responsible for their parents' (in)actions, placing them in a difficult position when they were encouraged to 'remind parents about hours'. Learners knew their own home conditions and what might prevent parents from volunteering very well and did not want to produce resentment and antagonism by pestering parents. Learners therefore argued that parents had reasons for not being involved at the school – some of them 'valid' and others sensitive. By contrast, members of staff were somewhat divided on the issue of compulsory hours. They emphasised the need to 'give back' or contribute to the school but differed on how this might take place. For example, some believed that training parents in learner support and basic computer skills should count towards their hours, and felt that doing menial tasks was demeaning. They also challenged punishing learners for their parents' failure to show up:

So a lot of children didn't make it (end of year outing) because parents didn't do their end of the scholarship agreement. I don't believe they should be held responsible for parents not doing volunteer hours, which is a load of crap anyway..., I think we don't have our story sorted. for me if you can be in a classroom for eight weeks, you actually volunteering your hours in a better direction to help your child.

And:

We even have parents of children who have left years ago. Yeah, they still come back and do a week at Chrysalis (grade 12 intensive academic support).

Finding meaningful ways for parents to dedicate hours of work, while simultaneously being upskilled, could hold value beyond cleaning and repairing the school. Teachers recognised that while there were many parents who were not involved, there were also many parents who were committed to helping them as best as they could. Clear instructions and communicating specific tasks to parents, in terms of how to help learners improve academically or behaviourally could help with parental involvement. The parent volunteer programme should provide parents with transferable skills and a sense of ownership in the school community. The school has been remarkably successful in avoiding paternalism or derision towards learners and their families but there are clear instances where more could be done to ensure that the relationship between home and school is not constructed as inherently oppositional.

“We want to do well at school, to get out”: perceptions of social mobility

Christel House’s mission includes a commitment to fostering social mobility to ‘break the cycle of poverty’. Learners were encouraged by the possibility of social mobility, explicitly linking their aspirations to ‘getting out’ of their home communities:

We’re from Hanover Park, we want to do well at school, to get out... We learn the habit of values so we don’t become like the people in our communities, so when we are older those core values can help us to get outside of our communities and reach a far better place.

Learners constructed an opposition between themselves and people in their communities. They did not exhibit a structural understanding of the causes of the poverty and violence they encountered on a daily basis, generally interpreting poverty as a result of things like poor values, a lack of effort and bad choices or activities. Younger learners, for example, described teachers who encouraged them to do well and be successful so as not to go out and ‘beg for money’ in the streets. One expressed a dislike for beggars from Freedom Park coming to the school to ask for food’.

Many learners believed they had ‘one shot’ at transcending their circumstances:

Christel House’s aim is to break the cycle of poverty. And if you get rich you can’t send your kids here because you’ve already broken the cycle of poverty.

And:

And because we already had the opportunity, so if we weren’t able to break it, like you can’t send our children here, we must give the next person the opportunity.

Learners were well aware of the value of the opportunity Christel House afforded them and its potential to unlock greater financial and social capital, however those who did not maximise the opportunity were expected to take responsibility for failing to 'break the cycle'. By contrast, teachers complained that parents didn't understand that mobility required significant time and that parents expected learners to work immediately upon graduating. This raised the question about whether parents were sufficiently aided in understanding the returns to further education, so that their children may be supported in their pursuit of post-school studies. There is significant pressure in the school environment for learners to better themselves, and an equivalent amount of disappointment when learners were unable to find work, complete studies, or even when they find themselves in forms of employment that staff feel fall short of the school's expectations:

Graduates come here and I look at them and think, why you working at the Spar down the road... Spar, I don't understand it.

It is understandable, given the school's personal and material investment, that expectations for learners to better their circumstances are high. However, 'breaking the cycle of poverty' is an incremental process and learners' aspirations are tempered by their circumstances and theirs and their families' immediate needs. Social mobility is not a linear process, and while learners may not find themselves at the pinnacle of the school's aspirations, those who have found themselves in work are still able to cultivate a life that may not have been possible without the school's support.

Further reflection on how the school fosters agency amongst learners to aid in the realisation of their aspirations would be useful. Inculcating a sense of agency and self-sufficiency may require a more complex approach than is currently being practiced through the school's character development programme. It demands a more nuanced understanding of how forms of economic, social and cultural capitals may stunt social mobility. This is not a simple matter of knowing how to dress and behave under certain conditions. It relates to developing the confidence to take on these new ways of being in the world, as this may require significant alterations not only of one's physical bearing, but also one's sense of self. Simply put, for learners who grow up internalising a sense of poverty and inferiority from the world around them, there may be other reasons why they struggle in post-school environments where they may experience discomfort and alienation:

That's why we are saying our kids are not ready ... they are living in two worlds. for them. I think maybe speaking in English is for, that's what the school wants. So they are not owning it, that I need the skill. They are doing it for somebody, therefore they're short changing themselves, it disappoints me...

Other comments related to learning to dress appropriately for the working world, including Black learners having to 'tie up dreadlocks' and keep their hair neat; knowing how to be polite and respectable, and in sum learning to obscure their impoverishment and lack of familiarity with the norms of middle-class society, similarly demonstrated that some educators did not understand the complexities inherent in an education that would genuinely support learners in their quests for empowerment. Social mobility requires a strong sense of confidence and self from learners who have found ways to integrate the two worlds which form their lives.

They need to incorporate understandings of where they come from and of their families that are not demeaning, but are bound up in a nuanced recognition of a deeply unequal and unjust society that loads the odds in favour of certain groups. The poverty from which they come needs to be acknowledged in a way that is not paternalistic or pathological, but may be used to create meaningful social change.

Theme 4: Organisational culture at Christel House

CHSA's organisational culture was mediated through its relationship to CHI. This section is separated into three sub-themes that unpack this relationship. **Teacher career governance**, looks at issues like pay, evaluation and job satisfaction, **performance culture** engages with the relationship between learner performance and teachers' bonuses/pay increases, as well as the general culture of promoting achievement and, finally, **putting the model into practice in Cape Town** looks at the complexities involved in combining ideas from Indianapolis and Cape Town.

"People did it for themselves before": teacher career governance

Teacher career governance relates to the organisation and management of teaching as a profession. Many of the teachers felt motivated because the school's mission aligned with their core values:

I always wanted to teach very poor children, as in my experience working at other schools they were so compliant, they were like sponges, you could just teach them anything. They were so willing.

And:

I prefer teaching kids at a disadvantage. I've always worked with disadvantaged kids and I didn't find myself working at [schools] for the more affluent.

Many CHSA teachers believed they could make their best contribution to society working with learners who most needed them, with CHSA learners seen as more receptive and appreciative of their efforts than learners at public schools. Dedication to the mission thus came from teachers' own values. However, there was also a sense that, over time, this willingness had been eroded and replaced by a degree of 'bottom-line thinking':

It's a crazy corporate culture, it has put a lot of pressure on us, which I feel is unnecessary. Because I believe Christel House is going to do their best anyway. We don't need a carrot or stick for teachers. People did it for themselves before, they would come in happily...It sort of monetizes, everything as a monetary reward. And I don't think it was intended to be that way. But I just that's how it just unfolded organically.

And:

It's tough to work on a Saturday... so the wellness issues have increased over the years.

One respondent above held the view that this change in teachers' motivations had occurred organically, rather than as a top-down break with how the school had initially operated. This is important because it indicates that shifts in organisational culture can have unforeseen effects on other spheres of the institution, such as 'instrumentalising' what were originally intrinsic motivators.

The monetisation of time and performance shaped attitudes towards compensation, as the school follows a different structure to the public system. Alongside an annual bonus, CHSA teachers may also receive a performance bonus:

I was talking about the KPA...if you don't achieve those goals your KPA gets affected, and the KPA is linked to your increase. So if you don't do well in your KPA you get a low increase. It's like a double punishment. I don't agree with that. I mean, you're taking my KPA bonus away, which is next year February, March, but you're also nailing me on my increase... There is a possibility that you can earn very well, if you perform well. And there are certain subjects that always performs well, Business, Economics, History, Afrikaans, Xhosa, those are subjects that I would say are 'easier' than physics, mathematics and sciences. The person that teaches math doesn't get a very good bonus. That is something they must look at.

The increased pressure created by incentive based targets has resulted in educators giving up more of their spare time to teach, including weekends. In a system where they are not assured that their efforts will necessarily lead to improved results, as much depends on the circumstances of learners, extra effort may well go unrewarded. One of the positive aspects of the compensation bonus system is that the junior school team worked collectively towards rewards. Improved systemic results benefitted the entire team in the form of performance bonuses, rather than only the grade 3 and 6 teachers.

The issue of less time off than the public system was also raised:

I don't know why we have to work another week longer than WCED. That is my gripe, I mean workshops and whatever can be done at another time...And in June I get one week, as WCED gets three. So it's always that issue of what do I do with my kids. My kids expect me at home...

Teachers accepted that CHSA was a different institution to the public school system and that their 'conditions of service', such as small class sizes, increased support staff and technological provisions, were far more favourable than the state system. However, some did mention things, like extensive holidays, as better in the public system.

Teachers were generally satisfied with working conditions at CHSA and the compensation they received, despite the increasingly quantified and managerialised approach to time invested, results attained and rewards given. There was relief that the structure of the KPA system would change, as this served as a major source of stress and anxiety, with staff flagging the prevalence of physical and emotional strain among their colleagues. The system of evaluation was also mentioned for its developmental focus and the encouragement and support offered by the school to staff members wanting to improve their practices.

***“What you believe you need to do as a teacher”*: performance culture**

Pressure to deliver good academic results, as well as a 'testing culture' and regular measurements of learners' progress have become common aspects of schools globally. Some teachers felt that a target-driven model that pushed educators to maximise learners' academic performance was always going to reach certain limits in the CHSA context:

So there's been this big increase with Indianapolis understands now that probably plateaued. We never going to get 100% at CH... We have children with serious academic issues and backlogs... And you can see in our business planning that we are expected to have goals. We have to do goal setting at the start of the year. ... the results are important and they get a performance check in accordance with how they performed in the classroom. So (there is) a lot of pressure to perform. Amidst of the concerns that children bring with and poverty presents.

As this educator said, a target driven culture that pushes constantly to achieve improved academic results can never completely overcome the social conditions that dominate education systems serving poor families. It may not even be desirable to do so, as this may result in educators focusing on 'giving knowledge' when learners may have other, more pressing needs. Educators' decisions around what to focus on for learners, in a context where they are under immense pressure to deliver excellent results, at times placed educators in dubious ethical positions:

Yeah, it just becomes too much. And it's not about meeting Christel's targets. It is about you wanting to do what you believe you need to do as a teacher; you're guided by your own conscience.

