

Poverty no obstacle for Christel House 2015 matrics

[Christel House](#), a donor-funded school in Ottery, Cape Town for learners living in conditions of extreme poverty, has celebrated the matric results with an impressive 82,5% bachelor pass rate - its best matric results yet.



Christel House 2015 matriculants

The celebration is particularly sweet because all of the learners come from Cape Town's most disadvantaged areas and had to overcome tough personal circumstances to literally make the grade.

This result is considerably above the national average for Quintile 1-3 schools (32,5%) and competitive with the most expensive private schools nationwide. There is one learner who needs to pass one exam in March to maintain the school's 100% matric pass rate since its inception.

The class also achieved 19 distinctions, and students are now going on to study science, law, actuarial science, commerce and accounting, among other fields. Top student Nathan Daniels, who achieved six distinctions, hopes to study medicine at the University of Stellenbosch.

Pushing performance bar

"We are extremely proud of our matrics; these results are quite unheard of for students who live in such poverty," said high school principal, Ronald Fortune. "At Christel House, we keep pushing the performance bar higher and our teachers and learners manage the most incredible of achievements. We used to be proud of our 100% matric pass, then it became our bachelor pass rate, now we speak the language of distinctions!"

Christel House is a not-for-profit school that provides top-quality education for learners living in extreme poverty. Unlike many schools or programmes of this kind, it does not select learners on academic merit, but according to financial need. Any child who is learning-enabled is eligible, but only learners who are in dire financial circumstances are considered. And yet - thanks to the school's holistic model, which includes social workers, counsellors, a curriculum that includes sport and music, healthcare and community support - poverty does not stand in the way of these learners' success.

"Our results put us on par academically with some of the best private schools in the country," said Fortune. "This is particularly impressive when you consider that most of those schools actively recruit students on academic merit whereas we are selecting students based on their financial need. It goes to show that with the right support, any child can do well at school - even if they come from extremely disadvantaged communities."

Typical student

2015 matriculant Clayton* personifies the typical Christel House student. He was once told that success was out of his reach; he was a "rough child", he says. But now, with a bachelor pass under his belt, he is preparing to embark on the next chapter of his life with confidence.

Clayton has a passion for cooking. He attributes much of his success to the school's Farm Study programme. A key part of its holistic model, the programme is designed to give Grade 12 learners - many of whom do not have a quiet and safe place to study for their exams - a place to prepare in peace.

For Clayton this was very necessary. His drug-addicted brother would frequently come to their home, stealing or starting violent confrontations. From a young age, Clayton felt the need to protect his mother. He slept little, sometimes not at all. He suffered from anxiety and digestive problems.

Many of Christel House's learners face similarly challenging personal circumstances, living in shacks or wendy houses; one former top Grade 12 learner previously lived out of a shopping trolley. The mission of the school is to break the cycle of poverty through a multi-pronged approach that includes nutrition, social support, medical care, community outreach and exceptional educational standards.

"At Christel House, we work with what we've got," Fortune said. "The biggest obstacle related to poverty is emotional trauma. So to fight trauma, we create dreams."

** Not his real name*