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Technology helps to educate pupils

BY SARAH WILD, 04 OCTOBER 2012, 07:35 | 1 COMMENTS

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Picture: SUNDAY TIMES

SATELLITE broadcasting of extra lessons to thousands of Grade 11 and 12 pupils in the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Free State had seen the matric pass rate in participating schools increase by 10.9%, Antoinette van der Merwe, director of Stellenbosch University's Telematic Services division, said yesterday.

Matric exams begin in less than three weeks, and while last year's national matric pass rate increased to 70.2%, the number of matriculants with passes in mathematics and science remained poor. The mathematics pass rate for last

year was 46.3%, down from 2010's 47.5%.

Of the 219,636 who wrote the exam, 104,033 passed, compared with 124,749 in 2010.

The programme — a collaboration with the Western Cape education department — offers extra lessons in maths, physical science, accounting, life sciences, English, Afrikaans and geography, taught by leading teachers in the province.

Ms van der Merwe emphasised that the programme was not replacing teachers. It provided "additional support" in areas that pupils struggle with.

The university had its own broadcasting studio, and "the Western Cape (education department) put up satellite dishes and infrastructure in certain schools", she said.

There were about 20,000 pupils in Grade 11 and 12 at 147 schools in the Western Cape participating in the programme this year. "We expanded the programme in 2012 to 69 schools in the Northern Cape, and three in the Free State," she said.

"We are committed to innovation wherever possible to improve the quality of education in the province, and ... we deeply appreciate our partnership with Stellenbosch University," the director of communications at the Western Cape education department, Paddy Attwell, said.

However, the Western Cape has the highest pass rate in the country at 82.9%. When asked if there were plans to expand the programme to schools in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, two of the worst-performing provinces, Ms van der Merwe said: "We need partnerships with the education departments, teachers and principals.... Without the support of the department, the technology will not have an effect.

"Also, the technology will not have an impact if a school has gone beyond the point of repair, if the technology is not managed, or if teachers are not engaged. It's not about the technology. It's about how it's managed."

The broadcasts were also interactive, with pupils and teachers able to SMS or e-mail questions in real time.

Ms van der Merwe would not disclose the running costs of the programme, but said that the Western Cape government funded the broadcast hours, as well as DVDs with the lessons that were sent to schools.

The division's main responsibility was postgraduate training for students not on campus.