The range of challenges learners face in their lives outside of the school means that academic performance can never be the only focus for these children and their teachers. The school has put in place a range of excellent support mechanisms to assist with health care, nutrition and career planning, however it is educators who spend by far the most time with learners and it is to them that these young people turn first, seeking help with a range of problems. This may make it difficult to focus exclusively on academic priorities. The situation is further complicated by the fact that educators' performance is on the line if learners get poor results: *"I will come to you ten times to get that assignment because you need that marks because I can't give you nought because it's going to affect my overall average, and it's going to affect that hundred percent, or that 65%."*

The fate of educators and learners was inextricably linked through measures of performance, meaning that educators felt disempowered to 'punish' learners with poor results, because this was ultimately going to reflect poorly on themselves. This can lead to a culture of results being more important than broader educational imperatives. Learner stress mentioned in an earlier section and observations that some were extremely tired may be related to this high stakes performance culture. A number of learners mentioned the long school day, intended to aid academic results, as a source of exhaustion. The long school day also hampered learners' involvement and participation in activities in their own communities. It might be argued that it also prevented them from becoming involved in anti-social activities, however a long school day doesn't take into account the range of responsibilities learners have, like chores at home and looking after siblings. The school's aspiration for academic excellence has therefore led to a range of outcomes, some positive and others less so.

“But they have ‘stuff’ ”: putting the model into practice in Cape Town

CHSA’s branding and image was described as very important to its ability to attract resources and funding. This model does, however, result in a number of tensions, in practice, as staff put into action Christel House International’s directives. For example, the school conducts assessments of learners’ poverty in order to ensure it reaches those most in need. Sometimes these assessments result in fraught contestations around the meaning of poverty in the South African context:

We look out for assets, that's a big one. So something like that would be a, CHI would say they can afford to go somewhere else. But we are saying that look where they are staying, you know, what they are doing. So what if they are spending money on DSTV? Do you want their child to play outside? You know, sometimes luxuries is a necessity. They have a car because it's dangerous to travel... And there's a big difference between black poverty and coloured poverty. So for example, black poverty looks like informal settlements and outside toilets and, however coloured poverty is staying in flats. So yes, it's a bleak structure. It's more formalized, they've got proper infrastructure, they've got electricity they've got running water. They've got a toilet in the house, however who would willingly go and stay in the flats in Hanover Park if they could afford to be somewhere else?

Staff reported a history of having to navigate the complexities of poverty with CHI, in attempts to ensure that the school’s opportunities were made available to the right cohort of learners.

We needed to meet all the criteria that used to be about ten, the criteria...And so the mission has changed, improved. Because this was a South African context and what we got was from America.

South Africa’s legacy of structural poverty produces a landscape of need that does not easily mirror other country contexts, and where for example access to apartheid-era housing does not preclude the grinding effects of poverty also found in informal settlements. For this reason, regular communication with the team at CHI allowed for these issues to be ironed out and indeed, staff reported that these interactions had improved over time:

Joe is the person that we deal with, with admissions. He actually said... ‘we are on the same page right now. I feel like I can let go a little bit because you and I are on the same page’. So, this has been a lot better. He's a lot more understanding. He listens.

This shift in the culture of engagement between the school and its ‘mother’ organisation was also reflected on in relation to past experiences where this confusion had adverse effects on the recruitment process:

Okay, now, we've gone to this home. The bed is well done, etc. That shows me that this parent is aspirational... then the US would look and say, “oh, but they have “stuff”... the international office believes in the look of poverty, what will they tell the donors. It's a point of contention between us and them. She has bothered to lay a bed, why are you punishing her? I'll give it a classic example... This granny had inherited, her former bosses had given their old furniture. The international office said no [and the granny said] I'm telling the truth because when some people in our neighbourhood,

when they know that the school is going to come they move their things away, Why am I being punished?

The difficulty in identifying 'true' poverty can create a scenario where the school's recruitment process becomes more concerned with the 'image' of poverty that will attract donors than with genuine need. It also fails to acknowledge that poverty takes different forms in a range of historical and social contexts and that poor people still desire comforts and can be gifted things by others.

Narrow notions of poverty provoked a fear among school management, the international office and donors that visible 'wealth' would prove the school's admission criteria and the model more broadly to be flawed:

Your mom works at Makro. So she might have gotten [a watch] at a reduced price because she knows when things get marked down... they might have made some arrangements to pay it off. But you're wearing it at school and a funder might see this and might question the school. So we need to know... she might not have liked what I said. But we need to be aware of those things.

Anxieties around being and 'looking' poor conflicted with families' desires for upward social mobility. As staff noted throughout the research, the majority of children at the school came from abject circumstances where there was no doubt of the fact of these learners' impoverishment. This discomfort with any visible symbols of prosperity was underpinned by fear that if learners appeared to be 'better off' they may no longer be as deserving, or that they may become sources of jealousy for their peers. An example made by one staff member may shed further light on this issue:

We had an incident where a child won a scholarship and she lived in America for a year, she was with a host family she told them well we actually not that poor, oh it was bad for the school, Christel got us to do a thorough investigation. Why did we enrol the child? What work did we do over the years to ensure that [we were screening properly]? So we've learned from those lessons that you need to be aware....for the sake of our funders...

There may have been a simpler explanation for this learner's remarks in America— the child may have felt uncomfortable about his/her poverty being 'on display' and responded in that way as a form of self-protection. Children may also have relative ideas of what poverty means, where living in a small house far outstrips being homeless, for example. Checking the child's scholarship may have been a safeguarding mechanism for the organisation, but for the child and her family may have produced a sense of great anxiety. Responsibility towards donors is indeed a priority in the case of charitable organisations, but this process may have unwittingly infringed on the child and her family's dignity. A balance needs to be found where the need for resources is effectively communicated to donors whilst not being paternalistic, patronising or sensationalistic about the circumstances that learners and potential learners come from. Arguably this balance can also be sought through effective communication with parents about how the donor support model functions practically.

This theme has examined the organisational culture of Christel House South Africa, focusing on staff and their needs and the desire to create a positive working culture that ensures 'best fit' of the core mandate with the operational context. Some teachers hinted that an increasingly managerialised and instrumentalised culture has detracted from their motivation for their work. Teachers said their intrinsic motivations to teach were previously sufficient to provide encouragement to improve. The pressure to deliver on results was undercut by the range of external factors that were out of teachers' control, but that impacted their ability to deliver. The organisation's model intended to demonstrate how poverty can be broken through good academic results means that investment is often primarily based on 'images of poverty' rather than, first and foremost, need. This led to contestations, anxieties and resentment when everyday lived realities were not congruent with internationally recognised notions of poverty, or when individuals tried to gain dignity with aspirational objects and identities.

Research at CHSA with educators and learners therefore highlighted the extremely innovative teaching, learning and personal development practices used by the school. A number of these practices could be disseminated across the wider educational system, stimulating learning and development for other schools and contributing to the work of the education department more broadly. These include the use of classroom assistants, Support Services and College and Careers. In combination these services provide learners with a package that leaves no base uncovered, ensuring that young people from extremely difficult circumstances are given every opportunity for success. These innovative practices and comprehensive services need to be reinforced by communicating to learners that whilst they, their families and communities experience immense challenges- largely the result of historical legacies, both the people close to them and their broader heritage hold the potential for knowledge creation and a dignified life. In the final section of the research we explored social mobility by looking at what happened after learners completed their matric.

PART 3: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITY

The final part of the research with CHSA focused on former learners and whether they have managed to obtain upward social mobility since leaving school. It used a short survey of 109 alumni and in-depth interviews with 12 participants. Building on the analysis of the school's academic results and the exploration of life in the classrooms, school community and learners' homes, this part of the study examined the longer-term results associated with giving young people a well-resourced education with a range of additional services, as part of the Christel House model. One of CHSA's core aims is to 'break the cycle of poverty and inequality' so prevalent in marginalised Cape Town and South African communities, residential areas that were previously restricted to Black and Coloured people under apartheid. Evidence of this 'disruption' effect being achieved ultimately depends on the quality of life and social mobility attained by graduates from the school once they enter the world of work.

The results need to be interpreted in the context of Cape Town and South Africa in 2020. National unemployment amongst youth aged 16-34 was measured at 45% in one calculation and 66% of the total unemployed population is between the ages of 16 and 34 (Reddy et al, 2016). According to 2017 World Bank data, South Africa had the highest rate of youth unemployment globally, affecting 57% of 15-24 year olds³. This can be compared to census data for the Western Cape, where 52% of youth are unemployed according to the expanded definition of unemployment, which includes discouraged job-seekers, and only 27% of youth are actually employed:

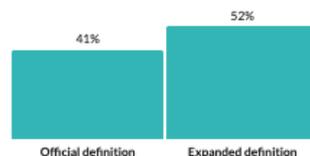
Youth employment status

41.2%

Youth (aged 15-24) unemployment rate using the official definition *

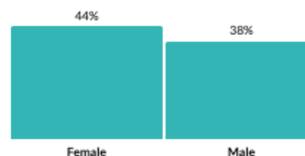
about 80 percent of the rate in South Africa: 52.4%

Youth unemployment rate by definition



Source: Census 2011

Official youth unemployment rate by gender



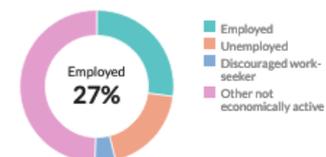
Source: Census 2011

27.1%

Of youth are employed

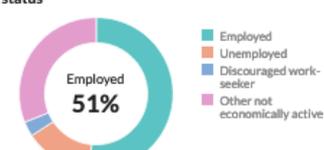
more than 1.5 times the rate in South Africa: 16.4%

Youth by employment status



Source: Census 2011

Population by employment status



Source: Census 2011

Accessed on 26 June from <https://youthexplorer.org.za/profiles/province-WC-western-cape/>

A small pool of university graduates fight for limited jobs in a formal economy dominated by a handful of large firms in each sector. A survey of members of the South African Graduate

³ See: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>

Employers association found that employers recruit from a median of 8 universities⁴ (out of 23), roughly overlapping with the number of historically white institutions (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). SMMEs are low in number and struggle to survive in a context where big firms dominate the market, meaning that self-employment and entrepreneurship suffer. Racial wage discrimination is a defining feature of the South African labour market (Branson & Leibbrandt, 2013). Black youth university graduates are less likely to be employed than white youth with grade 12 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The 2002 CAPS survey found that 45% of white boys worked while at high school, while less than 5% of African boys worked for pay at the same age. Only 37% of Black youth aged 21-22 had ever worked for pay, compared to 95% of white men (Lam, Leibbrandt & Mlatsheni, 2008). Black and coloured youth from poor areas therefore struggle to generate an income in a context that rewards forms of social and cultural capital, like English language skills, that are more easily available for white youth and opportunities are generally scarce. These contextual factors have important implications for CHSA alumni, as they are structural forces that create limits to what is possible in terms of social mobility for young people from poor neighbourhoods.

