

Groenvlei High launches science lab

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Groenvlei High School in Lansdowne is the latest school in the greater Athlone area to receive a science laboratory, thanks to a partnership between non-profit company Advancing Knowledge, Garden Cities Archway Foundation and the Western Cape Education Department.

Launched on Monday April 24, the modern science laboratory is expected to make the learning and teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths (also known as Stem subjects) a lot easier.

Also opening new science labs in the same week were: Maitland Secondary, Esselen Park Secondary in Worcester, Kenmere Primary in Kensington, Zwelethamba Secondary in Worcester, Hyde Park Primary in Parkwood, and Bonnievale Primary in Bonnievale.

More than 90 of these facilities have been opened at schools in the province since 2011.

Professor Shaheed Hartley, director of Advancing Knowledge, said the project started in 2004 with a focus on teacher development in science.

"Initially it was a training programme for teachers, and then learners became involved when science clubs were developed at

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schools and from there on it exploded.

"Our aim is to build a culture and passion for science learning, as many learners shy away from Stem subjects. Science happens in a laboratory and none of the schools had laboratories.

"I approached Garden Cities Archway Foundation, and in 2011, we launched our first laboratory in Robertson. In 2016, the WCED came on board. We split the cost between the three.

"The process is that we offer training, look at the passion and commitment from the teachers, security, and management structure of the schools before we bring the infrastructure.

"We have to start with the

basics in terms of supporting teachers to have the confidence to teach science with an advanced level of understanding, knowledge and skills. Similarly, we have to be creative in providing learners with opportunities that will draw their interest and willingness to learn science."

John Matthews, the CEO of Garden Cities Archway Foundation, said: "Most schools don't have this facility, and with it, they can compete on an equal footing with other institutions. We would like to do more of this, but we need other corporates to partake."

Principal Vanessa Prinsloo said the teaching of Stem subjects at her school had become



■ Western Cape Education Department circuit manager Natasha Pedro, principal Vanessa Prinsloo, Garden Cities Archway Foundation CEO John Matthews and Professor Shaheed Hartley from Advancing Knowledge at the launch of Groenvlei High School's science laboratory.

challenging.

"It has not been easy on us. We had to build a strong foundation, especially in the Grade 8 and Grade 9 classes. Many learners have a fear of maths and science, and over the past five years, many of my colleagues retired, and nothing prepared the novice teachers on what they should do. They needed the training and we are so grateful.

"I hope the laboratory will make the learners excited. We had to give them this opportunity. I remember going to study at UCT and being taken aback when I saw the laboratory, because we

did not have that at my school."

Life science teacher Tarin-Lee Hans said science was already a difficult subject to grasp, especially with all the terminology. "Now that they are able to do the practical, they will understand it much better," she said. "Our class sizes are big, and in the past, we had to move the desks out of the way in the classroom if we wanted to do an experiment. That is all now in the past."

Organisations and corporates who want to contribute to this initiative can contact Professor Hartley at shartley@skatt.co.za or 083 793 0436.