

# Maths and science: skills remain poor

By [Karl Gernetzky](#)

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Grade 9 pupils have recorded a dismal average score of 12.7% in mathematics and 35% in first additional language in the Department of Basic Education's second annual national assessments of pupils' mathematics and literacy abilities.

The outcomes, released on Monday (3 December), showed a general improvement in Grades 1 to 6 but poor results for Grade 9 pupils tested for the first time.

The test results will fuel the debate on the quality of SA's mathematics and science education and whether it is failing to prepare pupils for further study or the workplace.

Last year's results caused shock in many quarters, with Grade 3 pupils achieving an average score of 35% for literacy and 28% for numeracy, while Grade 6 pupils achieved 28% in language and 30% in mathematics.

This year's tests - which focused on mathematics and languages, regarded as the key foundational skills in basic education - were conducted among 7.2m pupils at 24,000 schools.

The differences for Grade 9 mathematics by province were stark, with Limpopo - where 0.5% of pupils achieved more than 50% in the test - ranked last at 8.5%, while top-ranked Western Cape achieved an average score of only 16.7%.

Pupils in Grades 1 to 5 all showed a marginal increase in mathematics ability, while Grade 6 pupils, who achieved an average score of 30% in 2011, managed only 27% this year.

Grade 3 pupils showed the largest improvement in mathematics, increasing their average score from 28% in 2011 to 37% this year. The number of Grade 3 pupils achieving at least 50% increased from 17% last year to 37%.

In languages, all grades except Grade 1 showed marginal improvements. Grade 1 pupils achieved 58% in their home language, slightly down from 59% last year.

In the World Economic Forum's 2012-13 *World Competitiveness Report*, released earlier this year, SA was ranked 133rd out of 142 countries in terms of the "quality of its educational system". The forum ranked SA second last in terms of mathematics and science education, ahead of Yemen.

The Department of Basic Education has presented the results as a diagnostic tool for intervening in the education system.

It said on Monday (3 December) that the results of last year's tests led to interventions to improve this year's outcomes, such as the provision of workbooks, the repackaging of statements on changes in the academic curriculum, and the provision of exemplar questions and tests to schools during the course of the year to expose teachers and learners to the kind of questions they could expect in tests.

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