The demographic details of the participants in the survey are summarised below.

Sample demographics

Male	Female
32	71

(6 did not answer)

Have children	Don't have children
24	79

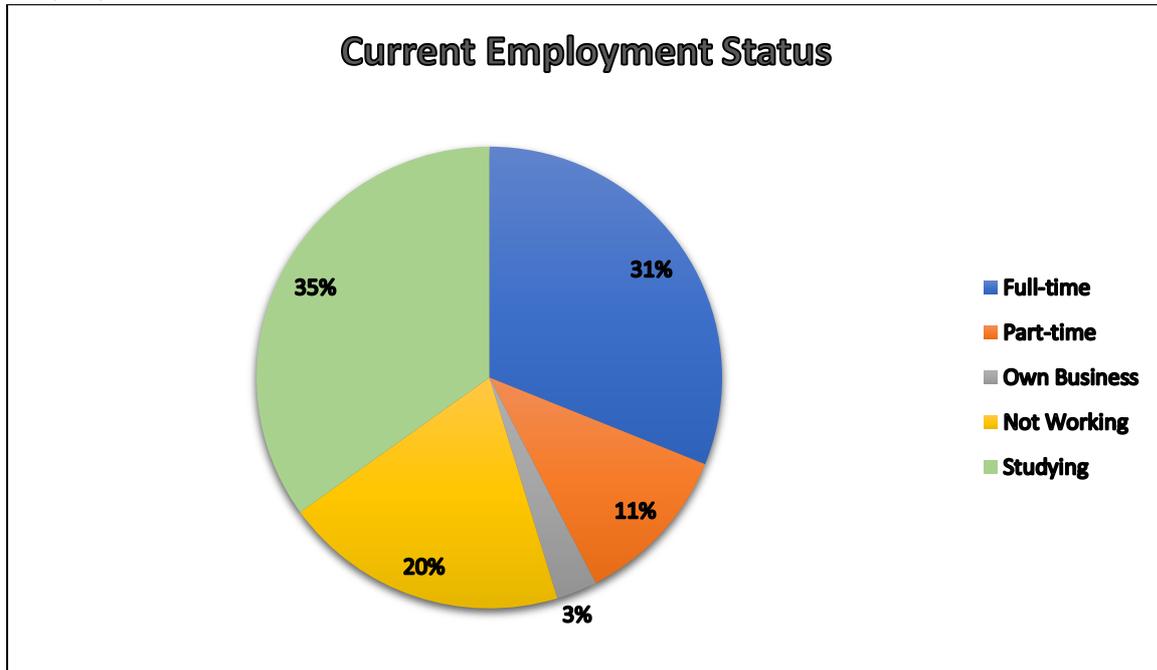
Year of matriculation									
2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
9	1	5	11	15	11	14	23	7	11

Nine of the sample said that they were married
--

The results from the survey are now described.

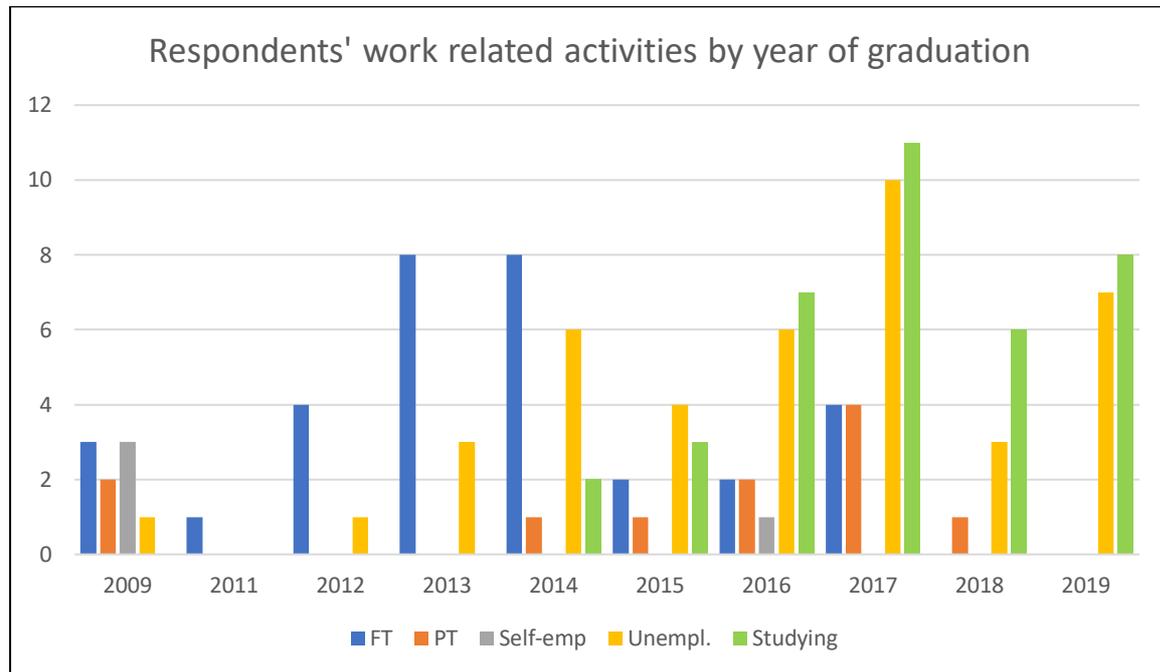
⁴ These were the University of Cape Town, University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria, Wits, Stellenbosch, University of the Free State, Rhodes University and Nelson Mandela University

Employment and income



Across the different graduate cohorts, the total unemployment rate for respondents in the survey was 20%, with 35% still studying and 45% engaged in work of some kind. Information from the College and Careers department supported the findings from the survey, but indicated that the unemployment rate was significantly higher during this time of the COVID pandemic than at other times. College and Careers said that across the five year cohorts from 2015-2019, the number of alumni not working or studying was at 24% in July 2020, climbing from 15.4% in February 2020. Data collected by the College and Careers department over the past four years shows that the unemployment rate usually sits at between 5 and 10% for the cohort that is five years or less out of school, occasionally rising to between 10 and 15%. The COVID crisis clearly impacted on the higher unemployment rate. College and Careers added that the usual cyclical pattern is for the number of employed alumni to be lower at the beginning of the year, as the newly matriculated numbers are added in.

in the labour market, constituted useful social capital to support CHSA graduates find entry-level employment.



Disaggregating work related activities by year of graduation, the majority of respondents to the survey matriculated in 2015 or later, with higher numbers of alumni from those years (2015-2019) still studying either through learnerships, degree programmes or other certificate/diploma courses. Unemployment is higher for the post-2015 cohort than before, indicating that a greater proportion of respondents from earlier years have settled into stable employment. This pattern mirrors findings from labour force surveys that indicate age-related patterns of employment⁶ in South Africa, with unemployment steadily decreasing as age increases.

⁶ This data uses the expanded definition of unemployment which includes those no longer looking for work because they are discouraged.

THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AMONG THE YOUTH IS HIGHER IRRESPECTIVE OF EDUCATION LEVEL

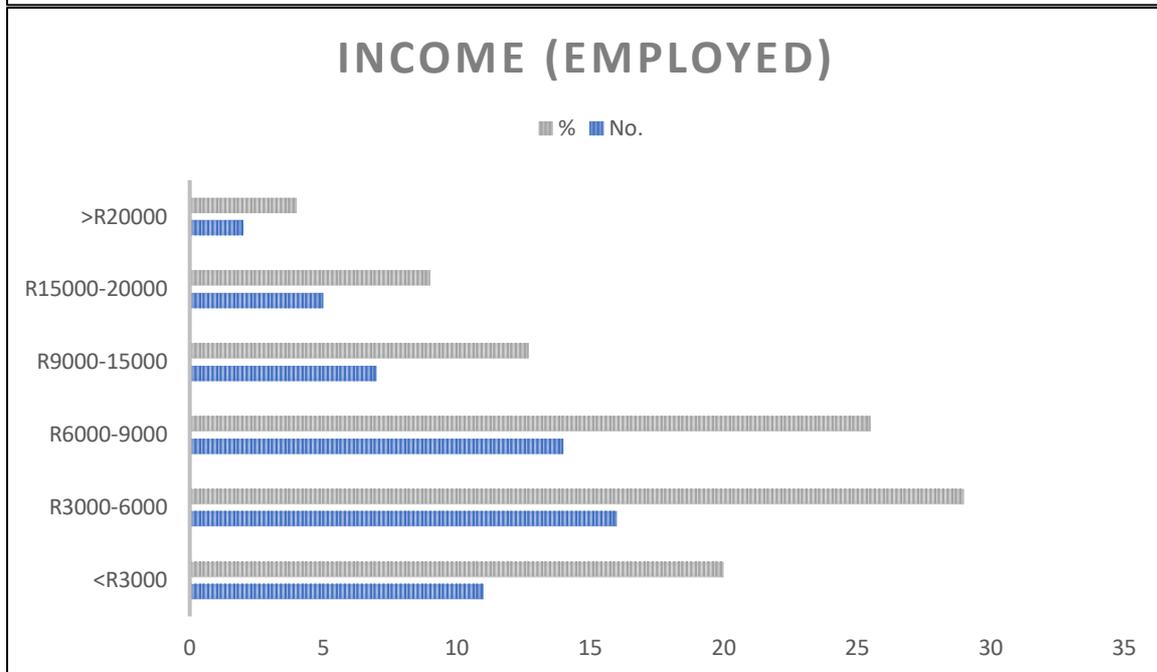
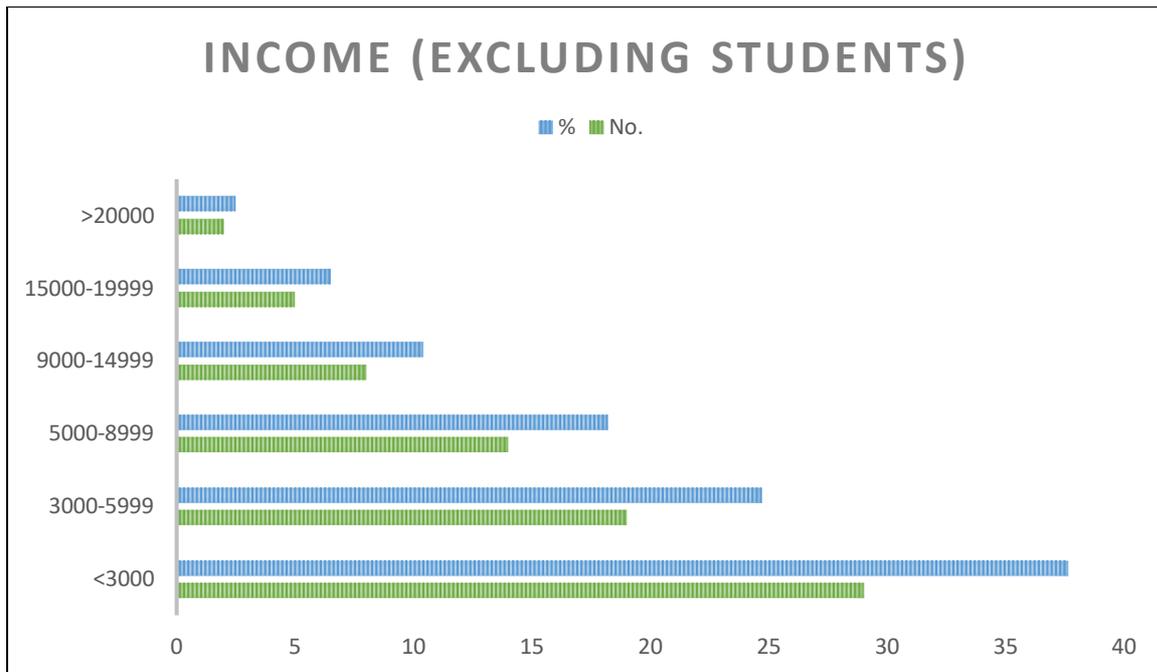


