



The kitchen where food is prepared. The school runs a feeding scheme for pupils.



Pupils engrossed in their work in the media centre.



All kids in the area want to attend the 'beautiful' school, says vice-principal Raesibe Laka.

A wellspring of hope in Mamelodi

School serves the community

LALI VAN ZUYDAM

THE SCHOOL'S name means "water of life" and since it was built in Mamelodi, the community's cup has been overflowing with educational benefits.

For the past two years, Meetse-A-Bophelo Primary School has been a beacon of hope for the people in Phase 5, Extension 8.

Before it was rebuilt in 2010, lessons were held in dilapidated prefabricated shacks.

"When we taught you could see the ground through the floor of the classroom," said vice-principal Raesibe Laka.

Rodents and cockroaches used to torment teachers in their classrooms, caretaker Thabo Mogale said.

The school has come a long way since then.

In 2009, the ArcelorMittal South Africa Foundation launched a R250 million school-building project, committing itself to build schools across the country where the Department of Basic Education identified a need.

ArcelorMittal built the school as a pilot project from 200 tons of lightweight steel. Construction with this steel goes faster than with bricks.

Meetse-A-Bophelo, with 34 classrooms, was built in 11 months at a total cost of R35m.

"A brick school normally takes more than two years to build," said Themba Nkosi, general manager of corporate affairs at ArcelorMittal.

The school is a haven for more than 1 700 pupils from Grade R to Grade 7.

Laka said the school benefited the entire community, not just the pupils.

"The children here are very happy and pupils who have moved on to high school come back to visit us often.

"All the children in the area want to come here.

"The school is beautiful and we have proper resources," she said, referring to the computer centre and a library.

The school is used after hours as a venue for more than 12 churches and adult education classes are offered on weekday evenings.

There is also a vegetable garden with spinach, onions and beetroot.

It is a recent development and the produce will be used as part of the school's feeding scheme, which provides breakfast and lunch to the pupils daily.

The pupils do not pay fees because parents cannot afford it.



The library at Meetse-A-Bophelo Primary School in Mamelodi. The school needs more children's books and chess sets to get the chess club up and running.

PICTURES: OUPA MOKOENA

"There used to be a vegetable garden, but people used to climb over the fences and steal the produce," said Mogale.

After the new seeds were sown, the area has been fenced off to prevent theft.

Parents and other residents have volunteered to clean the classrooms and cook in the kitchens.

They also sell snacks on the school grounds to pupils during break times.

"The women selling snacks are

entrepreneurs. "It is their way to uplift the community and earn some money," said Mogale.

ArcelorMittal will open another school in Mthatha in May.

Once built, the foundation will hand the school over to the Department of Basic Education.

"We have the technology to build schools in a shorter time and this is our contribution to infrastructure in the education sector," said Nkosi.

Laka said the school was in need of children's books to supplement the library, as well as chess sets to get the chess club up and running.

"We want the children and the community to have books – not only for school, but so that they can read for fun, too," said Laka.

● To make a contribution, call 012 840 3964.

The quadrangle at Meetse-A-Bophelo Primary.

