

A steel company with a soft heart

ARCELORMITTAL South Africa sees it as vitally important to use its resources to improve the lives of all those within its reach.

Underlining its commitment to education and contributing to the alleviation of the national skills crisis in the sciences, especially in the field of engineering, is the company's R28 million investment in science centres. These are in Sebokeng, Saldanha and Newcastle and operate in partnership with the Departments of Education and Science and Technology.

The department supplies the centres with mobile laboratories which are used in taking science lessons to outlying and rural schools. In the Vaal Triangle, the mobile laboratory has reached 88 schools in the rural and semi-rural areas.

The centres seek to improve mathematics and science performance at schools and to stimulate interest and curiosity in these fields. They provide information, knowledge and skills training to teachers, learners, school leavers and the general public in the communities surrounding the company's operations.

Maggie Mopedi, corporate social responsibility manager, says the project underlines the company's commitment to education and making a contribution to the alleviation of skills in mathematics, science and technology. As a company that requires a lot of engineers to run its operations, it was imperative for ArcelorMittal to grow its own timber through the centres.

To date, 91 learners from the science centres have received bursaries from ArcelorMittal and 23 are currently training as artisans and pro-

duction technicians. Nineteen maths and science teachers have also been receiving on-going training at the centre to empower them to teach the subjects with confidence.

The company's core business relies heavily on being able to access skilled people in the scientific, engineering and technological fields. So improving maths and science performance at schools in the communities close to its areas of operation provides a sustainable resource and works towards alleviating the national skills crisis.

The centres expose students to science and technology in a fun and relaxed environment by providing them with classrooms, fully equipped science laboratories as well as interactive science exhibitions that enhance their thinking skills and curriculum-linked science and mathematics instruction.

Apart from the schools programme the company hosts fun science shows to generate interest in science amongst primary school learners. While more than 40 interactive science and mathematics exhibits give learners the opportunity to apply and understand different scientific concepts through play.

Three years ago the company also initiated a R250 million school building project in underprivileged areas around the country. The first school, Meetse-A-Bophelo Primary – was handed over to the Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga in November 2010.

A new Nelson Mandela primary school is currently under construction in Umtata, Eastern Cape, and hand over to the Department of Basic Education is expected during the first quarter of next year.