<http://www.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Youthdatastorygraph.jpg>

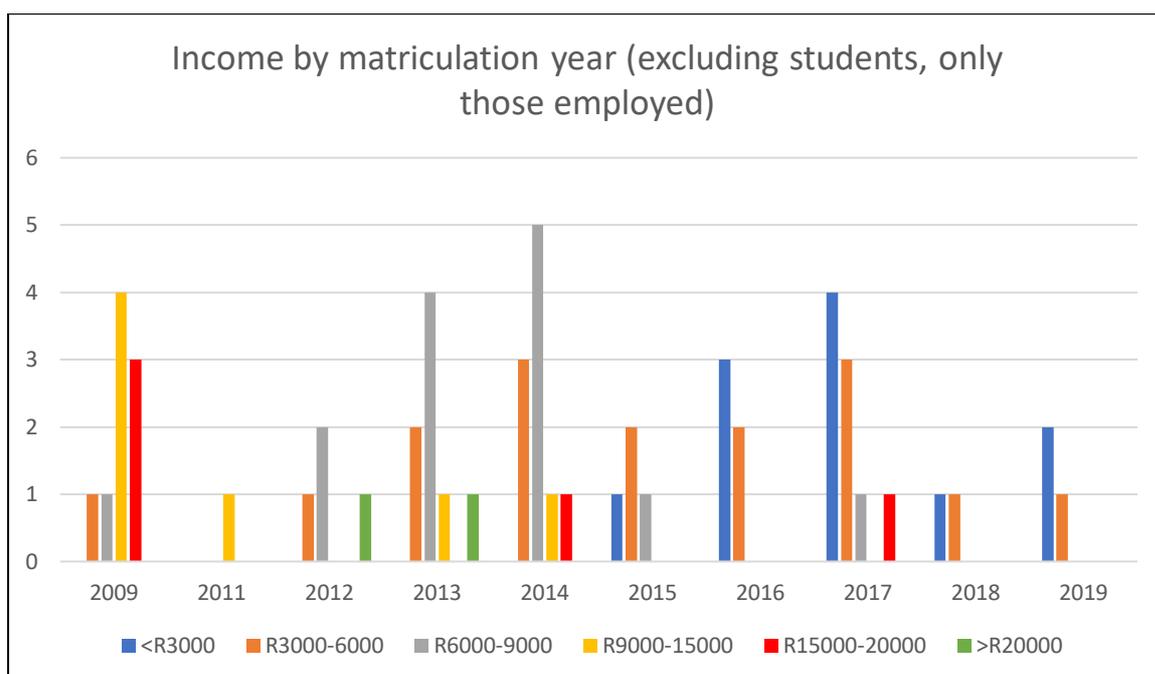
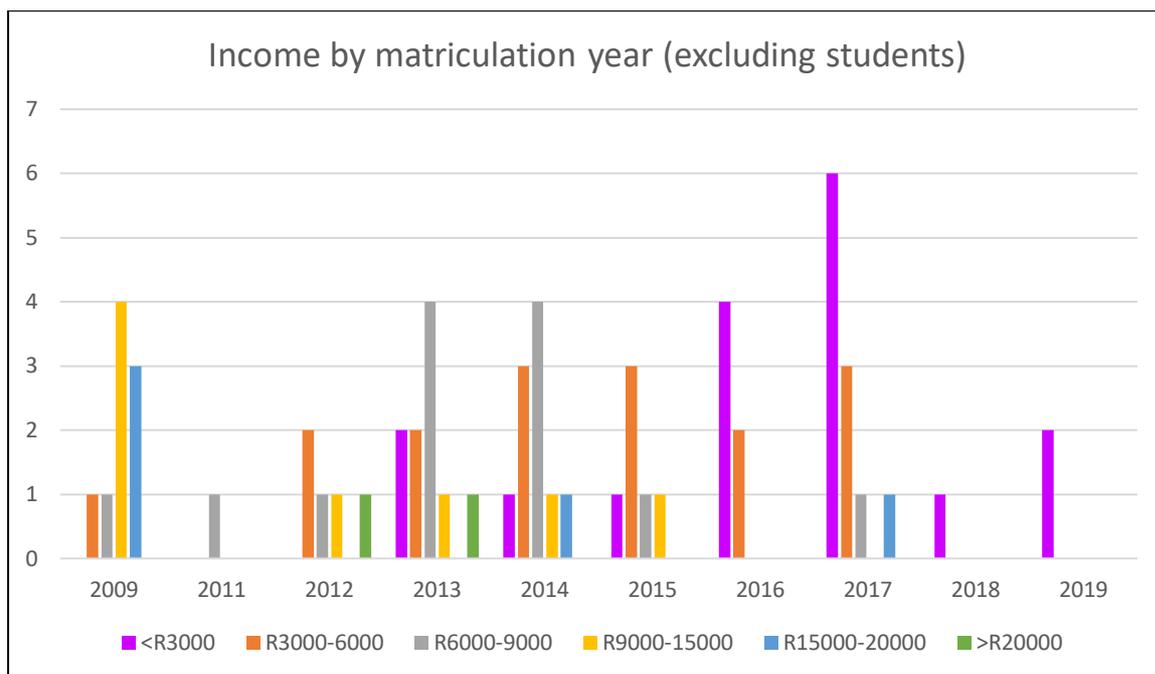
This may be due to employers being more trusting of older employees, South Africa's strong labour movement and legislative protection for those already employed, or young people simply become more wily in the labour market as they become older. As one respondent in the qualitative research said:

I always say that we are the choices that we make. So I always say to my friends from the 2009 group... you could kind of sell the movie, we kind of like hustlers you know, it's like a game of chess. Do we know what to do and where to go? We have this mentality like, "I'll go this route and that route".

It might be that earlier cohorts of graduates are naturally more street smart in their searches for employment, but it is more likely that approximately ten years of experience in searching for work enhances the skills required to hustle and improvise in navigating a context where opportunities are sparse.



Moving on to income, the two charts above illustrate alumni in the survey's various income brackets. Students are excluded from both charts, with the second one excluding the unemployed. Looking at the sample as a whole, the majority of respondents earned below R9000 per month, with most earning R3000 or less – 37,6% of respondents earned less than R3000 per month, 24,7% earned 3000-5999 and 18,2% had an income of R6000-R8999. In total, only 19,4% of respondents earned more than R9000 per month. Removing the unemployed and looking only at the earning power of those able to find work, almost one third of the sample earn R3000-R6000, a quarter earn R6000-R9000 and 20% earn under R3000. Of those that are employed, 25.5% earn more than R9000. It would be fair to say that the sample is doing substantially better than other young people in their neighbourhoods, but they are not (yet), in general, earning high-end salaries.



The charts above disaggregate income by matriculation year, confirming that it takes a number of years for alumni earnings to increase and that younger alumni, when employed rather than studying, largely find themselves in low-paying work. The graph indicates greater diversity of income brackets for the pre-2015 cohorts compared to the post-2015 cohorts. The results need to be interpreted in context. Using the expanded definition⁷, the South African youth unemployment rate stands at 57%, the highest globally⁸, with structural

⁷ The expanded definition includes discouraged people no longer looking for work. Statistics South Africa only includes those actively looking for work and unable to find it as “unemployed”.

⁸ See: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>

challenges resulting from South Africa's troubled histories of colonialism and apartheid, and a lopsided economy that consists of large firms dominating each sector with very little employment-intensive growth or room for SMMEs to break into the market. At the same time, unlike other parts of the global South, South Africa has a relatively small informal economy, in which many young people in other parts of Africa and Latin America have been able to generate an income. The conditions in which young people from poor Cape Town neighbourhoods find themselves, without the social capital and networks/connections of some of their more elite peers, makes it extremely difficult for them to access well paid jobs. It should also be remembered that CHSA alumni are people who are amongst the worst off in their already marginalised neighbourhoods. They are not simply young people from very poor neighbourhoods: they are comparatively marginalised even in relation to others from the same neighbourhoods, due to the criteria used for school admissions. Stories in the qualitative research confirmed that CHSA learners endure extremely difficult life conditions.

