

# Christel House Shows that Poverty Does Not Have to Stand in the Way of Success



Courtesy of John Scharges

By John Scharges

Top achiever: Cimone Maasdorp.

While Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga has expressed concern that the latest matric results show weaknesses in the education system, the school results released in January have pointed towards a substantially more optimistic future for the education of the country's youth, with the 2010 matric results showing a 7.2% increase in the national pass rate. Leading the pack is Christel House South Africa, an independent school for disadvantaged children in Ottery.

Christel House is showing others how it should be done, with its 2010 matriculants achieving a 100% pass rate, an increase from their 97.8% pass rate in 2009. A remarkable feat given that most children from similar backgrounds never reach matric at all.

In addition to this staggering accomplishment, three of the Christel House matric pupils have already received bursaries to study a Bachelor of Commerce Degree at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Top achiever Cimone Maasdorp, who received two distinctions, says that she was able to achieve such good marks because "Christel House offers a unique take, and so many opportunities that other schools ignore.

They are revolutionising the approach to education in our country, besides opening so many doors for children who really need the help."

One hundred percent of Christel House's students come from families that fall below the poverty line, and the school combats the problems that arise from such situations with a holistic approach; realising and accommodating for the fact that social problems in students' backgrounds are a significant factor in the hindrance of positive school results. They endeavour to empower children through longitudinal work that requires tremendous commitment and long-term involvement by dedicated professionals.

"In addition to our mandate to educate, the School sees itself as a social enterprise, an experimental think-tank in deriving new and exciting models for what works in education in a South African context. It is our goal to establish a new model of integrated education, in order to break the cycle of poverty," said Principal Ronald Fortune.

It is an approach that is working. Cimone Maasdorp credits Christel House for her outstanding exam results, which led to her acceptance to UWC to study a LLb degree. "The

opportunity to study through Christel House took me away from a situation that could have so easily sent me down the wrong path, it kept me out of trouble, and helped me reach my full potential," she said.

The 2010 class is only the second class of matrics for Christel House. The School opened its doors in 2002 and the first intake reached matric level in 2009. Principal Fortune said that for this reason the rise in aggregate is even more impressive. "We are so excited," he said, commenting on the results. "When one considers our students' backgrounds, such an achievement is made even more impressive. They are embracing their talents and opportunities and not letting their circumstances stand in the way of achieving great things." Principal Fortune says that 64.7% of the Christel House students passed with Bachelor Degree level passes (ie university exemption passes), and this has motivated the school to achieve even better results in the following year.

Christel House educates its learners through the generous donations of individuals and corporates in South African. For more information you can contact the school on 021 704 9400 or visit [www.christelhouse.org](http://www.christelhouse.org). ■

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