One participant described spending extended periods of time living with siblings in a supermarket trolley on the street, another grew up in a children's home, and one learner described her childhood home as "a slum, I was living with my grandparents, and they were backyard dwellers."

The extremely high rates and extreme forms of violence were disturbing in the interviews. This included parents being violent to one another:

Domestic violence made you feel that you want to go somewhere, you don't want to be at home, you know, every day. I mean, like my mom and my dad they still fight until today. And that impacted me a lot at school in to a point that when I'm at school, I've got freedom, yes, but at the back of my mind, I'm wondering, I wonder what my mom and dad are doing at home, because they're not really getting along. They are fighting, they use weapons. It's not just a punch or, you know, it's always a weapon that they're using towards each other. And we are in the middle of that you understand? Having to go to school after a fight that lasted until 12 o'clock at night. And then getting neighbours to come and stop policeman to come in, you know, intervene in the fight, you know, was really stressful, to a point that I had to repeat grade three, because sometimes they'll be just sitting in the class and not even paying attention to what the teacher's saying, because of what was happening at home.

As well as violence from parents towards learners:

And I think it's still very common practice in our culture, that you get disciplined and the discipline isn't all rosy and all. It's usually a wooden spoon... when you like, between the ages of three, five and six. You know, after that it progresses with age, you know, the weapons become very weaponized. Ah. So my mom really he had a very distinct way of disciplining us, especially. So she'd really beat me up. Sometimes I'd be unconscious on the floor after a beating... I got beaten up so bad this one time that I had a pipe actually, of water pipe almost stuck to my left eye and it's almost became blind because I was beaten with a water pipe and I became unconscious and when you do gain consciousness no one is there anymore... You pick yourself up, wipe the blood off the floor, you know, you patch up your scars, whatever and life continues until you

get the next beating again...And I resented my mom a lot for that form of disciplining me, you know, it's caused a lot of problems psychologically...

It is within these extremely troubled and troubling neighbourhood and family contexts, where immense social challenges are the norm, that these figures related to income of alumni need to be interpreted. The word cloud below describes what respondents considered to be their 'ideal jobs'. As can be seen, there is a high degree of aspiration among CHSA alumni, ranging from the sciences to business and media. There is also a predisposition towards work considered 'stable' – ordinary office jobs that would ensure continued financial stability for themselves and their families.



Word cloud two: Dream job

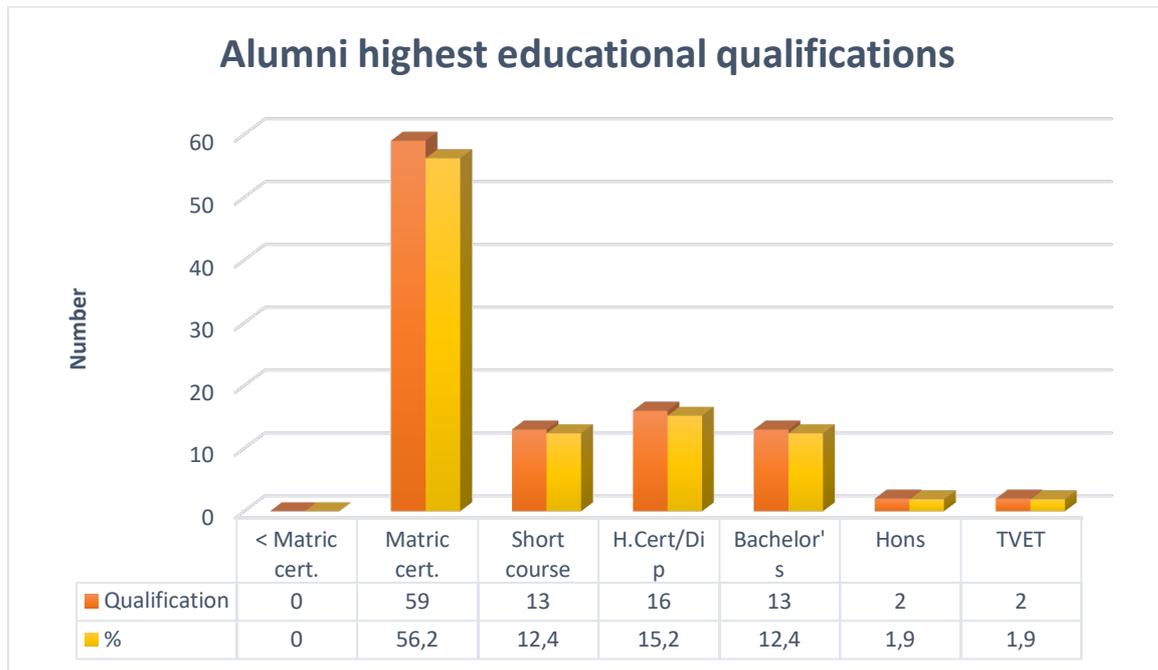
A number of respondents expressed a desire to start their own businesses, and flagged the challenges that arose from being or becoming entrepreneurs. There were also a few who were happy in their current positions but hoped to progress within them in the next few years. The next word cloud draws together respondents' perceptions of the potential barriers to accessing their ideal jobs. Some interesting insights emerge.



Word cloud 3: Barriers to dream job

While a significant number of respondents noted that they were still studying, many also raised concerns that they lacked the necessary qualifications to enter a particular field. This may well be due to not getting good enough matric results to study further in their field of choice and gain the necessary qualifications, rather than a lack of effort on the part of College and Careers to expose learners to qualifications needed for career pathways. Concerns were also raised about not being able to gain the experience required by employers, and having to compete with other job-seekers for a limited number of positions. A few respondents named 'coronavirus' as a factor – referring to the impact of the pandemic on their ability to find work in the context of rising unemployment. Respondents had a high degree of ambition and an awareness of what was required of them to succeed, but that this did not guarantee results because of the structural limitations they encountered.

Educational qualifications



All of the survey respondents obtained a Matric certificate, a successful outcome of the CHSA programme that ensures students complete their secondary school journey. The percentages of young people completing matric in neighbourhoods like Langa, Manenberg and Hanover Park, common areas where CHSA learners reside, are far lower than CHSA's completion rate, as was demonstrated in the first part of this research project. As a means of further comparison, only 36% of 20-24 year olds in Khayelitsha and 34% of 20-24 year olds in Mitchell's Plain had completed matric, areas with similarities to CHSA learners' residential neighbourhoods⁹.

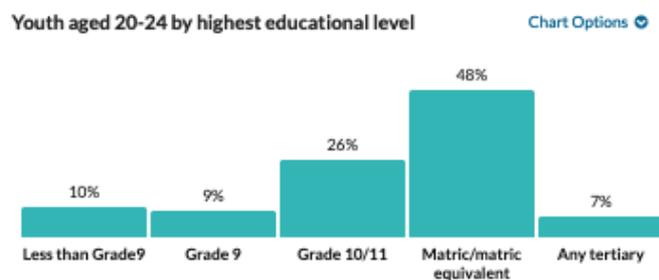
In total, 43,8% of alumni had completed more than matric, a number that is likely to increase even further with the extended and more comprehensive College and Careers programme that has been in place since 2017. In the Western Cape province only 7% of youth aged 20-24 have any tertiary education:

Highest educational level

55.4%

Of youth aged 20-24 have completed matric/matric equivalent or higher

about 10 percent higher than the rate in South Africa: 51%



Source: Community Survey 2016

Accessed on 26 June from <https://youthexplorer.org.za/profiles/province-WC-western-cape/>

⁹ https://www.westerncape.gov.za/sites/www.westerncape.gov.za/files/youth_well_being_wc_lowres.pdf

The qualitative research illustrated that a number of alumni begin courses of study, realise that they do not enjoy their chosen course or that it is not a good match for them, discontinue it and then regularly choose to return to studies of a different kind. One graduate said:

And I love that about them (Christel House), they direct you they allow you to find your path and they supportive in you finding, in you going through that journey. I however, didn't finish the education degree. I did two years, I got married, but teaching has always been my passion. So I went into training.

This young woman has found employment as a trainer and facilitator for a large social initiative in the youth employability sector. She is still engaged in upskilling herself through a SETA accredited programme.

One interesting finding was the very low numbers of young people enrolled in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) programmes, in the case of the survey only two out of 109. The College and Careers department indicates that a great deal of effort has been made in the past two years, particularly, to encourage TVET as a career option, facilitate learners attending college 'open days' and forge relationships with individual colleges like False Bay. It will be interesting to see how this focus on TVETs does or does not lead to forms of work and income generation for CHSA alumni in the future, as later cohorts enter the world of work.

Another factor that might influence income is the fact that a distinct hierarchy of universities exists in South Africa, with sought after employers mainly selecting employees from historically white universities. According to the survey results only a few CHSA graduates were enrolled at UCT and Stellenbosch and more commonly attended UWC for their tertiary studies, a trend that has repercussions for entry into the labour market. This trend has changed in the past three years, with 16 alumni currently at UCT, 12 at Stellenbosch and 21 at UWC, according to College and Careers data. It will be interesting to see whether having more alumni at UCT and Stellenbosch affects income generation in the future.

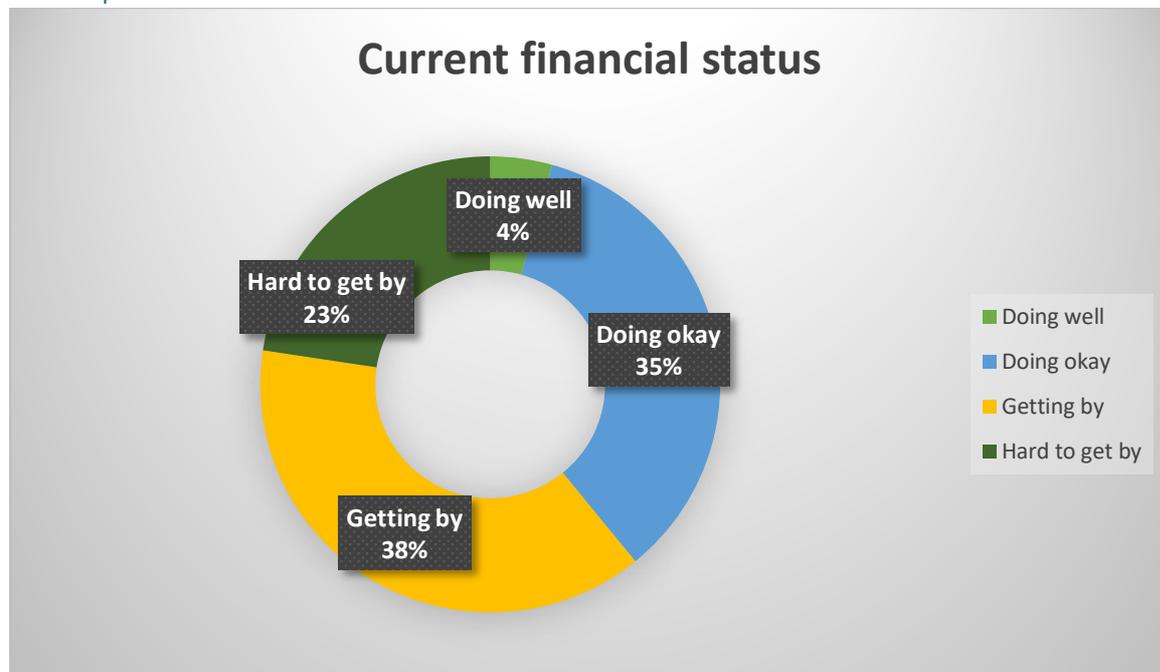
Some insights can be gleaned from the qualitative research. One UWC graduate with a Bachelor of Commerce degree said that:

And okay with the first job, the CEO of Christel House knew the lady who was a CEO of their company. So luckily, at that time, when I just left university, they were looking for an office administrator. So he was like, he knows the girl who just finished university and would they like to meet up with me. So that's how I got the opportunity for the interview with that first job. And then I've got it with a second one. Also got it via college and careers...When that opportunity at X came, they referred my name... because the manager said that they're looking for this kind of person. And then she thought of me, so she sent my things through and the manager was happy with the CV and my qualifications.

This UWC Bachelor of Commerce graduate required an introduction from Christel House in order to get a job as a Personal Assistant. The story demonstrates the value of social networks amongst the middle-classes, such as those that Christel House staff may have, but also that a

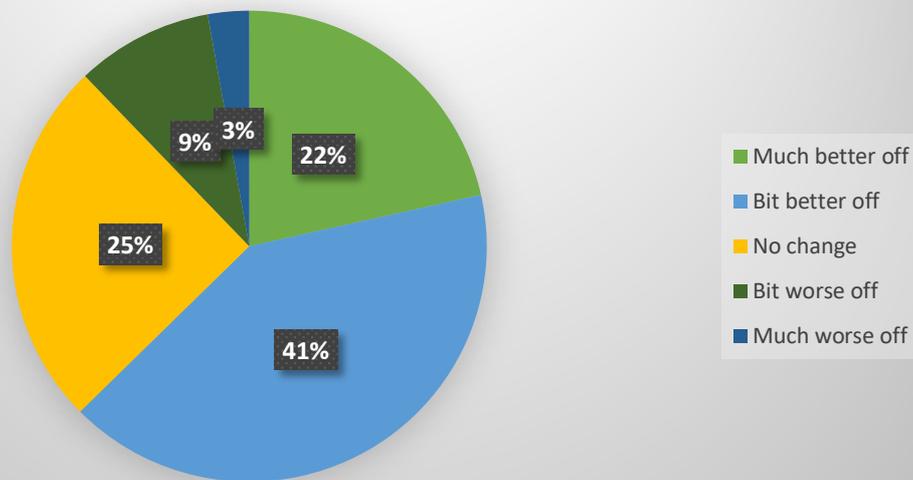
university degree does not ensure employment and that even fairly unglamorous positions require some social capital. However, having accessed and obtained experience in two positions of employment, with the help of Christel House, this young woman has now secured a fairly high-status position in the Human Resources department at a large fashion retailer, illustrating the benefits of experience in the world of work.

Self-reported financial status



Most respondents felt that they were 'doing okay' or 'getting by'. Although the relative meaning of these terms is debatable, they indicate a measure of subjective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing refers to people's beliefs and interpretations of their situations: how and what they assess in calculations of their own flourishing and life experiences (White, 2009). The fact that only a small minority of graduates felt that it was 'hard to get by' indicates that their life circumstances are at a minimum 'bearable' or better than that. Based on the demographic from which CHSA students are recruited, it is unlikely that that would have been the case prior to students being enrolled at the school. Whether this improvement in life circumstances is mainly due to their schooling requires more research.

How is your household doing compared to your parents at your age?



The survey question on whether alumni felt they were doing better than their parents at the same age found that 63% felt they were better off than their parents.

Other qualitative and quantitative findings

The remainder of the quantitative data delivered findings that were not out of the ordinary given the respondents' context. Despite the 20% unemployment rate, many were actively seeking work and applying for jobs as these became available. Respondents tried to help their families in a number of ways from finance to offering support and mentorship to younger siblings, and often this support extended to their local community, indicating that they tried to 'live out' the values instilled by their Christel House education.

For the most part, alumni continue to live in the neighbourhoods in which they grew up. There is some circulation between working-class neighbourhoods like Langa, Mitchell's Plain, Athlone, Hanover Park, Delft, Manenberg and Khayelitsha, but little movement into historically 'whites only' neighbourhoods or mobility outside of the greater Cape Town area. Considering the income status of most respondents this is unsurprising, but regardless of their options, some alumni might choose to continue living in the area where they grew up because it gives them a sense of comfort. There are also socio-economic and other benefits to high school graduates remaining in their childhood neighbourhoods, developing local township economies and building social relations over time.

Personal attributes were also considered important to developing a more grounded and optimistic approach to life. The group of 'achievers' that participated in the qualitative research highlighted the central role of mental health in their lives and the contribution that CHSA made to ensuring they remained both physically and mentally healthy:

You don't only need to feed yourself physically, but you also feed yourself mentally, so that you can have healthier relationships. And you do not project your childhood traumas on your children, or your kids or your partner... Sometimes you don't need

fixing because you're not broken. You just need help, you know? So I really appreciate that because now I've seen more and more of my friends open up to the idea of having therapists and I can advise people now that look, maybe you should try this route. It's really helped me a lot because we've always been told that depression, anxiety, mental illnesses are white illnesses and that black people couldn't get them.

Interventions by Christel House staff in the social services division made crucial contributions to young people who may otherwise have believed that they were damaged or broken by their domestic circumstances. These services also helped alumni to understand that people could support rather than harm them. Another learner said:

It impacted me a lot... negatively on my academics. Hmm. I got into a fight with one of learners... I cried because I didn't really mean to smack her... So I was thinking to the social worker, and then I think that's when I got a platform to express my feelings. And that's when I started to explain to the social worker what is going through my life. Yeah. And then they did intervene, they went to my house and visited to see the environment and everything.

A number of alumni in the in-depth interviews explained that without interventions from counsellors and social workers at the school they would not have been able to overcome traumatic circumstances at home and successfully navigate their schooling and professional careers. These successful alumni also described the very skilful and sensitive approach adopted by school staff in the difficult task of engaging parents with these issues. Many caregivers resort to problematic parenting strategies due to the stressful circumstances associated with poverty, with CHSA staff able to alleviate some of these stressors. Alumni mentioned the school itself and the services it provided as support that enabled parents to improve their own (parents') lives, when they would otherwise have had to, for example, purchase school uniforms and stationery. One learner explained how his mother furthered her education:

Because obviously, if I went to like a (government) school, she'd have to, you know, kind of probably work three jobs or something like that in order to pay... She shouldn't have to worry about, like the food and all those type of things... teaching my child x, x, y, z.. So I'm saying that they gave her a capacity in order to pursue other opportunities. And then also seeing her studying also motivated me.

Another graduate said:

My parents weren't paying money for me to go school or transport and all those things. My mom used to give back to the community, so she would then invest into other kids lives, like kids where they couldn't afford school books or things like that. They (Christel House) also improve their (parents) lives like my mom finished her school. She went to finish teaching. And my dad also went for courses so they both improved their lives with me being in Christel House and not having to spend money on my education, I think that also helps a lot with the way I am today...

And:

I see my mom is able with the money that she was earning and don't have to give to my school fees she was able to invest into her life. So she furthered her education, and then my stepdad, which I refer to as my dad.

The Christel House model therefore not only helps the learners that it serves in terms of their social mobility; it extends its positive effects wider than individual learners to service their parents, families and households, removing some of the stress associated with childrearing. This enabled some parents to improve their educational achievements, with positive indirect effects for their and their household's income generation. Assessing the impact that the model has on eradicating poverty therefore needs to take into account the effect the school has on caregivers and others in the lives of learners.

Other themes that came through the qualitative research included the helpful role that English language and computer skills played in former learners' lives, either giving them a comparative advantage over learners from township schools or making alumni feel a degree of equality with graduates from more privileged schools. Finally, it was apparent from interviews with successful learners that attending CHSA instilled a sense of purpose and vocation, a belief that their lives are destined to have meaning, that they are cared for and protected from the world's dangers and that difficult circumstances are temporary. As one learner put it:

Maybe they (other less successful alumni) had more pressure than I had to go and find a job, didn't have a lot of experience. So obviously it was something that paid the minimum wage and they just stuck with it. You know, when I started in the course in that I may, I told myself when I started this is not where... I don't want to take calls every single day, day in day out. But I also taught myself, in order for me to get to the training position I needed to be the best call taking person agent in the call centre so that I can get noticed and that's exactly what I did. So I don't know if it could be the drive that they are missing or it's just pressure from family.

This example illustrates how some Christel House alumni were able to differentiate between present circumstances and their inherent value, that the jobs they may have in the present are not necessarily their only possible form of income generation in the future and that, in general, they have some agency to improve their lives.

The research with alumni found that while the vast majority did not find lucrative forms of employment, in terms of income, former CHSA learners were substantially better off post high school than the general population of peers from similar neighbourhoods. It was also clear that over the past three years the work done by the College and Careers department is laying a solid foundation for future cohorts of graduates. The qualitative research found that the array of health and career development services offered by the school provided invaluable additional support to a group that experience immense challenges in the communities where they grow up. It was also apparent that opportunities and improved life circumstances emerge over time, often incrementally, meaning that longitudinal research may well find more positive results as time passes.

CONCLUSION

The research on education quality and social mobility at CHSA found that a well-resourced independent school was able to take marginalized learners from poor Cape Town neighbourhoods, instill solid literacy and numeracy in an environment that catered to a wide range of needs and ensure that the group completed secondary school. An ever-improving College and Careers department strives to explore a range of options for learners post school.

The school outperforms provincial averages usually by approximately 30%. This is impressive considering that the cohorts of learners are marginalized even in comparison to their peers in similar neighbourhoods due to the school's admissions policy only accepting learners from households of less than R2500 per month. This is, however, balanced with the many resources learners at CHSA are supported with, including small class sizes and teacher assistants in the early grades, for example. Comparison is therefore complicated. This research has not done a thorough comparative costing exercise or a returns-to-investment type analysis. Even if this was attempted, it is very difficult to cost the range of financial and social capitals that middle-class learners bring to the school environment. What is clear is that the school takes marginalized children from the poorest neighbourhoods in one of the world's most unequal cities and ensures they are well-grounded in the most important educational skills, namely literacy and numeracy and that they complete their secondary schooling and are given every opportunity to continue their studies. As we have noted, the school's intense results-based focus means that certain choices have been made to ensure learners progress rather than enroll in more 'high-risk'- in terms of possible failure- STEM subjects, including pure mathematics and physical science, which may lead to lucrative future careers. That said, the school produces pass rates that are almost comparable to former Model C White-only schools, yet its student body consists of learners at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum.

The school's educational opportunities extend beyond curriculum knowledge acquisition to include music, art, health care, clothing, food and, very importantly, career planning. The school works on a daily basis with young people who are regularly traumatized by the violent and unequal society in which they live, trying to calm and then 'arm' them with resources that may enable them to improve their own circumstances and the lives of those around them- as well as the lives of future generations in the form of their offspring. The school has at its disposal an extremely energetic, dedicated and generous group of educators that genuinely care about the learners' academic success, overall wellbeing and improving the lives of the people they serve.

In these daily interactions between learners and educators a set of highly creative and improvisational practices emerge in a context that provides the freedom to experiment. The emotional needs of learners are nourished through various 'bridging practices' like reintegrating them slowly after periods away and assisting them with transitions between school developmental phases. The availability of a bouquet of health services and classroom assistants provides invaluable support in this regard and could become a source of great learning for other schools.

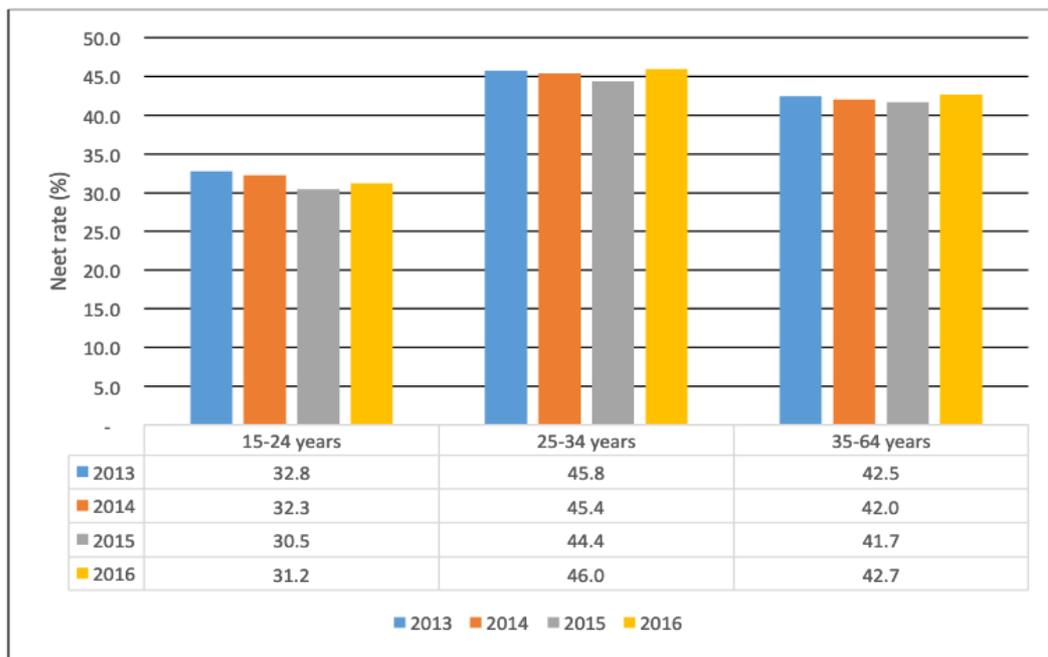
At times, however, the way that the school is envisioned in its ambitions, formal mission, fundraising strategies and marketing practices contributes to forging oppositional relationships between the school as charitable saviour and the communities that learners originate from, including their parents, cultural heritage and neighbourhoods with infamous reputations. *The related challenges are not so much a critique of the noble mission but are a result of it being embarked upon in a grossly unequal society fraught with inadequate attempts at post-apartheid reconciliation and wealth redistribution.*

Poverty is not an individual condition or sickness that can be spread between people. It is part of an ecosystem of inequality – a living, breathing, changing system that affects its environment inasmuch as it can be transformed by other factors and ecosystems around it. Understanding this dynamism is what this research has motivated for. What this research has identified is a friction, at times, between the systemic – this ecosystem we speak of – and the organizational – the daily labours of the Christel House community.

Some of the home-school comments that have been raised in this research are therefore not intended to expose individual teachers or staff in the Christel House universe. They are an attempt to point out that certain paradoxes emerge when embarking on a project that has good intentions in an environment with deeply problematic histories.

Children from communities where they witness acts of extreme violence, are forced to ask educators for sachets of peanut butter because there is no food at home and require a trip to the social worker before they are calm enough to concentrate. These children do not fail to attain social mobility because they are ‘over-pampered’, or because they make supposedly bad choices, like being forced to beg for money at the traffic lights. At times they do not reach the heights envisioned for them because the advantages that learners from more privileged homes receive are all encompassing, immediately recognised in a range of powerful spaces and rarely need to be justified. Preparing learners to enter a world that rarely recognizes the value they have to offer also includes inculcating a sense of defiance of the norms that seek to lock them into these social and economic positions.

Figure 1: NEET rates by age group, from 2013 to 2016



Source: Statistics SA, Quarterly Labour Force Survey Q2, 2016 (Calculations by DHET).

In the final part of the research results from the survey demonstrated subtle but important improvements to the lives of graduates that attended CHSA, in comparison to the general population of South African youth. Taking the graphic above into consideration, CHSA alumni had a 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET) rate of 20% across cohorts, considerably lower than the national average for 15-24 year olds in 2016 (31.2%) or 25-34 year olds (46%) in the same year. The national NEET rate for 15-24 year olds is lower than the 25-34 year old cohort because more youth in this age group will be studying.

The national youth unemployment rate is 57% using the expanded definition of unemployment, far higher than the figure of 20% for CHSA graduates. Although we only collected information on 'income brackets' rather than actual figures of alumni income, it is very likely that these too would be higher than national averages, simply because 57% of youth nationally are not generating an income at all.

The mindset and aspirations of CHSA alumni are also clearly elevated due to their education. As one alumnus put it in his individual interview,

They're (young people in his neighbourhood) normally like working at factories and stuff. Like two of my friends I know, the one works at Pick 'n Pay but like in the distribution center, and the one also works at the warehouse where they do packaging and stuff. So like jobs that they are allowed to apply for is very limited because of like, the education level and all that stuff.

Based on both the qualitative and quantitative research, graduates were not looking for work in factories, supermarkets or as security guards, some of the common forms of employment South African youth are actually able to access. CHSA graduates' expectations and aspirations have been raised, which may be one reason that unemployment is still common amongst the

group. CHSA alumni would rather continue to look for more challenging and interesting forms of employment than work in an alienating job. College and careers confirmed that learners and alumni are exposed to many career events and a range of options, supporting this 'raising of aspirations'.

The qualitative interviews also indicated that schooling at CHSA enabled parents to gain some respite from their financial and caregiving burdens to improve their own lives, further contributing to the eradication of poverty. This finding needs to be taken into account in assessments of the effects of education at CHSA, as it is not simply individual learners that are supported by the school, but a range of significant others, helping to improve the lives of households rather than only individuals. This was reinforced by the in-depth interviews illuminating how even the most successful graduates suffered from immense trauma associated with growing up in extremely difficult conditions. Almost all of these alumni spoke about challenges that would otherwise have 'derailed' their lives, had it not been for counsellors, social workers or remedial teachers from the Christel House, who helped to support them.

While the majority of CHSA graduates that participated in the research did not become doctors, lawyers and accountants, as the structural barriers in South Africa are simply too great and the opportunities in the labour market too few and far between, a small but substantial improvement in learners' lives was evident across the sample. As more alumni enter prestigious universities and the effects of the intensified College and Careers programme, begun in 2017, potentially bear fruit, further improvements may be observed in the career pathways of alumni. However, based on this research, the lives of their caregivers and broader households also appeared to be enhanced. Breaking the cycle of (generational) poverty is an incremental process, but one that is underway in small and powerful ways in the lives of these CHSA graduates. To reiterate, these are young people chosen from the poorest households, in the most marginalised areas in Cape Town, not simply youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The results therefore show relatively subtle but important ways in which CHSA has helped to improve the lives of those on the margins of South African society through a holistic model that involves more than basic material benefits and which targets a range of significant people in children's lives.

This research has emphasized the value that the school community has created and sustained over time. Social mobility is incremental. It is also generational. Research has spoken to the multiplier effect of education, specifically that educating a young girl, regardless of her economic position, ensures that on average her children will have better life-chances. While delivering scientists and doctors makes for an exceptionally good story to tell, arguably it is as important that there are schools instilling young people with knowledge of character, of nutrition and wellness, personal responsibility and the power of dreaming. In these spheres Christel House has cemented its impact and indeed, attests that the school's generational impact remains to be felt.

Recommendations

These recommendations span the themes discussed in the report, drawing together the findings into a series of ideas aimed at strengthening the school's policies and practices, improving the experiences of the school community.

Recommendation part 1

1. More learners should be encouraged to do pure mathematics and other STEM subjects and learners embarking on taking these subjects need to be thoroughly supported.
2. CHSA should engage in a dialogue with other high performing schools that service marginalised learners to generate sets of effective practices that can be used by the school and shared more widely.

Recommendations Part 2

1. CHSA should **document a set of innovative practices** including, for example, working with classroom assistants, dealing with transitions/reintegrating learners after periods away, learners as socio-emotional beings, the experience of working with dedicated Social Services and College and Careers departments.
These documented, innovative practices should be shared, discussed and opportunities for mainstreaming sought through a series of engagements with other schools and the education department more broadly. The purpose of documenting these practices is to use Christel House SA not only as a school that tries to uplift a small number of children, but as a space where innovative practices and policies for schooling for learners from troubled communities can be tested and demonstrated, for the benefit of system-wide reform.
2. **Consolidate the learning support and teaching assistance functions.** While factoring in the pressures of resource constraints, it would be a valuable exercise for the school to revisit its personnel provisioning to make teacher assistance available for select subjects in the high school, especially in the Further Education & Training phase. Extending the learning support programme in the Junior School, at least through the transition to Grade 4, may also strengthen the performance of learners as they move into more complex academic terrain. Another alternative may be to create a post for an Academic Literacy practitioner to assist high school learners in developing universal exam and revision skills.
3. **Institute a programme of staff development focused on sensitivity training and developing substantive understandings of phenomena such as poverty and charity.** This would include a practical focus on refining staff knowledge of how to marry curriculum content with knowledge of learners' realities, and scaffolding these to include their experiences as valuable resources in the learning process.

It would also explore how structural inequalities operate in a society, how these favour certain groups and how individual effort alone cannot solve societal problems. The Christel House mission could be put into conversation with these issues.

4. **Developing a collective programme for student wellness.** This could include tips for managing anxiety and personal wellbeing, cementing the Student Life programme in the school timetable post-Junior School (as learners indicated this was sacrificed for academics at times) and revisiting the structure of the Stars programme. Providing ongoing learning support, teaching assistance and/or academic literacy training may offset some of the pressures for exam and systemic test preparation at key points in the academic year. Relaxation sessions during exam time would also be useful.

5. **Update the model for parent involvement, perhaps in collaboration with parents.** It would be useful to have an initial dialogue amongst staff, exploring the purpose of parental contributions, how they may be realized in a range of ways, assistance with upskilling parents so that they may generate an income and exert less pressure on their children to find employment immediately after high school. An information sharing programme that disseminates information on income returns to education with parents, could also be implemented.

It might be interesting to consider a system similar to that of teacher professional development required for WCED teachers, where a point system operates over a cycle of three years. A modified version of this could see parents earning points performing a range of functions at the school, which could also include their regular attendance of developmental sessions provided by the school. Rewards or benefits for parents rather than learners could be incorporated into this system. In this way parents' involvement could become more structured, dignified and beneficial, cementing their role as invaluable members of the school community.

It is our belief that individual learners should not be punished by excluding them from excursions or perks like a matric jacket because parents do not abide by policies like contributing 'volunteer' hours, however this should at least be discussed by all of the staff at the junior and high schools.

6. **Revisit the character development programme currently in place at the school.** This would ideally involve the co-construction of meaning and shared values for the Christel House community. Consider using resources and materials that are connected to learners' own realities and cultural reference points, such as music, memes and resources from social media sites. Connecting the existing character-building materials to more contemporary sources would serve to refocus learners' existing knowledge of the world around its potential for learning and self-actualisation. The character development programme should be re-designed with an awareness of the deep structural inequalities that pervade the lives of South Africans and what it means to 'show character' in this context. Multilingualism should be promoted as an asset

that can be used and shared for learning rather than as a deficit that learners need to eradicate.

7. **Reconsider the roles, responsibilities and mandates of the different departments, particularly social services and College & Careers.** Strengthening communication to ensure clarity of purpose, and being willing to modify roles as more useful ways of using these resources become apparent, will be vital to maintaining the trust and collegiality the school has worked so hard to establish. Communication should include the school indicating which learners require assistance, with a feedback information loop communicating what action has been taken by Social Services for particular learners. Educators need to pass on information gathered about former learners to the College and Careers department. It would be worth reviewing whether the deployment of social services towards admissions is the best use of that department's time considering the mammoth task staff in the department have of providing support and counselling to learners already enrolled. Involving foundation phase teachers in recruitment practices, either up front or in review of how the cohorts selected fared, would be beneficial.
8. **Clarify aspects of teacher career governance.** This includes reviewing the rate of annual increases and delinking the value of annual increases from performance bonuses.
9. **Teacher wellness and a structure to support it need to be reviewed.** While some kind of structure already exists, we feel that it is a bit powerless. Developing a substantial programme for teacher wellbeing as well as a space where grievances and concerns for collective resolution can be channelled, would be invaluable. An example is the length of the school year for staff and how negotiations around securing additional time off may be tabled and discussed by a panel of school leadership and members of staff.
10. **Revisit how material 'need'/deprivation is assessed and communicated to potential donors.** Taking into account the critiques of the school's assessment practices related to deprivation' at home and how poverty is communicated to donors, it would be useful to think about how the school assesses, speaks about and portrays material deprivation in a way that maintains the dignity and the aspirations of learners and their families.
11. **Resolve the challenge of social capital remaining within the school space.** While the school provides learners access to career expos, workshops by business leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators in their fields, for the most part this access stops post-matric with the exception of the College & Careers programme. Learners thus take a limited amount of the school's social capital with them once they leave. One way to

offset this is to build a number of learnerships and work experience into donor agreements that would allow learners not working or studying to work and gain valuable experience through partnerships with the school's donors, thus cementing these relationships and ensuring learners' continued association with CHSA in the crucial period post-school.

12. The **length of the school day** should be reviewed, with the possibility of ending earlier on certain days.

Recommendations Part 3

1. The health care supports provided by the school make an immense difference to these children's lives and the learnings from these practices should be shared with others in the 'educational ecosystem'. CHSA could become a torchbearer for good practices in terms of trauma and mental health for children in the South African schooling system.
2. The extended College & Careers programme should be continued as it makes a significant difference to supporting the lives of former learners.
3. The school should explore creative ways of linking alumni to forms of social capital and influential networks. Donors should not only donate resources but should include learners in their networks of influence. A first job or foot in the door was crucial to these young people's social mobility. Strengthening the College & Careers programme through building long-term links with donors and other corporate partners would expand the kinds of support that can be offered to new matriculants, especially in terms of gaining the experience required to apply for jobs.
4. Entry points into the world of work that can catalyse a career with potential for social mobility and improved qualifications over time need to be explored.
5. Reflection classes on 'building a career' could be conducted with alumni a few years out of school to help them envision how a first job is not necessarily an 'endpoint' but a stepping stone to career development. These could include sessions hosted by successful alumni who have taken unusual paths to enter their chosen field, including those who initially dropped out of university or studied while working. Apparently work in this area already exists with College & Careers, but this could be built upon.
6. CHSA staff should have a session to think about the kinds of careers pathways, not necessarily careers, that are possible and desirable for their learners and then actively map out progression paths for alumni to access these opportunities. It needs to be acknowledged that opportunities are sparse in South Africa and young people do not initially know either 'what they want' or 'what is possible'.

7. One of the notable successes of wealthier schools has been strong alumni organisations that contribute not only to the improvement of those schools but their successive generations of matriculants. CHSA alumni are starting to get jobs in influential organisations in South African government, development organisations, educational institutions and business. These alumni should be used to link others to these networks, through for example establishing a 'Give Back' database that allows for sharing updates, job information and support between alumni, and providing feedback to the school on improving its C&C offerings. Some of this already exists on Facebook etc, but finding ways to strengthen this would be useful.
8. A better system for keeping track of older alumni's cellular telephone numbers needs to be developed. This is difficult with the frequency that numbers change, but a new system could be developed where alumni inform the school regularly of their new numbers.
9. Continued longitudinal data and research is needed because changes to the school and its College and Careers programme mean that different graduating cohorts are likely to exhibit different results.

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Appendix: Survey

Survey with former learners of Christel House South Africa

Demographic information

1. Date of birth:

2. Identity number:

3. Gender:

Male Female

4. First language:

Zulu English Sotho Tswana Xhosa Tsonga Afrikaans Venda Sepedi Ndebele
Swati Other (please specify)

5. Preferred network for airtime voucher:

6. Phone number for airtime voucher to be sent to:

7. Marital status:

Married Unmarried Divorced

8. How many children do you have?

0 1 2 3 4 5

9. Year first attended Christel House:

10. Year last attended Christel House:

11. Suburb currently living in:

12. Neighbourhood(s) lived in since attending Christel House South Africa:

13. Neighbourhood(s) lived in while attending Christel House South Africa:

14. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with the neighbourhood you live in?

1: very satisfied 2: satisfied 3: it's okay 4: unsatisfied 5: very unsatisfied

15. Ownership status of dwelling you live in:

16. Highest educational qualification:

Less than Matric Matric certificate Short course after matric Higher certificate or diploma Undergraduate degree Honours degree Master's degree TVET qualification

17. After matric, did you ever register for a short course, higher certificate, degree, diploma or TVET and not complete it or need to repeat it?

No, never registered no, never repeated/took a break Yes, took a break Yes, repeated a course Yes, repeated a year Yes, registered and dropped out

18. Are you currently employed?

Yes full time Yes part time I run my own business I help in my family's business
Unemployed

19. Are you currently employed?

20. What kind of work do you do?

21. What is the name of your place of work? For example, it might be Pick 'n Pay or a government department or a bank or your own home?

22. We understand that pay is a difficult and sensitive question. However, due to its importance, we would like to ask you a range into which your last month's take home pay falls

Would you say last month's take home pay was in rands:

(please tick one)

0-3000

3000-5999

6000-8999

9000- 14999

15000-19999

20000+

23. What job would you most like to do?

24. What is the biggest barrier to you getting the job you most want?

25. Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?

a. Doing very well b. Doing Okay, c. Just getting by d. Finding it difficult to get by

26. Think of your parents when they were your age. Would you say you (and your household) are better, the same, or worse off financially than they were?

- a. Much better off, b. a bit better off, c. about the same, d. worse off, e. much worse off

27. In the past 12 months have you (you may tick more than 1):

- a. Asked for a raise or promotion, b. received a raise or promotion, c. applied for a new job, d. started a new job, e. voluntarily left a job, f. gotten laid off or fired from a job

28. In the past 12 months, have you benefitted from a child support grant?

Yes, No, Prefer not to say

29. Does anyone living outside of your household provide you with regular financial support?

Yes, No, Prefer not to say

30. Did you vote in the last election?

Yes, No, Prefer not to say

31. What kind of help do you give to your family? (Check all that apply)

Money/financial

Time

Material goods (food, clothes, furniture etc.)

Share your skills

Share your expertise

Household chores

Support for siblings education

Emotional support

None

Not applicable

32. What kind of help do you give to the community you grew up in or the one you live in now ? (Check all that apply)

Money/ Financial

Time

Material goods

Share your skills

Mentoring

Share your expertise

None

